



S H A M B H A L A

Teacher Invitation Guidelines Revised March 2012

Dear Centre Directors,

The Sakyong has expressed his vision for the next ten years and the urgency of our work in both his *Letter of the Morning Sun*, and in his address to the sangha on Shambhala Day 2011. His aspirations and vision for Shambhala centres at this time is to focus deeply on the Shambhala curriculum.

Furthermore, the Sakyong feels we have developed to the point where our mandala can go much more deeply into the study and practice of the Shambhala mind terma of the Vidyadhara and the further unfolding of our lineage teachings as presented by the Sakyong. He has made it clear that he would like our sangha to support this focus on the Shambhala teachings by inviting our Acharyas and Shastris to teach more extensively.

This means moving away from inviting multiple Tibetan teachers to visit and offer public programs at our centres. Instead, such teachers would be invited to offer teachings to sadhakason topics that will support and deepen their sadhana practice. Acharya Mermelstein and Loppon Lodro Dorje, in conjunction with the Office of International Relations, can be consulted about invitations to visiting lamas and relevant teachings topics for them.

Over the past several months, I have been contacted by many Shambhala Centre Directors, who have asked for further clarifications of the guidelines. Through these conversations, further clarity has emerged and I would like to share some salient points in that regard:

1. We wish to invite distinguished masters to offer vajrayana programs for tantrikas and sadhakas in order to facilitate and deepen their practice. Their teachings should be offered specifically to these advanced practitioners to support them in preserving and deepening these practices. Although it can create a financial challenge to support these vajrayana teaching visits without additional public programming, the Sakyong has been clear that he does not want to confuse newer students about what Shambhala offers. This is the direction and approach he wishes for Shambhala centres at this point.

2. Therefore these revised guidelines ask all centres to focus on providing the distinctive teachings held by the Shambhala Mandala as our public programming. Invitations to other masters to teach in the mandala are now to be aimed at supporting our advanced vajrayana practitioners (sadhakas), normally in their study and practice of Kagyü and Nyingma sadhanas.
3. Some senior students feel that this policy should be adjusted if a significant proportion of their local senior membership are engaged in Kagyu and Nyingma vajrayana practices. Others wish to offer public programs with visiting Tibetan teachers because they feel that these teachers enhance our centres and bring people in. There is no question that other Tibetan teachers can bring depth and wisdom to our Shambhala centres through their personal realization and teachings. Here it is important to clarify the view. We are centering our programming and offerings around the Shambhala terma and utilizing the Acharyas and Shastris to offer a clear and cohesive curriculum. This is based on creating the appropriate environment and approach for our community at this time. The Sakyong is emphasizing the profound nature of basic goodness and the potential for creating a culture of kindness, through a deepening understanding of the Shambhala teachings. The Sakyong is asking us to concentrate our efforts in this way, by focusing the programming at our centers on Shambhala. He has said that he wants people to come through our doors because they have heard about the commitment to enlightened society and basic goodness. It's a very simple and yet powerful message that has taken us a long time to clarify and still very much needs our attention.
4. I would invite students with long experience in Shambhala to redouble efforts to create innovative programming based on the Shambhala terma and our personal practice experience. The wish of the Sakyong is for the face of our community and teachings to be consistent with his message of basic goodness and the potential for cultural and social transformation inherent in that message, even while we pursue our personal vajrayana practices.

In line with that vision and in light of centre's seeking further guidance on the role of visiting teachers, we have revised the Teacher Invitation Guidelines to bring them up to date. Please use the most recent version, which is attached.

As part of his work to clarify this important aspect of our mandala, the Sakyong has asked me to take overall responsibility for international relations on his behalf and further develop the Shambhala Office of International Relations. Mr. Michael Gayner, our Head of Protocol, assists me in this endeavour. A representative of this office, I hold a seat on the Kalapa Executive. This structure will help us coordinate more closely with the Sakyong – an outline of the current structure is given in Part II of the guidelines.

To help your close associates work with these guidelines, it would be good to share them with those most involved with teacher visits, and to go through them with the visit staff when you prepare for your next visiting teacher – so that everyone becomes familiar with the details.

I hope you find the revised guidelines as clear and helpful as possible and look forward to working with you on this. If you receive hard-to-answer questions about any of this, including invitations that you have already extended that may not meet these guidelines, please contact Mr. Gayner or me directly for guidance.

With profound gratitude for your willingness to act as a representative of the Sakyong and his aspirations for our mandala,

Lamen Kyi-Khyap, Acharya Mitchell M. Levy
Director, Office of International Relations
Mitchell_Levy@brown.edu

I.

Teacher Invitation Guidelines

Revised March 2012

1. Invitations to teach are issued by or on behalf of the Sakyong

Within any mandala, the longstanding principle for issuing invitations to teach is that the invitations are extended by or on behalf of the throne holder of the mandala. That view concurs with the view within the Shambhala mandala and provides our guiding principle.

In the Shambhala mandala, teachers are:

- 1) invited directly by the Sakyong,
- 2) invited by the leadership of Shambhala centres on behalf of the Sakyong,
- 3) appointed by the Sakyong, as in the case of Acharyas, or
- 4) authorized to teach by the Shambhala Office of Practice and Education, on behalf of the Sakyong.

In some situations, lineage masters from outside of the Shambhala Lineage may be invited to teach on aspects of advanced practice related to sadhanas the Sakyong is not presently providing teachings on. In such situations, where individual members are inspired to invite a particular teacher to their centre they need to propose this invitation to their Shambhala centre council or leadership who would in turn consult with Acharya Mermelstein and Loppon Lodro Dorje, and with the Office of International Relations before any invitation is issued. If the request is approved, the centre director, as the representative of the Sakyong, would then officially issue the invitation on behalf of the Sakyong. Please see “Formal invitations to other teachers” below.

2. Authorized Shambhala Teachers

Current Acharyas, Shastris, and other individuals within Shambhala who are appointed by the Sakyong, as well as individuals authorized to teach by the Shambhala Office of Practice and Education (or the Shambhala Europe Office of Practice and Education), continue to be welcome to accept invitations to teach within the mandala in accordance with the level of authorization they have received. These authorizations are, in effect, an invitation from the Sakyong to give teachings and guide students within the Shambhala mandala.

3. Refuge and bodhisattva vows

In general, the Sakyong would like refuge and bodhisattva vows within the Shambhala mandala to be given by Acharyas acting on his behalf. Acharyas are empowered to act as the Sakyong’s teaching representatives and as preceptors for these vows. They are familiar

with the procedures of the Shambhala mandala, such as offering refuge and bodhisattva names, presenting the vows in the context of a weekend program ensuring that students understand what they are entering into, and presenting *The Practice of Taking Refuge, Arousing the Motivation for True Freedom from Samsara* during refuge vows.

In reviewing this guideline, the Sakyong said, “This is a time when our Acharyas are mature enough to handle many of the responsibilities and teachings previously requested of visiting teachers. We can now depend on the Acharyas.”

The Sakyong will offer these vows himself as his schedule permits. In some cases, the Sakyong may also invite other masters to offer these vows on behalf of the lineage.

4. Invitations to lead trainings of teachers or practice instructors

If centres would like to invite teachers to lead local teacher training or various instructor training programs, including those for Shambhala guides and meditation instructors, we ask that you please first contact the Shambhala Office of Practice and Education for advice, coordination with other scheduled trainings, and approval. Please email Jill Scott <jscott@shambhala.org>

5. Vajrayana transmissions and abhishekas.

The *Tridzin* (throne holder) of Shambhala, the Sakyong, is responsible for giving vajrayana transmissions and abhishekas within the mandala. Normally, the Sakyong gives these personally. On occasion, he may invite other masters to do so on behalf of the lineage.

There may be other occasions when invited teachers may give “blessing abhishekas” (without the requirement to engage in the practice afterwards). We would like to ensure that these blessing abhishekas or teachings are given with the prior blessings of the Sakyong.

6. Invitations to offer teachings to sadhakas

Inviting teachers who have previously taught within the Shambhala mandala to offer teachings to sadhakas

Centres may invite masters who have taught previously within the Shambhala Mandala to teach vajrayana programs to sadhakas in order to facilitate and deepen their practice, normally of Kagyü and Nyingma sadhanas. Their teachings should be offered specifically to these advanced practitioners to support them in preserving and deepening these practices. Such invitations should be made in consultation with Acharya Mermelstein and Loppon Lodro Dorje and the Office of International Relations. Please contact both the Acharyas and the Office of International Relations prior to extending an invitation. These teachers have usually taught in Shambhala before, and are therefore familiar with the view and structure

of the Shambhala path. Centre directors may invite such teachers on behalf of the Sakyong using the formal template that accompanies these guidelines once approval has been obtained.

Even if a teacher has taught in the Shambhala Mandala previously, please check to make sure that the **content** of their proposed teaching is in accord with these guidelines.

Invitations to conduct cycles of teaching for sadhakas: If a centre wishes to invite a teacher to present a cycle of teachings (annual teachings over several years to complete study of a particular text) for sadhakas they must submit a written request to the Sakyong. All such invitations will come directly from the Sakyong. (An example of an invitation to teach a cycle of teachings occurred in 1991, when Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche invited Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche to initiate the cycle of teachings that he presented to our community over the course of many summers).

Making requests and seeking guidance: Requests about inviting teachers to offer cycles of teachings for sadhakas may be sent to the Office of International Relations by email to the Head of Protocol in the Office of International Relations, Michael Gayner: shambhala.protocol@gmail.com or directly to the Director of the Office of International Relations at Mitchell_Levy@brown.edu. If you are not sure if a teacher has taught within Shambhala before, or what the experience has been with that teacher, you are also welcome to email your question to Michael Gayner or Acharya Levy who will coordinate a response from the Office of International Relations (and thus the Kalapa Court). For details on the new structure for handling visit invitations throughout the mandala, please see Part II. The Office of International Relations will do its best to respond to these inquiries as efficiently as possible. However, since there is no comprehensive list of all teachers who have taught in Shambhala over the past decades, it may not always be possible to clarify this rapidly.

Inviting other teachers to offer teachings to sadhakas

Centres that wish to invite Buddhist teachers who have not previously taught within the Shambhala mandala to lead programs for our advanced vajrayana practitioners are asked to first seek guidance and clearance from the Office of International Relations.

An individual member or leader who wishes to propose an invitation to a new teacher should first make the proposal to the local centre leadership. If the leadership wishes to take this forward, they then take responsibility for seeking guidance and clearance. If the Office of International Relations approves the proposal, the centre director will take responsibility for issuing the invitation. It is not appropriate for individual students to extend invitations to teachers, as these invitations may have implications that are complex and in need of careful consideration. For instance, Tibetan protocol dictates that, once an invitation is issued, an open invitation to return is implied. Failure to follow through in this way may lead to confusion and unintended misunderstandings. Therefore, any such invitations need to be approved by the Office of International Relations and then made formally by centre directors on behalf of the Sakyong.

To submit such a proposal to the Office of International Relations, we ask the centre leadership to provide the following:

- a short biography of the teacher, including their lineage and organizational affiliations
- the proposed topic on which the teacher would be invited to teach,
- the reasons for inviting that teacher in particular,
- and the way the teachings would support specific aspects of advanced Kagyü and Nyingma sadhanas.

If the teacher is not known to the Sakyong, the proposal will be reviewed and, if necessary, will be presented to the Sakyong for decision.

Proposals may be sent by email to the Office of International Relations by email to Michael Gayner: <shambhala.protocol@gmail.com>. (For details on the new structure for handling visit invitations throughout the mandala, please see Part II.)

Invitations to teachers of related disciplines:

Centres may issue invitations to teachers of related traditional disciplines (such as yoga, chi kung, ikebana, etc.) on behalf of the Sakyong. Such teaching subjects should support topics and practices included in Shambhala. In most cases, these are offered by long-established friends of Shambhala and there is no need to consult before inviting them back. If you are not sure that the teachings or teacher would be a good match, please also refer this question to the Office of International Relations. These invitations may be made using the formal template that accompanies these guidelines.

Please email any questions about this to the Office of International Relations by email to Michael Gayner: <shambhala.protocol@gmail.com>. (For details on the new structure for handling visit invitations throughout the mandala, please see Part II.)

7. Visas

All visa requests for visiting teachers to be sponsored by any Shambhala centre or legal entity within Shambhala must be reviewed and approved. This is essential to ensure mandala-wide coordination and to deal with the obstacles we face as a result of increased travel restrictions. Please email any visa requests to the Office of International Relations by email to Michael Gayner <shambhala.protocol@gmail.com>. He will forward your request to the lawyers who provide advice on all such matters.

8. Procedure

The procedure for issuing invitations follows in Part III, along with draft letters of invitation in Part IV.

II.

The Office of International Relations: Responsibilities for handling international relations

Acharya Mitchell Levy is the Director of International Relations, a post in the Kalapa Executive.

Mr. Michael Gayner serves as the Head of Protocol in the Office of International Relations, assisting the Director with relations not only with major teachers, but also the increasing number of public figures making contact with Shambhala. Mr. Gayner is the point-person in the Office of International Relations for receiving and responding to most of the incoming emails from centres.

III.

The Procedure for issuing invitations to masters requested to offer teachings for sadhakas

In line with these guidelines, if your centre is intending to issue an invitation to a teacher to offering teaching to sadhakas, please be clear about the following points.

- The invitation is extended on behalf of Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche. As well, the invitation comes from your local Shambhala community, as represented by its leadership. Invitations should not come from individuals or be extended casually (in a conversation, for instance).
- Your centre leadership should have discussed and agreed upon the nature and scope of the teachings to be requested, the audience, the financial implications, and why your centre wishes to host the teacher.
- Your centre should have undertaken the necessary research to determine the appropriateness of inviting the particular teacher.
- As invitations to teachers have an important “diplomatic” aspect, please ensure that discussion of such invitations, and the hosting of visiting teachers at your centre, is appropriately respectful. For more information, please consult the Visiting Teacher manual in the Centre Resources area of Shambhala.org:
http://www.shambhala.org/documents/visiting_teacher_manual.pdf

Procedure for extending the invitation:

- Many teachers’ schedules fill up well in advance. Proper planning well in advance is important. It is not at all unusual for teachers to have invitations to

teach one or two years in advance. Please therefore think far ahead in planning and extending invitations.

- Please use the templates for formal letters of invitation to invite teachers to your centre. You will find these at the end of this section.
- Determine the best way to mail or hand-deliver the letter of invitation to the teacher. Emails may be used if you have a strong relationship with the teacher and it is clear from them or their staff that this is a good way for them to communicate. An oral invitation at the time of presenting a formal letter is appropriate.
- Please keep a record of all such letters of invitation. This will also help the Office of International Relations if it needs to check with you about teachers you have invited.
- As teachers sometimes must sort through invitations from many different centres, it may be necessary to follow up your invitations. This is usually best done by contacting the secretary or representative of the teacher, and building a relationship with them. It is not at all impolite to gently follow up on invitations. In some cases, persistent and repeated follow up may be required. As long as it is done in a polite and professional manner, such follow up is entirely appropriate. In fact, it can be impolite to invite a teacher, and then not follow up, and move on to the next teacher. This could be viewed as a lack of genuine interest in that teacher, or that the centre is not really sincere in their wish to host the teacher. When in doubt – follow up on your invitation.

Invitations from the Sakyong, Jamgön Mipham Rinpoche:

- In certain instances, invitations to teachers will come directly from Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche.
- The usual instances for these personal invitations are when the Sakyong wishes to invite a teacher to give an abhisheka, transmission, or when a cycle of teachings is requested that will take place over a number of years.
- If your centre wants to supplicate the Sakyong to make such an invitation, please send a written request to the Sakyong, care of the Office of International Relations, 1084 Tower Road, Halifax, Nova Scotia, B3H 2Y5, Canada.

For questions about protocol and hosting teachers, please refer to the Visiting Teacher Manual online: http://www.shambhala.org/documents/visiting_teacher_manual.pdf

IV. Template Letters

Invitation to masters requested to offer teachings to sadhakas

This template offers wording for a letter of invitation from Shambhala to Buddhist teachers. This draft needs to be adapted for each invitation, in line with the teacher, our relationship with them, what tradition the teacher is from, the nature of the requested teachings, the time frame, etc. Please give careful attention to tailoring each letter to each specific situation! If possible, it is good to present your letter by hand to the teacher. It can be delivered by any member of your centre, representing the centre director and the entire community. For Tibetan teachers, the letter should be wrapped in a khata and with some small offering, like flowers or fruit. Money is not necessary.

(Shambhala Centre letterhead)

Dear _____ (Rinpoche, Your Eminence, Roshi, Venerable, etc.) [Date]

I hope you are in the very best of health and spirits, and that your aspirations for the benefit of beings are being fully supported. *[For higher-ranking teachers, it is appropriate to be more poetic and expansive here.]* On behalf of The Sakyong, Jamgön Mipham Rinpoche, and the *[name of hosting centre]* Shambhala Centre . I wish to invite you to offer teaching to our community of advanced vajrayana practitioners.

We supplicate you to teach on *[it is usually good to be specific about the teaching that you are requesting, making sure the topic is appropriate. For instance, teachers invited to address public audiences within Shambhala are asked to give hinayana and mahayana teachings in these contexts. This need not be too detailed, but should give a clear sense of what you want. For example, you may request sutrayana teachings on emptiness, or teachings on compassion.]* We have many students at our centre who will benefit from your presence and teachings, and sincerely hope that you will be able to join us for a visit in *[time frame – you may suggest “Fall 2008” or “May through September 2009,”]*, for *[approximate length of proposed visit]*. *[One or two sentences may be included here about your centre, your history or experience with the teacher, or other relevant details. Two or three sentences will suffice.]*

Thank you so much for your kind consideration of our invitation. I look forward to hearing from you, and hope that it will be possible for you to visit us to teach.

On behalf of Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, and the community of our Shambhala Centre, we extend our warmest greetings to you, and offer you and your sangha our best wishes for your continued health and long life.

With respect,

[Person representing the local centre / with title, with street address, email address, and phone contacts. Do not have a committee sign the letter; it should come from the director or other responsible official from the local centre.]

Invitation to Teachers of Related Disciplines

This template offers wording for a letter of invitation from Shambhala to teachers of related disciplines. This draft needs to be adapted for each invitation, in line with the teacher, our relationship with them, their practice (e.g. chi gong, yoga, ikebana, etc.), the nature of the requested teachings, the time frame, etc. Please give careful attention to tailoring each letter to each specific situation!

[Local centre letterhead]

Dear _____ (Title if appropriate)

[Date]

I hope you are in the very best of health and spirits, and that your teachings are being well supported and appreciated. On behalf of The Sakyong, Jamgön Mipham Rinpoche, and the [name of hosting centre] Shambhala Centre, I would like to invite you to offer a program for our community.

As a community committed to creating an enlightened society, we recognize that there are many wisdom traditions and many means for creating an awakened culture. We believe that the [work / practice / method / approach] you offer contributes to the enrichment of such a culture and that many of our students may be interested in exploring how your [work / practice / technique / approach, etc.] can support and enrich their path. We sincerely hope that you will be able to join us for a visit in [time frame], for about [approximate length of proposed visit].

[One or two sentences may be included here about your centre, your history or experience with the teacher, or other relevant details. Two or three sentences will suffice.]

Thank you very much for your kind consideration of our invitation. I look forward to hearing from you, and hope that it will be possible for you to visit the [name of centre].

With warm regards,

[Person representing the local centre / with title, with street address, email address, and phone contacts. Do not have a committee sign the letter; it should come from the director or other responsible official from the local centre.]