



S H A M B H A L A
O F F I C E O F T H E P R E S I D E N T

The Fourth Shambhala Congress Halifax, 9 – 11 November 2009

Preliminary report

More than 150 Shambhalian from all corners of the world gathered in Halifax, the Shambhala capital, for the Fourth Shambhala Congress, from 9 to 11 November.

The Congress was preceded by the Gesar Trakpo Abhisheka, conferred by His Eminence Namkha Drimed Rinpoche at the request of the Sakyong, Jamgön Mipham Rinpoche. This is a protector practice that invokes the wisdom of compassion in the dark age.

During the Congress, itself, the mandala as a whole performed the Tenshuk ceremony for the long life of the Sakyong, who is now entering a one-year period of retreat. The events were streamed worldwide and centres and groups around the world took part in the traditional elaborate offerings to supplicate the teacher to remain in this world for the benefit of beings.

The Congress discussions were based on advance consultation with centres and groups to establish the topics that people most wanted to discuss. The vast majority of the Congress time was devoted to group discussion of these themes:

1. How do we work with conflict and/or differing points of view in our community?
2. How do we develop Intentional Community Building?
3. How can we best relate to finances and fundraising in our mandala?
4. How can we best develop and support volunteers?
5. What can we do to improve our publicity and general outreach?
6. What can we do to reach out to young adults?
7. How can we best re-examine the role of Deleks and other systems of support for our community members?
8. How can we meet the needs and challenges of smaller Centres and groups?
9. What can we do to really make our community far more diverse?
10. How best can we support the families and children in our community?
11. How best can we develop our care of the aging members in our community?
12. How can we improve mandala-wide systems of communications?

A major topic this year that is also being widely discussed in all parts of the mandala was the important question of how we welcome and support practitioners with diverse practice paths within Shambhala. This need has come into sharp focus with the emergence of the path that leads to the Scorpion Seal retreat. Many people are asking how best we can support and nurture those who are not on that particular path and who are wholeheartedly engaging in other practices offered within our mandala. A plenary session was devoted to this topic: "One mandala, many paths."

A highlight of the opening of the Congress was a surprise visit by the Federal Member of the Canadian Parliament, Ms Megan Leslie, who is the elected representative for Halifax. She spoke warmly of her work with many social activists from the Shambhala community and told the Congress: "I bring greetings from our parliament to your parliament."

This report provides a short summary of the discussion that took place on the theme of "One mandala, many paths", as well as the initial reports from all the break-out groups that addressed the 12 questions arising from the preceding community consultation.

Immediately following the Congress, the Mandala Council (on which all Shambhala Centres have a seat) met to discuss the highest priorities identified by the Congress. Those then went to a meeting of the Sakyong's Council for decision. The outcome of those discussions will be shared with the entire media through a Shambhala News Service.

One mandala, many paths

This topic was first discussed in small groups, particularly to bring out the heart quality. At the outset of the plenary session, the President quoted recent remarks by the Sakyong who addressed this issue at the Vajrakilaya Abhisheka he conferred at Karmê Chöling in October this year, just prior to the Shambhala Congress:

It is important now to create a strong mandala, culture and sangha to protect the practices such as Vajrayogini and Vajrakilaya. All these yidams need a home. In Tibet the culture provided such protection. Now Tibet is gone so we're doing what we can. This is why we have the path of the Dorje Dradül's terma teachings ... All the great masters had a base, an essential teachings unique to their lineage. Then we can have individual varieties of practices within that base ... We must practice as a group as much as possible. We must embody the principals. Unwavering compassion can be terrifying. We must support each other in that.

Among the concerns that people expressed, often on behalf of community members not present at the Congress, were the following:

There can be a great deal of personal pain around these issues, a lot of heartbreak, which is difficult to express. “Vision”, “devotion”, “loyalty” and “change” are hot words in our sangha.

At the same time, the discussion of this issue demonstrated the very considerable diversity of our mandala. People are following multiple paths. One of the small group discussions highlighted the need for us to see “parenting” as a path and to welcome that. To this could be added the arts and many other practices. In addition, there are those for whom this entire discussion is not an issue at all.

There is a need to go beyond hardening, so that we can all remain open to listening to each other. There are students who experience there being a “party line” and others who have no experience of that. Dialogue between the two is often difficult.

There is a need to create a more open, inclusive environment, both for longer-term and newer students. We need to practice patience in relating with each other: everyone is unfolding.

Without this openness, those students who don't regard the Sakyong as their principal teacher, for whatever reason, can feel as though others are judging them when they come to their centres. This is compounded by misinformation about actual policies on the training of Shambhala Guides and the criteria for teacher accreditation – for example, people end up being told, incorrectly, that, as a general policy, it is completely unacceptable for Shambhalians to study with other teachers.

It is important to be open about change. It was pointed out that there are shifting patterns of participation in some feast practices; the central practice path experienced for many years by practitioners in the mandala has changed. It is important to understand that there are students who have a lifelong commitment to Shambhala and the Druk Sakyong who

feel that the core teachings of the Vidyadhara and his vision have been abandoned, which causes them great feelings of a breaking of their samaya with the Vidyadhara. Remaining open to and being willing to engage in dialogue on a deeply human level with people who feel that way is integral to the practice of sangha.

This leads to a whole question about the vitality of our community when it comes to dissonance of views. One person spoke of her pride in the fact that we have, within our community, a website like Radio Free Shambhala, that space is available for that, and also that people who have dissenting views feel able to express them.

Some senior students feel their innate intelligence is not being heard, or if it is being heard it's not being acted upon by the organization – this leaves them feeling ineffectual in the mandala, even though their commitment has already been proven.

These issues have been with us for many years, but are now more openly discussed. This is partly owing to the energy being generated by the Sakyong and partly because it is now more possible to have these kinds of conversations openly. Some have felt this is the first time they could talk about their feelings in this way.

From a note sent in prior to the Congress from a deleg discussion in Halifax:

It is extremely important for everyone in our community to hold the space for people to express what they're feeling from their genuine heart of sadness and joy, regardless of the practice path they are following. The unfolding richness and diversity of Shambhala is not something that requires “fixing” or “solving”. It will work itself out like a snake uncoiling, without trying to make it all better and without indulging in aggression. That is, be compassionate. In this way, the Kingdom of Shambhala can surely accommodate various practice paths and offer the vision of a society capable to holding lots of views about the life of the mandala.

A different way of seeing all this was expressed:

The centre of our mandala is compassion, loving kindness and basic goodness. All paths lead to that. We need to keep our focus on that. We get too fixated on where someone is looking from and not on what there are looking to. The goal is the same; the difference is in the path to that goal.

A long-term senior member of our mandala said: “The essential ingredient is how we are, ourselves, on the path.”

The question is how to balance our unique, core path (the Shambhala terma) with the umbrella of a broad Shambhala society that embraces many paths. The Sakyong is devoting himself to the unique terma of the Druk Sakyong, which aims to create a good society on earth that is inseparable from our fundamental nature. The path of practice now being unfolded is not superior to or separate from other paths, but is essential to the need to create this dharmic society in this dark age. The Sakyong is asking us to raise our gaze so that Shambhala can offer this treasure to the world at this challenging time.

How do we work with conflict and differing views in our community?

View

What's happening now?

- We see conflict as a problem
- Conflict and differing views are to be gotten rid of

What is emerging in our mandala?

- Some understanding of the richness and insight underneath and contained in our conflicts and differing views

Obstacles to something emerging

- Indulging or denying our conflicts or differing views

How do we go forward?

- Seeing conflict and differing views as a gateway into the recognition of basic goodness and ultimately into enlightened society

Practice

What's happening now?

- We are seeing the conflicts and differing views more clearly
- There is a lot of passion for "our" way of seeing things (lots of energy to be transformed!)
- There is also ignoring going on. One form is "what's the big deal?"

What's emerging in our mandala?

- Recognition that we have things to learn from outside the Shambhala mandala
- We have practices and teachings that are applicable right now

Obstacles to something emerging

- Shambhala chauvinism
- Not making the connections between the teachings we have and our lives

How do we go forward?

- Reach out for complementary practices
- More explicit practice instructions regarding applicability of the teachings and practices we already have

Action

- Form a working group to continue the work
- Contemplations on view that conflict and differing views can be a creative opportunity
- Bringing in more tools to work with our richness of difference
- More clarity and education about procedures and resources currently in place to work with conflict and conduct issues
- More education about what resources are currently available to work with conflict
- More procedures in place for specific situations
- Posters about non-virtuous actions
- Developing non-conceptual ways to work with conflict
- Look into reforming upaya councils
- Webpage with resources such as mediation services within the mandala
- Celebrations to be in relationship with those in conflict
- Regional ombudsmen

How do we intentionally build community?

A strong community is the vehicle for carrying out the Sakyong's vision to manifest and expand Shambhala society. We have developed a remarkable community over the last forty years, and this success should be acknowledged. At the same time, much of the community building that currently happens is accidental rather than intentional, arising spontaneously in response to situational needs. There may small sub-groups that have a strong identity, such as youth groups or groups caring for a dying person, but these need to be gathered into a central umbrella identity which is sometimes disconnected at a local level. We feel it would be of benefit to bring more intention to the process of building community.

The ground of community building is twofold. We have a common ground, a seed syllable in vajrayana terms: the dharma and particularly our connection to the Shambhala terma. We have a strong existing community that has grown up over the last forty years spanning several continents, but we now have a command from the Sakyong to manifest more fully and propagate on a larger scale.

What we want to see is a community that feels harmonious and embraces conflict, that enables a deeper connection to practice, and that connects the heaven of the Sakyong's vision to the earth of daily living and center activity. We want to model enlightened society within our centers, and create a way for people from many paths to feel at home within Shambhala.

The path to arriving at this end is wide, with many possibilities. Ultimately, community building is an individual responsibility. Here are some preliminary recommendations:

1. Create a working group that can continue to explore this very broad question. The group could gather existing knowledge and examples of what is working within Shambhala, and also look outside to see how other groups are working to build communities (e.g., other religious organizations.)
2. Request senior teachers and leaders to consider community building as part of their teaching and leadership practice. For example, acharyas could find ways to engage with communities during teachings visits, perhaps by staying a day or two to connect to community life through feasts, meetings, parties or communal events.
3. Find ways to acknowledge and communicate what has been successful in building community, for instance, through a short documentary or posting content on online forums.
4. Request that other working groups consider community building in their discussions, e.g., how can IT (information technology) be used to enhance community? Many groups (aging, families and children, conflict resolution) already are considering aspects of building community. It would be helpful for the community building working group to actively liaise with these other groups.
5. Strengthen use of online tools to reach IT literate segments of our community. Specifically, to create a platform for an interactive online Shambhala network.
6. Develop skillful means and forums for addressing community issues and encouraging differing viewpoints before they reach the level of conflict. Specific training for community leaders in this area could be useful.
7. Strengthen all types of group practice.

How can we best relate to finances and fundraising in our mandala?

Where are we now?

(This is a short, incomplete summary of the group discussion)

The group described a mandala in which there are both points of financial health and points of financial crisis. Improvements have been emerging in our relationship with money and in our approaches to finance and fundraising, however we remain largely unsure of our vision about money and of how to effectively manifest that vision. People are feeling stretched as a result of un-coordinated fundraising and the global economic situation, and there is remaining mistrust and ignorance around matters of money. Overall, a lack of integration and coordination in terms of both finances and fundraising was seen to be a major source of difficulty.

Where would we like to be?

- People feel good when they think about money.
- Debt is used wisely.
- We can say “no” to things that don’t make sense now (both at the local and international levels).
- Everyone uses the standard budgeting and reporting format, resulting in improved communication, analysis, transparency, and training.
- There is a shared strategic investment plan in place, resulting in investments being made to the right places at the right times.
- There is adequate income to cover our reasonable operating expenses.
- There are enough people good enough at fundraising and finance to meet the needs of the mandala.
- We effectively include different financial cultures.
- The practice of generosity abounds.

How are we going to get there?

We believe there is a need for a shared mandala-wide view and approach to finance and fundraising which includes:

- A strategic investment plan
- Integrated fundraising

and is based on our mandate for growth.

We understand that in order for this happen we need:

- To further develop our human resources and systems for financial management and fundraising
- To further develop competency in financial sustainability throughout the mandala
- To further develop our culture of money
- To communicate well across the mandala

How can we best develop and support volunteers?

Ground: The current approach to working with volunteers in Shambhala is currently haphazard and piecemeal across Centers and the Mandala as a whole. It is a huge topic, though, because we are (almost) all volunteers. It is a frustrating process in many Centers people do not delegate well and end up doing too much themselves and become burned out. Some Centers are working creatively with the issue – i.e., developing a Volunteer Coordinator role, training volunteers at various levels – but these are not widely known.

Path: Discussion was focused around the need for a new way to envision volunteer service as a part of one's path and a fundamental aspect of community, and a way to develop a more organized approach that would address how to Recruit, Delegate, Guide and Inspire in volunteering. This could include training of volunteers that would include both the view and the specific tasks in volunteering. Other issues arising included:

The term "volunteer" has connotations of putting forth effort toward accomplishing a task, and too much effort expended over time leads to burnout, especially if it is not well acknowledged or appreciated.

Do we match people with the tasks that exist or encourage a person's inspiration for a task "not on the list" to define a new role? The using and acknowledging the inspiration seems to be important. How best do we match the interest/inspiration/talent of the person with the task/job?

Are there existing surveys or questionnaire used to identify people's interests/talents?

How does the large existing knowledge base about volunteer development and use relate to the Shambhala situation?

We need to be skilful in not asking too much of someone with initial enthusiasm and then burning them out.

We need to train our leaders in how to recruit, delegate, guide and inspire in working with volunteers.

Fruition: Our group's recommendations that this issue be further addressed by:

1. The entire community develop a new paradigm of "volunteering" that shifts focus from just getting the work of the Center done, to viewing it as a means of practicing the teachings and engaging in community -- possibly creating a new term for "volunteer."
2. Create a Working Group which would
 - Develop a model and guidelines for best practices for working with volunteers to include/address:
 - Consideration of both the size of the Center, as well as the experience and level of training of the volunteers, from the new person to the Center Director and above
 - Include the areas of Recruit, Delegate, Guide and Inspire
 - Service/volunteering as an entity in itself, possibly with level-appropriate training and slogans
 - The large body of knowledge outside of Shambhala on the topic relevant to Shambhala

What can we do to improve our publicity and general outreach?

We discussed “What is outreach?”

- Is it small organically arising local efforts?
- Is it individuals manifesting warriorship in daily life: workplace; community work etc.?
- Is it individual Shambhala Centers involved in local communities: ie. Interfaith councils, local arts, chamber of commerce, prisons etc?
- Is it large-scale Shambhala inspired endeavors i.e. Center for Living Peace?

We discussed “Who are we reaching out to?”

- People we want to draw into our Centers & Community; into membership
- People who need help through social service activity
- People we want to bring meditation & Shambhala principles to out side of our Centers

Where we are now and what is emerging?

- Group acknowledged a variety of non-coordinated outreach initiatives that are arising spontaneously throughout the mandala, such as:
 - Heart of Recovery
 - Street Retreats
 - Offering mediation in various professional and public settings
 - Prison Programs
 - Contemplative Arts
 - Tail of the Tiger programming trends
- Sakyong’s Council small group has initiated work on addressing lack of cohesive publicity materials for Centers.

What are the current obstacles to effective Outreach & Publicity?

- Lack of a clear definition of Outreach.
- Lack of human resources on local & international level
- Confusion about & lack of confidence in presenting who we are via outreach without presenting a view of spiritual materialism
- Language about who we are & what we’re doing that is jargon-free and clear to the general public.
- Lack of clear quality & branding standards in our publicity

Top High Level Recommendation with three components:

- 1) Re-Establish an International Outreach Working Group, of which a sub-group would be focused on Publicity
- 2) The Outreach Working Groups’ mandate should be to explore & articulate the view of Shambhala outreach which would being sure to include:
 - a. Sakyong’s Vision & Mandates
 - b. Canvassing our community for “best practices”
 - c. Exploring the “best practices” of other organizations
 - d. Utilization of professional resources, both within & outside of the Shambhala Community

- 3) The Outreach Working Group should develop a clear path of Outreach Engagement for both individuals and Shambhala Center.

Further Recommendations:

- Encourage all Shambhala centers & groups to establish an Outreach position within their local governance
- Encourage all Shambhala centers & groups to include an Outreach section in their website, with links to local & manadala-wide Outreach activities
- Establish an Outreach position at the core Shambhala mandala level.
- Establish easily accessible and customizable branded publicity materials for core curriculum and public programs, including a general Shambhala center brochure.

What can we do to reach out to young adults?

What defines youth? During the Congress we termed “Youth” as including but NOT limited to people in their 20s and 30s, college students and young families.

What is our motivation? Is it not so much about how we “get” more youth but more about how can we be of service to them? What do we have to offer that appeals to and helps youth?

An offer of creating a mandala wide working group on this issue was made at the Congress. This working group would focus on collecting information in regards to the three areas as well as be a reference, mentor, guide, and collaborator for *Youth Coordinators in centers.

It is hoped that a point person could be appointed in every center (what we’re now terming a Youth Coordinator) who could use the information collected by the working group.

We found it important to encourage and empower young people in teaching and leadership roles, eg. Shambhala guides, MI’s, teaching assistants.

It is essential to note that this is a just a beginning ground from where to work from. We hope and expect that this will all evolve as more individuals and information come together. Three possible areas of how to work with this topic:

Resources

Collaborate with existing people who work with this age demographic both in and out of Shambhala.

Collect best practices in regards to establishing the needs of youth, how to best meet those needs, and actually moving forward with ideas.

Engage in dialogue with other Buddhist groups.

Sun Camp Leadership group could be a resource for creating youth oriented programs.

Adapt books and texts for young audiences, eg. Ruling Your World for Teens/Young Adults.

Programs/Outreach

Explore previous programs that existed that were geared toward youth. What worked or didn’t work? eg. Dharmic Warriors.

Collect information regarding existing programs (i.e. Buddhist Youth Festival, Earth Stewardship at Windhorse Farm, Summer Volunteer Program at land centers, Touching the Earth programming, Nova Scotia Sea School, Shambhala Art Day).

Brainstorm future possibilities (i.e. bringing back Varja Dawn).

Encourage social outings/ open mic nights/ dance parties/film nights at local centers.

Create ties to college campus ministries.

Gap Year is a time when students are in transition. Offer some retreat/program to help with life direction, eg. social activism, environmentalism during this time.

Communication

Explore and research the wide range of possibilities with social media, eg. Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, My Space, etc.

Online teachings geared to young adults

How can we best re-examine the role of deleks and other systems of support for our community Members?

Heaven: Clarify view and intention

Research, compile and edit the teachings on deleks in a reader-friendly form and make them accessible to interested sangha members.

Look out for/request teachings on the specific subject from the Sakyong and Sakyong Wangmo /from acharyas and other senior teachers.

Create a place on the Shambhala website where best practices regarding community building and deleks can be shared.

Earth: Evaluate and examine the situation and needs

How can we meet each other on a local level: who we are, what we are, what are our needs; what are our joys? Don't let the idea of deleg system be a restriction.

- Needs also to be local, since there are such regional and cultural variations

Delek system itself as a model has had limited success

- Need to reevaluate how to build community

Human: appreciate, inspire and educate

Appreciate the feminine principles in terms of creating spaces where small groups can meet and share their humanity and experience in uplifted environments.

Value the graces and skills of hosting guests, leading by example.

Inspire young sangha to become hosts and facilitators, Continue creating deleks at land-centers for major programs.

Provide education at land-centers and in city centers by means of the publications mentioned under heaven.

It would make sense to join this effort with the working group on intentional community building.

How can we meet the needs and challenges of smaller centres and groups?

This break-out group was comprised of 14 people whom hold leadership positions for their group or small centres. These groups or small centres ranged from a small group of four people to a centre of 55 members, some well established and some new. Also represented were regional liaisons from Florida and Atlantic.

The break-out group is aware that there are existing resources in our community that if gathered in a more user friendly form would help in addressing some of the challenges faced by groups and small centres. We recognize that we all take individual responsibility in accessing the available resources, however the steps outlined below would greatly enhance our abilities to function as groups and small centres.

Recommendations. Create a working group to meet the objectives below:

1. Establish a regional support system and structure specific to groups and small centres:
 - * Establish a point person within the centre of the mandala that can respond to queries from groups and small centres
 - * Develop and connect resources specific to group and small centre needs (organizing what is available and where located).
 - * Create a regional representative position which is formally empowered with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, with a primary responsibility to support small groups and centres.
 - * Mentor groups and small centres by senior teachers and or larger centres.
 - * Use the already existing regional command system (Dorje Kasang) as a regional support system.
2. Define and disseminate the resources available already in existence while allowing for flexibility to accommodate varying needs of individual small groups and centres.
3. Recognize and support the practical needs of groups and small centres, such as:
 - Sliding scale for program pricing (for mandala offerings, on-line programs, etc.)
 - Authorization issues:
 - Not enough qualified MIs, AD, guides, teachers, etc.
 - Defining decorum for unauthorized teachers in a position of teachers
 - Mentoring from larger centres or regional teachers, etc. for guides, MIs, new teachers
 - On-line programs specific to small centre issues (e.g. training on working with groups, giving talks, working with council, etc.)
 - Financial support
 - Development of Shambhala micro-loan, matching grants, or other financial support systems for groups and small centres
 - Monetary or resource support for new groups (providing cushions, etc.) or funds to change locations

What can we do to really make our community far more diverse?

Ground: We need to re-affirm our aspiration for diversity; why does diversity matter? The group affirmed that the issue is still relevant to our mandala, even though there is a re-occurring obstacle of people thinking that bias is not a problem in our sangha. Diversity has many aspects that affect all of us and go beyond race and ethnicity. This is already recognized in our current articulation of the aspiration for diversity, but needs to be re-affirmed and communicated to the whole mandala.

The group recognized that different geographical areas, centers and parts of mandala may have different issues or concerns around diversity, and so a conversation about working with diversity needs to begin with what the local issues are. For example, Europeans may not resonate with the emphasis on “People of Colour” as the focus of the discussion.

Path: Working with bias as practice. We need collect and make resources available to teachers and center leadership regarding working with diversity issues; e.g. developing programs that include contemplations related to bias and working with differences; working with the fear and resistance that may arise; recognizing the shared experience of feeling disconnected; creating space where people can share their stories and experiences around this; and cultivating the practice of listening. These could be separate programs or could be included in existing programs such as Shambhala Training.

Support is needed from the Office of Practice and Education and the acharyas to encourage and develop ways to include this in our curriculum.

In addition to working within our own local Shambhala community, we need to appreciate and recognize the diversity in the larger community, develop curiosity and learn about the different groups in our community, their culture, celebrations, food and “local drala.”

Fruition: By going beyond our fear of differences and finding our common ground we can recognize the basic goodness in everyone. This is how we create an awake society and eliminate barriers that prevent people who do not now feel included from participating in this vision.

Summary of Recommendations:

1. Call on center leadership to re-affirm importance of working with diversity.
2. Explore the mandala geographically to identify different diversity issues and concerns; develop people in different regions who are interested in working this issue; and create a network for communicating amongst themselves.
3. Compile already existing and developing new resources to work with diversity issues (e.g. programs that explore bias.)

How best can we develop our care of the aging members in our community?

*Getting old is not a problem
But, should I become ill or have no money (or both),
It would be kind if someone would notice.**

This breakout group consisted of five people, all over 60 years of age. The statement *On Aging in Shambhala* presented by the Working Group on Aging in Shambhala was considered an excellent first draft of principles to contemplate relating to this issue.

On a personal level, we were all experiencing the impact of aging: the decline in physical and mental capacities and the need to adjust our life styles to these changes. At the same time, rather than viewing this process of aging as a problem, it could be seen as a path and an opportunity – to relate to the world with less speed, to explore new activities and interests, to devote more time to practice.

How to develop an enlightened response to the process of aging? The group felt that this was closely related to the vision of the Sakyong, as expounded in the Treatise on Society and Organization, that Shambhala should be **a community that cares**:

“Death, sickness, trauma, and other critical junctures in people’s lives are events that can be supported and nurtured through advice and care by a society that is sensitive to its own members.”

We all need to “push the bodhisattava button” within ourselves – to develop and manifest kindness and gentleness to ourselves, each other and throughout our lives.

Although many sangha members have said that aging is a big issue for them personally, the whole question of aging as path has not emerged as a central issue for the community as a whole. There was a need to raise awareness by, for example, making more widely known the work of the Care of the Aging Working Group and the Community Care Council (see recommendations below). The possibility that the Sakyong might write a special practice related to aging would be wonderful.

Aging is an issue not only for older people themselves but for everyone: those caring for elderly parents, families with young children co-habiting with grandparents, and our Shambhala society where the majority of members are over 46 years of age.

The Shambhala community has a lot of expertise and experience in this area – both professional and personal – and there are many examples of ad hoc arrangements or formal partnership initiatives that could be usefully shared more widely. Outside of Shambhala, there are also many communities facing similar issues of how to care for their aging members. At the same time, it was recognized that while the problems are the same, the solutions will be different, depending on community and personal circumstances.

How to go forward:

1. All centres should be asked to appoint a contact person for the Working Group on Aging. This person could be a member of the Community Care Council (where one exists) and could if they wished gather together other members to work as a team.
2. As a first task, the contact person should identify the needs of their community with regard to aging: older people who might need support (not necessarily financial) as well as those caring for elderly parents, etc.
3. To take this further and to raise greater awareness of aging as path, the idea of a conference was welcomed. This would be an opportunity to share experiences and resources and might lead to the development of teaching resources or programs.

How can we improving mandala-wide systems of communications?

The “Improving Mandala-Wide Systems of Communications Discussion Group” of the Shambhala Congress 2009 offers the following recommendations for consideration:

1. The creation of a mandala-wide system of communications that aligns with a Court view of dignified warriorship and the tenants therein;
2. Identify the gaps in the current systems where human involvement can facilitate the resolutions to counter past & present issues and foster growth for future possibilities; and,
3. We recommend that the current body, the Communications & Technology Steering Committee, be responsible for implementing recommendations 1 and 2.

With advances in technology and its applications to communications, the tools of use quickly become outdated & outmoded. Just as attachment to thoughts in meditation, attachment to specific technologies and methods are not always well served. Realizing the groundlessness of emerging technologies, energy may be better harnessed in attention to the view rather than attention to the vehicle. A right view encompasses protocol, decorum & manners which are appropriate to enlightened society.

With a ground of gaps, ranging from anglo-centric communications to little continuity in resources support, a path of richer human involvement with training & education in guidelines & protocols to language diversity will strengthen human connection & right speech in communications, decorum & sustainability.

Over three days of discussion, both past issues and previous resolves were addressed. Although successful in intent, the breadth & the scope of the resolution did not sufficiently attend to the human element of the interaction. By improving the bond, the tools in place can be better leveraged as tools of benefit to all, not just to few. Helping to mature the current tools and/or replace them with emerging technologies, the systems of communications in use at both the local level and the mandala-wide level will be sought out as a tool, not as an obstacle, to propagate Shambhala Buddhism.

Akin to the path, the obstacles & the antidotes may not be realized until they’re experienced. With vision, clarity & exertion, all situations arising are workable regardless of its realm – virtual or real.