JIKOJI CONSENSUS GUIDELINES, dating from approximately 2003

Jikoji was established as a corporation in 1982. According to its bylaws its purpose is "to provide space for instruction in the practice of meditation as taught by Kobun Chino Otogawa for all interested people and to provide religious educational activities which arise therefrom, including, but not limited to retreats, classes and seminars in the arts and sciences".

Jikoji is governed by a board of directors, up to 11 in number. The bylaws set forth certain basic assumptions that underlie the organization of Jikoji:

1. that membership is universal;
2. that the Directors and Officers serve and do not govern the affairs of the corporation;
3. that there is no idea of hierarchy within the organization.

The bylaws also provide that all decisions of the board are to be by consensus (unanimous agreement). Recently, some board members have asked that the board consider adopting more formal rules to govern its consensus decision-making process. As important as formal rule, if not more so, is that each board member re-affirm her/his commitment that all decisions will be based on the vision articulated by Kobun Roshi in the Jikoji bylaws, that of service to the purposes of Jikoji: instruction in meditation for all and support of religious educational activities.

The following discussion of consensus decision-making and formal rules associated therewith is based on materials contained in Conflict and Consensus: Handbook on Formal Consensus, by C.T Butler and Amy Rothstein. Bryan Gaynor, a long time student of Kobun Roshi's and an attorney who has been involved in Jikoji's affairs since it was first formed, is responsible for the current version. Bryan has been the city attorney for the City of Areata for ten years, is general counsel to several non-profit organizations and has worked as a facilitator for a number of groups that operate on consensus decision-making principles.

Consensus process creates a cooperative dynamic if the group has agreed to formal rules that provide at least the following: only one proposal may be considered at a time, and everyone works together to make it the best possible decision for the group; all voices will be heard and valued; any concerns are raised and resolved within a framework of structures designed to best represent the values of the Jikoji board; and the decision of any member to oppose the rest of the board is based on a member's commitment to service to the board and not on that member's personal preferences in the matter.

It is of utmost importance that the members of the board understand the fundamental elements of consensus theory, process, guidelines, and limits in order to avoid the main pitfall of consensus, that being the ability of one person

or group of persons to exercise a dominating power for personal reasons by continually blocking consensus, controlling agenda items, limiting opposing viewpoints, and avoiding consensus procedures.

Consensus does not mean that all parties involved must agree. In fact, this will rarely happen. Consensus is a process in which people involved must sometimes put aside personal concerns for the good of the group and as part of their commitment to service as a board member. Board members may give their consent, even if they disagree with the proposal, in a spirit of co- operation and service to Jikoji. This means that the blocking of consensus by one (or two members in the case of the "consensus minus one rule" discussed below) must be a last resort. People need to agree that standing aside or agreeing to disagree may be the best thing for Jikoji even if it means action will be taken that they find disagreeable. The process of consensus involves persuasion in a cooperative and loving spirit in order for the board decision to fully represent the best interests of Jikoji. The purpose of consensus is to allow each voice to be heard and valued. It is a process that affects all involved in an inner depth, and encourages each individual to question their own motives and values. If there is a willingness to go inside, take a look and honestly ask the question,"Am I serving Jikoji or am I serving my own interests in this matter," consensus decision-making will be functional.

STAND ASIDE

When a matter before the board has broad support but concern has been expressed by one (or, in under the "consensus minus one" rule discussed below, by two members) and provided that the concern has been fully discussed and cannot be resolved, it is appropriate for the facilitator to ask the person(s) with this concern if she/he is willing to stand aside; that is, acknowledge that the concern still exists, but allow the proposal to be adopted based on the broad consensus of the rest of the board. If a single board member is unwilling to stand aside but intends to block board action (or in the case of the "two person block rule" two members intend to block), it is appropriate for the facilitator to ask for an explanation as to why the members) will not stand aside. It is important that a explanation be given that is consistent with the board's policy on blocking.

If the member(s) is willing to stand aside, it is very important for the board to understand that this unresolved concern is then written down with the proposal in the board minutes and, in essence, becomes a part of the decision. If the adopted proposal is an ongoing decision of the board that is reviewed from time to time (as opposed to a one-time-only decision that takes effect immediately and is therefore not subject to further review), this concern can be raised again. Each time it is raised it deserves more discussion time as it has not yet been fully resolved. Filibustering is not appropriate in consensus decision-making and

Personal attacks and comments are not permitted in the formal discussion of a matter under consideration.

DECLARING A BLOCK

After having spent the allotted agenda time (see discussion below, concerning agenda times) moving through discussion trying to achieve consensus, if concerns remain which are unresolved, the facilitator is obligated to declare that consensus cannot be reached at this meeting, that the proposal is blocked, and move on to the next agenda item. A variation of this is the two person block rule. Under this rule a matter that is being voted on by the board cannot be blocked unless two members block. If seven or fewer board members are present then the one person block rule will apply.

In the case of a block, the basis for the block must be explained by the person blocking and must be solidly based on the fundamental agreements and principles that the board has adopted with respect to blocking. The block must be based on a higher standard than simple disagreement or personal preference. The Jikoji board policy requires a statement that the action being blocked is inconsistent with the bylaws, a current vision statement (adopted within the previous two years), precedent set in past decisions/basic Buddhist principles, or is repugnant to the member's fundamental values and ethics. Unless the higher standard is met the block is not justified and would amount to a violation of the bylaws. The board policy may also include situations in which a member is repeatedly blocking, in which case, if the blocks do not meet the board's standard, the member could be removed for violating the bylaws with respect to blocking.

In any situation in which three or more members (or two or more members if seven or fewer members are present) of the board are unwilling to approve a matter that other board members support, and assuming all reasonable efforts have been made to resolve the impasse through compromise and discussion, the board may take no action on the matter. In this situation the members opposed to the matter are not required to meet the higher standard required for blocking. It is also important to note that Jikoji board members, by assuming board membership, have agreed to observe a higher standard for any decision they make for or against a matter, the standard established by Kobun Roshi in the bylaws of always serving the best interests of Jikoji in their decisions.

ROLE OF FACILITATOR

The word "facilitate" means "to make easy." A facilitator conducts board business and guides the consensus process so that it flows smoothly. Rotating facilitation from meeting to meeting shares important skills among the members. Co-facilitation is also recommended and having a man and a woman share the responsibilities encourages a more balanced meeting. It is advised that

the person facilitating not participate in discussions, or take sides. If the facilitator feels he or she must become part of the discussion they must step down as facilitator for that agenda item, or if necessary, for the rest of that meeting.

CONFLICT AND CONSENSUS

While decision making is as much about conflict as it is about agreement, consensus works best in an atmosphere in which conflict is encouraged, supported, and resolved cooperatively with respect, nonviolence, and creativity. Conflict is desirable. It is not something to be avoided, dismissed, or denied.

Consensus must be based on a statement of purpose. That statement is contained in Jikoji's bylaws and is further defined by the basic assumptions on which the board operates quoted above concerning each board member's commitment to serve the purposes of Jikoji. In addition, the board may wish to adopt a more specific statement that would describe not only the common purpose, but would also include the definition of the board's principles and values as they relate to consensus decision-making.

FOUNDATION UPON WHICH CONSENSUS IS BUILT

Trust
Respect
Unity of Purpose
Nonviolence
Self Empowerment
Cooperation
Conflict Resolution
Commitment to the purposes of Jikoji
Equal Access to Power
Patience

CONSENSUS BUILDING GUIDELINES

It is important to recognize the underpinnings of the consensus process, which rest on understanding that the unity of the board is more important than any particular decision that we face, and as such decisions are worth waiting for until there is unity about the course of action. This unity may result from individuals opposed to course of action choosing to "stand aside" in order to let some movement to occur. Of course there may be instances that require immediate action or where a crystallized opposition requires additional alternatives for avoiding deadlock and these conditions will be addressed separately.

These guidelines are designed to assist in consensus decision making and problem solving. In order to insure orderly dialogue and prevent process-inhibiting criticism, there are some basic agreements regarding member conduct and process that can be helpful.

AGENDA ITEMS

The board agrees by majority vote to the agenda at each meeting, except that any matter not resolved at the previous meeting goes automatically to the top of the agenda at the next meeting, immediately following approval of minutes and emergency items. An emergency item is any item that requires immediate board action, and there is consensus that the matter deserves such recognition. Otherwise, any member can request that any matter be placed on

the agenda of a meeting. However, consideration of that item will occur only if the board agrees at the meeting that the requested item will be considered at that meeting.

TIME LIMITS

The members should agree on a time limit for the meeting and for each item on the agenda and then make every effort to respect that agreement. This will involve effort and a spirit of cooperation in setting time limits on individual agenda items or agreeing beforehand that a particular subject is worthy of whatever time is necessary and, as such, takes precedence over other agenda items.

MINDFUL SPEAKING

As a way of facilitating orderly dialogue, members are requested to refrain from speaking out of turn or to other individuals, instead constraining themselves to speaking in turn, to the general assembly, regarding the matter at hand, as directly as possible. Speakers should be brief and to the point and whenever possible, should avoid repeating previous statements (one way of doing this is by acknowledging agreement with a previous speaker's sentiments). It is especially important to refrain from critical "cross-talk", involving either individuals or proposals. If a member does not agree with a proposal, rather than criticize the speaker or the proposal, it is the responsibility of the member to either amend the proposal to be more agreeable, advance an alternative proposal, or express their satisfaction with the status quo (favoring no action). Consistent with the time allotted to an agenda item, it is appropriate for the facilitator to announce the time spent by an individual speaker and where other members have indicated a desire to speak to limit the time available to each speaker in the first round of discussion. Additional rounds of discussion with similar time limits will then follow until the time allotted has been exhausted. In this manner each speaker has a limited opportunity to discuss each item in the first instance, hears

the opinions of all other speakers on the subject and then has opportunity to address the matter again, mindful of the concerns expressed by the other speakers.

BLOCKING

The power to block consensus is an enormous responsibility and should be exercised with care. It is important for members to refrain from using this power to advance their personal agenda or express a viewpoint that is not part of the member's commitment to serve the interests of Jikoji (such as one's own personal agenda, revenge, disapproval of another speaker, etc.). The conditions for and limitations on "blocking" are discussed above. It is critical in the process to focus on building on the agreeable parts of any proposal and not to rely on blocking as a problem solving tool. Likewise, it is helpful to not regard "blocked" consensus as necessarily a final step in the process, but rather as an interim indication that there is no consensus yet.

SCRIBE

The board secretary would be expected to act as the "scribe" and assist in facilitating the meeting by keeping track of time allotments to agenda items, ensuring respect for established time limits and procedures, facilitating dialogue by summarizing in writing emerging trends of agreement. Decisions are then recorded by the secretary. Alternatively, the scribe position can be rotated in order to diffuse the power of the position and to encourage the development of skills by all members.

AGENDA

The agenda is established through a process of submittal by the board members, organization of topics according to logical association by the scribe, and prioritization by the board according to the board's sense of urgency and importance. Agenda items should be identified as being either "report", "action", or ''discussion/brainstorming" items, and the projected time needs for the discussion established. The scribe needs evidence of consensus on the agenda, its priorities and time limits for each agenda item and the meeting as a whole in order to proceed.

ACTION ITEMS

These items can be seen in terms of creative problem solving process. After a brief presentation of the matter at hand by the person placing the item on the agenda, the first step in this process is defining the problem or need that is precipitating the request for some action or decision on the part of the board. It is important that there be consensus regarding the definition of the problem we are trying to solve (or need we are trying to meet) in order to be able to agree on

a proposed action. This step is sometimes the most time-consuming and contentious part of the process, as establishing a clear and agreed-upon definition of the problem or need will often make the appropriate course of action obvious. If there is no consensus on the nature of the problem, the item is set aside for consideration at a later date and members are encouraged to dialogue outside the meeting (keeping the process moving with respect to the specific agenda item, as well as keeping the meeting in general on track). Once the board agrees on a definition of the problem, the problem-solving process follows the same procedures.

CREATIVE THINKING

The following four guidelines were developed for encouraging creative thinking in groups:

1.Spectrum Listening. Instead of listening to find fault,listen for aspects of an idea that you find attractive. In responding, acknowledge the positive to let the previous speaker know that you appreciate his or her contribution.

2. Hitchhiking. Identify the parts of what you have heard that seem to have potential and add your ideas to it. Pick up on others' contributions.

3. Use associative or "linking" thinking. Combine what others say with your ideas (hitchhiking) and blend your own ideas and others' suggestions in new ways. Put ideas together to develop "recipes" for action.

4. Don't quit after the first good idea. Keep it in mind and continue the search for more. Don't try to kill off one idea so you can initiate your own. Instead, acknowledge the first idea as helpful and suggest putting it "on hold" while exploring even more ways to use the resources at hand.