

Inviting Members to Contemplate Their Membership Activity - An Annual Practice

Introduction

In 2010, the Sakyong posed three questions to each member of Shambhala in his *Letter of the Morning Sun*. He asked us to contemplate the questions, and to actually send him our responses.

We would like the contemplation of his questions to become a part of our annual community rhythm, to provide us the opportunity to reflect on our engagement with Shambhala and with Shambhala principles in the world, to contemplate our aspirations for the future, and to offer our aspirations for the benefit of Shambhala and all of society.

For individuals

We would like to create a community environment in which membership is a continual invitation to engage in an intentional and active way. To help foster this connect, we are asking centres to host some kind of annual members conversation in which we all take the opportunity to contemplate and review our own personal goals as well as our aspirations for our group or centre and the world at large. This conversation is also an important opportunity for the leadership of each centre to listen to the current flavour and inspiration of the community, which can then be integrated into an organically emerging 'strategic plan' for the life of the centre in the coming year.

We suggest that centres host a community event for this purpose, to which all members and potentially anyone in the community interested in participating is invited. This should take place sometime in the period between the Children's Day/solstice celebration and the end of Shambhala Day week, as we gather our lungta for the new year. Centres are invited to experiment with the best time to do this - it could be very interesting to do as a calendar-New Year (December 31st) event, or as the government pillar's offering for dön season practice.

We suggest asking people to contemplate each question individually (all three questions are copied below). The first question could be contemplated silently, and people could write notes or journal if they wish. After contemplating the second and third questions silently, people could be asked to get together in groups of two or four to share their contemplations and aspiration.

Depending on the size of the full group, the host of the event could give each pair/quad sticky notes to write down their aspirations, and put them on a wall of the room so everyone can see

each other's aspirations, and even group them together to see trends. You could also spend 5-10 minutes on a popcorn-style harvest for anyone that would like to share verbally (but without feeling like you have to hear from everyone, because it's recorded on the sticky notes).

Following individual contemplation of the first question, an alternate format could be to do two rounds of world cafe-style conversation for the second and third questions, with harvests following each round.

We are happy to discuss format with you in more detail if that is helpful.

It would also be good to make it possible for those are unable to attend the event but who would like to participate in the contemplation to simply do it on their own. This could be communicated via email or through community groups like deleks. You might also wish to offer a way for those who participate at home or in deleks to offer their thoughts or contemplations, so that their inspiration can be integrated with the overall community inspiration.

[from Baltimore Shambhala Center Director Chris Kreeger:] When the Dorje Dradul left Tibet as part of the Tibetan diaspora, fleeing communist Chinese persecution, many teachers escaped and set up small Dharma centers to pass on their realization to small groups of students, in the hopes that the profound realization Tibetan culture had developed would not die with the death of Tibetan culture. In contrast, the Dorje Dradul, realizing that the destruction of Tibet was part of a global condition, came to the West to establish Shambhala, so that the world's connection with basic goodness would not die. Finding that same commitment in one's own heart is what it means to be a member of the Mukpo family. It also is what being a member of the Shambhala community means. It's actually discovering something that already has occurred in your own heart and deciding to move forward with what has already happened there.

From the *Letter of the Morning Sun*:

“Within my retreat, I have pondered three questions that have been very provocative and illuminating....I would like to ask each of you as a Shambhalian to contemplate them... Not only is this a very meaningful exercise, it also allows me to see your feelings, insights, and commitment to our vision. Thus, as we enter into the next era of Shambhala, we can begin with unity, rapport, and clarity.

1. What personal commitment would you like to make to practice and study? Since personal training and transformation is a lifelong journey, it is the method by which we constantly remind ourselves that, as beings with tremendous potential, it is up to us to constantly see each day as an opportunity to deepen and grow—that in fact the journey itself is the joy.

2. What might you offer to Shambhala? Shambhala is a profound lineage, but its goodness and glory depends solely on the commitment of its warrior students.

This sublime wisdom is our responsibility. *What would need to happen, in Shambhala or for you, to enable you to offer what you would like to offer?*

3. How might you contribute to the world as a Shambhalian? The ultimate purpose of Shambhala is to benefit the world, to reawaken basic goodness in all of humanity. This is the way we can manifest fully as warriors and benefit the world. *What inspires you? What would need to happen, in Shambhala or for you, to enable you to offer what you would like to offer?*

If all Shambhalians can contemplate these three questions at this critical juncture, it will help clarify and strengthen who we are, what Shambhala means to us, and how Shambhala can actually manifest in the world. I feel that if we as a community can take a moment and separate ourselves from the current of our lives to contemplate these questions, such communal self-reflection could considerably help clarify and strengthen our entire mandala. This in turn will give us depth of mind and character to take our vision into the future.

These three questions have been incredibly beneficial for my own path. Through contemplating them, I have realized that my clarity and commitment has grown. As we move forward as a community, and as our connection deepens as teacher and students—as well as warriors of awakening and human beings—a healthy, strong, and more loving bond can occur.”

For the Leadership

Over the past several years, the Acharyas and Kalapa Council members have developed a tradition of contemplating their leadership role. Each year during their annual retreat, they give back their Acharya or Kalapa Council pins, actually giving up their role. During the retreat they practice together and contemplate what they would like to offer, accomplish, or manifest during the next year. At the end of the retreat, they request the Sakyong to re-appoint them to their role. They can then step into the role in a fresh way, with renewed inspiration for their activity in the coming year.

As Shambhala leaders in all areas and at all levels of the mandala, each of us can benefit from making the same effort to contemplate our leadership role. When we do not regularly reflect on our intentions and our goals, it is easy to forget our purpose, or feel overcome by negativity and obligation. We may feel that we are holding our leadership position because no one else is willing, or because everything will fall apart if we don't.

During this same period of contemplation, we ask everyone in a leadership position to contemplate your leadership role, how you would like to manifest that role in your next year of service, and how you will mentor others to become leaders as well. This could take place during

the community event, or in separate leadership gatherings such as governing council meetings, meditation instructor gatherings, staff meetings (where applicable) etc. You can use a variation of the same three questions:

1. **What personal commitment will you make to practice and study?** Maintaining your personal practice is essential to nourishing you as a leader and keeping your leadership aspirations linked with the vision of Shambhala. How do you aspire to deepen your own practice path while also following the path of leadership?
2. **What will you offer to Shambhala?** What gifts and strengths do you have to offer to Shambhala through serving in your leadership role in the coming year? What would you like to be able to accomplish in your role this year? What needs to happen in Shambhala, the centre and the community, in order for you to be able to manifest that accomplishment?
3. **What do you aim to do in the world as a Shambhalian?** Through genuinely serving in your role, you can help Shambhala truly make a difference in the world. What are your aspirations for contributing to enlightened society in your greater community and the world, and what can you do within your sphere of leadership to enact that?

For the Centre

It is also important to take the opportunity at least once per year to contemplate how the centre is doing, relative to the overall vision of Shambhala and the Sakyong as well as to whatever strategic goals you may have set locally. In addition to your own local guideposts and markers of a healthy community, the [Shambhala Centre application](#) form can be a helpful reference point for how the centre is doing, and areas that may need attention. This contemplation can form the basis for renewed engagement or new initiatives in certain areas, and Shambhala Day is the perfect opportunity to ride the windhorse generated through this activity.