

July 8, 2018
Dear Noble Sangha,

The women acharyas of Shambhala are writing today to send our love and support to our community at a time of enormous groundlessness. We hear the pain of those who have had the bravery to come forward and share their experiences of harm, and we feel for all who are silent and marginalized. Our world has been turned upside down by the recent turn of events. We are all in the question of how we go forward from here.

On July 1, we received an email with the subject line "Please" and the following supplication:

To the mother lineage,

Please, break the silence.
Please, approach and speak up.
Please, step up to the plate.
Please, protect the girls and women.
Please, protect the children.
Please, be good mothers.
Please, don't look away.
Please, don't be ignorant.
Please, don't blame the women.
Please, establish enlightened society.
Please, be courageous.
Please, don't be afraid to be powerful.
Please, come together.
Please, be the female sages of our lineage.
Please, cry with us.
Please, feel our pain.
Please, talk to us.
Please, make the community safe for us.
Please, don't wait.
Please, be there for us.
Please, we need you now.

Over the past week, we have gathered our voices and intentions together. Rather than smooth our response into a homogenous presentation, we present the more gentle and tough perspectives among us.

As women, we have experienced the impact of systemic power imbalance in our community; some of us have also personally experienced gendered harm in our journeys. We are dedicated to a more just and inclusive society and to structural changes that are more representative and diverse.

Together, we have been reflecting on how our lineage has met great challenges in the past and has come through difficult times. Typically, in times of dissolution, there is a tendency to solidify, blame, polarize, or jump hastily to new reference points. But for new forms to be genuine and fresh, it is important for us to be steady within this open space of not-knowing. We encourage you to listen, nurture each other, and stay strong as a sangha and as friends. New and appropriate forms can then evolve—unhindered by hope and fear.

As women leaders, we wish to protect our community and its members from harm. Like the society at large, we see that our community has karma connected with intoxication and disrespect for women. Even though this is extremely painful, we are relieved this history is becoming transparent so that the Shambhala community, all of us, can address it.

We trust that the Shambhala path is one of transformation, and we remain loyal to the lineage. We have been steeped in the teachings of inherent goodness, and we hold the perspective that we don't give up on anyone—the teacher, the teachings, each other, or on ourselves. This is our path of warriorship. We feel that healing and transformation is possible for this community. As this is happening, we must be completely and fearlessly dedicated to deep and lasting change.

We support the Sakyong's decision to step back from teaching for now. We appreciate how he has brilliantly introduced thousands of people to the path of dharma, bestowed the highest transmissions, and guided our community for decades. At the same time, we now see a lot of pain, sadness, outrage, and fear in our community around gender and other types of harm. Our eyes have been opened to many of the patterns we have not seen before. Acknowledging this, we want to make the space safe for everyone to go through their process.

We invite you to consider this a time of unearthing old social patterns and joining together to let new ground and structures make us stronger as a community. These times are calling for deep self-reflection by the Sakyong and also ourselves. As he stated on a call with leaders, he is committed to doing "the hard work." So must we—business as usual cannot continue.

We are aware that some queer, trans, and especially, people of color, have been hurt by the sudden attention and resources (time, energy, money) to gender harms against white women. Marginalized communities have tried for years to call attention to patriarchy, racism, ethnocentrism, homophobia, and transphobia. Dominant group power dynamics harm everyone regardless of their social identity or culture.

We will be in touch again soon and look forward to working on co-creating spaces for open dialogue. The Kalapa Council's transition/resignation is a good first step toward a new form of governance, and we, as a community, can work together to ensure that what arises in its place is representative of all the diverse facets of our community.

We are committed to listening, learning, teaching, and acting. With profound respect and sadness, we want you to know we are here for you and that we are committed to a process of community transformation.

The Women Acharyas of Shambhala

This letter was composed by the women acharyas in Shambhala in response to the supplication of a woman in the Shambhala community and has been read and is supported by all the Shambhala acharyas. May there be virtue!