An Introduction to the Principles of Shambhala Environments: Embodying the Kingdom

“Thus a good human society was created on this earth.” The Druk Sakyong

“We shape our buildings; thereafter they shape us.” Winston Churchill, 1943

The Power of Building to Stabilize the Lineage, Transmissions, and Society
At Jambey Lhakhang in Bhutan one can walk the teachings back to the 7th century, when King Songtsen Gampo, the first king of Tibet, built the central lhakhang. Later lineage carriers – including the great terton Pema Lingpa who built the ambulatory in the 15th century, added to the central lhakhang in much in the same way generations of lineage carriers enrich a sadhana though their additions. The great spiritual centers of Asia have held the lineage, transmission and community together through numerous centuries. In the same way, spiritual and temporal seats like Surmang and Rumtek, and, in the west, Rome and Washington DC have stabilized vision and society as a legacies for generations. History crystallizes the critical role played by sacred architecture in actualizing seats of power and drala cultures - the unwavering pivots of spiritual and temporal aspiration over the millennium. In Shambhala, we use sacred architecture to stabilize the manifestation of Shambhala vision and teachings through transcendent environment.

Seating Spiritual Vision in a Sacred Temporal Container
Shambhala is defined as a spiritual kingdom – the unification of spiritual and temporal power. It is the proclamation and celebration that goodness and dignity are inherent to sentient beings, and within conventional secular life. The message of Shambhala is that sacredness is not otherworldly: genuine spirituality is not found by rejecting this world, but within its grit. The challenge of a Shambhalian spirituality rests in navigating this world that we have with dignity and grace. This non-theistic view of the quintessential inseparability of spirituality and ordinary daily life is the foundation for the entirety of the Shambhala path, culture and environments.

Shambhala is a coherent spiritually imbued social vision seated within secular temporal life. The power and shock of Shambhala is that it is visible, physical and manifest. Without embodiment Shambhala can’t be realized because we have no way to access and command the temporal realm. Spiritual vision and inner training alone do not fulfill the Shambhala promise of a spiritually based, temporal kingdom. It is within secular, spiritually realized society and drala culture that spiritual and temporal, sacred and secular are unified: the duality of sacred and not sacred dissolved.

Shambhala: The Upaya of Culture, Form, and Environment

“If the warrior has no sword, the blessings of the dralas cannot be gathered.”
- The Druk Sakyong

The physics of the sacred world tell us that without form, power dissipates. Spiritual power is gathered, stabilized, accumulated, sustained and wielded through physical objects and embodied places: without structure and a container, there is no expression - no manifestation. Our spiritual facilities are physical vessels that enable spiritual vision to take root and spread: landing pads for drala.
Shambhala is the upaya of form. Formal teachings and practices are the bedrock of Shambhala, fostering sacred view. But the hallmark of Shambhala that makes it unique from the Buddhist path is the emphasis on teaching through a drala soaked culture and environment: society is the cauldron in which we are spiritually marinated and cooked. The Buddhist path is largely an inner journey, manifesting at the fruition in a dharmic kingdom. Shambhala works in the reverse—*from outside in*. Shambhala is designed to complete the job started with Buddhism by infiltrating all of the corners left hidden from our formal practice—our dirty laundry. “Shambhala is a domestic affair and fear comes with that”. Our dress, families, business relationships, dinner parties, meetings, seating—everything that we think of as outside of the practice is included as practice and as sacred, and nothing is left out. Form is temporal power. Empowered forms become the trigger, like our heraldic pins - each a crystallized seed syllable and drala conduit.

To fulfill an upaya that relies on secular forms to shinjang requires a completely new kind of container, designed to empower both formal and sacred secular practices—from meditation to drinking tea. A spiritually imbued environment has tremendous power to uplift and unify.

**Container Principle: The External Court**

In Shambhala, we call the physical environment of sacred space *container principle*, which is also called the external Court—the embodied Court. Court is a Shambhala term for sacred space. A vivid external Court manifestation is critical to the emergence of Shambhala Kingdom, which is physical. When we build the physical Court we are creating the conditions for the Kingdom to emerge by reflecting the sacred world temporally: that is KOS, brought to you in living color.

**Spiritually Imbued, Shambhala Environments Transform**

What makes this container unique is that it is *spiritually imbued*; it is saturated with *spiritual presence*. What was intrinsic is now *visible* and palpable—mature. We call the external court “All-Victorious” because the ordinary conventional world is flipped to its wisdom-side. The external Court is wakeful and electric, like meeting the guru. *Therefore it can transform.* We enter the shrine room and mind opens, sense perceptions expand, we glimpse the Rigden’s mind.

The purpose of a Shambhala environment is to facilitate the spiritual journey—in one room, or an entire complex. Sacred architecture is the embodiment of intrinsic sacredness and the method we use to create the container. The hallmark of a Shambhalian sacred architecture is that is uses form to “capture alive” the intangible but palpable *energetic* and transcendent transmissions: the wisdom principle and wakefulness (the Inner Court/Sambogakaya; and the Ultimate Court/Dharmakaya). *Shambhala environments cultivate drala in the external environment in order to awaken our inner drala.*

A Shambhalian container is an environment that “*nurture[s] the waking state of mind of the student warriors.* (The Druk Sakyong) Like being in the presence of a great teacher, our environments are not always comfortable in a conventional sense, as their agenda is to bring about awakening, requiring that we raise our head and shoulders to meet them. But they are comfortable in the uniquely Shambhalian sense in that they restore us to our nature.

**Transmission Space**

When spiritual vision is brought into *presence* in an environment, built space carries *transmission*, triggering wakefulness. Great teachers give transmission, but transmission can also be carried by empowered physical spaces. Spiritually impregnated forms and
environments are not conventional, but are direct dharma teaching, the embodiment of the guru’s mind. Therefore they are *mind protection*, protecting us from sinking into the world of the setting sun. Carrying transmission, they structure the body protocol to synchronize us and shift the mind. The forte of sacred architecture is the cultivation of the transformational potential of the built environment to be the teaching, shinjanging through environment.

**Space Creates Mind: The Mechanism of Interdependence**

The link between environment and realization is activated through the mechanism of interdependence, regulated by architecture. Because energetic systems are porous, external and internal mandalas are *in communication* and have resonance, linked through our sense fields and sense perceptions: what is outside enters and alters our inner landscape. Energetic systems are embodied in form; once embodied, form literally shapes the energetic character of place. If an environment looks aggressive, it will activate aggressive energy, which we take in through our perceptions, fostering aggression internally. The built environment can foster awareness, harmony and equanimity; or, confusion, friction, depression, etc. *Whatever we express in the container is what we will cultivate; whatever is missing in the container will not be cultivated:* this is very literal – what you see is what you get. Whatever you want to cultivate, put it in the container, in a microcosm. The interdependence of inner and outer can also strengthen the container: adhistana accumulated in practice tames and empowers it.

**Landform is Temporal Power**

The external court container is created through a marriage of landform and sacred architecture, guided by Shambhala vision. Sacred architecture begins with the land - the great generator of energy and drala. Land is literally temporal power, the primary determinant of the energy of place. Landform expertise is held by the wisdom tradition of K’an-yu, the ancient landform practice of Chinese fengshui. The Chinese system has been used in Tibet for the siting of major monasteries since the 7th century, introduced by the Chinese princess Wangchen - one of the two wives of King Songsten Gampo. She is credited with ‘nailing down’ the vital points of an obstructing ogress to tame the ground for the dharma. The forte of Chinese fengshui is in working with the energetics, similar to ‘sign language’ in our vajrayana system: locating power spots and drala systems in the landform, and designing strategies to draw these energies into building to maximize their benevolent influence. Considered so potent that initially its use was restricted to the Emperor, this system was used to site the Imperial Capitols and place the Emperor’s Seat at a convergence of heaven and earth - joining spiritual and temporal as the foundation for right ruler-ship and the wellbeing of the empire. We use the same system in developing our urban and residential facilities.

**Sacred Architecture is Drala Cultivation**

Vision and landform are unified in sacred architecture – the joining principle. Sacred architecture is strategically designed and placed like acupuncture needles to tap and cultivate the land’s potential. Sacred architecture is *drala cultivation*: it brings intrinsic sacredness to fruition through embodiment. We might wonder: if the world is intrinsically sacred, why does sacredness need cultivation? Why do we need shrines and special buildings? Shrines point out the nature of reality, showing us basic goodness - guideposts illuminating the path and what to cultivate. They are drala magnets - temporal anchors that attract and house spiritual teachings: they *are* the deity, its body. But we also create shrines and sacred architecture to make drala *stronger*, like polishing wood to draw out yun. We can think of drala as a seed, like Buddha nature: while inate, it needs cultivation to bring it to maturity. The teachings say that reality is neutral, but that we tip it to GES by means of prajna. Prajna *sees* the virtue, triggering the cultivation. We call this Sacred View – seeing basic goodness reflected everywhere. Sacred architecture is a tool of prajna, used to identify virtue and nurture it to fruition through
expression. The Druk Sakyong said that without cultivation, drala does not manifest: it is cultivated through k’an-yu/sacred architecture and through our forms and ceremonies. It could be said that the job of enlightened culture, which architecture is in service to, is the cultivation of drala, in people, environment, and events. The strategic use of sacred buildings draws the magic of the natural world into our activities and spaces, to empower daily life with spiritual power and meaning.

Drala is cultivated through expression. Unless expressed through a feature or detail, they are not activated. For example, all rooms have a floor, walls and a roof; but only when we express heaven, earth and humanity through a detail is the meaning - and the drala - drawn out. We often miss opportunities to contact drala because we think they are otherworldly and abstract, but drala always has concrete expression, presence – some kind of physicality.

Drala is the strength of basic goodness. They are numerous, diverse, and hierarchical. Drala is: spatial and temporal; local and cosmic (not dependent on a location, Rigden); an upaya (Skillful means/wisdom) empowering organizational positions (the precious minister energizes the ministerial role). There are numerous dralas cultivated by sacred architecture in diverse ways – from shrines to toilets, all part of sacred space. We polish wood to develop yun - condensed drala. We celebrate nature’s ceremonies, rain highlighted in a downspout. Architecture orients us to capture beauty, in a moment: the turning of the seasons and daily cycle. We highlight ordinary activities to bring out their power: bathing, eating, socializing, meeting. We heighten the power of shrines and shrine rooms as vehicles of transmission, using spatial protocol to synchronize the body and shift the mind. We position the seat of our Monarch, to empower the King and Kingdom. Some methods cultivate the cosmic dralas that we all share – the ultimate court/dharmakaya deities; other methods invite the local deities/lokapalas unique to a place. The ruling drala/wisdom principle is the guiding vision that directs the primary built prototype.

Ritual Space: Empowering the Container
We call sacred architecture setting the stage or creating the conditions to invite further power. The container is equivalent to the samayasattva visualization, which creates the vessel and structure. Physical space is sacralized - empowered and activated - through the ritual, the janansattva empowerment. Space activation is set in motion by both formal and secular practices. Without a ritual component, even great architecture can be dead. It is said that when cultures neglect their rituals the dralas depart. The design of ritual space is an integral part of sacred architecture practice.

Sacred Architecture Prototypes
There are many and diverse sacred architecture prototypes, because the dralas are numerous and diverse. A sacred architecture prototype is a pattern with an embedded energetic structure. Sacred architecture prototypes are rooted in the natural world and in landform: we mimic their pattern in building to access their power and mirror their energetic patterns. The land determines the amount and kind of power we can draw from and directs which activities can benefit from a particular location. The primary generating source of our built prototypes is the teachings: landform and architecture are in service to the teachings and a vehicle for their expression. We match the prototype to the project: for example, a political prototype would likely create problems for a contemplative community. The vision needs to be clear, as the vision, - or lack of it - directs the manifestation. Vision – the heaven principle and ruling principle in a project – and landform – the earth principle of temporal power, are unified through building – sacred architecture the joining principle and vehicle for temporal
expression.

**The Imperial Path of Shambhala: Embodying Rigden in Environment**

The teachings talk about two paths, the path of simplicity, and the Imperial path, which alternate to purify each other. The path of simplicity is the path of formlessness. When the forms become materialistic and corrupt, losing their foundation in non-ego and emptiness, it is time for the return of the path of simplicity and formlessness. But when human life is degraded, and we forget our connection to dignity, it is time for the return of the Imperial yana of Shambhala – the path of form - to re-proclaim the dignity of life and reclaim our innate regal nature and worthiness. We are guided to a middle way to relate with form: between solidifying and frivolity, eternalism and nihilism. Solidifying means the loss of the connection to impermanence, emptiness and non-ego. Frivolity is embarrassment about committing to life mattering: a denial of basic goodness and dignity. The middle way has humor - sitting on the razor’s edge between real, and not real.

Shambhala is the imperial path, the path of form matured to ziji – basic goodness shining out. Court is an imperial prototype – sacred space with an imperial character, awake and luminous - The Rigden King is our prototype. An imperial form has no doubt or hesitation in the manifestation and radiation of intrinsic goodness. The stature of the architecture should fit the stature of the vision and manifestation. For the imperial path, we need architecture with power and ziji – splendidness, a vajra-like aesthetic of indestructibility - to reach to the imperial level of drala.

**The Kingdom Model: The Teachings Create the Architecture**

The primary sacred architecture prototype in Shambhala is the embodiment of the pattern language of the sacred world, crystallized in our central deities and their mandalas: the ruling dralas Shiwa Okar and Rigden; and their mandalas - the Three Courts, the mandala principle of Shambhala which includes the mandala of the four dignities. Our primary built vocabulary in Shambhala comes from, and is a vehicle for, the iconography embedded in these deities and mandalas: the mandala condenses the core transmissions, dralas and virtues that define enlightened society and being in our tradition.

**A Seat of Power: the Unification of Landform, Architecture, and Humanity**

In sacred architecture practice, when we place buildings or building elements outlined below, we are using form to trigger drala. The construction process is used to nail down and anchor sacred zones, delineate and stabilize sacred space and activate the mandala.

The three courts as a mandala principle is spatial, energetic and material; vertical and horizontal. **Vertically** is a central pillar – architecturally, an axis mundi or axis of the world – unifying the three powers – heaven, earth and humanity. **Horizontally**, the mandala radiates and gathers to the four directions, anchoring and activating the four dignity mandala. The vertical axis opens the conduit between heaven and earth, activating the horizontal axis. This is a co-emergent energetic structure, actualizing the three court mandala principle.

In the center is the universal monarch - the Sakyong, the central pillar of GES Society - joining heaven and earth through his presence, to bring about enlightened society. You are also the universal monarch, the central pillar, joining heaven and earth, radiating and gathering to the four directions through your perceptual mandala. The architecture places you in the King’s seat, the seat of Rigden, to synchronize and open – structuring a body protocol to shift the mind. Abiding in space, you rule your kingdom.

We organize the external structures according to this pattern to awaken and activate the inner dralas. When the architectural mandala is unified and in place, and the human Court
is seated according to mandala principle, we Hold Court together, synchronizing the container, the activity and the inhabitants. We raise lungta as a society: with longing, we invite the imperial dralas, activating the empowerment of sacred space through the ritual. Aligned and synchronized - a unity - the Court structure clicks into place and energy is released along the central axis – ordinary magic, in a moment. The architecture, the landform, the activities, and the organizational structure of the inhabitants all need to be organized according to mandala principle: when aligned, energy moves – externally and internally; synchronized, the three court energetic function is released: the unification of the three courts.

This is the fruition of a Shambhalian sacred architecture. Landform, the built environment, and the human mandala of the inhabitants converge in a King’s seat - a co-emergent throne and seat of power – a power spot, unified in nowness. Joining heaven and earth within ourselves, we rest in basic goodness, our inate regal nature. This is the manifestation of Shambhala Kingdom.

**Aesthetic principles of the container: Space, Energy and Form**

Sacred space, energy, and form are the ingredients of sacred architecture – the essences of the three courts and central deities. They are invited through the orchestration of fengshui and building. The three courts as an organizing principle refers to spatial hierarchy: the placement of shrines, services and inhabitants according lha, nyen and lu; outer, inner and secret (also, heaven, earth and humanity). We also draw out these dralas by expressing them vividly in architectural feature and detail: for example, roof, platform and column. The mandala of the four dignities can be activated through many methods, including cardinal orientation of facilities, the placements of heraldy, the use of color, the placement of symbols, such as banners of the four dirigites. These dralas can be activated by formal prototypes, as in a courtyard complex, and also through asymmetrical compositions wedded to the land.

Shiwa Okar is space: sacredness, original purity; awake; simplicity born of unity. Shambhalian environments are uniquely space based: space is the most important element in a Shambhalian architecture. Physical space is unconditional sacredness, the ground the mandala is built on; wakefulness – the ultimate court; emptiness; egolessness; original purity. We tend to think that adding empty space in our facilities is a waste of money, and, well, a waste of space. But physical space fosters awareness, which is critical to our practice: all of our practices, from the beginning to the fruition, are space based. Without space, there is no magic, and environments are dead. Space is the mother of form, giving birth to mandala principle and enlightened form: Rigden.

Space is not vacant like an empty parking lot, but pregnant with energy and potential. Space comes alive and is anchored through contrast: boundary. As Louis Kahn might have said, the wall brings space into being. Form and space rub together to produce luminosity, raising the lungta of the inhabitants through the container - turning up the energetics. All physical space has energy: the maitri rooms are brilliant examples of how form warps and shapes the energetic content of interior space. As in sadhana practice, space gives birth to luminosity and the inner court dralas, manifest in heightened environments literally saturated with drala and vibrating with TGS, designed to ignite those transmissions in the practitioner - and also in people who have had no exposure to our lineage, which is how many of us got here. Space can take on diverse nuance, which is not necessarily beneficial.

Rigden principle, connected with both the inner and external courts, is expressed through mandala principle and vivid form. Rigden: is energized by Shiwa Okar - awake, spiritually realized; embodies the inner virtues - four dignity mandala; is a spiritually realized
A secular person, the ideal Shambhala citizen and worldly expression of human dignity, the model for architectural form. We pattern the container following these principles to awaken them in the practitioners.

Embodying Rigden in the container means organizing the container as a co-emergent throne - the King’s Seat outlined above - a physical and geomantic power spot that co-emerges the three courts and captures three levels of drala. Whether we are designing a single room, or a Kingdom, in creating sacred space in Shambhala, we begin by placing the King’s seat, the heaven principle in the layout of physical space. The King’s seat as the heaven principle more broadly signifies the guiding vision and ruling principle that directs design: the Sakyong’s vision; the mission of a center; the community (monastic, yogic, etc.). Often in sacred architecture, the ruling vision is the central transmission and primary deity as the driving and primary iconographical source.

The mandala of the four dignities is activated through: building siting (following the manifestation of the four dignities in the landform) cardinal orientation (to land, or the cardinal directions); the placement of heraldry and symbols; the use of color; banners of the four dignities. Spatial prototypes embody the four dignities formally, as in a courtyard complex; and informally, through asymmetrical composition wedded to the land.

We capture Rigden by making the building look like the Rigden. The prototype is tailored to fit the deity, not the other way around. If we use the iconography of Chakrasamvvara in a space dedicated to Vajrayogini, we will find Chakrasamvvara has come to dinner. To invite Rigden, we need an imperial architecture in form and detail, with his external character: dignified; stable; unified; exuding ziji and splendor – enriching; authentic; vajra-like indestructibility, immovability, and protection; all victorious.

The copulation of form, space and energy in the external court environment is orchestrated by architecture through proportion and massing; how the building engages with land; spatial sequencing; solid and void; daylighting; orientation; materials; architectural detail and ornament; heating and ventilation; etc.

**A Uniquely Shambhalian Container**

The purpose of a Shambhalian container is to actualize the Shambhala Kingdom through its temporal embodiment. Shiwa Okar and Rigden are the indivisibility of spiritual and temporal power, the core Shambhala mission – the seed for a new, uniquely Shambhalian container that integrates traditional practice space with enhanced facilities that empower the sacred secular rituals of Great Eastern Sun Society.

Rigden as the seed syllable and generative source means a container is that is a fully manifest embodiment of Shambhala teachings: the Kingdom. In small centers, and even a single room, many of the features listed below can be represented in microcosm, once understood and appreciated. This means:

- A view of our container as not just a program space, but as a place to gather as a family, society and clan and be the kingdom: not theory or myth.
- A way to express kindness to people, by providing uplifting accommodations that respect and empower their dignity
- A court container that unifies sacred and secular, spiritual and the temporal, designed for a western lay community
- The three courts/ mandala of the four dignities as the primary spatial prototype: spatial hierarchy delineating sacred zones according to natural hierarchy; the placement of people and services according to mandala principle; program requirements adjusted to included facilities
required in a court container (including adequate support facilitites).
*Seating the Sakyong and Sakyong Wangmo: A family residential facilities as appropriate; Rigden shrine; photographs and a dedicated chair (attached PDF from the Office of Protocol and Decorum); a tenno room or tenno complex
*Vivid expression of the external court principles of indestructibility and protection, through: a strong and vivid boundary (welcome and protection); expressed gates, with entry protocol; protector iconography at the gate (see PDF, above); vivid kasung presence anchored by a garrison as appropriate or visible posts
*Seating local governance according to mandala principle: reflecting Court structure in the local organizational structure (The Three Pillars)
*Dedicated facilities to seat the GES society, including enhanced facilities to empower the sacred secular rituals, such as western dining; and services for bathing, food preparation and service, etc., which are part of the practice. We can think of our centers as formal practice facilities, but also as places gather as a family, society, and clan, to be the Kingdom.
*An imperial architecture that is Rigden. When we arrive, we enter the Kingdom. We walk the three courts through the power of built space. Architecture is the teaching.
*Trooping the colors: A vivid expression of our Shambhala pattern language, including natural hierarchy; yun, enriching and authentic presence

**Diverse Prototypes: One Size does not Fit All**
Because the dralas are numerous and diverse, we have many and diverse k’an-yu/sacred architecture prototypes. There is no generic prototype. The nature of drala is that it is specific to the situation. The Japanese crests we are all familiar with are a great example. They are powerful precisely because of their differences: each one captures the essence of a particular thing or upaya. Someone had the brilliance to pare down to find the uniqueness within each situation, and crystallize it. Through diversity, mandala is created – there is no mandala if everything the same. The prototype is tailored to fit a particular deity, landform, community, and function. It must literally reflect the attributes of the deity as the prototype is its body and its embedded energetic structure.

Not all of our centers fit the Kingdom model outlined above. Some facilities and buildings have unique fortes that direct the manifestation: the Maitri rooms are dedicated to the Buddha families; shrines to specific deities; stupas have targeted forms and functions. Even when the energetic prototype is the same, its expression can vary and many other critical requirements are factored in, ultimately resulting in a different built prototype. Most important of these is landform, which directs how an idealized prototype is adjusted to fit given site: the built complex is rooted in and wedded to the land, as the land empowers it. Natural hierarchy can be expressed formally/symmetrically or informally/asymmetrically; spacial hierarchy can be expressed vertically, from front to back, diagonally, etc. Rural residential centers vs. urban; contemplative vs. embassy-like seats; family vs. monastic; societal vs. yogic - each require a different pattern to maximize their potential. Ultimately, there is no single typology that universally fits: one size does not fit all. The Sakyong’s vision; the ruling transmission and deity; the landform potential; the nature of the community; the regional culture, architecture and drala; local building traditions and technology, etc. – all crystallize into one seamless unity, all of the requirements working together as a harmonious, fully integrated mandala.
**Space Creates Mind**

*Space creates mind.* The question is, what kind of mind do we want to create? Do we want a hinayana, mahayana, or vajrayana kind of mind? Rigden mind or Shiwa Okar? Do we want a practice mind; a contemplative mind; enterprising business mind; nurturing-the-family mind? Architecture is in services to *that.* There is a direct relationship between the environments we create and the mind and lives that emerge out of them. Our facilities will shape the community the nature of the manifestation. Know the vision: know the kind of mind you want to create and design the architecture to empower it.

**Inviting the Kingdom**

To invite the Kingdom, we apply the iconography of Shambhala to the design of built space, and structure architecture according to the pattern of the Three Courts - the mandala principle of the Kingdom. We follow natural hierarchy, the pattern language of the sacred world. When we use the colors and icons of the Three Courts we invite three levels of dralas into our culture and spaces. We can build with conviction in the teachings we have been given, that if we simply follow the pattern of the sacred world in how we organize, relate with each other and manifest, the Kingdom might arise.