



September 14, 2018

Dear Friends,

This has been a difficult letter to write. How can I express the range of experiences that we are going through at SMC: the heartbreak, hope, incredible dedication, triumphs and challenges, that make up our path here. I am writing because there are things I want to report, commitments to be made and followed through on, and projects that are launching that I feel you should be a part of. This will be a longer letter than usual to ensure that the larger SMC family understands and is invited to participate in our journey.

We are a living, breathing community that has awoken into a heartbreaking situation that has provoked doubt in each of us. We've perpetuated something in our culture that has caused deep pain, and that is driving people away from the teachings.

As a 57-year-old white cisgendered male who has been in this community since the mid-1980s, I have to stop and reflect on how I have been a part of the culture, which has proven so toxic. I know that I still have much to learn.

How we relate with the pain caused by the actions of the Sakyong and others will define much about the quality of our community. How we respond will demonstrate whether Shambhala carries something truly worthy of offering to the rest of our world.

It's no coincidence to me that in the midst of this crisis, a trench is being dug through the heart of the land at SMC for our new wastewater collection system. At the same time, members of our community have voluntarily gone out into the fields to collect native grass seeds to plant in the upturned soil when Spring arrives. When I consider the care and goodness behind that simple act it touches my heart and galvanizes my spirit. They are *protecting the earth*—embodying the essence of the Shambhala teachings.

I believe we all have an opportunity to meet this painful new reality as it is with vulnerability and our best intentions, and to co-create something better for the future.

I'd like to update you on the work we have been doing and the work we will be doing at SMC.

### **Crisis**

On top of maintaining our operations through the busy summer schedule, much of our time has been occupied with working with the social and financial crisis that followed the sexual misconduct allegations. Facing significant revenue losses, we had to put all of our options on the table. By far the most challenging part was the decision to make staff cuts and restructure. At SMC, that means saying goodbye not only to our co-workers, but to our friends and community members.



I'm proud of the way our team brought strategic, heartfelt, and creative thinking to the fore as we faced hard deadlines and critical decisions. SMC still needs a strong fundraising season this winter but we overcame a projected deficit of many hundreds of thousands of dollars and are now on sufficiently stable ground to fulfill our commitment with the wastewater collection system. This wouldn't have been possible without the generosity of this community, and frankly, some good fortune.

### **Follow Up On Commitments**

In our previous [email from the SMC community](#) we made a set of commitments and stated that we would find ways of making SMC more available to you. I want to share our progress so far, and also invite your input as members of the extended SMC sangha.

We committed to stand by the women who come forward. This means extending friendship and support where personal connections exist, and being clear through word and deed that we support a full investigation of any allegations. I understand that people care deeply about SMC and wish to protect it, perhaps leading them to hesitate in coming forward. If someone experienced any form of sexual harm at SMC or anywhere in Shambhala, please make a report to An Olive Branch and Wickwire Holm. We want and need the truth and we appreciate and honor the generosity and bravery of that act. To make a report, email An Olive Branch at: [ListeningPost@an-olive-branch.org](mailto:ListeningPost@an-olive-branch.org) and contact Selina Bath at Wickwire Holm, she can be reached at (902) 482-7030 and [sbath@wickwireholm.com](mailto:sbath@wickwireholm.com).

We also committed to doing what is right, despite any financial implications that may entail. That means owning what's happened and meeting it head on, notifying all presenters, participants and volunteers coming to the land of the situation and providing them with all of the details, as we have done. It also means developing and instituting the policies, procedures, staff training and programming described elsewhere in this letter, and holding everyone on the land to these standards.

We also committed to transparency. I want to acknowledge that we're aware of a recent anonymous allegation of sexual misconduct involving teenage girls which cited SMC as its location in 2004. We will do all we can to support an investigation of this allegation. I want to again stress that anyone who has information about any incident that may have occurred at SMC shares that with An Olive Branch and Wickwire Holm so that the truth can be known.

### **Policy Revision**

Frankly, our conduct policies at SMC have been inadequate and insufficiently disseminated. We're in the process of a complete policy and procedure overhaul that will be implemented by the end of the year. Policies we're working on or revising include Anti-Discrimination, Anti-Harassment, Gender Equity, Sexual Misconduct and Relationship Violence, Child Protection, ADA, Drug & Alcohol, Presenter Code of Conduct, Program Staff Code of Conduct, Family Code of Conduct, and the Grievance Policy and Procedure and Staff Training Plan.



## Social Impact Programming

For many years it's been clear there is work we need to do to create and honor diversity at SMC. The question is how to make this stream of programming financially feasible given the constant cash needs at SMC, and how to integrate and honor a Shambhala view in this work. We're taking a leap in 2019, creating a curriculum of trainings that will be offered to our staff and the Shambhala community at minimal cost to nurture awareness and intelligence in relating to key social issues. Topics we will focus on include sexuality, gender, allyship, and racism. We look forward to sharing all the details with you later this year.

## Scholarship Program

In the wake of the allegations against the Sakyong we lost a major grant funder that served as our primary scholarship source. We're now determined to create an in-house scholarship program at SMC. In 2019, we plan to award \$100,000 of targeted scholarships. There is still data collection and critical analysis to be done about who we have been serving, who we haven't, who we would like to serve, and why. There is also critical thinking needed regarding how SMC can serve key communities to maximize societal impact, what natural alliances we have formed, and where we can plug in to existing initiatives in the larger Colorado community.

## Getaways

I know that it's not inexpensive for the Shambhala Community to visit SMC, spend a weekend and simply experience this place as 'home': a place for resting, rejuvenating and reconnecting. We feel that such getaways are a key aspect of what SMC offers to this community. Despite our financial challenges, we are offering 75% off on getaways through this year. I believe it is a critical time for us to be together. If you consider yourself a member of this community, this discount applies to you.

Use discount code SANGHA75 when registering for a [getaway](#).

## Wastewater Collection System

I am relieved to share that work has begun on the wastewater collection system and the project is moving forward as planned. On August 22, Lama Pegyal came to the land to lead a puja that is traditionally performed whenever ground is broken for construction at a monastery. Workers have been locating and marking all the underground utilities on the land where the trench will be dug, and spot-drilling to test the granite for blasting. Digging will begin this week. We're on budget with the original estimate.

## Forestry Project

In partnership with the Fort Collins Conservation District, the National Resources Conservation Service, and with over \$300,000 in grant funding we have also begun a substantial forestry restoration project. Over the last 150 years human influence has changed the composition of forests in Colorado, making them more uniform and dense and therefore decreasing biodiversity and



increasing the risk of calamitous fires that bake the earth and destroy the buried seed banks that would otherwise provide for regrowth.

This project will involve removing a lot of trees from some of the most overgrown areas on SMC land to return the forest to a more natural state, increase resilience to pests (such as pine beetles), diseases, wildfire and severe weather events, and lay the foundation for a thriving natural ecosystem. In the short term, the forest will look disturbed and our visitors will notice the thinned stands of trees, but within a few years, SMC will not only have healthy forests, it will return to the healthy beauty of the ponderosa savanna nature intended it to be.

To work with the living, sacred realities of trees and the forest in general, Venerable Drüpon Lama Karma visited our land and led a traditional ceremony to express our aspirations to the land and receive permission from the forest to do this work.

### Survey

I'd like to invite you to help shape our programming going forward at SMC. Please take 5 minutes to fill out this 7-question survey about what practices you're interested in doing at SMC and how we can make SMC more convenient for you to visit: <https://goo.gl/forms/rKZkKoBISyjaY1hc2>

Both SMC and Shambhala as a whole are in transition and reaching for a future that can inspire and inform. We know there is much to do, and I have confidence that we can meet these challenges and grow into a deeper sense of service to our world. While engaging this transition, we're maintaining our posture. I for one find that incredibly inspiring.

We'll be in touch through the fall and winter as all these projects develop.

With love from the mountains,

Michael Gayner  
Executive Director

