



Insight Meditation Community of Washington
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Healing, Ethics & Reconciliation (HEAR) Council

Buddhist ethics provides a foundation for the practice and community life of the Insight Meditation Community of Washington (IMCW). As a lay community, we are guided by the five training precepts of avoiding killing, taking what is not given, sexual misconduct, false speech, and intoxication. These five are the basis for the IMCW Teachers' Code of Ethics [under development]. An important part of ethics is a commitment to finding wise ways to work with conflict. In times of serious conflict we have relied on the example and experience of the Buddhist tradition of monastic council for developing our own ways of resolving conflict.

Conflicts will inevitably arise within the IMCW community. The health of our community is not measured by the presence or absence of conflict as much as by our willingness to find effective, responsible, and compassionate means of resolving interpersonal tensions as they arise. The intention to attend to and learn from conflict is a clear application of Buddhist practice into our daily lives; without this intention, practice can too easily be a comfort rather than a deep transformative vehicle for our lives.

Buddhist conflict resolution is not based on good or bad, blame or guilt, winning or losing, offenders or victims. Rather it is based on fully addressing the suffering of all concerned. Hurt, fear, and anger are taken seriously through forums in which everyone may speak honestly, safely, and completely about their own direct experiences and feelings. In looking for resolution, Buddhist practice values dialogue over silence, reconciliation over estrangement, forgiveness over resentment, confession over accusation, and atonement over punishment. Because the process of reaching such resolution is often very difficult, IMCW's Healing, Ethics and Reconciliation Council (HEAR Council) offers support.

The HEAR Council is a group of seven IMCW practitioners, respected for their integrity, who are available to any community member who wants help in dealing with conflicts and grievances within the IMCW community (except for employee/personnel-related conflicts). The members of the



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Council are appointed by the IMCW Board in close consultation with the IMCW teachers and staff. The HEAR Council is comprised of at least one teacher, one board member, one member of either the People of Color sangha or the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender & Questioning sangha, one staff member, and one general community member. Council members will be appointed for a two-year term and cannot serve more than three consecutive terms.

The primary role of the HEAR Council is to provide initial, confidential consultation to anyone with ethical concerns. As such, the Council may, on request, function as a simple sounding board for one's concerns, as a source of questions to facilitate deeper personal reflection, or as a source of advice in how best to resolve the conflict. In addition, Council members are available to be mediators or witnesses for discussion between parties in conflict; however, the HEAR Council is available to oversee the implementation of a formal grievance procedure for such grievances, complaints and conflicts that can not be resolved through dialogue, mediation, and reconciliation. This involves setting up a Grievance Council that investigates and decides on specific issues submitted by members of the community.

Because many situations requiring a formal grievance procedure contain elements of interpersonal conflict, a formal grievance process may not be effective in resolving those issues. If such resolution is desired, other procedures, - such as mediation - are recommended. The HEAR Council will thus request that any individual(s) using the resources of the HEAR Council agree to a disclaimer that recognizes that the HEAR Council is a voluntary resource offered to the IMCW community, and does not abrogate any right, or necessity, of recourse to formal legal processes.

Grievance Process

An important function of the HEAR Council is to encourage an intention of mutual respect and reconciliation whenever conflict arises within our community. In the rare occasion that a more formal process may be necessary the following process is available.



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1. Bringing a Concern

A formal grievance process is initiated by communicating in writing with the HEAR Council. This “letter of request” must include:

- A clear statement that a formal grievance process is requested.
- The name of the person(s) whose behavior the complaint concerns.
- A description of the alleged behavior sufficient enough to allow the HEAR Council to decide whether the complaint is appropriate for initiating a formal grievance procedure.
- A history of the attempts, if any, to resolve the complaint through other means.
- A general statement about the resolution desired.

2. Accepting the Concern

Once the HEAR Council has accepted a request, it must convey its acceptance within two weeks to both the party filing the complaint and the party named in the complaint. As part of this notification, the Council will state its understanding of the issue under inquiry and will distribute a copy of the original “letter of request” to the party named in the complaint.

3. Forming a Grievance Council

Once a complaint is accepted, the HEAR Council selects three of its members to constitute a Grievance Council. In keeping with the tradition of monastic council this council will investigate, issue findings, and render a decision on the complaint. The HEAR Council will also appoint one of its members to be the moderator of the Grievance Council, who guides the procedures but does not participate in any decisions.

4. Investigating the Concern

The moderator schedules closed hearings in which all parties are given a chance to present their understanding of the issue under investigation. The Grievance Council may question all parties and may request additional information. The moderator will document the proceedings.

The Grievance Council may ask other people to provide information pertinent to the complaint. All parties will have a full and fair opportunity to respond to all information – oral, written, or otherwise – gathered by the Grievance Council.



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Except for informing the HEAR Council and appropriate community leaders (as agreed with the HEAR Council; this will generally comprise the IMCW Board and the Executive Committee of the Teachers Council), the proceedings will be held confidentially for the duration of the proceedings. For the duration of the proceedings, members of the IMCW Board and Teachers Council (other than those that might be in the Grievance Council) will refrain from involvement in discussion, mediation etc. in relation to the grievance. Further, both the party filing the complaint and the party named in the complaint also are encouraged to keep discussion of the grievance within the Grievance Council for the duration of the proceedings.

The Grievance Council will proceed with its work with all deliberate speed, continuing until the Council members are satisfied that they are adequately informed. In the event that one or more of the parties wishes more rapid resolution than is feasible, the Grievance Council has the right to choose to suggest, in consultation with all parties, an interim set of actions to be in effect during the duration of the proceedings.

If at any point during the proceedings, the party filing the complaint chooses to withdraw it – and the party named in the complaint agrees to its withdrawal – then the process will conclude without the issuance of written findings.

5. Grievance Council Findings

When the Grievance Council members are satisfied that they are adequately informed they will review and discuss the case among themselves. At its discretion, the Grievance Council may seek non-binding advice from any other source. The Grievance Council's decision should be reached by consensus. Within two weeks of a decision, all parties will reconvene at which time the Grievance Council will distribute copies of its written findings and read them aloud. For matters involving the potential suspension of a IMCW teacher, the Grievance Council will consult with the IMCW Teachers Council in jointly establishing the best course of action.

Anyone wishing to speak formally with a member of the HEAR Council or to bring a concern to its attention can send an e-mail to imcw.hear@me.com.



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These guidelines for IMCW's Healing, Ethics and Reconciliation Council were adapted from the description of the Ethics and Reconciliation Council of Spirit Rock.