

Guidelines for AZTA Netiquette

The guidelines that follow interpret, for internet purposes, foundational principles of Right Speech found in the Tripitaka. Right Speech is factual, true, beneficial, though not necessarily “endearing and agreeable to others,” as Buddha taught in *Majjhima Nikaya* 58:

“In the case of words that the Tathagata knows to be factual, true, beneficial, and endearing & agreeable to others, he has a sense of the proper time for saying them. Why is that? Because the Tathagata has sympathy for living beings.

“In the case of words that the Tathagata knows to be factual, true, beneficial, but unendearing & disagreeable to others, she has a sense of the proper time for saying them.”

In addition to the general principles set forth by Shakyamuni, these guidelines reflect discussion during the 2014 annual meeting. They address a range of issues, including procedural courtesies (such as trimming long posts) and practices that may enhance expression of the dharma.

Guidelines 1 – 10 represent typical, and explicit, practices to keep the list healthy. Guideline 11 spells out various means of responding to messages that you consider inappropriate, offensive, etc. Members attending the 2014 meeting agreed that it serves no one’s interest merely to hit Delete when we receive such a message. We offer a menu of graduated options that we hope will encourage you to respond – ways that don’t take lots of time but might help the writer who’s given offense to see the karma she or he is creating.

1. Confidentiality: The AZTA listserv is confidential. In joining this list, you have agreed to this rule.
2. Use the list to converse with your peers, sending to or requesting information from the list as a whole. Send a message to the entire list when it contains information that everyone can benefit from or when you seek information from the entire list. Please avoid using it as a means to converse with a small subset of the membership.
3. Include a signature tag on all messages. Include your full name, lineage affiliation, and location. (It might be obvious to you who wtpbear@aol.com is and where s/he comes from. It might not be immediately recognized by many others.)
4. Be sure the subject line clearly and concisely states the actual topic you are addressing. This helps members to respond appropriately to your post and makes it convenient for members to search posts by subject. This is particularly important when replying to a listserv message or when changing the subject.

5. Trim messages, including only relevant portions of preceding messages in your reply. If you receive your listserv postings in Digest form, please don't send out another copy of all 32 previous comments. Cut-and-paste is a great tool. Use it!
6. After a string is established, be mindful of the possibility that it may evolve into a private conversation. If it gets to that point (e.g. you want to follow up on a side issue, or simply chat), send a separate and private email to the individual(s) you want to reach.
7. Once you've had your say on an issue, don't dominate discussion by responding repeatedly to subsequent posts. Read others' posts with care, and give others a good chance to express their views. Maybe somebody else will make the points important to you; if a few days pass and you still feel a need to address the issue, please do so. Remember, though, that proper timing is one of the elements of Right Speech. By nature, electronic communication tends to accelerate exchanges, often to the detriment of careful thought and speech. We encourage you to experiment with allowing yourself and others adequate time to reflect on listserv issues.
8. Don't attack others or their opinions. Differing with them is fine, but if you feel worked up or contentious when drafting a message, please set it aside for at least 24 hours, then reconsider it. The list is a vehicle for the exchange of feelings as well as of information and opinions, but it's not a means to vent at others' expense.
9. If discussion seems to be heating up and in danger of getting out of hand, speak up and say so. A cooling-off period might be wise. Request such a period if you think the situation warrants it.
10. If you'd like to forward messages or even segments of messages from the listserv to persons not on the listserv, you *must* obtain the explicit permission of the person(s) you're "quoting." To do otherwise violates the confidentiality of the list (guideline #1).
11. If a post strikes you as offensive, please accept your responsibility to respond. Otherwise, the sender will be blind to the effect he or she has had and will lose the opportunity to clarify, make amends, etc. Such responses need not be long and time-consuming. Some of the possibilities, in order of increasing seriousness:
 - a. Make a brief, mild response (e.g., "My, that seems a little harsh!") to the *full list*. Past experience with our group has shown that such a reply sometimes is all it takes to let a sender know that a message comes across as angry or otherwise off the mark. It may provoke a bit of public back-and-forth, too, which can help regulate the tenor of our communications.
 - b. *Privately* inform the sender that the post seemed to you unclear, disrespectful, hostile, demeaning, or whatever. If you receive such a note, we advise sending a simple acknowledgment of receipt. If you wish to say more, of course,

you're free to do so, bearing in mind that your fellow member may not have time or inclination to engage further.

c. *Privately* inform the sender of the above and *ask* what she or he intended. If you receive such a request to clarify your intention, respond in a timely and respectful manner. If this seems successful and you feel so inclined, share your clarification *publicly* with the full list.

d. If an exchange of the above sort occurs but doesn't bring a satisfactory resolution, either party can *privately* propose asking a third person to review the exchange and facilitate a clearing.

e. If the sender doesn't respond after a few days or the above measures seem to have failed – and if you feel that the situation warrants it – express your concern *privately* to the members of this working group. This will enable us to track any patterns of concern that arise and to intervene if we feel it would be constructive and appropriate. (Note: the three of us have no desire to perform ongoing oversight of netiquette but are willing to serve until the next annual meeting.)

f. If none of the above has adequately addressed your concern, express it *publicly* to the full list, framed less as a complaint than as an important question for discussion in our listserv community.

g. If problems appear intractable, ask that listserv protocol be placed on the agenda of the next annual meeting.

At every step of this process, please take care to abide by the previous guidelines, especially numbers 7 & 8. Otherwise, your efforts are likely to make a bad situation even worse.

We look forward to your feedback about these guidelines and urge you to implement them in good spirit.

Gaelyn Godwin, Houston Zen Center, Houston, TX
Kyogen Carlson, Dharma Rain Zen Center, Portland, OR
Nelson Foster, Ring of Bone Zendo, Nevada City, CA, and East Rock Sangha, New England