

BIPOC Intergenerational Justice and Healing Community Agreements

A Working Guide for Our Virtual and In-person Sangha

INTENTIONS

Each time we enter a BIJaH Online or In-person space, we step into a shared practice container.

We water a collective intention to create and hold sacred spaces rooted in safety and bravery. In such spaces, we are witnessed and encouraged to express ourselves without fear of attack, ridicule, or denial of experience. A sacred space invites us to risk intimacy, trust, and transformative love, and to be mirrored by our practice and our sangha (practice community).

We use the phrase “brave space” with “safer space” to evoke the possibility of fearlessness alongside the fleeting realities of moving toward safety. We carry and express varied histories, traumas, and experiences of oppression. We embody different forms of power, privilege, and entitlement. Conflict may arise, and at times we may not feel safe. Together, we explore how to hold our pain and conflict with tenderness. We cherish our sangha and its members by taking responsibility for the impact of our actions. With bravery, we practice letting go of the conditioning and colonization that keeps us from sharing our vulnerability. We practice being curious and brave enough to acknowledge our blind spots, to ask for support, and to learn how to care for each other. We return to our intentions, we acknowledge our impacts, and return to sangha.

1. ARRIVE GENTLY, BE WITH

We begin and end our meetings on time. Appreciating how refreshing it is to be in a place that is well attended to, we take care of ourselves and our community by being mindful of the chat, mute/unmute, and the environment around us that is visible on screen.

2. HONOR INTIMACY, PRIVACY, CONFIDENTIALITY

We do not share the names or personal stories of anyone other than ourselves, now or later. If we want to follow up with anyone regarding something they said in community, we ask first and respect their wishes.

3. ASSUME NONE, BE ONE

We do not assume the race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, or life experience of anyone else. We have the individual option to share pronouns, and we will collectively respect pronouns.

4. DIALOGUE OVER DEBATE THROUGH MINDFUL LISTENING

We listen deeply with our full attention, in body, heart, and mind. We listen to understand, not to respond. We are willing to be surprised, to learn something new, to be changed by all viewpoints and ideas.

5. PRACTICE CARE AND CONSENT

We practice care and consent by participating in what feels right and speaking our needs and concerns as they arise, as much as we can. We can say “I pass” or “No, thank you” if we don’t wish to speak. We ask for permission before offering advice, unless directly asked.

6. PRACTICE SELF FOCUS AND SPEAK FROM THE “I”

We attend to and speak about our own experiences and responses and attempt to minimize intellectualizing. We speak using “I” statements and do not speak for a whole group or express assumptions about the experience of others.

7. PRACTICE “BOTH / AND”

We substitute “and” for “but” when speaking. This practice acknowledges and honors multiple realities. This also supports creating spaciousness around our binary ways and dualistic notions and tendencies..

8. UNDERSTAND THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN INTENT AND IMPACT

In addition to being mindful of intention, it's equally important to be mindful of the impact our actions and words have on others. Staying aligned with the Buddha's teachings on Upaya (skillful means) means assessing our ability to listen, opening to the diversity of perspectives, and letting go of the assumption of centrality of one's own conditioning.

9. REFRAIN FROM BLAMING OR SHAMING SELF & OTHERS

We practice giving skillful feedback and not performing quality control on another's expressions, or our own, understanding that powerful emotions can arise as a shout, a stammer, a cry; and that these expressions, too, deserve space and care.

10. MAKING SPACE FOR OURSELVES AND OTHERS

We encourage full participation by all present, knowing that courage takes different forms for each of us. Take note of who is speaking and who is not. If you tend to speak often, consider "tuning in" through mindful listening and making space for others. If you tend to rest in silence, consider "making space" by sharing your experience.

11. MEETING EDGES, RESPECTING BOUNDARIES

We listen to our body, heart, and mind. If we do not want to participate in break-out groups, we can decline to "join" the invitation and remain in the main room. If we are in a break-out room and we want to leave, we can click "return to the main room" at any time. While we encourage full participation, we respect everyone to know what they have capacity for in each moment.

This is our practice of collective liberation. It will be uncomfortable, joyous, terrifying, and profound. And we begin again anew, in every moment, together.

Acknowledgements, Resources, and References:

- Baltimore and Beyond Mindfulness Community
<https://www.baltimoremindfulnesscommunity.space/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/guidelines-for-dharma-sharing-2019.pdf>
- Insight Meditation Society dharma.org
- East Bay Meditation Center, Agreements for Multi-Cultural Interaction, adopted from Visions Inc.'s "Guidelines for Productive Work Sessions." www.visions-inc.org
- Buddhist Peace Fellowship, Block Build Be Shared Agreements, July 2017
- Intergroup Dialogue trainings (dialogue and debate, University of Michigan, University of California Los Angeles)
- "From Safe Spaces to Brave Spaces" (article from The Art of Effective Facilitation, Stylus Publishing, 2013)
- Natural Bravery by Gaylon Ferguson (Shambhala Publications, 2016)
- Brooklyn Zen Center "Community Agreements," www.BrooklynZen.Org

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