



# **Code of Ethics and Good Practice for Spiritual Leaders, Teachers and Guides**

## **Purpose of the Code of Ethics and Good Practice**

1. To educate and encourage spiritual leaders, teachers and guides (“teachers”) to approach their professional work in a competent and ethical manner and provide relevant resources to aid them in these pursuits.
2. To educate students on how to work with their teachers and the teachings in an empowered and ethical manner.
3. To promote ongoing inner work and cultivate qualities of transparency, honesty and integrity in all teachers.
4. To cultivate and safeguard the integrity of the teacher-student relationship.

The ASI defines a spiritual teacher as anyone who provides spiritual guidance in a professional manner, either one-on-one with individuals or to larger groups of students.

## **Section 1: External Performance**

- 1.1 Teachers offer their services in a non-discriminatory manner. They respect all students regardless of age, physical limitations, race, creed, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, spiritual tradition, national origin, marital status, political belief, learning or physical disability, preference, personal characteristic, condition or status. They also respect the rights, dignity and privacy of all students.
- 1.2 Teachers agree to be honest in their dealings with money. To this end they agree to offer teachings without favoritism for personal gain, regarding student's financial circumstances. Teachers do not give or receive commissions, rebates, or any other form of remuneration when referring students to other teachers or for professional services.
- 1.3 Teachers' material needs should not be brought into teachings or the teacher-student relationship. Spiritual teachers should consider having another way of gaining income and supporting themselves if their teaching income is not sufficient for their needs.
- 1.4 Teachers will use discernment in accordance with their knowledge base and training. When they do not know how to answer a student's question, they will

admit it and refrain from using spiritual concepts to disguise a lack of wisdom or insight.

- 1.5 Teachers will abstain from misusing Absolute-Level (nondual) language to dismiss a student's questions or concerns, justify their own unethical behavior, or make unethical demands of students. Examples include phrases such as 'nothing ever happened,' 'nothing matters,' and 'you don't exist.'
- 1.6 Teachers will not give counsel outside of their area of training and expertise. Teachers agree to refer students to an appropriate resource if the teacher lacks some professional skills or is unsuited to work with the individual. Examples might include health or psychological issues, investment advice, etc.
- 1.7 Teachers agree to hold in confidence what is conveyed to them in confidence, through direct communication or in any form of correspondence. When confidentiality is implied, the teacher agrees to respect and uphold the students' rights to privacy.
- 1.8 Teachers will recognize the power differential in the teacher-student relationship and take care not to exploit or abuse the authority that may be directly or indirectly bestowed on them. They will be aware of their influential position and avoid exploiting the trust and dependency of students, establishing and maintaining a formality in the teaching relationship and upholding professional boundaries.
- 1.9 Teachers will not presume special status because of their role as a spiritual teacher. Abusive hierarchical relationships between teachers and students are avoided when the teacher does not identify with his/her role as a teacher. Teachers will not create or actively support the idea of being the 'one and only transmitter', neither will they claim ownership of any spiritual transmission, special energy or grace.
- 1.10 Many students are unsure about how to work with a teacher. They may lack the confidence to question a teacher and thereby relinquish or weaken their own discernment. Teachers should not exploit this tendency and should instead encourage autonomy and emotional maturity in students. Teachers should encourage students to question them on their guidance and teachings when genuine doubts about the teacher or the teachings arise.
- 1.11 Teachers agree to respectfully and transparently support each other as an effective community of peers. To this end, teachers should understand they may be called upon as a member of ASI to contribute to discussions and/or attend webinars so that members can learn from each other's wisdom and experience.
- 1.12 Teachers will not use techniques/procedures/modalities when common sense suggests they may be harmful, even if such services are requested.

- 1.13 Teachers agree to place students' best interest above their own and agree to do no harm. In the best interest of students, teachers actively cultivate intellectual, emotional and spiritual independence and autonomy in their students. Students are encouraged to inwardly discern the words and actions of a teacher and may openly question a teacher if they suspect inauthenticity in the teacher or teachings.
- 1.14 Teachers will address any personal concerns that may affect professional competency. They agree to monitor themselves for signs of physical, mental, or emotional impairment and refrain from teaching when such impairment is likely to harm a student or unduly obscure the teachings. As a community, ASI members strive to support each other through nonjudgmental peer feedback.
- 1.15 Teachers will take care to establish and maintain appropriate physical and psychological boundaries with students, refraining from sexualized behavior, including, but not limited to manipulative, abusive, or coercive words or actions toward a student. They will not engage in physical abuse of any kind or in behavior that is a violation of any criminal laws.
- 1.16 Teachers will make only realistic statements regarding the benefits of spiritual teachings, practices and retreats. They will endeavor to be clear about what they offer and provide as spiritual teachers, and not mislead students or misrepresent what is possible through their work.
- 1.17 Teachers will not make statements that they know or suspect to be false, fraudulent, misleading, deceptive or unfair to others.
- 1.18 Teachers will avoid any relationships that may exploit the trust of students, and approach interactions with students as consciously and intentionally as possible.
- 1.19 Teachers will endeavor to ensure that their practices and behavior conform to the representations they make about themselves.
- 1.20 Teachers will maintain an acute awareness of their motivation when working, agreeing that their satisfaction shall come only from:
  - a) the spirit of service and love of truth for its own sake;
  - b) the learning from the working itself;
  - c) the pleasure of working;
  - d) the fee (if any) agreed upon between themselves and the student(s)
- 1.21 Teachers will acknowledge that it is unethical to attempt to satisfy personal needs that are contrary to the goals of the work. Such needs include:

- a) sexual needs in any form;
- b) needs for physical contact, for physical or emotional intimacy;
- c) social needs like chatting, bragging, gossiping, or simply spending time with a student without regard for the fundamental purpose of the teacher-student relationship;
- d) financial needs, above the agreed upon fee such as soliciting additional money, gifts, favors, or getting information that is designed to lead to financial benefits;
- e) security needs, physical or emotional, including the need for emotional support, self-esteem, fame, power, or control;
- f) needs for attention;
- g) needs to express hostility, to victimize, or to assert one's power;
- h) consciously acting out on feelings of competition, desire for attention, need to be special, craving for admiration, and similar impulses

1.22 Teachers will refrain from asking favors which would negatively affect the student, the student- teacher relationship, and/or the students' relationship to the teachings. Students must not be compromised or coerced into a supportive role for a teacher.

1.23 Selfless service (Seva) is a time-honored form of spiritual practice. Teachers will agree that Seva undertaken by their students is not free work where the teacher can glean financial profits. Selfless service by students is to be managed carefully by teachers to ensure that students are not exploited in any way.

1.24 Teachers will not express hostility toward students, victimize or verbally abuse students. Teachers choose a compassionate methodology to convey teachings. It is accepted that on rare occasions the teacher exercises his/her responsibility to appropriately confront the student's ego behavior, which might include the appropriate expression of anger or another affect. This approach is used sparingly and with discernment and is employed from a place of compassion.

1.25 Teachers will not make statements that are motivated by the intention to exploit a student's fears, anxieties or emotions.

1.26 Teachers will not make statements implying that working with a particular teacher or teachings is the only way to realization.

1.27 Teachers will not create or actively support student dependency in regards to transmission or spiritual energies that come forward through the teacher or during Satsang or while on retreat; neither will they claim personal ownership of any spiritual transmission, special energy or grace.

1.28 Teachers will discern appropriate self-disclosure and refrain from disclosing personal details about their family, friends, or self in teaching situations when other means of conveying a teaching point can be used. Appropriate self-disclosure

needs to be in respectful service of the teacher-student relationship. Examples in inappropriate disclosure may include bragging or gossiping.

- 1.29 Teachers have obligations around disclosure of information in cases of sexual abuse, child endangerment, and intention to self-harm or harm another person. Teachers will take responsibility to be informed about and conform to their respective 'laws of the land' requiring the disclosure of information to public authorities. When upholding the legal requirement necessitates a teacher to widen the circle of support for their students, teachers will communicate this with their students.
- 1.30 Teachers will be mindful to not create dependency on the teacher. Teachers will consciously foster and encourage independence in students by cultivating the students' ability to live from wholeness as they participate in their daily life's relationships and events.

## **Section Two: Inner Qualities**

- 2.1 At the ASI, we acknowledge the evolutionary nature of this world, as well as our consciousness, humanity and realization. Member teachers will commit to taking responsibility for their ongoing growth and maturation and will remain open to and welcome feedback from peers, colleagues, and students. Transparent and honest constructive criticism alleviates ignorance and aligns with the awakened heart. Member teachers will be encouraged to self-reflect. In the event of a complaint about the ethical behavior of a member, the teacher involved is expected to be willing to listen, contemplate and consider what can be learned from this situation, and engage proactively to earnestly reach a common ground of understanding or healing and reconciliation.
- 2.2 Teachers will cultivate transparency as an inner quality and recognize that this openness will show up in external performance.
- 2.3 Teachers openly acknowledge their own imperfection and do not encourage students to see them as perfect. Teachers openly acknowledge their own shadow and blind spots and actively engage in the healing and integrating them, thus modeling their humanity authentically to students.
- 2.4 Teachers agree not spiritually bypass their humanity or use spiritual concepts and approaches to avoid looking at their own deficiencies. They are expected to be prepared to acknowledge the limitations of their skills and wisdom.
- 2.5 Teachers agree to engage in both self-reflection and self-care activities to monitor, maintain and promote their own emotional, physical, mental, and spiritual well-being to best meet their professional responsibilities and to live a wisely balanced lifestyle.

- 2.6 Teachers agree to discuss difficulties in their personal life with a therapist, colleague or someone qualified to offer appropriate assistance. These difficulties may include addictive behaviors, financial pressures, excessive stress, relationship struggles or debilitating medical conditions.
- 2.7 Teachers commit to conducting themselves in a manner that is consistent with the principles of honesty and integrity.
- 2.8 Teachers agree to respect the dignity of all beings and to cultivate the attributes of love, compassion and kindness in their own personalities.
- 2.9 Teachers commit to responsible and ethical practice towards their own professional and personal growth.
- 2.10 Teachers agree to cultivate conscious and honest communication as the basis of their speech.
- 2.11 Teachers will abstain from misusing Absolute-level (nondual) language to wield social power over people. For example, phrases such as 'we don't exist anyway,' and 'nothing ever happened' should not be used in avoidance or as a conversation stopper to the teachers' advantage in any social or personal setting.

### **Section Three: Intimate Relationships**

- 3.1 Teachers do not engage in any kind of sexual activities with their students. They agree to avoid creating harm through sexuality and to avoid sexual exploitation and harassment. This includes flirting, expressing sexual thoughts or desires toward students, any erotic or overly familiar touch and/or conversation, and/or sexual banter. Erotic feelings toward a student should be worked through in private; either with a therapist or another appropriate professional support, and never with the student.
- 3.2 Teachers agree not to use their authority and position to invite sexual relationships with students. Such behavior is an abuse of responsibility. If a teacher feels at risk of violating this guideline, they agree to suspend the teacher-student dynamic and seek counsel with an objective professional experienced in this area.
- 3.3 Teachers will adhere to the following guidelines and boundaries:
  - a) A sexual relationship is never appropriate between teachers and students.
  - b) The decision to sexualize a relationship almost invariably means the loss of any ability to properly fulfill the original teacher-student contract.

- c) During retreats or formal teaching, any intimation of future student-teacher romantic or sexual relationship is inappropriate.
  - d) Inappropriate sexual relations between teachers and students, involving coercion or an imbalanced power differential, have been the most common and egregious ethical violations in many spiritual communities. But in a minority of cases, a healthy romantic relationship has evolved. Transitioning from a teacher-student relationship to a partnership between two consenting adults can be a delicate process, taking time, maturity, and mutual communication. At the ASI, agreeing upon a reasonable standard on this issue that would be widely respected and adhered to has been our most difficult challenge. In spite of differences in opinions, we endeavor to continue to discuss the topic with rigor.
- 3.4 Without denying their own intimate needs, spiritual teachers agree to remain present to the purpose of the teacher-student dynamic, which is to provide a dignified and healthy environment for spiritual growth.
- 3.5 Teachers will avoid words and actions constituting harassment, sexual or otherwise. Neither will they condone exploitation of human rights in any circumstance.

## **Section Four: Towards Greater Transparency**

- 4.1 Teachers will offer support to fellow members of the ASI in their personal or professional lives unless, using their discernment, they feel they are not the best suited in a given situation, in which case they will refer them to another ASI member.
- 4.2 ASI will confidentially serve both students and spiritual teachers, keeping in mind that being a teacher means continuing to be a student.