

Report on Cologne Sangha Process days Part 1

The following is a synopsis of the protocol from the first “process day” organised at the center in Cologne, Germany on June 20, 2019. It was the result of the work of a team effort of the local center council and members.

Prior to this day, as background were four Meetings of the Sangha members, as well as guests, over a period of 9 Months for open exchange about the “crisis” within Shambhala. These initial meetings were very open in their format: A circle where everyone present could speak from their experience. In later meetings, the leadership structure within our center was presented and explained with the question, “does the center leadership at the moment have our communities support”? As the answer to this question was yes, plans were made to create a process through which we could come to a consensus about what our community would like going forward.

Synopsis:

Using the recommendations from the Olive Brach report as a starting point, the larger group chose areas of interest for discussion. These became:

- 1- Culture Change
- 2- Leadership Structures
- 3- Dealing with instances of abuse
- 4- Code of Ethics and Training

Culture Change:

Many aspects to Shambhala Culture are wonderful. Some need to be addressed.

Alcohol:

Responsible, mindful use of alcohol. Not forbidding it. Less alcohol consumption. Becoming more aware of group dynamics around alcohol especially peer pressure. Community dialog necessary.

Arrogance:

Feelings of in and out group. VIP treatment. Entitlement through hierarchy. “The important people with the pins sit in the front.” Secrecy fostering mistrust.

Some recommendations: Transparency around hierarchy, leadership forms. Limited terms of service to inhibit cronyism. Timely training of new leadership personnel. Creating opportunities, invitation for newcomers to involve themselves. A true attitude of humbleness from senior teachers and leaders especially. Desire for more exchange “on eye level”, less patronising.

Abuse:

Meaning here abuse of all kinds. Sexual, power, emotional...Identify forms within Shambhala that enable abuse. How does abuse get reported at our center? What actions and consequences result? Clear mechanisms for reporting and ensuring safety/confidentiality of reporter.

Leadership Structures:

There were ideas presented that represent contrasting views as to how the future leadership could look. Especially in regard to the idea of separating spiritual and administrative leadership.

4 models proposed and discussed:

- 1- 2 pillar model
- 2- Vajra area model

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- 3- Mandala Model
- 4- Decentralisation

2 Pillar Model:

Spiritual Pillar led by the Sakyong, holding the lineage and the teachings. Inspiring the community and presenting the path towards enlightened society.

Administrative Pillar hopefully populated with competent trained individuals responsible for finances, properties, centers and land centers. Creation of contract with Spiritual Pillar regarding distribution of Payment to the Spiritual Pillar, for use in a transparent way.

Argument against this: Some felt that this would undermine the Sakyong and his role. It would be a “de-throning” and leave taking of the vision of monarchy. “only the one who controls the money is able to make form out of vision.” Also, where are these qualified administrators supposed to come from and who should appoint them? Should they be external to Shambhala? Can outside experts understand the workings and needs of Shambhala? Trust in the Guru is a basic element of Vajrayana practice.

Others argued: Concentrated power in the hands of the few carries the seed of mistrust. Until now leadership rested with Vajrayana students. Should this be changed? Why not?-- already Mahayana practitioners are being empowered as Meditation Instructors as an example

Vajrayana Area:

Separating the Vajrayana Path from the rest. Those who wish can enter into this area have a closer relationship to the Sakyong along with all that that entails. The Mahayana Path can be expounded upon separately for others, yet still within Shambhala.

Mandala Model:

A flat disc containing:

- Sakyong
- Administration
- Mahayana Sangha
- Vajrayana Sangha

Each area being of equal value. Trust and appreciation being key here.

Decentralisation:

Network of local Shambhala centers responsible for themselves who share as a basis the Shambhala teachings and culture. They work cooperatively with each other possibly creating statutes which are annually renewed. Can be seen as crowd structure. Constantly fresh and renewed, yet protecting the teachings.

Dealing with instances of Abuse:

Olive branch suggestions:

Nr 9 More personnel in the area of care and conduct, qualified external support

Nr 10 Creating System for reporting

Nr 11 Create permanent reporting post

Prevention:

Centers creating a statement of our obvious support for a respectful community environment which is repeated at the beginning all events. Encouraging self-responsibility/care among participants. Inviting open discussion of any question, inviting criticism.

Constant process of developing sensitivity in the center: possibly offering evenings dealing with sexual boundary issues, hierarchy, Cliques and exclusion, gender issues...

Offering more social meditation, or practices like speaking and listening from the heart. Strengthening this through regular meditation practice. Compassion practices.

Steps:

Contact existing external reporting center at the DBU. (German Buddhist Union). Information is already posted on our website.

Identifying local Psychotherapists or people having completed Karuna Training who could be of assistance (non shambhalians)

Internal reporting structure. Official or unofficial post of care and conduct.

Explaining the process what happens to individuals who are accused of misconduct.

Centers required to present annual summary on reported cases of misconduct. Goal being zero reports.

Also discussed:

Increasing staff and presence of Care and Conduct. Lack of clarity around role of Desung. How do we reach out to people who have left the community whose feedback we would like to hear?

Code of Ethics and Training

Olive branch suggestions:

Nr 5 Implement new conduct guidelines. Strengthen process of adjudicating complaints against teachers so that they can be fairly held accountable....

Nr 6 Strengthen Care and Conduct Council. Teachers should be removed in cases where abuse has been verified....

Nr 7 Proper vetting of all personnel in centers, land centers, training programs...

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Nr 8 Training: All leadership should attend trainings on conduct guidelines. Offer regular trainings to the larger community.

Brainstorming and discussion did not deliver a “finished” result. Also no concrete position regarding the above mentioned proposals.

- Explore our cultural and social predispositions. Blind spots and patterns of behaviour.
- Recognise that perception is subjective and not truth in terms of dealing with situations. If someone feels hurt, they are hurt.
- Don't minimise. Don't use expressions like “don't make such a fuss, relax!”. “just deal with it!” or “ she brought it on herself”.
- Sensitivity through trainings that aren't taken care of with just a signature.
- a culture of giving and receiving feedback.
- Procedure for dealing with complaints and having consequences.
- Reporting officer being member of council
- clarification around the following areas: care and conduct, Desung, Health and well being.
- Agreement on core values. As in german Constitution. “Human dignity is inviolable”. Non-negotiable point.
- Clarification around use of following terms:
 - Abuse
 - Violation of boundaries
 - MIsconduct

Finally, within all discussions the following points were commonly addressed:

Desire/need for eye level communication
Need for clear rules, or clarification of rules, boundaries.
What constitutes abuse?
Clear Process regarding adjudication, redress.
Shambhala Judiciary?

This process within our center is continuing. The next meeting date is set for Saturday August 31, 2019.