

Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche
Leadership Conference
Talk 1
8 December 2006
Boulder, Colorado

President Richard Reoch: Acharyas, members of the Sakyong's Council, office of the Kalapa Court, Dorje Kasung Command Council, representatives of Gampo Abbey, president of Naropa University, directors and board members of the practice and retreat centers, directors and members of the board of the Shambhala Centers, representatives of Shambhala Europe and the European vice-chair of the Mandala Council, the Shambhala Trust, and representatives of other entities in the mandala – Ukyo Kyudo, Ashoka Credit Union, the Shambhala Prison Community, the Prison Dharma Network – invited guests, staff, and friends. It gives me great pleasure, on behalf of the Kalapa Court, to invite you all to this exceptional gathering of the leadership of the Shambhala mandala. This comes just as we are heading into the final phases of this particular year and heading towards Shambhala Day, at the end of what has been a truly extraordinary year in the history of our kingdom. This has included, of course, the Blossoming of the Sun, at which many of us had the honor to be present. I am delighted to say that at tomorrow's feast we will be joined by Khandro Tseyang. We also hosted the historic visit of his Holiness the Dalai Lama to The Great Stupa of Dharmakaya, where the Sakyong presented him with the first Living Peace Award. These are two of the extraordinary milestones of this year.

And it was this year that the idea arose in the mindstream of the Sakyong that perhaps it would be good for the leadership of our growing mandala to gather together with him. When I say "growing," I should just perhaps mention one fact that I discovered on my recent pilgrimage: over half of all the Shambhala Centers of North America are currently seeking new space, or have already acquired new space, or are trying figure out how to reconfigure their existing space, because so many people are coming to our centers that it is just not possible to accommodate them within the present physical confines. So it is in this time of growth – which brings with it also growing pains, considerable challenges – that we have gathered together to receive teaching from the Sakyong.

May I invite you, Sir, to address us?

Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche: Very heartfelt greetings to everyone, in particular to Lady Diana, who has journeyed here to be with us. I am very happy that so many representatives from all aspects of our community have come together. I must say that it is strange to look out at all of you and see you all in one place, in one room. This is what the bardo is supposed to be like; everyone you know

shows up at once. But we are not dead yet, and we need to act alive. I think that is the point of this whole weekend.

How do we reflect this weekend? One of the inspirations I've had as I've gone around teaching is that it would be important for me to convene a gathering of all of us in one place to look at what we are doing and to see what needs to be done in the future. Just the power of our gathering together is essential, and I hope to put more effort into this. This afternoon I met with the Sakyong's Council, and in the next few days I hope to be meeting with all of you. I'd like to emphasize putting energy into what is essential and important.

All of you are leaders in our community. Everyone knows that we have been doing a lot of development, a lot of experimenting with different things, and continuing to grow. We have come to the point where I think all of us can see the incredible potential in what we can do together. Richard has put so much effort into actually going out and meeting with people this autumn. There has been a lot of interchange of different ideas. What we need to do now is decide clearly what we are going to do and move ahead with it.

The talking and interaction are important and will continue. But I feel that there is a point where the spirit of working together and the energy of galvanizing all the aspects of our mandala need to bear fruit. I am talking about the acharyas, members of the Dorje Kasung, and center directors. When I travel around, people talk to me about certain issues, and I say, "You should be talking to So-and-So." I go to Karne Choling and say, "You should be talking to Shambhala Mountain Center." It's back and forth, back and forth. I know that people do talk to each other, but the ease by which we can communicate among each other and share ideas needs to reach another level. Many of you have come to me with different ideas about what to do. In terms of Shambhala's future potential, there is expanding outward momentum. But internally, we have to strengthen, clarify, and consolidate.

Recently I've been working with the acharyas and other individuals on clarifying the path of practice and study. It is important for all of us to understand what the purpose of this path is, as well as how it happens. One of the key points is to understand clearly who we are as a Shambhala Buddhist lineage and the different aspects of that. People have asked questions about the "umbrella" principle: How can we accommodate everything we have to offer? If we are not sure about who and what we are, it will be very difficult. The more certain we are about who we are, the more we can relax, and the more accommodating we can be. If we are not sure about that, becoming more diverse will only weaken our situation.

I try to be as open-minded as possible about a lot of things that happen. But at a certain point, too much happening weakens the situation so that it is no longer healthy for us as students. I'm saying this because we need to have more confidence and understanding about our role as leaders in the community. It is important to empower and train ourselves as leaders. As all of you know all too

well, some position needed to be filled and you were chosen. All of a sudden, you became one of “them.” You hear all the complaints and problems without a training process. The whole thing happens in a haphazard way.

What we are talking about is leadership. What we are talking about is development, and how we need to implement it. One of the inspirations I had for this gathering was just to be able to talk about certain teachings in our own tradition, such as the six ways of ruling that I mention in my book. These are also in *Court Vision*. I wanted to discuss different kinds of teachings from our own tradition about how to develop as an individual and as a leader. I wanted to talk about how we are to develop certain qualities so that we can be genuine, and so that we can have peace, joyfulness, and an understanding of the power inherent in these aspects of our training. Engaging these qualities and training in them gives us a natural sense of confidence and ability to lead. As we continue in this process, we have to self-reflect, look into the mirror of our own dharma. Are we conducting ourselves according to our own dharma?

If we are going to talk about the Shambhala teachings, we need to be living those teachings. We need to be somehow incorporating them in terms of what we do. There does not need to be any separation between our responsibilities as leaders and our responsibilities as individuals and practitioners. We’re going to delve into that while we’re here. In terms of leadership, so many issues arise for us. Dealing with those issues depends on how we organize and regard ourselves.

There is a natural order in terms of how things are. We call it heaven, earth, and man; we call it *lha*, *nyen*, and *lu*. In the beginning of my life as the Sakyong, I felt that my responsibility was to support everyone as much as I could. I was more in the *lu* or the *nyen* position. I was not in the *lha* position. I was just supporting and trying to help. At the same time, it has been somewhat awkward for me to separate my role as the Sakyong and myself as an individual. But the role of the Sakyong is to be the *lha*, the galvanizing factor. This is a direct reflection on what you as leaders do. For example, having created the Sakyong’s Council, we now have an entity where the Sakyong is the *lha*, the binding factor. We’ve brought out the natural order. We have to understand what that is and not run away from it, because if I am not in my appropriate place, it is hard for you to be in your appropriate place.

If you don’t have a *lha* at your center, the *nyen* people take over. Then there is no inspiration because where do the *nyen* people look for inspiration? They look to the *lha*. And where do the *lu* people look for inspiration? They look to the *nyen*. If we are afraid of power and the effect it might have, we tend to consolidate and all become equal in some ways. Within the principle of bodhichitta and buddha nature we are all certainly equal, but on a relative level we are all in different phases of our lives. Some of us have a lot of experience and knowledge; therefore we need be in higher positions in order to lead others.

How are we to look at ourselves as leaders? This is a challenge. If we don't agree with this natural order, we should not be expounding it. We talk about lha, nyen, and lu, but we don't really practice it. Even though at this point in some ways it's very philosophical, a lot of the issues we are dealing with – in terms of our society, our finances, our spiritual life – have to do with how we as leaders take our seat. What helps us take our seat is also helpful to other situations. When we don't take our seat, it is difficult to engage in beneficial activity because the people we are supposed to be leading become more afraid. That applies to being a parent or a business person, too. You have to take your seat to show that you are not afraid. Even though you may not know exactly what is going on, just that sense of basic confidence gives others inspiration.

We look at the financial situation or the practice situation and say, "How are we going to do this?" We need to have confidence. If we feel like we do not have it, we need to support and organize ourselves in terms of training in order to bring it about. This weekend here is not a program; I am not necessarily going to be teaching about something. It's not an opportunity for the president to present concrete ideas about reorganization. Rather, it is opportunity for us to realize that this is a pivotal time in our community.

We're now entering a phase where we are taking on a lot. So much is about to happen. As Richard was saying, if we want to bring in all those people who are curious about our community and our vision, it needs to be in a way that makes us proud. We want to be happy to bring them in so that we can offer them the jewels and the goodies. To do that, we ourselves need to be able to integrate these inherent principles.

There is the element of keeping our vision, the heaven principle. I really hope that all of you in your roles always keep a sense of what your heaven is – your aspiration, what it is that you would like to accomplish. We're not talking about some sort of conventional klesha-ridden ambition. However, we need to have a sense of purpose. I feel like within our community we have spent many years doubting ourselves: Are we for real? Are we going to survive? How long are we going to be around? In my situation, I'm always hearing the disaster scenario, you know. People are always telling me about the worst thing that's going to happen. Yeah, it is possible, the worst thing could happen. But that is not really what we are talking about.

We are talking about the lineage of the middle way. We are talking about how we can move forward in a sensible way. At this point we have to realize that we are here for the long haul. We are here for a long time. We are establishing something. There was a great mahasiddha who prophesied and worked hard so that this lineage would have the ability to bring tremendous benefit to the world. This is what this individual laid his life down for. There are many teachers who come in and support that and help. It's happening. We have to be looking at the long term. If we think only in short-term ways – if we are not sure this is going to survive – then all our actions will be short-term. All of the decisions we make

will be short-term, because we aren't considering the long-term effect. It's the same thing with practice. The many-lifetimes scenario enables us to plan well for this lifetime. We need that vision of who we are and what we are doing. Looking at it from a long-term perspective enables us to relax and not be so worried about what we are doing. The ability to see things that way is totally available, here for us to dive into and move forward with.

We have such a unique role here in the world, such a responsibility. In terms of the world situation at a governmental level, we are always discussing and criticizing the lack of inspiration in terms of leadership. There are not that many places to see good leadership at work. So now we're convening and asking: What does enlightened leadership look like? What are our centers for? How can we move forward? At the same time, we are in the process of creating them.

I have joked with some of you about how in the beginning I always thought there was somebody who knew what was going on. However, now I am meeting people who are really high up – governors, presidents, ministers, and the like – and they are asking *me* what I think they should be doing. The Vidyadhara had the powerful insight that these teachings are not necessarily just for a spiritual situation, but they are for the world at large. The Dalai Lama's visit to the Stupa and the inspiration of offering him the peace award is an example of a bigger view of what can happen.

In terms of how the whole thing happened, I didn't want his visit to the Stupa to be just a simple blessing. "Great Tibetan Teacher Visits Stupa" is not a very exciting story, you know. That's pretty obvious. I wanted to make it bigger so that this stupa can become not just a symbol for our community, but a symbol of everything that we feel, a symbol of peace. I want it the Stupa to be a symbol for the whole country in terms of what this country can do. I found it incredibly provocative for us to work in the direction of thinking bigger in terms of who in this world is living in accordance with the tradition of peace. Obviously His Holiness the Dalai Lama represents this tradition in an ideal way.

His Holiness's reaction was that this award was very much a good thing. In a couple of little conversations, he gave us very concrete examples about how to go forward. One thing he said to me is that what we are doing is very strong and vast. He used the word *gyachenpo* [?], which means "very big." The other Tibetans were impressed that the Dalai Lama would use that word. They felt that because he said it, it must be true. He also told me that we have great responsibility in terms of everything we are doing.

So often we get very insular – and on some level we need to do that in order to work with what we have. But now we also need to look at what we can offer to the world. As far as timing goes, we need to be moving ahead. While I think it is a very positive situation, at the same time I am concerned about our ability to gather and organize and support each other – especially over the next five to ten years – because there is a big power shift happening in terms of

generation change, knowledge, and so forth. Here we are talking about the long-term sustainability of what we are doing. We need to pass it along so that the being in the leadership role is not so tenuous. The ability to offer what we have to others is the very fabric of our centers. That's a lot of ideas for me to present as a way of trying to help and support you as leaders so that we can work together. Although we are in many separate areas, we need to come together. Right now we waste a lot of energy talking and worrying about each other in various ways. Sometimes there's a reason to worry, but most of the time there's not. We need to put that energy into something else.

How will we be able to put energy into what is important? I do not want to talk about me too much, but I am in a particular phase of looking at what is really meaningful to do. I share this with you because I think as a community and as individual leaders, we need to look at what is meaningful to do. Where can we put our effort and energy for maximum yield and benefit? I don't want us to waste energy, and I don't want leadership to be an energy-draining experience for people.

I hope that this process of being involved in the mandala as part of the leadership is something that people look forward to. As I was saying to the Sakyong's Council earlier, I really hope that our children and others who are studying go to university specifically to train so that they can have a role in Shambhala. This is a meaningful thing to do with our lives. Our community is multi-dimensional now, with different levels and different generations. It's a different kind of mix than existed before.

We also need to communicate and understand our financial resources. There are so many projects that people want to do. In many ways the community is very wealthy. It has a lot of potential. We need to feel comfortable with the notion of wealth and expand. How can we do that? I'm sharing this because when I travel around to the centers they are always asking me to fundraise for one thing or another. I'm always pleased to say yes, but I think there needs to be more overview of what we are doing in terms of specific projects. Why are we focusing on Shambhala Mountain Center or Karma Chöling or Dechen Chöling or Denma Ling? What are doing? There needs to be some sort of understanding altogether. I know it's a lot to ask. But I feel incredibly happy and relieved that so many of you came to this gathering. I was worried that it was going to be Richard, myself, and a few other people thinking, "Now what do we do?" The fact is that if we put effort into Shambhala working, the benefit will be amazing, because we are still fairly early on in this process of establishing dharma in the West.

I like to read history. I always like to look and say, "Wow, it would have really been amazing to live in that time because you could have influenced how the world turned out. So much was new." But right now we are at a time when something new is happening and we can put effort it. We may be struggling; it

may be a bit of a headache; it takes hard work. But we should feel tremendously fortunate to be in a position that allows us to bring benefit.

As leaders we all have to do a little soul-searching about why we are in our position. It can't be because there was no one else left to do it: "I was the last person left on the committee." I think we can change that. But first we need to look at ourselves. If we feel conviction and purpose – in Shambhala language, a sense of confidence – whatever our role is, we will be so much more effective. It doesn't matter if we are not the best organizer. When we have confidence, it begins to generate outward. We can infuse confidence into the people we choose for certain responsibilities. We are talking about the image of the bodhisattva. They say there are three ways the bodhisattva manifests: as the shepherd who puts the flock ahead, as the ferryman who takes travelers across the water, and as the king who rules with compassion. As leaders we are definitely in the shepherd mentality, trying to get everyone to go a particular way. We have to support each other in that.

As for me, I will continue to be here for everyone. And as I mentioned in the beginning, I would love to have the opportunity to work more closely with all of you here. It sounds almost selfish, but it's a good use of my time. So I am happy to do that. I have gone around doing lots of things, and I feel like in some ways we need to make a shift here. But how do we go forward and do this? Obviously we have tomorrow and the next day, so we can let this time period be that shift. In some ways we need to learn how to get out of our own way so we can just let things happen.

I am extremely happy that Lady Diana is here. I asked her to give a talk and have a discussion with everyone. This is an opportunity to share and discuss various topics that we want to talk about. This would be the time to have that interchange.

My last comment is simply that I have no doubt that we are able to do this. People often say, "I'm not sure if that's going to work out." I personally never think of failure. I feel that if we really put a good attitude and our whole mind of basic goodness forward, it doesn't matter what happens after that. Maybe that's simplistic, but it's gotten me this far. I do not lose too many nights of sleep worrying about things. I have noticed that the potential to worry is exponential once you start down that road. You don't even want to go there, as they say.

So we need to know how to hold our seat, our mind. The conventional world is not looking to us because we worry better than everyone else. The conventional world is saying, "Oh, there is another way." We are coming together not necessarily to improve our people skills, but to work on our compassion skills. We are coming together to look at the deep treasure chest of teachings. If we apply them – and I would encourage all of us, whether it be regionally or nationally, to start moving this way, training and developing – then

auspiciousness, *tendrel*, takes over. There is that kind of element in what we are doing here.

When I see all of us gathered like this, when I see the Dorje Kasung, when I see Mr. Halpern doing the *shihoborai*, it is simultaneously totally normal and completely bizarre. It is also auspicious, very auspicious. What I don't want is for us to get together and worry ourselves down. It's not that kind of conference. Then if we can take this energy back to our own centers and our work, that's the spark of change. Sometimes people tell me things over and over until they get a worry reaction from me. Then they feel like they have done their job, because now "he really knows what the problem is." But what's the point? We are not in this at that level. We need to *really* know what's going on.

So I am not gathering everyone here because I am worried. I am gathering everyone here because I feel like it is an auspicious time. In such a time you are not sure exactly what's going to happen. Because there is the power of the lineage and the power of what we are doing, Shambhala will definitely go forward.

Anyway, thank you very much. We have an opportunity for more discussion tomorrow, and the feast the next day. These are just my opening remarks; tonight I will not take any questions. Just let what I said sit and over the next few days we can talk about it. Those of you who came from out of town need to get some rest tonight. Again I feel great joy that we are gathered here in this particular way. When I see all of you, I see all the people you represent. You are not just here as individuals. You all represent something. It is a good weekend to be selfless, to be true bodhisattvas that way. Thank you.