

Membership Policy Working Group

Recommendations for a Unified Membership Policy for the Shambhala Mandala

What's New?

- A recommended mandala-wide definition of membership
- A unified approach for every Center to know exactly how many members they have
- A new International membership category for persons not affiliated with a Center
- Centralized support for local membership coordinators
- Membership in a Center automatically confers membership in the mandala-at-large
- Membership as an open and public community event
- Emphasis on magnetizing members rather than making membership mandatory

What's the Same?

- The cornerstones of membership: strengthening the Shambhala community through practice, financial giving, and service to the Center.
- Local determination of dues structures and membership categories
- Local determination regarding volunteer service to the Center by members

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INTRODUCTION

When membership is discussed, questions immediately begin to arise related to our identity as a mandala. The question of who is a member, and therefore who is not a member, highlights differences in view among us and often sparks fear that some may be inappropriately excluded. Defining membership is further complicated by the fact that within our Shambhala culture, wide variations exist in terms of how we relate to the teacher principle, the teachings, and to one another (see Appendix D: Community as Practice: Contemplating Shambhala Buddhist Culture).

Questions regarding our core identity as a mandala touch each of us deeply, and therefore give rise to lively and impassioned debate. What are the distinctive qualities and features that constitute our Shambhala mandala? What forms the boundary of our mandala, and how does one actually enter or become a member? Matters regarding membership must be considered within the context of these larger questions.

The Membership Policy Working Group acknowledges that addressing identity issues is difficult. Differing viewpoints exist regarding these questions even among those in our working group. We would like to suggest, however, that a healthy society welcomes and appreciates questions and debate; it is in this spirit that our work is offered to the mandala-at-large.

This document outlines a unified approach to Membership in Shambhala. When we think about a membership policy, we are thinking about how a participant in our activities can openly express their support of and dedication to Shambhala vision. The current situation in the Shambhala mandala is that there is no unified membership policy. Membership is approached in

a variety of ways across our mandala, and there are differing opinions about such fundamental issues as what constitutes our core practice and whom we relate to as our teacher. Based on the findings of this working group, we know that most Centers are unable to report the number of members they have due to a lack of clear definition and/or administrative procedures regarding membership. In many cases, there has also been a disconnection between local membership and a sense of belonging to a worldwide Shambhala mandala. (See Appendix B: Summary of Current Membership Practices). So the aim of this document and process is twofold:

- To develop an approach to membership that genuinely reflects our diverse mandala
- To start the process whereby such a policy of membership is a reality in most of our centers and groups.

Finally, we acknowledge that regardless of the form that membership in Shambhala takes, there will always be those people who choose not to become members. Thus far, the Membership Policy Working Group has encountered near-unanimous agreement that those who are not members always be warmly and completely welcomed into our communities and our shrine rooms.

OVERVIEW

We begin with a list of the policy recommendations made by our working group. Following this list, we discuss the logic of each recommendation and how it might address frequently asked membership questions. We conclude the document by listing some of the major areas of disagreement that seem to exist regarding membership issues (the reader is encouraged to add his or her own concerns to this list). Finally, in the appendices, we provide a summary of the recommended respective membership duties at both the local and core services levels, a summary of current membership practices, an article on view of money and commitment, and an article titled “Community as Practice: Contemplating Shambhala Culture”.

PLEASE NOTE: Throughout this document, we make reference to core services we hope can be provided by a centrally functioning administrative entity. For the membership in Europe, many of the roles and tasks described will be delegated to and carried out by Shambhala Europe.)

MEMBERSHIP POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation #1: The following definition of membership will be adopted mandala-wide: *A member is one who makes a connection to mindfulness-awareness practice, and/or contemplative practices based on mindfulness-awareness, and is interested in deepening his or her experience by integrating this into daily life. Based on this connection, members are empowered to serve the community by supporting its activities financially and by taking on appropriate responsibilities.*

Recommendation #2: As an expression of this connection, members are asked to contribute financially to the Shambhala community.

Recommendation #3: As an expression of this connection, members are asked to donate time to be of service to the Shambhala community.

Recommendation #4: Membership is based on an individual's choice to become a member, which arises from his or her felt sense of connection. The decision to become a member is left entirely to the individual, as opposed to an external screening, recommendation or acceptance process.

Recommendation #5: To insure a unified approach to membership across the mandala, informational materials about membership will manifest common principles in all centers.

Recommendation #6: Each Center will designate an individual who will serve as membership coordinator.

Recommendation # 7: Each member has the right to a meditation instructor.

Recommendation #8: The Office of Practice & Education will review the ways that we train and support meditation instructors, and also serves in a consultative role to Centers who feel their M.I. resources are not adequate to meet the needs of their students.

Recommendation # 9: Systems will be developed whereby people new to the Center are welcomed into the social and community life of the Center through personal contact with one or more members.

Recommendation # 10: The relationship between local centers and the mandala-at-large will be described in informational materials developed by Shambhala core services.

Recommendation # 11: When one becomes a member of the local Shambhala Center, one automatically becomes a member of the entire Shambhala mandala.

Recommendation # 12: The Office of Practice & Education will clarify what the entire path looks like, so that potential members have access to this information.

Recommendation # 13: All members are required to give regular financial support to their local Center or Group.

Recommendations # 14: All members provide service to the Center through donating their time, as they are able.

Recommendation #15: In addition to developing local guidelines for financial giving, Centers/Groups will develop systems to accurately monitor this activity.

Recommendation #16: Local Centers will develop systems for working with volunteers, including ways to invite and mentor new volunteers. “Best practices” will be shared across centers.

Recommendation # 17: Every Shambhala center/group will develop ways to let the community know who its members are.

Recommendation #18: Whenever possible, a Shambhala community leader or M.I. should meet face-to-face with members who have ceased to contribute to and associate with the center.

Recommendation # 19: Both members and non-members alike are completely welcome in whatever ways they wish to participate in the mandala, so long as they meet program prerequisites.

Recommendation # 20: Those who are regularly active in the Shambhala community, but who are not members, should understand the Shambhala community has volunteer needs, and that they are welcomed to help out.

Recommendation # 21: Those who are regularly active in the Shambhala community, but who are not members, should understand the community has financial needs, and that they are welcomed to help out.

Recommendation # 22: Anyone who has an interest in the activities of Shambhala can join as an International member.

Recommendation #23: Requisites for attending programs should be set by the entity that has developed the training, usually the Office of Practice & Education. These requisites should not be determined locally as part of a Center’s membership policy.

DISCUSSION OF MEMBERSHIP POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

MEMBERSHIP DEFINITION: A member is one who makes a connection to mindfulness-awareness practice, and/or contemplative practices based on mindfulness-awareness, and is interested in deepening their experience by integrating this into daily life. Based on this connection, members are empowered to serve the community by supporting its activities financially and by taking on appropriate responsibilities.

Recommendation #1: The definition of membership stated above will be adopted mandala-wide.

Recommendation #2: As an expression of this connection, members are asked to contribute financially to the Shambhala community.

Recommendation #3: As an expression of this connection, members are asked to donate time to be of service to the Shambhala community.

WHY BECOME A MEMBER?

Membership is based on an individual's choice. By this we mean that only the individual can determine their level of connection to Shambhala. Pressure should never be applied to anyone contemplating membership. A standard service provided by local centers would be to provide necessary materials, including accurate information about their center and the Shambhala mandala, to help familiarize an individual with who we are and what our organization provides.

Membership for some dignifies their aspiration to practice, study and connect further with the teachings of Shambhala, and is a formal statement of one's identity with the Shambhala community. Membership should be recognized in a public way as a powerful expression of trust (even if embryonic) in the Shambhala and Buddhist teachings, in our teachers and in one another as a meditation community. Finally, membership is a practical way to support the teachings and practices through supporting the mandala within which these flourish.

Recommendation #4: Membership is based on an individual's choice to become a member, which arises from his or her felt sense of connection. The decision to become a member is left entirely to the individual, as opposed to an external screening, recommendation or acceptance process.

Recommendation #5: To insure a unified approach to membership across the mandala, informational materials about membership will manifest common principles in all centers.

One of the core services functions would be to supply sample materials. These materials would clearly delineate for local centers in which ways they are free to customize membership information to better fit their local situation. They would also make clear the information that needs to be given to everyone mandala-wide.

Recommendation #6: Each Center will designate an individual who will serve as membership coordinator.

Critical job duties for this individual include, but are not limited to: making sure accurate and up-to-date informational materials about membership are readily available to everyone, making sure that those who are considering membership receive the support they need, maintaining accurate membership records, and coordinating with Shambhala's central administration regarding membership issues. The core services of Shambhala would supply a sample job description.

HOW CAN WE HELP THOSE WHO ARE CONSIDERING MEMBERSHIP?

There are three important elements in helping someone who is considering membership. These elements are: support, information/education, and our example as practitioners.

Support

Everyone should be offered the opportunity to work with a meditation instructor. Furthermore, new students will require help in understanding the role of an M.I., how an M.I. might be useful to them, and what sort of things one might talk to an M.I. about. Understanding that a new student has no context for understanding the above, the M.I. takes initial responsibility for offering support and meditation know-how to students.

Recommendation # 7: Each member has the right to a meditation instructor.

It is essential to check regularly to see whether each person has an M.I. or at least has been offered one. If possible, the M.I. should play a key role in the membership process through communicating the view to students, and helping them to decide whether to become members.

There is wide variation in how effectively the M.I. system is working in Shambhala communities across the mandala. If the meditation instructor system is to play such a key role in our mandala, it needs a major tune-up. More effort and training needs to go into developing M.I.s. There needs to be a system of continuing education and follow-up for M.I.s. Consideration needs to be given regarding how to help Centers and Groups who do not have enough M.I.s to meet their communities' needs.

Recommendation #8: The Office of Practice & Education will review the ways that we train and support meditation instructors, and also serves in a consultative role to Centers who feel their M.I. resources are not adequate to meet the needs of their students.

Everyone at the Shambhala Center offers support to potential members by being warm, welcoming and friendly. Even the newest people can be personally invited to community social functions, open group sitting, etc. E-mail is not a substitute for person-to-person contact and support.

Recommendation # 9: Systems will be developed whereby people new to the Center are welcomed into the social and community life of the Center through personal contact with one or more members.

It is suggested there be a designated person, perhaps the membership coordinator, who takes responsibility for tracking new people and keeping them in the loop. For many students, this could be at least as important as having a meditation instructor.

Information

It is very important for potential members to be aware that the Shambhala mandala is much larger than just the local Shambhala community. Even if they choose to attend only local programs, they should have a sense of what is happening in the mandala-at-large. They should understand the various functions that are centrally administrated, and they should understand the relationship between the mandala-at-large and local Centers. Finally, they should be aware that

their local community provides financial support for the Sakyong and the core services of the mandala, (assuming this recommendation from the New Economic working group is adopted).

Recommendation # 10: The relationship between local centers and the mandala-at-large will be described in informational materials developed by Shambhala core services.

Recommendation # 11: When one becomes a member of the local Shambhala Center, one automatically becomes a member of the entire Shambhala mandala.

The names and addresses of all current members will be forwarded to the core services from local centers. As new members join, the local Membership Coordinator will also forward their names and addresses. The governing body of the Shambhala mandala will acknowledge new members with a welcome letter and a membership pin, as well as pertinent information about the mandala-at-large.

The Sakyong has recently stated in an address to the Mandala Governing Council that new students to our Centers should receive an overview of what is possible for them as students and practitioners of Shambhala Buddhism. Obviously, this implies that we should be able to provide this overview with clarity and warmth. An understanding of the possibilities that lie before them is particularly essential to those contemplating membership. They should know about the three wisdom lineages from which our mandala has sprung. They should know their local group isn't "making this stuff up".

Recommendation # 12: The Office of Practice & Education will clarify what the entire path looks like, so that potential members have access to this information.

This is particularly important now that the curricula for Shambhala training and Buddhist training seem to be merging more and more. Adequate training in this view is essential to all who will be responsible for transmitting it to students.

Potential members should understand that they are free to work with the various practices and teachings at their own pace, with no expectations or pressure to do otherwise. At the same time, encouragement to go further, given within the context of a trusting relationship, is always appropriate.

Our Example as Practitioners

As practitioners, the example we set is a singularly potent way to support and inform potential members. How we conduct ourselves, how we relate to one another, and how we practice and study communicates far more to others than do our words or our policies.

HOW DOES A MEMBER SUPPORT THE SHAMBHALA COMMUNITY?

Regular mindfulness-awareness practice: This is the best way for all of us to support our Shambhala communities, our world, and ourselves. As we come to realize the importance of study and practice to our lives, we are inspired to:

Financial support. Members are willing to give regular financial support to their Shambhala community, based on their income and other financial obligations. Financial support therefore becomes a part of one's practice, and

Service at the Center. Members are willing to donate time for various tasks the Shambhala community needs accomplished, based on their abilities and their time availability. Providing service to the Center likewise becomes a part of one's practice.

Recommendation # 13: All members are required to give regular financial support to their local Center or Group.

The amount of giving is less important than the exchange of energy between a member and their community, although dues structures should be developed with the financial needs of the Center in mind. Persons with extremely low incomes should still give regular support to the Center, even if it is as low as \$1 per month. (Please see Appendix C: View of Money and Commitment). The best way to structure financial support will vary from Center to Center and should be based on the local situation, size, etc. Local guidelines regarding financial support will be developed at each Center, in writing, and be available to all members and non-members. Support and advice regarding financial concerns will be available to each Center through the office of the Chief Financial Officer (assuming the recommendation from the New Economic working group to hire a CFO is adopted).

Recommendations # 14: All members provide service to the Center through donating their time, as they are able. The administration of volunteer activities is left up to the discretion of local Centers.

HOW DOES A COMMUNITY KNOW WHO IS A MEMBER?

It is recommended that membership be a transparent situation in each Shambhala community; everyone will know how to become a member, the ways in which a member pledges to support the community, and who are the members of each Center/Group. It is important for membership to be a discrete event in time, so that each new member could actually know on what day and year he or she became a member. (Old members could be grandfathered in, maybe all on a certain date, so long as they are actively supporting the Center) When the act of membership is a public event in the community, and when the ways in which a member pledges to support the Shambhala community are clear, knowing who is a member becomes simple:

Members pledge to support their Centers, and therefore the mandala as a whole, through practice, financial support, and service provision. While it is not possible, or even desirable, for

any of us to judge another person's practice or how much time they feel they have to volunteer, it is possible to monitor financial giving within a community.

Recommendation #15: In addition to developing local guidelines for financial giving, Centers/Groups will develop systems to accurately monitor this activity.

Recommendation #16: Local Centers will develop systems for working with volunteers, including ways to invite and mentor new volunteers. "Best practices" will be shared across centers.

There are many ways to publicly and openly announce membership, including welcome letters to new members from the community, membership ceremonies for new members, listing new members names in the newsletter, adding their names to membership directories, etc. Community events that celebrate and welcome new members add power and support to the process of becoming a member. The skillful means of announcing membership could be decided at the local level.

Recommendation # 17: Every Shambhala center/group will develop ways to let the community know who its members are.

Relating with our members is a natural part of caring for the overall well being of our community. Every Center/Group has members who disappear from the radar screen, often with no follow-up regarding their welfare or why they have disappeared. Monitoring members' financial and volunteer giving should not be done as a way of policing the local situation, but as a way of caring for members by tracking their involvement with the community.

Recommendation #18: Whenever possible, a Shambhala community leader or M.I. should meet face-to-face with members who have ceased to contribute to and associate with the center.

Attempts should be made to understand why the member has disconnected from the community, both as a way to care for the member and as a way to gather information that may be important to the center. If such a member has decided to discontinue their membership, this should be explicitly understood via person-to-person communication.

WHAT ABOUT THOSE WHO WANT TO BE A PART OF THE COMMUNITY'S LIFE AND ACTIVITIES, BUT WHO DO NOT WISH TO JOIN?

Most Centers/Groups in our mandala report a significant number of people (around 25 to 30%, on average) who attend programs and activities but who are not members. Some of these people may eventually become members, but some will never join despite frequent attendance at Center programs. There are many skillful means for working with participants who are not members; these upayas vary from Center to Center depending on size, age of the Center/Group, etc. Even given the variation between Centers/Groups regarding this issue, some general recommendations could be made:

Recommendation # 19: Both members and non-members alike are completely welcome in whatever ways they wish to participate in the mandala, so long as they meet program prerequisites.

All non-members who are regularly active in the Shambhala community will be warmly welcomed and their decision to not become a member should be respected. Every effort will be made to include them in the life of the community. Often the creation of an “out-group” is unintentional, and results from poor or inconsistent communications from the leadership outward. Although there may be some valid exceptions, in general everyone who is active in the Shambhala community, whether members or not, will receive the same information and communication. Examples could include: newsletters, directories, invitations to social and practice events, etc.

Recommendation # 20: Those who are regularly active in the Shambhala community, but who are not members, should understand the Shambhala community has volunteer needs, and that they are welcomed to help out. This invitation should be extended with warmth and without expectation. They should be personally invited to volunteer (some Shambhala communities report that in many cases those who accept invitations to volunteer often end up becoming members).

Recommendation # 21: Those who are regularly active in the Shambhala community, but who are not members, should understand the community has financial needs, and that they are welcomed to help out. This invitation should also be extended with warmth and without expectation. Some ways this has been accomplished in the mandala-at-large include the use of a donation basket, the use of a “Friends of the Shambhala community” category that involves a small monthly donation, higher program fees for non-members, and the use of direct fund-raising efforts. Each Shambhala community should determine the approaches that fit best for them, given their local situation.

INTERNATIONAL MEMBERSHIP

Not everyone lives in a city with a Shambhala group or Shambhala community, or they have other reasons why they cannot be a local member. Often such people are studying Shambhala and/or Buddhist teachings and practicing meditation on their own, and would like to connect with the larger mandala. To date, Shambhala has not had a mechanism for this to happen other than through joining an already existing Shambhala community or Group.

Recommendation # 22: Anyone who has an interest in the activities of Shambhala can join as an International member.

International members are asked to support the mandala-at-large through paying an international membership fee. They are also required to continue to deepen their practice of meditation and their study of the Shambhala Buddhist teachings, as evidenced by connecting with a meditation instructor.

Those interested in International membership can join Shambhala through contacting the core services provider or through signing up on the Shambhala website. International members would receive informational materials about Shambhala, a welcome letter and membership pin, and access to the member's pages on the Shambhala website. Shambhala's core services would connect these members to a meditation instructor who would work with them on-line and/or by phone. These members would also be informed about on-line opportunities for study, such as those currently being offered through Naropa University, as well as Ngedon School. Shambhala core services would be responsible for working out the details of this type of membership and for communicating this information to the mandala-at-large. Shambhala core services would also be responsible for developing and maintaining a list of M.I.s who would be interested in working with International members.

IS MEMBERSHIP EVER MANDATORY?

In some Centers in our mandala, membership has been a requirement in order to attend certain advanced programs.

Recommendation #23: Requisites for attending programs should be set by the entity that has developed the training, usually the Office of Practice & Education. These requisites should not be determined locally as part of a Center's membership policy.

Some advanced programs require a letter of recommendation from the local Center Director. In rare cases an individual may have completed the requisite study and practice to qualify for such a program, but is not yet a member of Shambhala. In such a situation, it is recommended a conversation be held between the student and his/her M.I. or Center Director so that the issues regarding non-membership can be understood and clarified. Following such a conversation, whether or not such a student is a good candidate for an advanced program would be left to the discretion of the person writing the recommendation.

DISCUSSION POINTS

(Please note: this list is not intended to be inclusive of all potential discussion points. You, as the reader, are heartily encouraged to add you own thoughts and concerns to this list, and to discuss them with other Shambhalians.)

1. The Druk Sakyong described the Kingdom of Shambhala as an inclusive, far reaching situation that would include peoples of all religions and walks of life. From this point of view, the Shambhala mandala is much broader than the recommended definition of membership in this document. Some current practical examples of persons who could be included in the mandala but would not necessarily be members (as defined here) include students at Naropa and participants in the Shambhala Institute. Thinking even bigger, the Shambhala world could be said to include contemplatives of all wisdom traditions,

contemplative artists the world over, business people interested in dignifying and uplifting workplaces and commerce, and governmental officials world-wide who are working for peace and compassion. How can a membership policy reflect this larger view, and at the same time draw a practical line regarding who is and who isn't a member? Should it even try to do so? Can one be a citizen of Shambhala without being a member? Is membership a sub-category of citizenship?

2. Some Shambhalian express the belief that a membership definition should explicitly state that when one becomes a member, one is expressing a connection to the three lineages of our teachers (Kagyü, Nyingma, and Shambhala). Others think the entry level connection point is to mindfulness-awareness practice, which may or may not develop into a connection with one or more of the three lineages listed above.
3. Many Shambhalian do not relate to the Sakyong as their primary teacher. Is membership based on a connection to the Sakyong as one's spiritual leader and teacher, or do we think membership could be broader than this?
4. Should membership ever be mandatory? For example, should membership be required for those going to Vajrayana seminary? (FYI: membership has been a requirement for tantrikas in our tradition, although this has not always been enforced).
5. Some Shambhalian believe money should not be tied in any way to membership, even if the amount of money is minimal (such as \$1 per month). Others believe that giving money to the Center in the form of dues is a concrete expression of connection, an important exchange of energy, and a practical way that we can know whom our members are.
6. In some Centers, having a meditation instructor is a perk of membership; one must become a member in order to work with a mediation instructor. Others disagree with this approach, stating that meditation instructors should be available to all persons, whether they are members or not, and that having an M.I. can help one develop towards becoming a member.

APPENDIX A: LOCAL AND CENTRAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Local Responsibilities:

- Designate a membership coordinator.
- Monitor the assignment of meditation instructors to potential members.
- Develop a system for tracking persons new to the Center, including keeping them in the information loop, inviting them to functions, and educating them about membership.
- Develop informational materials about local and mandala-wide membership.
- Coordinate with Shambhala core services; forward names and addresses of all members.
- Develop local dues guidelines and membership categories (if applicable), in writing, and distribute to all members and non-members.
- Administrate volunteer activities, invite and mentor new volunteers.
- Regular monitoring of financial giving, thereby knowing who is a member.
- Create ways to announce and celebrate new members in the community.
- Follow-up with in-active members.
- Develop an approach for soliciting financial and volunteer support from active non-members.

Central/Core Services Responsibilities:

- Develop informational materials about the mandala-at-large to include definition and view of membership, mandala-wide membership policy, etc.
- Create a suggested job description for local membership coordinators.
- Revisit the current system for developing and supporting meditation instructors to be sure that a) the training is adequate, b) the needs of local Centers are being met as regards M.I.s, and c) there is opportunity for continuing education for M.I.s.
- Designate an individual from core services to be a membership liaison to local Centers and to International members. Develop a job description for this individual.
- Send all new members a membership pin and a letter of welcome, along with informational materials about the Shambhala mandala.
- Consult with local Centers regarding membership issues.
- Collect and distribute “best practices” related to dues, volunteering, and other membership concerns.
- Set up the International membership category, including website information, fee structures, and the development of M.I.s for international members.

APPENDIX B: CURRENT MEMBERSHIP PRACTICES

I. Method

Information about current membership approaches across the Mandala was gathered in two ways: (1) The following thirty-two Centers & Groups were queried by members of the Working Group, using a structured interview format (see Appendix B):

- 4 large European Centers (Centers large enough for paid administrative staff)
- 7 small to medium sized European Centers (all volunteer staff)
- 8 European Meditation Groups
- 4 large North American Centers (Paid administrative staff)
- 4 small to medium sized North American Centers (all volunteer staff)
- 4 North American Meditation Groups
- 1 South American Center (all volunteer staff)
-

(2) A brief survey was sent out on Center-talk (see Appendix C). A total of forty-two Centers and Groups responded to this survey, as follows:

- 18 North American Centers
- 15 North American Groups
- 3 European Centers
- 4 European Groups
- 1 Japanese Group
- 1 New Zealand Center

II. Findings

This section attempts to integrate all of the data described above without being too wordy. For the reader who may want further detail, individual interview findings and spreadsheets with Survey findings are available by contacting the Working Group Chairperson (contact information is posted on the Shambhala Congress website).

A. Size Range: Who Knows? Apropos to the questions raised above by this Working Group, many Centers and Groups found it very hard to say how many members they have. There was no standardized approach across Centers/Groups for defining how they counted members. Even among groups with written policies defining membership, records are not always able to be kept. For example, for Centers using the modal definition of membership (money, volunteering, practice), the only easily tracked criteria is financial support, and some all-volunteer Centers have had difficulty tracking even the finances. In Europe, Centers must keep Shambhala Europe informed about how many local members pay dues since they must pay a proportion of the membership dues received. Estimated Group sizes ranged from 4 to twenty-one members. Estimated Center sizes ranged from thirty to six hundred-twenty members.

B. How many of us use tiered membership or participation levels? These types of levels would include “Friends of Shambhala” status, for example, or a level of financial giving, such as Golden Key member. The use of tiered membership levels vary widely across Centers with no discernible pattern of variation. For example, one might expect larger Centers to use a tiered system. In Europe, however, two of the four larger Centers interviewed use a tiered approach, and in North America only one of the four larger Centers interviewed use different membership categories. Paris has three participation categories primarily tied to level of practice involvement: exploring member, friends, and full member. New York was unique among North American larger Centers interviewed with six distinct membership categories tied only to levels of financial giving; discounts and benefits increase with each level of financial giving.

Small to medium sized Centers interviewed also varied regarding use of participation categories. In North America, three of four Centers interviewed have a “Friends” category: the definition of who is assigned to the Friends category, however, is not consistent across these Centers. The European Mid-size Centers also vary in whether they have tiered participation levels, with three of the six interviewed using this category. Shambhala Europe provides a very clear definition of the Friends category, which these Centers seem to have adopted. In Santiago, a three-tiered membership approach is being tested as a simplification of the “confusing” 5-tiered old system.

Of the eleven Meditation Groups interviewed, only one employed a tiered participation system.

C. What are the benefits of membership?

At some Centers, members’ benefits and responsibilities are defined via written policies. For many others, however, there are no clear-cut policies about either the benefits or the responsibilities of membership. Most Meditation Groups do not have written membership policies, about half of the small to medium size Centers have written policies, and all eight of the larger Centers interviewed have written policies. Centers/groups vary widely regarding how membership is introduced, and when, with some of the options including:

- brochures
- through Meditation Instructors
- word of mouth
- at GES level

In Europe, local membership automatically entails membership of the wider mandala - Shambhala Europe and Shambhala International. There is direct communication between SE and the member - the member gets an annual letter from the Director of Shambhala Europe and the monthly Shambhala Europe newsletter. Centers contribute a proportion of their membership dues to Shambhala Europe (as well as a proportion of the income from Shambhala Training programs). These monies fund Shambhala Europe staff posts servicing the membership.

Throughout the mandala, membership means that members can get a user name and password and have access to the “members only” section of the website. Members should also receive

electronic communications from the Shambhala News Service. Current practice seems to suggest that many members are not taking advantage of these possibilities.

There may be other unwritten benefits of membership. The following apply in some Centers: reduction in purchases from the shop, possibility to borrow books and tapes from the center library including transcripts, possibility to have a key to the center.

It is important to remember that when people become members, they do not automatically have access to all parts of the mandala, in particular dharma texts and materials. There are still areas restricted according to level of practice.

D. What are the Responsibilities of Membership?

1. Financial Responsibility: Every group and Center contacted considers financial support as part of membership. There is wide variation, however, on the valence given to this support. Some Centers/Groups see it as the defining characteristic of membership, since it can be measured. Others see it as secondary to commitment to practice. All Centers/Groups have mechanisms for inclusion of those who have limited income. This seems to be a universally shared value, but not a universally communicated practice.

Survey responses from 21 Centers world-wide revealed that about 65% of people who attend their programs are members, and about the same percent pay dues. Some Centers have a suggested dues amount, others leave it open. European Centers have been given suggested dues amounts by Shambhala Europe – some appear to follow this suggestion while others do not. Average dues range for members appears to be around \$35US to \$100US per month.

Financial support for Meditation groups is more relaxed, often because they have little or no overhead expenses. Survey responses from 21 Groups indicate about half of people who come to their programs are members, and about 41% pay dues regularly. Of the groups interviewed, all four North American groups operated on the “collection bowl” system, while 60% of the European Groups interviewed are collecting dues via automatic withdrawal!

2. Volunteering. Volunteering at the Center/Group is a part of most membership policies, whether written or implied. However, there is wide variation in how often this requirement is followed up on by members. Among the 21 Centers who responded to the survey, the percent of program attendees who volunteer regularly ranges from 10% to 60%. There appears to be an interesting correlation between size of Center and percentage of volunteers: the larger the Center, the smaller the percent of total members who volunteer. One Center with 600 members has an 18% volunteer rate: their volunteer director emailed to say this is NOT because they don't need the help! Many Centers and Groups regardless of size note that volunteers need to be invited to help, even if they are already members. To a non-volunteer, the appearance of an “in-crowd” who does everything and needs no help seems to be a frequently appearing phenomena. No one

mentioned any mechanism, formal or informal, for tracking whether members fulfill volunteer obligations.

3. Meditation Practice. All groups and Centers report this as the mainstay of their requirement for membership. The main differences across Centers/Groups seem to be related to how a potential member's commitment to meditation is assessed. In general, most Centers/Groups in North and South America approach one's level of commitment as an individual's personal decision. They would advise consultation with an M.I. regarding membership, but most do not require such a consultation. The Europeans, on the whole, tend to be somewhat more structured about ensuring one has a committed meditation practice – the Shambhala Europe membership policy underscores the importance of the MI in the process of becoming a member and strongly encourages all potential members to talk to their MIs (and also all MIs to talk to their students about this). The three tiers of membership in Paris are presented as linked to the level of individual practice. It should be noted, however, that there are also broad differences in approach across European Centers. For example, at the Marburg Shambhala Center the practice commitment may be to Nalanda or Maitri activities rather than to the Buddhist or Shambhala paths.

- E. Active Non-Members.** Survey results from 21 Centers in Europe and North America indicate that on average, about 35% of people who participate in Center activities are not members. This statistic is subject to various interpretations; the Working Group has discussed the importance of learning more about the 1/3 of folks who attend our Centers but who do not join.

- F. What sorts of programs our students attend.** The Center-talk survey was interested in learning about how many students currently move back and forth with some ease between Buddhist and Shambhala programming. This question is closely related to cultural shifts in status and hierarchy, and also how well we are beginning to integration the notions of Shambhala Society and spiritual path of practice and study.

Survey results for both Centers and Groups reveal that the majority of students attend Buddhist programs/practices and Shambhala Training programs/activities just about equally. A bell-curve pattern was described, where the least numbers of students attended only Buddhist or only Shambhala events. Below are the central tendency results in terms of mean and median for both Centers and Groups:

MEDITATION CENTERS: N = 21 (*responses shown in percentages*)

- A. Attend Buddhist programs/practices exclusively, with no participation in Shambhala Training activities. Mean = 13.47, Median = 10
- B. Attend mostly Buddhist programs/practices, with some participation in Shambhala Training activities. Mean = 19.76, Median = 15
- C. Attend Buddhist programs/practices and Shambhala Training programs/activities just about equally. Mean = 39.42, Median = 40
- D. Attend mostly Shambhala Training activities, with some participation in Buddhist programs/practices. Mean = 16.85, Median = 13
- E. Attend Shambhala Training activities exclusively, with some no participation in Buddhist programs/practices. Mean = 11.09, Median = 10

MEDITATION GROUPS: N = 21 (*responses shown in percentages*)

- A. Attend Buddhist programs/practices exclusively, with no participation in Shambhala Training activities. Mean = 14.33, Median = 0
- B. Attend mostly Buddhist programs/practices, with some participation in Shambhala Training activities. Mean = 15.76, Median = 0
- C. Attend Buddhist programs/practices and Shambhala Training programs/activities just about equally. Mean = 37.81, Median = 30
- D. Attend mostly Shambhala Training activities, with some participation in Buddhist programs/practices. Mean = 21.76, Median = 10
- E. Attend Shambhala Training activities exclusively, with some no participation in Buddhist programs/practices. Mean = 10.33, Median = 0

APPENDIX C: VIEW OF MONEY & COMMITMENT

View of Money and Commitment

From: Shambhala Europe's Finance manual

Written by Ed Kaizer, CFO, Shambhala Europe

Money

In working with money, it is important that we have a good view of what we are doing. It is just as important as having a good view when we practice – understanding what our practice is about and what we are supposed to be trying to accomplish. Working with money can be viewed as a practice, so we should first look at our view of money.

Our job as a sangha can be very simply defined: to preserve, protect, realize and propagate the teachings of the Buddhist Kagyu and Nyingma lineages and the Shambhala lineage. In doing this, we are working with both the teachings, as well as a container to hold the teachings and enable others to connect with them. And in order to build and develop these containers, we need both exertion and money.

The Buddha taught very simply on the importance of treating our bodies well: "If there is no food, there is no body. If there is no body, there is no ability to hear the dharma." Similarly, we could take the view: "If there is no money and no exertion, there is no container. If there is no container, there is nothing to help protect, preserve and propagate the teachings." The Vidyadhara Trungpa Rinpoche also taught about the importance of money for our sangha. In particular, he emphasized that we should regard money as mother's milk: "It nourishes us and it nourishes others". Money is simply energy.

On a very simple and matter-of-fact level, money is important in what we do. We can also move slightly beyond the matter-of-fact level, and not just regard money as a form of energy to help build containers, but also look at and work with money and its relation to our psychological states of mind.

In our world, money is so many things. There are few issues as loaded as money in our daily life of giving and taking. In some sense, in the world of materialism, our whole life becomes reduced to a business deal of trying to take more than we have to give. Money is the means and the measure of this business-deal approach to life. Money is also, like nothing else, the object of passion, aggression and ignorance. And in the world governed by materialism, money actually seems to replace the process of the twelve nidanas as being the cause and the effect of all activity. In fact, money offers us wonderful and delightful possibilities of exploring the depths of samsara.

But for us, according to both the Buddhist and the Shambhalian approaches, we could also develop a very different view of money.

From the Buddhist point of view, starting as beginning practitioners we can work to overcome our neurosis; we can learn to work with our passion, aggression and ignorance relating to money. If we are too loose and sloppy with money, then we can learn to tighten up, to be more precise and mindful with our money. We can learn to watch how we might want to spend money to entertain ourselves, or how we might have an aversion to being careful with money as a form of aggression. If we are too tight, we can watch how we cling to money, how we become insecure when we do not have enough money, how we feel resentful when people ask us for money. Above all, we can develop a sense of precision, carefulness and simplicity in relation to money, as we can to everything else.

On the bodhisattva path, we can also work with money as an object of generosity. Giving money and material objects is one of the aspects of the Dana pârâmita, along with giving protection from fear and giving the dharma. We can practice nonconceptual giving – giving fearlessly, openly and without strings attached.

Equally, as Shambhalians, we can connect with the fundamental richness and sacredness of our world. Rather than feeling poor first, we first can feel rich. We have these precious teachings, we have our community, we have our kingdom, on the spot. We should not have any hesitation about working with money; we should feel confident to cultivate a sense of richness in all that we do. From that sense of richness, that absence of poverty mentality, money flows naturally as an expression of our inner wealth.

This latter point is very important in our view of money. Where there is inspiration and a sense of richness, money will follow naturally. We must trust money as an expression of energy. When people care about and love something, there is no limit to the amount of money they can be willing to contribute. Both Suzuki Roshi and Trungpa Rinpoche expressed this point on a number of occasions. So fundamentally, it is most important to work on our community and our sense of connection to the dharma. If that flourishes, then money will not be a problem. In fact, we can take an even stronger stance on this by acknowledging its opposite: where there is too much money to build a container, and not enough exertion and inspiration, the danger of corruption is very high.

Commitment

In addition to relating and working with money, our job as a finance coordinator also means we work with people's expression of commitment to their path. There are a number of ways that people can express their commitment to their path – in their practice, in their exertion for their community, as well as in their financial contributions. We could say that it is the job of the meditation instructor to work with people's commitment to their practice, and the job of the centre coordinator or director to work with people's exertion for their community. In the same way, we cannot view our work as only the impersonal administration of money; but we must also be willing to relate to people and their commitment to the path, as expressed in their financial support. This requires a lot of sensitivity, too – for while we must relate to their commitment as expressed in their financial support, we should never relate to them solely based on their financial contribution. In our sangha, the human being is always more important than the money flows.

At the time of the Buddha, when Buddhism was generally practiced as a monastic path, the general populace expressed their support of the teachings by supporting the monks – either by giving them food or by offering financial assistance for the monasteries. There was a separation between those who practiced and those who supported. For us, as a community of lay practitioners, the situation is somewhat different. We must practice and support our community at the same time. It is not just our duty to practice; it is also our duty to support the dharma and our connection to the dharma. The Regent expressed this in a talk in 1980 to a group of supporters of Karne Chöling: “It is our duty to

ensure that what we have begun is not interrupted, that what we have cultivated is not corrupted, that what we have given birth to is expanded.”

By supporting the sangha and the teachings financially, we are not just expressing our commitment to support something outside of ourselves, but we are more fundamentally expressing our commitment to supporting the sanity inside of ourselves, at the same time. We are supporting ourselves when we support the sangha and the dharma. The Vidyadhara also expressed this in a talk given to the Ratna society on money and working with money within the sangha:

“Vajradhatu organization has survived because of you; you have survived because of Vajradhatu.”

From this point of view, a financial commitment to the community is actually an important expression of the practitioners’ commitment to their own sanity. It is important that everyone has the opportunity to express that commitment, and actually does so. And when we have a group of people committed to supporting the sangha, then that commitment can have a profound radiance – it can radiate out a sense of strength and a sense of richness to the wider world.

APPENDIX D

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).*

COMMUNITY AS PRACTICE: CONTEMPLATING SHAMBHALA BUDDHIST CULTURE

**A Framework for Discussion offered by
Mary Whetsell, Chairperson, Membership Policy Working Group**

(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 Inskeep 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 Inskeep 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 yanas (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 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.

Issues regarding outreach, inclusion, and welcoming are germane to how the borders of our mandala are determined. Equally important are issues about commitment and responsibility. Who is outside of our mandala and why? Who is inside of our mandala and why? Nowhere are these issues so seemingly polarized than with the question: “Who is a member of our mandala?”. Although some individual Shambhala Centers seem to have answered this question to their own satisfaction, President Reoch notes that our mandala has been unable to develop a unified membership policy since at least the death of the Vidyadhara. Why has this question been so difficult?

Welcoming and Commitment: When discussing membership issues, two main cultural ranks seem to form. The more conservative faction is afraid we’ll let anybody in as a member, whether they have a committed meditation practice or not. At the same time, others are afraid we will inappropriately exclude people from our society. Two continua seem to have emerged in discussing this question. One continuum regards levels of commitment, and one regards levels of welcoming or inclusivity. The various factors are often combined in peoples thinking, for better or worse, forming a continuum that looks like this:

LOWER COMMITMENT, HIGHER COMMITMENT,
HIGHER DEGREE OF ≈ ----- ≡ LOWER DEGREE OF
WELCOMING WELCOMING

The view at the left extreme of the continuum is that anyone who wants to be a member can be a member. No commitment is required, but meditation practice, payment of dues, and volunteering at the Center is **suggested**. Leadership qualifications are not necessarily based on practice/study experience. At this end of the continuum, membership is a self-selected category. Members may or may not be committed to the sitting meditation practice of Shamatha-Vipashyana. Their primary commitment could be to another contemplative discipline, such as ikebana, kyudo, elocution. Their primary teacher may be outside of the Shambhala-Buddhist lineage, they may not relate to a primary teacher at all, or they may self-identify as members of other major mainstream religions. They may be considered members only because someone else in their family is a member (e.g.; a parent, a spouse), whether or not they participate in Center events. Emphasis is on inclusivity, warmth, and welcoming all to our Society.

The view at the right end of the continuum is more similar to how membership was approached in the days of the Vidyadhara: dues, volunteering, and well-delineated practice regimens were required. These activities were monitored, including the practice requirement, and people who did not meet the requirement were subject to losing their member status. Today, our more conservative 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 it's 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!

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.