

Meeting Management

There are a number of important aspects of meetings, especially in the Shambhala context.

- Preparing the ground
- Forms for meetings
- Managing an meeting with agenda
- Creating and open space for discussion

Preparing the Ground

One of the most important and oft overlooked principles for meetings is laying the physical ground. Make sure a room is clean and physically arranged in an uplifting way, with a picture of the Sakyong and/or Vidyadhara, and incense. Place the chairs/cushions in a circle as much as possible so that everyone can see each other.

One of the more interesting examples of preparing a meeting space is contained in the *Memoirs of Sir Nyima Sangpo*—a text written by the Vidyadhara which is received at Kalapa Assembly. This text is remarkable in its rich description of certain settings where meetings take place. One room is described as follows:

The twenty-ninth day of the Lunar calendar was chosen for the meeting. The meeting was to be held in the Sun room. This room is decorated with fine portraits of the Rigdens and has a deep golden-yellow velvet wallpaper and gold leafed trim. The ceilings of this room are beautifully decorated with the symbols of the Four Dignities, alternating with Ki Ki So So Calligraphies. On the day of the meeting appropriate incense was lit, signifying a Court conference atmosphere...The floor of plain Oak wood, had low cushions on it, and small black writing tables were provided for each member at the meeting. Black leather folders, embossed in gold, with the government seal, and writing instruments embossed with a small Ashe, were placed on each table...

One can imagine what kind of meeting atmosphere is created in such a space.

Forms for Meetings

One of the essential points about a good meeting is to encourage people to overcome their own habitual patterns and discursiveness, surrender their own personal agenda, and open to the situation, the group intelligence, so that good decisions can be reached and it is possible to reach consensus. There are a number of forms which are extremely helpful for this including:

- Taking a moment to touch one's own state of mind before a meeting—feeling where one is.
- Five minutes of meditation before a meeting
- Starting the meeting with a bow to mark a definite boundary between our ordinary discursive minds and the mental space of the meeting
- Stopping occasionally, especially when the atmosphere gets intense or too painful, to practice, or even raise Lungta. This is very helpful if there are many or difficult matters to attend to because it keeps peoples awareness precise and open.
- Close meetings with a dedication of merit.

Managing a Meeting with Agenda

Some meetings have clear goals. There are matters that need to be attended to, and limited resources, in particular the time of the volunteers working for the centre or groups and attending the meetings. Thus it is important for such meetings to manage them well, and includes such points as:

- Clearly determine which meetings are necessary for making basic decisions and seeing to regular tasks. These meetings should have very focused agendas. Articulate which meetings are more open for general discussion to resolve a problem or get wide input.
- Decide on the agenda and send it out in advance, with topics and times on the agenda.
- Discuss issues as they arise. Focus should be on the people who are responsible for a particular issue. Make a decision based on pre-prepared material; do not try to develop all things in meeting, or make guesses when facts are required.
- Make a decision and record it in the minutes. The best decisions are those based on consensus – consensus based decision making should be used..
- Assign responsibility for follow up and next steps.

- Defer any issues where there is disagreement to another meeting (maybe especially for this issue, so that it does not swamp other issues), or defer issues where more facts or input from other people is required.
- Keep minutes of each meeting, including decisions as well as things to do.
- Between meetings, the director/coordinator keeps an eye on agreed-upon responsibilities to ensure that they are followed up on, and that tasks are taken care of. Everyone should be reminded of his or her responsibilities between meetings, and if a problem is identified, this should be discussed between meetings.

Creating an Open Space for Discussion

Some meetings should not have a focused agenda, but are more to gather views from people or to touch difficult issues—to allow people to express themselves and share difficult experiences. For such meetings, a talking circle format is much more suitable, as laid out in the Community Leadership section in this manual. .