

ROBZ Governance

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Preamble

The governance of Ring of Bone Zendo is premised on a collective aspiration to conduct Sangha business in a manner that is consistent with practice and realization, and challenges its Members to embody them fully. Our means of governance have developed in stages from a standard, board-directed, majority-rule model to a Quaker-influenced experiment with more dispersed responsibility and consensus-based decision-making to the structures and procedures set forth in the following pages. We consider this a third step in the long-term project of fully integrating the implications of the Dharma into our corporate life.

We rely throughout on the principle of acting with one mind. This term denotes not unanimity, which requires the agreement of everyone present, but rather a general satisfaction that Members have aired their concerns fully and that the Sangha has done its best to weigh and incorporate those concerns in arriving at a decision. Thus it may be concluded that the Sangha has reached one mind despite the existence of divergent, even opposing, views on the matter under discussion. A decision to go forward in one mind while a Member remains opposed will be rare, reached only after prolonged attempts at harmonious resolution.

Although organizational structures and procedures are the focus of this document, we hope that Members will understand them not as ends in themselves, but rather as expressions of a goal much subtler and more far-reaching in nature. Our challenges entail learning to listen, speak, think, relate, and solve problems, whether we're at the Zendo or not, and whether we're interacting with fellow Zen students or not. Such transformations never occur purely at an institutional level; they will be matters of personal and group spirit, attitude, and effort that no document such as this can adequately prescribe.

The formulation we've arrived at is without close precedent, as far as we know, so its use is likely to reveal unforeseen weaknesses and unrealized potentials. We urge Members to view it, accordingly, as a work in progress, not a finished product, and to remain open to its refinement in years to come.

The Membership sits at the apex of the structure, with the officers and committees serving it—acting on its decisions and preparing matters for its consideration. The Teacher has a respected voice in Sangha deliberation, but holds no executive authority in the organization and is formally looked to for leadership exclusively in realms of Sangha life directly under his or her purview—Zen training, texts, rituals, and the like. Of course, service in those realms may reveal Sangha needs and make the Teacher a valuable source of perspective and counsel on Sangha affairs.

I. Organizational Structure

A. The Sangha

The Sangha is the basic unit of our organization. While the term has various definitions, in this document the term Sangha comprises people formally recognized as either Core or Sustaining Members of Ring of Bone Zendo, as set forth in its by-laws. Final decision-making authority in all areas of Zendo business rests with the Sangha. It may freely delegate powers and responsibilities to its committees and designated leaders and, in the event that it does not concur with actions taken on its behalf, may overrule the committees or leaders involved and rescind their decisions.

Committees are the first point of contact for Sangha Members with a specific request, question or concern. In determining which of the committees to contact, Members should take as their guide the outline of committee functions given in B.i and B.ii below. Upon receiving a request, the committee decides whether it can act on the matter independently, needs to refer it for consideration by the other standing committees, or should recommend to the Moderator that it be discussed by the full Sangha.

The Sangha establishes and directs its programs, creates its committees, names their Members, owns all Zendo property, and does most of the work required to maintain the property. As stipulated in the by-laws, membership is premised on participation not only in formal practice at the Zendo but also in conducting the Sangha's business and in other work necessary to maintain its facilities and programs.

B. Committees

Committees serve the Sangha in various ways, of which two are especially important: to sift and season matters that will be brought to the Sangha for consideration, and to implement decisions made by the Sangha. Committees conduct their meetings in the same spirit and the same general manner as the Sangha conducts Meetings for Practice of Business. Notes of Committee meetings are kept and committees report on their work at each Meeting for Practice of Business. On occasion, they may contact the Sangha directly by phone or email, or indirectly through a newsletter article.

Each committee will select a Moderator to take the lead in organizing its business, conducting its meetings, and communicating its actions to the wider membership. It is important that committee members, especially the Moderator, attend the Meeting for Practice of Business to ensure effective communication between the committees and the Sangha.

Members of committees should be selected according to their abilities and concerns, with attention to overall balance. In particular, a mix of more and less senior Members is desirable, since longstanding Members bring valuable experience to committee work, while relative newcomers often contribute fresh perspectives. Serving on a committee is a good way for those who have joined recently to learn Sangha traditions and come to know other Members. Although seats on standing committees usually will be best filled

by Core or Sustaining Members, Associate Members too may serve on those and other committees if the Sangha approves.

Three standing committees function to serve the Sangha. Additional committees, either standing or ad hoc, may be formed as necessary.

i. Practice and Care Committee

The three Members selected by the Sangha to serve on this committee should be knowledgeable of Ring of Bone's history, forms, and practice; skillful in coping with interpersonal problems; and trusted to be fair, compassionate, patient, and discreet. Specifically, these responsibilities include:

- a. monitoring the spirit and vitality of the Sangha and offering encouragement to individuals or the entire group when it discerns such a need;
- b. taking note of illnesses, financial problems, family stress, or other hardships experienced by Members of the Sangha and arranging appropriate assistance when feasible;
- c. counseling Members who seem out of step with Sangha meeting practice and cautions;
- d. finding leaders for practice events outside the purview of the Teacher (e.g. Sangha circles, zazenkai at which the Teacher will not offer formal instruction);
- e. providing a conduit for Members to air and resolve problems arising in their relationship with the Teacher or with another Member;
- f. leading the search for a new Teacher when the need arises;
- g. receiving, considering, and deciding on requests for membership or changes in membership level, in keeping with the established standards regarding participation in Zendo activities;
- h. counseling applicants whose declared level of membership does not, in the committee's estimate, meet the established standards of participation;
- i. receiving requests to be married in the care of the Sangha and forwarding such requests, when deemed appropriate, to the Sangha for decision;
- j. receiving, considering, and acting on requests for memorial services;
- k. supporting the work of the pool leaders for Tenzo, Jikijitsu, Ino, Tanto, and Jisha; and recruiting and appointing people to pool leader positions when they are vacated;

- l. receiving requests and making decisions regarding sesshin fee waivers.

In executing these responsibilities, the committee has the authority to disburse funds from the Sangha Assistance Fund. It shall hold such disbursements confidential, along with other deliberations and actions it considers inappropriate to report. Since the Membership considers transparency a vital norm in conducting Sangha business, the committee must exercise great care in determining when confidentiality is warranted. Confidentiality should protect the interests of the Sangha as a whole, not shield the committee from oversight.

The Practice and Care Committee will meet as needed, but not less than three times a year. The term of service on this committee is three years, and terms are staggered, with one Member's term ending each year.

ii. Business and Finance Committee

This committee serves the Sangha by managing or overseeing most of its practical affairs, especially caring for its material assets and maintaining its relationship with the public. It is responsible in particular for:

- a. responding to needs and requests concerning the Zendo buildings and grounds, their use, finances, the Sangha's public interface and government relations, insurance and other matters of a practical nature;
- b. overseeing the work of the Bookkeeper, the Recorder, the Building and Grounds Manager(s), the Membership Secretary, the Sesshin Coordinator Pool leader; the Newsletter Editor(s), the Calendar Planner, the Website Manager, the Zendo Contact Person(s), the Sangha's Representative to the board of the Bald Mountain Association, and ad hoc committees; (*Refer to Appendix A for more a detailed description of these responsibilities.*)
- c. recruiting and appointing people to the above-named positions when they are vacated;
- d. maintaining the records necessary to substantiate and continue Ring of Bone's status as non-profit church;
- e. managing finances; and
- f. making proposals for fee changes.

The Business and Finance Committee has spending authority for amounts up to such a ceiling as may be established by the Meeting for Practice of Business. The sole exception is the Sangha Assistance Fund, which is managed by the Practice and Care Committee.

The three members of this committee serve two-year terms, with no limit to the number of consecutive terms. Its Members will decide which of them shall serve as officers of the corporation, as required by law. They may also function in one or more of the capacities listed in I.B.ii.b. above.

iii. Nominating Committee

Unless the membership decides, through action at a Meeting for Practice of Business, to form the committee in another manner, the Nominating Committee comprises the Moderator, Co-Moderator and the moderators of the Business and Finance and Practice and Care committees. The Moderator will convene and moderate the Nominating Committee. The purpose of the committee is to nominate Sangha Members to fill positions on the two standing committees, as well as the two Moderator positions.

For each vacancy, it is the job of the Nominating Committee to find a single, well-qualified candidate who is willing to perform the required duties for a full term. That person will be evaluated according to his or her own capabilities, experience and willingness to serve. A Sangha Member who desires to serve on a committee may contact any member of the committee at any time and let their desire be known. When vacancies arise, their name will be forwarded to the Moderator. Volunteering to fill a vacancy is heartily encouraged, but is not a guarantee of placement.

If the Sangha does not embrace a candidate the Nominating Committee puts forward, that nomination will be returned to the committee for further consideration. Each fall the Moderator will determine what openings exist in the committees and ask at a Meeting for Practice of Business if there are any candidates that people are aware of.

C. Leadership

i. Moderator

This leader has a crucial role in shaping our interchanges, especially in maintaining the trust and sense of fairness necessary for the type of collective decision-making to which we aspire. Accordingly, the Sangha will seek for this position a Member respected for maturity in the Way, exemplifying practice and realization in both speech and action. The Moderator will need to be an attentive and sensitive listener; be able to guide meetings gently but firmly; know Ring of Bone's membership and history; and possess strong organizational skills. In addition to playing a central role in Meetings for Practice of Business, the Moderator will endeavor to maintain a broad overview of the Sangha's welfare; stay in touch with its committees and individual leaders; promote a smooth flow of communication among them; monitor impending vacancies in leadership positions; and, when necessary, initiate timely processes for nomination of new leaders. The Moderator will serve a two-year term with no limit to the number of consecutive terms.

ii. Co-Moderator

The Co-Moderator will serve in the capacity of Moderator when called upon, and the same qualities will be sought in a nominee. The Co-Moderator will work closely with the Moderator in keeping abreast of developments in Sangha business and will assist in the duties around preparing for and running Meetings for Practice of Business. Although this collaboration will provide excellent training for subsequent service as Moderator, it is not assumed that the Co-Moderator will automatically succeed an outgoing Moderator. The Co-Moderator will serve a two-year term with no limit to the number of consecutive terms.

iii. Other Leaders. See Appendix A.

II. Meeting Practice

Meeting for Practice of Business is the setting in which all major decisions of the Sangha are made, an arena of collaborative effort where we put our capacity to see past self and other to an intensely practical test. It involves individual and group practice in perceiving things clearly, speaking openly and to the point, listening empathetically, thinking inclusively, responding creatively, and cultivating strong, respectful relationships. The health and continuation of Ring of Bone depend on what we do there, and we hope that capacities nurtured in Meetings for Practice of Business will bear fruit also in situations beyond Ring of Bone—in our families, friendships, workplaces, community involvements, and so on.

A. Decisions & Minutes

We come to decisions when the participants in a Meeting for Practice of Business reach one mind about the issue before them. Decisions are formulated as minutes, and in that process, all Members have the opportunity to indicate their agreement, stand aside from the decision, or register a dissent.

B. Meeting Participants

Members and Non-members alike are welcome to attend any Meeting for Practice of Business. Core and Sustaining Members provide final weight on decisions, so their attendance is vital to a meeting's success. Thoughts and feelings expressed by Associate Members will also be taken into account, though they will not be asked to join in decisions. Non-members will normally take part as observers. It is incumbent upon all participants to enter into meetings in the spirit of practice and to comport themselves throughout in the manner described in meeting guidelines, modeled by Members they look up to, and indicated by the Moderator.

C. Moderator

The Moderator will formulate and circulate an agenda for each meeting, incorporating items carried over from prior meetings and those brought by committees or Sangha Members. The agenda will be made available a minimum of three days in advance of the

upcoming meeting. It will be up to the Moderator to give priority to the most important items, to set reasonable goals for each topic, and to move business forward within meeting time limits. He or she will need to be sensitive to the energy of meeting participants, responsive to possible tensions, and at the forefront of the effort to maintain a spirit and quality of practice in our interactions.

Among the Moderator's functions will be discerning when the Sangha is nearing one mind and articulating or helping to articulate a minute summarizing the decision for approval by the participants. The Moderator will gently and thoughtfully mitigate conflicts and opposition, recognize when opposition is intractable and discern when to carry a topic over for "seasoning" to the next meeting. The Moderator will also have the weighty responsibility of discerning when one mind includes voices of opposition and dissent, and adopting a minute without full support.

D. Co-Moderator

The Co-Moderator, when not being called upon to preside at a meeting, will assist the Moderator in conducting Meeting for Practice of Business, helping with such functions as identifying speakers in turn, timing, formulating minutes, and sustaining an appropriate tone of practice.

E. Meeting Format

i. Meeting Time, Duration, and Frequency

Meetings for Practice of Business will be scheduled through the annual calendar-planning process. Meetings will generally be scheduled in conjunction with Sunday zazen.

The Sangha may choose to hold a Meeting for Practice of Business at some other time if the need arises. The Moderator will exercise discretion in assigning time to consider each agenda item and thus is responsible for setting a target for the length of each Meeting. Meetings will typically last between one and two hours, and will exceed two hours only in special circumstances.

ii Meeting Records

a. Minutes

Decisions made during Meetings for Practice of Business will be recorded as minutes. Each minute will be drafted during the meeting, read back to participants, and revised, if necessary, until the group is satisfied that it expresses its intentions.

b. Notes

The Recorder will also keep notes on discussion surrounding such decisions, on reports, and on other matters brought to the group's attention; and these notes will be combined with the minutes in the interest of preserving a more complete account of the meeting than the minutes alone would provide.

Though the Moderators will review these notes to ensure a measure of accuracy, they should be considered approximations of the proceedings only

and shall not be binding upon the Sangha in any way. Minutes will be clearly set off in the meeting records to distinguish them from the notes.

The contents of the meeting record shall conform to the guidelines set forth in Appendix C, Guidelines for Record Keeping at Meetings for the Practice of Business. Records will be sent to the Moderator and Co-Moderator who will review them for accuracy. Copies of the records will be kept by the Member of the Business & Finance Committee who is designated as Secretary, as well as the Moderator and Co-Moderator. Records will be made available to any Core or Sustaining Member upon request to the Secretary.

iii. Quorum

A Quorum will consist of 50% of the number of Core Members, rounded up to nearest whole number. At a given meeting the quorum may be filled by either Core or Sustaining Members physically in attendance.

Appendix A: Individual Job Descriptions

The Sangha depends on individuals as well as committees to accomplish its work. Membership entails a willingness to accept the sort of tasks and responsibilities enumerated below. None of these positions, except Moderator and Co-Moderator, are integral to Ring of Bone's governance structure. The others simply represent the current allocation of tasks and responsibilities and may be retired, altered, or supplemented as the Sangha desires. While some of the positions may be filled by members of its standing committees, in general the Sangha will be best served if leadership is widely dispersed among its Members.

1. Bookkeeper

The Bookkeeper will handle Ring of Bone's day-to-day financial affairs. Duties will include receipt and disbursement of funds, maintenance of appropriate records, and presentation of an annual report to the Sangha. For purposes of continuity, it may be advantageous for the Bookkeeper to serve for an extended period; there will be no cap on his or her years of work in this capacity.

2. Recorder

The Moderator is responsible for finding a Recorder in advance of each meeting. The Recorder will have the responsibility of taking both "minutes" and "notes" at the Meeting for the Practice of Business as described in Appendix C.

3. Buildings and Grounds Manager(s)

One or more Members will provide the leadership necessary in caring for Ring of Bone's physical plant and environs. The responsibilities include:

- a. maintenance, repair, and improvement of all buildings (including outhouses and woodshed), mechanical systems inside and out, water supply, appliances, and other fittings attached to buildings;
- b. obtaining adequate supplies of heating and cooking fuel and ensuring their proper storage;
- c. organization of Ring of Bone workdays and supervision of the work;
- d. management of weeds, grass, and brush on the grounds, both for fire safety and the comfort of users;
- e. maintenance of written instructions on water systems, mechanical systems, and appliances; and
- f. consultations with our land partners on any topics related to the preceding.

The Manager(s) will promote Ring of Bone's longstanding practice of performing the work necessary to create and maintain the Zendo, relying on Members' freely contributed skill and labor whenever practical. In consultation with the Business and Finance Committee, however, the Manager(s) may sometimes hire people to meet maintenance, repair, or improvement needs.

4. Membership Secretary

The Membership Secretary's job is to keep Ring of Bone Membership information correct and up to date. He or she will receive all membership declarations and submit them promptly to the Practice and Care Committee for review. If a claim for membership seems inappropriate under the membership guidelines, the Secretary may flag it for committee attention, but it will be the committee's responsibility, not the Secretary's, to resolve such questions. The Secretary will also maintain a current roster of Members, indicating each person's present level of membership, and provide it regularly to the Business and Finance Committee, Sesshin Coordinators, and Moderator and Co-Moderator.

5. Newsletter Editor(s)

One or more Ring of Bone Members will bear principal responsibility for producing the newsletter. The Editor(s) will collaborate with other Members in generating material and preparing the newsletter, seeking direction from the Business and Finance Committee if questions arise about editorial policy, cost, circulation, or other issues.

6. Calendar Planner

This Calendar Planner works with the Teacher and with representatives of sister organizations to formulate an annual calendar for proposal to the Sangha. The Calendar Planner has no authority to enter into commitments on behalf of the Sangha, striving only to work out a pattern of events that might meet the Sangha's needs and to recruit coordinators for the various events. The Calendar Planner will consult with the Moderator to ensure appropriate and timely presentation of the proposal to the Sangha, which will decide the final disposition of events and dates.

7. Website Manager

The tasks of the Website Manager are two-fold: interacting with website users (answering queries, referring correspondence for others to answer), and serving as point person for modifications to the website's content and design. Since the website functions increasingly as Ring of Bone's "public face," concerns about how we present it there have risen in the Membership. The Website Manager's role includes effectively addressing and resolving Members' concerns, either through the Business and Finance Committee or, in the case of concerns too substantial or charged for the committee to handle, at the Meeting for Practice of Business.

8. Zendo Contact Person(s)

The job of a Zendo Contact Person is to answer queries, either by phone or by email, from people who have questions about the Zendo, its location, its mission and its activities. The Contact Person is a “public face” of ROBZ and this role is best filled by someone who is familiar with the Zendo and its history.

9. Representative to the Bald Mountain Association

A senior Sangha Member, usually but not necessarily a Member of the Business and Finance Committee, will represent Ring of Bone on the board of the Bald Mountain Association. Besides serving as our chief and formal conduit for interaction with our land partners on matters of mutual concern, he or she will make every effort to keep Ring of Bone’s relationship with them clear, strong, and responsive. He or she will report to the Business and Finance Committee and, as needed, at the Meeting for Practice of Business.

Appendix B. Conduct for Meeting for Practice of Business

The following description of meeting process is an aspirational narrative, *not* a description of exactly how meetings will take place. Meetings might go something like this: At the end of zazen, we'll take a silent break for a few minutes to relieve ourselves and for those who feel the need to get a little food. At the sound of the densho, we'll reassemble in the zendo and arrange our seats facing the Moderator and Alternate. The Moderator will have posted the meeting agenda within easy view. Once settled, we will do zazen for a few minutes. The Moderator will read off the agenda with approximate time allowed for consideration of each item.

First item will be thanks, and the Moderator may ask if there are additional contributions.

The Moderator will introduce each agenda item, framing the issue and specifying whether the goal is to reach a decision or only to give it consideration. This will be done clearly and thoughtfully, setting the tone for subsequent comments. The Moderator will then open the floor for others to speak, recognizing raised hands in order. The Co-Moderator will help keep track. The Moderator will often wait a moment before recognizing a speaker, to allow silence to break the momentum of comments. This can hold through the entire meeting, bringing the Sangha back to mindfulness and the matter at hand. Everyone will need to rein in eagerness to speak on an issue to keep our process grounded in practice.

Comments will be addressed to the Moderator and other Members present, not to anyone in particular, and not repeat what others have said. The Moderator may call for a pause to help things settle or caution us all if we are straying into conversation or speaking without being called on.

The point of the process is to reach one mind on the matter at hand. We work to let go of our own viewpoints, to hear each other with an open mind, to let comments settle unhindered just as we let our thoughts come and go in zazen. In that way we are able to see things clearly and hear each other as uniquely manifesting the Dharma. We may find that our opinions still don't match most others but will be free to stand aside. We may still feel strongly that others are mistaken and that we can't stand aside but may find ourselves able to abide by the will of the group.

If the item is merely for consideration without decision, the Moderator may remind us when the allotted time is up and ask if people feel a need to have more time. This will only be possible if the agenda is short enough.

If a decision is desired, when the moderator senses that comments are coalescing around a particular outcome, he or she may call for someone to compose a minute that clearly states the outcome. The Moderator may propose a draft if no one else does so. The Recorder will read the minute back and a pause will be taken to allow everyone to consider the wording. The Moderator will then allow comments again, using the same measured approach as before. Sometimes the minute may get quick assent from a number

of people and the Moderator may ask if anyone objects. If there are no objections, the minute may be read again and recorded. If there are objections, they will be heard and considered in silence. The result may be that someone may propose amending the language to remove the objection, and then the Moderator will again ask for approval.

If no change of language will satisfy everyone, the Moderator may ask us all to return to silence for a time to settle. Then the Moderator can ask if the objection still stands and if there are other comments. Time allowing, commentary can carry on in the hope of finding agreement. Everyone will need to keep their thoughts open to the objections and ideas of others, speaking as best they can from the spaciousness of not knowing. The goal is to achieve clarity and agreement, so proceeding to a decision with Members standing aside should be rare, and doing so over a continued objection will occur only as a last resort.

Generally, unless a decision is urgently needed, when strong objection to a minute remains, the Moderator will hold the matter over to the next meeting for seasoning. This seasoning period will allow everyone to reflect on their positions and consider what the best course is. This often leads to changes of position that allow for agreement.

If an objection does stand, but it's clear that everyone else approves of the minute and a decision is needed, the Moderator may ask if the objecting Member is willing to stand aside. In the extreme case that a Moderator asks the Sangha to approve a minute despite a deeply held objection, the objection will be recorded, along with the objecting Member's name if he or she wishes. Before such action, the objecting Member and other Members should converse outside the meeting to seek understanding and reconciliation of differences. The objecting Member may seek counsel from the Practice and Care Committee, or that committee may itself offer a meeting to seek resolution of the concern. Any Member who's chosen not to stand aside may feel dejected and alienated from the rest of the group. This is a critical time when group cohesion might begin to weaken. Therefore, after a minute has been recorded, it is of the utmost importance that gratitude and care be extended so that he or she doesn't feel ostracized. In addition, if Members observe that speaking out will be met with listening and appreciation, there will be a greater willingness for others to express an unpopular opinion.

When all agenda items have been addressed or when the meeting time has elapsed with no agreement to continue overtime, the Moderator may ask for comments on the meeting, in an ongoing effort to align our Meetings for Practice of Business with the Dharma and with our own aspirations. A few minutes of zazen will conclude the session.

Appendix C. Guidelines for Record-keeping at Meetings for the Practice of Business

At a minimum, the record must include:

- A copy of the agenda.
- The date of the meeting.
- The names of the attendees.
- The names of the moderators.
- The name of the record-keeper.
- A brief account of each committee report.
- A record of each decision or “minute” made by the attendees, read back verbatim to ensure accuracy.
- Any comment or opinion which is requested to be part of the written record.

Record-keepers are also encouraged to include brief notes, as described below, but these must be clearly separated from minutes, with minutes identified as such.

Notes

It is often useful to include a record of ancillary information that comes up in the course of an MPB. This is information of a factual nature that may be of value to the sangha in the future. Examples could include:

- Proposed Sangha Circle topics.
- The names of volunteers for various projects that might arise.
- Useful information offered during discussion of a Committee report.
- Results of a straw poll taken to gauge attendees’ support for an idea or proposal.

No attempt will be made in such notes to document general discussion of agenda items or to record individual statements unless specifically requested, as mentioned above.

Records will be sent to the Moderator and Co-Moderator, who will review them for accuracy. Hard copies of MPB records will be kept by the Member of the Business and Finance Committee who serves as Secretary of the Board, as well as by the Moderator and Co-Moderator. Records will be made available to any Core or Sustaining Member upon request to the Secretary.