

Restoration of Harmony Procedures

I. Guiding Principles

We are committed to be the living embodiment of the truth that it is possible to have a vibrant sangha, without power trips, without alcohol and drugs, and without money issues. We believe that we can run a clean, clear program, and are dedicated to having a stand-up organization that serves our entire community and our world. We are a group of devoted Vajrayana practitioners who value staying true to our Teachers' vision of serving others through sharing the dharma. We are committed to creating a warm, safe, and welcoming atmosphere where all levels of practitioners, from all walks of life are free to practice in a supportive and authentic environment. Our Teachers are committed to us to ensure that what we receive from them is always safe and always in accordance with the Dharma.

We value harmony but welcome challenges, as we understand challenges are necessary for growth. Cooperation, like independence, is a quality to be nurtured and encouraged, though it may not be easy. Lion's Roar is "*heart centered*." This means we value truly knowing one another through human connection – teacher to student, warm hand to warm hand, warm heart to warm heart. Maintaining heart centered harmony takes commitment and work from every individual in our community.

The basic foundation for our harmony is the five precepts. Lion's Roar Refuge Members and Teachers specifically commit to these five precepts as part of their dharma practice. Following the precepts are not always easy and conflict over them can arise. It is how we resolve these conflicts within dharma that is important. The five precepts are:

1. To abstain from taking a life
2. To abstain from taking what is not given
3. To abstain from sexual misconduct
4. To abstain from false speech
5. To abstain from intoxicants

A basic assumption of this framework is that the community members involved are doing some regular dharma practice, whether this is a secular mindfulness practice or lineage dharma practice or something in between. These practices are our basis for harmony, when we center our heart and are therefore able to grow through our challenges. They also form the common understanding that allows our community to nurture and encourage each other, hand to hand and heart to heart. Challenges are when our hearts and minds are stretched and overwhelmed, and we are not able to settle ourselves privately from our own side.

The purpose of this document is to provide a framework for restoring harmony when challenges have arisen. There are three main levels of intervention: informal, where those involved in the dispute learn specific techniques to use on their own to work through their challenge; formal, which has several sublevels, but essentially this is where neutral parties become involved to help restore harmony; and finally tribunal, where the entire community is involved because the discord or harm was at the community level and harmony needs to be restored to everyone.

At the informal level, restoring harmony is assisted by changing how we communicate with ourselves, and therefore with each other. This is called the 'independent mediator' level, because you are acting as your own mediators. The language we use is the foundation we build our relationships on, including the relationship with ourselves. Gathering ourselves back together through meditation and better communication will help restore harmony between ourselves and others.

When parties are unable to restore harmony between themselves using the new communication techniques, then the first level of the formal restoration process may be started. A single mediator is chosen by the parties together. This mediator will help the parties build on their communication skills. Guiding them through restoring harmony, the mediator will rely on the communication techniques that were introduced at the informal level. Sometimes, having a neutral party to help settle the heart and mind is all that is needed to reach harmony.

The third level is that of the Triumvirate, where three mediators help the parties restore harmony between them. Often, the two parties will each pick a member of the triumvirate, and then those two mediators will choose the third. At the level of the Triumvirate, not all challenges will have gone through the first two stages, these include, moderately serious challenges which arise and need to be handled differently, or minor challenges which involve a Teacher. The Triumvirate focuses on deep listening skills, allowing the parties to truly hear themselves and each other.

At the final mediation level, restoring harmony is pursued through equanimity and the legitimacy of the process. The Board, as the collective composition of mediators is called, is intentionally designed to be composed of leaders from outside of the sangha—leaders of Dharma centers, other community leaders, people with specific knowledge or skills. Convening a Board is not likely to be a common practice, but the process must be in place and the willingness to do so whenever needed must be there. The Board is intended to handle serious challenges, ones where potentially there has already been legal action, anything more than a minor allegation involving a Teacher. Restoring harmony on this level requires more time and investment on the part of all involved, it requires that dharma be real and alive and accessible. The stretched and overwhelmed hearts and minds involved in a Board-type challenge are not likely to resolve the underlying issue. Therefore, it is important to use the principle of equanimity to help free the parties from the suffering of our mercurial hearts and minds.

Lastly, the Tribunal, bringing together the entire sangha and community for healing and compassion. A challenge that is so great that every heart and every mind is stretched and overwhelmed is not the time to try to consider what to do. We live in a time when religious institutions are the target of violence. Tragedies happen and beloved Teachers die. Having an immediate plan in place, even if it is not the formal proceeding, starts the healing and brings the community back together.