



SHAMBHALA
THE KALAPA COURT

Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche
Shambhala Households

President Richard Reoch: Dear friends, I'm speaking to you from the Kalapa Court here in Halifax. It is just days after the 4th Shambhala Congress and, in fact, it is the Sakyong's birthday. And it was today that he called me to the Court to say that he had a message for the entire Shambhala leadership, a message which is destined to go to all of Shambhala.

Your Majesty, as you know, the theme of the 4th Shambhala Congress was "exploring community." What do you see as the next steps in developing Shambhala society?

Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche: Well, first of all I am very pleased with how the Congress went and the incredible clarifying, bring together all these principles and aspiration that happened. So I'm extremely, delighted by the Congress. Before I go to retreat, it seems like an auspicious and good time in terms of our next phase. Over the years I feel like there's been an element missing. Initially I did work on the Dorje Kasung, its strength and structure, and then obviously the acharyas—I have to say they're all working beautifully and that group is very strong—and then with the leadership and also government coming together. I feel like the next principle is the notion of Shambhala household, which is connected with the principle of Kalapa Court in the center of Shambhala.

If you look at the traditional thangka of Shambhala, the Rigden in the middle is usually painted as sitting on an eight-petal lotus, and around it there are many households going on. So Shambhala historically is connected with households, with many millions of households taking place in Shambhala. The

Kalapa Court is the central household where the Sakyong and Sakyong Wangmo live. That's a principle of family as a unit, as opposed to an individual. I feel like that's something that we need to aspire to and develop further.

So I feel like the next phase is really this notion of Shambhala household, and how all of our community can essentially be household. People could choose to say, "I would like to live as a Shambhala householder," and they would participate that way. Maybe I would send a letter or some kind of acknowledgement that their home is an official Shambhala household and that they wish to live their life on certain principles that correlate with the Court principle, which really has to do with how we run our houses and how we run our lives. The Shambhala centres have been wonderful, but there has sometimes been a stress or disconnect: we live our lives, and then we sometimes go to the Shambhala Centre and have activities. I think that for us to have a social transformation, we need to bring it down to our home level.

Having a household doesn't necessarily mean you're married in the traditional sense. You could have a bachelor as a household or any number of individuals living together in what is essentially their home, their palace, their court, or their fort—however they'd like to think about it—some kind of solidity and seat. From that, they live an uplifted life. Nowadays, this is one of the key issues, this principle of household and how we live together with a shared principle by which we get up in the morning.

I don't think this needs to be particularly heavy or uptight. It could be very practical: people should have clean stoves, I feel, and they should handle themselves as Shambhalians in terms of how they bathe, how they keep the house clean, how they use language, the whole thing. We often use our house to hibernate into or run away into and there's some sort of disconnect. When you walk into a Shambhala household, there should be a sense of cheerfulness and upliftedness, delightfulness, and also a palpable sense of discipline, that somebody there is working with something. It's not that we're always going to be successful, but that we have some principle we are working with, as opposed to the attitude that it's "my" territory and I don't want anyone barging in.

In a Shambhala household we see our life as interlaid. We see that every aspect of the life has a principle of basic goodness, that it's an opportunity to

develop and train. Generally speaking when we are more disciplined and there's some structure or principle, which we're living, we're more cheerful. We're happier individuals. Many times we feel like we want to get away and finally be free in our home, where we can do whatever we want. That often leads to more self-orientation and self-centeredness. There's a lack of inspiration and we lose perspective altogether. So there should be a sense of delightfulness and principle.

When you walk into the house, you might actually have a kitchen shrine with certain elements so we can designate it as a Shambhala household. It could be a certain image that's sent from the Court, or perhaps you would do a particular practice like a short four-line aspiration. Or you would work with certain contemplations.

PRR: You've talked a lot about the relationship between the Court and the household. It sounds as if you're seeing each household as like a mini-court, in some sense. Is there a Court principle that binds it together?

SMR: The Court principle is the mandala principle. It's balanced principle, it's the masculine and feminine, father-mother lineage, the union of those energies, the union of gentleness and fearlessness, prajna and wisdom. So you have the masculine/feminine, and each person plays a certain role, but it's that universal principle and it's the balanced principle of Court, which is mandala principle, where everything has its place. It doesn't mean oppression, but everything has a particular role. For example, if a husband and wife don't themselves play their respective roles, the family unit starts breaking down, and the children don't know exactly what hierarchy is, and they start running things, and the whole thing gets upside down. So there's a universality to the whole thing, which is Court principle.

At the Shambhala kingdom level, the Kalapa Court is the household where the leaders of the community live. But you're going to have variations of that in every Shambhala Centre, with local leaders, the directors, everyone mimicking or manifesting in their particular way. There's a spectrum of people: single people, there may be a gay couple, there may be people who are just living together in a communal home—people who are disenfranchised in some ways

and they're living together. That's what we mean by what we call traditionally "the seven riches of the Sakyong": the precious minister, the precious general, the elephant, the horse—all these historically represent certain aspects.

For example, steadiness and the notion of the general is that each of us, even if we're single, should have a "general," or the principle of protection. We also need somebody who gives us some good advice. The queen principle is a consort principle, somebody with whom we can share the notion of decency, somebody who gives us direct feedback; we work with them in a certain way. If we don't have that principle or the steadiness principle, the horse, or the dignity of the elephant, then our life begins to lack some things that we need in those areas. Those are universal, historical principles that we all need, and I think we all seek them.

A Shambhala household is a drala catcher in the sense that it's a place where everything—magic and auspiciousness and practice—can mix together. Since we're human beings, we're social; we live together in groups. The household is that basic group; that doesn't change. But the way a lot of us grow up now is simply based on the individual, and that orientation often creates obstacles because we don't know how to run a household; we're not sure how that can happen. So even though we may do meditation, our household is completely out of balance. With practice alone we can accomplish a certain amount, but it's not going to ultimately do what's necessary.

The household is a very important unit also for social change. The breakdown of the household—not even necessarily the family—begins to affect all of society. So you have lack of harmony. If there's not kindness, empathy, and sympathy cultivated in the household, then it's hard to do that on the national level, because that sense of kinship and appreciation has not been generated. Then it's just about "me" in my household.

That's something we have to think about. What is Shambhala about? It's not just about the individual, it's about the household, it's about society. That does give a different message for Shambhalian. A lot of organizations, spiritual groups, are made up of individuals practicing. I think Shambhala can really manifest its principles by saying "we are about the household." If we can emphasize that and help people understand that, from the beginning, the

household is the basic building block unit of Shambhala, and that this principle differentiates Shambhala, that will have power. People have their individual things, but there's this difference in Shambhala: it's based upon the household. The household is the basic collector of all the aspects of our life. It congeals them.

PRR: How does this relate to the notion of deleks?

SMR: People have had a hard time getting deleks together if their whole household is not running on the same principles. From having Shambhala households, I think that the deleks will be a natural outgrowth; it will be natural to get together. This will be a big change for the Shambhala Centre. I think the Shambhala Centre will be more about social action and it will be about more deepening.

A lot of things that are happening at the centre could happen more at the household level. Before, often people would go or not go to a Shambhala Centre and they would retreat into their household, almost like they're voting with their participation or non-participation. That creates an atmosphere where some people feel like they're *doing* something and some people feel like they're *not* doing something. When some people go to the Shambhala Centre, they feel guilty because they haven't been there for a while, whatever it is. This takes that to a much broader spectrum in that everyone is participating and practicing: even though you may be not being doing regular practice, you're participating in the household practice, and within that, obviously, is your own practice. Then, when you go to a Shambhala Centre, the whole thing is much more invigorated. There's less of a dichotomy, and the pulley of the energy at the centre will be much more dynamic. It's much more social.

Often people go to the Shambhala Centre as though it's their living room—they just want to hang out. They don't want any new people coming, and it becomes too cozy. People need a certain amount of coziness, and that can happen at their home. When they go to the Shambhala Centre it's much more engaged. People ask so many questions about how to take practices that you do on the cushion or at a program: how do you bring those practices into your life? Essentially what they're asking about is how to integrate it into their household

situation. If there's a lack of structure or understanding of how to relate to the household, all the practices are just band-aids. We need to look at the whole thing. Looking at the whole thing is really that notion of applying the practice to our life, to our actual daily situation. If this begins to happen, it will make a profound impact. We could have a web page where people find out what the contemplation of the week is, or the day.

The Shambhala centres can also then be as a basis for proactivity. For example, for individuals who have difficulty with relationships, we can use a therapist or another caring person to help guide them in working with it at the household level. If they're having a hard time financially, we can help show them how to work with that in the household. We can teach people the principles. We're not going to tell them, "This is right, this is wrong" per se, but we can offer a basic sense of the principles. For example, "Do you have a sense of delightfulness, dignity, and harmony in your household? How's the relationship with the children? What's the balance of work?"

Often in family situations people get very nitpicky. They start coming down to a very functional level, where there's no vision, so I felt we'd help each other in terms of keeping the vision. Traditionally you have a vision, the *lha* principle; a working basis, the *nyen* principle; and you have the *lu* principle, which is doing very basic things. If your house is not clean, it's not organized, and you're not practicing relating, it's hard to ask for practice from the lineage, asking "How can I resolve this situation from the top?" You need to look at the whole thing. So it's really that notion of being there and manifesting at home and realizing, "This is actually how to practice."

PRR: Are there any particularly practical suggestions that you want us to bear in mind as we do this?

SMR: Well, here at the Kalapa Court, Khandro Tseyang, the Sakyong Wangmo, likes to clean, and she likes to have order. One of the things I've been saying to the staff of the Court is that this is supposed to be the example; therefore our stove should be the cleanest stove. And every household stove should be clean. That's where your *ziji* or *wangthang*—your energy—comes from, because it's the

fire, it's the kitchen. If the stove is left dirty, then you decide, "Well, I'm not going to do the dishes either." Then you start not putting things away; then you think, "Well, there's no point getting a shower, because I might as well come down and do whatever I want." The whole thing starts falling apart.

There may be times like Sunday morning when you want to just go downstairs in your pajamas and that kind of situation is okay, but just as a principle, if there's a certain breakdown in the household, then other things start falling apart. We sometimes feel like lack of structure is freedom, but some kind of structure is important. For example, I feel like within our own community, if certain households, like those on the East Coast, for example, decided that they would all practice at the same time, then everybody knows that all those Shambhala households are practicing at the same time.

I think you could have certain meals that might be served. Part of being a Shambhala household is that you would participate in certain activities of the Shambhala Centre—Shambhala Day or Midsummer's Day—that are culturally vital for everyone. Another important element is that all of the children who are born into the Shambhala household should be given Shambhala birth certificates as recognition that they're participating in this way, that they are born into this situation. There's a real sense of community that way. You're actually participating in something.

PRR: So this feels like it has a radiating quality to it, which may be a little different to what many of us understood by the earlier notion of the householder yogi. Do you see a difference here?

SMR: This is a shift in that we have this householder yogi, which is a very romantic idea, but often what happens is that people feel disenfranchised from their household, like they're a yogi trapped in a house and they don't want to relate to what's going on; they just want to practice. So it's almost like the yogi's taken out of the forest and stuck in a house. But of course if you're very competent, you can practice anywhere, but thinking of yourself as a household yogi creates an individual level of practice as opposed to the view that there's something inherent within the household that is actually dignified. Traditionally

speaking, the person and the household have the same relationship as the mind and the body; the body is the house and the consciousness is this individual who is living in a house. How do you balance those things? With the householder yogis, what often happens is that they want to get away from society. When they go from home to the Shambhala Centre, they still don't want to be relating, essentially. So it creates a bit of a rub that way.

The basic principle of Shambhala is household. The next stage for us is to have Shambhala households manifesting, which is something that we haven't really fully done. It was attempted in various ways, but now we are more mature. Also, we have now aligned the central practice as the Werma Sadhana with the Shambhala lineage. Actually embodying these principles brings a lot of power. It's hard to talk about helping the world when fundamentally people think of themselves just as individuals and want to be disassociated from their household and the family. It's incongruous. We need to figure out how to bridge that. This is the next phase of our evolution: how we can be there as warrior household individuals. In the future, when we talk about Shambhala, this will also allow for us not to talk about membership in terms of how many individuals, but in terms of how many households there are in Shambhala. That would be the ideal scenario.

The Kalapa Court
Halifax, Nova Scotia
November 15, 2009

© 2009 Mipham J. Mukpo. All rights reserved.