

Shambhala Community Plan

FOLLOW-UP TO THE SHAMBHALA CONGRESS

Developed at the Extended Meeting of the Board of Shambhala International
Boulder, 6-8 February 2004

Arising from unconditioned space, the wisdom of basic goodness that is always present and with the blessings of the lineage, our intention is to –

- *Manifest enlightened society*
- *Through a global unified mandala*
- *Based on a practical plan*
- *Achieved with community-wide participation*
- *To present to the Sakyong and the Shambhala Congress by Shambhala Day 2005*

1. Overview

This plan, “Community as Practice”, is the follow-up to the Shambhala Congress. The Congress, held in Halifax in November 2003, was attended by more than 200 people from all parts of our mandala.

The follow-up to the Congress, reflected in this plan, proposes a one-year timetable of action, culminating in the next Shambhala Congress to be held on this theme just after Shambhala Day 2005.

The opening statement, displayed above, is the core aspiration, or statement of purpose, this plan.

The plan takes a step-by-step approach to a number of core topics in our community. Each of these will be the focus of community-based Working Groups. These groups will follow the model already set by The New Economic Model Working Group, which is working openly and transparently with people throughout the community and includes a broad-based “review group” for community feedback.

The plan is based on inclusive community engagement by Shambhalian at all local Shambhala Centres and groups.

Where there are clearly defined leadership teams in the mandala already handling specific topics, a number of Advisory Groups will be established so that Shambhalian with special experience and skills can work closely with those leadership teams to contribute their advice. These also will be supported by broad-based Review Groups open to everyone in the community.

2. Principal recommendations on follow-up from the Shambhala Congress

On the last morning of the Shambhala Congress, representatives from all thirteen topic groups met together to discuss follow-up to the Congress. They recommended:

- Formation of Working Groups to carry forward the discussions started at the Congress, with close links between those Working Groups and the Board of Shambhala International. This was accompanied by a series of suggestions on the immediate follow-up process to the Congress (which corresponds to the process now underway) and how the Working Groups should function (which have been taken into account in formulating the plan that follows).
- Open and transparent communication within the mandala, including the use of the electronic bulletin board on the Shambhala website to share information within the community about follow-up to the Congress, combined with periodic reporting by the President/Board to the whole community.
- Further periodic mandala-wide meetings such as the Congress.

Their report stated:

*“We appreciate efficient time management, but not at the expense of process or vision... It is essential that the participatory process started with the Shambhala Congress continue on an on-going basis to ensure efficiency, transparency and accountability across all levels of our mandala. Based on the results of this Congress, considering both pragmatic and emotional levels, we feel that this is the only approach that will lead to re-building trust, harmony and well-being within our Shambhala so that we truly **have** a flower to turn outwards.”*

3. Consultation on the follow-up to the Congress

A follow-up plan, based on the advice of the Shambhala Congress, was promised at the conclusion of the Congress, and the process of preparing the plan was announced to the entire community on the Shambhala News Service in December 2003. A draft plan, based on the results of the Congress, was circulated to all leadership groups in the mandala for their advice and suggestions. The results of that advance consultation were discussed in detail at an extended meeting of the Board of Shambhala International that took place in Boulder, 6-8 February 2004. The meeting was attended by a further seventeen leaders, including representatives from the Council of Archaryas, the Council of the Makkyi Rabjam, the Council of Warriors, the Shambhala Trust, the Shambhala Youth Council, Shambhala Europe, and representatives of major urban centres and practice centres.

Based on the recommendations of that meeting, the plan was finalized by the President of Shambhala and presented to the community on Shambhala Day 2004.

4. Being inclusive and open

It was clear from the Congress, and in all subsequent discussions, that the values of being inclusive and open are at the heart of what needs to guide this period of community reflection and renewal.

Many points have been made along these lines, stressing the importance of:

- Including all generations in this process, embracing elders, emerging leaders, the second and third generations, as well as those who feel they have been marginalized in our community over the years;
- Appreciating the importance of our spiritual and cultural heritage, the power of our lineage and the forms we have developed, while at the same time, allowing for new forms and new teachings to arise that will enable even more people to have access to the power, wisdom and beauty of Shambhala;
- Examining ways in which we can create a sane society in our own community and extend that outwards, creating the spaces and containers for working with our differences and conflicts, developing the practice of trusting in basic goodness and the way it manifests in each other, so that we come to embody and communicate our precious teachings through our way of being with ourselves and each other;

- Working with the balance of feminine and masculine energies in ourselves and throughout our mandala, developing heartfelt and powerful communication with each other;
- Understanding and developing the practical skills needed to create mechanisms of governance that are appropriately open, transparent and accountable, as part of our community-wide experiment with natural hierarchy;
- Turning the Flower Outward so that our aspiration to create enlightened society starts to take shape in the interactions within our mandala and also manifests in initiatives, individual and collective, that have an impact on the lives of other people and our environment.

An effort has been made to infuse the plan with these aspirations and values, not only as far as the goals are concerned, but also in the way we aim to reach them through community discussion and participation. Rather than setting this out as a fixed “vision”, we might call this a collective exercise in “visioning”.

5. Community as Practice: Engagement by Shambhala Centres and Groups

A major theme that emerged in the lead-up to the Shambhala Congress came to be known as: “Community as Practice”. This, in fact, was the theme of a weekend program convened by the Lexington Shambhala Centre to bring its members together for a reflection on its own development. The theme caught on more widely because it highlighted a need felt throughout our mandala, which is the need to deepen our understanding of what is involved in respecting and sustaining not only our teachers and the teachings, but also the community of practitioners.

This theme was also central to the *Treatise on Society and Organization* composed by the Sakyong in early 2003. This stressed the distinction between the “organization” (or central administration of the mandala which can provide the framework for programs and so on) and the “community” in which individuals need to be willing to take care of each other’s human needs. Looking deeply into how we develop as a community cannot be left to a set of Working Groups and Review Groups alone. This needs to be a theme of reflection in all our centres and groups.

Therefore, this plan strongly recommends that the leadership of each centre and group, during the coming year, convene a series of meetings, including a small number of full community meetings (or Town Hall meetings) to open up discussion on “Community as Practice”. In addition to the Sakyong’s treatise, the Vidyadhara’s Community Talks (published by Vajradhatu Publications and available from www.shambhalashop.org) provide invaluable advice and insight for those wishing to have background reading on

this theme. It could then be within this context of discussion that members in each centre and group can receive the reports from the Working Groups in late 2004 and give their feedback as part of the preparation for the next Shambhala Congress. Shambhala International Board member Susan Skjei has volunteered to be a long-distance resource for groups wanting to discuss how to convene Town Hall or community meetings.

To sharpen the focus on this theme and make clear to the community that the contribution of members of centres and groups is central to what we are attempting to accomplish, the phrase “Community as practice” could be considered as a possible theme for the next Congress, following on from the theme “Towards a Unified Mandala” which was used for the first Congress.

It has also been suggested that the Congress also include the subject of establishing “The Kingdom of Shambhala” within the framework of the discussions that will flow from this plan. This suggestion, as well as others that will emerge in the months ahead, will be referred to the Congress Planning Advisory Group (see 13 below).

6. Practicing as Community

It is vital that our mandala, as a spiritual community, recommit itself to the communal practice of meditation. The discipline of meditation is the foundation of everything we do, individually and collectively, on the path to enlightenment and the manifestation of enlightened society. During this period of community renewal, it is all the more significant, therefore, that we endeavour to engage in common practices together so that we can mix our minds together with space, with the mind of the lineage, the mind of the Buddhas and the mind of the Rigdens.

This year, when the Sakyong is spending a great deal of time on retreat, is a particularly auspicious time for such collective practice. This principle is being manifested immediately after Shambhala Day this year in a leadership dathun specially convened by the Ashe Acharya and the President at Karne Choling. The month-long retreat will be attended by leaders from all parts of the mandala.

It would be particularly helpful for community members to attend Nyinthüns, feasts and other group practices throughout this year, and all community leaders are strongly urged to attend and, where appropriate, lead such practices. With a strong, collective container of practice, the discussion of “community as practice” will be able to benefit from the mindfulness and awareness that blossom naturally from our meditation.

7. Talking Circles

At the Shambhala Congress, a spontaneous group formed to discuss issues associated with the Vajra Regent. It became known as Group 13. The group formed a talking circle where each person could share their contemplation of the situation with the Vajra Regent and how they had worked with it over these nearly fifteen years. This process has continued in Halifax with two further meetings of a talking circle on this subject. That group made the following formal request to the President, which was immediately accepted:

We request that President Reoch encourage talking circles throughout the Shambhala mandala before the consecration of the stupa for the Vajra Regent. This kind of listening and speaking from the heart is a profound and compassionate pathway to healing our community and to purifying the ground on which the consecration will take place. We in this group are willing to provide practical guidance and to assist interested people throughout our mandala in setting up these circles of the heart.

In the words of the Halifax talking circle: “The process of a talking circle is simple: each person speaks, no one interrupts with questions or comments, and then the next person speaks. If someone does not want to speak, they simply pass, and at the end, if they wish to speak, they do. Each of us really listened, and when we spoke, each of us spoke from the heart. At the second meeting we had a free ranging discussion and focused on how to help this process go forward. For all of us in the group, it was a startling, truthful, and moving experience.” All centres are encouraged to consider this suggestion. Alice Haspray has most generously offered to be of (long-distance) assistance to any centre that wishes to discuss how best to do this.

In addition, at the extended board meeting in February, it was also noted that there are number of other matters in our community that could benefit from enabling people to participate in talking circles. These circles create the open, compassionate and non-judgmental space in which people can speak about matters of deep concern.

8. Community Conference Calls

In the months prior to the first Shambhala Congress the President hosted a series of conference calls, open to the entire community. Notes from each call were then posted on the Shambhala website. These seem to have been widely appreciated, and the aim now is to have such a community call-in more or less monthly. These would likely have a particular theme, but could also serve as a regular check in on how the follow-up in progressing. These monthly community calls will start in April and the community will be sent details well in advance on the Shambhala News Service

9. Moving forward together: A step-by-step approach

The reports from the topic groups at the Shambhala Congress (now posted on the Shambhala website) from the topic groups at the Shambhala Congress reflect the wide range of views and approaches that manifested during the four days. It is important to remember that participants at the Congress were not required to reach consensus on any matters. The reports, therefore, include many ideas and suggestions. This is very much in line with the way the Congress unfolded. It was not structured with the aim of reaching decisions, but with the aim of enabling people from all over our mandala to come together for an open exchange on the matters uppermost in people's minds.

Therefore, it is important that the process of follow-up be given time to assess the various proposals put forward, and most importantly, to allow for considerable community discussion and feedback. Since many of the issues are interrelated, it is also important to take the time needed to coordinate discussions and work towards a cohesive result. This is essential to ensure that the ground is being properly prepared for substantive discussion and closure at the next Shambhala Congress on matters that have serious implications for all parts of our mandala.

This plan does not, therefore, attempt to tackle every single issue that was raised at the Congress, at least not within the coming year. Instead, it focuses on a number of core issues. We can move on to other issues after we have accomplished the work set out in this plan. This more modest approach is also in line with the fact that we have extremely limited staff resources at this time, and will need to rely heavily on volunteers to accomplish most tasks.

10. Milestones between now and the next Shambhala Congress

We need to ensure adequate time and space for reflection and consultation in the community, and to lay a solid basis for productive discussion at the next Shambhala Congress. The following milestones would take us from now to the next Congress to be held in the week following Shambhala Day 2005.

January 2004

Preparation of draft plan to be circulated to leadership groups within the mandala.
Advance consultation on the draft plan by the leadership groups in preparation for extended meeting of the Board of Shambhala International

February 2004

Extended meeting of the Board of Shambhala International to discuss the draft plan.

The report from this extended meeting will be posted on the Shambhala website and a brief overview of the outcome will be given by the President in the mandala-wide broadcast on Shambhala Day, Saturday 21 February.

Creation of an expanded governing structure for the mandala – the Mandala Governing Council (see section 11 below). The Council will be responsible for coordinating follow-up to the Congress in preparation for the next Congress to be held following Shambhala Day 2005.

February – July 2004

During this period, each of the Working Groups established in this plan will be asked to complete the first phase of their work, including initial consultation within the community, in order to prepare the a first draft of their initial findings and recommendations.

These drafts will be posted on the Shambhala website for the entire community.

July 2004

Meeting of the Mandala Governing Council and interested Directors of Shambhala Centres. This will take place over a four-day period at Shambhala Mountain Center (provisionally 29 July – 1 August) during the time when the Sakyong is there for the Varjaya Seminary. This will serve as a “first review” meeting to discuss the first reports from the Working Groups, and assess the progress being made in follow-up to the Congress. It will decide on any changes needed to the plan and the work to be accomplished between then and the next Shambhala Congress.

July-November 2004

The Working Groups complete their work and prepare their reports. These will be posted on the Shambhala website for the benefit of the entire community. These reports will become the basis for the discussions to take place at community meetings and in conference calls in preparation for the next Shambhala Congress in 2005.

December 2004/January 2005

Meeting of the Mandala Governing Council to consider all the reports, feedback received from the community meetings and conference calls. The Mandala Governing Council will prepare final proposals to be presented to the Sakyong and the Shambhala Congress.

Week following Shambhala Day 2005

The next Shambhala Congress will be held.

11. The Mandala Governing Council

At its February meeting in Boulder, the President and the Board of Shambhala International agreed to establish an expanded governing structure for the mandala for a one-year period. This will be known as **The Mandala Governing Council**. The Council will be responsible for coordinating mandala-wide follow-up to the Shambhala Congress in time to present detailed recommendations to the Sakyong and the Shambhala community before the next Shambhala Congress.

The Council will be the supreme governing body of the mandala for that period. It will function under the authority of Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche and will be chaired by the President.

The Mandala Governing Council will have responsibility for authorizing which recommendations from the Working Groups to be established under this plan (see section 12 below) will be incorporated into the final proposals to be presented to the Sakyong and the next Shambhala Congress.

The Council will bring together in a unified decision-making structure the following:

- The **Board of Shambhala International**, which will manage the legal, financial and corporate responsibilities of Shambhala International, chaired by the President for this year.
- The chairs of the **Working Groups**, as well as the additional member responsible for coordinating and synthesizing their work
- Representatives of **major entities within the Shambhala mandala**, including the Council of Archaryas, the Council of the Makkyi Rabjam, the Council of Warriors, the Shambhala Trust, the Shambhala Youth Council, The Shambhala Arts Council, Shambhala Europe, representatives of major urban centres and practice centres, and others agreed in consultation with the President.

As soon as the full membership of the Mandala Governing Council is established, following Shambhala Day 2004, their names will be published on the Shambhala website and the entire community notified through the Shambhala News Service.

The members of this large, inclusive body will serve for one-year. Based on the results of the Working Groups and the final proposals for structure and governance to be presented to the Sakyong and the Shambhala Congress at the end of this process, a future governing body, appropriate to the needs of our growing and diverse mandala, will be established.

Minutes of the Mandala Governing Council will be posted on the Shambhala website for access by the entire community.

12. The Working Groups

To do the detailed work of following up on the major topics of the Congress, eight Working Groups are being established.

One Working Group has already been established. The way the group is working may as a possible model for other Working Groups.

- **The New Economic Model Working Group** was established in October by the President so that its work could begin during and immediately following the Shambhala Congress in November. The minutes of its first meetings have been posted on the Shambhala website.

The objectives of the Working Group are to-

- Develop a financial model that enables all constituent parts of the Shambhala mandala to have a sound financial foundation.
- Propose structures for basic financial planning, reporting, and controls throughout the mandala that will help enable our society to flourish and engender trust from our members.

This group will facilitate discussions across the mandala and bring forward issues and a practical model that can be presented to the president and board for decision. It will build on the ground work done by the Finance topic group at the Congress, but it also needs to work in close touch with centres throughout the mandala so that the outcome of the group's proposals are grounded in the realities of our mandala, workable and supported by centres.

A further seven working groups will be established. Each will need a similar statement of objectives. Based on reports from the Congress, a preliminary statement of objectives for each group was drafted at the extended meeting of the Board of Shambhala International in February. These preliminary objectives will be transmitted to the Chairs of each of the Working Groups, once the President has appointed them. The objectives of each group will then be finalized by the Working Groups themselves.

In the first sixth months of their work, from February to July 2004. Each Working Group will attempt to:

- a) deepen their understanding of what is involved in their particular topic;
- b) identify the most significant aspects of the topic to be tackled first, since the outcome of the discussion on those key aspects would influence the rest of the work they do;
- c) think about the implications of these aspects for topics being considered by other Working Groups (and vice versa), and relate to those Working Groups;

- d) establish a Review Group (see below) to provide a community sounding board;
- e) publish notes from their meetings on the Shambhala website for the benefit of the entire community;
- f) prepare a set of initial findings and recommendations for consideration at the July meeting of Centre Directors and the Board of Shambhala International.

The further seven working groups will cover the following topics:

- **Mandala Structure and Governance**
- **Leadership and Succession Planning**
- **Membership Policy**
- **Community Care**
- **Communications** (*including support to the process of mandala-wide communication this year*)
- **Outreach**
- **Diversity and Accessibility**

Reporting to the community

Each Working Group will be asked to keep notes of its meetings, written in a style that is accessible to anyone in the community who wants to follow the progress and discussions of these topics. These will be posted on the Shambhala website for the benefit of the entire community. This practice is already being followed by The New Economic Model Working Group.

Decision Making in The Working Groups

It is expected that Working Groups will work in a collaborative way with a special emphasis on paying careful attention to the inputs from the Shambhala Congress and feedback from the Review Groups. Each Working Groups will prepare recommendations to be brought to the Mandala Governing Council. The aim will be to develop broad agreement among the member (unanimity will not be required), with the Chair of each Working Group having final decision making authority as to what proposals are taken forward.

The Review Groups

Each Working Group will set up its own “review group”, by open invitation to the entire community. This has already been done in the case of the New Economic Model Working Group – its review group consists of some 50 people hooked up by email and conference calls.

The purpose of a review group is to provide a forum for those with a particular interest in the topic to give feedback and suggestions to the Working Group as its work unfolds. A review group provides a useful mechanism for testing analysis and ideas before presenting findings and recommendations to the community as a whole.

13. Advising the leadership: The Advisory Groups

There are other matters discussed at the Congress on which various leadership bodies or officers of the mandala are already working. To take the work they are already doing forward we need a framework within which people can provide advice, particularly if they are experienced or have specialist expertise to offer.

Accordingly, the following groups will be established to work with and support the leadership who are already hold responsibility in these areas:

■ Practice and Education Advisory Group

The Office of Practice and Education of Shambhala International continues to work with the **Acharyas** to service the mandala’s needs in the area of practice and education, provide curricula and manage major international programs. The Office is headed by **Carolyn Mandelker**, and staffed by **Jill Scott** and **Bill Sutton**. An Advisory Group on Practice and Education to engage in dialogue on the issues over the coming year will be established by Carolyn Mandelker.

■ Environmental Policy Advisory Group

The Land Stewards and Directors of the four largest practice centres in the Shambhala Mandala have created a team that will work together over the next four years to develop “Shambhala Principles” for protection and enhancement of our environment. This group is facilitated by **Jim Drescher** and currently includes **Jim Tolstrup** (Land Steward, Shambhala Mountain Center), **Jeff Waltcher** (Director, Shambhala Mountain Center), **Bill Brauer** (Director of Karma Chöling), **Simon La Haye** (Co-Director, Dechen Chöling) and **Tony Di Nicola** (Gardener at Dechen Chöling)). The team will function as the Environmental Policy Advisory Group.

■ Social Engagement Advisory Group

During 2004, there will be programs at Dechen Chöling and Dorje Denma Ling on the theme of “The Shambhala Path of Social Action”. The purpose of these programs will be to practice together, contemplate and discuss the social dimension of Shambhala Vision and programming. Both programs are being led by **the President** who has overall responsibility, in consultation with **the Sakyong**, for steering this aspect of development of our mandala. An Advisory Group would be useful in helping shape those programs and the follow-up to them, and will be established by the President. The social engagement topic group from the Congress has continued to communicate regularly and will be invited to nominate three or four of its members to serve on this Advisory Group.

■ **Shambhala Conduct Advisory Group**

The Shambhala Conduct Procedure (for dealing with complaints about office-holders in the mandala) has been developed and put in place in the course of the last year by a team headed by the President and an International Assessment Panel of Desung General Simon La Haye, Acharya Christie Cashman and member of the Board of Shambhala International, John Sennhauser. This team will continue its work. However, the development policy and procedures in this area requires specialist advice. An Advisory Group will be established by the president to enable the team to take its work in this area to the next stage of its development.

■ **Congress Planning Advisory Group**

A group needs to be established how to advise the Mandala Governing Council on the holding of the next Shambhala Congress in 2005. This will be done once the rest of the work on this plan is underway.

A community-wide invitation will be issued on Shambhala Day to people who wish to be on Review Groups associated with the Advisory Groups. The working methods of the Advisory Groups have yet to be determined, so it is too early to say exactly how their Review Groups will function. Further information about this will be circulated to the community once the Advisory Groups have been formed and have started their work.

14. Forming the Working Groups, Advisory Groups, and Review Groups

The Working Groups will consist of approximately a dozen people each, drawn from across the mandala. Their members will include people who attended the Shambhala Congress and those recommended during the period of advance consultation among leadership groups prior to the February meeting of the Board of Shambhala International. Particular attention will be paid to people who have specific skills and experience in dealing with these particular issues.

The Chairs of the Working Groups will be appointed by the President. The Chairs will appoint the members of their respective working groups, based on the lists of names generated from all the recommendations made thus far.

Each Working Group will then extend an open invitation to the community to create the Review Groups associated with each topic. There will be no limit on participation in the Review Groups, which will serve as the initial community feedback loop for the Working Groups. In some cases, as with the Review Group for the New Economic Model Working Group, it will be the Review Groups that take on major tasks involving extensive consultation in the community.

The Advisory Groups (see point 13 above) will be appointed by the President or by the office-holder already working in each area at the centre of the mandala. The aim is ensure a broad range of points of view, background and special skills. Their respective Review Groups will be formed by open invitation to the community.

Collegiality and decision-making

The guiding principle of the Working Groups will be collegiality. It will be the responsibility of the chair of each Working Group to create the space for open and candid discussion. Diverse points of view will be encouraged and welcomed. It will not be necessary for the groups to reach consensus (a unanimous point of view) on any matter, nor will consensus be imposed. It will be the responsibility of the chair of each group to seek broad agreement, as far as possible, from the group and to articulate an emerging view. Final decision-making authority within the group will rest with the chair. The principle of collegiality includes the practice of moving forward together in a spirit of shared responsibility once full discussion has taken place and a decision has been made.

The notes of the meetings of the Working Groups will be posted on the Shambhala website for the information of the entire community. Minority views will be included in the notes of the meetings. Dissenting opinions will be recorded, if so requested.

The outcome of each Working Group will be a set of recommendations to the Mandala Governing Council (see below). Final decision-making on the recommendations will rest with the Mandala Governing Council, chaired by the President.

Interdependence

Many aspects of this work are clearly interdependent. The results of the Working Groups and Review Groups need to be correlated and brought together into a unified decision-making process. This will be achieved in two ways. First, the chair of each of the Working Groups will be a full member of the Mandala Governing Council, established to lead the mandala for this year. Second, one additional member of the Mandala Governing Council will be specially named to the Council for the specific purpose of ensuring regular coordination and synthesis among the Chairs of the Working Groups.

15. Funding the follow-up

There are extremely limited financial resources available to fund this work. Almost all the activities, such as participating in meetings, keeping notes and preparing reports will have to be done on a voluntary basis. The Working Groups, Review Groups and others will need to function using a mix of telephone conversations, conference calls and email. Members of those groups who need to be reimbursed for their telecommunication costs will be asked to keep records for reimbursement, which may be possible towards the end of calendar year 2004.

Sarva Mangalam!