

## **“One mandala, many paths”**

This topic was first discussed in small groups, particularly to bring out the heart quality. At the outset of the plenary session, the President quoted recent remarks by the Sakyong who addressed this issue at the Vajrakilaya Abhisheka he conferred at Karmê Chöling in October this year, just prior to the Shambhala Congress:

*It is important now to create a strong mandala, culture and sangha to protect the practices such as Vajrayogini and Vajrakilaya. All these yidams need a home. In Tibet the culture provided such protection. Now Tibet is gone so we're doing what we can. This is why we have the path of the Dorje Dradul's terma teachings ... All the great masters had a base, an essential teachings unique to their lineage. Then we can have individual varieties of practices within that base ... We must practice as a group as much as possible. We must embody the principals. Unwavering compassion can be terrifying. We must support each other in that.*

Among the concerns that people expressed, often on behalf of community members not present at the Congress, were the following:

There can be a great deal of personal pain around these issues, a lot of heartbreak which is difficult to express. “Vision”, “devotion”, “loyalty” and “change” are hot words in our sangha.

At the same time, the discussion of this issue demonstrated the very considerable diversity of our mandala. People are following multiple paths. One of the small group discussions highlighted the need for us to see “parenting” as a path and to welcome that. To this could be added the arts and many other practices. In addition, there are those for whom this entire discussion is not an issue at all.

There is a need to go beyond hardening, so that we can all remain open to listening to each other. There are students to experience there being a “party line” and others who have no experience of that. Dialogue between the two is often difficult.

There is a need to create a more open, inclusive environment, both for longer-term and newer students. We need to practice patience in relating with each other: everyone is unfolding.

Without this openness, those students who don't regard the Sakyong as their principal teacher, for whatever reason, can feel as though others are judging them when they come to their centres. This is compounded by misinformation about actual policies on the training of Shambhala Guides and the criteria for teacher accreditation – for example, people end up being told, incorrectly, that, as a general policy, it is completely unacceptable for Shambharians to study with other teachers.

It is important to be open about change. It was pointed out that there are shifting patterns of participation in some feast practices; the central practice path experienced for many years by

practitioners in the mandala has changed. It is important to understand that there are students who have a lifelong commitment to Shambhala and the Druk Sakyong who

feel that the core teachings of the Vidyadhara and his vision have been abandoned, which causes them great feelings of a breaking of their samaya with the Vidyadhara. Remaining open to and being willing to engage in dialogue on a deeply human level with people who feel that way is integral to the practice of sangha.

This leads to a whole question about the vitality of our community when it comes to dissonance of views. One person spoke of her pride in the fact that we have, within our community, a website like Radio Free Shambhala, that space is available for that, and also that people who have dissenting views feel able to express them.

Some senior students feel their innate intelligence is not being heard, or if it is being heard it's not being acted upon by the organization – this leaves them feelings ineffectual in the mandala, even though their commitment has already been proven.

These issues have been with us for many years, but are now more openly discussed. This is partly owing to the energy being generated by the Sakyong and partly because it is now more possible to have these kinds of conversations openly. Some have felt this is the first time they could talk about their feelings in this way.

From a note sent in prior to the Congress from a deleg discussion in Halifax:

It is extremely important for everyone in our community to hold the space for people to express what they're feeling from their genuine heart of sadness and joy, regardless of the practice path they are following. The unfolding richness and diversity of Shambhala is not something that requires “fixing” or “solving”. It will work itself out like a snake uncoiling, without trying to make it all better and without indulging in aggression. That is, be compassionate. In this way, the Kingdom of Shambhala can surely accommodate various practice paths and offer the vision of a society capable to holding lots of views about the life of the mandala.

A different way of seeing all this was expressed:

The centre of our mandala is compassion, loving kindness and basic goodness. All paths lead to that. We need to keep our focus on that. We get to fixated on where someone is looking from and not on what there are looking to. The goal is the same; the difference is in the path to that goal.