

## Acharya Protocol

Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche has empowered each Acharya to represent him and the Kagyü, Nyingma, and Shambhala lineages he holds. The Sakyong chose these individuals because of their knowledge, wisdom, and commitment to the extensive teaching required throughout the mandala. You will be establishing the environments in which your visiting Acharya will reside and teach. All arrangements should reflect consideration and respect for our teachers and the teachings they represent.

If you have invited a Shambhala Training Director or senior teacher in the past, the arrangements for Acharyas will be similar. These guidelines are provided for those who are not yet experienced with visiting teachers.

### You May Invite an Acharya to

- Give any Shambhala, Buddhist, or Nalanda program they are empowered to teach. Certain Acharyas specialize in particular aspects of the teachings; they will let you know if they are best suited to teach what you are asking.
- Give the Refuge Vow
- Give the Bodhisattva Vow
- Give vows as the representative of the Sakyong (acceptance of office, retirement from office, etc.)
- Give reading transmissions (*lung*s) for ngöndro practices; guru yogas such as *The Rain of Blessings*, *Dharmasagara*, *The Profound Guru Yoga*; and for recent practices written by the Sakyong, such as *The Primordial Rigden*, *Powerful Activity Phurba*, *The Wheel of Wisdom*, *White Tara*, *Sadhana of Luminosity*, and *Ground Lungta*.
- Conduct ceremonies such as weddings and funeral rituals (*Sukhavatis*).

### Inviting an Acharya

Do not hesitate to approach any of the Acharyas with your teaching request; we cannot cover all the possibilities here, but the first step toward an Acharya's visit is simply to find out who is available to conduct the teaching you would like to sponsor.

- Check the Acharya's schedule at [www.shambhala.org/teachers/](http://www.shambhala.org/teachers/).
- Contact Lin Waters, the Acharyas' secretary, at [lin-waters@comcast.net](mailto:lin-waters@comcast.net), for assistance and contact information.
- When you have established one or two sets of dates that will work for your centre, send an e-mail inquiry to one or more Acharyas to find out if they are available to present the program you have in mind.

- After an Acharya has expressed interest, discuss details of the program and settle all the dharmic, administrative, and financial requirements. For an extended program, it will be helpful for your centre to have coordinators for the program as well as the household. It is generally best if only one person communicates with the Acharya about the details of the visit, so that communication is coordinated and simple.
- You can download a picture and biographical information on each Acharya from the Shambhala website.
- When an invitation is extended to an Acharya for a potential teaching visit, please notify the Rusung, the local Dorje Kasung representative. Please keep the Rusung notified of all pertinent details concerning the Acharya teaching visit.

## **Program Coordination**

It will be very helpful to the Acharya if the centre can send the following information prior to the visit.

- The name(s) of the host/hostess, their address, phone and/or cell numbers, and email address
- A list of the community members
- A list of the leadership of the centre and their positions
- A list of staff for the program
- A list of program participants; this should be updated as registrations are received.
- A proposed schedule for the program and overall visit
- Any special requests for interviews, lungs, etc.
- The name(s) of those who will be meeting the Acharya at the airport, and contact information in case of travel delays or a missed connection.

## **At the Event**

- When the Acharya is presenting a program or officiating at a ceremony, he/she should be escorted by Kasung.
- Prior to the event, find out how the Acharya would like to be introduced and what practice materials may be needed, for instance, for a lhasang or stroke practice.
- The Acharya will have travel cushion covers. If he/she wishes to use them, they should be installed before the Acharya arrives at the event.
- During the event, the Acharya should be offered the beverage of his/her choice.

- If an Acharya is present at an event but not officiating, Kasung need not be provided. An introduction may be appropriate, especially if other introductions are being made.
- Standing when an Acharya enters to give teaching and when he/she leaves is appropriate for receiving teachings at this level. Offering khatas for blessings is reserved for Rinpoches.

## **Hospitality Coordination**

The Centre Director should be available to greet the arriving Acharya either at the centre or the residence.

### ***Travel arrangements***

- If the Acharya is arriving by plane or other public transport, arrange for them to be met by Kasung or others in appropriate dress and driven to the centre or residence.
- If the Acharya will need local transportation during the visit, it should be provided in the same manner.

### ***Housing***

- Depending on the situation and length of stay, you might appoint a “household coordinator” to arrange the residence and meal service.
- Housing should be as nice as possible; flowers should be in place when the Acharya arrives.
- If you can offer practice space at the residence, ask the Acharya what supplies or other materials may be needed (stroke practice materials, etc.)
- If possible, provide Internet access, especially during extended programs.

### ***Meal service***

Pre-visit discussions should cover whether the Acharya has any special dietary requirements and how he/she prefers meals to be handled. If the Acharya is familiar with your community, he/she may be invited to take meals with various members, or community members may provide meals at the Acharya’s residence. In this case, the household coordinator should prepare a schedule prior to the visit.

## **Honoraria and Teaching Gift**

Shambhala Center visits follow the acharya livelihood model of \$200 per day, with travel days included. The typical visit is a full weekend with a traveling acharya, with an honorarium of \$1000.

The center would typically cover travel expenses as well as hosting expenses. See **Heart Gifts** below for a discussion on how to work with heart gifts.

Because a visit can be structured in many ways, it is important to clarify all the details well in advance of the visit. This includes:

- the number of days covered by the honorarium and the total honorarium to be paid
- travel and hosting costs to be paid
- the programs and events with heart gifts
- request for tax ID number and mailing address for reporting honorarium payment
- For non Canadian resident teachers who will be teaching in Canada, confirm whether the acharya has a tax withholding waiver from Revenue Canada and if so, provide a copy to the centre.

## Exceptions

Sometimes a center or group will want to host an acharya, but not have sufficient revenue to offer the full honorarium. This should not be viewed as a situation for negotiation. Rather the center or group should offer what it can, with the understanding that this may not be workable for the teacher, who may decline the invitation.

Ideally, the center knows in advance that a program may fail to meet the minimum number required to offer a full honorarium. In this case, they should communicate this when the invitation to teach is made. For example:

*Our center would like very much to host you for an extended weekend, This would include a program, a community talk and a vow ceremony. This will be a major event for our center and we hope to get a very good turnout, but we think it is unlikely we will have more than \$700 to offer for an honorarium.*

*We really hope this arrangement will work for you, and that you will be able to come to (city). But we will understand if it does not. Please let me know if you are able to accept our invitation under these circumstances.*

**Note:** Heart gifts must always be given to the teacher. It is not appropriate under any circumstances for the center to keep these gifts. If the teacher wants to offer something back to the center because a program had marginal revenue, (s)he can do this by taking a reduced honorarium.

## Heart Gifts

Note: *Heart Gift* is the terminology we are now using for what used to be called the “teaching gift”. We have changed this because *heart gift* more accurately conveys the spirit of this offering. This is separate from the teacher honorarium, which is provided by the host centre.

## When is it appropriate to ask for a heart gift for an Acharya?

Any program led by an Acharya could include a heart gift. This would include weekend programs, practice intensives (e.g. a Werma retreat), and other vajrayana programs.

It could also include events like a guided Shambhala sadhana practice, or a Werma feast with a talk. Vow ceremonies include a gift from those taking vows.

For every visit, you should confirm with the Acharya prior to the visit, which programs and events will have heart gifts.

## **How do we communicate about the heart gift and tangra offering?**

### *Advance set up:*

*For heart gifts:* There should be an offering bowl and envelopes set outside the meditation hall where people can offer their gift. It is good to have a nice bowl or basket, envelopes and a pen near the bowl.

You could also have a small sign indicating to whom checks should be made. It is preferable that checks be made to the acharya not the centre – this is cleaner and more straightforward. If someone mistakenly makes a check to the centre, then the centre can process the check and pass on the gift to the acharya.

In the rare event that you are hosting an event with more than one acharya receiving gifts, checks can be made out to the centre, which can then pass on the gifts to the acharyas.

### *Making the announcement:*

One of the assistant directors (or meditation instructors) makes an announcement a day before the end of the program, preferably not in combination with other announcements.

If you are making the announcement, please prepare in advance. Please notice how you are feeling about asking the participants to make a heart gift or tangra offering, and note if you are feeling shy or hesitant about it. If this continues to be an obstacle for you, perhaps it would be best to ask one of the other assistant teachers to make the announcement.

When making the announcement, be settled and confident in your own enriching presence. Speak slowly and clearly and without shyness. Your presence is very important. If you are comfortable asking, and you yourself feel inspired by offering heart gifts to your teachers, the participants will feel comfortable and inspired when hearing your message. We provide suggestions below for the content of your message. It would be best to convey the message in your own words, rather than reading a script.

### *Suggested message for heart gift:*

It is traditional to make a monetary offering, called a *heart gift*, to the acharyas, or to the lead teacher (here you could say their names). We have an opportunity to do that at this retreat. It is a gift from the heart, and therefore it is called a “heart gift”. It is an expression of your heartfelt appreciation for the teacher and the teachings you have received from them. The amount you give is entirely based on your inspiration.  
(please refrain from suggesting an amount, even if the participants ask).