

## PLEASE EMPOWER THE DISCIPLES

This feels like an exciting time in Shambhala, with a sense of openness and reflection on how to proceed. Mine own aspiration is that this diverse community, Shambhala will grow much larger, into a full fledged society. We do have so much to offer the world. The dharma is the best product there is, and the world could certainly use it. As I see it adapting the dharma to the current cultural time is the main challenge. While I feel a profound heart connection with Shambhala Buddhism, I, like most people, have my ideas of how to reform the current manifestation of Shambhala culture. I believe that reform would be very helpful to the current membership and in attracting larger numbers of new members.

While I would love to see Shambhala as a full fledged society, if it were, I don't know if I would move there. I cannot imagine on a voluntary basis that I would submit myself to taxation without representation. I don't understand why large numbers of others would either. After all Shambhalian come from places like the United States, Canada, England, and France. We do not have a big following in Iran, and Saudi Arabia. Representation does not seem to be an important idea in Shambhalian political culture. Communication is very important, which is why the Congress is such a big step forward. But communication is not representation.

I am not advocating that Shambhala become a democracy. I do not believe we should vote on a new Sakyong each four years. The Sakyong is at the center of Shambhala and we need to have non- theistic devotion to him. The notion of natural hierarchy makes sense to me, but the culture of hierarchy as it has evolved in Shambhala, does not. I am not sure how natural, the political hierarchy of Shambhala is. I do know that an important aspect of Shambhala culture is genuineness. In genuineness maybe the natural hierarchy isn't so steep. Joining heaven and earth is the central issue in creating harmony in society. In Shambhala political culture we have a very empowered heaven, and that's great. The problem I see is that the earth is not empowered. The wisdom of the earth, as in the will of the people, has no legal power to affect decisions in Shambhala, except to the degree that heaven chooses to listen. I believe that the wisdom of the earth deserves a little more than that, particularly as it's matured over all these years. We can be trusted. I hope that Shambhala political culture evolves from one that is just top down to one that is both top down and bottom up. Therefore heaven and earth can really be joined. Precisely what the form would look like I don't know. Perhaps an empowered deleg system would appoint half the members of a board and the other half would be appointed by the Sakyong or his representatives. Perhaps there would be higher and lower boards, both of which were needed to create policy. I am not at all attached to the form, but I am attached to the principle of some type of representational governance structure. Even the Tibetans under the Dahlia Lama have moved in this direction.

As politics and economics are so closely related, changing the political structure of Shambhala could have an effect on the economic structure. In Shambhala we vote with our wallets. The more connected we feel the more likely we are to attend programs and make donations. The more alienated we feel the less likely we are to participate, in any way, including financial.

Empowering the earth could expand the wellbeing of the memberships. Living in a community where one has no power, even though one has a strong connection to practice, creates lack of inspiration for the community and alienation. In order to expand significantly it would be helpful to have a community not just where people can come in and learn and practice the dharma. It would be great if the membership felt very positive about the society that they are part of. I think having some say in how that society operates would go a long way. Everybody wants to feel included, rather than excluded, in decision making that affects them. With such small numbers, under 10,000, all be it geographically and politically diverse, we can do a lot better in this regard. It's hard to imagine that with a top down structure alone, the different opinions feel represented. Certainly there is a greater chance that the diverse elements will feel included if the earth is empowered. If we look around the world very few societies are just top down. The membership should know that nobody is above the law, so that justice is genuine.

It appears that something is not working correctly in Shambhala. There are many reforms I believe that would be helpful, but at the heart of it empowering the earth will affect many other aspects of Shambhala culture. I think that now is the time for the Sakyong to truly, please empower the disciples.