

# SZBA MEMBERSHIP STANDARDS

## Reasons for SZBA Membership Standards:

- Provide certification of a definable level of training for priests.
- Ensure that SZBA full member priests are prepared for the responsibilities they may face in society.
- Support a common Soto Zen tradition.
- Provide guidance to teachers in the training of student priests.

Standards: The standards in this document define the minimum level of proficiency required for full membership in the Soto Zen Buddhist Association (SZBA). These standards are in addition to the previously established requirements for membership, which are:

- 1) Ordination and dharma transmission in a recognized Soto Zen lineage (with ceremonies conducted in-person and according to the tradition of the lineage);
- 2) Submission of an application and registration fee;
- 3) Payment of annual dues;
- 4) Agreement to abide by and be held accountable to the SZBA Ethics Statement;
- 5) Submission of an Ethics Statement to which the member agrees to abide and be held accountable, and which meets the criteria listed in the SZBA Ethics Statement.

**Note: Dharma transmission is solely a matter between teacher and student. SZBA standards are intended to delineate requirements for SZBA full membership, not a person's readiness for dharma transmission.**

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## DEFINITION OF TERMS FOR THIS DOCUMENT

These terms are defined for the purposes of understanding the SZBA membership standards. It is understood that definitions and uses of these terms vary widely among different lineages and practice places.

**Dokusan/Sanzen:** Dokusan, “going alone to the teacher,” also called sanzen, “going to Zen,” is a private, formal, in-person meeting between a Zen student and the teacher. It provides an opportunity for the student to discuss their Zen practice, ask questions, discuss difficulties, and present their understanding of the dharma.

**Formal Practice Intensive:** A period of residential practice and training that meets criteria for a formal practice intensive as established by an SZBA training committee. This would be a 3-week to 90-day period that involves a 24-hour schedule of continuous practice.

**Ministerial Training:** Training that specifically addresses the ability to guide individuals and communities in spiritual practice, in one or both of these areas: 1) pastoral care during times of transition or crisis, and 2) leadership (such as group dynamics, communication, diversity issues, administration of religious organizations).

**Monastery:** A contained residential practice community where all, or almost all, of the people present are expected to participate in a communal, full-time, residential practice schedule focused on zazen and other aspects of Zen practice.

**Practice Discussion:** A meeting between a Zen student and a teacher, or someone appointed by the teacher, that provides an opportunity to discuss one’s Zen practice in a less formal setting than the dokusan/sanzen room.

**Primary Mentoring Teacher:** The teacher who takes responsibility for supervision of the structure and completion of a priest’s training.

**Qualified Teacher:** A dharma transmitted priest in a recognized Soto Zen lineage.

**Recognized Lineage:** A recognized Soto Zen lineage is one that can trace ordination and dharma transmission from teacher to disciple back to a Soto Zen priest recognized by the Soto Shu in Japan, although the lineage may no longer maintain an active standing with the Soto Shu. It is expected that ordination and dharma transmission ceremonies occur in-person and according to the traditions of the lineage.

**Residential Practice Community:** A temple that provides live-in accommodations for practitioners who are required to attend a daily zazen schedule (not including days off) that is also open to non-resident practitioners.

**Sangha:** Community of Soto Zen practitioners.

**Temple:** A Zen center which may or may not have a residential component, where people can participate in regularly scheduled zazen, gain access to Zen and Buddhist teachings, receive guidance from a qualified Zen teacher, receive ritual support for important life transitions, and join sangha and other aspects of Zen practice valued by the community.

**Temple Centered Life:** Living a life centered on participation in and support of the practice and function of a Zen temple while residing outside the temple grounds. A temple centered life includes attendance at or support of all, or almost all, important temple events such as ceremonies and retreats, and a balance, in terms of time spent, between training in formal practice (zazen, ceremony, study) and training in practical service to the temple (service positions and labor).

# REQUIRED MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR SZBA MEMBERSHIP

## 1: TRAINING UNDER QUALIFIED SOTO ZEN TEACHERS

### *Intensive period of formation as a priest*

Standard: A full SZBA member has demonstrated stability, humility, selflessness, and dedication to their priest vocation through a prolonged and intensive period of formation as a priest-in-training, during which they have trained in the roles, responsibilities, study and service required of a priest.

Training: At least five years of intensive training after ordination as a priest, during which time priest training is one's primary focus. This period should be long enough to test the priest-in-training's character and dedication, allow them to embody the Soto Zen tradition, and learn the lessons that come with time spent in dedicated priest training.

### *Guidance by a primary mentoring teacher*

Standard: A full SZBA member has been closely mentored by at least one qualified Soto Zen teacher who takes responsibility for supervision of their training as a priest, such that the priest-in-training's Zen practice and character are witnessed in person and subject to guidance over time. A mentoring teacher is subsequently able to serve as a practice and character reference.

Training: Recommended interactions between the priest-in-training and teacher(s) include in-person meetings, daily practice in the same community, and participation in sesshin together. Emphasis should be placed on working toward the trainee's transparency with and accountability to the teacher and sangha. Through proximity, the teacher will know the trainee well enough to plan and guide the training process.

## 2: INTENSIVE PRACTICE

### *Sangha practice*

Standard: A full SZBA member has significant experience living a Zen life centered on participation in and support for a practice community in either a monastic, residential, or temple-centered environment.

Training: At least 5 years training at a monastery, in a residential practice community, or while living a temple-centered life.

### *Sesshin*

Standard: A full SZBA member has deep experience with sesshin, or intensive formal meditation practice.

Training: At least 15 full sesshin-days per year during five years of priest training (including sesshin during formal practice intensives).

### *Formal practice intensive*

Standard: A full SZBA member has substantial experience with intensified periods of formal residential practice with sangha.

Training: At least one 90-day formal practice intensive that meets the criteria established by the SZBA training committee. Priests-in-training who demonstrate an inability to fulfill the 90 day

requirement may alternately complete four three-week formal practice intensives that also meet the criteria established by the SZBA training committee.

### **3: SANGHA SERVICE**

#### ***Service as shuso (head student)***

Standard: A full SZBA member has served in the traditional Soto Zen position of shuso in a manner consistent with their lineage tradition.

Training: Serve as shuso for a length of time and in a manner typical for the lineage of the priest-in-training. While the responsibilities and form of the shuso role differ widely by lineage and by temple context, the role generally requires advancing from a junior position in the sangha to a more visible and responsible role. Shuso terms are marked by beginning and ending ceremonies, with the final ceremony involving a public test of the shuso's dharma understanding.

#### ***Traditional sangha service roles***

Standard: A full SZBA member is familiar with and has served in traditional Soto Zen sangha service roles and understands the importance of the function of these roles within the sangha, including their use as training tools.

Training: Significant experience in three or more of the following traditional Soto Zen sangha service roles, or similar ones: head cook, head of zendo, practice coordinator, work leader, temple officer, teacher's attendant, teacher's assistant.

#### ***Service in teaching roles***

Standard: A full SZBA member has experience in leading groups in Zen study and practice such as teaching dharma classes and leading sesshin or a meditation group.

Training: Gain skills through rigorous experience in all teaching roles appropriate to one's lineage with evaluation and feedback from the primary or designated teacher throughout the priest training period.

# RECOMMENDED MINIMUM STANDARDS FOR SZBA MEMBERSHIP

## 4: SOTO ZEN KNOWLEDGE AND EMBODIMENT OF FORM

### *Providing zazen instruction*

Standard: A full SZBA member has the ability to give zazen instruction to a wide variety of people and is able to adjust zazen instructions according to the abilities and needs of the person receiving instruction. They also have the ability to help seasoned zazen practitioners with physical and other problems that may develop over time.

Training: Observation of zazen instruction given by other trained instructors. Giving zazen instruction under the observation and direction of a trained instructor with feedback on performance.

### *Ceremony*

Standard: A full SZBA member is familiar with and has a basic understanding of the meaning of Soto Zen services and ceremonies and is able to design, plan and lead them.

Training:

- Learning to conduct regular Soto Zen services, special ceremonies such as weddings, funerals and lay precept ceremonies, and other important ceremonies in the liturgical year, as appropriate in one's lineage;
- Performing ceremonial roles including teacher's attendant, altar attendant, ceremony organizer, chant leader, and player of service instruments;
- Instruction in proper use of traditional Soto Zen ritual implements that are used in one's lineage, such as drum, bells, clappers, incense, bowing mat, and teaching stick (kotsu or nyoi);
- Instruction in care and wearing of priest garments, movement, posture and timing.
- Learning to care for and use priest eating bowls (oryoki), instruct others in their use, and lead formal meals.

### *Practice discussion and informal practice instruction*

Standard: A full SZBA member has the ability to connect with sangha members in settings of different levels of formality, including one-to-one practice discussion, respond to their practice concerns with clarity and compassion, and give useful direction in living the teachings.

Training: Under the guidance of the primary teacher, experience interacting with sangha members in informal and semiformal settings in the role of advisor, senior or instructor in various aspects of Zen practice, and, if appropriate for one's lineage, conducting practice discussion.

### *Giving a dharma talk*

Standard: A full SZBA member has the ability to clearly express the dharma in their own words in a talk from the teaching seat.

Training: Training in organizing and giving talks either in consultation with the primary teacher or with other teachers. Feedback on the effectiveness of talks by teacher and/or peers.

### ***Dokusan/sanzen with sangha members***

*Some lineages do not include this practice. A statement to that effect can be included in the applicant's training documentation.*

Standard: A full SZBA member knows their lineage's forms for conducting sanzen/dokusan - a formal interview between teacher and student - and is able to conduct such interviews with clarity and compassion.

Training: Training in the rituals and forms of dokusan/sanzen and in the skill of instructing students. Special attention may be given to keeping the discussion in the realm of practice, listening without self-concern, understanding the importance and limits of confidentiality, and recognizing the limits of advice-giving.

## **5: CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT**

### ***Personal conditioning, habits, and tendencies***

Standard: A full SZBA member recognizes and practices with their own unskillful personal behaviors and thought patterns, is able to recognize them as they arise, and works with them in ways that support their ability to serve as a priest.

Training: Explicit discussions with the primary teacher about entrenched habits of thought, speech and action that interfere with functioning as a priest. Observations from sangha members may be included in these discussions. The teacher and priest-in-training are encouraged to consider additional external supports as necessary, including professional counseling and/or consultation with another teacher approved by the primary teacher.

### ***Stability and commitment in sangha relationships***

Standard: A full SZBA member maintains stability, sensitivity and respect in their sangha relationships in the midst of the challenges that may occur in individual relationships or within the group. They remain committed first and foremost to supporting the practice of self and other.

Training: Development of mentor and peer relationships in which sangha difficulties and one's response to them can be honestly identified and discussed. These discussions would include reflection on one's own needs, relational habits, and aspirations as well as concrete ways to maintain stability and equanimity. They would also include a discussion of the needs of the sangha as a whole.

### ***Sustaining oneself over a lifetime of religious leadership***

Standard: A full SZBA member has the ability to balance the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of the sangha with their own personal needs.

Training: Regular discussions with and guidance from the primary teacher, and/or another teacher or professional counselor approved by the primary teacher, regarding cultivation of the balance of the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of the sangha with their own personal needs.

## 6: KNOWLEDGE OF BUDDHIST TEACHINGS

### *Study of the development of Buddhism and its foundational sutras*

Standard: A full SZBA member has a working knowledge of the historical development of Buddhism and its schools, and of the Buddhist sutras most commonly used in services and referred to for teaching the tenets and precepts of the Soto Zen tradition.

Training: Study of the history of Buddhism and of at least three of the early sutras that express the foundation of Buddhist teachings such as:

- Pali Canon –Digha Nikaya, Majjhima Nikaya, Samyutta Nikaya, Anguttara Nikaya, Vinaya
- Mahayana sutras – Lotus Sutra, Prajnaparamita Sutra in 8,000 Lines, Heart Sutra, Diamond Sutra, Lankavatara Sutra, Mahaparinirvana Sutra, and Vimalakirti Sutra

### *Soto Zen teachings*

Standard: A full SZBA member has a working knowledge of the central teachings of Dogen Zenji and other key teachers in the Japanese Soto Zen lineage and the significance of their contributions to the Soto Zen tradition.

Training: Close study of at least ten writings of significant Japanese Soto Zen ancestors such as:

- Dogen:
  - Essential teachings: *Bendowa, Genjokoan, Fukanzazengi, Tenzokyokun, Uji, Zazenshin, Bussho*
  - Useful: other writings from *Shobogenzo, Eihei Koroku, Eihei Shingi, Shobogenzo Zuimonki*
- Keizan: *Denkoroku, Zazen-yojin-ki* and other writings

### *General study of Buddhist and Ch'an/Zen texts*

Standard: A full SZBA member has a basic understanding of the Soto Zen tradition within the context of the broader stream of Buddhist teachings and is able to utilize and explain these teachings.

Training: Study of and familiarity with the following four areas:

- Chan texts important to the Soto tradition, such as Seng-T'san's *Faith in Mind*, the *Platform Sutra of the Sixth Ancestor*, Shi-t'ou's *Harmony of Difference and Equality*, Tung-shan's *Precious Mirror Samadhi*, *Book of Serenity*, *Blue Cliff Record*, *The Gateless Gate*
- Mahayana Buddhist Philosophy, such as writings by Ashvaghosha, Nagarjuna, and Vasubandhu
- Other Buddhist traditions, such as Tibetan, Tendai, Pure Land, Shingon, Korean and Rinzai Zen
- The American Zen tradition, such as writings by the pioneer Japanese and American teachers whose thinking has shaped American Soto Zen as well as writings by contemporary Zen and other Buddhist teachers

## **7: MINISTERIAL TRAINING**

### ***Sangha ministry***

Standard: A full SZBA member has the ability to listen, offer guidance and choices from the perspective of Buddhist teachings, recognize when referral to professional counseling is appropriate, recognize signs of emotional disturbance, and maintain appropriate boundaries.

Training: Training and/or experience in these skills, whether through close mentorship under a teacher, and/or through classes or organized trainings.

### ***Working with people during times of transition***

Standard: A full SZBA member is able to work with and compassionately support people as they experience significant life transitions or difficulties such as serious illness, the dying process, or coping with significant loss.

Training: Training and/or experience in these skills, whether through close mentorship under a teacher, and/or through classes or organized trainings.

### ***Community leadership skills***

Standard: A full SZBA member has the ability to cultivate a sense of community within sangha, be a voice of practical wisdom, and find or provide relevant resources and skills as required.

Training: Cultivating competence in the following areas, whether through personal experience, classes or formal training:

- Issues of diversity: race, gender, class, sexual orientation, age, culture, and ability
- Boundary and ethical issues for priests, senior students, sangha and community members
- Resolving conflicts and understanding group dynamics

### ***Respectfully relating to other faiths and traditions.***

Standard: A full SZBA member is able to respectfully relate to all people regardless of their faith, tradition or beliefs, and to understand and cooperate with those people for the welfare of society.

Training: Direct experience of working with and understanding people from other faiths and traditions, such as participation in a local charitable organization, participation in interfaith events, or course work in comparative religion.

*Adopted by the SZBA on September 29, 2017.*