

Mandala Council Meeting
April 1 to 3, 2006

Notes

Friday night, March 31st

Reception

We ended the two-day Shambhala Governance Academy with a cocktail party to celebrate, and welcome those arriving for the Mandala Council Meeting.

Saturday April 1st

We opened the morning by doing the Werma Sadhana together in the spacious, light-filled shrine room of the Shambhala Meditation Center of Atlanta.

Then we did an introductory exercise, experienced the breadth of the mandala (attendees hailed from a wide range of places, California to Vancouver to New Zealand to Germany), introduced ourselves, and spent a bit of time getting to know each other.

Welcome and report from the President

President Reoch gave some update and news on:

- the Rigden Abhisheka in Halifax: 330 people attended, galvanizing old and new
- the wedding: the generosity policy in funding it, and why the change was made
- the seminary in Chile

We reviewed his original assessment in 2003 as to what directions the mandala needed to go in, and looked at progress that has been made on those issues so far. There has been a lot accomplished (and a lot still in progress) on many fronts—integration into a single mandala, governance structures and processes, communication, trust, transparency, membership, diversity and accessibility, and so on.

Agenda

We reviewed the agenda and people contributed items that they would like to see added to the agenda.

Lunch

Relations between the Sakyong's Council and the Mandala Council

In the months before the meeting, Sakyong's Council members were each assigned three centres to contact. The purpose of the call was to explain that we would be establishing this more direct link for communication between centres and the Sakyong's Council, find out how centres were doing, as well as find out whether centres were able to send representation to the Mandala Council meeting. For various reasons, some centres were successfully contacted and others were not. Those contacted seemed to find it helpful, and some ideas for improving the process were suggested.

Database

An initial report was presented on the efforts to move towards an integrated Shambhala membership database. To date, 23 North American Centres and groups are in some part of the process of coming onto the SDB already in use in Europe. Usability of the SDB has been greatly improved, and a system for providing every Center with Technical Support has been developed. All Center Directors are asked to give an approximate time when their Centres could join the SDB, with a goal of having 75% of North American Centres onboard by year's end. Meeting attendees were given five minutes of "homework" – to get onto the database and set up and access certain sample information, to get a feeling for how it would work. They were also provided with a FAQ sheet regarding the SDB, and asked for feedback regarding this document.

Build Shambhala

This section of the agenda consisted of a few different parts:

President Richard Reoch introduced the topic, talking about the financial history over the past few years, and our combined financial strength. Although the centre of the mandala (support for the Sakyong and the Core Service to centres is still severely weakened, taken together, all parts of the Shambhala mandala generate approximately \$16 million US (\$19 million Canadian) in annual revenue and own approximately \$35 million US (\$40 million Canadian) in assets.

Although individual centres and parts of the mandala were active in planning and fundraising for their development, historically there has been very little communication, coordination or cooperation in this area. There was a recent effort to identify capital fundraising campaigns across the mandala. In a significant shift, centres were now willing to share information and consider working collaboratively. Collectively the Mandala plans to raise about \$26 million US (\$30 million Canadian) for land and buildings over the next five years. The question now is how we can collaborate to further these efforts. At the previous meeting of the Mandala Council, there had been agreement to work towards a comprehensive Build Shambhala campaign.

Three centres talked briefly about their efforts to fundraise or build: San Francisco about current fundraising efforts and their vision for a larger multi-use building; Atlanta about building their new shrine hall on land they already owned; and Chris Tamdjidi about finding the new space in Cologne, Germany.

Larry Teitlebaum spoke about an idea for a Shambhala Foundation. Sangha members could invest their savings with this proposed entity, and the money would be loaned back out for building projects within the mandala. Good financial principles would be followed so that people felt confident that their savings were safe, and being put to good use.

The remainder of the Build Shambhala Campaign was presented on Sunday afternoon.

Evening

Saturday evening we had a reception with the Atlanta community, including a spontaneous comedy routine by Lodro Rinzler and President Reoch, and transmission of the National Kiss of Shambhala!

Sunday April 2nd

Shambhala Commission on the Status of Women and Feminine Principle

The report on the Shambhala Commission on the Status of Women and Feminine Principle by Sangyum Agness Au, Chair, and Alice Haspray, Vice-Chair.

We began the morning with a guided meditation practice, led by Alice where we contemplated our strong and upright back (masculine principle) and then our soft and open front (feminine principle), followed by our left and right sides, concluding with a sense of all around balance.

Then Agness executed a stroke of Ashe to demonstrate absolute nature manifesting into the relative, and gave a talk on the inseparable union of the feminine and masculine principles. We used word maps to study the basic qualities of the principles, the unbalanced manifestations, and finally a fruitional map of complementary pairs of qualities. The maps were accompanied by different contemplative exercises.

Alice followed with a report on the tangible work of the Commission, the "WHY" statement, gender inclusive language for texts and liturgies, the list of classes offered and the story of the new Yeshe Tsogyal banner that is being developed for the community. We concluded with a Q. & A. discussion.
Lunch

Practice and Education

Specific questions came up yesterday that Carolyn Mandelker, the Director of the office of Practice and Education, addressed.

Curriculum:

There is a group of four Acharyas and Carolyn working with the Sakyong on the pre-vajrayana curriculum. They hope to have something to present by the end of the summer to centre directors, meditation instructors and teachers throughout the mandala.

It's envisioned that there would be regional meetings to discuss and get feedback on the proposed curriculum throughout the fall and winter, and pilot projects. The aim would be, if all goes well, to begin a partial rollout of a changed curriculum by the fall of 2007.

The new curriculum would cover the path right up to Vajrayana Seminary, and present things in a more unified way. There would still be the opportunity for people to elect to take certain kinds of courses/programs and not others.

The post-vajrayana-seminary curriculum is also being discussed by Acharyas, Carolyn, and the Sakyong. This includes encouragement of group practice that encompasses teaching as well as practice, and the new Mipham Institute for senior teachers. They are currently writing a letter to tantrikas, describing what is happening on these fronts.

Students of other teachers:

Some vajrayana students of other teachers may want to attend Shambhala Vajrayana Seminary, but they should understand that in doing so, they are also making a samaya commitment to the Sakyong, resulting in a full commitment to two teachers, which can be a challenging situation. Carolyn will send out the guidelines on the participation of vajrayana students of other teachers in feast practices.

Chants:

The question was asked, how much individual/centre discretion is there in which chants are done?

The minimum shortest set of chants should be:
Supplication to the Shambhala Lineage
Concluding Request to the Protectors
Longevity of Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche
Dedication of Merit

Seminary:

There is thought being given to how sutrayana seminary can be organized so that it can be broken into two-week segments, so that people with regular jobs could more easily attend.

Database Working Group Part 2

Participants gave their feedback on the results of the database exercise, and also regarding the FAQ sheet. There were further questions and discussions about who can access the data, how it is maintained, the benefits of having a reliable mandala-wide database, and so on. Specific questions arose regarding the following issues:

- 1) How do we handle people who belong to multiple centres?
- 2) We need a precise policy on privacy/bulk emails. Members need to be able to choose what of their information they are willing to release to all other members
- 3) How to best sort practice levels so that they reflect a sense of "one path" as opposed to the model of two parallel paths
- 4) We might have multiple centres that are administered by one DBA -- Halifax actually runs the databases for a lot of the little centres around.

There was general agreement that we should continue and commit to this initiative.

Membership and Communications Chairperson Mary Whetsell will be contacting each Shambhala Center Director who has not already signed on for a start date to bring their Center on to the SDB.

Build Shambhala Part 2

There were further discussions and presentations about the financial aspects of the Mandala, including a presentation by President Reoch on behalf of the group headed up by Jim Rosen that is looking at high-level mandala-wide financial coordination.

Out of 8,000 Shambhala households in North America, fewer than 1,000 make a regular, recurring donation to the centre of the Mandala. There was a discussion about how we could best increase regular support for a re-invigorated centre of the mandala. There was some explanation of how it works in Europe, where centres contribute a much larger percentage of their income to sustain Shambhala Europe.

There was a well-received idea that President Reoch could go on a tour to visit all Shambhala Centres in North America to update everyone on the current 'state of the mandala', and at the same time, inspire people to see opportunities for working together internationally (e.g. more practice and study support, publicity templates, etc.) and collectively supporting those kinds of initiatives financially.

Following the presentation, a 'Build Shambhala' group was formed that will be taking some of this forward. It consists of three members of the Sakyong's Council, three members of the Mandala Council, and potentially two other members selected by that group for their expertise, if required.

Website Update

At the previous Mandala Council meeting, participants voted on funding two of four proposed upgrade sections to Shambhala.org. Though two were chosen, all four had support as valuable, so an application to fund the development of the remaining sections was made to the Shambhala Trust, which did fund it. The four key upgrades are:

New Users/Public Sections
Centre Resources
Best Practices
Practice and Study

The new website will be launched in the fall.

Shambhala has paid for the development of a standard template that all centres can use. It will be available in the next few months. The template will include customization options, online registration, and a calendar feature that will automatically update a centralized calendar, so that people will be able to find programs outside of their centres. The template, which is a fully functional website, will be made available to centres and groups at a very modest cost.

Holly Gayley heads the working group, and the company Blue Mandala is doing the development work.

Governance Working Group Update

The Core Services part of the Mandala Structure and Governance Working Group was working on sharing Best Practices as a part of their mandate. The new website will have a section for that. What was proposed and now being implemented, is a web platform that would allow people in various roles to access information and connect with each other. Each section (e.g. Publicity, Membership) would have a section with reference documents that were resources or best practices from specific centres, as well as a section to share questions and answers about issues within that topic area. A form was handed out for Mandala Council members to prioritize which functions are most important to start with, and ideas for experts to develop and monitor those sections.

Financial Reports

Income and expense statements for 2005, and a budget for 2006, were distributed to everyone, along with explanatory notes. These were reviewed and questions answered.

The shift towards having part of the budget paid for by centre transfers is going as well or better than expected. Sixty-four percent of the centres in North America, as well as Shambhala Europe, are now participating in the transfers. Further analysis on the contributions was distributed to the meeting.

We continue to be challenged to grow revenue sufficiently to pay for expanding services to meet the needs of the mandala. Meeting this challenge has been included in the Build Shambhala campaign.

Outreach Working Group

President Reoch circulated copies of a revised new brochure introducing people to Shambhala. He asked people to give him suggestions for changes in wording or design. He also circulated a redraft of wording prepared by the Outreach group and asked for comments on that.

Monday April 3rd

The whole group practiced together, then split up into two separate meetings.

Centre Directors' Meeting/Sakyong's Council Meeting

The Sakyong's Council met separately for the morning, and the notes from that meeting will be separately posted.

At the Centre Directors' meeting we covered a few items that had been suggested during the preceding three days, including:

- finding representatives from the Mandala Council to participate in the Build Shambhala group

- suggesting that these topics, which were raised at the beginning of the meeting as desirable discussion areas but couldn't be fit into the meeting, be the subject of conference calls over the next few months; that suggestion was agreed to

- there was some discussion about how we could communicate what happened at the meeting to the centre directors that weren't present; people present volunteered to each contact one centre director to update them on the meeting and answer questions; this could happen once the notes from the meeting were complete

- we also discussed the idea of a buddy system among centre directors, particularly pairing new and experienced directors

- there was extensive discussion about President Reoch visiting all the centres, and how that could be done most effectively

After a break, we reconvened to go through a process to choose a representative for the Sakyong's Council to replace Debbie McCubbin, who was retiring as Centre Director in Toronto and therefore also as the representative for centre directors on the Sakyong's Council. Nominations from the previous day were put up on the board, and anyone who didn't feel they could serve withdrew their names. That left seven names. We then did a talking circle to say what felt important to each of us in selecting someone for this role (or for those who had their names up, how they saw inhabiting the role). The comment was made frequently that any of the seven would be an excellent candidate. Each centre director chose two people and submitted the names on a piece of paper, and the votes were tallied. It was a close vote but Lodro Rinzler was selected to be the representative for centre directors on the Sakyong's Council.

Lunch

Kasung Update

Sue Firer was representing the Kasung leadership. Her role will be to get involved in special programs and issues, and she would be happy to help centre directors who have a kasung-related problem. She can be reached at hey_sue22@hotmail.com.

There is a desire to work more closely with centre directors in the selection of rusungs, getting input so that all factors are taken into account in the appointment. The Kasung leadership would also like to explore other ways of working together better, and to that end will be organizing conference calls with centre directors, initially every six months or so.

Karme Choling Update

Cara Thornley presented a report on the major developments happening at Karme Choling. These include major new program initiatives under the guidance of Ashe Acharya John Rockwell, as well physical changes — the new participant housing being built, the winterizing of the pavilion, and other changes. Cara reported briefly on the history leading up to the changes and other current events at Karme Choling.

Next Congress

The next Congress will be in May 2007, in Cologne, Germany. There was a lot of momentum to hold the next conference in Europe, and Cologne was chosen because it is one of the cheapest cities to fly into from North America, as well as having much inexpensive accommodation.

The aspiration is that there will be financial aid available so that for most North American representative, the cost will not be significantly greater than going to Halifax. More information will be forthcoming.

Shambhala Arts Council

A report from the Shambhala Arts Council was presented and welcomed

Membership Working Group Report

Mary Whetsell, head of the Membership Working Group, summarized the work that had been done. She emphasized that information on the new membership policy had been sent to centre leadership in late 2005, and that it would shortly be announced to the entire sangha, so that centres should be prepared to answer questions once it is released.

Children and Families Working Group Report

There is a Children and Families Conference coming up in June 2006. It will be held at Shambhala Mountain Center. A link to further information can be found on the Shambhala News Service that announced the conference

There is also a manual being developed with resources and ideas for including families and children more in the life of Shambhala Centres, a curriculum that could be a 'living document' as people add ideas to it.

You can email Amy Conway at amyxconway@yahoo.com for further information.

Diversity Working Group Report

Cortez Rainey circulated the report on how centres have been implementing the recommendations from the working group, and what obstacles they have encountered.

Much work has been accomplished in this area, in the face of what Cortez saw as many demands on centre leadership. A copy of the report can be viewed at (is there a link?)

It was also suggested that the Shambhala Aspirations document be framed and hung in a more permanent way.

Accessibility Working Group Report

There will soon be a statement and guidelines re accessibility, to go out to centres. President Reoch mentioned a document, That all May Worship, that might be helpful to us in this regard. Copies are going to be sent to all Shambhala Centres.

Next Stages in Developing the Governance Structure of the Mandala

The current governance structure was initiated Shambhala Day 2005 for a proposed two-year period, which ends next Shambhala Day. President Reoch noted that from what he has observed and feedback he's received, that the current structure seems to be working reasonably well. It seems that it could stay in place without major change for another 2-3 years and then, with the help of Joe Inskeep who heads up the Mandala Structure and Governance Working Group, it could be looked at again. Keeping it in place doesn't preclude tinkering with the working groups, as we did with the second Congress—some groups were continued, others were discontinued, and still others were added. The current framework seems flexible enough to accommodate that.

What still might be missing:

- including those centres in the governance and the communication, that find it hard to get to Mandala Council meetings
- somehow ensuring that 'groups' are plugged in and connected to the larger mandala

The Mandala Council meeting concluded a round of appreciation for the Director and staff of the Atlanta Shambhala Centre who had been magnificent in their support and hospitality and with the Protector and Longevity Chants and Dedication of Merit.