



SHAMBHALA

*Making Enlightened Society Possible*

— TUCSON —

*Findings Report  
from  
Appreciative Inquiry Conversations*

*Prepared  
by  
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Tucson Sangha Liaison*

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## ***Background***

The impetus for conducting these wide-ranging Appreciative Conversations was a decline in volunteers after the Transition Task Force concluded its work on September 21, 2019. Initially, we experienced a high level of enthusiasm and commitment in serving on one of six committees. We seemed to be off to a lively start but within a short time, interest waned, and a number of people resigned from committees and the Council.

The governance structure adopted by the community has not been working and the work has now fallen on three Coordination Team members and one volunteer for IT support. During this COVID time our Sangha Liaison, Deb Maher, suggested it would be a good opportunity to get a sense of what people want and how they see us moving forward.

Appreciative Conversations were conducted with dues paying members, participants from Shambhala classes, morning meditations, Sarpashana, volunteers, Monday night reflections group, long-time Shambhala practitioners and those new to mediation and Shambhala. All conversations were confidential and followed the informing philosophy and model of Appreciative Inquiry which seeks to find the inherent strengths within systems. The questions were designed to illicit a conversation, hear stories of what brought people to Shambhala and gain ideas for creating a vital future.

To that end, she made 71 personal calls, conducted 42 conversations, and discovered 25 people who would like to volunteer a service offering. These conversations highlighted what people love about Shambhala, and the Center and what they would like to see improved including ideas for making improvements a reality. The results of this Findings Report will guide the community and Coordination Team in charting our future and how best we can meet the needs of our community.

## ***The questions:***

1. Tell me your story; how did you come to Shambhala?
2. What have you loved about Shambhala?
3. What have you loved most about the Tucson Shambhala??
4. What would make us even better?
5. If you had a magic wand and Tucson Shambhala could be anything you would want, what would it be?
6. What specific ideas do you have for the future?
7. What commitment are you willing to our future?
8. What question could I have asked but did not? And how would you have answered i



## **Summary**

The overriding sentiment is that people feel Tucson Shambhala offers place of refuge, regeneration and community through meditation, education, and practice. Despite the challenges resulting from the Sakyong's misconduct and local leadership issues, there is still energy and commitment for moving forward as evidenced by volunteer offerings made by 24 of the 41 respondents. The key themes are offered here, and the key findings for each question follow. You are invited to review this Findings Report and send our Coordinating Team any comments you might have; [tucson.shambhala@gmail.org](mailto:tucson.shambhala@gmail.org)

### **1. People want community!**

Across the board people repeatedly said they want stronger connections, friendships, and community. This Center should be a place of study and practice and a place that supports community-building through social activities and friendship. This should be a positive, inclusive, diverse, and welcoming environment where people feel safe to learn and grow as they travel on their spiritual path. People who have come to this Center are spiritual seekers.

### **2. There are lingering effects of power struggles from the past**

Some people have felt tension and have even seen conflicts between senior leaders which contributed to people not wanting to be involved. In addition, the lingering impact of the Sakyong's misconduct has contributed to people leaving and feeling that Shambhala is no longer the spiritual path that is right for them.

### **3. There is still excitement about moving forward**

Respondents offered some exciting ideas; some are included here, and you will find a more comprehensive list in the Key Findings section.

People want to see:

- More Pema: people love her books and films and discussion groups
- More and consistent offerings especially for Level 1 and 2 so that cohorts can be supported throughout the Sacred Path
- Increased community gatherings: monthly potlucks and social get togethers, weekend retreats
- Sunday Services and consistent sits
- More diversity: sits for People of Color, LGBTQ and Spanish speaking offerings
- More communication with the community and more volunteers



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## **Key Findings**

Questions posed to participants resulted in engaging conversations with emergent themes. The quotes below represent sentiments expressed by participants.

### **1. Your Story: What brought you to Shambhala?**

#### ***Major life changes brought people to Shambhala***

People were looking for a place to meditate and study with a group. Many had engaged in Eastern spiritual practices with interests in various Buddhist practices including, Thich Nhat Hanh, Pema Chodron, Suzuki Roshi, and Ram Dass. Many were seeking a course of study and found that The Sacred Path of the Warrior provided a way forward.

- *"I was looking for a spiritual path and studies for a number of Eastern religions and Shambhala appealed to me."*
- *"I was in crisis and I needed to find some place."*
- *"Sarpashana was a life saver, and I love the book by Pema Chodron"*
- *"I heard a radio interview with the Sakyong on his book Turning the Mind into an Ally. I wanted to know more, and I searched for Shambhala and found the center."*
- *I started with Zen Buddhism and later became a student of Chogyam Trungpa and The Sacred Path of the Warrior.*
- *"A friend brought me to a Pema video workshop and after that I signed up for Level 1 and have done all five levels."*

### **2. What have you loved about Shambhala?**

#### ***Belonging to a community and the teachings***

Across the board people repeatedly said they want stronger connections, friendships, and community. The Center provides refuge from the hustle bustle of everyday life where people can study and practice together.

- *"A sense of belonging to something bigger than yourself."*
- *"I love it here, even if I don't come all the time, it is a comfort knowing it is here. I especially like the meditations with Marianna."*
- *"I love that you can go into any shrine room in the Shambhala network and feel at home."*
- *"A different way of looking at the world, no pressure, all faiths are welcome."*
- *"I love the dignity of the old formulas, original chants, and practices. I love the feeling of connection to a family of mind, a sense of belonging to something bigger than you. It touches the heart."*



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- *“Community sangha; a group of like-minded people on a path of working on self and with others. We can share a view of Basic Goodness and can teach others about Enlightened Society.*
- *You can go anywhere in the world and meet wonderful people. It offers an approach to understanding the world on the path to confidence and you can resonate with people who are good at heart. The structure of IELS and Levels makes Shambhala accessible.*

### **Pema Chodron’s teachings**

- *“I respect Pema and her books; they are written so clearly. Shambhala lays out concrete steps to develop a mindful state of being.”*
- *“Meditation and Sarpashana combined with the 12 Step Program and Pema Chodron’s book.” (Comfortable with Uncertainty)*
- *“Pema videos and discussions.”*
- *“I love Pema Chodron’s book, Comfortable with Uncertainty and her teachings.”*

### **3. What have you loved about Tucson Shambhala?**

#### **The space!**

- *“It is nice place to meditate and engage in Buddhist studies.”*
- *“We have a beautiful shrine room available to us.”*
- *“It is a nice, peaceful space in a hectic world.”*
- *“The center has a good atmosphere to sit and walk, a homey environment.”*
- *“The environment is inviting, and it is good to practice compassion and mindfulness with a group.”*
- *“I love the space especially the shrine room for meditation.”*
- *“The aesthetics of the mediation room are pleasing, the bamboo floor, beautiful flowers, and the children’s altar at the holidays.”*
- *“The facility; silent no-frills meditation, the shrine room and the bamboo floor.”*
- *“The peaceful space and morning meditation, I love the people who go.”*

#### **Sense of community**

- *“Like-minded people who want to better themselves and explore how their minds work. The center is a place that allows people to spread out in the brave and wonderful world of meditation and the Sacred Path.*
- *“The people seem open and non-judgmental toward others. You are who you are without losing yourself in order to belong.*
- *“Authenticity; open heartedness of members; their emotional availability; practice as students so teachings can be put to use in the world.”*



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### **The teachings**

People said they want place of study and practice to deepen their spirituality. Most liked the structured approach to learning the Sacred Path because it provides an organized systematic approach that guides student in incremental learning. The Everyday Life series was referenced as a tool to help maintain continuity between the Levels. There was deep appreciation for the consistency of morning meditations and Sarapashana.

- *"I like the continuity of the curriculum, the sense of structure and the Everyday Life series between Levels."*
- *"Readings and discussions, the videos of Chogyam Trungpa"*
- *"The Heart Sutra workshop"*
- *"Sarpashana evenings, mandala classes and a small dedicated group of students."*
- *"People are willing to explore and share knowledge; lots of smiling faces."*
- *"Gail leading P&E, there was a step-by-step system of study. The cohorts have been really beneficial."*
- *"A sense of openness and community, book readings, and discussions, classes with different levels, other teachers who come here, the Weekthun and the Sacred Path."*
- *"I love how consistent Marianna has been, I can count on it being there, even if I am not."*
- *"I see the healing that takes place in Sarpashana."*
- *"Sarpashana and meditating as a group."*
- *"A sense of community, it is run by people from Tucson, it is close to my house, unassuming and lovely inside."*

#### **4. What would make Tucson Shambhala even better?**

##### **Stop the drama and power struggles**

- *"I sensed personality conflicts and it was stressful to be around."*
- *"People need to stop being so grabby and pushy and so destructive with each other. I saw backstabbing, but I want to be hopeful. In the past we had lots of classes and lots going on; bring Gail back."*
- *"Less drama, we need freedom to move forward and stop alienating people. We have a core group of regulars and cranky people with anger issues. 18 years later, here we are again."*
- *"Don't give up if raw anger shows up, it has its place. Understand the fierce aspects of the Deities and learn to be skillfully angry."*
- *"Have a process for managing conflict, teach resolution and prevention skills to deal with the elephant in the room."*



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- *"Stop the bickering out in the open, it has a bad effect on everyone and should be done behind closed doors."*
- *"Get rid of bad vibes and unacceptable behavior."*
- *"The energy was weird, so I didn't come anymore, it was just the wrong 'temperature' in the room. Can't there be more people of color?"*

### **Create a non-hierarchical structure**

- *"Shambhala is supposed to be Buddhism without credentials. We need an alternative governance structure, so people are not drawn to abuse of power. Shambhala has attracted certain people that have engaged in top-down leadership. Now governance needs to be more transparent, inclusive, and welcoming. A small center gets down to a small number of people keeping it together."*
- *"There is a sense of 'better than'; those who have spent time studying the Sacred Path are a special club and treat others as outsiders."*
- *"Don't have a director, create a group to lead."*
- *"No chanting to a King, disconnect from Shambhala. Women have been marginalized."*
- *"I am not a fan of the patriarchy. I like the feeling a female centric place and want to learn more."*
- *"The whole patriarchy thing with Sakyong as king is troubling."*

### **Keep Zooming during this COVID time and beyond**

- *"Even after COVID, keep zooming, it brings people in and really helps me to attend."*
- *"Zoom meditations are good, I can feel connected since I will be moving."*
- *"Remote meditation is working well; it saves travel time and is a useful option to continue to offer even when in-person sits resume."*

### **Hospitality: create social gatherings and events**

- *"Do something in nature, have a get-away; a mini-retreat; hike and meditation"*
- *"Once a month film night; documentary on the practice and Shambhala topics, Dalai Lama and Pema talks and discussion groups."*
- *"More public service activities outside the Center"*
- *"Quarterly meals"*
- *"Be more a part of the neighborhood."*
- *"Welcome every person and what they have to offer. Help them shine and be better, honor people as part of this community. We have the benefit of learning something different from new perspectives."*



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### **Consistency in offerings**

- *“Need to make sure Sunday mornings are staffed, these sits are the anchor to the sangha and community. It would be good to include a lecture [dharma talk] and discussion with chanting.”*
- *“Consistency; things have been planned and then cancelled with no follow-through. We need to know what is being programmed and what we plan for.”*
- *“We have lost consistency in the Shambhala network, there is no consistency in teachings, lineage, Chogyam Trungpa’s version or the Sakyong?”*
- *“We need to create a sacred feeling and outlook; bring back teachers who know Buddhism and honor them.”*
- *“Have Level 1-2 more often so we can start the Sacred Path and offer the rest of the teachings.”*
- *“More activities: mandala making and creative ways to be together.”*
- *“More meditation during the day. Meditation is the core.”*
- *“Classes on Tuesday night with deeper instructions on meditation, reading books and discussions, invite guests to present.”*
- *“There is too much spiritual materialism; using the teachings that are popular in the moment that are not steeped in the wisdom of the ages. The sangha is a powerful ingredient in building a whole community to support everyone in their practice and meditation. We have often had a lot of participation from people who never became members, it has been a fluid community, it always resulted in a core group doing the work (admin/class logistics/teachers).”*
- *“Open up a little more; be more eclectic in Buddhist offerings, it does not have to be strictly Shambhala.”*
- *“More Buddhism: taking refuge in Buddha, we are not just a meditation center. Shambhala has so few Buddhists and not many long-time students. Focus on being a Buddhist Center, it makes a big difference.”*
- *“Don’t discount the experience and knowledge of older students. They don’t seem to be encouraged or involved.”*
- *“Have a wide variety of offerings and other Buddhist teachers.”*
- *“Combination of Buddhism and Shambhala teachings”*
- *“More classes: Six Paramitas, Heart of Bodhisattvas; more education and study.”*





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**5. If you had a magic wand and Tucson Shambhala could be anything you would want, what would it be?**

(Many responses were captured in question 4. This question was intended to illicit, big picture thinking. Some respondents expanded on earlier comments,)

***Tucson Shambhala would be thriving and welcoming***

- *“People would feel loved and cared for and safe so they could follow the Path. There would be no looking down on others, no pre-requisites. There would be great benefit in learning from different people’s perspectives in the world.”*
- *“We would be a thriving meditation community with Buddhist classes teaching how to move our practices off the cushion and into everyday life. It would be an opportunity to learn traditional Buddhist teachings including Shambhala Sadhana of Mahamudra, Black Ashe, Losars, (Tibetan New Year), Loving Kindness Practices. Members could study the Sacred Path and take the Refuge Vow.  
We could follow the **Rime Movement**. In Tibet, Rime is a practice that takes the best of all different lineages and brings them together. If we go back to this practice, we could create wider trust and serve the community at-large. There has been no place for Dalai Lama teachings, Karamapa, or the Kagyu lineage. Shambhala has always been a blending practice with a history of adapting teachings. If we use Shambhala teachings as the core and bring expanded Buddhist teachings into the Center, we can be more sustaining. We would be a blended center offering so much more to participants.”  
(\*Rime movement from Tibet was intended to recognize the differences between traditions and appreciate them, while also establishing a dialogue which would create common ground.)*
- *“Make the shrine room a real shrine room; use traditional Tibetan colors, red room, use traditional tongas. Do the research so it has an authentic feel. Teach core teachings like Heart Sutra and all 5 levels of meditation training and then create a core sensitivity to Buddhism. Go deeper into the psychodynamics of symbols and reach beyond teaching meditation training for those interested in a deeper experience. Provide scholarships not just work arrangements, people need to focus on study and meditation.”*
- *“Everybody would be involved, be excited and enthusiastic and willing to do work. We would embrace changes and discuss difficulties. People would be self-reflective and challenge themselves”*
- *“Be able to stay open longer so people could come and meditate or use the library”*
- *“Have more teachings with Kim Kelso and use the website to make announcements so people can plan ahead to get time off from work.”*
- *“Bring in teachers beyond Shambhala like Sharon Salzberg and others, we could be like Spirit Rock and be dharma oriented.”*



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- *"We would have our own Shastri with Shambhala knowledge, it would make a huge difference."*

#### **Increase hospitality**

- *"More retreats; as a group for a day hiking in nature with meditation and journaling and food OR longer weekend trips together."*
- *"Anybody who walks in, of any age/background and good will, with a sense of curiosity and interest, would feel a welcome presence."*
- *"Invite people to stay after meetings to talk instead of rushing off. Take time to tell people about the center and volunteer opportunities. Personally, connect with people."*
- *"It would be a welcoming environment; I would feel excited to go there. Create projects that involve families for example 'conscious gardening'. I don't want to feel like an isolated person in a group."*

#### **Encourage participation**

- *"Invite people and encourage their participation in projects from dreaming them up to rolling them out. This means people need to know what is happening; bring an idea to the community, engage in conversations, determine whether it is a priority and have a team together to do the project. People need to feel heard and connected with people in community."*
- *"More diverse people from different backgrounds, more people of color. Teach classes in Spanish. Have sats for LGBTQ and people of color."*

#### **Other Ideas for the future**

- *"Serve as a Buddhist Recovery Center; Sarpashana funnels a lot of people into Shambhala."*
- *"Have a resident Acharya or Buddhist monk."*
- *"Have a bigger facility that would also serve as a community gathering place where space could be rented out to the community and have yoga classes."*
- *"Move to a new location and build a retreat center like Red Feather Mountain. It could be close to nature, go on hikes and have meditation."*
- *"The center needs a facelift outside; more color to the exterior to brighten it up. Have landscaping in front and places for sitting and maybe make a fenced area. Improve the garden in back with the Buddha wall."*
- *"Provide more opportunities to learn what other centers are doing?"*



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**6. What specific ideas do you have for the future?**

Participants were given an opportunity to expand on their visions for the future, there were no additions made beyond what was already offered.

**7. What commitment are you willing to make to the future of the Center?**

25 people offered to volunteer specific acts of services which are captured on the Volunteer Roster.

**8. What question could I have asked you but did not? How would you have answered it?**

Participants were given an opportunity to make additional comments, here is what they had to say:

- *What makes me feel more connected?*  
Zoom meetings; I can get there more easily
  
- *What is your willingness to support the Center financially? What would that look like for you?*  
I am willing to support the Center financially and to commit my time.
  
- *Why did you leave?*  
It was too stressful to be around the people.
  
- *Why has the Sakyong not made amends? Is he the leader or what?*  
This is the elephant in the room, did he abdicate? If he can't lead, then who do we look to in his absence? The whole organization needs closure, it feels like the whole thing is just hanging out there. How can we offer the Path when the leader is gone?
  
- *Not a question but a statement*  
I am interested to see how Shambhala will shift.
  
- *Where am I in my own life?*  
I feel a lot more for the Center than is apparent, I really care what happens. I pulled back even before the conflicts became apparent. I believe Shambhala is a lineage and we should build on it.
  
- *How long have you been interested in Shambhala?*  
7 years! I have been trying to figure out how to make my schedule work with Shambhala offerings. The schedule did not accommodate when I am available.
  
- *What are the obstacles for overcoming trust?*  
We need to help everybody get their needs met, it is a give and take. We must address the underlying issues constructively and repair broken relationships.



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- *What don't you like?*  
People are snooty, some project an attitude of “better than you” because they have attended more levels and you are not part of the club. It is very exclusionary and off putting. It is like they are speaking their own language and you are excluded.
- *Why is this community important to you?*  
It became my spiritual path and an important part of my recovery. It is becoming more central to my life.
- *What value do I find in meditation?*  
It has deepened my practice and I have become a more centered person.
- *What impact is meditation having on your life?*  
It is very subtle; I have noticed my reactive patterns and gradually they are dissolving and allowing me to live much more in the present. I do not need to control things as much and life has become easier for me.
- *What is your favorite thing about Shambhala?*  
I like the regular sits with like-minded people who have a commitment to the practice of meditation on a regular basis (daily). It has helped me develop personal maturity with group support. I like the uninterrupted 50-minute sits to allow me to go deeply into the silence. If the conditions are right, I can go into a deep meditation and my mind gives up.
- *What has Shambhala done for me?*  
Taught me more about my humanity more than anything else. I have received insights into who I am and where I came from.



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## **Volunteer Roster**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Offer</b>
1. Ron Bachorski	Help with putting events together; film night once a month (Dalia Lama, Pema) and potlucks. Lead book discussion
2. Aurore Chabot	Help with weekend training; mindful clay class one afternoon in the future
3. Mary Anne Lisney	A workshop on <i>Tune-In/Tune Up on Shambhala: Understanding the Terminology, Symbols, and Imagery</i> . A workshop to gain a deeper understanding of the meaning and background of Shambhala.
4. Dana Leon	Database administrator, landscaping to revitalize the front of the house could work with others to plan and design a refreshed look; help with monthly potlucks, and willing to stay around after meetings to tell people about Shambhala
5. Becky Behmer	Would love to get involved, could do umdze once a month on Sunday, has experience working with volunteers
6. Annie Franklin	Meditation instruction
7. Emily Danies	Culture and Decorum; helping with social event organizing but it depends on things changing, we need more inclusion
8. Cheryl Purvis	Could host out-of-town teachers, provide logistical support for weekend trainings, financial support, lead meditation
9. Joy McCrary	Be engaged in small group activities, commit to membership
10. Carrie Richards	Help with retreats and events (wants to go on a retreat with a group)
11. Melissa Bias	Willing to make calls to support events, pick-up supplies, and support events
12. Donald Boyce	Help with social events, organize potluck, set-up, and clean-up
13. Joy Elliott	Support events use my skills in conflict resolution and collaboration.
14. Kris Anderson	Mediation and conflict resolution; help set up dialogues and workshops on conflict resolution grounded in Shambhala (trained by the Center for Community Dialogue)
15. Christine O'Flaherty	Continue to be a facilitator for Sarpashana



### ***Volunteer Roster***

<b><i>Name</i></b>	<b><i>Offer</i></b>
16. Jane Black	Umdze on Sunday once a month
17. Mallika Rao	Start and lead People of Color meditation sit
18. Julia Butler	Participate in Sangha activities; help beautify the Center, monthly potlucks, gardening projects, create collaboration with the Yarnell group, host out-of-towners, maybe charge a small fee and give it to the Center.
19. David Hagen	Teach the Everyday Life Series and umdze on Sunday once a month
20. Meg St .John	Do a piece of the program for a weekend training, brainstorm ideas for the Center
21. Gary Jones	Provide support for Sarpashana zoom meetings, find support for making our offerings available in Spanish, continuing to serve as Treasurer
22. Arlene Watkins	Some volunteering, ikebana flowers
23. Katherine George	Anything I can contribute
24. Tere Miller	Provide teaching
25. Leah Mermelstein	Serve as an advisor, open to phone calls as one of the original founders.

***This concludes the Findings Report!***

*Thank you to all who participated, we will use this to guide our next chapter.*

*Deb Maher, Sangha Liaison*