



OFFICE OF THE KALAPA ACHARYA

Dear Shambhala Leaders and Teachers,

It seems that our “path” is not a solid and permanent thing. Likely it will continue to change and transform to meet the needs of an evolving and dynamic vision. We realize that it can be difficult to explain and institute so many changes, and that constant changes can be confusing to those who turn to our teachings for inspiration, sanity, and vision. We aspire to arrive at as settled a path as possible so that we can focus attention on nurturing it, rather than changing it. The purpose of this letter is to describe a few of the more recent shifts in our core path and explore how we as leaders can balance ongoing change with the practical needs of our community.

The major changes that we are instituting right now are:

- Changes in participants’ preparation for Enlightened Society Assembly.
- Changes to dathün requirements
- Enlightened Society Assembly comes before Warrior Assembly.
- The pilot for the Basic Goodness Series

These changes will be described in detail below.

Background:

Why are we making these changes? Why can’t we just let the path be as it is? In brief, we are still working to find the right balance between depth and breadth, especially given that our time is increasingly limited as householders living in the world. We have too many riches, too many amazing teachings! We have so much that we would like to offer, and we would like our path to have integrity, authenticity, and the right amount of rigor. This is the depth.

At the same time, our offerings must respond directly to the social and ecological challenges that mark our world. There is a need for breadth and reaching many people. The Shambhala teachings provide a unique way to unite breadth and depth.

We are also still working on bringing together what had been two separate streams: the Shambhala Training path and the Buddhist path to seminary. These are now one, single journey. The *Way of Shambhala* has been a great success, for the most part. Yet we still have some structures and assumptions that refer back to previous, more divided models of the journey. A good example is the way we think of Warrior Assembly. Many of us still think of Levels 1-5 and the Sacred Path leading to Warrior Assembly. However, for various reasons that I will discuss below, our courses and weekends in the centres now lead first to Enlightened Society Assembly, not Warrior Assembly.

When we talk about continuing to make changes on the path, we are talking about a slow process of integrating major programs and courses into a single skillful and powerful path. We are still right in the middle of that process. It will take patience, a sense of humour, and collective engagement for this process to be most powerful. On behalf of the Sakyong and the Kalapa Council, I want to thank you for any moments of relaxation, laughter, and vision that you may experience along the way!

In the Vision,
Adam, Kalapa Acharya

Introduction: Aspirations and Emerging Directions

What follows next is an overview of the path, so that you have a sense of the logic of the whole journey. After this overview, please find a description of the specific changes that we are instituting this year.

The description below represents where we are right now, and also gives some sense of aspiration, or the direction that we are heading. There are a few important changes that we aspire towards in the *culture* of our path. For example, we currently have a model of the path that is a bit like a “tube” or a channel. You move from one step to another in a sequence. While there are many good things about the systematic clarity of this approach, there are also some difficulties. One difficulty is that we have become accustomed to “ranking” our community: we have new practitioners, we have vajrayana students, we have senior students etc. The result is that many of our practice situations do not represent a mixture of experience, and the more senior practitioners may not connect with the newer practitioners. Our path actually creates some of this sense of separation.

While there is some truth to the fact that we develop as we practice year after year, there is another side to the journey which is much more cyclical. It is good that new practitioners may begin by focusing on the simplicity of meditation, and teachings

on contentment and gentleness towards our self. Yet just because we “took that course” or “completed that Level” does not mean that we have integrated that principle into our being. Those of us who are more senior practitioners also need to continue to develop gentleness and contentment, for example. A practitioner returning from Warrior Assembly or a new vajrayana practitioner doing ngöndro may also benefit from Contentment in Everyday Life or a Level 1.

What we aspire towards in our emerging path is a culture in which a Vajrayana student or Scorpion Seal practitioner might say to themselves, “I really am being aggressive towards myself and need to return to the teachings of Meek. Contentment in Everyday Life [or Level 1, or The Basic Goodness of Being Human] is coming up and I am going to see if they need an MI to help participate, or maybe I will just enter it fully as a student.” Or, if you are just returning from Sacred World Assembly, it might be a good time to retake the Wisdom in Everyday Life Course, or staff a Golden Key, in order to return to the teachings of magic. The idea here is that we reflect on what we need at a given moment on our journey, what themes and teachings may support what we are facing, not just “what is the next step.” How do we engage this kind of reflection, while at the same time moving through the sequential Shambhala journey? This is the kind of question being raised by the Sakyong, the Acharyas, the Shastris and those of us in Practice and Education.

Another emerging direction is about the “culture” of learning in our Shambhala centres. There will be much more collective conversation about this in the coming period. For now, I will just note that the Sakyong and the Kalapa Council have been emphasizing the view that our centres could feel “more like life, and less like school.” In other words, we are a culture and a society, and not just a program of education. We need to find ways to leave more space for social interaction, celebration, movie nights, the arts, open invitations to non-Shambhala social transformers from our surrounding communities to come and speak, and family and children events. How do we leave room for this cultural richness and at the same time continue to offer our many offerings and teachings? These are some of the questions and aspirations that we have for our emerging and changing Shambhala path. We know that many of you have expressed similar aspirations. Perhaps these aspirations would be helpful to keep in mind as you read below, and as you contemplate your own communities.

One helpful definition: *The Way of Shambhala* refers to the whole journey to Sacred World Assembly. It includes, the Everyday Life Series, Levels 1-5, the Basic Goodness Series, and the Sacred Path.

The Shambhala Path

The Sakyong describes four phases in the logic of the Shambhala path. Each of these phases represents a sequential step on the journey. At the same time, we move through these phases in a cycle, again and again. For example, Wisdom in Everyday Life introduces themes from Phase 4, though it comes earlier on the path.

Phase 1 is introducing basic goodness to all. This phase correlates with the verse “That mind of fearfulness should be placed in the cradle of loving kindness.” Here, individuals are introduced to and soak in basic goodness, through society, community, culture, view, and meditation. There is an emphasis on discovering basic goodness in everyday life.

The training in local centers during this phase includes, *The Way of Shambhala*.

The practice intensive for this phase is a weekthün.

The vow is the Shambhala Vow (at Unconditional Confidence: The Rigden).

Phase 2, creating enlightened society, expands this experience of basic goodness to others. The student warrior trains in opening to the basic goodness of all beings—humans, and the entire living world. In particular, we introduce the basic goodness of society. The path itself is creating enlightened society. The training in local centers for this phase also includes aspects of the *Way of Shambhala*.

Training focuses on involvement in the local center, household practice, and social/ecological engagement.

The practice intensive for this phase is the Enlightened Society Assembly.

The vow is the Enlightened Society Vow.

Phase 3 is receiving the weapons of the warrior, the tools to actualize the experience of basic goodness and create enlightened society on the spot. The primary tools are windhorse, the Ashe, and the *terma* texts themselves.

The trainings in local centers for this phase prepare people to receive the Ashe: the Sacred Path, including the Golden Key. This phase also includes a deepening of loyalty and devotion to the Shambhala lineage.

The practice intensive for this phase is Warrior Assembly and also includes another weekthün.

Phase 4 is Sacredness. Having been introduced to one’s own basic goodness, the basic goodness of all beings and society itself, and having received the tools to create enlightened society, the warrior is introduced to the full magic of the sacred world. The way of sacredness continues throughout the Kalapayana journey.

The training in local centers for this phase includes the course, “Entering the Vajra World.”

The practice intensive for this phase is the Sacred World Assembly.

Two consecutive weethüns are a prerequisite for this phase.

The vow for this phase is the Kalapayana samaya vow.

More about These Changes:

The major changes that we are instituting right now are:

- Changes in participants’ preparation for Enlightened Society Assembly.
- Changes to Dathün requirements
- Enlightened Society Assembly comes before Warrior Assembly.
- The pilot for the Basic Goodness Series

Changes to the preparation for Enlightened Society Assembly:

Enlightened Society Assembly is a powerful retreat that has emerged as something quite different from Sutrayana Seminary. The key point of Enlightened Society Assembly is the personal shift to becoming a bodhisattva-warrior, committing to creating enlightened society. The ground of this shift is recognizing the basic goodness of society. The path is taking the Enlightened Society Vow and training in the *Shambhala Sadhana*. The fruition is learning actual skills to manifest as warriors in the world, and in our households.

The Sakyong would like this Assembly to be an accessible and powerful milestone on the journey: it is the culmination of much of the first aspects of *Way of Shambhala*, the major Assembly that our local courses and weekends flow towards. We envision many thousands of people gathering in Enlightened Society Assemblies around the world to proclaim and train in enlightened society.

In order to prepare for this experience, warriors on the path will need to complete: Key components of *The Way of Shambhala*:

- The “Everyday Life Series”
- The “Basic Goodness Series”
- Shambhala Training Levels 1-5,
- Unconditional Confidence: The Rigden
- One weekthun

That is it. You will notice that the Sacred Path is no longer a pre-requisite for Enlightened Society Assembly. No SSBS classes are prerequisites for Enlightened Society Assembly. We are making these changes in the prerequisites to make his

Assembly more accessible to more people. The Sakyong feels that it is not necessary for participants to receive the *terma* text, *The Letter of the Black Ashe*, before attending Enlightened Society Assembly.

Why is this the best preparation for Enlightened Society Assembly?

The best preparation for Enlightened Society Assembly is the *Way of Shambhala*:

- Levels 1-5 provide a foundation in sitting meditation and warrior teachings.
- The Everyday Life Series gives an overview of the whole path with an emphasis on the development of meditation experience and working with emotions.
- The Basic Goodness Series provides the view of the basic goodness of being human, society, and reality. This view links directly to the *Shambhala Sadhana*, in which we practice deepening our experience of this view.
- The Rigden program brings all of this together into the personal proclamation of the Shambhala Vow and the experience of unconditional confidence.
- One weekthün provides a deepening of the meditation space. The Sakyong feels that these are the essential steps to prepare for Enlightened Society Assembly.

What does this mean for the Sacred Path?

Sacred Path will most-often happen after returning from Enlightened Society Assembly, as the path between Enlightened Society Assembly and Warrior Assembly. It is, of course, wonderful if participants do the Sacred Path weekends before Enlightened Society Assembly, but it is no longer a prerequisite. Enlightened Society Assembly is *not* a prerequisite for the Sacred Path. **The only change that we are making in prerequisites for Sacred Path is that the Basic Goodness Series is also a prerequisite for the Sacred Path. In order to begin the Sacred Path, one needs to complete Levels 1-5, the Everyday Life Series, Rigden, and the Basic Goodness Series, (once this is offered in your Centre), in any order.**

If you are a **smaller Centre** and cannot offer all of the above, it would be best to offer *The Way of Shambhala* **in this suggested order**:

- Begin by offering the Everyday Life Series (either with a local teacher or using Shambhala Online).
- If you would like to offer more, add Levels 1-5
- If you can offer more, add the Basic Goodness Series.
- If there is more space and time, the next step would be to offer the Sacred Path.

This can give a bit of a road map for how to develop a growing community. This is just a suggestion; you may be part of a community where offering a weekend Level would be more practical than offering weekly classes, and that is fine. However, we are finding that the ongoing relationships which arises in the weekly classes as part of the Everyday Life series is excellent for cultivating community.

Changes to the Dathün requirements:

- One weekthun is a prerequisite for Enlightened Society Assembly
- A second weekthun is a prerequisite for Warrior Assembly
- Two consecutive weeks of a dathün is the prerequisite for Sacred World Assembly. That is, two straight weeks of sitting, back to back.

We are making this change in part because this is what most people are already doing, no matter what our official prerequisites may be. At least in North America, it is very difficult for people to get two weeks off from work and family, and almost impossible to get a full month off. In Europe it may be slightly easier to take a full month to sit, but may still be a challenge. There is also a possible value in having a few different opportunities to engage in a week of intensive sitting along the path and we are looking forward to seeing how this change may support the deepening of meditative experience. Of course, it is excellent if people would like to do all four weeks together; a full dathün is one of the great practice traditions of our lineage. Each year, we will try to offer at least one dathün that is only for people who will commit to a full month. However, we are breaking up the prerequisite into more accessible pieces. Again, we find that this is already happening. This will allow for easier access to Enlightened Society Assembly and Warrior Assembly, but we will still have a high bar for entering into vajrayana practice at Sacred World Assembly. As ever, we are trying to balance depth and breadth.

Local centres can offer the single weekthuns, but the two consecutive weeks will exclusively be at land centres.

Enlightened Society Assembly comes before Warrior Assembly:

Warrior Assembly is a radical and daring program. For many years now, the Acharyas and other teachers of Warrior Assembly have been questioning if we are preparing people in the best way to receive the full transmission of lungta and Ashe. As the Sakyong developed the new vows and the *Shambhala Sadhana* and designed the Enlightened Society Assembly, it became clear that this Assembly is the perfect preparation for Warrior Assembly. In short, Enlightened Society Assembly stabilizes the aspiration to create enlightened society; it softens the heart through

the practice of the *Shambhala Sadhana*, and it begins to inspire direct action in the world. It is only when the heart is open in this way that we can fully receive the Ashe at Warrior Assembly. Therefore, Enlightened Society Assembly is now a prerequisite for Warrior Assembly.

The pilot for the Basic Goodness Series.

We are now in the midst of the pilot for the Basic Goodness series. Under the leadership of Shastri Benoit Cote, we are involved with gathering extensive feedback and input about the courses themselves, and about how they are working (or not working) in our local schedules, with our teacher resources etc. If your community is part of the pilot, please do keep involved with this developing process.

These are the changes that we are currently making. Thank you for contemplating these changes and asking questions about anything that does not make sense to you. This way, we can provide clear guidance for newer warriors who are moving through the path. Please make sure that all students, teachers, MIs and leaders in your community are aware of these changes.