

COMMUNITY AS PRACTICE: CONTEMPLATING SHAMBHALA BUDDHIST CULTURE

GROUND

Within our Shambhala Buddhist culture, wide variations exist in terms of how we relate to the teacher principle, the teachings, and to one another. We are engaged in an ongoing, dynamic process of figuring out who we are as a mandala, with all our seeming contradictions and diverse points of view. What are the distinctive qualities and features that form our mandala? Matters regarding governance, structure and membership must be considered within the context of these larger questions.

PATH

Self-awareness is essential to healthy cultures as well as to healthy individuals. We begin with open acknowledgment of our differences, rather than ignoring them, pushing them away or grasping for “the right answer”. As we work with the many teachings and forms we have been given, we come to appreciate the paradoxes inherent to our culture. Where there is factionalism, we admit it, and work towards deep listening, respect and healing. We relate to the third jewel of sangha as a vehicle for awakening, at the same level of devotion we hold for our teacher and the teachings.

FRUITION

We recognize that wisdom and energy spontaneously arise from all quarters and from opposing points of view. Diversity of viewpoint is experienced as a source of richness rather than as a problem or threat. Community becomes one with practice. *“Chaos is regarded as extremely good news” (CTR).*

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A Framework for Discussion offered by
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(Contextual note: This document originated with the efforts of the Membership Policy Working Group to address the question “Membership in what?”. It became apparent that a larger dialogue regarding our Mandala’s defining characteristics could be helpful, and I was asked to formulate a framework for such a discussion. I was advised by Connie Brock, Joe Inskip and Richard Reoch in this effort. I have borrowed liberally from ideas already beautifully expressed in papers or talks by Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche, Sakyong Mipham, Dan Montgomery, Judith Simmer-Brown, Joe Inskip and Chris Tamdjidi. My sincere thanks go to all of these individuals for their contributions to this discussion.)

I. INTRODUCTION

At the 2003 Shambhala Congress, I was part of a discussion group whose mission was to discuss diversity. Initially, members of our group were looking at diversity only in terms of race, physical disability, sexual orientation, and so on. For the most part, the expressed view was “Our mandala is not diverse enough.” However, what happened next was quite juicy, because the group began to strongly disagree about how to work with the very important issues of race, physical disability, sexual orientation, etc. We began to see that even though most of us came from roughly the same socio-economic demographic, **WE ARE DIVERSE ALREADY AND IT’S QUITE EDGY!** Not many of us had thought of diversity as simply “how we differ”. It was a raw and powerful moment.

Dan Montgomery writes in his paper Living and Breathing the Paradox. “*We must begin with an appreciation of the conflicts and paradoxes inherent in the various forms and teachings that have come to us, and what we ourselves bring to it from the entire cultural ground of western society and a democratic knowledge economy. We should recognize and accommodate the inherent paradoxes in the larger mandala.*”

This paper offers a framework for discussion regarding diversity and paradox within our mandala. Current paradoxes and/or key identity issues will be discussed under the following headings: 1) The Center of the Mandala, 2) the Boundaries of our Mandala, and 3) Relationship of our Mandala’s Center to its Perimeter. We begin with an executive summary, or overview, of some of the current paradoxes within our culture. Next a discussion section “fleshes out” this summary by providing background material, as well as writings by various Shambhala Buddhist teachers and leaders regarding each paradox

or issue. Please note that this discussion does not presume to be inclusive of every area in which our mandala lacks agreement. Readers are humbly requested to assist in the process of articulating our mandala's unique qualities and current issues to their most pithy possible levels.

II. PARADOX/ISSUE OVERVIEW

A. Center of our mandala: teacher and teachings.

1. There are many students who do not relate to the Sakyong as either teacher or king, yet are active members of our mandala.
2. There are many students who do relate to the Sakyong as their guru, teacher and/or king, yet they may never be able to develop the type of personal relationship with him that our teachings hold to be essential.
3. We are essentially a Vajrayana or Shambhala Tantra mandala, yet many of our members are not interested in pursuing tantric studies/practices of any type.
4. We house Buddhist, Shambhala and Nalanda teachings under one roof, and follow a wide variety of practices and forms within a single mandala. As a culture, we are not always clear about the essential tie that binds us as one mandala.

B. Boundaries of our mandala: the entry point.

1. We are a group which cannot, thus far, reach agreement regarding who is inside our mandala, who is outside our mandala, and why.
2. In the absence of a unified definition of our mandala's boundaries, many local centers have developed membership policies and practices of their own. Across centers, these policies vary widely.
3. We have not clearly articulated the relationship, if any, between membership policy and the development of healthy thriving sanghas.

C. Relationship between the center and the perimeter of our mandala.

1. In decision making and governance, our mandala employs both hierarchal models as well as process-oriented models. Because there has been no mandala-wide understanding regarding how decisions are made, who makes them, and how they are to be communicated to others, there has been inconsistency in governance. This seems to be the case at all levels of the mandala.

2. Status in our mandala has often been closely tied to level of practice (usually vajrayana) and to access to our spiritual and organizational leaders. Those with this type of status have historically been chosen for leadership and teaching positions, thereby establishing a system which is closed, and includes an “inner circle”. The absence of term limits further contributes to this closed system.
3. The edginess of our differences has the potential to either wake us up or divide us further.

III. DISCUSSION: Center of our mandala

A. One Teacher or Many?

There are many students who do not relate to the Sakyong as either teacher or king, yet are active members of our mandala.

Joe Inskip, Chairperson of the Governance and Structure working group, writes that “*historically the vast majority of members were students of the Vidyadhara, Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche. Our cultural identity emerged in relationship to the Vidyadhara’s leadership and teaching style, and our core identity was narrowly centered on him. We felt strongly that we had by far the most profound and powerful teacher. Studying with outside teachers was seen as problematic in the culture.*”

With the empowerment of the Vajra Regent, and especially as the details of his illness and death became known, crucial questions about loyalty and devotion to the teacher arose. Differences evolved between sangha members in response to this issue that are continuing to be sorted out. These questions were further elaborated, and perhaps exacerbated, for many when the Sakyong assumed his throne.

The relationship of the Sakyongs to the Shambhala mandala is described by Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche in his Treatise on Society and Organization: “*The Sakyong is the center of the Shambhala mandala. The center of the Mandala manifests as the Kalapa Court, the seat of the Sakyong and the heart of his government. The energy generated within the Court radiates outwards through the teachings, culture, and structure of the mandala. The energy that is generated towards the Kalapa Court is harnessed by the organization. When the organization can extend the energy of the Court as the basis of inspiration throughout the mandala, the members of the community look in and around themselves for solutions, realizing their responsibility to motivate themselves and to communicate with others.*”

Today, it appears that our sangha at large is no longer so narrowly centered on one teacher. At the same time that we see ourselves as members of the Shambhala Buddhist Mandala, many of us are actively studying with other teachers, ranging from a wide array of Tibetan tulkus to Brazilian shamans to ikebana grand masters. Others who consider themselves a part of our Mandala relate to no teacher at all.

Dan Montgomery writes “*How can the Sakyong be viewed as the center of the mandala if one does not see him as Teacher? The impulse to say that this is the lineage of Sakyongs is comforting for someone who did see the Druk Sakyong as a teacher, but doesn't really answer the question. At the end of the day, we are an organization in the present time, consisting of living human beings, some of whom have authority. To diffuse a practical discussion of authority and loyalty by talking about the lineage obscures the difficult issue here. What is the nature of the Sakyongs authority if I don't see him as my teacher? How could I fully participate in this mandala if I feel that way?*”.

B. Long-Distance Guru

There are many students who do relate to the Sakyong as their guru, teacher and/or king, yet they may never be able to develop the type of personal relationship with him that our teachings hold to be essential.

Our mandala encompasses five continents, with Centers, Groups, and Practice Centers located throughout the world. The Sakyong, even for those who relate to him as guru and/or king, is still one man who cannot be everywhere at once. At the same time, traditional views about the student-teacher relationship across the yantras (teacher, spiritual friend, guru) continue to be taught. Particularly as Buddhist students, we learn that a profound, personal relationship between teacher and student is a non-negotiable and indispensable part of the Path.

How essential is the personal teacher-student relationship in our mandala if the teacher is not able to know all his students? How do we make sense of these traditional teachings when many or most students who have clearly committed to the Sakyong may never spend more than 5 minutes alone with him in the course of their practice lives? To what extent are the Acharyas meant to fill the role of spiritual friend?

(Illustrative story: A membership review group member shared that as a student at Sutrayana seminary she was having doubts about entering the Vajrayana. She had never met or spoken to the Sakyong, and therefore felt especially unsure about accepting him as her guru. She mentioned this to the Acharya leading the seminary, who offered to meet privately with her and the three or four other students who had approached him with

similar concerns. Word got around about this meeting, and approximately 60 people showed up for the discussion.)

The Sakyong addressed the question of student-teacher relationship during a Q & A session at the 2003 Shambhala Congress. He acknowledged the critical nature of connecting with students at the same time that he compared his job to that of traditional monastic-based tulkus. He said: “*Recently when Lama Gawang came from Namdroling Monastery, where he was one of the top students at the shedra, to assist me at Vajrayana Seminary. After the first week, I asked him, ‘What do you think?’ ‘Oh’, he says, ‘You have to do everything, you have to be the lama, giving abhisekhas, and you have to be the khenpo, which means teaching, and plus it seems that a lot of people ask you about their personal problems, and you have to be their advisor. Its amazing that you can do all those things, because in the monastery its divided up in terms of who does what.’ I feel that yes, that situation has happened. At the same time, now the acharyas are coming along and they are able to teach, and I’m saying that it’s now the role of senior students and others to deal with the financial and administrative responsibilities. That allows me time to breathe and to connect with people, which is obviously one of the most critical things.*”

C. View

We are essentially a Vajrayana or Shambhala Tantra mandala, yet many of our members are not interested in pursuing tantric studies/practices of any type.

As a mandala, is there one characteristic view which binds our separate structures into a whole? Is there a view and/or practice which make us “who we are” as a mandala? This question is currently characterized in our mandala by dynamic tension arising from varying beliefs and opinions.

During the earliest years of our mandala’s history, it seemed there was a clearer answer to this question. All members of our mandala were Vajrayana Buddhist, with a view which had been articulated by realized masters over 2500 years. In describing how our approach to practice and study looked in those days, Joe Inskeep states “*We developed and housed a highly structured, clearly defined study/practice path that graduated students from beginning to advanced levels of view and practice through a track that required very significant commitment of time and exertion.*”

Director of Shambhala Europe, Chris Tamdjidi, reasons that although culture may shift and change, essential view does not. He argues our essential view is that of Shambhala Buddhist tantra, stating “*This point is important to underscore - as leaders of this mandala, which is essentially a Vajrayana mandala, or a Shambhala tantra mandala, we have to always be clear about the essential view.*”

Then if we are clear on this, we can ask ourselves what are the skillful means to present this view, which may mean a non-Vajrayana or non-Shambhala presentation. One does not conflict with the other as long as we are clear what we are doing.”

The Sakyong wryly notes that the clarity Mr. Tamdjidi references above is not universally present. *“When we get down to specifics, the details become hazy. Some of us may feel that we are a secular group interested in education and the arts, but how does Buddhism fit? Do we mean that we practice the buddhadharma and also perform tea ceremony and arrange flowers? Is it more that culturally we accept everything, but spiritually and philosophically we adhere to the Buddhist and Shambhala views? Or is it that we are equally comfortable with Buddhism, Judaism and shamanistic traditions? When people ask us about the specifics, we might present them with a jumble of run-on sentences that are met with a blank stare.”* (from Shambhala Buddhism).

The “haziness” the Sakyong describes above is related to factionalism and conflicts about the co-existence of Buddhism, Shambhala and Nalanda teachings under the same organizational umbrella. Dan Montgomery notes *“When Shambhala was introduced, it was a shock to many students of Buddhism. Many who had made a practice of wallowing in the first noble truth found the notion of basic goodness insipid, a dilution of the real hard stuff. To others, it skillfully cut through the cynical cutting-through mentality and culture prevalent in the sangha at that time.”*

In the “Treatise on Organization and Society”, the Sakyong optimistically notes that our ability to comprehend the view of the Great Eastern Sun seems to have matured. He states *“In essence, the emphasis of the Buddhist path is to help us attain enlightenment, and the emphasis of the Shambhala path is help us create and maintain a good society. When we put these two together, we have the Shambhalian Buddhist view of enlightened society. Thus the two paths work in tandem, not in competition.”* Today our Mandala is still trying to understand how the views of these paths work together, how they are the same and how they are different, and what is the core that binds them. Apparently, as with so many of the teachings given by Sakyong Mipham and the Druk Sakyong, the view is simple but not easy.

D. PRACTICE

We house Buddhist, Shambhala and Nalanda teachings under one roof, and follow a wide variety of practices and forms within a single mandala. As a culture, we are not always clear about the essential tie that binds us as one mandala.

Just as members of our Mandala are currently studying with a number of teachers, we are also employing a wide range of practices. Vajradhatu seminary

has been bifurcated into Sutrayana and Vajrayana sections, and our students are taught that working at the Hinayana/Mahayana level is a totally noble and respectable way of being part of our mandala. At this point in time, the Sakyong seems to be especially interested in teaching about mind stabilization and Bodhicitta practice. We have many students who consider themselves to be members of our Mandala who are not interested in tantra of any type, whether it be Buddhist tantra or Shambhala tantra. What is their role in our mandala and our organization if tantra is our core identity?

Another viewpoint posits that the sitting practice of meditation is the essential practice and tie that binds us. The following excerpt from the sometimes taken, sometimes never heard of, Shambhala Membership Oath (see Appendix A) defines the practice commitment of a member as follows:

“I pledge to practice, uphold, and propagate
the disciplines of sitting meditation
and meditation in action;
continually working with myself and others
with gentleness, fearlessness,
a sense of humor, and exertion.

In a public talk given in 1978, the Vidyadhara said “So Rigden and Buddha are the secular and spiritual side of awakening. And the path of the Rigdens and Buddha’s path are parallel paths. They go hand in hand, but have their own particular practices, their own particular philosophy, with one thing in common. Do you want to guess what that one thing in common is? Shamatha-vipashyana practice. We talked yesterday about the fact that neither the Shambhala world nor the Buddhist world had any copyright on awakening, but I am going to make a rather outrageous statement: There is no awakening without shamatha-vipashyana as a basic underlying quality. The link to awakening and the method, the path to awakening, is always associated with shamatha-vipashyana.”

Shamatha-Vipashyana can be understood, however, in broader terms than exclusively sitting meditation. This is already understood within our mandala as it applies to the Dorje Kasung, whose core practice is shamatha-vipashyana when performing their various protector duties. More broadly yet, could the stability-awareness practice connected to many martial arts and performing arts be considered as a way to partake in the essential practice of Shambhala Buddhism.?

IV. DISCUSSION: Boundaries of our mandala

A. The Entry Point

We are a group which cannot, thus far, reach agreement regarding who is inside our mandala, who is outside our mandala, and why. In the absence of

membership strategies require a prospective member to be approved or recommended by a senior mandala member or members - usually a meditation instructor or Center Council. At this end of the continuum, membership is a privilege granted by those already in the organization. Leadership at this end of the continuum is typically linked to level of practice, with the most senior practitioners seen as the best candidates for leaders. Additionally, at least until recently, leaders were primarily Vajrayana Buddhist practitioners. Precise adherence to Shambhala Buddhist forms, practices, curriculum, and lineage is seen as what differentiates Shambhala culture from general culture, and this differentiation is seen as necessary, positive and magnetizing. Concern is expressed that we can't be all things to all people without compromising the integrity of the teachings and the Path. Vajrayana/Shambhala tantra is seen as the essential view, teaching and practice. Emphasis is on purity of approach, discipline and exertion as we follow our spiritual path.

As with any continuum, the extremes above contain both wisdom and distortion. What are the wisdom aspects which could be integrated? How can we begin to identify distortions and work with them skillfully? What would the middle of this continuum look like?

B. Policy and Community Health

We have not clearly demonstrated or articulated the relationship, if any, between membership policy and the development of healthy thriving sanghas.

Chris Tamdjidi writes: *“When we look at how and why someone becomes a member, the key determining aspect is their experience with the people and the practice. I think we can see that healthy communities have higher growth, irrespective of what their written membership policies are. Thus, the boundary people experience is not the membership policy, but how welcoming people are to them and how well the dharma is presented. I think actually that healthy communities attract more people than any membership policy ever does.”*

Most members would probably agree with the above statement. Yet it still seems that a unified membership policy is important. Why might this be? Again, from Mr. Tamdjidi, *“I think that a policy statement can be a written statement of identity, of what binds us together. It is not quite a vision statement, but it defines a boundary between ourselves and others. Any healthy community, or any healthy society needs a binding element, and hopefully, something that can describe it. Countries have geographic borders and constitutions. So first comes the essential understanding of what binds us, and then comes a statement about what that is.”*

He continues: *“I think building a healthy community is hard work, and requires both good leadership and participation and practice by the sangha. This practice must include bodhicitta practice in some form (Lungta, tonglen, four*

immeasurables etc). And there must be a common binding element. To create a strong and flourishing community, there must be a common experience and shared practice, and a healthy sense of identity.”

V. DISCUSSION: Relationship between the center and perimeter

Acharya Simmer-Brown notes that in a healthy system, the center and the perimeter of a mandala are interdependent and mutually respectful. The quality of the relationship between center and fringe has profound societal and organizational implications for governance, decision making, community building, and social hierarchy, to name but a few. In discussing the manner in which conventional, naturally-occurring mandalas often work, she writes *“It is especially difficult for mandalas to acknowledge the power radiated between the center and the perimeter boundary. The center would like to manipulate its boundary, or the perimeter would like to overthrow the center... When this happens, everything is reduced to the lowest common denominator, and sacred world is impossible to discover.”*

A. Decision Making.

In decision making and governance, our mandala employs both hierarchal models as well as process-oriented models. Because there has been no mandala-wide understanding regarding how decisions are made, who makes them, and how they are to be communicated to others, there has been inconsistency in governance. This seems to be the case at all levels of the mandala.

In the early days with the Vidyadhara, there was little question regarding decision making and governance. Trungpa, Rinpoche was the ultimate authority, and if he did not personally make a decision, he would appoint someone to make it in his place. That person was then considered fully empowered, and beyond questioning. The process was strictly hierarchal, based on a combination of monarchal and military models. To paraphrase a popular bumper sticker in the deep South of the U.S., the view was “The Vidyadhara said it. I believe it. That settles it.” Center Directors were also thus empowered, so that decision making at the local levels and at Practice Centers generally followed strictly hierarchal processes. For the most part, only Vajrayana practitioners were delegated authority of any type.

Once again, things did not remain so clear. Following the Regent’s death, a period of tremendous confusion arose about who could make decisions, and how they were made. Particularly in the period between the Regent’s death and the Sakyong’s empowerment, no one was any longer ascribed the unquestionable decision-making power the Vidyadhara held. Decisions continued to get made,

but many people throughout the mandala were not sure by whom they were made, and what the process was. To the average “practitioner on the street”, the central governance structure for the mandala was a mystery at best, and a nuisance at worst. Consequently, a certain amount of mistrust began to arise towards our administrative leaders, and towards “Central Office”. At the same time, devoted practitioners around the mandala filled in the leadership/governance gap by assuming the reins at their local centers. Fewer people waited for word from on-high to make decisions, and in most cases, they developed more collaborative processes for making decisions at the local levels.

The Sakyong noted in his Q&A session at the 2003 Shambhala Congress: *“I was recently talking to Mr. [David] Brown, who has been my secretary and friend for a long time, about how up until recently things were just happening in a haphazard way. It would be David and myself saying, ‘Well, what do you think?’ ‘Well, I think its good, what do you think?’ And I was saying, ‘This is not the way to make these decisions.’ [laughter] For me, it wasn’t like there was some kind of scheme going on, it was like, ‘Well, who else wants to be involved?’ We’d ask somebody else, and they’d say, ‘Well, I don’t know, what do you think?’ What was interesting is that sometimes if we took it to an official group, they wouldn’t care or they wouldn’t have the time. I feel like this whole situation needs to be brought together. Accountability is one thing, and transparency is another, but we need a system where people will look at a situation in order to be involved, to participate, not just to look at it and criticize it.”*

Today, the Sakyong continues to set the tone for greater collaboration in decision making, particularly through his appointment of President Reoch. From the time of his appointment, Mr. Reoch has attempted to increase transparency, accountability, and communication across all levels of the Mandala. As a culture, we are being encouraged to think in terms of both process and outcome, and to include as many people as possible as we work through issues. Equally important is the fact that leadership possibilities are opening to a much broader range of people, not necessarily just tantra practitioners.

Regarding this topic, Dr. Judith Simmer-Brown writes *“I am asserting that there are two aspects of our community. One is the civilian aspect, perhaps described in an extreme as a pure grass-roots, seemingly democratic, inspirational, process-oriented model, that is synonymous with the feminine principle. The other is the military, based on discipline and oriented toward hierarchy and command, synonymous with the masculine principle. Isolated or alienated from each other, the grass-roots community process model can become limited in effectiveness, while an excessively hierarchical model divorced from its constituency may become despotic. Effective communities (and enlightened societies, for that matter) must combine these in order to manifest awakening.”* (from: The Dynamics of the Civilian Community and the Military).

B. Status issues.

Status in our mandala has often been closely tied to level of practice (usually vajrayana) and to access to our spiritual and organizational leaders. Those with this type of status have historically been chosen for leadership and teaching positions, thereby establishing a system which is closed, and includes an “inner circle”. The absence of term limits further contributes to this closed system.

At one point in our history, individuals were not considered as potential leaders or teachers if they had not followed a closely prescribed training path which included Vajrayana seminary. As noted by Joe Inskeep, status in our culture has historically been linked to how advanced a level of practice one has achieved. In describing our cultural history, he writes *“High commitment led to high status, and a high level of commitment was presented and viewed as an expression of personal development. If you weren’t highly committed (i.e.; moving along a direct path towards high-level vajrayana practices), you were likely viewed in this culture as having less devotion to the Vidyadhara, or possibly as having an issue, an obstacle to path. Some of the dynamics around membership, status and empowerment emerged from this, I think.”*

The second type of status currency in our culture is access to the Teacher. One currently expressed point of view in our mandala is that so long as these are our status variables, the Buddhist path with its many intensive practices and its samaya connection to the guru will continue to be seen as the path for the most advanced or serious students. Can we, and should we, detach cultural status, including leadership opportunities, from accomplishment in the realm of practice/study?

Many in our mandala report experiencing subtle and not-so subtle factionalism which ranks one type of practice or practitioner under or above the other. Some students practicing primarily within the non-Buddhist “gates” report feelings of cultural marginalization. How widespread is this experience in our Mandala at large, and how does this effect the interpersonal dynamics of our community? How can leadership and teaching opportunities be opened to a broader range of students without compromising the quality that arises (we hope) from intensive practice/study?

C. Relating to paradox and diversity of view

The edginess of our differences has the potential to either wake us up or divide us further.

That we embrace many different points of view is not at question. How we relate to this fact, however, is of core concern. Dan Montgomery argues elegantly for

the importance of being willing to acknowledge our differences openly and directly. Acharya Simmer-Brown appears to be in agreement with Mr. Montgomery, stating: *“When we do not see the mandala principle at work, we constantly reject, grasp or attempt to manipulate the world around us to make it into something other than what it is. Our only transformative choice ... is to take our seats in whatever world we find ourselves, and acknowledge it as mandala.”* According to our lineage teachers, and in the words of Dr. Simmer-Brown, our Shambhala society and organizational structure *“can only be seen as a mandala if we include everything, all the positive qualities as well as all that we would like to ignore, reject, or distance ourselves from.”*

VI. CONCLUSION

As we struggle to work with our own habitual patterns and our spiritual materialism, it must be acknowledged that various factions have formed over the years within our mandala, causing pain, confusion and discord. This type of factionalism seems to be one of the key factors in our inability to reach agreement about self-definition, membership, governance, and so on.

Some of the stronger areas of divisiveness have included (but are not limited to): issues related to the Vajra Regent, criticism and lack of understanding for the Shambhala teachings by some Buddhists, criticism and lack of understanding for the Buddhist teachings by some who follow only the Shambhala training path, apathy and mistrust at the local level towards our organizational leaders and Shambhala International, disagreement regarding the core identity of our mandala as well as its natural boundaries, and confusion and lack of agreement related to the role of Sakyong Mipham, Rinpoche.

Today our Shambhala Buddhist world seems to be full of possibility: many feel our culture is going through a powerful change process which could lead to clearer self-definition. We might be able to say with confidence to newcomers “here’s who we are”, without the vague “run-on sentences” to which the Sakyong refers. We might begin to trust our leaders again. We might be able to trust one another.

It’s possible that we could begin relating to community as a valid practice vehicle, as a powerful and edgy way to really work with our doubt and our fear. *“... No matter how painful and confused situations might be for everyone in them, from an awakened perspective, all of this pain and confusion is merely the play of wisdom. And that play has a recognizable pattern which is called mandala principle. If one can identify these situations as mandalas, then transformation of the painful circumstances is possible.”* (Judith Simmer-Brown, Mandala Principle)

Through blessings and generosity beyond our comprehension, we have been given the skillful means to create enlightened society. This process must begin at home, here in our own Shambhala mandala. The establishment of such a society cannot be divorced from

how openly and gently we relate to one another within our mandala, and to what degree we actually take community as our path. According to the Supplication to the Rigden Father , if we are brave enough to do this:

- Our thirst can become elegance.
- Our jealousy can become confidence.
- Our intimidation can become fearlessness.

May we vow, as a unified mandala, to perpetuate sacred world!

APPENDIX A: SHAMBHALA MEMBERSHIP OATH

Inspired by the vision of Shambhala,
I hereby affirm my commitment
to the path of meditation as presented
by the Vidyadhara, Chögyam Trungpa, Rinpoche
and the Sakyong, Jamgön Mipham, Rinpoche.

I pledge to practice, uphold, and propagate
the disciplines of sitting meditation
and meditation in action;
continually working with myself and others
with gentleness, fearlessness,
a sense of humor, and exertion.

Whether following the path of the Buddha,
basking in the glory of the Great Eastern Sun,
or enjoying the precision and elegance of the Shambhala arts,
being in the moment, living in the world now,
is the binding wisdom of Shambhala.

Committing my support to carry out this vision,
I hereby take this Shambhala oath.

