

APPENDIX

Each of us will approach conflict resolution somewhat differently, and this creativity of response is in fact the Way. Here are a few general suggestions, offered in the hope that they will support your creative response.

I. Suggestions for individual practice

Before even engaging with the other person(s) in a conflict situation, it's helpful to ask, "What work can I do on my own here? How can I take some first steps?" Our practice suggests: meditation, precepts study, and consultation with a teacher or spiritual friend, for starters.

Our vows are tools for practice of enormous power. It is not always easy to turn to them at the moment when feelings run high, and it's tempting to use them to analyze where the other person has gone wrong....but actually they are meant to be, and can be, a source of solace and helpful perspective on our own reactions.

Identifying one's own part in a conflict gets easier with reflection. Is some part of this problem a result of my actions?

In preparing to talk with someone, practices such as those taught in Nonviolent Communication texts are also very helpful. For example, identifying one's own actual feelings, and the actual bare facts of a situation, and disentangling these from our beliefs and opinions about a situation can be enormously helpful.

A teacher can be a companion as you take up the matter as the very stuff of your practice. In beginning this way, you may find that some space opens up in the situation; that you don't have to "believe everything you think," and that in fact you can find some curiosity about the situation, the other person/persons involved, and the intensity of your own response. This might help you clarify what it is you'd like to resolve so that the Way can operate freely in the situation, bringing increased wisdom and harmony to all involved.

II. SUGGESTIONS for Practicing with another person

First of all, when entering into a process for addressing conflict with someone, it's helpful to create a common space, you might say, or find some common ground on which to meet .

Four actions can help this happen:

1. Express gratitude or appreciation to each other for something, anything real. It changes the quality of the air.
2. Acknowledge common ground, any common ground.
3. Acknowledge not knowing, not understanding.
4. Look for ways to learn from each other and the situation.

As you prepare to meet with someone, it can be helpful to review guidelines our sangha or other sanghas have found useful. For example, here are some from San Francisco Zen Center:

Basic Guidelines for Resolving Conflicts and Disagreements

Although no fixed procedures for informal conflict resolution exist, the suggestions and procedures that follow are intended to give all persons involved in a dispute a chance to be fully heard in an environment of respect and kindness that flows from knowing that there is no fundamental difference between us.

1. Stating the Actual

A crucial aspect of conflict resolution, just as in Buddhist practice itself, is discriminating between our interpretations and opinions of an event and how the event was or is personally experienced. In part, this means not making general statements but rather sticking to the particulars of actual situations and the emotions experienced. It is extremely difficult to have mutual understanding when discussion remains at the level of interpretation and generalization.

2. Being Heard

It is important that everyone be given an opportunity to be fully heard. This means that everyone be given a chance to recount how they remember the history of a conflict, to state their feelings regarding the conflict, and to explain the goals they have for its resolution. Such statements should be neither defensive nor critical since both approaches tend to preclude deeper mutual understanding. Much conflict arises and is perpetuated through a lack of mutual understanding; taking calm, deliberate, and adequate time to listen to each other is often all that is needed for reconciliation to begin.

3. Restating What Was Heard

To insure that everyone understands one another, it is useful for each party to briefly restate what the other has said, highlighting the main points. The other party then says whether the restatement is complete and accurate, and makes correct

4. Confession

Resolution and reconciliation is greatly facilitated if everyone involved reflects on how they may have contributed to a conflict and then explains this to the other party. Even when one person is primarily responsible, self-reflection, confession, and apology on everyone's part can provide a safer, more trusting, and understanding environment for everyone to be truthful.

5. Facilitation

It is often useful to invite one or more neutral witnesses or mediators to take part in a session of conflict resolution. Such a person may simply be a silent witness providing a sense of calm and presence or may be an active mediator who helps ensure that each person is given uninterrupted opportunities to speak. This person might also point out the difference between statements of opinion and interpretation and direct statements of how an event or feeling was or is actually experienced. Invited facilitators can be anyone whom both parties respect; e.g., friends, neutral acquaintances, practice leaders, or people who are trained in mediation.

6. Affirmation (An SMS addition)

A meeting or meetings to address a difficulty may or may not end in agreement or resolution of all issues. In concluding such a meeting, it can be useful to return to the beginning---to affirm our appreciation for each other, our common ground, our common humanity, our common commitment to practice, and our recognition that all attempts to resolve conflicts are a contribution to peace. If any agreement has been formed, it's good to restate this.

III. Guidelines for Members of Conflict Resolution Committee

- Communication
 - The Chair of the Conflict Resolution Committee (CRC) will provide copies of the SMS conflict resolution process to all relevant parties and act as the primary point of contact. (already in the process document)
 - Whenever possible, all members should meet together with the relevant parties:
 - If possible, consider roles such as "Facilitator", "Observer", "Note Taker"
 - After the meeting, the CRC should meet to clarify what went on, share points of view and to understand the next steps

- Working as a group:
 - The CRC is a group effort, temporarily formed for a specific purpose by the SMS Steering Committee. This purpose may be to facilitate a conflict between Sangha members, gather information for the Steering Committee, etc. If the CRC meets and determines that the purpose and objectives are not clear, the CRC should work with the Steering Committee to better understand the purpose. If clear goals cannot be established, consider dissolving this instance of the CRC.
 - As in any working group, disagreements may appear within the CRC itself. Whenever possible, the CRC should try to address these disagreements as individual and group practice. If needed, Sangha Teachers, the Steering Committee Chairperson and trusted Sangha members should be utilized to try to resolve these issues. Whenever possible, an eye should be kept towards the specific purpose and goals of this instance of the CRC.

IV. RESOURCES

Please see the SMS website, www.smszen.org, for the names and contact information of current members of the Steering Committee of Springs Mountain Sangha.

Here are some resources that some of us have found helpful:

- Our Buddhist Precepts. These can be found in the Open Source Sutra Book, section 5. These precepts express the ethical foundation of our Way, and they are guides we turn to for help when we find ourselves troubled by our own or another's behavior. The precepts are not so useful as a measuring stick by which we can judge another's behavior; but they are very helpful in looking into our own reactions and responses to another's actions.
- Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life , by Marshall B. Rosenberg
- (ADDITIONAL RESOURCES TO BE ADDED ON SUGGESTION OF SANGHA MEMBERS)

*Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,
there is a field. I'll meet you there.*

*When the soul lies down in that grass,
the world is too full to talk about.
Ideas, language, even the phrase each other
doesn't make any sense.*

*From Essential Rumi
by Coleman Barks*