

SHAMBHALA
Mandala Council
Minutes of the
Meeting at Shambhala Mountain Center
August 17-19 2005

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Tuesday August 16th

The meeting opened with a reception on the evening of Tuesday August 16th. After introductions, President Richard Reoch made some brief remarks, then invited people to share some experiences of the summer to that point, for those who were just arriving at Shambhala Mountain Centre. Several people shared their impressions and inspirations from seminary, the ngondro practice intensive, the Ridgen Abhisheka, and the wedding reception.

Wednesday August 17th

Opening

We started each morning with opening chants and practice.

Introductions

On the first morning, participants introduced themselves, then we broke into pairs to answer the question, “What are the changes you are aware of, that are happening within the mandala?”, and come up with a metaphor that captured the essence of that change for us.

Here is the list of the metaphors as recorded and distributed to the group:

Playing for high stakes: a season of growth.

A bridge reaching out to others—partially completed.

The Shambhala cocoon pierced by joining with another family

A family reunion that goes very deep

Golden pollen is exploding from the spruce trees

We are giving birth: seeing how things fell apart and now come together

The windhorse of our community is being roused

The train is leaving the station

The prince steps out onto the balcony dressed as a king

After a long time of things being stuck, we are a living organism—unpredictable, but joyful

Sun bursting forth; wind; barriers dissolving

In this spring, there is a thaw, a blossoming, possibilities—dew on soft flowers, pollen or love in the air, and the energy of a white horse galloping in the fields

The paramitas saturate our activity

A gold coin falls from the sky—it lands: neither heads nor tails.

Opening into space, suddenly the light goes on: there is thunder and lightning.

Fertiliser—a flower opens

Our rowboat now has a motor

Golden Victory!

The President's Report

President Richard Reoch then gave some introductory remarks, beginning with revisiting the new governing structure that was put into place as of Shambhala Day 2005, and the role of the Mandala Council within that.

President Reoch also talked about various trends he sees happening within the mandala:

- a shift from fragmentation to cohesion
- more people interested in a larger sense of mandala
- more openness about finances
- some boundaries dissolving
- healing of rifts between teachers and administrators
- less separation between Europe and North America
- role of the Sakyong now clearer; more able to exercise both spiritual and temporal rule

President Reoch also talked about the “three C’s”: communication, community and conflict—how increasing our skilfulness in these areas is key to creating enlightened society and strengthening our mandala.

There was a period of time for people to ask general questions at this point.

Accessibility Exercise

Participants in the meeting were all asked to spend a half-day in a wheelchair during the meeting, to develop a better sense of what some of the issues and challenges are for people who have accessibility challenges, who attend our urban and practice centres.

Practice and Study Report

Carolyn Mandelker, Head of Practice and Study, gave an update. Some highlights:

--The Sakyong set out and clarified the Shambhala Buddhist path leading to the Scorpion Seal retreat; this was available on video for attendees at the Abhisheka, and people could meet with Carolyn at a specified time to get clarification in that area.

--Carolyn thanked people for the questions that had been submitted since the Primordial Rigden Ngondro had been introduced. She said that this helped clarify the issues that arose.

--We piloted shorter Warrior's Assemblies this last summer- nine nights instead of fourteen. The aim was not to compress or water down the teachings, but to make Warrior Assembly more accessible to people who have a hard time attending residential programs. Many more people attended Warrior Assembly this year than in previous years. We will have to examine whether this was due to the shorter format, the recent change making Warrior Assembly a pre-requisite for Seminary, or the fact that the programs were offered more regionally, making it possible for people to attend without travelling such great distances.

--regarding staffing at the Office of Practice and Education: Carolyn works full-time, Bill Sutton works full-time but will step down after the seminary in Chile (recruiting is under way for his replacement), Jill Scott works half time, and Chris Kreeger is working with Shambhala Training Resident Directors on a volunteer basis.

--Acharyas Lobel and Bower have developed teacher trainings for Turning the Mind into an Ally programs, according to the Sakyong's wish. There is now a certification process, though experienced (Turning the Mind into an Ally) teachers may get grandfathered in. In the meantime, people who are already teaching it, can continue to do so.

--A Sutrayana tutorial was offered to certain people who had intractable issues with attending several long residential programs. This helped make it possible for some people to be here at this seminary. This clearly did not prepare people as well as if they had attended Sutrayana Seminary, however, we may still have to offer this as an alternative for certain people. Other alternatives are being looked into as well.

--the Rigden thangka is finished and available. <www.rigden.info> The shrine design has not been finalised yet. We are currently working with the Sakyong to bring this design to completion. As soon as we have more information about the frame and mat for the thangka, the lineage photographs, the backdrop, shrine box, and cushion colours, we will communicate it.

Membership

Mary Whetsell, Chair of the Membership Policy Working Group, presented information on the proposed membership policy wording, and described the process for considering it so far, which has been extensive.

There were questions and comments, and some consensus seemed to develop on direction. The policy was referred to the Sakyong's Council for a final decision.

Redesigning Shambhala.org Website

There was a presentation by Holly Gayley, Chair of the Outreach Working Group, and Cameron Wenaus of Blue Mandala, who have designed websites for many Shambhala needs, including Shambhala Mountain Center, Mipham.com and some urban Shambhala centres.

There was acknowledgement that our current website is not as user-friendly as we would like, and because things have been added on over time, has become a bit of a "jungle", with information and resources that are out of date and/or hard to find.

The concept of the website being like a 'concierge' was presented. Ideally a person could know what they want, and be easily directed to it, without having to understand how it was put together or what else was available.

Holly and Cameron presented some ideas about how the website could evolve, short and long term. Some short-term options were presented, and the group was asked to give feedback on what the priorities would be. Possibilities include adding video streaming in time for Shambhala Day 2006, making it more friendly for first-timers, making centre resources better organized and easier to find, adding ‘best practices’ functionality, and others. Participants were asked to fill out a form and return it the next day.

There was also a vision presented of what the website could evolve into longer-term—possibilities include an archive of video teachings, a vehicle for creating and accessing community, social action networking, customized news on home page, community resources like a Shambhala version of Craig’s List, “book tour tool kit”, “dharma centre tool kit”, “teacher visit tool kit”, online MI interviews for those in remote areas, video conferencing, and other exciting ideas. There could also be ways to generate revenue through opportunities that we aren’t currently exploring (examples included booking at least some of the travel to international meetings through one Shambhala source, and linking to bookstores for on-line book ordering, both of which could generate commission income that could be used to support the Sakyong’s travel, website support, etc.).

A mandala-wide integrated calendar is something that is envisioned as part of any initial redesign. Centres would get the calendar software for free, and by keeping their centre info updated on it for their own use, would automatically be updating a worldwide calendar in the background.

Cameron also presented a ‘packaged’ Shambhala centre website that could be adapted for centres rather than developing their own from scratch. There was a request for Shambhala to work with Blue Mandala to do a group purchase rather than centres negotiating separately with Blue Mandala. ***This matter was referred to the Sakyong’s Council for action.***

“What is Shambhala?” brochure

Holly Gayley, Chair of the Outreach Working Group, presented a draft of a new “What is Shambhala?” brochure. The idea is that a template could be used across all Shambhala centres, saving development costs and putting the best of our thinking and design into it, as an international community.

Holly handed out copies of the brochure as well as feedback forms.

Membership Database

Mary Whetsell, Chair of the Membership Working Group, updated the Mandala Council meeting on a project to develop a mandala-wide database. With support from Shambhala Europe, twelve centres have been piloting a test of the European database to see if it would work for their centres' needs. The results from that project have been very promising; the centres have recommended that we implement the database mandala-wide.

Chris Tamdjidi, Director of Shambhala Europe, gave a demonstration of the database and its features. Feedback was very positive from those in attendance. The database would function to support individual centres and their administrative data needs, but would also allow us to have information mandala-wide in a common format and location. It would be an internet-based database, with distributed ownership of the data itself. Update authorization would be built into security levels.

We would also be able to analyze trends mandala-wide—for example, how many people progress through Shambhala levels, and how quickly? We would be able to schedule teaching in various regions with more information about what seemed to be required based on what.

There seemed to be unanimous agreement that we should move ahead with this project mandala-wide. However, there was a recognition that though the software itself won't cost anything, there will costs associated with supporting it—i.e. staff costs, and some discussion of what those were estimated to be.

Thursday August 18th

Governance as Path

Alex Halpern spoke on this topic and generated some discussion. A few of the highlights:

- the Sakyong and the court are in the centre of the mandala, and these governing councils (Sakyong's Council and Mandala Council) are the next ring outward; being a member of this council, so close to the Kalapa Court, we should reflect on how to manifest this
- people want to use their skills to bring Shambhala to others; we can have the confidence to use both GES and setting sun skills (he used the example of being a lawyer!) to accomplish this; so the Mandala Council becomes a path of invoking the power of the Sakyong and benefiting others
- one of our central tasks is to align ourselves with the vision of the Sakyong; if we look at how he governs, we can see the dignity, elegance, grace and peace of the court and we can see how to do it
- as we extend out into the world, we must know how to communicate with the confusion of the setting sun, which is essentially "one big argument"; this argument can't be resolved, but we need to work with that environment

--the power of Shambhala hierarchy is that it is not demeaning or oppressive, but that it empowers others
--emulation has developed at times into mimicry, because we cling to form and not genuineness; we must try to bring into our centres that genuineness—then we become the mandala of Shambhala on this earth
--we hold seats where the dharma content and the services we provide are direct manifestations of the teachings; those in governance don't need to feel like 'second class citizens' relative to people who are directly teaching
--the closer you get to the edge of the mandala, the closer you are to the setting sun, confusion and argument; at the core of the mandala there is no doubt
--how do we deal with people who don't see us as representatives of the Sakyong?
People will always doubt our actions and decisions as administrators. So we can support each other at these meetings and stay in contact. The warrior arts also help us.

The Sakyong talked about the relationship between Acharyas and centre directors (and senior kasung). He said that each person is 1/3 protection, 1/3 teacher, and 1/3 governance—that we should all think of our roles that way, even though the role might have a specific emphasis.

Planned Rigden Abhishekas

There will be a Rigden Abhisheka in Halifax in March 2006, and in Europe in the autumn of 2006.

The Royal Wedding

The civil wedding in Boulder needed to happen quickly because of immigration purposes and to allow Semo Tseyang to travel with the Sakyong as husband and wife. There will be a Shambhala wedding in Halifax, 8-11 June next year, and a wedding in India in early 2007 in Orissa or at Namdroling monastery.

There was a discussion of the Halifax wedding, which is to be called “Blossoming of the Sun”. Wendy Friedman and Richard Peisinger are the co-ordinators, including some details about a proposed budget. The event will take place over two and a half days, and 1100 to 1600 guests are expected to attend from all over the world. There will be a variety of events during the wedding—a lhasang, dinners, abhishekas, the wedding itself, wedding reception, and so on.

There is a proposed budget and an estimated cost per attendee that will enable the event to be self-funding. That will include provision for a fund for 'scholarships' so that more centres can be represented and some people who could normally not afford to go, would be able to do so.

The Sakyong has said that rather than wedding gifts, there will be an invitation for people to contribute money for the renovation of the Halifax court, “Namgyal Potrang”, so that it will be more suitable for a family.

In addition to Shambhala and Tibetan sangha, political leaders in the area will also be invited.

Updates from other Working Groups

Communications—Chair, Mary Whetsell

Main points

- just getting started in this area
- there are two key categories of communications that are being looked at: systems, and individual/personal
- only 50% of centre directors are on center-talk; need to find better ways of reaching people and communicating
- there are a lot of grassroots initiatives aimed at increasing interpersonal communication skills; want to network those people and create resource lists

Governance and Structure—Chair, Joe Inskeep

Main points

- recap of process with centres and at Congress to identify next layer of core services requested by centres
- “Best Practices” information sharing came out as the main service priority; in other words, opportunities and venues for sharing what works with other centres
- this could be offered through a web-based platform that was organized by topic or function, such as “Publicity”, “Finance”, “Families and Children”; each section could have three components: reference material, access to experts, and a ‘bulletin board’ type feature for asking questions and sharing information in that particular topic area
- a possible list of content topics was distributed and people were asked to suggest people who might be sponsors/mentors/experts in various functional areas
- it was brought up as part of governance concerns that there hasn’t been an Acharya participating in the Sakyong’s Council meetings recently, or in this Mandala Council meeting; that all three ‘branches’ need to work together when making decisions that affect the whole mandala

Revitalizing Deleks—Chair, David Quinn (absent)

- this is a newly-forming group that came out of the last Congress, nothing to report yet

Children and Families—Chair, Amy Conway

- also a newly-formed working group
- they are organizing a conference on this topic, and working to try to enable local centres to help support families

Diversity—Chair, Cortez Rainey

--the original working has split into two groups, Diversity and Accessibility, with Hamish MacLaren chairing the latter

--following the Congress, the working group put forth the most pressing recommendations, which were:

- (1) leadership—continuously work on the issue of diversity; Richard Reoch has done a good job of this
- (2) a public statement expressing our commitment to diversity and accessibility; draft is almost complete; this statement would be permanently displayed in centres, so people can see what we value and what kind of society we want to create
- (3) need for diversity awareness training—we all have a lot of assumptions that we're not aware of; the Sakyong's Council created a committee to create 'no-bias' training; Agness Au, Hamish MacLaren, Cortez Rainey, Mary Whetsell and Chuck Whetsell put the half-day training together for this MC meeting
- (4) the need to integrate no-bias training in all of our curriculum; could be as simple as a contemplation or a discussion

Most of the other recommendations were put forth to centres, who were asked to choose a contact person to form a network of people committed to diversity. So far there hasn't been a lot of response—the information really needs to be shared locally. We don't communicate the wonderful things we're doing enough.

There are several documents on Diversity on the Shambhala website, in the Congress area. We are aiming to have a directory of Diversity contacts as well as images of diversity on the website.

Accessibility—Chair, Hamish MacLaren

--very close to having a statement on the basic policy of accessibility for the whole community, with the idea that it would no longer be optional for centres to have accessible space; we're still not sure exactly what this will mean—more discussion is required

--it would be good for centres to do an experiment with wheelchairs the way we have here at the Mandala Council meeting

--there is a definite feeling in the Sakyong's Council that this issue must be tackled

--many people have psychological barriers to dealing with this issue, whether from personal fear or worry about the challenge of perhaps moving a centre

--our social belief in making the dharma accessible to all is out of step with our actions

--we are trying to create a policy that is skilful and not punitive

Talking Circles

Alice Haspray talked about the talking circle initiative she is heading up. Several people commented that they instituted regular talking circles at their centres and that it is very helpful in working with difficult issues.

Talking circles relate with the “three C’s”: community, conflict, communication.

We have started working with talking circles more since Group 13 spontaneously formed at the 2003 Congress to talk about the past issues with the Regent.

We all need to learn about this kind of communication—speaking and listening from the heart. This means “listening to the more intangible essence in the space and all the clues of the inner realm.” Being able to be with ambiguity. Related to the feminine principle, space. With this communication, we bring in drala and magic.

Many centres have people trained in these kinds of communication techniques, and we should make use of them. Alice is also available for consultation. Two good reference books are: “The Way of the Council” by Jack Zimmerman, and “Calling the Circle” by Christina Baldwin.

It was acknowledged that some people at centres resist or don’t like talking circles. They experience it as manipulative or touchy-feely. It would be good to train more people in this technique so that it can be facilitated skilfully.

Next Congress

A poll was taken of the Mandala Council. The majority of people who responded chose November 2006 as the date, and alternating Halifax and another location.

(Note: www.surveymonkey.com was used, which is a free customizable survey tool that centres might find helpful.)

In Halifax, the co-ordinator was paid from the participant fees for a certain number of weeks, and we anticipate doing the same thing again. It was felt that it should be held in an airport hub city to keep flight costs down for participants.

A few options discussed were holding it in Europe, Florida, Atlanta.

It was felt that other programs shouldn’t be jointed to the Congress—that having a vajra assembly right afterwards last time stretched resources too much, even for the large Halifax sangha.

We should start scheduling Congresses further in advance.

As a result of the discussion, the President and Vice-chairs will determine the exact location and dates of the next Congress and report to the Sakyong.

If you are inspired to help with the Congress, please let Debbie McCubbin know at dmccubbin@rogers.com.

Next Mandala Governing Council meeting

Our original intent was to meet about every six months. There was discussion about possible locations and times. The matter was discussed by the President and Vice-Chairs, taking into account the discussions. The meeting has subsequently been set for Atlanta from 28 March to 3 April 2006. This will include the first Shambhala Governance Academy.

Finances—Overall

Being informed and involved in the mandala finances is one of the governing responsibilities of the Mandala Council.

For the first time ever, we have a consolidated financial report for the entire mandala for 2004. We arranged ourselves into groups, with each of us representing a unit of money earned by a part of the mandala, to see where income comes from within the international community. The total annual income generated by all parts of the mandala is approximately \$20 million per year. Our book value assets are \$40 million but the true value is much higher, since land and buildings are accounted for at original cost, not current market value. Against those assets, we have only \$13 million of debt, which is a very good ratio.

We reviewed the consolidated financial statements. There is missing information from most of the European centres but we hope for next year to be able to pull together an even more complete picture for the mandala, both budgets and actual numbers. We want to establish the discipline of regular financial reporting and publishing the reports.

The Sakyong would like us to start using the term “Shambhala” as shorthand for KOS, so the financials reflect that in the way we are looking at our mandala.

We'll be short by about \$100,000 in our budget for this year. It's a combination primarily of Shambhala Day fundraising being less than plan and Congress attendance also being less than plan, producing a net loss. President Reoch has asked the Sakyong to do a special fundraiser to cover this and ideally pay off most of our debt. Our ideal financial situation would be to be able to depend on our monthly donations and contributions from centres, as opposed to the ups and downs of one-time fundraising.

Re centres transferring a percentage of revenue based on gross revenue:

48% of centres are making the transfer payments

20% have said they can't do it yet but are working towards it

26% have not responded

There was an initial recommendation to transfer at 4-6%. This is what most centres are following.

Around 800 people make monthly donations to Shambhala central. This is about one in eight Shambhala households, not a high percentage. There are about 1500 who made one-time donations. However, many people do make recurring donations to a land centre rather than to the centre of the mandala.

New members often don't know enough about, or feel inspired to donate to, Shambhala at the international level.

Shambhala Europe receives between 10% and 50% of membership fees collected in Europe. They are able to provide a lot of services for this money. It's a matter of gradually introducing it and educating people on how and why it can be of benefit.

How could we help centres with managing their money and budgeting better, if they wish to have that help? Could we provide training? At the moment, no one is working on that.

Capital fundraising aspirations mandala-wide

There has been an effort to explore whether fundraising could be more co-ordinated across the many locales and projects. We are only at very early stages of trying to understand the complexities.

Of the 45 centres in North America, 12 own buildings, 3 have major expansion plans, 3 will likely buy soon, and 5 are fundraising to buy but not close. There was some discussion about whether there could be a 'Build Shambhala' co-ordinated campaign, co-ordinate loans, etc. That could include major fundraising projects at the practice centres, for the Kalapa Court, etc. – bringing everything together in a way that kept the emphasis on individual projects, but presented them in the context of a far larger global campaign.

Evening: there was a Centre Directors' meeting and a Sakyong's Council meeting. The Centre Directors participated in a talking circle about taking their seats in their centres, and the path and challenges in their leadership roles. Notes from the Sakyong's Council meeting are separately posted.

Friday August 19th

Morning:

We began with a talk on “no bias” by Agness Au, which was very well received by the participants. A transcript of the talk will be made available to Mandala Council members soon.

A workshop titled Going Beyond Bias was presented to the Mandala Council on Friday morning of the meetings. This program was developed and facilitated by Agnes Au, Cortez Rainey, Hamish MacLaren, Mary Whetsell and Chuck Whetsell. Through a variety of exercises, discussion and meditation practice, the workshop endeavoured to meet the following goals:

- 1) To demonstrate the breadth of diversity within the assembled group.
- 2) To provide an experiential understanding that everyone has prejudices, i.e., that we put people into boxes and then relate to them as a member of a group. Sometimes we put people into boxes on the basis of race, ethnicity, age, gender, social class, religion, or sexual orientation. Even within the Shambhala community we place people into categories and deal with them on the basis of what we think those categories entail. The categories include all those named above, but also include community-specific categories such as how long one has practiced meditation, what one's main practice is, center affiliation (large or small), and membership in kasung.
- 3) To demonstrate that everyone has suffered from being the object of bias.
- 4) To demonstrate that our Shambhala community, the Kingdom of Shambhala, suffers when bias is solidified. On the basis of such solidification the society of cowards is formed. When bias is faced directly with fearlessness, the society of warriors arises.
- 5) To introduce the practice of fearlessness as it relates to issues of difference/diversity and prejudice, and to heighten awareness of this aspect of our personal and societal cocoon.
- 6) To provide a taste of diversity practice in a safe setting using a safe process, so participants have a positive experience disposing them to want to engage in further explorations of this work. To leave participants seeing why diversity practice is important to both themselves and the Kingdom of Shambhala.

The program was very well received, and appeared to meet its objectives. Many participants expressed the importance of continuing an exploration of diversity and "going beyond bias" at their local Centres.

Afternoon:

There was a proposal to have a workshop on Talking Circles at the next Mandala Council meeting.

Highlights from the Sakyong's Council meeting the evening before were presented (see notes from that meeting, separately posted).

Leadership Training

There is a proposal to do Leadership Training at the next Mandala Council meeting. People felt it would be good if centre directors could get together to do that as a group. The Leadership Development and Succession Planning working group was formed from the November 2003 Congress. The past year was spent looking at what resources we could use to help us incorporate some leadership training into our work.

The current goal is that training would be uniquely Shambhalian, organized regionally. It wouldn't be just a weekend, but more of an ongoing process. Two pre-existing programs are being looked at, in terms of how we could modify to meet our needs.

Shambhala Europe's leadership training has three components:

- a weekend training (which several people were going to pilot the next weekend)
- a leadership manual with both view and skilful means
- a mentorship program

We're looking at how to apply these pieces here in North America. We also want to look at Naropa's Authentic Leadership program. Ideally want to draw from both of these so we can implement a leadership-training program in North America very soon. There was some discussion about costs, and acknowledgement that it's important to keep it affordable.

The Sakyong has asked Shambhala Europe to develop a leadership program based on his new book—it would be about 18 months long in total.

Budget 2006/Funding Requests

The Mandala Council participants gave some input to the Sakyong's Council as to how they might see relative priorities among various spending requests for 2006. Some proposals include:

- scholarships for attending the wedding in June (possibly these could be built into the cost of the wedding)
- website redesign (different options within that)
- central membership co-ordinator, part-time
- children and families pilot regional conference and manual
- Vajra Dawn conference seed money
- a Chief Financial Officer; this position might help pay for itself through better fiscal management, but will have to be considered in the light of all proposals and when there are sufficient funds
- part-time finance person in the Office of Finance and Fundraising
- money for legal work related to the Sakyong's copyrights, changing from a provincial to a national status in Canada, and trademark enforcement

The meeting did a straw poll of preferences and priorities which were then to be taken forward into the budget discussions of the Sakyong's Council in time to adopt a provisional budget for 2006 by October.

The meeting ended with people offering a few comments about their experience of the days in which they had gathered together and how the time reflected their aspirations for a Shambhalian way of governing the mandala.