

Arcata Zen Group's Core Values for Decision-Making

We root our participatory group process in the realization of non-self, in the understanding of interdependence, and with faith in practice-realization. We vow, together with all beings, to ease each other's discomfort through our thoughts, words and actions, by rooting them in the Noble Eightfold Path. In addition, we vow to do no harm, to do good, and to do good for others. This is the beauty and joy of the Sangha jewel.

Our Core Values for Participatory Decision-Making are:

- **Full Participation**
- **Mutual Understanding**
- **Inclusive Solutions**
- **Shared Responsibility**

Core Value: Full Participation as Practice

In a participatory group, all members are encouraged to speak and say what's on their minds. To be able to speak and listen from the heart, and to encourage spontaneity, we offer each other the gift of fearlessness. Fearlessness is letting go of preconceived ideas, protective measures, competitiveness, and the delusion of separation. In offering this gift, we open up to the present moment, let the world come in, and offer our life to one another. Being fearless, we encourage each other to take risks, to give voice to controversial issues, and to embrace divergent thinking and an open process.

Practicing Full Participation

1. Share first draft ideas, half-formed thoughts and spontaneity.
2. Avoid criticizing, complaining, competing, and comparing.
3. Come prepared to engage fully by reviewing and considering agenda items before meetings.
4. Listen with an open heart and without preparing your own statement while someone else is speaking.
5. Honor each other's full participation by being on time, and keeping comments brief and related to the discussion.

**Being here with all of you
I offer myself and my life for all to see.
Letting go of narrowness
I vow to engage fearlessly for the sake of all beings.**

Core Value: Mutual Understanding as Practice

Our group strives to integrate the perspective of each member through the practice of *mutual understanding*. Decisions made with mutual understanding are more fully participatory and result in lasting benefit for our shared practice life. Mutual understanding develops when each of us cultivates a sense of curiosity and openness to one another's views, a willingness to accept that other members' viewpoints are essential to our common effort, and trust that that the shared wisdom of our group is greater than the sum of its parts.

Practicing Mutual Understanding

1. Ask questions to understand another's view without critiquing it. Engage in an effort to reveal unspoken aspects of a view for the benefit of the speaker, as well as the group.
2. Reflect speaker's view in your own terms, spoken or unspoken, to verify a mutual understanding.
3. Acknowledge and integrate one another's ideas and recognize the richness of differing views and apparent differences between them.
4. Help build connections between apparently disparate views.

**Taking refuge in the jewel sangha,
We strive for integration.
Allowing ourselves to know and be known,
Without clinging nor repulsing,
Our ideas are molded in common effort.
Woven together with each other,
Our common wisdom,
Made whole, thread-by-thread.**

Core Value: Inclusive Solutions as Practice

We value the Wisdom that can emerge only from inclusive solutions. We recognize that we need each other's experience and perspectives to creative innovative and sustainable responses to the opportunities as well as the challenges of our shared life. We realize that, to the extent that we practice inclusive solutions, we will reach the best possible decisions.

Practicing Inclusive Solutions

1. Be active in discussion as both a listener and a speaker.
2. Be prepared to explain every person's position in terms that they can agree represents their thought.
3. When all have spoken, return to summarize each person's thoughts before proceeding to conclusions.
4. When consensus seems likely, ask
 - “what have we left out?”
 - “what part of our potential decision is still troublesome?”
 - “what seems particularly pleasing about our decision?”

**Listening with my mind and heart,
I vow to hear and understand the mind and heart of each person.
Knowing that the best solution comes from all together,
I vow to welcome our shared emergent Wisdom.**

Core Value: Shared Responsibility as Practice

Sustainable decisions require everyone's support, and responsibility for the decision-making process helps ensure that each person will be willing and able to implement the proposals. Our vows support us in relinquishing our self-concern and cultivating the qualities of empathy and assertiveness. This helps us realize that it is really only through the support of others that we can accomplish our goals.

Practicing Shared Responsibility

1. All participants help design the agenda, take on meeting roles, and be willing to implement the proposals.
2. Make every effort to raise issues that are important to you, and make sure you are satisfied with the proposed course of action before a final decision is made.
3. Assume responsibility for designing and managing the thinking process during the meeting even when you are not the facilitator.

**When the bell rings to begin the meeting,
I vow together with all beings,
to be ready to meet others
with don't know mind.**

Other Suggestions for Practicing

1. Speak from your heart, without concern for what others may think of you.
2. Listen with your whole mind-body, taking in the whole person speaking, not just the words being said.
3. Speak from the perspective of your own practice.
4. Listen for what is right with what the other person is saying, not what is wrong.
5. Participate in the group fully, because without you, everyone else's experience is diminished.
6. Respect what you don't know.

**Opening my mouth to speak,
May I be mindful of my vow
To open Buddha's Wisdom Way
For all beings.**