

Recommendations Drawn from Shambhala Community Conversations on Practice and Study

This document examines the Practice and Study Paths series of Shambhala Community Conversations between February and April. These eight conversations were open to anyone, and each included between eight and 25 participants.

Each conversation has been transcribed, summarized, or both by the Shambhala Community Conversations team. Transcripts and summaries of all conversations are available in [this Google Drive folder](#). We highly recommend reading these transcripts and summaries as an immediate record of the Shambhala community's voices on practice and education issues.

Our team, members of the Process Team's Paths, Teachings, and Practices Working Group, has worked to synthesize these conversations toward answering the following question:

What core principles, if the Shambhala community adopts them in relating across our differences, seem most aligned with the best future in terms of our paths, teachings, and practices?

Format

We have identified four emerging principles from this process. They are listed below.

Each principle has a succinct description, followed by a "Relevant quotes" section of quotes that support, elaborate on, or highlight challenges with each principle.

Each quote is referenced by its date; quotes and the surrounding conversations can be accessed in the [Google Drive folder](#) containing transcripts and summaries of all Practice and Study Paths conversations.

Note that we have also included one relevant quote from a Community Conversation on Governance, and three from Community Conversations on Belonging in Shambhala. As those conversations reside in a different folder, we have linked directly to their transcripts rather than providing a date identifier.

One member contributed notes on the process of developing this document, and requests of the assessor team: please see "Open Response to Both Assessors," immediately after principle 4.

Team Members

Four members of the Process Team's Paths, Teachings, and Practices working group contributed the emerging principles:

1. Bob Stevens
2. Frederick Meyer
3. Nora Wiser
4. Sherab Manoukian

One member contributed the Open Response to Both Assessors:

1. Ron Vine

Two members contributed comments and suggestions to the emerging principles:

1. Mary Fahrenfort
2. Susie Vincent

Emerging Principles

1. We should respect and appreciate everybody's path, and should not disparage others' paths.

In particular, we should not disparage other people's relationship with, or choice not to be in relationship with, the Sakyong.

Relevant quotes:

"You can't practice when you're surrounded by people who hate your guru. It's very, very difficult when you don't feel safe in your practice environment, or in your meditation centre." ([Link](#))

"The Dharma has so many languages, and so many paths. And actually, each of all, each of us has their own path, their own interpretation, we couldn't even help it. So the only thing we have to do is to let other people realize that other people have their own paths, and leave them be instead of saying they should do this or that." (2/27/21)

"We need to be respectful of people's connections to their teacher." (3/5/21)

"For me, the elephant in the room is and what I find heartbreaking is that [the Sakyong's] teaching again, but he's unable to do it in the container that was constructed for the transmission of the teachings and that his students, not me alone, but me for one for sure. Feeling welcomed in my own center. That's the elephant for me. That's the discomfort. So adding more pictures, you know, Gampo Abbey, Pema put her picture up instead of the Sakyong's. Hard to practice in that room too." (3/30/21)

"I think the people who don't want to relate to the Sakyong or think he's unfit, need to let us have him. And let us have his picture on the shrine and not consider that an endorsement of the kind of behavior that was revealed in the Sunshine Report... So that's what the people who can't relate to the Sakyong need to do, they need to let us have him and respect us and not cancel us. And then the people who are relating to the Sakyong need to allow the people who don't to be full members of the community." (3/30/21)

"Having a higher tolerance for, and appreciation for diversity, in terms of paths and practices within Shambhala, is important. Accepting others and their diverse paths, and being inclusive and kind to all, is vital." (3/5/21)

2. We should follow our individual paths, under a shared umbrella of basic goodness and enlightened society.

The “pole” of the umbrella is the Shambhala terma, beginning with the core principle of basic goodness and its expression as enlightened society.

The umbrella includes under it all valid wisdom traditions:

-Including, centrally:

- The Shambhala teachings;
- Shambhala Buddhism (including its Vajrayana component leading through Scorpion Seal);
- Kagyu/Nyingma Buddhism;
- Shambhala’s many forms of culture, arts, and decorum, with their various influences from bon, Shinto, etc.;

-Drawing inspiration from other authentic wisdom traditions; and

-Inviting in anyone - from any or no tradition - who is inspired by the central teachings of basic goodness and enlightened society in the Shambhala terma.

Shambhaliens *may* choose a Vajrayana guru relationship with the Sakyong, *may* study with other Vajrayana teachers, or *may* choose a path that never involves Vajrayana, without any real or implied sense of one path being better than any other.

Within this umbrella of paths, we will also need to do a better job than we have done to support diverse lived experiences (age, ethnicity, gender and sexual identity, socioeconomic status, etc.)

Relevant quotes:

“We’re all one family, we all want to be under the same umbrella, regardless of differences, juicy as they may be. And we all want to be respected and not have arguments, and get along. . . We all have to recognize and live these teachings which say that emptiness and compassion, basically openness, is to allow people to have their differing views.” Transcript 3/30/21

“Having a ‘big umbrella’ in Shambhala, where people can feel free to study with other teachers and do the practices that inspire them, is important -- seemed to be important to everyone in our breakout group.” Summary 3/5/21

“How can our community move forward together under a multi path umbrella when there are disagreements around pictures on our walls?” 3/30/21

“When we talk about the umbrella, we don’t acknowledge the core post that hold it up -- a big tent without a core central pole is not attractive.” (3/19/21)

“Having opportunities for all the students of Shambhala to share in practicing, administrating, and teaching in centres is the direction that seems healthiest. The umbrella, with a space for all of us. Dialogues together once centres are open again might be helpful.” 3/30/21

“I feel like things are more workable now even after a few conversations. I’m interested in Big Tent Shambhala where there is activity of the Sakyong, other paths set in play by LDM, a path supported by SGS and other teachers welcome. I see our community as a large gathering of impossible views, much like a large family gathering where there are different politics, but we are bound by blood. In this case we are bound by our connection to the terma.” (3/19/21)

“I miss the time when we had other realized teachers coming to our community. The more Rimé time in our sangha.” ([Link](#))

“When I first started coming into Shambhala, and when I had this sense that it was very accommodating, and there was not well you’re a vajrayana student and you’re not.” (3/30/21)

“I feel there has not been a lot of healing yet. We still need more time to really understand what has happened. When I hear that people felt excluded because as Mahayana practitioners they were treated as lesser, it makes me so sad. We need to understand much better, what is meant by ‘yana,’ what are the yanas. We need to acknowledge that practice paths are very individual.” (4/11/21)

“We first have to clear the ground. As long as we are a split sangha, it will be very difficult to continue. If no lineage, it will be very difficult.” (3/5/21)

“A Shambhala center needs the reference to the lineage, the Mukpo lineage. The purpose of a Shambhala center is the battle with ego and what results from it, for example resulting from it is enlightened society. This battle with ego is absolutely essential. Ego is the greatest trickster’. All practice and study should be directed to the realization of ego; everything else everything else will follow. Without a lineage holder, in the form of a father, friend, guru, ego will take over.” (4/11/21)

“There are Vajrayana students that have asked the Sakyong to be released from their samaya vows, such as myself, yet still feel a deep connection to the Shambhala sangha, the Shambhala teachings and Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche. In order to be able to continue with their Vajrayana journey they need guidance from other Kagyü and/or Nyingma Lineage masters.” (3/5/21)

“Somehow we need to reconcile or we will either divorce or just live on opposite sides of a large tent ... and that would be heartbreaking.” (2/27/21)

“To be Shambhalian is to be open to the world in its greatest and deepest dimensions. I hope for cultural and social contributions from elsewhere, that we can recognize as being ours and that we don't do things in isolation.” (4/4/21)

“There's always been an interesting complication about the fact that the Shambhala path is presented as a secular path and non-sectarian right off the bat. The whole idea was to have human beings be able to communicate with each other their wisdom in a non-sectarian way. I thought that so brilliant. . . That's what I appreciate about it, that people do not have to be Buddhist in order to be Shambhalians.” Transcript 3/30/21

“We are eager to practice in-person and enjoy the warm companionship of the group again; appreciating more open possibilities of teachings at our centers; hoping and trusting that people who are and are not loyal to SMR can continue to share practice space and celebrate what we have in common: appreciation for our basic goodness/ innate wisdom and the compassion that arises from that.” (3/5/21)

3. We should take responsibility for ourselves as individuals, in line with the principle of basic goodness.

We are each personally responsible for how we manifest the teachings, how we foster an inclusive community, and how we foster integrity and honesty so as to invite drala.

We subscribe to the Shambhala Code of Conduct, and we commit to good conduct and decorum.

It is especially important that teachers, from Guides on up, practice what they teach.

All teachers should “walk the talk”: they should have integrity.

Integrity includes being willing to name and work with whatever “elephants in the room” there are, including personal pain and struggles and painful incidents and divisions in our community.

We should not try to gloss over, avoid, or explain away painful issues; we should work with them.

Relevant quotes:

“What we experience as a community invites us to be responsible not only for our practice but for how we conduct ourselves in the world. I find this to be an opportunity for personal and collective maturity” (4/4/21)

“Taking responsibility for our own darkness first, really struck me as helpful for each of us. Individually, in terms of darkness, I interpreted that as, you know, like my own doubt, my own self doubt, my own, the things that I am choosing to forget about in my history with Shambala, or..Yeah, I didn't, I feel like that was a really provocative thing to say, and I really appreciate it. So that's something to chew on for me.” (2/27/21)

“I encountered Gaylon Ferguson. He's a fantastic teacher. And he, he feels very embodied to what he's teaching. And that was what was missing. In the majority of the local teachers said, they didn't. They will they quite honestly express it that they were not embodying the teachings. They were following a curriculum. And I don't know how to correct that. No, I'm just saying it's a severe problem.” (2/25/21)

“It is good to see that a lot of us are confident and open to the situation as it presents itself .. but we also have to remember that the situation includes us and how we move and offer our help and heart.” (3/5/21)

"We've never been very good at that at talking and not listening. And actually hearing and accommodating. So I feel like that whole world of things is an important part of our path forward." (2/27/21)

"Why am I here? Shambhala teachings are wisdom, which I want to protect and share. I am here because Shambhala teachings have inspired me to open my heart. Without open heart, I cannot sit. I have learned that I can be as dignified as a king or queen." (4/11/21)

"For me, the difference right now is when John mentioned trauma is it's about really respecting what people bring to the path, like everybody walks in the door, they have different they have their own personal background. And there's a lot of trauma that people bring with them psychologically, and historically, and from their personal life path. And so I think there is a lack of recognition sometime for that, and I know I'm in in a therapeutic profession as well. And I've had the good fortune to be have a path that's, you know, parallel to my meditation path of working through traumatic stuff in my own self, that has helped me be able to meditate. And I think this stuff that has come up with the Sakyong has laid bare, the, what happens maybe when people go on a meditation path, and maybe haven't worked through, as well as the Sakyong, you know, like how we we really have some deep rooted issues to work with that. You know, that that's what that speaks about, to me, with the Regent as well. It's like, it's not the, the the gossip of it, the drama of it. It's, it's more like the underlying work that people bring into the center that are, that's the residue of a lot of different, you know, challenging stuff that we have to maybe like, be more transparent and courageous to admit that this, just yeah, just teaching them to meditate is not going to erase all right." ([Link](#))

4. We should emphasize cultivating a strong and wise community, enacting the vision of enlightened society.

We can do more to manifest the inherent power and wisdom within our community itself.

Our personal wisdom can resonate collectively: we can “wake each other up” in powerful ways. The community is a wisdom body.

This is related to the sangha coming fully into its role as a “jewel.”

In organizing ourselves in P&E and elsewhere, we should maintain needed structure but avoid rigid, “lidding” hierarchies that stifle community agency and wisdom.

One helpful principle may be *subsidiarity*: that each particular P&E issue be addressed at the level with the greatest knowledge about the issue and its consequences.

Relevant quotes:

“So the primary question remains - how does our practice and waking up individually contribute to the maturation and growing up of our community, in all its diversity?” Summary 3/11/21

“I think some of what's happening now this open space that we've had for a couple of years, for us collectively as a community to design some alternatives... We want the power spread out more diversified and we want to be able to make different choices and everything. And here we have a blank canvas and an opportunity to suggest a different way. More often than not, again, I hear the question is when is someone going to fix this or when is someone going to decide what to do? Someone's us, right?” Transcript 3/30/21

“But we don't have anybody to make up paths, so to speak, right now, that used to be made up by people who were employed by Shambhala International. And here we would be delivered the path, you know, but I think that's changing now. And it feels like it might be up to us to do some thinking about what a path looks like all together for these diverse possibilities.” (3/11/21)

“A year ago when I started having this this conversation about race in Shambhala, there was not a lot of desire really to talk about it. Almost. And what I understand is that's a common thing that white sanghas say well, this it's actually not that's not a spiritual issue. That's that's racism. Another thing it's not, it's not sort of a, a Buddhist understanding of reality. It's, it's, like, we get, we fall into an absolute view of reality. And until we begin to realize the relative and absolute have to be related to at the same time, I think we're gonna have a rocky road. So it's not just race, it's, you know, it's gender. It's, you know, LGBTQ issues. It's social. I know this is a loaded term, but social issues. So I think that's what I meant by Shambhala must diversify.” ([Link](#))

“Living through crises makes us deepen the non-conceptual experience. In Montreal, we went through a lot of powerful emotions: anger, love, fear. Never before have we gone through such a rich period of teachings, unconventional teachings, different from spiritual instructions. We

realized the power of fear, of aggression, of attachment to opinions. We learned to accommodate, to suspend judgments; to stay in the energy of co-emergence, when it is said that confusion is the dawn of wisdom. Crises make us realize the preciousness of the teachings. Today we are embarked on an immense field of exploration, on an experience of sharing, one could say democratic, but it is more than that, it is an experience on another way of listening.” (4/4/21)

“The most interesting thing is actually the process we are going through: do we manage to stay in conversation, and heal the wounds that have occurred?” (4/11/21)

“What makes us a community is frank and gentle conversations, without aggression, like this. This is new to me. Here the teaching and practice infuse my life. I don't know how to talk about it, I never thought this would happen.” (4/4/21)

Open Response to Both Assessors

The document that was submitted to you was written by only four members of the group. They based it on the shortened data (not the raw data) written by Janet Bronstein and Fred Meyer, who led the discussions with the small numbers of Shambhalian from the 4000 invites sent out.

This document was created after Janet Bronstein reported that our request to the Two Assessors to meet with us as a group was turned down. Assessors have met with other working groups.

The raw data has some very poignant quotes that do make it into the final document that is being sent to the two assessors. However, by not reading through the raw data, I think both Assessors will lose a unique opportunity.

Throughout these past two years, Janet Bronstein, Susie Vincent, Mary Fahrenfort and Lodro Dorje Holm have attended our meetings and had a lot of input during this period. Janet, Susie and I participated until the last two special meetings where the document to be sent to the 2 Assessors was created. (Susie has since sent in suggestions within an extremely shortened timeline about other emerging principles as she sees it.

The raw data is important because it reflects some very heartfelt comments from individuals whose voices should not be ignored.

Two that stood out to me were :

"A year ago when I started having this conversation about race in Shambhala, there was not a lot of desire really to talk about it. Almost. And what I understand is that's a common thing that white sanghas say well, this it's actually not that's not a spiritual issue. That's that's racism... it's not just race, it's, you know, it's gender. It's, you know, LGBTQ issues. It's social. I know this is a loaded term, but social issues. So I think that's what I meant by Shambhala must diversify."

"It's not the gossip of it, the drama of it. It's, it's more like the underlying work that people bring into the center that are, that's the residue of a lot of different, you know, challenging stuff that we have to maybe like, be more transparent and courageous to admit that this, just yeah, just teaching them to meditate is not going to erase all right."

Often in the conversations over the past two years, I have wanted a discussion that went beyond who teaches, to how we create accessibility to a diverse population. In my mind it is important that the 2 Assessors be involved in an open discussion with all members of this group willing to listen to a conversation that goes beyond the role of the Sakyong and others teaching.

I shared the three principles that I felt needed to be included in sending a written report to the 2 Assessors.

- Full transparency about the documents, to be presented in an unbiased manner to both Assessors.
- That the raw data be accessible and be presented to both Assessors so they can read the heartfelt comments to those who participated, as well as get an accurate profile of how many people participated in these conversations out of the 4000 invitations sent, and the demographic data of those who participated.
- That after they are presented with the data that both Preceptors be invited to a Zoom meeting with all of this group. Their identities can be easily protected. That this meeting be an open space meeting where every member of our group be given a chance to participate.

In closing, I think there is much richness that could be garnered from Community Engagement Conversations, but they would need to adhere to a strict set of principles. They also should not be viewed in isolation from other ways for individuals to share their concerns to the key decision makers in Shambhala.

Submitted by Ron Vine

Should either Assessor, or both which to contact me to discuss my opinions discussed here my email is chadsterd@gmail.com.