

Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche
Leadership Conference
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Q&A

Question: Your Majesty, I have three quick questions. First, regarding the invitation to visiting teachers, would the person to contact be David Brown, Peter Volz, or someone else?

SMR: I would like the invitation to come from the Office of the Sakyong, so that would be David Brown. It needs to have a personal touch. Peter should be the liaison involved in making sure the visit goes well, but we'd like to avoid the invitation being even one step removed from my office. I think Peter is very happy that this is happening because the protocol has been unclear. Teachers have just shown up at different places.

Also, we need to work together in terms of integrating different teachers into teaching cycles and other activities that are taking place. Another important element is that acharyas – who as my representatives have done a lot and will be doing more – be invited for a particular teaching and practice. In the past, certain centers have told me, "Just send any acharya," but the invitations really need to have a sense of which acharya would be appropriate, because all acharyas are different. Different acharyas specialize in different teachings and practices, so we need to ask ourselves who would be good for what.

Some acharyas have said that they don't mind becoming regional and working in particular areas, but what I was saying in terms of the Asian teachers is also important with our own teachers. There needs to be a balance in the specific teachings the acharyas offer. For example, I want to have a little more teaching on the *powa* and bardo teachings because more people are getting older and sick. There's more dying going on. I will probably do a certain amount of teaching on *powa* and bardo myself, but other specialists will be invited as well. We also need people to give teachings that keep us based in the mahayana.

When it comes to tantric teachings, it's very important that anyone who teaches us has a direct lineage connection. We need to respect what abhisheka is, what a *lung* transmission is. There should be continuity. I've talked to certain lamas just coming out of Tibet who give abhisheka too readily. That becomes a bit of a problem when people are supposed to do the practice and don't know what it is. You can't really blame the teachers; they think if you invite them, this is what you want. They figure we must know what we're doing. So a lot of people who have barely taken refuge are suddenly taking abhisheka. The process needs more thought.

Q: My second question is about practice, in terms of trying to define and distill. We have so many chants. In my small center, there are people who think there are too many chants for regular sitting. I wonder if we couldn't have selected chants for a particular

program. For example, at an open house you may have no chants; for a beginning Shambhala program, maybe just the Shambhala lineage chant; for a Buddhist program, maybe the Buddhist chants. Do you have any thoughts? Do we always do them all, except when it's late at night?

SMR: The later the better, and the more you do. And if you don't want a lot of people to come around, then do a lot of chants. That always seems to work.

Yes, regarding the chants, we need to have what's called *thap* and *sherab*, skillful means and *prajna*. The point is not the chant, but the purpose of the chant. The chant is meaningless without purpose and understanding. Some chants we do because that's why we've received them. Other chants, such as the protector chants, we do because we're a vajrayana lineage. As we've discussed at Karme Chöling, these can be done by a small group of people. For example, at Penor Rinpoche's monastery, the protector chants of the Payu lineage, which is one of six major Nyingma lineages, are over 500 pages long, so they have a cycle. A single lama might commit to doing them for three years. He sits in a room, and starting at 4:00 AM all he does is the opening chants. He chants all day, banging away on the drum. I know this because he was right across from when I lived at the monastery. It was "bang bang bang" all day. Not all 3,000 lamas are doing it; certain ones are doing it for the whole monastery. When Penor Rinpoche travels, there is a certain group who do those chants wherever he goes. In the monastery at Surmang, the lineage chants are done in one room, twenty-four hours a day. Right now there are people at Surmang doing chants for myself, for Trungpa Rinpoche, and for others.

At our centers, there could be some version of that approach, where at least all the chants are done quietly. Even if only one person is doing them at your center, that's fine. The chants don't need to be thrust onto new people. If you are having an open house, clearly you are not going to be chanting. Even bowing and offering incense seem strange to some people. But at other times when it seems appropriate, there could be a chant. If it is a Shambhala gathering, someone could announce, "This is our basic lineage chant," so people will know what's happening. If we need to come up with a protocol for this, then we should do that. We do need guidelines, but I don't want it to be too regimented. However, it is important that the purpose of the chants is understood.

That's un and deux – trois?

Q: La troisieme: this is a quick governance question, Sir. When I became co-director, the council, what was left of it, was espousing decision-making by consensus. Given your first talk Friday night, I find that there is a danger of the nyen capturing the lha when any one person can block consensus. In that light the insistence that everyone agrees may be not so good. I would like to go back and keep trying to seek consensus, but some people get very entrenched. I don't know how other centers and councils are voting or making decisions. Do you have anything to say?

SMR: I think this is where John F. Kennedy, Longchenpa, and others agree: you can't please all the people all the time. One text instructs us to think of the whole. Since this is a bodhisattva path, you think of what's best for the whole. Clearly there are certain individuals who may have other issues, and you need to work with them, but I think it's important to choose the council carefully. Who is on it and why? The purpose is to move things forward. Do you want to have a council where people discuss what's important, or what is on people's minds? These are different scenarios. There was a period when people seemed to feel that there was too much top-down management and that we needed to do a bottom-up kind of thing. Now at certain centers they've said, "Would you please just pick somebody, because we're kind of 'nyenned out?'" They can't make a decision, not even about what color to paint things.

So there does need to be a format in which people feel inspired, a format in which they can participate. People want to be heard; often that is the main thing. But at a certain point, if there is a majority in agreement about how to move forward, then we should go ahead. At other times, you can make decisions by trusting auspicious coincidence. There is one method of recognizing tulkus where everybody puts their name in the pot, you all pray for three days, and then you pick one name out and that's the person. Everybody had their name in there, and everybody has to support whoever it is, but that may not go over too well, either. We joke about the "tulku lottery." Those are different methods of making decisions, which are not just particularly Buddhist.

It's important to bring in the local culture, which in this case is more democratic. But according to the mahayana, the purpose of leading is to consider the betterment of the group in general, so you can make the decision. I think we are moving toward that. As I was saying at the beginning, we need to put our money where our mouth is: if a group has decided that So-and-So is their leader, then that person gets support when he or she makes a certain decision. The others have to follow. Obviously, if it seems like the leader needs more training or is creating disharmony, then the council addresses it: "This isn't really working." That doesn't mean putting the person in a bad situation; you don't want to create more strife for them.

Again, every system both works and doesn't work, so we're not going to have the perfect system. We're saying that there is a process where we empower somebody and the group has to decide to support that individual. We need to keep tabs on the situation so that the center doesn't simply choose one person and expect them to take care of the rent, the advertising, and everything else. It's clear that it's helpful in some centers to involve as many people as possible, because then there is no "us" and "them." Even if it's just sweeping or lighting candles, more participation is good. In a monastery, everyone has a job – working in the kitchen, taking care of the shrine, teaching, or building things. Everyone has something to do. So it is important to bring people along according to their proclivities.

Question: Thank you, Sir, for your teaching. I wanted to ask you about worrying, because I think that's something that all of us do to a certain degree. You addressed it a little bit on Friday night. Maybe even "worrying" is too strong a word; it's more just the

fact that once you take a position like this, a lot of your thoughts during the day, and possibly the night, are about details that you need to attend to. It can be very consuming. Do you have any thoughts about how to work with that as a practice? When it's happening with me, I recognize it as not particularly beneficial. It's more like I'm wearing myself out.

SMR: I think you've hit upon the main point, which is that we need to recognize what's happening. It's just like in meditation, where you recognize when you're thinking, not even just a big thought, but simply starting to shift gears away from peacefully abiding. The thinking starts happening and it's very subtle.

So you can say, "Here I go, I'm beginning to worry." There is a difference between being concerned and worrying. Worrying doesn't help – it probably even has negative physical effects like increasing your blood pressure – so we do need to be aware of it. Right now we're in a time where there is a heightened klesha of anxiety. It's almost a disease. So I think we need to be aware of that and support each other.

The antidotes to worry and anxiety are giving yourself breaks during the day, allowing yourself to practice, realizing that half an hour of not doing e-mails, of sitting or exercising – whatever it may be that breaks the cycle – will help, and that will make you a better individual. Ultimately the work is endless, and even after you're used up, it continues. All of us are in that situation. We need to realize that we don't want to be used up. We're not helpful when we're used up. If your energy level is low, your friends in the sangha should say, "Maybe you should take a break." We can tell others to take a break, and we also need to tell ourselves to take a break. That means practicing or doing something else that clarifies the senses. I think that's very helpful.

Balancing your energy level and taking care yourself is part of your job. It's being a good leader. If you are a worrywart and get more and more stressed out, those you are leading will pick up on the energy. Of course there are times when a big project's coming up and you know you're going to go through a period of more worry. You can anticipate that: "I'm going to be working more, I'm not going to get as much sleep, and then that will be over." As long as you know that, you can wait out that cycle. That's just natural, and it's okay. The main thing is that if we recognize worry as something we're all dealing with and find antidotes for it, we can deal with it. But if it seems to be continuing, please take a longer break.

Question: I feel like I'm an advanced worrywart. I would love to have a 1-800-hotline within Shambhala where I could leave a message about my list of worries. We could have volunteer phone bank worrywarts who could pick it up and worry, like the 24-hour chanters. They would be advanced practitioners who would worry and let it go so it would dissolve.

SMR: This is what I like. You're bringing solutions, and really practical ones.

Q: I have two questions. First, a lot of this weekend has been about money and wealth –

generating specific wealth in terms of dollars. As I have watched this mandala grow, with more retreat centers under discussion and centers buying buildings, what I see is a lot of vision and expansion. But we don't have the ground to support it. I keep wishing – and I talked about in yesterday afternoon's group – that we had an entire overview of every project being considered, so that we could understand how one center buying a building would affect that center's ability to give to Shambhala International. Or if you build a retreat center in the Midwest, how will that affect people going to Shambhala Mountain Center or Karme Chöling? I feel like what we're going through now is not sustainable financially unless we become very specific and focused about how we are going to fundraise to support it.

SMR: That's music to my ears because as you know very well, I've gone around saying, "Yes, yes, yes" to a lot of projects. In part I'm just trying to get people's energy and lungta up. As we enter this next phase, we have to consolidate our planning. Now that everyone's here, I think you know why. Clearly there are financially savvy people who are seeing different ways we can pool our resources and how that could help other centers buy what they need. We have to prioritize what is important in terms of the mandala. For a while there was a level of insecurity that kept us at a level of just maintaining what we have. In terms of what we're really moving into now, we have to balance our needs and become more sophisticated. I totally agree that financially it's not sustainable. We need to look at how we as a society work with the issue of money and wealth, from how it affects what the average sangha wants to do, to the role of donors and patrons in terms of why they would give, to center directors saying, "I know the scope of this – what is possible and what is not possible."

In this new phase we'll need to cultivate a relationship with what's important overall. You all need to understand mandala principle: we're all connected. In a sense we've acted like a group of individuals. We have a mandala of individual centers, and most of the centers only think about their center. They're all called Shambhala Centers, but they don't really share; New York is not sharing with Philadelphia, or whatever it may be: "That's them and this is us." But whatever New York does is going to affect the whole Eastern seaboard. So what is the relationship between Washington and New York and these other places? If one center is expanding, then the other centers should be able to use that experience to prepare themselves if they're drawing the same number of people or if they too are going to be expanding. We need to be thinking that way. Other organizations do it. We're coming to that point – in terms of leadership and finances, we're talking about lha, nyen, and lu – and we need to realize what the parameters are. That's important for me because with such an approach we can then expand our activities; we can have more forward-looking vision in terms of things like the Living Peace Award that extend out with a base of solid ground.

Right now is probably the most difficult time because we're making a transition. We feel the rub because we're shifting gears and saying, "Now's the time." Once we make the decision and do it, I think things will build exponentially; I've talked to many people who want to participate and who want to give, but they first want to know what

the structure is. Instead of going from one problem area to another, we need to have an overview of the entire situation. In terms of where the world is at and where we're at, that view is necessary. We all need to have it.

The *New York Times* always has an A-Z list of year-end ideas and inventions. The one that inspired me this year was called a "giving kiosk." There's one inside a church in Georgia. It's like an ATM machine that you can use to give with your debit or credit card. I thought we could have something like that, but ours would look quite Tibetan. We could do a prayer wheel kind of thing. Or a gomden where you insert your credit card as soon as you feel generous.

Q: Well, I think we could do both of them. I just wanted to say that in Berkeley we started an Elders' Council. I spoke with Richard about this, and he said are a few other centers that have started them, too. We just had our third meeting. It's been an excellent way to bring together older students and get them more involved in different projects at the center. It really helps in that it supports the center and also brings back some disenfranchised older students—even students who have other teachers—into the fabric of the center.

SMR: That's important. The more synchronized we are, the more time we'll have for that kind of thing to take place. Often we're just worrying about how to run the center. This gathering is about consolidating and moving forward.

Question: Good morning, Sir. Being a finance person for some years, my ground practice when I start my day is the practice of generosity. Some years ago at Dechen Chöling I heard you give a teaching about generosity in the West and East and I like to think about that. I was wondering if you could give us some of your present thoughts about the way of generosity in our sangha.

SMR: It's a cultural thing, I think. From a Buddhist point of view, generosity is essential in terms of how anything grows. We say that in order for the dharma to survive, you need a teacher, teachings, and patrons. Even from the Buddha's time, that is how the dharma has spread, through the generosity of royalty or local leaders or businesspeople. The idea that being a practitioner means you just give your material possessions away and you don't need any money is inherent in this culture, but not in the Tibetan, Thai, or Japanese cultures. So it's a cultural concept, not necessarily a Buddhist concept.

Buddhism says that the three jewels—the teacher, the dharma, and the sangha—are the basis of incredible merit and practice. The practice of outer generosity is to offer to those three. Then you also have inner generosity and secret generosity. We're mixed up about that, whether it's because of people's Catholic background or thinking that we're all yogis. There are certain traditions in Tibet where a yogi gives up everything as part of the practice. There's also a tantric practice in which you give away everything three times during your life. Jigme Phuntsuk Rinpoche, who was a great lama in Tibet,

did that. He received a lot of statues and other gifts, and one day he got up and gave all his stuff away. Of course, generosity being what it is, a lot came back to him.

So there are many different levels of generosity based on what people can handle. Clearly Jigme Phuntsuk had such a big view that he didn't really care. Other people give one small thing and it's incredibly painful. It's all a matter of where people are at. We have to understand the context of generosity rather than talking about money with the attitude that it's not a Buddhist concern. That's just not true. But we also have to adapt to the culture we're in, where people think money is separate from spirituality. This issue has to be discussed at a societal level in terms of what people feel.

Ultimately it's important for people to feel the energy of generosity from the heart—that being generous is how they would like to help. Coming from a logical point of view doesn't exactly work; we need to put it in context. In terms of our situation, I've seen progress over the years but I still think there's room for a shift in attitude. We could see our culture as a giving culture where we give as a matter of course. Most of the time we still have to be convinced that we're giving to a good project. Another approach is to always be seeking the opportunity to give. Clearly this kind of generosity has expanded into the corporate world, where Warren Buffet and others are giving major money to particular projects, so I think there's a cultural shift happening.

But in terms of how we gather ourselves together, we do need to prioritize as well as help people understand what we're doing and why all of us need to participate. In the Tibetan system you look at a year and figure out where you want to give and then you give what you can in the cycle of the year. It doesn't really matter what it's for because of course you gain merit. And as I was saying, people also need to understand that materialism and spirituality are not separate. Sometimes we seem to have the attitude that money has nothing to do with practice. Talking about money is considered to be materialism, and practice is considered to be spirituality. So we draw the conclusion that giving money is not spirituality.

In my wife's tradition when people ask His Eminence Namkha Drimed Rinpoche or another lama for a divination, if they tell you to have pujas done—for your health or your mother's health or to clear obstacles—then you make an offering to the monastery. The price at the monastery is already set: 200 rupees for this or that. These people have thousands of years of experience. From a Tibetan point of view, you wouldn't gain any merit if they just did the practice for free, because you're offering something is part of the practice. In Tibet they might offer yaks or clothing if you can't give money; that's how the whole process works. From the ultimate view of *khorsum nampar takpa*, threefold purity, there is no giver, no gift, and no recipient. With that attitude, giving is very easy. But relatively speaking the attitude "I don't want to give; I'd rather do nongiving practice" won't get you to threefold purity. It's a step-by-step process.

People say, "They do pujas just for money? That seems kind of shady." You can come up with any logic you like, but the Buddha said to make offerings. That's why a stupa is called the basis of offering: it's there so that people can gain merit by giving. It is said that through such generosity all kinds of incredible things will happen. In terms

of the six paramitas, generosity is one of the main virtues because not only does it help us let go of attachment, but it also gives us freedom from sickness and other obstacles in this life and in future lives. That's how the dharma works.

We all have kleshas, we all have attachment, and we all have different reasons for not giving. Relatively speaking, you can say you're right not to give because the purpose of this or that project isn't clear, or that particular center isn't financially sound. I understand that. You should understand that it's important to give to something, because being generous actually has more to do with your mind than with the object of your generosity. It's a practice. The amount you give doesn't matter. The teachings of tantra say that if you can give rocks, give rocks; if you can give wood, give wood; if you can give semi-precious stones, give semi-precious stones; if you can give precious stones, do that. They list everything.

These teachings also say that if you want to receive, if you want to become wealthy, the best way is to give. In the Tibetan tradition, the Gelukpa lineage is very wealthy. Supposedly one of the main practices of Dzongkapa, the founder of the Gelukpa tradition, was mandala offering. He made hundreds and thousands of mandala offerings, which developed a lot of merit for the lineage. So there's that spiritual aspect as well. Are there people who misuse it? Yes, but that has more to do with the process of the individual, not with the system. When I'm giving, is it partly due to my attachment in that I'm hoping to get something back? Yes, but that's involved in all practices. Even when you're sitting down to practice shamatha, ego says, "I hope something happens." That's just natural. If that little part of us weren't there, we'd already be Buddha. That is just part of the process. So it's interesting for us. The way generosity works is like the sky and the stars: it's there whether or not we pay attention to it. Our not paying attention to the sky and the stars doesn't make them go away.

Clearly this is an issue. For whatever reason, our culture has a heightened neurosis around giving. But we don't need to get overly obsessed with fixing it. We are subject to our environment, so our relationship with money, for most of us, is colored by capitalism. Whatever philosophy we grew up with, that's just part of how we relate to it. Even when we see money, some of us think, "That's not good." But in Tibetan monasteries, they display the money on the mandala plate. They put it in front of the statues because it's something of value: we're attached to this and we're offering it. As I said, it's a cultural thing. Some people from the West see that for the first time and they think it's disgraceful. So it's a complete miss from that point of view.

Question: Your Majesty, I'd first just like to express enormous appreciation for all you've offered to this gathering. I think that your teachings are reflecting incredible clarity that is timeless, up-to-date, and really inspiring. In our money work, we've learned maybe just a few things. One is that avoiding the painful point is not helpful, whereas touching the painful point while coming from the compassionate mind of practice can bring a lot of benefit. This question isn't about money, but it's offered in that spirit.

Some months ago, in your role as lineage holder, in response to many causes and conditions, you drew a vajralike boundary, which was necessary to protect the integrity of the lineage. I think there was a diamondlike, nondual, nonnegotiable quality to the line that was drawn. At the same time, in the minds of students, such a sharp and clear slice from the top down creates a lot of confusion and lungta-destruction from the bottom up. Earlier you touched on the point that for many of us sangha represents family. I think that's completely true, and it's at the heart of this question. The reason that line is so damaging is that it cuts the hearts of students, really good people, people we've seen at Warriors' Assembly and other programs. You could use the metaphor that these people are now like children of a very destructive divorce; they're caught in a no-man's-land with a lot of fixed mind and no guidance as to how to proceed. The wounds are very deep and have become kind of rocklike, with karmic scars that will last for years and maybe lifetimes.

It's so hard because the path forward has become obstructed. Unfortunately this is not the first time we've experienced this in our mandala, and it may not be the last. I think that no one knows better than you how hard it is to repair those scars once they have arisen. So the question is, Who cares for the wounded? We used the word "fragmentation" in our discussion group almost like the military uses the term "collateral damage," but it's human, it's not a concept. It's clear that in your role as Sakyong, earth-protector, fundamentally you and the greater mandala contain all of that, none of that: nobody exits the kingdom because of a divisive fissure like this. We all wake up the next morning and we're still the same family. So the question is, How do we regard this? How do we care for its victims?

SMR: I think that's why we're all here, to take care of them. If you let the situation go on undefined, then the whole thing becomes collateral damage; everything falls apart and there's no center, no fringe, no Sakyong, no sangha. It all dissipates and then it's just finished. What we're doing here is not necessarily drawing a line, but reaffirming our direction so that those individuals involved in these issues have to reflect on what it is they are involved in and what it is they want. I've had certain people say, "It's okay; you don't have to make any decision," but as time goes on, it becomes more painful not to draw a line because no one can come to a conclusion. People continue to go back and forth.

I've talked to Dzigar Kongtrul Rinpoche, who said, "When are they going to make up their mind about what they are going to be doing? Is it you or me? What is it going to be?" He himself increasingly clarifies exactly what his mandala is, as do other teachers. I think we've had a certain amount of openness, and we're still pretty open, but that does not mean that we don't clarify what we are and who we are. Hopefully that clarification is an act of compassion and understanding.

Simultaneously, of course, there's loving kindness and concern, and I continue to work with whoever comes forward. You know more than anyone that I don't have a generational problem; I work with whoever wants to be here. At the same time, I cannot wait until everybody dies, and I cannot wait until nobody shows up, in terms of moving

forward with a sense of what we are going to do. One reason we're gathering here is to clarify who we are and where we need to go. Then we need to work with those other individuals as we move along.

But that doesn't mean we sit and wait for everyone to work it out by having discussions. We've been having discussions for a long time now and it doesn't get us anywhere. We have to have a sense of purpose and direction. That also helps these other individuals clarify what they want to do. There are many concentric circles of involvement, which is important because it means that there is a center, but frankly that's also one of the challenges of leading such an extensive community. Khandro Rinpoche and some other teachers have said that my job is the most difficult job of any Tibetan lama apart from the Dalai Lama. In fact Khandro Rinpoche said, "Well, even including him." And the Dalai Lama himself told me, "You have a big responsibility but you have to keep going forward."

As you say, this is not the first schism in the history of Buddhism, and it won't be the last. But nonaction creates suffering, too. We have to relate to what's going on. We want the situation to be inspiring and focused. Making it so will be clarifying for the people you are talking about. For those who are not sure about this or that, being clear about who we are will be a wake-up call, like water in the face: "What am I going to do? Which way am I going to go?" It's important to make a decision; it doesn't matter which way you go really; ultimately, it's all good. But not saying who we are is cowardice: "Oh we're nothing, really." That's not true. If we don't say who we are, I shouldn't even be sitting on this throne. Instead we should say, "I don't want to deal with it," and just go home.

In some sense maybe I should have drawn a line sooner. But it wasn't time because I felt like there needed to be some openness. However, too much openness just creates more wandering. By the way, what we're doing here is not in any sense drawing a line, but reconfirming who we are. I think it's important for people like Lady Diana and others who understand our history to say, "This is what needs to take place." I also think it's important for us to say what we are and who we are, which is the question I asked in the beginning: Who are you, and why are you here? That's not a mean question. That's a question we should be considering anyway. Every practitioner should be thinking about that. I myself am friends with other teachers and other sanghas. The whole process is a reality that has to take place.

I was talking with Tsoknyi Rinpoche. We've known each other for a long time. Certain people study with him. In the beginning, he was kind of happy-go-lucky. But after his following had gathered momentum, he pointed out that it was beginning to get complicated because people need to make decisions. He actually said, "I'm hiding in my retreat because I'm not sure what to do." It's the same thing everywhere you go. It's just the reality of what happens as the dharma grows in the West.

So for us to clarify what we are shouldn't be seen as some kind of negativity. There are certain things that people say should be done in this community, and we're trying to open it up by having all kinds of roles. There are roles for senior students, older students, new students, people who are involved in finance, people who are

involved in family. That's our challenge, but without a central focus, it doesn't work. Everyone here has to realize that what's coming out of this is a compassionate clarity. Then we need to talk to these other people and say, "What would you like?" As I used to say, "I'll do what you say if you can totally stay with it, if you'll back me." And people say, "Oh no, I don't want to do that." I've said, "Okay, I'll introduce your program; you advertise it and if no one shows up, you take the fall, or if people do, you make sure they stay for years and years." "Well, I'm not sure about that." So who's going to do it? There's been that kind of quality, along with a lot of enthusiasm and openness.

I've worked for many years trying to create a livable community rooted in compassion and openness, which is what sangha is. It's not just a group of people criticizing each other. I honestly don't want to live in that situation, and I don't think anyone else does, either. But that doesn't mean that I've become limpid. As you said in the beginning, my responsibility is to make sure this continues, and that's a big samaya on my part. I'm practical, but that's what has to happen.

Q: Allow me just a little bit of clarification here. I think there's one dynamic where people are spiritual shopping, getting caught up in, "Is this better for me or is that better for me," which is the wrong end of the stick. But my concern is for students who entered what they thought was a unified situation, and then without making any choice suddenly found themselves floating on two logs splitting farther and farther apart. We're dealing with these folks at our centers, victims of confusion that's coming from something other than hesitation or spiritual shopping. That's really at the heart of my question.

SMR: Yes, but I think part of my responsibility here is to impart as much clarity as possible regarding this situation. I have to work with those individuals; you have to work with them; everybody has to work with them. That's what sangha is. At the same time, as leaders, you have to maintain the situation and develop it, which requires talking, listening, and understanding. Sometimes these people simply misunderstand. When I talk about the path, for example, saying, "I'm not cutting this or that; here's what it is," they often understand. The more clear we are now, the more clear you can be with those people when you're talking about it. Right now, I'm not saying there's an in or out, so what is the issue? I'm not even saying that you have to really like me. I'm saying you have to acknowledge the fact that this is my responsibility and position.

So within that context, whether it's an emotional issue you're dealing with or an issue relating to the path, this is the time to clarify it, because if those logs keep rolling, where are they going to end up? They are going to end up breaking at least two samayas. It's important to address the situation, clarify it, and help them understand. The whole thing really depends on those people here doing that and not just saying, "The Sakyong said" or "Oh I heard this." I've been leading this community for almost seventeen years, from roughly 1990. How long are we going to wait to say what we're doing here, another fifteen? Obviously not. At a certain point it has to be clear.

I'm trusting all of you. It's not just me who is dealing with this situation. It's just what I said to the acharyas when they asked, "What happens when somebody asks this question?" I said, "This is called micromanagement. If you can't be genuine and have enough confidence to sit there and explain what is happening and how to understand it, quoting me is not going to work." People here have to say, "Yes, this is how I understand the situation." If people have a different idea, you have to be able to say, "No, that's not what's happening; this is what's happening," and be genuine about it. That gets across. "Is there a place for me?" "Yes, there's a place." "Do I have to make a decision?" "Yes, just like any other human being, you have to make a decision. You can't have it both ways. If you want to do this, you can do this, if you want to do that, you have to decide. You can't wait for Shambhala to melt so that you don't have to make a decision." You get the point.

Question: Your Majesty, I'd like to voice an aspiration, which I think comes from my experience as a co-director. We've been energized and inspired this weekend. Our finger has been put into the electrical socket, which is part of the privilege of being in our positions. When people come to us and say, "You're doing such a good job; you're working so hard," they don't usually say, "Oh, you're so lucky for what you're doing." It's a secret that we're so lucky, in part because we get to receive teachings from you in this way. We're all inspired to be more lha when we get back home. This too is part of clarifying who we are and making the heart of Shambhala radiate more powerfully and clearly at all our different centers. A component of that is your personal presence.

So my aspiration is that more people in our sangha will be able to place their finger in the socket of your presence, which is irreplaceable. As the leaders of the sangha, I just hope that we find a way in which those connections can be made.

SMR: Yes, I am very happy to come and teach. Right now we are in the process of trying to find out just how my time could be used most efficiently. Last night some of you were asking me to come to your centers. It would help me for certain centers to invite me to come to talk on a particular subject that they think would be helpful for their area. That way I wouldn't have to say, "Gee, I like Atlanta better than Kentucky, so I guess I'll go there." Instead, *you* decide what would be good, making plans that next time I'll go to the other place in your area and give other teachings. Everyone could understand how it works; one center can encourage students at another center in the area to participate. We could all work together in this particular way.

People are always having all kinds of ideas and then when they see me they say, "Now that I see you, I don't have any questions." And I want them to say that about you. The more you are comfortable with what is actually going on, the more you understand it, the more you can relax. It's not a matter of always giving exactly the right answer; it's more a sense of inviting. That's really the key thing that we want to express.

Any more dying, burning questions?

Question: Thank you. This may be redundant, but what I'm thinking and hearing about when I look at the local centers is that there are a lot of overlaps in programs. Take refuge vows, they're offered in Boston and at Karne-Chöling. Teachers come through and go to both places. I'm just offering these two examples, but I'm sure it's the same all over. I'm wondering if there is any kind of road map being developed to reduce the sense of competition. It would be wonderful to have a literal map so that we all work together rather than for or against.

SMR: I think that sometimes there's a kind of survival mentality. We're going to have to step out of that somehow. All of these questions are related, because they involve individual students and what they're going through, or to how to run a program, or our being a community. We need to get to the point where we see one program happening in one place but not in another as an overall enhancement of what's going on. Eventually the same program will happen at the other center. That kind of coordination needs to take place.

Right now it is really important to clarify what the path is. Then we also need to clarify which programs support that path. Before, it was a bit of a free-for-all, so it didn't logically work to say, "This should happen first, this should happen second, and so on." It didn't really matter, but now clearly it does. So if we start having Scorpion Seal retreats built at Karne-Chöling, does that mean that every center has to have one? Or do we say, "For now it would be better for most people to go here, because we have the support system and instructions for it; other teachers or other programs would be better at other places."

That level of practice coordination is very important. Mr. Waltcher and other members of the SMC board, as well as others, know that we're dealing with that right now. The acharyas also to have some coordination in terms of thinking beyond what program they as individuals would like to teach and looking at the overall impact and how people participate. That level of participation from the acharyas is coming. We're also making decisions about the timing of certain programs; one might be biannual and another might happen in a three-year cycle. Thinking in longer terms like these would be helpful.

Q: Thank you. It seems like it's a matter of each center connecting the dots, so that we end up with a mandala with open communication of those lines. Then we've all got the same picture.

SMR: People need to see each other. That's what's happening here. It's good for you to know who's at the other centers. We also need to be more technology-savvy so that we can look online and see what's going on and where. With around 20,000 programs happening and 250,000 people going through them, somebody better be organizing it. Again, we don't want people to come through saying, "I'm processed, now where do I go?" "I don't know" is not a good answer.

Question: Thank you, Sir. This is the same question at a different level. I come from Sonoma County, California, where we have a meditation group in Santa Rosa that will be becoming a center in the near future. We also have the Sonoma Meditation Center. One issue that both our centers face is that we feel a teaching vacuum because in the San Francisco Bay Area, usually people come to Berkeley and San Francisco or Davis. The way they magnetize people is to the credit of those centers, but I'm thinking about the welfare of the people at my center, particularly the newer people. Since we can't magnetize the situation all the time ourselves, it would be of benefit to have teachers think of rotating alternately to Sonoma in one visit and Santa Rosa the next, so that people could have the same experience we have when we go to Berkeley and San Francisco. We're talking about people who are not necessarily connected enough to make that trip. I've already discussed this with Carolyn and Amy; I'm not trying to go over anybody's head. I'm just trying to articulate that this is our experience in smaller sanghas.

SMR: I think that it's the responsibility of larger centers to nurture smaller centers. That's just a given. It would help the bigger centers to break out of their cycle and realize that their tentacles go out. The Bay Area is obviously very strong, so it can start moving north into Sonoma and Napa and south into San Jose and Santa Cruz. But it's not as if we're not just going to cross one bridge and then another; we need to think this through and come up with some kind of strategy. In big centers like Los Angeles and the Bay Area, where it takes so long to travel anywhere, the energy needs to be conserved. People need to look at what is important. Is this the year we're going to try to really support Sonoma because they're in a growth period? Then when an outlying area reaches a critical mass, you can turn your attention to another region. That is important. If people know why the program is happening in this place instead of that one, they don't mind. In all areas, we should be thinking about that. But again confidence is the determining factor. We need to know we can do this to help each other grow. Often the reason people don't do this is because they feel like they might lose their center or miss something.

SMR: Thank you, everyone. Love is what I feel for you, for this community, and for what it means. It is an expression of that love that I'm still here and doing this. I want all of you to feel that love and concern; it's important for you to take that away with you. With love in your heart and mind you will grow more ears and more eyes, and you'll also become as solid as an oak tree. Love is the pith of how we are going to move forward. If we have love, we can take care of so many of the issues that we're dealing with. Living your whole life in this way is the path of the bodhisattva who is practicing exertion; with such a mind you are delighted when a new problem arises. The bodhisattva is not looking towards solving problems, which is not a path towards enlightenment. The path towards enlightenment is to revel in challenge. Having that kind of strength is leadership. My experience has shown me that such strength even

allows for a certain kind of comfort. But if we think we are going to solve problems, which is different from helping people, we will wear ourselves out. So let's support each other in this path. We have met in this lifetime; I'm sure we'll meet in many many lifetimes, and there will be many many problems. I'm all ears, as it were. As counterintuitive as it may be in this time and place, this is the enlightened culture.

So with heartfelt thanks to you for making the journey, and for your generosity, openness, and strength, please continue. I'm looking forward to Cologne, the next time we'll be together in this kind of format. I'm also looking forward to more interaction. As I said before, I'm going to be working on leadership training, so when my schedule says "leadership training," please come. You know what it's about. And bring a friend, so that we can all work on this and enjoy it together. Thank you.