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ETHAN NICHTERN
Author & Buddhist Teacher
(<https://www.ethannichtern.com>)

MENU

Reflections on Shambhala

June 29, 2018



(Note Before Reading: I have no intention to take attention away from the voices of those who have been harmed. Their voices are the most important. I wrote this with some hesitation. I wrote this because many friends have asked me to make a public statement and share thoughts about recent revelations. What's below is offered to those who have expressed a desire to hear my thoughts. It is posted on my own website. I speak for no one but myself. If you choose to read it, please also listen directly to the perspectives and the requests of those who have been harmed.)

You may know by now that Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche sent a communication this past Monday in response to allegations of inappropriate sexual conduct with students, and that Project Sunshine released a report yesterday with three anonymous first-hand accounts of sexual harm caused by him. The first outwardly shared allegation, which was articulated on social media last Friday, took place in 2011 and involved the Sakyong exerting a power differential to violate the boundaries of one of his female students in the kitchen of his home in Halifax while his wife and one year-old daughter were asleep upstairs, after his daughter's first birthday party. The harm caused has been substantiated and the generally egregious nature of that incident is not in doubt. The other two accounts involved times before his marriage and abusive sexual interactions during ongoing relationships with committed students of his.

(You can find the report here (http://andreamwinn.com/project_sunshine/Buddhist_Project_Sunshine_Phase_2_Final_Report.pdf). Additionally, a second initial report involving a fourth incident in

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Chile in 2002, has now been published here, (http://andreamwinn.com/project_sunshine/Memorandum_II_on_Sexual_Misconduct.pdf) and it includes a credible allegation of sexual assault.)

I would just like to say bravo to all the Shambhala community members – especially the female-bodied ones – who have been courageous enough to make their voices heard so far about being harmed. Seriously, thank you.

These are obviously devastating stories to hear about one's guru, who has taught me so much about how to open my heart and sharpen my mind into a space of confidence and relaxation. Also, as close friends know, this has been the second reckoning of harmful actions by very powerful and “progressive” male figures whom I looked up to and hold quite dear, within the span of just about six weeks. Given that my own daughter's first birthday party is this weekend, everything about this moment feels immediate, yet shockingly surreal.

I am taking this opportunity to reflect on the work I still have to do on my path as student, friend, husband, father, colleague, teacher and leader. I am also reflecting on how toxic masculinity and the constructed superiority of powerful men (especially of the cisgendered straight white male) creates a system of societal interactions that leaves nobody happy. For better or worse, an Asian version of this patriarchal construct has also descended through the transmission of the Tibetan lineage that Shambhala sits within.

In addition to listening to students, friends, colleagues and mentors speak about their painful experiences in relation to these revelations, I'm taking this time to check in with those colleagues, friends and students around me, to see if they have any issues, in general, with my actions or our interactions on the path together, even from the distant past. I would like to hear about it directly so I can request forgiveness for that which is mine. I am hoping that more of our leaders, especially male ones, will also take this opportunity to listen to direct feedback, not about the Sakyong or Chogyam Trungpa Rinpoche, but about ourselves. As Reverend angel Kyodo Williams said during the Q&A of a recent dharma talk, requesting the students not to demur when confronting her or asking tough questions: “I'm not fragile.” As for me, I'm very tender right now, but I'm not fragile. Any teacher or leader worthy of their position should be able to say the same and demonstrate it. Especially Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche.

I am not leaving Shambhala over these revelations. At this point, it would be as impossible as pretending I am not a member of my own family. In fact, I am more committed to Shambhala than ever before—at least as a vision, if not as an organization (that part depends on what happens now). I also pray that the Sakyong – who has taught me so much – can rise to this

occasion and further his own manifestation of vulnerability and goodness. He will need—at the very least— to invite new voices into his inner circle of empowerment, especially those who have historically not been heard, and that requires him to trust new people (especially non-white non-males and those who haven't served as his personal attendant or “kusung”) to give direct and critical feedback and, more importantly, take on seats of *true* power, rather than do any sort of cheerleading for him. I don't see Shambhala surviving without him doing so right now. **[Note: since the writing of this post, Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche has stepped down pending an independent investigation, and the entire governing Board of Shambhala International has resigned]** If he doesn't move from his seat of relative distance from his students to meet us all at eye level, then according to his own teachings, the energetic influencers of this world (called “drala”) will not aid any attempts to expand the Shambhala teachings. The wrathful energetic protectors of truth (called “dharmapalas”) will block this community from creating more confusion and causing more harm. Other, more appropriate and worthy communities will develop instead. And wow, does the world need loving and fiercely determined communities right now!

There are major problems. Not minor problems. Major problems. Not only with the interpersonal harms being revealed, but with the energetic and systemic structures of this organization. I've thought about these problems a lot since my teaching path and career began 16 or 17 years ago and have always tried to listen deeply to my friends and students about their concerns with the Shambhala teachings and organization. Every thoughtful person in this community will be able to tell instantly if the leadership proposes minor solutions to our major problems. Little tweaks are not going to work this time.

A blind approach to patriarchy is one of the deepest problems we face. Blind patriarchy creates a power structure which thrives on non-transparency and gaslighting. The basic message of any strict patriarchy is this: “Daddy gives you what you need and keeps you safe. Don't ask how Daddy makes his decisions or what Daddy *does*. You don't need to know.” The non-transparency of blind patriarchy creates the shielding for leaders to profess certain values while straying far from those values themselves. It is the harm and hypocrisy caused by these systems which so many in our world are waking up to right now, especially as we have perhaps the most distortedly hypocritical and illegitimate patriarch in modern history occupying the seat of power in the United States.

In the case of Shambhala and Tantric Buddhism, this general lack of transparency often manifests in opaque language around the “ordinary magic” of the lineage and the presumed-before-witnessing purity of the guru's conduct. Magic is a beautiful thing. But when the “ordinary magic” of the deep bond

with one's guru is misunderstood, it quickly becomes "magical thinking" and students are encouraged to ignore their own insights into the parts of the teacher and community that feel misaligned, insights which, if delivered in loving transparency, could help everyone grow! This is a tragedy. Luckily we are becoming more aware of the harm caused by hidden power differentials which magical thinking doesn't even allow us to name, much less change. If you want to experience ordinary magic, you have to call out magical thinking.

Shambhala's mythology and root texts propose an alternate society with an alternate leadership structure based on a sort of compassionate monarchy. There are many positive aspects to imagining a society with such an arrangement. But, in *reality*, Shambhala is a small but global community situated within Western democracy and capitalism. Therefore, all the problems of our actual society are also Shambhala's *actual* problems: The legacy of slavery, racism, misogyny, sexism, sexual violence, homophobia, extreme wealth inequality, nonconsensual power differentials, and much more. Luckily, all the benefits of Western grassroots movements are also available to us: especially the ability to organize and respectfully—with love for our teacher, our tradition and all beings—demand change *within* our own community.

One thing I've noticed about the psychology of community in general, especially the Shambhala community – we often take an "extreme" approach to our participation, bouncing back and forth between polarized views on our commitment and loyalty. We are either "IN" with zero doubt and wide, foggy eyes (I call this facial expression the "Shambhala glaze" and I've seen it so many times when any topic comes up which requires critical thinking, nuance, and above all, authenticity – and friends have seen it in *me* and were gracious enough to call me out on various occasions), or else we are "OUT" due to betrayal, negative interactions or reactions we might have with the organization or representatives of the organization.

I've wanted to leave in the past. Everyone I know in a leadership position has thought about doing so at one point or another, even if we don't share that publicly. It's a really enticing possibility, especially given the tendencies of mean-spirited gossip and secret competitiveness for the leader's attention that can occur in a guru-focused culture. It isn't hard at all for me to imagine leaving right now and still having what I need in this life and in the dharma, even if our whole world is on fire.

The Shambhala teachings and techniques become even more powerful at the Vajrayana level, and I am always saddened when students think they have to leave the community because they feel they can't be who they are here. I've had to watch this happen hundreds, if not thousands, of times to friends and students I cared about. And if it happens because a person feels

unsafe in Shambhala, I want to cry. This week, I have cried.

And despite that ever-present possibility of hitting the exits, everything here feels worth fighting for, or worth *practicing* for, together. Our teachings are incredibly powerful, especially the teachings on fearlessness, compassion and confidence.

There is a middle path between “The Shambhala glaze” and “hitting the exits.” It’s to bring your voice, your fierce compassion, and your protest further *into* the community. For me, it’s to realize that there is so much here worth practicing, worth learning, and worth building together. As somebody with a voice, privilege and platform, it’s about being a good ally to those with less voice. Because I get to talk plenty, right now it’s about listening. Whatever you do, please don’t *ever* be afraid of showing your loyalty via dissent.

But, of course, this is relatively easy for me to say. I would never even try to speak for survivors, or for those who don’t have as privileged an embodiment as I do. I don’t speak for anyone but myself here. If any of it resonates, awesome. Regardless, I am grateful to everyone who cares about these matters.

Now is not the time for me to teach. I’ve never wanted to teach less than right now. Now is the time to listen to others. We have a weekend program to Reimagine Enlightened Society this coming weekend. I hope friends attend. I look forward to listening.

Yours, with great appreciation in the view of basic goodness and enlightened society, and with deep trust in your own path,

Ethan

72 thoughts on “Reflections on Shambhala”

1.  Carl Maida says:

June 30, 2018 at 10:18 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10338>)

Nathan, this is a brave and compassionate statement. We’ll have to see whether other women come forward to report abuse, and especially whether any victims were underage

minors at the time of abuse. When initial clergy abuse allegations are made public, there typically is an outpouring of others who are empowered and emboldened to report their own incidents of abuse.

Reply

2.  **Kathleen Waldron** says:

July 1, 2018 at 7:43 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10339>)

My revulsion is overwhelming.. I also wonder if the spotlight will shine on all those who knew about the abuse and either actively supported it or let it pass with a wink. These are protectors? How many of these men and students are now in local Sangha with the same mindset? I've worried about the behavior of at least one teacher in the local Sangha. I understand not just going with black and white thinking but I strongly suspect it is a cancer that has metastasized. The Sakyong first response was weak and evasive. I find it hard to even practice at this point.

Reply

1.  **Mary** says:

July 2, 2018 at 12:20 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10367>)

I agree with you you Kathleen.

Reply

2.  **Susan Swihart** says:

July 2, 2018 at 7:25 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10375>)

Kathleen, I agree with you about the Sakyong's response. I think it was wholly inadequate, especially with regard to creating a safe place for victims and survivors. I don't feel confident that he knows how to do such a thing.

Reply

3.  **Annie Price** says:

July 3, 2018 at 8:19 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10383>)

I agree with you Kathleen. His response was dismissive and was not an apology of wrong doing but of redirecting the blame to the victim for feeling harmed. I am even more disgusted that this has been obviously covered up and we have been lied to. I can't practice at all right now because I am so hurt and angry.

Reply

3.  **Mike Henderson** says:

July 1, 2018 at 7:57 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10340>)

Thank you for this.

Reply

4.  **Brus Westby** says:

July 1, 2018 at 8:33 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10341>)

Ethan, thank you for your candor and insights regarding our teacher and our sangha. This is a time for sangha, the third jewel, to come forth to express the wide range of emotions we feel, and to explore ways, personally and as a community, to cleanse, heal and grow.

Several hundred of our sangha participated in general conversation at the Boulder Shambhala Center yesterday on the topic of abuse by the Sakyong and other leaders. For two hours we expressed our feelings, and listened to each other. It was both difficult and poignant for us all to hear the pain some of us have endured, and continue to work with.

That session helped me, and others, to soften, and to feel the strength of our sangha. We acknowledged that this session was only the start of much work to be done to heal the victims, perpetrators, and every member of our sangha.

Reply

5. **Bob Sutherland** says:

July 1, 2018 at 8:45 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10342>)

You articulate many of my own thoughts, particularly that a “middle ground” between silly competitive guru adoration and leaving has been lacking. Your essay (and a sudden and needed WTF about all this from many people who have felt a simmering and unspoken sense of disgust for years) is very validating and I appreciate it. Let’s all stick around and clean up this hot mess.

Reply

6. **Mary** says:

July 1, 2018 at 10:12 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10344>)

Thanks for speaking out with your honest reflections on Shambhala and our current direction, I supplication the dralas to help our best efforts at this time.

Reply

7. **Fern** (<http://www.wholeheartedway.com>) says:

July 1, 2018 at 10:53 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10345>)

Well said dear Ethan. I wholeheartedly agree. In the continued vision of the Great Eastern Sun-Fern LaRocca

Reply

8. **Stephen Miller** says:

July 1, 2018 at 11:21 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10346>)

Dear Ethan, Your words are profound, insightful, and compassionate. As someone who is just getting back into the saddle of practice with this sangha, I am deeply moved. I feel like I’m in the right place even though I’ve been through a similar scenario with the Regent as well. Thank you for

speaking up and clarifying so much. Much love, Stephen

Reply

9.  **Alan K Anderson** says:

July 1, 2018 at 11:42 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10347>)

Thank you Ian.

Perfect.

Much love.

Reply

10.  **Candice Taylor-Horvath** says:

July 1, 2018 at 12:14 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10348>)

As someone who is most comfortable with “hitting the exits” in times like this, I appreciate the article. The concept of staying and protesting further “into” any community is new but makes perfect sense. Thanks for that.

Reply

11.  **Mary Lang** says:

July 1, 2018 at 12:47 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10350>)

Dear Ethan,

Thank you for this amazing piece of reflection and advocacy. I really appreciate your insights. I hope our paths cross soon.

Best,

Reply

12.  **Priscilla** says:

July 1, 2018 at 12:57 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10351>)

I and thousands of others have benefitted immeasurably from

their experiences with Shambhala. The teachings, the teachers I've known and sangha members have deeply enriched my life. It appears that others have been deeply harmed. I feel compassion for all.

It is typical of human organizations, religions, governments, that people engage in nefarious behavior. How that is dealt with is crucial. Can the "powers that be" in Shambhala take action that will not only heal, but transform the organization into more of an Enlightened Society? Will all involved respect the laws of the countries where these crimes took place and take appropriate action? More will be revealed.

If alcoholism is a factor in the Sakyong's behavior, the bigger view should include that. In my years of active alcoholism, I harmed others and engaged in criminal behavior. I have been physically, emotionally and spiritually sober for 35 years.

I take refuge in the Buddha, the Dharma and the Sangha. For me, the three jewels go above and beyond "Shambhala" and the Sakyong. I believe that our nature is "Basic Goodness". Milarepa, one of our lineage holders, came to the path after having practiced "black magic" and murdered many. His teacher, Marpa, helped him purify his negative karma and he ultimately attained enlightenment. What will the Sakyong choose to do?

Reply

1.  **Joel Puleo** says:

July 2, 2018 at 8:16 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10379>)

Thank you Priscilla for your comments and observations and particularly mentioning Milarepa. How the Sakyong responds and reaches out further with an open heart will go toward his needed purification as this time.

Reply

1.  **Errol Korn** says:

July 3, 2018 at 6:36 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10381>)

Thankyou Priscilla, I fully agree with you and Joel Puleo above. Milarepa and Rechungpa have long been personal models/heroes.

Reply

2. **Errol Korn** says:

July 3, 2018 at 6:40 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10382>)

Thankyou Priscilla, I wonder if you could please repost this flash of sanity and wisdom on the FB – Shambhala group. I feel it would help tamp down the reactivity on it. Not the strong emotions or revulsion but the reactivity.

Reply

3. **Tania** says:

July 6, 2018 at 6:23 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10408>)

I've seen many references to Milarepa since these allegations arose. However, didn't Milarepa commit these evil deeds BEFORE he was on the path, not AFTER having followed it his entire life? Not AFTER having been trained by the greatest teachers of his time, not AFTER years and years of study and practice?

Reply

1. **Adrienne Papermaster** says:

July 12, 2018 at 11:16 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10426>)

Yes, thanks for pointing that out.

Reply

2. **Michael Brandt** says:

July 16, 2018 at 2:21 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10432>)

Thanx for bringing this up Tania.
This is the buring question for me.
How could this all happen and how could people turn away and not step up and put a stop to this?
We definately need to look in our neurotic tendecies in our devotion.

Reply

13.  **Anya** (<http://www.anyaporter.com>) says:
July 1, 2018 at 1:12 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10352>)

Thank you, Ethan. I feel so lucky to call you a teacher and a friend.

Reply

14.  **Tal Varon** says:
July 1, 2018 at 2:26 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10353>)

Thank you, Ethan. Much love and appreciation

Reply

15.  **Caitlin** says:
July 1, 2018 at 4:40 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10354>)

I am surprised you think that Shambhala can continue in 2018 with a sexual abuser at the helm, just thinking in practical terms. Even if he changes his ways, having violated his vows in the past and having harmed his students, I can't see modern spiritual seekers trusting him now that all of this is out in the open. I'm sure he will retain some loyal followers but how will he attract new ones?

I really hope Shambhala can continue, and that this rather large coconut of wakefulness knocks the organization back on track. To me, keeping the Sakyong in a position of power is extremely dangerous, though, not just to students but to the continued existence of the organization and the availability of the Shambhala teachings to the world.

Perhaps I am misunderstanding what you are saying though?

Reply

1.  **Caroline Contillo** says:
July 4, 2018 at 10:20 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10398>)

I am also extremely wary of the fact that it appears that this statement takes as a given that the Sakyong will continue as the leader of the organization and would like clarity about that.

Reply



malijimenez108 says:

July 4, 2018 at 10:56 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10399>)

Ethan says: "Thank you for reading Caroline and Caitlin. I have no idea what will happen. There is no template for a Shambhala community without a Sakyong leader and the presumed next Sakyong is a child right now, his eldest daughter. It is completely groundless what comes next. What the community demands depends on how he responds. What I will do depends on how he responds."

Via Mali, Ethan's assistant.

Reply



1. **David Wiggin** says:

July 5, 2018 at 7:02 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10404>)

I wonder if another teacher might be able to step up and serve as substitute Sakyong until the eldest daughter is old enough to teach in that case? To me, that seems like one of the few feasible solutions to this conundrum... because I'm in agreement with others that there's absolutely no way the Sakyong can continue as the head of Shambhala. But if Shambhala needs a Sakyong to function... then that's quite a pickle.

In any case, it all depends on how the Sakyong and the organization respond. As someone whose life has improved for the better by the teachings and who is fond of the NYC Shambhala community, I hope for the best- but the most important thing is that the right thing be done here.

Reply



16. **Tony Cape** says:

July 1, 2018 at 5:12 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10404>)

on-shambhala/#comment-10356)

Ethan:

Your words finally allowed me to cry—tears of grief and gratitude to replace the shame and rage I have been feeling.

Thank you so much.

As someone who lived through the Regent scandal, I strongly agree that it is crucial that the Sakyong act decisively and show the humility to take full responsibility. If we retreat again into two camps of accusation and denial, we are doomed.

Reply

17.  Jean Marie says:

July 1, 2018 at 5:40 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10357>)

Thank you for this response. I'm grateful to you for recognizing that Shambhala reflects the culture and systems in which it's embedded. So Shambhala reflects the patterns of abuse of power in American culture (slavery/racism, oppression of women, patriarchy, economic inequality, homophobia, fear of immigrants, Islamophobia, etc. etc.). A part of this pattern of abuse is the powerful never having to take responsibility for the damage they do. I hope that this family chooses to stay together and do the healing work on behalf of the women who have been abused and silenced and also reforming/imagining healthy systems of governance.

Reply

18.  Eric Henn says:

July 1, 2018 at 9:29 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10358>)

I am struggling deeply and completely with these revelations. It seems highly likely that I will leave the Sangha at this point. I have for too long turned a blind eye to our long history of men in power mistreating people. This is not a problem unique to the Sakyong. We all know the history of CTR and the Rejent. At some point in time we have to say that this is not an issue with one particular leader but is an issue with the entire organization. As a student of the Sakyong, I was always able to brush off the previous episodes by believing that this teacher was different. Sadly, I have been proven wrong. We as a sangha are now 0 for 3 in terms of ethical leadership. It

must be considered that the new revelations are part of a pattern going all the way back to our origins and not a unique event. We cannot try to deal with the current revelations in a vacuum. They must be dealt with in context of all the abuses in our history.

Reply



1. **Tsondru Namkha** says:

July 3, 2018 at 8:40 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10384>)

Leaving the organization does not mean leaving the sangha. There are lots and lots of us out here. ❤️

Reply



2. **Peggy K** says:

July 9, 2018 at 2:24 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10417>)

At the moment I feel the same way as I don't think the organization knows how to function without this patriarchy. That said, I also think this could liberate us from our past "sins". It is a huge opportunity for the feminine to rise, if there are strong uncorrupted women available, to take a dominant position to rebalance what has been a dreadfully lopsided structure. And too many people, both men and women have colluded with the Sakyong in this duplicity. I have been outraged. I am now deeply saddened, and my perception of the Sakyong will never be the same again. Time to focus on practice—shamatha is always good—and authentic sangha, of which there are many. It will not be easy. And we can learn and evolve. Thank you Ethan for giving voice to our deepest feelings and confusion. Maitri.

Reply



19. **Carey** says:

July 2, 2018 at 12:02 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10361>)

Wow. Thanks so much for this Ethan. You are such an embodiment of all I hope Shambhala can be one day. This is all beyond heartbreaking and I've nothing meaningful to add

beyond the comments made. Just hope and pray to see gentleness, openness and transparency manifest across the board from this awfulness and that it can become a catalyst for wholesale change and evolution within the entire community. No more lip service. Time is now. May those harmed and the Sakyong, his family and the whole sangha find true healing and refuge from this time on. May Shambhala vision go beyond organisational hierarchical limitations and it's dualistic bonds.

Reply

20.  **FENNANDA ELEVELD** says:

July 2, 2018 at 3:27 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10362>)

Dear Ethan,

Thank you for your letter. It makes me think more, doubt more and be sad and wise more
On my way to Rigden Abisheka...
What to Choose?

fennanda SANGHA AMSTERDAM

Reply

21.  **Erin Vanderstelt** says:

July 2, 2018 at 6:13 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10364>)

I too am waiting to see what happens next within the organization – there needs to be extensive change. I will be happy to advocate from within for much of what I feel must happen, but I will not be able to hold my place in Shambhala if the Sakyong is allowed to maintain his. The only way I see to go forward is without him.

If we can make that change, we can start looking at who else was complicit, and also look deeper at whether this kind of hierarchy is serving the sangha. If Shambhala takes the first step to remove the Sakyong, I will be there to do what I can to help rebuild our communities and ensure safe spaces for all of us on the path.

As a sexual assault survivor that once found healing in Shambhala, this has been incredibly distressing. I am hoping that the next steps will put the sangha and survivors first.

Reply

22.  Perry says:

July 2, 2018 at 8:42 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10365>)

Wonderful article, Ethan!...

Deep down, I feel this is a very health first step toward healing within the community.

May this foster a period of re-making and re-aligning the community more along the lines of the principles of Shambhala — and less on the institutional aspects, which are impermanent and always subject to change.

May there be a top-down reorganization. May there be more women in roles of leadership and teaching.

May healing happen for all those harmed.

May confusion in the sangha dawn as wisdom. May what has happened draw out more of the natural wisdom, clarity, sanity and compassion that's already present in the sangha.

May the sangha continue to flourish. May we all become more transparent and heart-felt in our dealings with each other.

My we have courage to take our practice out into the world where compassion is so desperately needed.

May we have the courage to go into the places that scare us.

Reply

1.  Michael Brandt says:

July 22, 2018 at 1:36 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10441>)

I would say :

May there be a 'Ground Up' reorganization

Reply

23.  **Douglas Martin** says:

July 2, 2018 at 9:41 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10366>)

Thank you Ethan!

Reply

24.  **Mary** says:

July 2, 2018 at 12:23 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10368>)

Why are you not publishing this letter on your facebook account website? I looked for a statement from you there first. Can you speak to teaching at ESA this summer? I am torn about whether to go, or go to KCL for a half dathun with Shastri Shelley and Gary Heinz, for healing.

Reply

25.  **Modesto Fortuna** says:

July 2, 2018 at 3:40 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10369>)

"If you want to experience ordinary magic, you have to call out magical thinking."

Thank you very much for this sentence. It is past the time people start discerning between both.

Also, thank you very much for your letter. It is very important to me seeing a important teacher speaking about this in such a candid way. Your ideas may be correct or incorrect, good or bad, but at least they are out in the open. This is good.

One thing that could be provided for the vajrayana students who feel they can not go on practicing in the Shambhala sangha is guidance as to leaving without breaking samaya (if it is possible at all).

Reply

1. **Charley Rosicky** says:

July 3, 2018 at 7:13 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10390>)

Modesto

For the leaving and Samaya question, I found Mingur Rinpoche's article about Vajrayana and teachers who abuse power very useful. <https://www.lionsroar.com/treat-everyone-as-the-buddha/> (<https://www.lionsroar.com/treat-everyone-as-the-buddha/>)

Thank you Ethan

Charley Rosicky

Reply

26. **Suzan Oudshoorn** says:

July 2, 2018 at 3:51 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10370>)

Hello Ethan, thank you for offering context and direction to the community. I always felt that the ethics of Shambhala are primarily that everything can be put into process, "we can work it out" so to speak. But this time, with the Sunshine Report, it's like colors are somewhat changing. It's toxic! what I like to share is that I take part in a 12step programme to work with my own history of abuse and co-dependency, and I can tell you that there are intelligent ways to support each other and heal when we are damaged. It's not something boring. Bottom line is that we seriously need to work with ourselves, honest and all, so that we don't continue to neglect, intimidate and abuse others, that we recognise dysfunctional behaviour. I wish that Rinpoche will take the lead in opening up to us, on eye level as you say, be with us, closely work together, travelling to the wisdom in it together. Reading the report it's like he hates the young women, very powerful language. It may be of big help if we are willing to change.

Reply

27. **Ann Bruck** says:

July 2, 2018 at 6:06 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10372>)

Ethan-

Thank you for taking time out of your own day, reflection and

practice to write this beautiful piece.

May we all take time to look deep and reflect on how we move, think, act and speak. One of the greatest benefits I have received through meditation is space between stimulus and reaction/response.

Wishing you well-

Reply

28.  Jan Lorraine says:

July 2, 2018 at 6:24 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10373>)

Thanks from Australia. I am appreciative of hearing a Shambhala teacher speak out with an independent voice. I am hoping there will be more voices of senior teachers. The letters from Kalapa Council and the Sakyong are essentially cover ups or... smoothers-overs. The wishes of healing and kindness? Maybe clarity, honesty, courage, are more appropriate. Would Shambhala be enriched with readings (from non-Shambhala sources) on the nature of power in all its forms? Hopefully a different time is here: Black lives matter, me too movement..... I read somewhere that angel kyodo williams said the age of denialism is over. Thought from philosopher Slavoj Zizek we do not fear and obey power so much because it is in itself so powerful: on the contrary, power appears powerful because we treat it as such. Thanks once again.

Reply

29.  Susan Swihart says:

July 2, 2018 at 7:49 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10377>)

Thank you so much Ethan for this letter. It answers so many questions I have had about this recent turn of events. As others have said, it is kind and compassionate, qualities we all love and seek from Shambhala.

When I first came to Shambhala, I was troubled by the pictures of both Chogyam Trungpa and the Sakyong up at the shrine; deification of mere humans seemed very unwise to me. I think both of these men acted out their assumptions of what they could do as a result of that deification; said in a

kinder way, they both demonstrated that they suffered from an illness: alcoholism.

Having run a statewide domestic violence legal hotline for five years, I am familiar with both domestic and sexual violence. As a result, I do not believe that the perpetrators of the alleged sexual violence in Shambhala communities will stop until they see a meaningful reason to do so; that reason usually pertains to power. Similarly, the victims know that they will not be safe until they know that their abusers are no longer present. It is all about power and control. For these reasons, I believe that compassion is indeed vital, but it is also very important that all involved not be naïve about the underlying dynamics of sexual dynamics. We need to be loving and compassionate about the victims also and make sure they feel safe. Thank you.

Reply

1.  Rhoda Climenhaga (<http://www.balancedways4women.com>) says:
July 3, 2018 at 2:14 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10387>)

This is a very wise view. While compassion is called for, my own personal experience has also been that people don't change overnight. A major shake up is in order, including asking the Sakyong to step down until he has done extensive work on himself and made adequate reparations. His apology letter is far from adequate as others have stated and for me only further served to show deep dysfunction and even narcissism. Power and spiritual materialism are deeply seductive, at we can't accept and "oh, woops, sorry you felt harmed", and move on. For myself personally, I am deeply hurt, having experienced such behavior from males on the past, not within Shambhala luckily, but elsewhere, because of the level of hurt it is difficult to practice in the form of sitting with the emotions as they are too painful, as Susan Piver skillfully points out, but reaching out to others, walking mindfully in nature, and calling for action within the community is how I am practicing at the moment. As many have said, I am withholding decision as to whether to stay part of the Shambhala organization for now until I see how things are handled. I hope the organization is getting this strong message. I believe if there are not serious changes, since Shambhala tends to be on the edge financially anyway, it is in danger of crumbling. I hope and pray for the strength and wisdom for these changes to come forward, because the teachings are indeed precious.

Reply

2. Susan Swihart says:

July 3, 2018 at 9:12 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10392>)

This is a correction to my reply above. I apologize for two errors:

Misspelling of Chogyam Trungpa in the second paragraph, first sentence

and the penultimate sentence, last paragraph should read:
...it is also very important that all involved not be naive about the underlying dynamics of sexual violence.

Reply

30. Benjamin Moreau says:

July 3, 2018 at 5:08 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10380>)

Dear Sangha

I ve learned recently like all of you that my Guru has been acting far differently from what i could think

I ve learned he was also a man fighting his own démons and he could harm others

.. a kind of simple human being.

I have to admit at this point that i had another kind in mind

What kind if not a simple human kind ?

I ve been and i m still fighting my own démons,i ve been and i am still harming people occasionnelle but not Him !..no no no no not Him !

He had to be perfect ! He had to be à different kind !

But he is not :I WAS WRONG !

He s just a simple human being

I m a slow student, i need time to understand properly !

It s a grey morning,yet i wake up

I want to send my love and suport to those who were harmed

I also want to send my love and suport to Rimpoche , to the royal family and all of you around the world as my Sangha sisters and brothers

We are all suffering together,..may Kindness and Prajna lead our steps !

I understand the ressentment , the anger , the sadness floating among us and i'd like to encourage everyone to understand that altrought these feelings are present in us floating like a ghost, they might not be our best allies to win Victory over war.

Love compassion forgiveness and mutual support are much

more reliable allies as they often provide a good ground for clear insights for chaotic/difficult situations
 I can not read Rimpoche's mind but i have no doubt that He will fight his démons with bravery. His letter shows his will to walk in this direction but we also have to support Him
 We need to stay confident in the genuine qualité of this painful process.
 Together we suffer and together we'll blossom.
 Rimpoche has offered to us so much love and Care for many years and many of us have seen their lives becoming meaningful and beautiful as we were starting to rule our World following His teachings
 All of that could happen because of this simple unperfect human being
 The Sakyong Wangmo , Rimpoche ,the all royal family deserve our support our understanding our compassion
 We all deserve to be kind to each other
 We could be that brave

May those who were harmed be healed
 May we be able to forgive each other and ourselves for the harm caused to others and ourselves
 May we walk in this battle with an open heart of gentleness
 Long life to our beautiful yet unperfect Sangha

Reply

31.  **Terry Blaine** (<http://www.terryblaine.com>) says:
 July 4, 2018 at 6:16 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10393>)

Thank you, Ethan, for sharing your heart. See you at ESA, where we can lean in, listen deeply, and practice together at this tender, difficult time. What else can we do?

Reply

32.  **Kevin Knox** says:
 July 4, 2018 at 6:35 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10394>)

Thanks Ethan for your heartfelt post. The nobility of your intentions is very clear. I also see a lot of blind spots that are inevitable for anyone deeply invested in a teacher and a community. As an old student of Trungpa Rinpoche who left the community shortly after Ösel Tendzin was named Regent I have a very different perspective – starting with seeing

everything Andrea Winn's courageous Project Sunshine has revealed as being perfectly consistent with conduct in Vajradhatu (and then Shambhala) since the early 1970's.

I think every teacher (and as many experienced students as possible) in the community should carefully consider this post from Matthew Remski, a great writer who has done more to illuminate the blind spots and denial (and ways out of both!) in Dharma communities than anyone else I've read.

Wishing you and everyone else involved with Shambhala the courage to chart a new course that preserves great teachings in a framework free from feudal models of control and corruption.

<http://matthewremski.com/wordpress/accountability-or-apologia-reading-between-the-lines-when-yoga-and-buddhism-leaders-issue-crisis-statements/>
(<http://matthewremski.com/wordpress/accountability-or-apologia-reading-between-the-lines-when-yoga-and-buddhism-leaders-issue-crisis-statements/>)

Reply

33.  Alexander deVaron says:

July 4, 2018 at 6:36 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10395>)

Hello Ethan,

Many thanks for these words. As usual, they're thoughtful and thought provoking. Also a wonderful mix of big broken heart and clear insight.

Keep it up...we need you!

Reply

34.  Sheila Baylis says:

July 4, 2018 at 7:48 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10397>)

I don't see how we, as Shambhala warriors, who aspire to be brave and create an enlightened society, can allow the Sakyong to maintain his power at this time.

As you say, Ethan, he exerted this power differential to sexually abuse women. Multiple times. Years apart.

I am willing to forgive him, but I call for him to step down immediately. That doesn't mean he can't be a part of the community, but he should not have power over others at this time. It seems so obvious, I don't get what possible excuse we could come up with to allow him to maintain power.

Not only that, a woman should be the next Sakyong. That is what an enlightened society would look like.

Reply

35.  **Pam Rubin** says:

July 4, 2018 at 11:44 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10400>)

Eth- you refer to "strict" patriarchy and "blind" patriarchy. is there a kind of looser, clear-eyed patriarchy that you support? Patriarchy means male dominance = not cool.

Reply



malijimenez108 says:

July 5, 2018 at 7:16 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10405>)

From Ethan: "Good question. I think I only support 'natural hierarchy' with full transparency on power dynamics. Sending you love and thanks."

Reply

36.  **Leann** says:

July 4, 2018 at 7:02 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10402>)

I am a bit surprised that 1) you didn't mention and 2) nobody else has asked in the 47 comments above this one: were you aware at all of these assaults? As a Shastri, I would assume you would be somewhat part of an inner circle, or an outer inner circle. By not mentioning it at all, are you implying you heard nothing of these experiences? Please make a statement addressing this. By not doing so, you perpetuate the very same problem, albeit on a more subtle, but perceptible, level.

Reply



malijimenez108 says:

July 5, 2018 at 5:19 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10403>)

From Ethan: "I was not aware of any of these allegations. I was aware of on two occasions SMR briefly dating two friends of mine who were committed Vajrayana students of his, in 1999ish and 2003ish. This made me uncomfortable, given that every other teacher in our tradition (non-gurus) is asked to follow explicit guidelines that if you are romantically involved with another community member, it must be established between the participants outside of a student-teacher or MI relationship. I think 95% of us have followed these guidelines. His romantic relationships with students bothered me at the time, but neither of my friends reported (to me) anything abusive happening within the relationship. We were told pretty broadly in the community that when he got married, he settled down completely. Thanks for your question. I did not include this because I did not think it was my place to shout out my friends. The only other thing I will say is that the "outer inner circle," which perhaps I am part of, offers a person almost zero access to the Sakyong's personal life, or for that matter, zero access to any direct feedback from the Sakyong regarding your own work in the sangha. Insularity is a huge structural problem here. All best to you. Thanks for your valid point. May all be healed."

Reply



1. Lily says:

July 12, 2018 at 1:41 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10425>)

Hi, Ethan,

You hit the nail on the head. Insularity is not only a symptom of the illness. It has also been used as a tool, to enable power abuses. To create a sense of clubiness; to hide questionable behavior; to isolate those who have spoken out.

I'm sure we all have experienced sudden frozen silences when "inappropriate" or embarrassing observations are made. Nobody speaks of them again, usually.

I was once in a large meeting where one of the most influential Shambhala elders told a student to not tell his spouse the truth about having a long term affair

at seminary. What message does that send?

I saw a Shambhala Training Level I director hit on two new program participants, and then arrange with the next coordinator to be billeted with one of them for Level II.

I also witnessed the director of a land center abusing young, inexperienced staff, using the dharma to do so. "Problem employees" were sent to go on solitary retreat. The head of Shambhala administration tried to intervene, to no avail. The board of directors met with the full staff, and not one staff member spoke up. The director was present in the room; fear was in the air.

This doesn't demonstrate enlightened society. It is worse than conventional society. People are exposing tender hearts, and we don't always protect them. Our mechanisms for doing so seem toothless. (Note: That same director is still leading retreats at other locations.)

I thought of this memory when I recently read that the Sakyong performed a healing ceremony with the woman who he had previously groped and kissed against her will. How would it feel to me if my *abuser* were using Buddhist ritual (as the preceptor) to make me feel better about it?

The genuine, transformative benefit that Shambhala Buddhism has been to so many of us is now in jeopardy, because of the corruption that isolation and insularity enabled. This would be a heartbreaking loss.

Maybe any one of us would lose perspective, if given so much power with insufficient accountability. Let us all learn how to balance authority and responsibility.

Reply

2.  Leann says:

August 25, 2018 at 6:56 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10505>)

Thank you for answering this.

Reply

37.  Hannah says:

July 6, 2018 at 7:18 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10505>)

on-shambhala/#comment-10409)

Thank you for your reflections on this, Ethan, they have been important for me in this past week, and I have been able to share your words with members of my sangha, to help me articulate my thoughts on all of this. In sadness, and anger, but staying with the trouble – all my best wishes.

Reply

38.  Emme Edmunds says:

July 6, 2018 at 9:33 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10410>)

Dear Ethan, I'm glad you wrote this. I was waiting to read what you would say. I also need to hear from other leaders in our sangha. I feel very much for the women who were treated badly, violated and then betrayed by the larger sangha. Others, as well as myself, have experienced sexual assault and abuse as children. So this is a dismal and familiar landscape. It was discomfiting to say the least to hear about CTR and then the regent. Now this recent report and totally pathetic apology are so so disheartening. I am feeling anger and betrayal and feel strongly that the SMR should step down immediately and permanently. The organization will not survive his staying on any sort of power, and all of the goodness it has done will be tainted. His statement was weak and inadequate, and those who took root guru vows must be devastated or in denial. what a sad choice that is. I can see the healing of all only if the MSR steps down and apologizes and takes a humble position. Also, any who protected him and turned away should step down. I always thought the court thing was a little creepy and now I trust my gut. It makes me sick with sadness that apparently there were people who covered it up. I agree with much that you wrote. and I feel strongly that Shambhala needs accountable, clear, transparent leadership. I will be following the investigation and work and will be happy to make my Dharma home in a safer place where there is a commitment [BY THE TEACHERS as well as the students] to following vows of non-violence and compassion if need be. Meanwhile, best of luck and may all beings experience, clarity, protection, freedom, and bliss. and may they find good Dharma homes where they will not be harmed, betrayed or belittled.

Reply

39.  Adam Hart says:

July 8, 2018 at 3:06 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10412>)

It seems to me that there is a big job at any levels to be done by many if Shambhala can transform / develop from all this .

One thing that needs to be returned to is Shambhala as a non religious path and one which the notion of an all powerful monarchy is jettisoned in favour of democratic / meritocratic community / tribal leadership, as something that can discerned/ learnt from in many relatively enlightened societies pre , and post, capitalism . The traces of which exist now.

In other words the current disfunctional and grandiose form of central state Shambhala kingship that has wrought so much damage needs if to be radically revised, downsized and pluralised , if it is to have any benefit at all .

They terms monarchy and king need to be completely dropped as part of this process . I suggest that are not core to our values or practice .

All best

Adam

Reply

40.  Tami says:

July 9, 2018 at 7:26 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10418>)

Your reflections are very thoughtful and are much appreciated. But realistically, this tidbit below is so disgusting and so tone deaf that it seems eminently clear that Shambhala should really just dissolve and let the teachings go forth to flourish on their own.

“Shambhala has reportedly hired the public relations firm Hiltzik Strategies—headed by Matthew Hiltzik, who has represented Harvey Weinstein, Justin Bieber, Katie Couric, and former Fox News host Glenn Beck. Hiltzik also has ties to the Trump administration”

Reply

41. Joseph says:

July 9, 2018 at 9:01 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10419>)

Thank you Ethan and everyone for your comments. Like all of you I am devastated, and at the same time I am asking why didn't I see the giant elephant that was always in the room. Giant coconut of wakefulness indeed. I have just finished reading the white paper on Clergy Sexual Abuse by An Olive Branch, and I think it is incredibly important and informative about what has been taking place in Shambhala SINCE THE VERY BEGINNING: <https://www.an-olive-branch.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/An-Olive-Branch-White-Paper-on-Clergy-Misconduct-and-the-Misuse-of-Power.pdf> (<https://www.an-olive-branch.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/An-Olive-Branch-White-Paper-on-Clergy-Misconduct-and-the-Misuse-of-Power.pdf>)

#metoo is opening our eyes to the everyday brutality of male power-misogyny, and this paper makes clear that there is no such thing as consensual sex between teacher and student. The Dalai Lama's statements are particularly clear and direct about this. I believe that both Trungpa and Sakyong Mipham did not mean to cause harm; but treating humans as infallible godlike persons creates the conditions in which harm is inevitable. Everyone's understanding is limited in some way, no matter how advanced in others, and creating hierarchies of secrecy, protection, and blind obedience assures that the limitations, and yes, ignorance, of those at the top, will manifest as harm. I feel very, very badly for the victims of sexual abuse in our community. I feel badly for the Sakyong: as weak and inadequate as his statement was, I heard him loudly & clearly when he said he was just a human being trying to learn how to be a teacher. What man among us would have done better given the mythology he was raised on and the unbridled power he was given? Shambhala's great liability and blindness has always been its arrogance. The dharma is the dharma with or without this organization, the teachings remain in myriad traditions. Buddhism thrives because it adapts to time and place. This is a time of societal awakening, and Shambhala will only survive, because it will only serve, if it – we – humbly recognize our leaders' and our societies' historical blindnesses and faults, and shed them. The monarchy, to be blunt, is bullshit. We accepted it because we didn't want to be grownups and responsible for ourselves, we WANTED a perfect, magical, omniscient Daddy or Mommy to cower behind. Now we see the devastation and rot that has caused. I love the teachings and I'm forever grateful to my compassionate, brave, faulty and human teachers. Shambhala as an organization is either done, or must shed its structure COMPLETELY.

Reply

42.  **Matthew** says:

July 9, 2018 at 9:18 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10420>)

The answer seems difficult but clear – why not just let Shambhala dissolve? Why in the world do we need a king anyways? And if this thing we currently call Shambhala does needs one, then let's derive something new that does not. What might happen if we love these teachings but simply say no to monarchy and all notions of human hierarchy or fundamental differentials in human value and competency?

Ps. This line is timeless and so important: "If you want to experience ordinary magic, you have to call out magical thinking." Thank you for sharing it.

Reply

43.  **Susanne Vincent** says:

July 10, 2018 at 10:38 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10422>)

Dear Ethan,
Thank you. I've just sent your article to our members, with an email that says pretty much what I say below. I'm Director of the Auckland, New Zealand Centre.

Kiluaea is erupting, and the lava of feminine wrath is spewing over Hawai'i. The First People venerate this, while safeguarding people from collateral damage!

You have really unlocked the critical points: no – if there is an energetic dissonance between the teachings and how we 'do Shambhala', then the dralas cannot possibly play. As you say, all of this is a great message about authenticity, and also about accountability for being warriors in our own right. When it comes to what we stand for, where we stand, and what we will stand and not stand – we must be ever alert to the apparent forces of imposed hierarchies and conventions, and never assume that compliance is always the required default position. To do so is to rob the world of our intelligence, which is not the Shambhala vision at all.

Shambhala is also bigger than all this. It was never the lineage for the fainthearted (!), and certainly this time will test us in going forward, but we go forward together. Right now we have a curious gap, like at the end of the outbreath, where

suddenly the ground of safety and Knowing What to Do Next has gone, and we're out on our own, in a space of raw potential that nobody is crystallising for us. This could be the most interesting and pregnant time we have ever had.

We have an eclipse on Friday, and they say that these times are always catalysts. But people in this sangha are wise. And maybe we can all contribute to how this vision needs to manifest. Meanwhile, here's mine:

Dear Sakyong: please don't feel you have to be a Tibetan king sitting up on a big box, with massive uncontested powers, commanding people on this and that. This isn't the model at all. The actual king of Shambhala is the Rigden King – always has been – and that's the best way to keep it. The people were always devoted to the Imperial Rigden, without encouragement, through their self existing inscrutability!

You will do far, far better to be an Earth Protector.

We all aspire to manifest as the Universal Monarch. In your case, I would like you to be more like the King of Bhutan was portrayed to be. You can wear a crown if you like, but you would sit on the wall in the town in the afternoons, and talk to the kids about how they're doing. You and the Sakyong Wangmo can teach your kids to live close to the land and get to know the wildlife, and invite other kids over to do the same. You can both get some good outdoor clothes and dig a veggie garden. It would be good to plant trees. When we gather with you, we can all sit together on the ground. All the money you have – apart from ordinary household needs – can be spent on carefully selected projects for the world, and invested in helping “free those who suffer at the hands of the three lords of materialism and are afraid of external phenomena, which are their own projections”. This is urgent work.

You are surrounded by teachers who have tremendous empowerments, and a few more not too far away. Your job as Earth Protector is to nurture what can naturally arise to flourish, and also to safeguard: Maori call it the principle of Kaitiakitanga, of stewardship and accountability. It is not a role for just one person, but the whole tribe. You could have an Earth Protector movement for youth – for us all. How powerful that would be.

This Sakyong role that you were given – how could anything be more fortunate and auspiciously relevant in this time than that we have a Sakyong Earth Protector, who steps forward into his rightful role at all levels and teaches us to do the same?

I do so hope you can recognize this.

With love and very, very good luck

Susie

Reply

44.  Sarah Guare says:

July 14, 2018 at 5:54 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10430>)

Thank you, Ethan, and thank you, Susanne. I take heart in the power of Project Sunshine and in the vision of a world of Earth Protectors.

Reply

45.  Monica says:

July 14, 2018 at 12:08 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10431>)

As a person who purposely never stepped foot through the Shambhala doors I wonder if I have anything to offer. Maybe not. Maybe.

I hope your Sangha will have the chance to plant a healthy tree from new healthy seeds. In my opinion Chögyam Trungpa was a genius. But the fact that he so thoroughly understood the teachings and so eloquently transmitted them, at the particular time he did, is exactly what made him so dangerous. Because, in my opinion, he was also a megalomaniac, psychopath, a sexually abusive deviant and an alcoholic. He is the seed of Shambhala. The seed was rotten and the seed was very very dangerous because the seed had some pretty interesting and dynamic things to say. He caused serious harm to individuals, groups and Buddhism in general. This is your seed.

I offer this as a new seed. As your community works through these more obvious and horrible issues of sexual assault, abuse and misuse of power, I humbly ask that you also look at the inherent power imbalance between any teacher and student and consider the issue of consensual sexual relationship between teachers and students (including students who just attend open classes).

In my opinion and personal experience, when teachers become sexually involved with an active student or sangha member, it is an abuse of power and it creates an unsafe space for learning anything, let alone Dharma. Most women have been on the receiving end of an authority

figure(s) using their power to procure sex or relationships. Obviously we all know this is most often done by men but both sexes are capable. This happens in all institutions, with doctors, teachers, bosses.

Please question if it is a good practice to allow you teachers to date students. For me, the space is no longer emotionally safe when my teacher is dating a fellow student. I now only practice and teach at places where this is not allowed or where there is a clear process when the student is no longer in the class of that teacher. It is wonderfully clear. It protects both students and teachers. It take the idea off the table and creates a safe space for everyone to learn and grow. Thanks for listening. With love and hope for your future,

Sincerely,
Monica

Reply

46.  **Susan Berger-Jones** says:

July 17, 2018 at 5:43 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10434>)

Thanks Ethan. This is a time for growth for Shambhala even when the events that lead to today are heartbreaking. I am thinking of the NY Sangha. My heart is with you. The top leaders were (yes) too free to act without moral accountability. The institution seems out of balance. The vision of Shambhala might be more organic and viable if allowed to be reimagined (even fractured) by individual sanghas: add a certain groundlessness to the vision. For me, I need to understand more deeply what it means to be both victim and predator. This is very hard. Maybe too much for now.

Reply

47.  **Ans de Vries** says:

July 17, 2018 at 12:36 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10435>)

Dear Ethan,
Thank you your clarifying thoughts. I am a Shambhala translator in The Netherlands. I translated your blog into Dutch, i hope you don't mind. I sent the translation to some of my Shambhala friends in The Netherlands, to further our exchanges and discussions here in Dutch Shambhala.

Yours in virtuous speech,

Ans de Vries

Reply

48.  Alexa says:

July 17, 2018 at 8:50 pm (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10436>)

Thanks Ethan,

I took the Shambhala training weekend 1 with you and your dad, and the Shambhala training weekend 2 with Kevin Bogle (the instructor who quit upon learning of these allegations). I do understand how these allegations can be difficult to digest or accept for some of those who have their identities tied to being part of the Shambhala community.

As for me, I feel like I've just dodged many, many bullets. I was just about to fully commit and take the complete Shambhala path when I read the sexual abuse article in the New York Times. I can't dismiss these claims just so that I have can shot of becoming part of an enlightened society. I won't be part of any organization, religious or not, that tries to cover sexual abuse, and child abuse for the sake of their "teachings/ dharma." There is so much wisdom out there that is not tainted with cover ups and deceptions.

Thank you again, Ethan. Good luck.

Reply

49.  AI says:

July 19, 2018 at 5:57 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10438>)

I'm new to the Shambhala teachings, but not new to Buddhism. I love Trungpa's work and hope that this community can heal but it is going to require a structural overhaul.

What needs to lead the way is the teachings not the teacher. If you look at all of the communities where this type of abuse has occurred it is always one where the teacher is revered. The Zen communities where this has happened are the ones that basically worshiped the roshi (Eido Shimano and Joshu Sasaki). It only happened with the San Francisco Zen Center in the 70's because Suzuki Roshi made the mistake of getting around to naming only one successor before he died. This wasn't his plan. Suzuki Roshi himself never wanted to be

considered a leader.

These indiscretions don't happen in the majority of Zen communities because the teacher usually refuses to be looked upon as an authority figure. I've never heard of these issues in a Theravaden community.

I want to participate in the Shambhala community but am weary until they change the structure of power. The teachings are what the students should be devoted to.

Reply

50.  John says:

July 25, 2018 at 5:08 am (<https://www.ethannichtern.com/reflections-on-shambhala/#comment-10476>)

Since the moment I read the accounts of this horrific circumstance I lost a considerable amount of connectedness to this organization. As a community of teachers you seem wiser than I, however these recent events seem to have brought to light that the history of Shambhala is full of these accounts of it's leaders? I really hope that these stories are just internet fodder, but from my perspective they may also be true. I can only keep searching for clarity on these historical accounts.

I personally hoped that this community would recreate itself under a different name and mission... rather than be so attached to it's history. I may not fully understand the decisions as I have only been on this path for a few years, but I have been very serious about it and these have been very important years in my life.

I guess that I just can't understand why anyone would care about the name and lineage remaining intact if at it's pinnacle it is repeatedly failing... It seems to have little to do with what the Buddha was all about to my understanding.

My best to you all... many of you have taught me so much, and I can not thank you enough for making so many great teachings available... Right now I just can not see myself representing the Shambhala name out in the world. If it wear a patch on my jacket, I'd just tear it off... unfortunately it's sewn on my heart, making this all so painful. Perhaps in time, my understanding and heart will change, but right now this just all feels like a punch in the gut.

In love, Honesty and Peace, -Mr. Lost in Ohio

Reply

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