

Open Letter to Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche

31st August, 2014

Dear Sir,

After living and working in Bhutan the last several years, I returned to Nova Scotia this past summer for my first extended (3-month) visit back in five years. After living far from our Shambhala sangha for so long, I was deeply moved and gratified to experience again the extraordinary richness of the support for our dharma practice and study available in our wider Shambhala community.

I want to emphasize here that I personally am profoundly appreciative and grateful to you for all you are doing to teach and explore further the precious Scorpion Seal terms. Indeed, having now completed four Scorpion Seal Assemblies, I remain fully committed to that path. To be blunt, despite my deep commitment to creating Shambhala society, I confess that my Werma practice used to be episodic and pale to say the least, and it has come to life with ever greater vividness as a direct result of the Scorpion Seal practices you have introduced. Thank you so much for that!

I also recognize that the Buddha taught the dharma in 84000 ways, that not every one relates to the Scorpion Seal path, that the Kagyü, Nyingma, kasung, dharma art, and many other practices so kindly given us by the Vidyadhara are all entirely valid and authentic paths that suit particular people, and that the Shambhala umbrella is big enough to incorporate the Vidyadhara's entire legacy.

For me personally, the Shambhala, Kagyü and Nyingma paths are part of a single fabric and inseparable. As the Vidyadhara said in answering a question after his *Windhorse* talk at the 1982 Kalapa Assembly:

"... The drala practice is like the sharp edge of a sword blade which deals with day-to-day life already, automatically. The Vajrayogini practice is like the other edge of the sword blade, which carries the weight so that the sharp edge can cut. It's like the two sides of a coin."

But I also realize that the Kagyü, Nyingma, and Shambhala paths are all entire paths in themselves, and that others may not choose to join them.

And so I was deeply disturbed during my visit back this past summer to see how widely accepted and 'normalized' the rift in our sangha has become. From afar, of course I was aware of and saddened by that split, but I never had to deal with it on an ongoing basis, and so I never got used to it and find the present divisions entirely unacceptable. Those entirely loyal to you and those entirely alienated remain equally my heartfelt Shambhala brothers and sisters.

On the one hand, we learned long ago that furthering disharmony in the sangha is a serious breach of our vajra commitments. On the other hand, what struck me over and over again was how unnecessary and easily resolvable the present divisions are.

And so I am moved to write this open letter to you to plead and supplicate you for very simple actions that can not only heal the present wounds but I feel will also greatly strengthen and broaden your own leadership of the Shambhala Kingdom. Indeed, I really don't believe we as Shambhalians can be any kind of effective model for the world or for our wider society while we cannot accommodate each other or heal our own fractures.

I want to emphasize here that none of the modest (and perhaps naïve) suggestions that follow would even slightly detract from or prevent your own present teachings, writings, assemblies, and other activities from proceeding apace, nor would they diminish even slightly the number and quality of students following the Scorpion Seal path and the various practices and teachings you are giving. On the contrary, I feel certain that the humble gestures suggested below would strengthen the paths you are propagating by virtue of their unifying influence and their accommodating so many more students under the broad Shambhala umbrella.

I have discussed the following specific suggestions in some detail with your secretary, David Brown, during a meeting in Halifax last month:

- At Gampo Abbey, just restoring the Seven-Line Supplication to Padmakara and the Supplication to the Takpo Kagyü to the morning liturgy would do wonders to heal present wounds. Abbey folk have plenty of time, and the extra 2 minutes in the morning would be greatly welcomed in the Shambhala practice centre with the deepest commitment (e.g. 3-year

retreat) to preserving our Kagyü and Nyingma inheritance. As well, the Shambhala aspiration could be alternated in the evening liturgy with the aspiration to fulfil the wishes of the Vidyadhara written by the Abbey's own abbot, Ven. Thrangu Rinpoche.

- At Karme Choling, the Vajrayogini shrine room has become the community room and the ngondro shrine room has become the exercise and music room. If Karme Choling is to continue to be a 'deep training facility', then restoring dedicated shrine rooms for the Kagyü and Nyingma practices would be ever so accommodating and greatly appreciated by many dedicated practitioners.
- I am sure you agree that the three-volume *Profound Treasury of the Ocean of Dharma* is a true tour de force for our Shambhala sangha, a magnum opus that systematically brings together the Vidyadhara's core teachings on the entire Buddhist path like never before. What could be more central to our Shambhala sangha than thirteen years of the Vidyadhara's Seminary transcripts, beautifully compiled, arranged, and organized by one of our most gifted, practised, and genuine senior teachers in 25 years of dedicated effort? This is a reference work that will be studied for generations to come.

And yet the annual *Profound Treasury* retreats taught by Judy Lief are held in Maine, outside our Shambhala practice centres. Why not simply invite the *Profound Treasury* organizers to have the annual retreats at Karme Choling? I can think of no program that more definitively belongs in the very heart of our Shambhala community and practice mandala.

- If just once a year, Sir, you were to give a Vajrayogini tri, and if you would allow entering vajrayana students (new tantrikas) the option to pursue the path of Kagyü ngöndro in addition to the Primordial Rigden ngöndro, this would again be greatly appreciated by so many genuine students and practitioners. My understanding is that all the acharyas have the authority to give the necessary permissions for these Kagyü practices within the folds of our broad Shambhala sangha. Without that, we are in danger of losing a vital and precious component of our inheritance – “the other edge of the sword blade” to use the Vidyadhara's words cited above.

There are many other similar and very simple gestures that would work wonders in healing present rifts and accommodating all our Shambhala sangha in the broadest sense without in the slightest detracting from your present path, teachings, and trajectory. It is perfectly understandable, Sir, to make a distinction between your role as teacher (focussing on the Shambhala and Scorpion Seal paths) and your broader organizational role as leader of the Shambhala sangha (which can embrace a much wider range of skillful means and students committed to other authentic components of the Vidyadhara's legacy).

I felt this past summer that, at bottom, all us Shambhalians – those most loyal and those most alienated – are one sangha deeply sharing a vision and an inheritance that are precious beyond imagination. The present painful rift is truly unacceptable and it would take so little to bring us together again in full harmony. From the bottom of my heart, Sir, I supplicate you to take the simple actions needed to make that happen. Thank you again for your kindness, skill, and generosity in teaching the Scorpion Seal terma, and for considering this heartfelt plea.

Yours in the dharma,

Tashi Colman