

THOMASVILLE BUDDHIST CENTER

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Repa Bushi Yamato Damashii's Ethics Statement

Ethics Statement

Thank you for reading this document. **I am currently accepting new students or mentees.** Requests for one-on-one conversations or meetings will be scheduled at my earliest convenience, which may be several weeks after your request. In the meantime, please take a look at resources on my website. Also consider joining me at a workshop, dharma event, retreat, or online talk that is most accessible for you. In any case, the following document clarifies my role as a spiritual teacher and mentor and the ethical guidelines do apply to one-on-one sessions with me.

My Motivation

I share Dharma and other Buddhist based spiritual practices because these practices have deeply benefited my life. My teachers were kind enough to offer these practices to me when I most needed them, and they continue to do so. My only aspiration is to see people healthy, happy, fierce, and fabulous! I want to see people living authentically from a place of love and compassion, not from a place of aggression, fear, shame, or any form of self-degradation. I want to help free others from the habitual patterns that intensify suffering for themselves and the community.

And while I want others to be free and woke, I understand that if I am to play a role in how others are waking up, I must practice ethical guidelines that are rooted in my primary ethic of minimizing harm to others and myself. To decrease harm in my relationship to others especially as a teacher and mentor, I am committed to healthy communication, vulnerability, freedom of expression and nonjudgmental presence, appropriate boundaries, self-empowerment, and confidentiality.

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Financial Compensation

I do not charge for my work with mentees and students. I am completely sustained by donations from individuals and practice communities. I am open and grateful for whatever financial donation you are willing to offer but at the same time it is important to understand that your willingness and capacity to offer does not affect my willingness to work with you. However, it is important to offer something to any teacher or mentor to help them practice sustainability. I have supported and continue to support my teachers through financial offering and this helps them offer support not just to me but to many others. If you are able to offer a donation, \$10-\$100 is an appropriate range to think about donation offerings depending on your financial capacity. Again, your capacity to offer financial support does not determine my willingness to offer guidance. If you have questions, I am more than willing to talk more about this.

Clarifying Relationships

I believe when starting any relationship it is important to be very clear about the relationship. The traditional teacher-student relationship is a very complex interaction that can be extremely profound and fulfilling yet at the same can be intense and confusing. This document is intended to offer insight into my process of working with students and mentees in this relationship including the things I value the most and my expectations of both myself and anyone entering into this kind of relationship with me. My intention is to offer clarity and insight into what it means to enter into an authentic spiritual relationship.

My Role as a Spiritual Mentor

I think of my role in different ways. On one hand, I am a trained and authorized Dharma teacher in the Tibetan tradition of Vajrayana Buddhism. My direct teachers are Lama Rod Owens and Repa Dorje Odzer (Lama Justin Von Bujdoos). Yet within a contemporary perspective I function as a Buddhist Minister, pastoral counselor, and spiritual director. However, when working with others offering guidance and instruction in Buddhist and mindfulness based spiritual practices, I see myself more as a spiritual mentor. In my capacity as a

spiritual mentor, I see myself entering into a spiritual relationship with a mentee/student.

My Role as a Secular and Buddhist Based Mindfulness Mentor

Among my roles, this is the newest. Over the past 25 years, I have deepened my personal practice and study of mindfulness. My mindfulness practice began in my early 20's and continues today through study and practice of tantric Buddhist mindfulness, the practice of Chod, and Sesshin. Currently, I am the abbot and director of Thomasville Buddhist Center in Thomasville, NC, and a guest lecturer at many colleges and universities, specializing in Buddhist meditation, and its influences on personal and social peace.

For Those Seeking Advice and Guidance

Another kind of relationship that is more informal, which others seek from me, is through asking for guidance or advice. This is support I often offer others who often do not practice with me as a student or mentee. This ethical framework still applies to these relationships as well.

My role as a mindfulness and spiritual mentor includes:

1. Offering spiritually based Buddhist spiritual instruction on decreasing suffering and increasing happiness
2. Supporting a student/mentee in identifying appropriate goals for our work together
3. Modeling authentic practice
4. Maintaining my personal practice

I am not a Therapist

Most importantly, I am not a licensed mental health professional. I have no authority or expertise to diagnose any mental illness or to prescribe any medication. While I do believe that Buddhist based spiritual practice is particularly powerful, it is not always effective as an antidote for more serious forms of mental illness. For serious illness, Buddhist based spiritual practice is a profound compliment for traditional forms of mental health therapies and treatments. I reserve the right to suspend our formal mentor/mentee relationship and encourage you to seek formal mental health treatments if I feel there is a need for it. After securing such treatment, we can continue a more formal relationship.

What is the Difference between a Student and a Mentee?

Simply, students are those who identify me as one of their primary spiritual mentors. This is a relationship that is agreed upon only if others feel compelled to do so. It is close relationship. A mentee is someone who relates to me not as a teacher but someone they seek guidance from and the relationship doesn't have to be strictly about dharma practice. Regardless of how the relationship is identified, what is most important is developing reasonable goals for our work together and dialoguing together to develop an appropriate and effective working relationship to meet these goals.

What I Expect from Students/Mentees

I don't have many expectations from potential students/mentees. The only expectations I have are:

1. A willingness to trust me
2. Making an effort to practice in a way that is appropriate and sustainable
3. Respecting my boundaries as a spiritual mentor
4. Being able to communicate experiences and appropriate boundaries

What I Value and What to Expect from Me

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There are several things that I deeply value in a relationship with student/mentee. These follow and will help to support the expectations I have for students/mentees. They also demonstrate what you should expect from me.

Overall, I value transparency. For me transparency means clarity, directness, honesty, and a willingness to be vulnerable. I work to being this to all of my relationships. The following values help me to practice transparency and helps you to understand what to expect from me.

Communication

Communication is very important to me and is something that I am striving to improve and deepen continuously. Without clear, honest, and direct communication there can be little improvement in relationships. As a spiritual mentor, it is imperative that I model healthy communication with those I work with and encourage the same from others.

One important aspect of communication is feedback. I support and deeply value a relationship where sharing our experience of the relationship is nurtured. Without this kind of communication, it becomes very difficult to be sensitive to the needs we may have in the relationship.

Listening is also very important. Not only am I committed to healthy communication I am also committed to active listening or compassionate listening. This is a practice of listening from a place of personal vulnerability, holding the space for others to offer their experience while at the same time being mindful of what my experience is, not becoming distracted by it or reacting to it.

I strive to model healthy communication and listening by:

- Expressing my experience in a clear and direct way
- Being mindful of my experience and choosing to communicate out of compassion and care for both myself and others
- Expressing what is truthful and meaningful
- Listening from a place that validates, cares for, and honors

others' experiences

Trust

For the spiritual mentor-mentee relationship to be effective, there must be some level of trust between all involved. Some level of trust initiated the relationship to begin with. Initially, my responsibility is to help provide a safe space for instruction and guidance to be transmitted. Later, it becomes both of our responsibility to test this safe space out and determine if it is actually beneficial for the both of us.

The ways that I encourage trust in my relations with students and mentees are:

- Practicing Integrity
- Being authentic
- Practicing mindfully while working together
- Modeling what practice looks like and maintaining my own personal practice

Vulnerability/Openness

As trust in this relationship deepens, it is important that we both feel that we can be open or vulnerable. Often the most important teachings that are transmitted are those of simply allowing ourselves to feel relaxed, safe, and cared for in the relationship. For me, vulnerability means that I feel safe to hold the space for anything to arise and to simply be present to it. As we continue our work together, it is important that you challenge yourself to understand what vulnerability means to you and how we can support this experience for both of us.

The ways I practice vulnerability are:

- Through compassionate communication and listening
- Encouraging feedback
- Practicing mindfulness

- Sharing what is meaningful for me

I encourage vulnerability from others by:

- Not judging the experiences of others
- Practicing compassionate communication and listening
- Practicing mindfulness
- Being honest and direct

Freedom of Expression

I feel that with trust and vulnerability being practiced in a healthy way, our freedom of expression will naturally strengthen. For me, this means that we are both able to express ourselves in a way that is natural and self-affirming. However, we must also practice mindfully to understand how our expression could possibly be challenging for both of us. It is important that we communicate and offer feedback in order to make sure we are working within a safe space for us.

I practice freedom of expression by:

- Being authentic
- Speaking truthfully and earnestly
- Practicing with my own internalized shame and fear

I encourage freedom of expression from others by:

- Not judging others expressions
- Practicing mindfulness
- Practicing vulnerability

Self-Empowerment

One of my key aspirations is to empower those I work with to bring about the changes in their practice and life that is most beneficial. It is important for all practitioners to understand that any positive results we wish to see comes from exerting our self in practice (especially basic meditation) while being guided by

authentic instruction. If there is no willingness to practice, then our relationship will not be beneficial and I will choose to terminate the relationship.

I work to empower others by:

- Offering authentic and detailed dharma instruction
- Helping to define and develop a practice for mentees-students
- Encouraging and supporting practice
- Supporting others through obstacles related to practice

Confidentiality

Confidentiality in a spiritual relationship is crucial. Whatever is explored in our relationship is considered private. You have the right to share your work with me with whomever you wish. I will not share specifics with others. If I do share, it will be in a general manner with other teachers or mental health professions in order to seek advice on how to best support our work together.

I support confidentiality by:

- Practicing mindfulness
- Discussing and respecting boundaries

Boundaries and Misconduct

Boundaries are imperative in the spiritual mentor/mentee-student relationship. Boundaries help protect both of us. It is important that we understand what is appropriate and what is not. This can only be practiced through communication and trust. Boundaries have to be discussed and processed often as our relationship deepens.

I practice healthy boundary making in relationships by:

- Practicing my right to set boundaries
- Being direct and honest about what is conducive to emotional and physical health

- Encouraging check-ins about what is comfortable or not

I encourage others in boundary making by:

- Being open to boundaries being set
- Being willing to discuss proposed boundaries
- Respecting boundaries

Sexual Misconduct

I am personally committed to refraining from creating harm through sexuality and sexual exploitation. I am mindful of not exploiting my authority and position in order to assume a sexual relationship with a mentee/student. I cannot enter into a mentor/mentee relationship with anyone whom I have an intimate relationship with nor will I maintain a mentor/mentee relationship with anyone if intimate feelings develop on my part or a mentees part and if these feelings disrupt the relationship or lead to romantic involvement.

What Working with me Looks Like

I am a fulltime Tibetan dharma teacher, thinker, and mindfulness instructor. I maintain an active travel and teaching schedule. I work with students and mentees and several spiritual communities. I work with students/mentees individually in person when possible or over the phone or Zoom. If you choose to work with me, then it is important that you consider attending group retreats that I offer in different parts of the country and soon in Europe and the UK. For those who live in and around the Piedmont Triad area, I offer periodic one-day retreats especially for those who work with me. Please refer to my website for my teaching schedule.