

Meditation Center Beatenberg
Guidelines of Ethical Conduct for Dharma Teachers
and for Retreat Participants

The value of guidelines for ethical conduct

Ethical conduct is an expression of our respect for others and ourselves. By following these guidelines, we cultivate inner and outer relationships that are less bound by resentment, anger, greed and carelessness. We acknowledge that we influence the world around us through our thoughts, speech and actions - and learn to live in the spirit of 'interbeing'. The value of ethical conduct is particularly noticeable in retreats, helping us feel protected and safe. They are a cause for significant changes of heart and mind.

Guidelines for ethical behavior are an important practice aspect of daily life. They are also referred to as training guidelines, which means that they are not 'commandments' but a path of constant exploration, learning and understanding.

The guidelines of ethical conduct during retreats

At the beginning of a meditation retreat, we commit ourselves to adhere to the code of conduct in the sense of a universal, secular ethic. Such guidelines are essential aspects of the meditative path.

— We commit ourselves to non-violence by abstaining from deliberately killing or harming sentient beings. And we consciously train ourselves to respect and protect life.

— We commit ourselves to refrain from stealing by not taking what we were not given voluntarily. And we train ourselves in the practice of generosity.

— We commit ourselves to refrain from any form of sexual-erotic activity that causes suffering to others or to ourselves. In the context of retreats, this means renouncing any kind of erotic-sexual activity. And we train ourselves in cultivating respect and care for others.

— We commit ourselves to truthfulness of speech and to abstaining from dishonesty, gossip and slander as well as speech causing dissent. And we train in mindful speech that is honest, helpful and friendly. At most courses at the center noble silence is being kept. In all courses we refrain from the use of any kind of electronic media.

— We commit ourselves to abstain from taking intoxicants and drugs which cloud the mind. And we consciously cultivate a mind of clarity.

Specific guidelines for ethical conduct between teachers and retreat participants

As the Dharma (the Buddha's teachings) has been established in the West, continued investigation into and clarification of the guidelines of ethical conduct with respect to the relationship between teachers and students is under way.

The majority of Western teachers are lay people who relate to their students in much more informal ways than ordained teachers do. In the context of our culture, the roles of teachers and their relationship with their students are also much more complex than in Asia.

This has led to a continuing dialogue on how teacher-student relationships can be protected in our culture. It is a relationship in which trust, honesty, discretion, safety and openness are core values.

At international meetings of Dharma teachers, a Code of Ethics has been compiled, which is specifically tailored to the relationship between teachers and students. It is meant to help defining the responsibilities of both sides.

The Beatenberg Meditation Center acknowledges the Code of Ethics of related Dharma Centers in the USA and England (Spirit Rock, IMS, Gaia House) and has adapted it to its specific circumstances.

All of the teachers working at the center are expected to comply with this code during retreats and seminars as well as in relationships with their students outside retreats.

Code of Conduct for Teachers at the Meditation Center Beatenberg:

1) Abstaining from killing and harmful conduct

We acknowledge the connectedness of all beings and respect everything that lives. We agree to avoid all intentional acts that injure or kill living beings.

2) Abstaining from stealing

We agree not to take anything that has not been given to us voluntarily and to respect others' possessions, to cultivate a deeper awareness of the respectful and ecological use of natural resources, to be honest with money, and not to misappropriate or claim funds donated for Dharma projects or other purposes. We agree to share the teachings without any preference for students on the grounds of their financial situation.

3) Abstaining from unwholesome speech

We commit ourselves to say what is true and helpful and to abstain from statements that divide, or that depreciate other meditation traditions, persons, races, or religions. We agree to cultivate conscious and clear communication and the qualities of loving-kindness and truthfulness as the basis of our speech.

4) Abstaining from hurtful sexual behavior

We agree to avoid causing harm through sexual conduct and abstain from sexual misconduct. As teachers, we commit ourselves not to use our teaching role, our authority and our position to initiate an erotic-sexual relationship with a student. In particular, promoting erotic-sexual acts as a special teaching for students is unacceptable.

Since in our community a number of single teachers have entered into partnerships and marriages with former students, we recognize that such relationships are possible, but that great care and sensitivity are needed. We agree that in such a case the following guidelines are crucial:

A) An erotic-sexual relationship in the context of an existing teacher-student relationship is never appropriate.

B) During retreat and formal teaching, any reference to a future intimate and/or sexual teacher-student relationship is not appropriate.

C) In case that there is an interest developing between teacher and student over a longer period of time, the teacher-student relationship must be ended clearly and consciously before it develops in the direction of an intimate partnership.

An approach to such a relationship should in no case take place immediately after a retreat and a minimum time interval of three months before an intimate encounter should be observed.

5) Abstaining from the use of intoxicating substances, which leads to loss of mindfulness and careless conduct

It is obvious that the harmful use of alcohol and drugs causes great suffering. We agree to abstain from the use of drugs and alcohol during retreats or on the retreat site and we agree to refrain from harmful use of drugs and alcohol.

We also commit ourselves to cultivate great sensitivity and integrity in dealing with money and power.

Procedure in case of violation of the Code of Ethics

Teachers who seriously violate this code of conduct are no longer invited to teach at the Center, and the above communities and centers in England and the US will be informed of the situation. In order to establish a system of accountability, the Meditation Center will ask one or more suitable individuals to be available as (an) ombudsperson(s). Students who see the Code of Ethics seriously violated by a teacher are welcome to contact the Ombudsperson. He or she will contact the teacher in question and the Center's Board of Trustees where the complaint will be investigated.

However, it will take a while before we find the right people for this function!

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