

President's Tour 2006

This is a brief report from Richard Reoch, President of Shambhala, on his tour of all Shambhala Centres in North America. It took place over the course of 62 days, from 17 September to 18 November 2006. He made a total of 63 stops in all.

After his report, is an update on projected plans for strengthening the central services provided to the mandala.

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THE TOUR

Shambhala Centres on the move

Perhaps the most startling discovery of my tour was that more than half of all our centres in North America are in the process of moving. So many people are attending programs (particularly open-houses, introductory programs and Shambhala levels) that new space is needed. Well over half the centres are:

- Settling into new space they have just acquired
- Looking for new space
- Raising funds to acquire new space
- Reorganizing their existing space to enlarge their shrine rooms
- Using additional space outside their centres (particularly to meet the needs of multiple programming)
- Starting strategic planning to prepare for a move to new space in the near future

Most centres reported increasing numbers of people coming to programs and open-house events, including “Café Shambhala^[AC1]”. They attribute the increased numbers to:

- Publicity for and sales of the Sakyong’s recent books and continuing high levels of sale of the Vidyadhara’s works
- People searching for Shambhala on the internet, or searching for meditation and visiting their centre
- Word-of-mouth conversations that lead people to try meditation or contact Shambhala
- Changed public attitudes towards meditation, particularly as a result of mainstream cover stories in *Time* and *National Geographic*
- Greater name recognition of “Shambhala” thanks to the outreach of the many Shambhala authors, Shambhala Publications, the *Shambhala Sun*, the Shambhala Institute, Naropa University and so on
- Hard work by the legions of Shambhala volunteers who welcome people to their centres, host, and support them in many ways

The Rigden Thangka and Film

Even though many details of the Rigden Shrine are still being worked out, at least half the centres now have the Primordial Rigden thangka framed and displayed over their principal public shrine. A number of others have the thangka and said they were just waiting for further details of the shrine before putting it up. (I received a report from Shambhala Europe that indicated that 23 of the 25 centres now have the thangka in place; the other two are in the process.)

At many centres, I was able to explain our Shambhala Buddhist path in terms of this unique image. It symbolizes the joining of heaven and earth, the union of the secular and the sacred, the inseparability of the masculine and feminine principles, and so on. I encouraged centres to show all their members the film, *Realizing Confidence*, we commissioned while the thangka was being made. Through the profound interaction of the Sakyong with Cynthia Moku, the artist, this short film, edited by Johanna Montgomery, follows the thangka through all the stages of being designed and painted. It explains the meaning of the rich imagery and evokes the lineage of our spiritual inheritance. This lovely film, available in DVD format, is available through the Shambhala Shop. It is worth everyone making sure they have it, or see it!

Honouring the original students

Another wonderful discovery was that at so many of our centres the original students of the Vidyadhara are still deeply and meaningfully engaged in the life of our community. In many places these were the first people who began offering meditation in their homes, then moved from place to place as the growing community needed new locations, including to the present centre. When I met them, I was able to ask when they thought their centre got started. “That was in 1976,” they would say. “Well, then this is your 30th anniversary!” I would reply. “Have you thought of having a celebration?”

In fact, many centres were observing important anniversaries: Boston 35; Atlanta 30; Durham 29, Juneau 15 – with the original people still there, but now augmented with the additional energy of new generations of practitioners. Acknowledging this and celebrating it underlines the fact that our community has come through many difficulties, faced up to many challenges and has grown all the stronger for it.

There was a wonderful appeal to the assembled community in Atlanta by one of the Vidyadhara’s early students. He told everyone how the Vidyadhara used to sit with his students in order to get them to practice. At some nyinthuns, he would eventually be the only one left sitting when all the students had drifted outside to lie down on the grass or have a smoke! He urged all the senior students to follow this noble example and to be present as often as possible [AC2] in the shrine room to practice with the newest arrivals, to offer the strength and warmth and insight of their years of practice as a powerful support and inspiration to everyone else on the path. It was truly a beautiful moment.

Re-articulating the core curriculum

The Sakyong has asked us to gather the potency of our teachings into a unified, clear path of practice and study that fully expresses our unique heritage. We are unique in having received the teachings and practices of the nine yanas of the Buddhist path, the Shambhala cycle of terma, the maitri space awareness teachings, the Shambhala Art teachings, the teachings on Feminine and Masculine principles and so on, as well as the skilful means of the protector principle and the path of the Dorje Kasung. The aim is to present these so that we can taste their distinct qualities, but at the same time understand how they work together to cultivate the full potential of human beings and a flourishing human society.

This year, the Shambhala Office of Practice and Education and a group of acharyas has done a great deal of work on clarifying the path [AC3]. I was able to hand-deliver an update on the revised curriculum to the leadership of every centre. It explained that we will be having a series of regional consultations later this year to ensure that we are able to meet, as far as possible, the many concerns that people have expressed about the need for a more coherent path of study and practice. We are also looking at how our Shambhala world can be more accessible to people leading busy, working lives, with families and needing more affordable programming.

Pilot projects of the new curriculum are taking place in Albany, Boston and Halifax. These initial projects are already yielding a great deal of practical guidance (and wrinkles) about how best we can unfold the curriculum.

Protector Principle and the Dorje Kasung

At almost every centre I visited, we were able to have a Dorje Kasung Mess, to which the entire community was invited. This was a great opportunity to explain the importance of protector principle (which is inherent^[AC4] in all our practices) and the special role that the Dorje Kasung play in manifesting Shambhala Vision. I feel there is a deeper understanding now in our community of the precious practice of kasungship^[AC5], and a much greater awareness of the larger relevance of the Kasung path in working with the energy of aggression. Each Kasung Mess was also an opportunity for me to report on the extraordinary morning of Sunday 17 September when His Holiness the Dalai Lama visited the Great Stupa of Dharmakaya at Shambhala Mountain Center. At that historic event, the Kasung played a major role. Having witnessed the power of Kasung practice, both the federal and state authorities expressed their appreciation for and deep interest in the path of Kasungship.

Families and children

One of the key themes raised at the first two Shambhala Congresses was the importance of further developing programs appropriate for families and children. People have also said how important it is to have an environment that welcomes and supports families and children. This summer we had the first Families and Children conference, organized at Shambhala Mountain Center by the Families and Children Working Group, chaired by Amy Conway. To read more about what was discussed at the conference, please go to http://www.shambhala.org/members/files/pdf/ChildrenFamiliesConference2006_FinalReport.pdf^[AC6]

I was delighted, as I travelled around, to see how many centres are really working on this. Some places have distinctive programming and areas set aside in their space for children's programming. In one centre they said that children were coming from all over the city to attend and then drawing in their parents as well!

Accessibility and diversity

There is a growing awareness of the importance of these issues. At almost every centre I hand-delivered a letter from the Sakyong's Council seeking nominations for an Accessibility Review Group to provide expert guidance to centres moving to new premises or wanting to adapt their facilities to make them more accessible. Virtually all of the centres planning to move are taking this into account.

Thanks to the work of our extremely active Diversity Working Group, chaired by Cortez Rainey, there are individuals in almost all our centres now who are participating in efforts to contemplate and encourage greater diversity. This requires deep reflection: authentic change will not come about without that ground of genuineness. At the same time, much is being done to facilitate change: a North American People of Color Scholarship Fund is being initiated by a number of our leaders in this field, and the

Diversity Working Group has presented the Sakyong's Council with an impressive list of practical recommendations aimed at taking us to the next stage of being a diverse, global mandala.

The Shambhala Commission on the Status of Women and Feminine Principle

Leaders that I spoke to at most centres were well aware of the new Yeshe Tsogyal banner that will be available from the Shambhala Shop for display. The commission has worked on preparing materials and guidance that will help all centres introduce the banner. This was one of the themes of (another!) letter I hand-delivered to centres. It also explained that the Commission is seeking people at all Shambhala Centres to act as a link to the commission. The "links" would help by communicating issues from their centre to the commission and also helping ensure that the suggestions made by the commission are considered at the local level. I felt this idea was well-received and I hope that all centres are now responding to this invitation.

Challenges and issues

One of my goals was to meet and listen to as many people as possible. I think I met almost 4,000 folks and I did my best to invite everyone to say whatever they thought I should know. Many centres and people are experiencing all sorts of challenges – these range from the personal challenge of practice, through to the growing pains of running Shambhala Centres, conducting programs and trying to make ends meet financially. In talking to me, people raised a number of questions. These included:

- questions about understanding our Shambhala Buddhist path
- the importance of contemplating ways to handle conflicts when these arise in our community
- the importance of improving our electronic and internet communication
- how we could further our efforts to turn the flower outward
- the need to improve the ways in which we talk to each other and train people for leadership in the community
- how best to engage the growing energy of the new generation of practitioners in our community
- the importance of clarifying the path of practice and education from the time a person enters a Shambhala Centre through Vajrayana Seminary and the Rigden Abhisheka, right through to the Scorpion Seal retreat^[AC8]
- the need to clarify the role of other teachers who are invited to teach at Shambhala^[AC9] Centres and those who are guiding students in their individual practice
- how best to ensure that the practices of more senior students are respected (as well as their practice environments) and that their role in the community is better understood^[AC10]
- how to make programs more affordable, while still ensuring the financial health of our centres; how to make it easier for students to have affordable access to training programs for Meditation Instructors and Teachers
- questions about the Kingdom of Shambhala and the role of the Sakyong both as spiritual teacher and secular leader

- the role of the Sakyong in determining the current programming of Shambhala and the shrines
- the role of the Sakyong and President in relation to the Shambhala capital in Halifax^[AC11]
- questions about Dr Reggie Ray's role
- the need to ensure continuing care for Tagdrug Mukpo

I was personally touched by the way these kinds of issues were raised. I know there are people who are sceptical or fearful about raising questions. Others are deeply frustrated. I have tried to foster an atmosphere that is more open to genuine listening and that provides a space in which people can express themselves on matters of deep concern to them. Some of the best evenings we had on the tour were when we all just sat together and opened up that space ^[AC13]for whatever people had on their minds. There is so much that we all want to accomplish! Sometimes we feel disheartened by the seeming gulf between what we would like to achieve and what is possible at the present time. Nonetheless, I had the sense that people knew that many of their concerns were being addressed in different ways and that there was increasing space opening up for discussion of how best to move forward.

Feedback

I got a lot of helpful feedback as I went from centre to centre. I'd like to share this message that I received from one of the regional tour coordinators: "The energy and sense of care during his visit really touched the hearts of our sangha and made us feel that we are part of the larger mandala. There was so much warmth and lungta. It is very inspiring that he visited all the centers, met so many sangha members, and ate potlucks with sangha all over North America! His visit really brought our community together in a way that hasn't happened in a long time." Another sangha member said, "The visit really helped us feel more empowered locally, offered very helpful advice, and also raised our awareness about what is happening throughout the rest of Shambhala."

Shambhala Day film

Everywhere I went, I took my video camera along. On Shambhala Day (18 February) everyone should be able to see the results. Gesar Mukpo is editing my footage into a 20-minute sequence showing all 60 centres!

PROJECTED PLANS

During my tour of Shambhala Centres, I gave people a hand-written sheet that gave a very general outline of:

- the Mandala Services (such as practice and education) that sustain the life and work of the mandala
- the governing structure of the mandala: the Kalapa Court, the Sakyong's Council, the Mandala Council and the Congress^[AC14]
- the distribution of funds: the annual turnover of the mandala as a whole is about twelve million US dollars: 45% of that is devoted to our practice and residential centres; 40% is devoted to all the Shambhala Centres; 10% is devoted to the

Mandala Services; 5% goes to support the Sakyong, Kalapa Court, Kalapa Valley and the Kalapa Centre (Europe)

The relatively small percentage that is devoted to the centre of the mandala is simply not adequate to meet the many requests for assistance that we receive, or to support the very real needs of our growing mandala.

Over the past year, we have been putting together a “wish list” of what we would like to achieve in the coming year. It would require almost double what we currently have as our central budget. It sounds ambitious, but it is achievable. The simple method is for every Shambhala household to make a regular recurring donation of \$10 a month to the centre of the mandala. That would virtually double our resources. But, more importantly, it would put our core finances on a stable footing, enabling realistic long-term planning to take place. We would then be able to put in place a workable structure of services and staffing in place for the benefit of the entire mandala.

Apart from the services that we already provide to the mandala, here are some of the highest priority items on the “wish list” we have compiled.

Providing a proper seat for Khandro Tseyang

Many of us, for many years, have been supplicating the lineage for the energy that would manifest in the form of a Sakyong Wangmo to take her seat alongside the Sakyong. That aspiration was fulfilled with the wedding of Khandro Tseyang Ripa to Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche. Their union is an extraordinary karmic confluence of the Mukpo and Ripa lineages, the richness of which we are beginning to witness. Although we had hoped for this moment so for long, when it arrived we found ourselves unprepared. We now need to factor into the central resources of the mandala, a stable budget that will support Khandro Tseyang’s role, provide her with the secretarial and other support that she will need, and ensure her ability to travel throughout the mandala. A small number of very generous donors contributed to this at the end of 2006, but we have to integrate these needs into the central funding of the mandala from 2007 onwards.

Strengthening the services for practice and education

Our tiny team in the Shambhala Office of Practice and Education (Carolyn Mandelker, Jill Scott and Rand Gaynor) is unbelievably overworked. Carolyn alone receives 1,500 emails a day – many are spam – but there is still a huge volume of questions and requests coming in from all over the mandala. We want to be able to respond properly. We also want to provide the kind of detailed advice that practitioners, meditation instructors and teachers are constantly requesting. A major, immediate challenge is the unfolding of the new curriculum and the regional consultations that will be needed to ensure that this next step in the development of our core programming meets the needs of people throughout the mandala. This alone will require proper coordination and the funds needed to make this possible.

Regional cooperation to support local centres, groups and members

Many more people are realizing that we could greatly strengthen the whole fabric of our mandala if we could cooperate a lot more at the regional level. Shambhala Centres have already seen the benefits of arranging regional teaching visits: better planning, lower costs, wider and more effective publicity. The same is true for scheduling Shambhala Training levels so that participants can see what is offered throughout the same region. There are a growing number of areas where this kind of regional planning and coordination is taking place, and a growing interest in making this much more systematic.

The Dorje Kasung already have a functioning regional structure^[AC15], which clearly demonstrates the effectiveness of this model in terms of communication, training and overall coordination. Shambhala Europe is a shining example of what can happen, and how a good regional structure greatly strengthens and supports the efforts of local centres and groups.

On my tour of North American centres, a number of people proposed the idea of organizing the Sakyong's visits by region. The Sakyong was extremely interested in this idea when I reported on my trip. He would be delighted to organize his annual schedule to ensure that he visits each and every region in the mandala at least once a year. This could be coordinated on a regional level, with each centre in each region having the opportunity to host him once a year – and with the region as a whole making a commitment to make the visit a regional event which everyone would attend. This would benefit each centre in turn, while strengthening the region as a whole every single time.

Developing this kind of regional structure would likely be the most logical way forward for building a user-friendly network of services to support local centres, groups and members. It would need to be carefully thought through and budgeted, but with the kind of stable financial model we are trying to put in place, it would certainly start to be possible.^[AC16]

Supporting a diverse, global mandala

Our dynamic Diversity Working Group, chaired by Cortez Rainey, has made a wide-ranging set of recommendations that would dramatically increase the support we give to new groups and members who are establishing themselves in regions throughout the world into which Shambhala is expanding. Many of the recommendations would enable people to attend international programs and participate in training for Meditation Instructors and teachers. Other ideas are to speed up our experiments with distance learning, increase the range of texts available in languages other than English, and introduce a mentor program specifically aimed at helping developing groups.

The Sakyong's Council has warmly welcomed the proposals and is taking the initiative to examine how we can put all this into effect. Not all the recommendations require additional funding. Many simply require us to identify existing skills and expertise within the mandala (such as bilingual Meditation Instructors and teachers) that can be deployed in this innovative work. Other recommendations that do require

additional funding (such as seriously investing resources in global travel to international programs and events) are now being reviewed so that we can factor the funding we will need into the next stage of serving the mandala.

Regional acharya and development in Latin America

This past year, Acharya Simon Luna held several discussions with the Sakyong about the direction and vision for Shambhala in South America. He identified two key areas to focus on:

- finding and funding city centres and land retreat centres in both Chile and Brazil, to give the sanghas there the necessary stability and space for group practice so that they can deepen and grow, and invite in new practitioners
- making the dharma more accessible in Spanish and Portuguese translations throughout Latin America.

For the land and city centres, Rinpoche said the first step should be to bring Eva Wong to visit and offer her Feng Shui expertise. Her assessment is important so that we align with the local dralas, and don't waste our energies in the wrong direction.^[AC17] The South American sanghas have enthusiastically invited her to come in November-December of next year. There is now a group of "Drala Detectors" exploring possible sites in Brazil, and a similar initiative will take place in Chile.

The second point about translations and accessible publications also was raised in the Diversity Report put together by Cortez Rainey, and in communications with the Sakyong's editor, Emily Sell, and with translators in Mexico, Chile, Spain, and Brazil. Translations are very challenging, and will require substantial investment – which is essential if the dharma is to expand in those cultures.

Another pressing concern in South America is finding the funds to continue to support Acharya Simon Luna in his work. The Shambhala Trust graciously funded him over the past two years. Those funds are now exhausted. Our ability to continue supporting his vital work is dependent on the additional funding we are seeking to strengthen our Mandala Services.

New website and communication services

As a result of the tremendous work done by the Technology Working Group, chaired by Holly Gayley, the Networking Shambhala Conference, convened by Mary Whetsell, the extensive work done by the Shambhala Europe team of Chris Tamdjidi, Bernard Spiegeler and Ed Kaiser, the members of the Shambhala Council on Information Technology and the Dorje Kasung Communications Group, we are making significant improvements in our communication technology:

- a new website is being designed and will go live this year
- new website templates for Shambhala Centres have been designed and are starting go live: 30 Shambhala Centres are in line for the new templates and others are signing up for this service

- the Shambhala Database developed and tested in Europe is now being extended to the whole mandala; a majority of Shambhala Centres in North America are now using it or transferring data to it
- a wide range of possibilities were discussed at the Networking Shambhala Conference, held in Boston in November. Among the key recommendations was to create an overall coordinating communications group for the mandala that would help ensure coherence as we move forward.

All these initiatives are going to require resources to ensure their sustainability. We will need to have professional staff and facilities to maintain the website, support the database, keep the infrastructure up-to-date and respond to requests from the community.

Sharing best practices

There is an untapped wealth of experience and creativity available from so many of our Shambhala Centres. Centre directors and others are realizing that we could all benefit from this if it could be shared in a systematic and easily accessible way. The Mandala Structure and Governance Working Group, chaired by Joe Inskip, has been working on how this could be done, in conjunction with Lodro Rinzler who represents all Shambhala Centres on the Sakyong's Council. When the new Shambhala website goes live, it will have a Best Practices section, 'stewards' have been found for most of the sections and people have started to collect content to post. We want to really create a lively and user-friendly way in which people can share their experience, identify helpful solutions to common problems and get easily accessible help and support from each other.

Strengthening our financial and development services

Our overstretched team in the Shambhala Office of Finance and Development (Terry Rudderham, Patricia Bennett and Dangang Lui) are struggling heroically with the volume of financial and development work that is needed to service this vital (but often unseen) aspect of the health of our mandala. We need to add two positions to bring this team up to full strength—so that our financial reports are timely, so that we can respond quickly to the many, many inquiries we receive from Shambhala Centres worldwide, and so that we can be far more proactive in managing the resources of the mandala as a whole.

Cohesive planning and governance

At a recent gathering that the Sakyong convened of Shambhala leaders from across the mandala, he made it clear that we are moving into a phase of development that requires more cohesive overall planning and governance. This is necessary to set financial priorities for large projects that require mandala-wide investment, to ensure that there is more cooperation among urban centres and the practice centres, to create more coherent planning of major programs and give greater clarity to students about the path of practice and education offered by Shambhala. The Sakyong expressed that achieving this cohesiveness is now much more possible than it was previously. To make it happen will depend in part on the regional cooperation described above as well as strengthening the capacity of the centre of the mandala to offer the services everyone is asking for.

(Note: this list is not in any particular order of priority. Developing a budget for the coming year and assigning priorities is a responsibility of the Sakyong's Council, which will be examining what is possible in light of the fund-raising efforts now underway.)