

Chicago Sangha Gathering — Aug 28, 2020

Event Summary

A meeting was called to connect with Sangha members after many months of absence due to covid-19. This invitation link was sent with the newsletter “It’s a busy August at Chicago Shambhala...” on August 10: [Chicago Shambhala Sangha Gathering](#). 25 participants joined the zoom call.

Guest speaker Shastri Mark Blumenfeld spoke about being on the Shambhala Board of Directors, realizing that a lot happens that isn’t evident from the monthly communications from the Board. In his experience, this is an unusual executive body, where everyone’s view is heard. When there is not 100% agreement on all things, minority viewpoints are represented. They need to be very careful about their communications, because uncoordinated social media posts have resulted in much pain.

The Board members are extraordinary and accomplished; they dedicate a lot of time and carry a unique responsibility in this transition time for Shambhala. They come from all over, but don’t try to represent particular constituencies; they sense and feel the whole community. They are charged with fiduciary and legal responsibilities, as well as caring for the well-being of the community.

They were initially assembled in 2018 by the Transition Task Force, and operate independently from the Sakyong and the Potrang (organization representing the lineage of Sakyongs); however, they consult regularly with members of the Potrang Board, as well as with the Process Team (also appointed by the Transition Task Force). They can replace members of the Board who step down, and will operate until October of 2021. Although the Potrang is a controlling element of Shambhala, the Sakyong has committed to refrain from governance during this period. The Board operates by consensus; each decision includes a minority report if needed. They do not have the power to change the by-laws or revise the charter of Shambhala; they are in dialog with the representatives of the Sakyong, and with the process team, about possible changes or restructuring of the organization going forward. They are also talking with Lady Diana, and with Acharyas and former Acharyas.

They agree that, at this time, it is important to allow space for creativity and for sparks to fly—a time for seeing what can happen. Although it is something of a 3-ring circus, it would be sad to shut that down. We need to accommodate a lot, without losing our depth.

The Process Team group on governance has developed several potential models for governance of a future organization, that are under discussion. In recent months, we’ve also heard from the Care & Conduct Group who have circulated a new [Code of Conduct for Shambhala](#). The Survey Group conducted the Sense of Shambhala Survey, and has reported on the [initial quantitative results](#); the qualitative analysis, summarizing the text responses (“Part 4”), is expected in October.

We broke into small groups for discussion of our concerns and aspirations over the next year. This summary combines comments on the same topics from more than one group.

Concern was expressed about the loss of many members. Whatever comes next must be something people can buy into, and will attract new members.

Supplication for the Board to give property control to the Center—we bought it, and are responsible for it, but don’t have authority over it. We need to be able to decide how we want to go forward, so

we need clarity about our legal and financial responsibilities to Shambhala Global Services and the Potrang.

The hierarchical nature of the organization seems problematic—there were Congresses in the past, but then focus and authority became centered on Sakyong. Some of us have issues with too much concentration of power, and concern with his and the central organization's response/lack of response to failures in the care and conduct situation. Perhaps there is a clash of cultures: Tibetan vs Western ways.

How will practice & education evolve? Right now a vacuum. Need for diverse voices & teachings. How to magnetize participation? Suggestion for interest groups, study groups, support groups.

This is not the first time Shambhala has experienced a crisis—30 years ago with the Vajra Regent situation. What's important is what we offer; we have core competence in teaching meditation. Important to maintain what we have. Our community can rally around the teachings and practices.

Concern with a split between offering a big umbrella vs. a single lineage, can we be open to both?

After the discussion, Mark mentioned that the Board is exploring how to learn more about concerns of city centers, so we should expect to be hearing from them. He also recommended the Shambhala Online class: Right Use of Power (Here is the registration link to share with leadership:

<https://shambhalaonline.org/calendar-details/?id=453221>)

This will help with changing the culture of power dynamics in shambhala, where many people felt hurt, by helping us to see and label power issues.

—Shambhala Chicago Governing Council