



January 19, 2020

Dear Current and Prospective Mindful Teacher Certification Program Participants,

On January 18th, 2020, Mindful Schools was alerted by members of our community that Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, former Head Teacher at Shambhala International, plans to resume teaching at an upcoming event in France. In June 2018, a series of reports were released that detailed sexual abuse by Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche. In July 2018, the Sakyong announced his decision to step away from teaching and administrative duties.

Mindful Schools is a secular organization and has no direct association with Shambhala International. Mindful Schools does, however, use Shambhala Mountain Center as a venue for our Mindful Teacher Certification Program Retreats, due to the venue's size and capacity to accommodate our students who live in the west coast region of the US.

Shambhala Mountain Center did not communicate to Mindful Schools about the Sakyong's plans to resume teaching. As an organization that values the strength of the relationship between teacher and student, and understands the devastating impacts of trauma on individuals and communities, Mindful Schools remains committed to stand with those who came forward to report the cases of sexual abuse.

As such, our staff will be in contact with the retreat center to explore all possible options for a change of venue. This creates a challenge given the minimum advance warning our team received and the various needs of our retreats, but it is a high priority considering the nature of the allegations.

Mindful Schools will regularly communicate our progress and updates as this work continues, and we thank our community members for bringing this issue to our attention.

Sincerely,

Mindful Schools



SHAMBHALA
MOUNTAIN CENTER

January 28, 2020

Dear Mindful Teacher Program Applicants,

My name is Michael Gayner and I am the Executive Director of Shambhala Mountain Center. I am writing to address concerns about hosting the Mindful Teacher Certification Program retreats at our location, due to the news of the Sakyong teaching in Europe, after allegations of sexual assault which came out in 2018.

I first want to apologize for not communicating the news of the potential for a program to be led by the Sakyong to the Mindful Schools community in a more timely and proactive manner. We had no say in the decision and were not aware that this decision had been made, nor of Pema Chodron's response until they were made public. We have been working on a response with the goal of having a clear public statement following a meeting of the SMC Board at the end of January. None-the-less, our commitment to transparency should have resulted in an update being shared when we became aware of the news.

I also want to be clear that SMC is not inviting the Sakyong to teach. Our position, which we publicly stated in a letter from our entire community in the summer of 2018, is that "We're watching closely and with hope for the Sakyong to engage in a genuine process of accountability, purification, and reformative action." We continue to stand by this and other commitments we made. [SMC Statement](#).

Since the allegations of misconduct emerged in 2018, SMC has engaged in a process of reflection and resulting actions to ensure that we learn and respond effectively to ensure the safety of our guests, presenters and staff. This process has included piloting and establishing a series of staff trainings including active bystander and diversity training, power dynamics with Dr. Cedar Barstow, and training with SAVA (Sexual Assault Victim Advocacy). We have recently completed a year-long process of developing a new [Code of Ethics](#) for staff and visitors at SMC. We are also in the final stages of completing a comprehensive grievance procedure to support the code.

Another element in our response has involved a process begun in the winter of 2019 to change our ByLaws in order to strengthen our status as an independent and separately incorporated 501c3 Educational Non-Profit. Recently completed, these changes establish the Board of SMC as the sole authority to change the ByLaws and Articles of Incorporation, hire and dismiss Directors and Board Members, and to sell assets of SMC. We will be publicly announcing this change along with further details of the new arrangement in early February, following our Board meeting at the end of this month.

In keeping with our commitment to transparency, SMC has also gathered all of the links we can find to reports, responses and processes carried out such as a third-party investigation, police investigations and the work of “An Olive Branch” regarding abuse in Shambhala. We are building a page on our website where all of these links will be provided.

This is a fraught and painful time for SMC, the larger SMC community, and for our guests who trust us to hold a safe and nurturing space for profound, restorative and often challenging work. We are working hard to meet this responsibility and this moment with integrity and clarity. More than simply with words, we recognize that we need to demonstrate by our actions that abuse of any kind is not tolerated at SMC, and will be met with a swift and effective response due to clear policy and effective training and procedures, all taking place within a wholesome community culture. Our staff, most of whom are young and not members of Shambhala, remain committed to SMC due to our collective commitment to this work. More than simply acceptable, we want our guests and staff to be proud of visiting and living at SMC. We aspire to be an example of how an organization and a community can acknowledge, take responsibility for past harm and grow from the experience.

In writing this letter, I acknowledge that the situation may cause significant disruptions and distress for members of your community. I would like to make myself available to address any questions or concerns about visiting SMC, or in regard to our response to the allegations.

Finally, I want to express my gratitude to the Mindful Schools community and leadership for the clarity and kindness with which they have brought their concerns regarding the immediate issue forward, and for your willingness to work with us. We are deeply committed to our on-going process of learning and implementing how to best be of benefit to the world and look forward to serving your community.

Sincerely,

Michael

Michael Gayner
Executive Director | Shambhala Mountain Center
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January 28, 2020

Dear Current and Prospective Mindful Teacher Certification Program Participants,

We are writing to follow up on the communication we sent last week regarding our use of the Shambhala Mountain Center for retreats this summer. In our previous communication, we shared that we were unaware of the Sakyong's potential return to teaching, and that we would initiate a fact-finding process to assess the implications of this turn of events on our use of Shambhala Mountain Center (SMC) now and in the future.

Since that communication, we have:

- Been in contact with several of you to hear more about how the Sakyong's return to teaching impacts your decision to participate in retreats at Shambhala Mountain Center.
- Considered the implications of changing venues at this late date, both for Mindful Schools and for our participants.
- Connected with our staff to discuss our personal responses to the Sakyong's potential return to teach and to brainstorm options for Mindful Schools' response.
- Researched the possibility of moving our retreat to alternate locations in the Colorado area during the same time as is scheduled for our retreats.
- Determined the space available at our other retreat location (in Garrison, NY) to accommodate participants that do not want to attend a retreat at SMC.
 - Please note: The opening and closing retreat content is the same at both locations. For closing retreat participants, changing venues will not impact your ability to complete the program nor are there any cohort-specific activities scheduled during our retreats.
- Met with the Executive Director of SMC to hear directly from him about SMC's response to allegations of sexual misconduct and the Sakyong's potential return to teaching.
- Connected with Mindful Schools board to discuss how to formally and publicly address our own community with a clear statement, stance, and commitment that aligns to our own values

After this thorough investigation, we have determined the following:

- SMC has been taking proactive steps to address past misconduct and to develop structures to safeguard against future misconduct. Further, SMC has been taking steps to more formally separate from Shambhala International.

- Based on SMC's proactive measures, as well as forthcoming communication from SMC to address MT participant concerns, Mindful Schools has determined that the proper supports are in place to allow the use of the SMC for our scheduled retreats this summer.
- We are prepared to support participants that would prefer to change locations to Garrison on a first-come, first-served basis, up to the maximum space available.
- To support full transparency and open communication, our community would benefit from hearing directly from the SMC Executive Director, Michael Gayner. To that end, we have scheduled two live Zoom calls with Michael Gayner, where he will be able to communicate with you directly about the steps SMC has been taking and to answer questions you may have. To protect the confidentiality of the space, these calls will not be recorded.
 - Here the dates, times, and links to those calls, please select the one that works best for you:
 - Wednesday, January 29th, 4-4:30pm PST:
<https://mindfulschools.zoom.us/j/990065001>
 - Friday, January 31st, 9:30-10am PST:
<https://mindfulschools.zoom.us/j/191368950>

We realize that no solution will be perfect for everyone, and that our decision to continue hosting our retreats this summer at SMC will have implications for some of you. Please know that we have made the best decision we could given the timing, circumstances, and our trust in SMC's good-faith efforts to address past wrongs. We are available to connect with you individually to hear your concerns and to support you to make the best decision for you.

Sincerely,

Megan Sweet
Director of Training, Mindful Schools



SHAMBHALA
MOUNTAIN CENTER

February 7, 2020

Dear Mindful Teacher Program Applicants,

In response to concerns raised by donors, presenters and participants regarding the need for Shambhala Mountain Center (“SMC”) to establish greater autonomy from the Sakyong Potrang (“SP”), SMC’s Board of Directors (“Board”) worked with SMC staff and leadership, and in early 2019 initiated discussions with the SP to amend the SMC Bylaws.

SMC is a Colorado nonprofit corporation and a tax exempt charitable nonprofit organization. When SMC was formed, the SP had four specific powers in the Bylaws in regard to the governance of SMC. The SP had exclusive authority to:

1. Amend the Bylaws;
2. Amend the Articles of Incorporation;
3. Appoint and remove Directors; and
4. Sell all or substantially all of the assets of SMC.

In January of 2020, SMC and the SP agreed to amend the Bylaws to grant those powers to the SMC Board, with the SP retaining veto power in those four areas. In all other areas of governance and management of SMC, SMC’s Executive Director and Board have full authority and responsibility.

We are grateful for the support and understanding of the SP in accommodating these changes.

Sincerely,

Michael

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SHAMBHALA
MOUNTAIN CENTER

February 17, 2020

Dear Friends,

We're nearly two years into a process of reckoning in the Shambhala community. We've learned of patterns of abuse of power, sexual misconduct, and harassment that have been a thread in the fabric of Shambhala culture. It is as heartbreaking as it is necessary to acknowledge and learn from this. Shambhala Mountain Center will turn 50 in 2021. In order to honor and hold responsibility for the 50 years of profound teachers and dedicated practitioners who have worked, volunteered, practiced and studied at our retreat center, we need to be willing to recognize and address these challenges.

There is deep work for us to do.

So far, we've updated and improved our [Code of Ethics](#) with the help of ethicist and therapist Dr. Cedar Barstow, instituted a grievance procedure, and launched a cycle of staff trainings on power, harassment, abuse, and bystander intervention led by Dr. Barstow, SAVA (Sexual Assault Victim Advocate Center), and The Blue Bench.

While these initiatives are a necessary start, they need to be integrated with an ongoing inquiry into the structural and cultural factors that have contributed to this situation. As a staff community, we've continued to process and examine each new communication and piece of information. Carefully, we've been making adjustments to how we conduct our business and develop our community.

These are divisive times in the world at large, and the very notion of a middle way is turning into a fault line. The momentum seems to be pushing us into separate camps. Here at SMC you'll find a spectrum of experience and views, even in our staff of 50. This diversity of opinion means we cannot escape grappling with the very real issues we're facing, and it challenges us to keep our hearts open to one another, even when it's difficult. Within SMC, as long as people are willing to join in dialogue, follow our Code of Ethics and serve our guests with kindness and respect, they are welcome. Our intention is to be a safe place where those who wish can come to focus on engaging

their minds, hearts and bodies in a powerful natural environment with profound teachers. We also seek to be a place where those who wish, can engage in reflection and dialogue.

In July of 2018 the staff and board of SMC made public a [set of commitments](#): to not minimize or rationalize the behavior of any teacher, including the Sakyong, to stand with the women who came forward, to do what is right even if it jeopardizes our existing power structures or financial position, and to be transparent. We also said we would be: "... watching closely and with hope for the Sakyong to engage in a genuine process of accountability, purification, and reformative action." This has not yet happened.

In keeping with these commitments, we cannot invite the Sakyong to teach at SMC at this time. We believe we must ask the Sakyong to meet the same standards we would ask of any other teacher. These standards are embedded in our new [Code of Ethics](#) that will be signed by every teacher or participant who comes to SMC.

We intend to continue to be a welcoming home for our friends and family on the Shambhala path, as well as those who visit to teach and participate in the range of secular and nonsecular programs we offer. Whatever the need, we know that it is our responsibility to ensure that SMC is safe and dependable, and that our principles are clear.

We move forward as a Shambhala Center with a clear statement of our commitment to reformation and accountability. This is a fine line to navigate. Some of our thinking is manifest in the [recent revision to SMC's legal relationship to the Sakyong Potrang](#), the non-profit which holds the assets of the Sakyong lineage, of which the present Sakyong is the lineage holder. This revision places the responsibility for SMC, and thus the responsibility for a clear stance, in the hands of the SMC board. It is important to state that the board reflects the same diversity of opinion as is found in the staff of SMC.

We also want to share that the Larimer County Sheriff's Office has closed their investigation that was launched in response to allegations made in Buddhist Project Sunshine. No charges came out of the investigation. We know this doesn't mean misconduct hasn't happened at SMC, and we have acknowledged this in [previous communications](#).

Finally, we are working on a page to be located on our website that will provide links that chronicle all reports, articles, letters and other documents that have come out over the past two years. We feel this to be a key element in fulfilling our commitment to transparency.

We engage in this work with humility, knowing that the clarity of our stance is critical to our guests and staff having the trust to teach, practice, study and work here. We recognize the need for voices beyond SMC and Shambhala such as The Blue Bench, SAVA, Dr. Barstow and An Olive Branch to support our work. It is our intention that by genuinely acknowledging mistakes, learning, and implementing change, we will be able to meet the divisiveness of our time and play a part in addressing the power imbalances and confusion that underlie these challenges.

As Executive Director of SMC, I am deeply grateful to all of you whose support for SMC allows and informs this essential work. I am committed to seeing this through.

With love and gratitude,

Michael Gayner
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