

# Palpung Shenpen Tharchin Tibetan Buddhist Sangha Ethics Policy and Protocol for Maintaining a Harmonious Environment for Spiritual Practice

## I. Policy Statement

Palpung Shenpen Tharchin Sangha of Richmond (PST), established in 1993, is a community within the Palpung Lineage of Vajrayana Tibetan Buddhism. Its primary goal is to preserve the authenticity and continuity of the three vehicles of the Buddha's teachings in the contemporary world in order to benefit all sentient beings, and to make these available to all who are interested. The PST community is made up of lay practitioners. PST shares with all traditions of Buddhism the three principal refuges and the commitment to avoid the ten negative actions. All teachers and members are expected to take these to heart.

The principal refuges: We take refuge in the three jewels: Buddha, Dharma and Sangha, and we take refuge in the three roots: the Lama, Yidam, and the Dharma Protectors.

The ten negative actions: We vow to refrain from: 1) killing, 2) taking what is not given, 3) sexual conduct that harms others in any way, 4) false speech, 5) harsh speech, 6) divisive speech, 7) gossip/idle speech 8) covetousness, 9) ill will, and 10) wrong view.

## II. Personal Conduct of Sangha Members and Teachers

### A. Discrimination or Harassment

PST members and visitors are expected to treat each other with respect and kindness both physically and verbally. We will maintain an environment free of discrimination of any kind based on race, color, age, ethnicity or national origin, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, or disability or any other factor.

### B. Standards of Conduct for Sangha Leaders

Teachers, center leaders, and senior sangha members are responsible for recognizing the authority implicit in their roles and refraining from any use of this implicit authority to secure special privileges or to inappropriately influence others, or for any other personal ends; and to refrain from any action that might result in harm to a student or the community.

A sexual / romantic relationship between a teacher and a sangha member is not encouraged, but may occur. These relationships must be disclosed immediately to the sangha, not kept clandestine. Both partners are obliged to seek counsel from the resident teacher, a PST center leader, and/or a senior member of Palpung Thubten Choling monastery. All parties involved, including the board and sangha, have the right to initiate a Grievance Procedure.

### C. Interpersonal Conduct

PST is a place of spiritual practice and refuge. The feeling of comfort and safety for both members and non-members of PST alike at PST meetings and events takes precedence over the pursuit of romantic / sexual relationships. Sangha members must be aware that everyone comes to PST in a different state of mind and/or with a different set of needs and preferences. Some may not be comfortable dating or being asked for a date by others at PST meetings and events.

Inappropriate or repeated unwelcome conduct in this regard shall be considered harassment and will be addressed with a Grievance Procedure.

#### D. Intoxicants and Weapons

Intoxicants, including marijuana and alcohol, and weapons, including licensed firearms, are prohibited in the Ekoji Buddhist Sangha building. The only exception is when a Lama introduces sacred implements or small amounts of alcohol as part of a formal ritual.

Whether online or in person, we resolve to attend PST meetings and events sober. If an attendee is obviously intoxicated and it is affecting the functionality of the meeting, they may be asked to leave the meeting or event.

### III. Grievance Procedure

Please note that as of October 2024, the Grievance Procedure following is still in review by the Board of Directors of PST. We hope to have a final document in November 2024.

The purpose of PST's Grievance Procedure is to facilitate communication and bring any problem to resolution in as honest, simple, and straightforward a manner as possible. We acknowledge that there is no perfect solution to any problem among people. We will endeavor to help all parties arrive at the best possible solution given the situation, but the Grievance Procedure will center the needs of the aggrieved.

If a person in the sangha feels harassed, unsafe, and/or uneasy at PST meetings or with another member or visitor of PST, and they do not feel comfortable or able to resolve the situation directly with that person, they should seek counsel from a PST mediator who shall be 1) the PST resident teacher, a center leader at PST, and/or a senior member of Palpung Thubten Choling monastery, and 2) able and willing to try to facilitate a resolution. The grievance may be stated orally or in writing.

PST's Board of Directors will be notified of the grievance unless the aggrieved party requests that the Board or specific Directors on the Board not be notified. A PST mediator may request assistance from a Board member, center leader, or PTC teacher provided that the person bringing the grievance does not object.

The person bringing the grievance is welcome to invite another sangha member or visitor to accompany them throughout the grievance process, provided that all involved understand that the process and complaint must be kept confidential in respect to all parties involved.

If a resolution is not reached through the above procedure, the PST Board of Directors may employ an outside mediator or seek advice from other experts and professionals.

All who are involved in a Grievance Procedure will maintain confidentiality in all informal and formal proceedings, and all related documents will be maintained as confidential, unless the grievance concerns a relationship between teacher and student, in which case the relationship must be disclosed to the sangha, or if legal counsel requires disclosure.

Anyone who has violated PST's Ethics Policy and Protocol may be asked to cease attending PST meetings and events.