

Social Engagement Advisory Group

Conference Call- February 10, 2005

Attending: Lance Brunner, Tashi Colman, Conner Loomis, Chris Montone, Laura Simms, David Wimberly

Laura: introduction and chair. Lance will add some information.

David taking notes.

The four main topics for discussion were:

1. We have been told that there will be no sanctioned sangha activity for social service-but a diversity of activities ranging from work in the field, individual or group endeavors and personal life/work trainings etc.
2. We recommend that we need systems, resources, and supports in place for social action when people go out to do that. Deadline as this is happening in six months following the Rigden Abhisheka in August. Recommendation that we need a working group to do this. Report defining 5 sub-committees that are separate groups under an Executive Council (experienced people to nurture the committees - not necessarily hierarchical - heightened listeners)
3. Do we want to add anything to the recommendations; and suggest topics for Lance at Congress? 15 minutes
4. We will look at 4th and 5th questions from President Reoch. 30 minutes

Lance suggested that the opportunity to move from Advisory Group to Action Teams or Working Groups seems to be possible (please note, that we are not dissolving the advisory group at this time). This will be discussed after the Congress.

Tashi: Can social action people be a part of helping with Gross National Happiness/ Redefining Development conference

<http://www.gpiatlantic.org/conference/conference.shtml>, such as helping with organization of the conference? Can people engage in this as social service? This is not a new project, but is one already endorsed and co-sponsored by Shambhala. Group discussed willingness to help Tashi advertise need for volunteers from those at Congress interested in Social Action.

The group then went on to discuss Question 4 from President Reoch.

Laura: Read Question 4. "4. What resources might be made available to the community as a whole for those who will participate in social engagement as part of their ngöndro? How and should we create a possible and reasonable directory of activities for people to engage in using the 6 categories that Barbara Blouin worked on with the President (from Shambhala Survey):

- Health Care
- Education
- Social Work
- Environmental Activism

- Arts
- Other (completely open)
- For example, is it okay to say that certain Hospice Care organizations are recommended, but give warnings about places we find untenable, disorganized, etc.
- What kind of support might we provide on the ground? Mentoring, information, health contacts... lists of trainings that are beneficial and related such as: non-violent communication, etc.
- How might we begin to keep a database of pertinent information and also reviews from people? Who will do this?"

Laura: Asked how could we make the needed resources available to the community as a whole for those who will participate in social engagement as part of their ngöndro?

David: Post the information on the web where it can be readily updated and developed. Keep categories flexible.

Connor: What do we mean by limitations? What do we mean by warnings? In reference to Rocky Flats nuclear weapons site, VACT recommended the best way to effect change was by going to work for them. This was when people in Boulder wanted to go there and join a protest.

Chris: Present information as caveats as it is too vast to pick and choose. Issues become political within the sangha. Taking focus from what to do to what we (?) Our sangha all has as core value compassion. But how to express this differs from person to person.

Laura: We might mention the possibility of harm in certain situations.

Connor: Like a range of what is happening. The US government has a web site with a good description of what is happening in locations across the world. That sort of information could be very useful.

Lance: We need stories gathered about people's experiences in social service. Concerned about getting involved in liability issues. For example, do I sue Shambhala for a splinter from prostrations? Will a youth's parents sue for harm during social service? Need to emphasise the importance of inner practice.

David: Keep reports and stories short so they can be posted and so people will read them. Keep contacts available for further personal contact for more information, etc. Give training and help to do this both before and after period of social service.

Chris: Website as a good way to contact others to get more information and support. Possibly later the stories could be published in print in edited and culled form.

Laura: Read Question 5: "5. How can those all ready engaged in social projects provide mentoring for those who are newcomers? For example, a therapist working with children who has a lot of experience in our sangha might become mentor for a particular area of service. How to find these people? Who will do that?"

- Also, we can help others begin to consider that almost all activities that arise from the shambhala vision, kindness to others, ordinary work, parenting, where we are benefiting others can also be considered social engagement?

- Can we include such things as someone engaging in a six-month period of training to enhance their life's work as a social activist in some way? If a person is all ready engaged, for instance a social worker, performing artist working in schools, a nurse, can that person consider their work as social engagement in terms of the ngondro requirement?"

Laura: Instead of YEAR of Social Service, the official instruction is now PERIOD of Social Service. Will Sakyong give further clarification?

Chris: Stories of Milarepa show social service as a way to stretch us, particularly to stretch our motivation.

Laura: What about finding mentors for kids going places like to Brazil or Nepal. How do we get that kind of data?

Lance: Meeting Robert Walker at Congress. He wrote guidelines for mentoring and getting feedback.

Conner: She also recommends Karen Wegela's book *How to be a Help Instead of a Nuisance*. <http://www.shambhala.com/html/catalog/items/isbn/1-57062-150-0.cfm> Also Marshall Rosenberg's excellent Non-Violent Communications (NVC) principles and techniques <http://www.cnvc.org/>

Lance: We should also ask Fleet. He will have many suggestions from his work.

Chris: Can being a mentor be ones service, officially? Can a Working Group work this out?

Lance: Coaching can be tough love.

Conner: Finding what is one's genuine motivation and what is getting in the way is important. We need service oriented workshops. Really relating to the other's life, not being totally in one's own world is crucial. Shambhala has found this very difficult to communicate when going beyond meditation instructions. Mentors need working on. How does mentorship be drawn into practice? Recommends delving into how mentors are found, trained, and utilized. Create a database.

Laura: Jenny Warwick suggested that any new Working Groups, should have a retreat together before starting. (Group agrees.)

Conner: Put some breadth and teeth into the Working Group.

Conner: Not just who - but what specific perspectives. The range of what people feel is practice. Prescriptive vs. Descriptive. Conflict/Balance.

Lance: One size fits all is not working/ Talking to others is useful. No substitute for paying attention. Our practice designed to help us pay attention.

Conner: Practice is to open our eyes. To open up that dialog. That contemplation. That dialog. Liability. Responsibility.

Laura: Will a parent sue? Do we need a lawyer to help on this?

Lance: Do we need a release form for people to sign?

Laura: To explore legal aspect will need to be a recommendation. Also to explore mentoring will be a recommendation.

Lance: We can now move on to discussions about the 2005 Congress. I will be doing a workshop or a presentation there. I am still considering how to do that best. A short conversation ensued with Lance about presenting recommendations; interest in working group title.

Conner: People as individuals tend to just do social service. How does Shambhala as an organization asking these questions influence this discussion?

David: This brings up a very important point that Fleet Maul made at the last telephone conference call: That insight was that it is crucial that no one tries to control the social engagement process within Shambhala too tightly or those people who are most motivated and creative will find it too stifling to work within those tight controls and will simply go on and do it themselves outside of the official "social service process." We have taken two years to make the simple and obvious recommendation that the form we were put into of an Advisory Group is not satisfactory or capable of doing the work that needs to be done. Our recommendation to Congress is mostly a list of the tasks we feel a real Working Group or Groups need to do, and we now have only until this summer to do them. In that sort of situation, the wonder is that anyone still continues, but the issue itself is so important that it can still keep our small group trying to make some progress.

The following is a note condensed from the David Wimberly recommendations:

*I have made some notes of some suggestions I feel are important to add to the draft SEAG recommendations. We need Working Groups with real autonomy. They should not be so constrained as now, nor should they be waiting so long for further directions from the hierarchy. Those directions should be given right away and should be clear. I see the need for three Working Groups that can cooperate but are essentially separate, as were the Working Groups in the previous process. The present letter to Congress from SEAG concerns itself with the Period of Social Service and I agree that should be the focus of ONE of the three Working Groups. But we also need a separate Working Group on a Curriculum or Syllabus for outreach to communicate Shambhala teachings with other groups, to teach outside the shrine room particularly to groups involved in social service/action. That was the core recommendation of the Core Topic Group from the previous Congress and that really needs to be addressed decisively and positively. The third and final Working Group I see as needed is one to address helping with specific projects, like the Gross National Happiness/ Redefining Development Conference. It is quite a double standard to say Shambhala will not get involved in specific social action projects when it is clearly doing so!!! President Reoch and the Sakyong both will speak there. The giant Sustainable Resources Conference in Boulder is another example, as is the Shambhala Institute.*

*And we need to pay more attention to our group process to make it work. We need to build consensus and to consult with the sangha. We need to find ways to magnetize additional creative and dynamic people to this process and make it productive enough to be worth their time. [More complete notes on these suggestions were submitted and are*

available on request.]

Laura: Are we only working with the period of social service or more?

David: Marty Janowitz told me that the Sakyong said he would have answers to many questions after he has done the Scorpion Seal retreat. Now that he has done the first week of that we could send him our questions and ask for answers so we can proceed. What issues can Working Groups decide and what issues will the Sakyong decide? It is very important that be clearly laid out right away.