

Practice and Education Task Force Report

August 30, 2015

Submitted to:

Boulder Shambhala Center Executive Director, Staff and Council Members

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5 Meetings
July 13, 2015
July 20, 2015
July 27, 2015
August 3, 2015
August 17, 2015

P&E Goal 1: Broadening Participation in Shambhala Sadhana

1. Clarify the vision for the Shambhala Sadhana's place with the BSC community (clarify the language used).

There is a general understanding that the Shambhala Sadhana is intended to be practiced together as a community. However, there is still a lot of uncertainty about the details of this practice's place within the community. Who is allowed to practice it, when and where? If you already doing other practices how should this one be integrated and what is the priority? Why is this an important practice?

Recommendations:

1. The task group recommends that the BSC find ways to clarify and communicate the vision. This can be done in email invitations as well as on the website, and it is also recommended that the Acharyas/Shastris leading the Moon Day practice address this during that time.
2. Furthermore the group recommends to make the Moon Day practice as inclusive as possible by encouraging members to invite their friends and family to join. There are few regular events that bring all practitioners together and are open to all. Shambhala needs to have a place where people can gather (without needing prerequisites) just as a church service would be open to all including those outside of its membership.
3. Elevate communications regarding practice opportunities & generate enthusiasm and uplifted environment for practice
 - Send multiple email reminders for moon day community practice. Include an email from the Acharya or Shastri that will be leading the practice, inviting the community to attend and pointing out the importance of the practice. Re-communicate SMR's desire for this practice to occur.
 - In order to generate enthusiasm, encourage leaders within the community to attend. For example, if the community sees 5 Acharyas attending the Moon Day practice, it communicates importance and will inspire other members to come as well.
 - Have the Kasung provide protection during the practice to help uplift the environment. Hold the Moon Day practice in the main shrine room.

4. Take into consideration busy lives and members with multiple practices

Given that many members have very busy lives and already find it a challenging to make time for the practices they are already working with, it is important that the Moon Day and other Shambhala Sadhana gatherings take time constraints into consideration. Particularly, there is a desire to make the Mood Day practice a family-friendly event.

5. Therefore it is recommended that these events do not go beyond 2 hours from start to finish, are held on a Sunday and held sometime between morning and mid-day, and offer child care.

- (It was also suggested that Survey Monkey could be used to poll membership as to best day or time).
- It is also recommended that while keeping the event uplifted, it is also kept simple.
- There was discussion regarding content of the Moon Day event and general consensus that in addition to practice, it is important that the event encourages making new connections between people in the community. This could be done through a reception with food or through discussion groups or other forms more within the practice environment. Again, keeping in mind the 2 hour limit and need for simplicity.

Having a variety of times for the Moon Day practice (not just family friendly) would include all segments of the community, though not everyone will be able to make it every time.

The Moon Day practice aims to integrate the various segments of the sangha. The person leading the Moon Day may be able to facilitate that by trying new ways of getting people that don't know each other to start talking. An example: pair up with someone you don't know and do an activity. This would help cut through the tendency to stay within our practice co-hort.

P&E Goal 2: Meeting the Mindfulness Meditation Movement

Overall engaging with external groups seeking guidance in mindfulness/meditation was seen as very important to our center. We felt that this was a way to help bring about Enlightened Society. While doing so we need to be true to our lineage and teachings and not dilute the language or vision.

In the process of connecting with external groups we may inspire individuals in these groups to start practicing with Shambhala. In this way relating with external groups is also an avenue of outreach, public exposure and marketing.

Recommendations:

1. Curricula for teaching external groups need to be developed.

We already have curricula that are suitable for new students, such as MIEL and other IEL classes, "Turning the mind into an Ally", etc. We felt that much of the material in these would be appropriate. The guidance of Acharyas and Shastris in developing curricula is seen as optimal.

We could offer a short/introductory curriculum and also have longer term courses.

Shambhala Meditation is seen as being uniquely powerful for such outreach.

2. Assessment of groups requesting teachings.

We felt that perhaps not all external groups were a good match for Shambhala. In dialogue and assessment the external group and Shambhala need to determine if they are a good match for each other. What is the intention and motivation?

3. Recruitment of teachers that will go out to external groups.

Teachers would come from within the teacher pool of BSMC. In particular we could draw from Shambhala members who are already working within such external groups and therefore know the culture and expectations. For instance doctors/nurses within our own community would be uniquely suited to teach to hospital staff.

4. Developing a fee structure.

Teachers and other staff dedicated to outreach need to be compensated. Perhaps an

initial fundraiser could get this program started but in the long term that outreach program needs to be self-sustaining.

P&E Goal 3: Teacher Training

Recommendations:

1. Teacher Training Path needs to be clarified and / or developed.

In a communication from Office of Kalapa Acharya in April 2014:

"Our ground is the tremendous success of our Shambhala teacher training path. We have accomplished perhaps the largest system of training lay meditation teachers in the history of the dharma.

The inspiration to rethink our approach comes from recognizing that we are currently with our present infrastructure unable to fully accomplish training either the quantity of teachers that our growing centers require nor are we able to train the quality of teachers that we aspire to."

What is the new path for teaching? What are the qualifications to enter the path? How do you enter the path? No one in the discussion group knew what the "new path" is.

From word of mouth we hear that there are people being trained by Acharyas or Shastris to teach but there is no official information. How do you join such a group? The hidden nature of such groups can lead to perceptions of favoritism or cliquishness.

2. Strategy for gathering and recruiting seasoned and new teachers needs to be established.

Discussion mainly centered on recognizing new talents. In the course of teaching levels and classes current teachers sometimes encounter an aid or coordinator that shows great promise as a future dharma teacher. We need a portal where teachers can submit names of such potential.

We feel that the net needs to be thrown far and wide to gather all possible emerging teachers. And of course at this time we have no vehicle to train such new talent.

3. Establishing a mentorship program with follow-through.

Matching a trainee with an experienced teacher over a period of time (not just one course). We need guidelines for mentoring: How long is the relationship? What does mentoring mean? Who will get mentored? Who oversees this mentoring program?

Can we draw in seasoned but currently inactive teachers to act as mentors?

Current mentoring needs improvement in some of the following areas: sometimes the mentor is not aware that they are mentoring (they were not informed), the mentor does not know where to send feedback regarding the mentee, and the relationship is too short-lived to bear fruit.

Our group again noted that more staff or volunteers are needed to administer such training and mentoring program and that P&E cannot take on all of the work. Perhaps the Shastris could take a more visible and active role?

In summary we felt that there was a lack of information on the teaching path. We did not know how to encourage someone to step on this path. Whatever information is available is vague and informal and only known to some people and not to all community members. This was seen as the biggest obstacle.

P&E Goal 4 Scorpion Seal Integration:

DID I MISS THIS?

P&E Additional Topic: Monday Night Open Class

1. Background

The P&E Task Group was asked to explore questions around Monday Night Open Class (MNOC). The MNOC regularly draws a large crowd of about 40 people. It is taught by a group of seasoned practitioners and the topics are chosen by whoever is teaching, therefore the content varies significantly. The teachings may draw from different traditions or be based on “basic Buddhism” and are typically not specifically Shambhalian.

Questions that arose include: Should specific Shambhalian teachings be included? Should an additional evening class be created that has a similar format but is focused on Shambhala teachings? Should coordinators of MNOC do more to inform attendees of other opportunities and events at the BSC and invite them in? How does one become a teacher for MNOC?

2. Discussion

It is understood that attendees are mostly not Shambhalians. For some, this is their primary place and form of practice (do not go on to Shambhala Levels). The class asks for no commitment or pressure to take Shambhala courses or become members of the center. Many in the group felt it was important to have a place for people to come where there was not an intention or pressure (intended or not) to be “funneled” into the Shambhala path. It was recognized that this sensed pressure turns some people away from the path. Some in the group expressed that MNOC was their entry into the Shambhala path and it was specifically the freedom to come and go without commitment that made them feel comfortable to continue to engage.

It was also recognized that a path such as Shambhala Training, that has significant commitments of finances, time, and heart, is not what everyone is looking for. Therefore in offering MNOC under this format, a different population is reached that would likely not be if only Shambhala courses were offered.

It was not clear how those who teach MNOC came to take on that roll. There was a sense of the group of teachers as being “a secret society”. There is some lack of clarity around how this group of teachers and the MNOC coincides and interacts with the BSC staff and collection of offerings that the BSC provides. There is some sense it is operating outside of the P&E department – that the two are not integrated.

3. Recommendations

1. The MNOC should maintain its sense of openness and maintain a pressure-free atmosphere
2. Teachers/leaders of the MNOC should meet with the BSC staff to discuss how they will work together and clarify the intentions of the MNOC and its place within the offerings of the center.
3. If there is a desire for an open class that only focuses on Shambhala Teachings or Enlightened Society, this should be a separate course from the MNOC.