

## **Restorative Processes**

### **Restorative Processes at No-Rank Zendo: Resolving Interpersonal Distress and Conflict**

No-Rank Zendo (NRZ) recognizes that creating a stable space for spiritual work depends on providing a safe, non-threatening, and caring environment in which to practice. We recognize that, as we let go of ego defenses, Zen practice can feel at times unsafe and threatening. This is especially so as emotions are rubbed raw during the rigors of sesshin but can also occur because of the inevitable tensions, irritations, and misunderstandings that arise among members of a small, often intense, community.

Any of us may at times feel bumped or rubbed the wrong way, and any of us may – though most likely unintentionally – do the bumping or rubbing. Attending to and learning from these sorts of conflictual interactions is a clear application of Buddhist practices in our daily lives. The health of our sangha depends on our willingness to find effective, responsible, and compassionate means of resolving interpersonal tensions as they arise.

Buddhist conflict resolution focuses on fully addressing the suffering of all concerned. We take hurt, fear, and anger seriously, and in responding to these feelings, our practice is fundamentally guided by kindness. Buddhist conflict resolution is not based on good or bad, blame or guilt, winning or losing, offenders or victims. Instead, we foster curiosity, mutual understanding and acceptance. We encourage connection, compassion, clarity and forgiveness (of both self and other) rather than holding resentment and blame. Acting on these values, we aim to provide the means and support for people to speak honestly, safely, and completely about their own direct experiences, feelings and needs

### **Restorative processes and procedures for resolving concerns**

A sangha member experiencing distress due to some interpersonal interaction that has left them feeling hurt and in dismay may wish to take the following steps as a sequence or move directly to the step that seems it will be most immediately effective.

If a sangha member feels that the distress is the result of an ethics violation, even if the potential violation does not involve them, they can go to any member of the Board of Directors, the Abbot, unsui, or any other person within the sangha the person feels comfortable approaching, to report such a violation.

#### **1. Sit with the distress.**

Sitting with our perceptions and feelings can be very helpful as our hurt and dismay may have more to do with our own projections and internal process than what someone else said or did. So we should investigate within, determine to what extent our own minds are creating the distress, and see whether we can resolve it internally. Try self-empathy and empathy for the other person or people involved.

Oftentimes, time itself will resolve the distress. This should not be a matter of sweeping things under the rug but of letting feelings that are intense settle into more calmness and spaciousness. We might, with more inner peace, be in a place of more acceptance and tolerance and better be able to process what is happening with us in a cool detached moment.

## **2. Speak with an empathetic listener.**

If sitting with it on our own is not enough, we may turn to someone whose empathetic listening may help us sort out our feelings about what has occurred. This person may be the Abbot or Osho who is leading a sesshin, a board member, unsui, someone whom you know and trust in the sangha, or a trusted friend.

Speaking with another should never be about vilifying or building your case but helping to sort through our feelings about what has happened and how we might move forward with care and compassion for self and other.

## **3. Speak directly with the other person involved.**

If we feel able to do so, after sitting with the distress, and perhaps after being heard by an empathetic listener, we might try speaking directly with the other person involved. We can request a private conversation where we may communicate what has happened, and share our experience of it. Be prepared to listen to the other person's perceptions and experiences of what happened. Be open to the possibility of mutual misunderstanding and that there is something for both of you to learn. Together, we can aim for clarity, mutual understanding, and connection.

## **4. Request a facilitated conversation.**

It is often very difficult for two people to sort through a tangle of hurt feelings. So we may consider it unsafe and want mediation in a personal conversation. The process may initially look dauntingly formal and cumbersome, but it is designed to create an assurance of safety as well as flow and ease.

If we are seeking a facilitated conversation, we can approach the Abbot, a board member, unsui, someone whom you know and trust in the sangha, or a trusted friend for assistance. Together with the Abbot or board member, we can consider various approaches for facilitation including, but not limited to, having the Abbot or a board member facilitate a dialogue, having each person select a representative for dialogue, finding outside mediating support, etc.

If the steps outlined here do not lead to the resolution of the conflict or tension, or if a potential ethics violation has occurred, further steps may be taken to address such occasions, and the matter can be brought to the entire Board of Directors.

If one needs support in approaching an area of distress or conflict and it does not appear any resources are available from within the sangha or if the sangha resources are not satisfactory enough to process these issues, one may reach for outside support. Here is a [list of local Buddhist teachers](#) who have agreed to serve as an empathetic listener to aid in personal reflection regarding the distress and/or to assist in facilitating a dialogue with the other person involved.

### **Conclusion**

Given our human complexity and the complexity of social interaction, conflict is inevitable. Our hope is that conflict deepens us as individuals, helps us see our own shortcomings and allows us to grow into more mature adults practicing peace and care in the Dharma.

Endnote: This document, along with the Ethics Policy, is a living document. As such it is always and forever incomplete and unavoidably insufficient in reaching its goals of support and reconciliation. Just as we rely on these documents as guides through the reconciliation process, these documents rely on all of us to bring our caring hearts and our discerning minds to them so that they too can grow, change, and improve in the ways they support this sangha.

Version: 3/31/25