

THE SHAMBHALA MANDALA – A Partnership Model

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What we are doing here is not trying to get together set patterns and ideas, ideologies or theologies, We are not trying to develop a set idea of what a mandala is or isn't. We are more trying to relate to what a mandala might be or could be. There is no dogma involved at this point at all. It is more a question of developing a working basis for working together.

-- Chogyam Trungpa, Rinpoche, Orderly Chaos, 1972.

There is a broad need within the Shambhala Mandala to take a fresh look at the structures and relationships of governance in our society. This need has been expressed by the leaders of major Shambhala Centers, has been articulated by the President and the Board of Shambhala International, and reflects the direction given in the Sakyong's *Treatise on Society and Organization*. We are called upon to develop a new set of mandala-wide understandings that reflect the opportunities of our present stage of development and preserve the spiritual vision of the Druk Sakyong and Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche. This document is offered as a starting point for that discussion. We hope it will be a living document whose final shape will be defined in consultation with the leadership of the mandala over the coming months.

I. We begin by affirming two defining truths concerning the structure of the mandala:

1. The Sakyong Is the Center of the Mandala

The Shambhala Mandala manifests through the agency of the heavenly-appointed Sakyong, "he who joins heaven and earth." The entire mandala has a single, definite, indisputable center on which it depends and from which it emanates. The Sakyong's most immediate extension is the Kalapa Court.

The Sakyong is the source of the forms, practices, and activities that are Shambhala and make it recognizable. The entire mandala is permeated by the power of the Sakyong. In that context, such notions as mandala, hierarchy, and loyalty enter our discourse and give content to our efforts to organize ourselves as a coherent social body.

2. The Principle of the Unified Mandala

Shambhala is an integrated entity with a unified central vision that pervades the entire mandala. By contrast, we are not a loose confederation of autonomous enterprises associated for no greater purpose than the preservation of their particular self-interests. As an integrated entity, we can understand the concepts of “inner,” “outer,” and “boundary” with respect to our mandala.

Therefore, *the Shambhala Mandala can be broadly inclusive and allow for considerable diversity and autonomy.* Shambhala was originated with and has been guided by the intent to include a wide ranging network of participants; principally, the practice centers such as Shambhala Mountain Center, Karme Choling, and so on, and the local Shambhala Centers. These centers are integral parts of the mandala vision of the Sakyong, from which their existence finds meaning. The activities of the centers are bound to the Sakyong and the Kalapa Court, as well as to each other, in a dynamic relationship of hierarchy and interdependency.

II. Here we describe Shambhala as a participant in world society:

1. The Enlightened Society

Our heritage is the vast, profound, and precise vision of the Kingdom of Shambhala, the enlightened society. It is a world-transformative vision with roots in the traditions of warrior societies of the past and the spiritual depth of Vajrayana Buddhism. The enlightened society is a profound antidote to the widespread cultural bankruptcy that the Druk Sakyong referred to as the “Setting Sun.”

2. The Task at Hand

That vision has barely begun to manifest. We are thirty years into the journey of a millennium. *Our immediate geopolitical task is to anchor Shambhala in this world so that it may begin to influence its host.* In today’s world that requires becoming thoroughly engaged as a recognizable entity within the institutions and processes that constitute the dominant cultures.

This brings us to the question of how to accomplish this task, which begins with assessing our own condition.

III. We are seeing the emergence of a new Shambhala Mandala:

The critical administrative transformation taking place appears to be from a “monolithic” structure directed and defined by a central body to a world-wide network of partner organizations associated through a central service provider. Our task now is to adapt our structures to join the fundamental principles of our mandala with this emerging reality.

1. A Glimpse Back

Over the past thirty years, Shambhala has seen the highly centralized form of government created by the Druk Sakyong pass through a period of disintegration following his death to resurface significantly altered as a far more diffuse structure characterized by a significant number of strong and capable local centers and the progressive devolution of the central administrative role. Finally, we have the recent realignment of the Kalapa Court as the center of the government mandala, marked by the installation of the President within the Kalapa Court and the convening of the Consultative Congress.

2. The “Organization” and the “Community”

Our general understanding of the role of the “organization” or “administration” within the larger mandala is also changing. *The organization no longer defines the community, but is an aspect of community at both the local and international levels.* This is an expansion of our understanding of Shambhala as a society that includes but is not limited to an administrative component. In the words of the *Treatise on Society and Organization*: “Developing our view of what Shambhala society is and could be will no doubt involve an ongoing search and experimentation, rooted in these questions: Can the organization be a stem, and the society the flower? Can the organization be the bones, and the society the flesh and the heart?”

It may be hoped that this view will create the conditions for the administration to assume its proper function and dimension within a society liberated of the concept that it has no purpose broader than its own administration.

3. The Rise of the Local Centers

Within what was once seen as a single organization, several of the principal constituents have become substantial organizations in themselves. *Both practice centers and mature local centers (“major centers”) are becoming essentially self-governing and capable of operating at a high level of teaching and technical sophistication.* These entities house and manage a substantial percentage of the people and resources of the mandala, have become our primary points of development and transmission of the Shambhala dharma, and are clearly key participants in the mandala.

4. Local Autonomy

As these major centers continue to develop, *the pressure for increased autonomy, responsibility, and participation has grown – and legitimately so.* This has been demonstrated in the trend of the last two years toward empowering local governing boards, separate incorporation of local centers, an increased volume of real estate acquisitions, dharma programming initiatives, and a heightened level of local financial activity. This development has vastly expanded the capacity and creativity of the entire mandala and has opened up leadership opportunities among the members of the sangha.

5. A Network of Partners

The time has come to acknowledge these changes in our internal relationships, and to understand this blossoming of local strength as part of a much broader process of the maturing of our mandala: we have come to a new stage of development. The need now is for a framework within which we can work collaboratively to understand these new relationships and adjust our forms accordingly, guided by the critical characteristics of the Shambhala mandala itself.

We now need to examine how, within the broad framework of a single mandala, we can best support the reality of a diverse community of mature and developing centers and other institutions. *The practicalities of the situation itself lead us to see ourselves as creating a network of partners* that brings the centers and organizations together and accommodates their specific local governance prerogatives. The intent is to provide solid connections, rather than central authority.

6. Empowering the Stakeholders

Within this new structure, mature centers would become full stakeholders in Shambhala International. To do so, they must expand their knowledge of and responsibility for the well-being of the entire mandala while continuing to manage and devote energy to their particular interests. To do so, they need to be empowered so that they can exercise their appropriate voices in fulfilling those dual responsibilities.

7. Rebuilding a Central Administration around Critical Services

Since the passing of the political relationships of the era of the Druk Sakyong, *the central administration has held an ambiguous seat within the mandala*, often unable to define or express itself coherently to a community that sometimes saw it as a valuable resource and reference point, sometimes as an ineffectual but arrogant parasite, and, perhaps most often, as a shadowy nonentity. Of these, only the first provides a useful paradigm.

If we take the partnership model as the starting point, as one's understanding expands to include the entire mandala, it will become apparent that *there are some services that are of a mandala-wide nature* and cannot be self-provided by individual centers. Identifying and prioritizing these services is the ground for reconfiguring a central administration around the critical support functions that require a mandala-wide provider. The key term here is "service" -- rather than "command and control" -- based on supporting and meeting the needs of the individuals and institutions of the mandala, but acting within a common framework of values and principles. These services must respond directly to the needs and aspirations of the community and be accountable to the community under the supervision of the central leadership.

IV. What now?

Theory precedes praxis, but not by much. It is in the nature of the partnership model that the ideas sketched out in this outline should be disseminated and discussed, with the expectation that the members of the mandala will reach agreement on at least the

basic principles and identify the questions that need further consideration. The Kalapa Court and the International Board, on the Sakyong's direction, will take responsibility to host the initial forum at the Consultative Congress and, in that context, to bring forward specific proposals exploring methods of implementing the principles stated above.