

Dear Meditation Instructors,

I am writing to let you know about the first of our Meditation Instructors' Gatherings which took place last month, during which the Sakyong clarified much about Shambhala Meditation.

Teaching Shambhala Meditation

The Sakyong clarified that, for now, only he transmits Shambhala Meditation. He has asked us NOT to teach Shambhala Meditation until further notice. He has been transmitting the practice at specific gatherings which he teaches, including the Shambhala (Sangha) Retreats, last winter's Rigden weekend in San Francisco, and this summer's Scorpion Seal Assemblies. In making this statement, the Sakyong emphasized the high degree of subtlety involved in transmitting Shambhala Meditation, and the importance of establishing the right context through environment and atmosphere.

The Sakyong wants us, as meditation instructors, to use this period of time to train and deepen in Shambhala Meditation. This involves practicing, studying, and contemplating the text thoroughly. The text is still in the process of being edited and produced, and we hope it will be available in several months.

At the same time, people who have learned Shambhala Meditation from the Sakyong are now returning to our Centers asking for meditation instructors to guide them in the practice. For this reason, I will be offering several online opportunities for meditation instructors to further explore the practice, including studying material from the text, to prepare for supporting these students. More information about the scheduling of these sessions will be available soon.

Meditation Instructors' Gathering—the pilot program

During the past year, I have been working toward holding Meditation Instructor's Gatherings to develop community, practice together, and strengthen our skills of meditation instruction. An important aspect of this is a combination of true listening and skillful inquiry, using open-ended questions to "help the student discover something, rather than 'teaching them something' ", to quote the Sakyong. These gatherings will be held regionally, to make them as accessible to as many people as possible.

Immediately after the Sakyong's online international address to meditation teachers of Shambhala last March, he instructed me to

schedule a pilot program for Meditation Instructors to start to study the Shambhala Meditation text as soon as possible. Thus, the first M.I. Gathering was held in Boulder earlier this month, concurrently with the Shambhala Retreat. Sixty M.I.s from nearby locations and also from as far away as Mexico and Australia attended the program. Both the Shambhala Retreat and the M.I. Gathering, originally planned for Shambhala Mountain Center were held at the Boulder Shambhala Center due to the proximity of the High Park forest fire.

The M.I. Gathering had four components: attending the Sakyong's Shambhala Retreat talks (in which he presented Shambhala Meditation to several hundred people of all ages, many of them new to practice); structured contemplation of the Shambhala Meditation text excerpt in small groups led by Acharyas and Shastris; training in embodied listening, led by David Rome; and gathering in "Meditation Instructors' Circles" to share our experience and discuss what we as meditation instructors need in order to reach our students well and thoroughly. .

Skills of deep listening and the use of open-ended inquiry questions are crucial in refining our ability to understand students' experience and to guide them in exploring their practice (in meditation and in everyday life) in a fresh way. David Rome has been developing an Embodied Listening approach based on his work in Focusing. He gently and skillfully let the M.I.s present at the Gathering in listening and speaking from the "felt sense", as the ground for communicating with our meditation students.

We are currently in the process of scheduling regional M.I. gatherings. I hope that you will join in when a Gathering occurs in your region.

With warm wishes, and much appreciation for all of you,
Acharya Dale Asrael
Dean of Meditation Instructors