

Amy Conway: Good morning, Rinpoche. I just wanted to say a few words about how we chose these questions. We received questions prior to the congress from many sangha members around the world; we also collected questions here. We chose the questions to ask today based on the most people asking them. They were the questions that had the most energy around them, or seem to be causing the most confusion, you could say. We prioritized in that way and, as President Reoch said, we will open this session up so that people can ask individual questions as well. I also wanted to say that many, many of the questions expressed love and gratitude to you and thanks for all of the work that you are doing. Though the question we are asking might not reflect that, we wanted to at least acknowledge that there was quite an outpouring of appreciation.

Q: Rinpoche, when you introduced Shambhala ngöndro and the changes to the practice path last summer at Shambhala Mountain Center, seemingly the path for non-Buddhists to practice Werma was eliminated. Will there be a path for non-Buddhists to practice Werma, and will there be a path for non-Buddhists to practice Shambhala ngöndro?

SMR: We have a particular path that we have been practicing for many years. Obviously, for some time now, I have been the one introducing people to ngöndro and the vajrayana teachings. I have been the individual who has been dealing with students—some of you—in terms of how one goes forward. Within the lineage of tantra, there are many, many different ngöndros, different yidams, and different kinds of practices. We have been doing primarily Kagyü ngöndro. Every year more people are saying, “I want to do Nyingma ngöndro,” or “I want to do this,” or “I want to do that.” As I was meeting with people even before the Shambhala ngöndro process was started, I noticed that people were factionalizing, saying, “I’m this kind of practitioner; I’m that kind of practitioner.” At the last seminary, I had an inspiration to see that we need some kind of common ground, and that ground is Shambhala. It wasn’t so much that something is broken and needs to be fixed. As I said, it’s fine to do these other kinds of ngöndros and practices, but we really need some common way of understanding what we are doing, how to be together.

When I teach ngöndro at seminary, I don’t specifically say we’re going to study Kagyü ngöndro or Nyingma ngöndro. The principles of ngöndro are always the same, so I teach on the general principles. But since I have been the one taking people through this path, I started to wonder how long I want to do it this way. What is the best way to bring people forward on the path, to sustain their doing ngöndro? Some of you may remember that at the 2003 seminary I gave people a three-year time-frame in which to do ngöndro—any ngöndro—which I think worked fairly well, though it wasn’t great. But it was really interesting to try to figure out how to bring in vajrayana transmission, ngöndro, and sadhana practice so that they aren’t so far apart, but more immediately in people’s path. We are a vajrayana tradition, and people need to be able to do sadhana practice and other practices sooner, learning how to incorporate these practices into daily life, so that they are helpful.

Just as there is Kagyü ngöndro and Nyingma ngöndro, now there is what is being called the Shambhala ngöndro—not by me. I don’t think calling it “Shambhala ngöndro” is very helpful. Specifically, it’s the ngöndro for *The Roar of the Werma*, for the Rigden practice. It is a base ngöndro. There are still people who are going to be doing Kagyü and Nyingma ngöndros. Obviously, I hold both lineages, but I wanted there to be some binding factor for myself and all individuals in our community, doing all kinds of practices. That’s why when I initially introduced *The Primordial Rigden*, I said to take just one month of doing ngöndro, and if you feel inspired, over a lifetime, do it three times. This would equate to doing about a hundred thousand repetitions. This way one would do the ngöndro, get a taste for what the practice is and how it progresses, receive a sadhana practice in order to get a taste of that, and then maybe feel inspired to do the ngöndro practice again for another month. The practices would be interlacing back and forth, and the experience would be more equalized, as opposed to eating a big meal and waiting a long time to have your next meal.

Why would anyone be in our community altogether? There is some basic shared vision about Shambhala—enlightened world, enlightened society, kingdom of Shambhala. With that as our basic principle, there needs to be some sort of ground. You’ll see that ground encapsulated if you look at the refuge tree within the Shambhala ngöndro: we have the Shambhala principals, we have the Tibetan teachers, and we have the Indian teachers. It is the common ground of our practice.

Of course, one is supposed to request teachings from one’s teacher. The teacher doesn’t necessarily

force teachings on the student. As the teacher in this situation, when I introduced the ngöndro last summer, I said very clearly that I was offering this practice to whoever wanted to do the practice. In no way, shape or form did I say that you have to do it, nor am I eliminating any other practices. People came to me and said they'd been wanting to do Kagyü ngöndro for a long time, and I said, "Great." As a teacher, I'll be happy if you did any ngöndro, so go ahead and do it. Introducing this ngöndro doesn't mean that I don't want anyone doing that other ngöndro because I don't want to have to deal with it. That's not fair. Those people want to do it. We are living in a world where there are people doing different practices, and we are learning how to be together. And frankly, it is a more complicated world.

In the days when the Vidyadhara taught, there were very few teachers. Now we have many, many teachers—hundreds, really—teaching all kinds of different practices. We have to realize that people are coming into the situation in many different ways. There has to be a binding factor. My approach is that ngöndro and sadhana practice need to be incorporated in a more understandable and immediate way, even for people doing Kagyü ngöndro and Nyingma ngöndro. Depending on their situation, I have given them permission saying, if you want to do one month of ngöndro, if you do it intensively, that would be enough to be able to receive the Rigden empowerment. If you want to do ngöndro again, do it. If somebody does ngöndro for a month, are they going to get as much out of it as if they do it for a whole year? Obviously not. But doing it for a month is better than not doing it. So people have been doing it.

People talk about what has happened previously. Every year at seminary I see developmental change in the quality of students in terms of how the programs have been. It's not like it used to be—even five years ago—in terms of introducing people to practice. It's almost as if we have to look at how and who is entering seminary, what their inspirations and so forth, in terms of going forward. That's the general layout of the plan.

In terms of non-Buddhist practitioners doing the Werma sadhana, that's been an issue. We begin that sadhana by taking refuge and bodhisattva vows, and we purify the mandala with the Vajrasattva mantra. Those are tantric issues, Buddhist principles. I don't want non-Buddhists doing this practice under false pretenses, thinking that somehow they are excused from that. Having just come from the Scorpion Seal retreat, where one is in a dark room having to memorize the text and trying to understand the nature of mind, I would not want to send somebody else in there without their understanding the principle of emptiness. Last night I was having dinner with the khenpos. We were talking about dark retreat, and how all kinds of images shine in people's minds. If you don't know how to deal with it, it's dangerous.

We're really looking at what this is. In the past, there have been practitioners of the Christian tradition who have been given permission to practice Werma. But I don't think the intention was ever that we would have thousands of hard-core Christian practitioners doing Werma sadhana without any other commitment. It's a question. In talking with Jeremy, I found out that some non-Buddhists are under the impression that they could enter all the way. I think that there are certain teachings within the Shambhala tradition that one can do as a non-Buddhist—in other words, not taking all the vows—with tremendous benefit. We need to make that path clearly available within Shambhala training and within other teachings. There needs to be something that those people can practice. But to say that the Shambhala path is clearly a secular path that has nothing to do with any of the Buddhist teachings is just not true. They are blended. In fact, if you go over Rinpoche's Shambhala terma in Tibetan and in English, you see that the words in Tibetan are dzogchen and mahamudra words. It's not talking about another set of rules. So I'm saying that we've come to a place in our maturation process where we're looking at our tradition and seeing what it is.

The inspiration within Shambhala is that everybody who has basic goodness, which is everybody, should be cultivated. They can do a series of practices. Then they go back to their particular tradition and infuse it with the inspiration that they gleaned from this one. But to say, "I'm not going to take refuge or the bodhisattva vow, and by the way, I'm doing the highest purification mantra in tantric tradition, the Vajrasattva mantra," or "I've taken refuge, I've taken bodhisattva vows, but I'm still not a Buddhist. I'm going all the way to the end and I'm going to take all that and reintroduce it to the Christian tradition"—well, what is wrong with your own tradition? Why do you need all these things? You should practice your thing. Shambhala training, initially, is how to learn meditation.

One of the reasons that Shambhala training was introduced was to be able to present meditation in a secular way so that people could incorporate that view into their life. That is the heart of it. I've talked with certain people who have been practicing Christianity and other traditions, who feel really connected

and want to do more. Others say, “I always wondered why they are letting me go along so far,” as if we are looking at how far they can swim upriver. It’s an issue that I really want to look at. I want to be able to provide a path for those people.

Those of you who know me know that I’m really into teaching meditation. I teach a lot of programs in a very public setting where people don’t know anything about Buddhism or Shambhala. But now they know about meditation. I also feel that the teachings of lungta—windhorse—and the principles of tiger, lion, garuda, dragon, can be helpful in everybody’s life. That’s why I’m writing about them in my book. You do not necessarily have to enter and take refuge.

By the way, what’s so wrong with taking refuge? I’m just being honest, because my understanding is that you take refuge in what? Not in a religion, but in your own buddha-nature. I’ve given vows to people who are Christian, who say, “I feel like I’m both Christian and Buddhist, so I want to take refuge.” I ask them, “Why do you want to take refuge, if you are so happy with your own tradition?” And they tell me that they feel a kinship with this. Then I tell them, “As long as you understand what your relationship to the Buddha, dharma, and sangha is, then it’s fine for you to take refuge.” That’s the kind of period that we are entering.

When the Dalai Lama gives the Kalachakra to thousands of people, most of them do not know that they are taking refuge and bodhisattva vows. They’re just mumbling along. So you have people of all faiths taking refuge and bodhisattva vows. I’m just saying that they should know that they are doing that. At the beginning of the Werma sadhana, you take a vow. If you are maybe not doing this, but you are doing this, that’s a trick. You have just taken refuge. We should be aware of that and see what the path is. So is there a way for people to progress along the path? Yes, if they know what they are doing.

Thank you sir.

Q: Rinpoche, you’ve anticipated our second question and addressed much of it, but I still think it is important to articulate the question. It came from a diverse group of people, and there is a lot of emotion behind it. I’ll ask this in a couple of different ways. We understand that you are not taking away options, as you’ve just told us, you’re adding new practices and not telling people that they can’t do anything.

SMR: That is correct.

Q: But the question is, does your current emphasis on Werma and Rigden and the practices and teachings from the Shambhala terma represent a de-emphasis of the traditional Kagyü and Nyingma lineage and teaching?

SMR: Is there a lawyer writing this? (Laughter)

Q: No. Some people have the sense that the Kagyü lineage in particular and also the Nyingma lineage have been at the center of what we do, and they feel that it is being marginalized.

SMR: I would not be one of those people. (Laughter) The best way to think about it is that we need a ground. Shambhala has to become the ground. Otherwise we will diversity into varied groups. Fifty years down the road, we’ll have people in groups doing various practices of Longchen Nyingthik, people doing various Nyingma practices, and others following the Kagyü tradition. There’s a whole series of Chakrasamvara and Vajrayogini practices in the Vidyardhara’s own Surmang tradition. I am sure—translators being the way they are—they’re going to translate all those. I will have to give those empowerments, and we will have those variations, and there will be less opportunity for people to come together in a particular feast practice. Our situation is getting more complicated, and more diverse.

We need some kind of binding factor. My inspiration is to lay the ground for that, and then those other practices can be protected and enhanced. It is very clear that the Kagyü tradition, and in many more ways, the Nyingma tradition, are at the heart of what we are doing. But what is that tradition? It is tantric tradition. Chakrasamvara, Vajrayogini, and the others—the yidams are the same in every lineage, whether it is Gelugpa, Sakya, Nyingma, or Kagyü. There’s not a Kagyü Vajrayogini or a Nyingma Vajrayogini. Vajrayogini is the notion of prajna. What makes it Kagyü is that someone received it from

Tilopa, and then other teachers transmitted it, so that at the beginning of the sadhana, we supplicate all the teachers we received it from—Kagyü or Nyingma, whatever they were. Each tradition has a certain way of doing it, that's true. It all comes together at dzogchen and mahamudra.

I think we have to go to the heart of it. We are not eliminating anything. If we are able to understand this plan—and I do feel like understanding is an important thing—we will in fact have more people doing Vajrayogini; we will have more people doing sadhana practice altogether. For example, I might tell people who do the Shambhala ngöndro and really connect to it go ahead and do some Kagyü ngöndro. Do a few months of that and then go ahead and do some Nyingma ngöndro. I don't see what's wrong with that. But within the context of why you are doing Kagyü ngöndro, what makes Shambhala Shambhala? You could be doing it in a lot of other places. I think we need to look at who we are.

Are we a completely traditional Kagyü center? People often come to look at our shrine, and Tibetans don't even recognize it. It's not a Tibetan shrine. It's our own shrine. I know what a Kagyü shrine looks like. We can't operate under a false pretense. That's not being who we are. If we do that, then we are factionalizing; there are people who want to do Nyingma and other practices. We have to allow for those people to do what they are doing.

Fortunately or unfortunately, I am the teacher, so I'm taking people on the path saying, "I have these various teachings. How can I help you?" I am also in the role of Sakyong, trying to protect all these teachings. You're not simply here to receive Kagyü ngöndro, and that's all. When students come into seminary, they're entering a bigger world. That's more and more what seminary has become. The idea is that it's about having to do ngöndro, whether it is Kagyü ngöndro or Nyingma ngöndro, within the context of one month.

There are certain traditions—the lineage of Penor Rinpoche is one of the most prominent—where you do Nyingma ngöndro for one month, then *tsa lung* or the six yoga practices for one month. Then you do dzogchen practice for one month. That enters you into the path. The one-month thing is common in some traditions. Usually they do talk about it as the five hundred thousand recitations. Often people extend that. They do one month as a preliminary to understand how the path works, then they will go back and do more ngöndro, more tsa lung, more dzogchen, because very few people are going to get it within one little period. Extending it introduces them to how the path works. Within our situation, we need to be able to do that. In the beginning, if somebody comes to seminary and they want to do a specific ngöndro, I will allow them to do that particular ngöndro. But if they're going to do the Rigden abhisheka, they have to do the Shambhala ngöndro at some point, because that's required. The ngöndro is a preparation for that abhisheka. That's the connection.

People have also said that the path is being diluted in terms of deep practice. I'm suggesting that those individuals who have the time can spend one year doing ngöndro or even Vajrayogini practice, doing four sessions a day. For example, right now, when you do the Six Yogas of Naropa, you're supposed to spend a minimum of six months doing that practice; that's the rule. I just received those teachings in a particular format from Khenpo Tsultrim, who's having people do it as a daily practice, and that guy's the real deal. (Laughter) We talked about how to express the teachings. It's a matter of adapting to what's happening. People work and work; on top of that they don't need, "By the way, six months." If you have the time and the luxury to do it that way—great, go ahead and do it. But that doesn't mean that sixty per cent of the sangha can never touch those practices. We can incorporate and adapt them.

Ngöndro itself was invented to create lamas; the three-year retreat was created so you could do all the practices within a set period of time, with a minimal amount of recitations. Ngöndro was only created a few hundred years ago. Milarepa never did ngöndro. The inspiration for ngöndro was to enable people to do a certain amount of practice so that it would begin to have an effect on their life. We're looking at the situation and keeping the tradition so that people are allowed to do as much as they want. But within that, we're not diluting the path.

I talk to people all the time. When they say, "I'm doing fine," I'm not telling them to change their practice. If your practice is working, then you understand more the nature of the practice. Therefore when you see me allowing other people to do shortened versions of it, you shouldn't get all upset. (Laughter) Some people receive one abhisheka where there are three hundred different implements that you get bopped with, and then they say, "That's a real abhisheka." There are also abhishekas where no implements are used at all. Then people say, "I don't know about that abhisheka. It doesn't seem like much happened." Well, those are the highest abhishekas.

Q: Thank you.

Q: The next question has to do with the planned new shrine. Many questions concerned removing the Kagyü and Nyingma lineage holders from the shrine, and whether that indicates a de-emphasis, which you've already discussed. I wonder if you could tell us about your vision for the new shrine, its meaning, and the time-line for it. When we can expect to see it?

SMR: Well, right now it's a concept. Again, we're looking who we are. For myself, it's kind of an awkward situation, because we have a shrine, and it would be good for it to represent who we are. We are Shambhala. We are based on the principles of trying to create enlightened world. Within that, we do different kinds of practices. At the heart of that situation in terms of leadership is the lineage of Mukpo Dong, the Mukpo family lineage, which is represented in the sakyong. The Druk Sakyong, of course, was Trungpa Rinpoche. He was a Kagyü teacher, and also a great Nyingma dzogchen master. The more he lived and taught, the more he taught from his heart, in the sense of who he was. He became more of a sakyong—a universal monarch or dharma king—trying to allow all these traditions to happen. If he had just said, "I just want Kagyü, or I just want Nyingma," we would probably have gone along with it. But he didn't. He incorporated a lot of other things.

What the Druk Sakyong expressed to me is that he wanted a family lineage of sakyongs, as opposed to a tulku lineage. That is the base of who we are in terms of leadership. That's why I'm saying that it's awkward for me. In terms of the shrine, we have Kagyü shrines with Nyingma pictures. Over the years, the shrine itself has evolved. One of the initial shrines Rinpoche had in the early seventies was a picture of Khyentse Rinpoche and a picture of Sechen Kongtrül. The Karmapa was not there. Later the Karmapa came, and we put up the picture. Later the Dalai Lama came and we put his picture there. Then we took it down. (Laughter) People have come and gone from that shrine many times.

I'm looking at the pictures saying, "Now I have pressure to put the Dalai Lama's picture on, and the reincarnation of this tulku and that tulku. This is a lose-lose situation. We need to look at the basic principle of who we are. In terms of the Sakyong lineage, there's the Vidyadhara. Currently, there's myself. Hopefully, there'll be more in the future. The shrine needs to reflect clearly who the lineage is. Within that, we can host a big variety of people. In my mind, we have to simplify; at the end, we'll have less confusion that way. We won't have someone saying, "I just met this guy, and I want his picture up there," or, "We're Shambhala. We should have everything up there." The shrine would end up being like a Christmas tree.

I actually believe in this principle so much that I'm happy to take my picture down and leave the Vidyadhara's picture up there. Otherwise, we'll be putting pictures on and taking them off all the time. I went to visit the seventeenth Karmapa, for example, but there are people who don't agree with that, so if we put his picture up, we eliminate them. There's Khyentse Rinpoche, and now there's his tulku. There's obviously Trungpa Rinpoche. The Tibetans say, "You don't even include the Dalai Lama's picture." Well, why are you looking at me? I hate to say it, folks, but it's politics; it's also heart connection. This process doesn't mean we are eliminating people; we're clarifying, distilling. It's not a matter of personal choice. It's like meeting the queen of Sweden and then going to England and suggesting hanging her picture in Parliament. You're in England; you have that queen's picture.

I feel like the Rigden represents the heart of who we are. We need an image that is manifest. On some shrines, it's hard to have Vajradhara, because Vajradhara is a sambhogakaya-level buddha. Sometimes it's hard to have just Shakyamuni Buddha, because as an exterior image he represents the hinayana vows, and we are a vajrayana tradition—even though Shakyamuni is perfectly kosher. Somebody's stuck Padmasambhava up here this time. Before another program I taught, they told me that they had a couple of thangkas, and I said, "Well, it probably has to be Padmasambhava." So we put his picture up and then people said, "Oh, Rinpoche's making us Nyingmapas." (Laughter) What's wrong with Padmasambhava? He was a great guy, the root of all Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

Someone suggested that people put up whatever picture they want. There's a place where you can do that, and it's called your home. (Laughter) I won't mess with that. But right now we are in the process of clarifying. We're going to make a chöten that represents the first time the Buddha taught the Kalachakra in the tantric tradition. We will probably stupa representation of that, and keep the shrine very

simple, with the notion that the Rigden—which I think we need to learn more about—represents wisdom, but also the human aspect of how one can lead one's life representing domine rigden, the Rigden of basic goodness. Here is the Rigden of basic goodness. Here is the image of those individuals who are Rigden, holders of basic goodness, or the vajra nature. That is what the shrine is representing—our own basic goodness. That is the visual image. Ultimately, these images dissolve. That's what we call dharmata. But relatively, we need these images to help us stabilize our mind.

The shrine has been an issue because it is complicated; it brings up divisions in people's ideas of things. I'm attempting to look at the future for myself and for the next generations of sakyongs. I'm sure there will be lots of kids and they will have offspring; the way the Tibetan world works, they will probably be recognized as various tulkus. It needs to be very clear who's in charge, so that the situation doesn't break down into bickering. Other Tibetan teachers—whose pictures, by the way, people have put on our shrines—have actually said to me, "Rinpoche, there are so many pictures for your students; less would be better. Just make it clean, because this is your center. With all those pictures, it's a little confusing whose center it is." They say, "Has this now become this or that kind of center?" So hopefully we can go ahead with the new shrine. Certainly, people have been sending me all kinds of ideas. But ultimately, I have to make some sort of decision. Maybe we should just have a big white space and we can project whatever we want onto there. (Laughter) Then people would accuse me of being a coward. It doesn't work, anyway.

Q: Do we know when the new shrine might be coming?

SMR: I think we'll probably have a shrine at the seminary this summer. I'm thinking that the best time to empower it is with the Rigden empowerment. Right now, as I think some people know, Cynthia Moku is painting the shrine thangka. We're attempting to provide a stable ground as much as possible—visually and spiritually—that will be inclusive. All these questions we've been discussing are dealing with that issue: What's inclusive? For people who've asked me, "Why can't I practice just this Kagyü thing or this Nyingma thing?" I've said, "There are a lot of centers out there where you can do that. Why are you coming here and trying to change everything around? If you want, we have these traditions. At the other centers they read in English and Tibetan and there're all kinds of variations.

Frankly, this is an issue that other specifically Tibetan Buddhist teachers are dealing with, too. I know, because I talk to them. People connect with a certain teacher and then say, "I want to do this other kind of ngöndro mixed with the kind of ngöndro you gave me." They are now trying to make rules in their own centers about what can and cannot happen. It's based on students deciding what they want and then it's offered, as opposed to the center having to adapt again and again to individual students. This is about us deciding what we want to do.

Q: Okay. At this point, we'll go ahead and open it up for questions from the people on the floor.

Q: Good morning, Rinpoche. I wondered if you could speak to us about your ideas about the Commission on the Status of Women. How you see its role in our mandala? Why do you think we might need such a commission?

SMR: Somebody told me that sixty per cent of our community is women, a majority. In shrines and images and practices, women are obviously concerned about the preponderance of males in the lineage, our language, and so forth. I feel that right now it's a question of balance, instead of going back and looking at history in terms of what it was. Obviously Tibet was a male-dominated society. The dharma has been preserved, and now we approach things in a way that women do not feel excluded in any particular way. In terms of texts, instead of using the word "sons," for example, we are trying to use the word "child," so that people feel included. These things are small, but they are cumulative. Part of keeping a balance involves not becoming too revisionary in terms of how things work. We need to remember that right now we are introducing the dharma in a way that really has not happened before. That is often what we are tackling here, these issues of where we are socially right now, and how to incorporate them into our practices. With this Rigden practice, the domine Rigden, we tried to make it a nondual tantra, the notion being that the Rigden is neither male nor female. So the issue of gender in our practices is

something that we've kept chipping away at over the last few years, and there's been some progress. We need to remember the nature of our whole situation. When we die, in the bardo we have our memory of whether we were male or female, but the nature of the mind is the same no matter which kind of body we had.

In terms of our leadership, I feel that it is important to have an openness, and at the same time, to respect the tradition of the whole thing.

Q: Rinpoche, in our community right now, as you well know, there are a lot of opinions, ranging from a sense that you are manifesting the vision of the Vidyadhara, to the sense that you are dismantling his vision. My question is not so much about who is right or who is wrong, but about how as a community we can deal with that situation and try to be genuine with each other.

SMR: Especially during this period of change, one thing that I try to keep in mind for myself is that, having grown up with the Vidyadhara, I saw many different people come and go from his personal mandala. Some people left because they felt like that he had changed from how he was before. I just met some very old students who had not been around for a long time. They had left about halfway through his teaching in North America. Now they've come back and feel very connected. The reason they left was a sense of not quite being able to handle how the situation grew from being very personal and small to what they saw as a big organization. They didn't want to deal with that. Even in the Vidyadhara's own lifetime, there were people agreeing and disagreeing and changing all the time. It's hard to remember that, because now his era is globbed into one time period that happened before my own. I am a different individual. Within my own time, I see people doing the same thing with what I have done. It just seems to be human nature; people have trouble with change.

The other thing that we are experiencing is leadership change, generation change, lineage change. Within the Tibetan monasteries, you see this same phenomenon. The Vidyadhara himself was a perfect example of that. The previous Trungpa tulku had been a vegetarian, did not ride horses, was very simple, and never had any brocade anywhere. Obviously the Vidyadhara who we knew was very different. I talked to people in Surmang monastery who actually thought they must have recognized the wrong guy (laughter); when he was young they didn't believe that the Vidyadhara was the real tulku, because the real tulku would not have acted that way. So this is an ongoing situation. I am not trying to put blame anywhere; I'm just saying that this has been going on for a long time. We experience it more acutely because there is change going on.

Right now I am in the position of preserving the teachings, not in a sense of preserving them in time, but in terms of their essence. What I have to maintain is people's enthusiasm for practicing the dharma. The outer forms are things that Rinpoche actually created himself. I was talking to Jeremy yesterday about what Shambhala Training was like; I told him that it's important for him to talk to other people in terms of how it came to pass. It didn't just happen in one night [Rinpoche snaps fingers]. It was evolving—"Let's try this," and "Let's try that."

At times I would go to Rinpoche and I say, "I don't know if this thing is working," and he would say, "Well, we should change it." Change is part of the process, but obviously, for whatever reason, people hold memories of a certain way things were. That's hard, no matter who you are. We all go through that; there is not even an enlightened version of it. The older teachers are always talking about Tibet. When you have lunch with a certain generation of teachers you know that's eventually where the conversation is going to go. The younger tulkus just sit there and roll their eyes. So it's everywhere. (laughter)

In this situation here, I can't really do anything about what people think. What I can do is train myself to carry out what I think Rinpoche's intention was, to do what he wanted me to do. My mind never had a moment of doubt from that point of view. Instead of using the word "dismantling" to describe what I am doing, I would probably say "expanding." He did so many things—they are almost like seed syllables. Many times he told me, "I do not have time to do this completely; later we will expand on it." He said that in the future we would see the complete mixture in terms of how the Shambhala terma is connected with the dzogchen lineage. He said that we would have a program about that. He said that in the future, once people have done a certain amount of ngöndro, they should do the Nyingma ngöndro, because that was his practice for many years. That is what he said he wanted to do. I am in a very difficult

position because I am not him, so I can never say, "This is exactly what he wanted." But I can almost guarantee that if he had started having people doing Longchen Nyingthik ngöndro, he would have gotten the same question: "Are we now becoming Nyingmapas?" That's just how it is.

I have never in my mind had a thought of exclusion. I just think we should utilize those individuals who want to participate and help. As a leader, I am learning how to be more skillful in terms of trying to use people's help. It's not easy, because a lot of people come forward and as soon as you do not agree with their ideas, they get upset. But at the same time, if you say, "Okay, I agree with you, and I give you the authority to do it," they don't do it. So what are you going to do? People are basically saying, "I am going to watch you from afar, but I am not going to step in and participate unless you do these things." Just for you? This is for everybody.

I'm not trying to make a sob story out of it, because this doesn't happen just to me, but to anyone in a leadership position. Recently I was talking with Ane Pema—a great woman, a great practitioner, and a nun. She has done everything right and she gets all kinds of stuff coming at her. So it is hopeless. (laughter) But I am not giving up. We'll know later what happens.

Sometimes we would like to go back and say, "It can be that simple." But it cannot be that simple. Before, we were making a soup that had five ingredients, and now we are making a soup that has a thousand. The soup tastes different. It is like we think we have the choice of not changing. (laughter) Even if I said—and actually I have tried this—"By the way, we will just do Kagyu ngöndro. I am going to teach in the most traditional way," people would say, "Oh, he is just a traditionalist." I remember when I started to wear robes, people said, "Oh, now he's become a Tibetophile. He just does the Tibet thing; he's forgotten about Shambhala." So now I am teaching Shambhala and people are saying, "Oh, all the Buddhist stuff is going out the door." (laughter) You know, the reason that Chakrasamvara is standing on two corpses is because they represent extreme views. I'm not saying you are expressing extreme views; I'm saying that is the way the mind works. All I can do is try to hold the middle course. I am constantly trying to get feedback.

Right now one of the most important things is for people to realize that there is actually some kind of change going on. There is forward momentum. This is an attempt to find a way to include people. I am sure we will keep attempting ways to do things. For any of us in these times, stepping into a leadership role is challenging. For me, being in this situation has become more of a path than something to be avoided. And I tried to express this in my letter—if there is something that somebody wants to do, I will try to support them in that. But they also have to understand that it has to be in the context of everything else that is going on in the mandala. That's not an easy thing.

Certainly in the West, we have a tremendous challenge, because we're coming from a long history. Every method, every skillful means we have of trying to teach the dharma, brings in other issues and problems. That is just the way it is. When we say, "Gee, just create a single path that everybody can do," we need to realize that some people do not want a single path. There needs to be some point, and that is we're deciding, at which we tell people that if you want to be part of this, you have to commit to at least this much, because otherwise, why are you here? We have a free choice to mix; you can make your own mix. You can do a bit of this here and a bit of that at home on your own. There is nothing stopping anyone from doing that, and people have done that. But we have to look at it in terms of having a galvanizing factor. Otherwise, if people really want diversity, we should just say, "Okay, everybody go off and do your own thing." The point of being in a group is that there is a common goal, a common purpose. If you enter into a group like this, you want something, and if you want something, you have to be willing to give something up. There is no situation where you do not have to give a single thing up. It's like marriage. (laughter) If you think you can get everything, that's just unrealistic. It is not life, and it is also not the path.

Q: I'd like to hear more about the point where you have to do "at least this much," because I have been encountering what I perceive to be a lot of kind of group-think lately. I really don't know how to engage in the practice of trying to relate to a teacher and I am not sure that I want to, yet I have connected very strongly with the Shambhala teachings and Shambhala training. I think there is a real danger for someone like myself to engage in the process of blindly following some kind of path, because the notion of self-respect does not come naturally. I think sometimes that some of us respect the teacher more than we respect ourselves and our own inner wisdom, and that it's dangerous. I would like to know what some of

the non-negotiables are.

SMR: Well, it's non-negotiable from the point of view of comfort. As we enter into the path, we're going on a journey. We need to be able to help students coming along so that they do understand the various points of the path and feel comfortable with what they are doing. That means they are able to appreciate where they are and relax into it, and they don't feel pushed to do the next thing, or that they are not doing the right thing unless they are doing the next thing. There is time and there is pacing, and everybody's pacing is going to be different. There is also a certain point where an individual says, "I am lazy, I am scared," whatever it may be, "and I need some kind of support. I need someone to inspire me, or I need a group situation, and I would like to take that daring step." That is one's first step into sangha or teacher, who is not necessarily somebody who innately knows more than you, but someone who is able to see your blind spots and help you in that particular way.

Again, people in the West aren't used to this tradition in terms of having a teacher; maybe it brings up more issues. That's why it needs to happen with a comfortable pace. There are programs and practices that are able to support that along the way. Part of that is having the ability to maintain self-respect—lungta—vitality and good life-force energy. One needs that before stepping onto a full-blown path, buddhadharma or whatever it may be. So saying, "I'm at a certain point—what are the non-negotiables?" is almost like saying, "I want to commit myself to this particular approach to life. When I get up in the morning, I want to take refuge because I have made a promise to myself." That is what taking refuge is. You don't take refuge so that you'll get beaten over the head. It's a promise you're making to your own mind. It is a binding factor; that's how this path works. Sometimes people get scared because they think it is an objective thing that they are doing when in fact, it is subjective. You are entering into it.

The Shambhala practice of meditation, refuge, bodhisattva, or any vow is something one brings one's mind to. If you take refuge with any other attitude, you are just taking refuge by words. There is a point where you have respect for an individual, and you need to look at what it is that you respect. Is it their strength? Their wisdom? Your respect is coming from your desire to embody that quality. There are three kinds of faith. The first faith is called inspirational faith: "There is something about that individual, that image, or that teaching, that inspires me." The next kind of trust is when you realize that you want to bring out the same quality in yourself, and you look at how that individual does it. Then they show you. This is a step-by-step process that everybody goes through.

Q: I am looking at it almost the opposite way, where something seems to smack of spiritual materialism. It's like, "Okay this person has done this ngöndro and that ngöndro, so now I will listen to this person," and I listen to that person and frankly, it doesn't make any sense to me. (laughter) I think I need to take heed and frankly object; that seems to be the right response. I find myself doing that more and more, and then wondering if there's a place in this community for a person who just does not want to buy into that whole scene.

SMR: But why would you want a place? I think that's the question that everybody is asking in terms of our situation. We can all learn from each other, even if we learn what not to do.

Q: That's true.

SMR: Okay, now we are getting somewhere. (laughter) I agree. We also need to have compassion. We need to look at the situation and say, "Here are these people; I trust what they are trying to do. It may work, it may not work." At the same time we should trust our own intelligence, and look at that. If we are so intelligent, why aren't we happy? There is a reason. There is something else I need to learn. Can that individual help me? Maybe not. That's the thing with meditation instructors. Some people make a certain connection with certain people. At other times the chemistry is not right, even though that person may actually know something. A few years down the road you can meet the same person and say, "Now you make a lot of sense." It is timing and understanding. Certainly if you are in a particular place where you have a lot of issues and discussions, or where you're trying to understand and you're learning, that's great. That's where you are, that's what you're doing, and you need to keep looking at that. I'm saying that there is always a place, because there are no borders, in a sense. But if somebody comes in and says,

“I want to be able to do this practice, but I do not want to do all the requirements,” that isn’t going to work. You can’t play soccer and say I want to go outside of the pitch; it has to be played in the pitch.

Q: Rinpoche, I was wondering if you might address the sangha’s relationship with the group in Ojai led by Patrick Sweeney, as well as the situation with Acharya Reggie Ray and his students possibly moving to Crestone?

SMR: Mr. Sweeney was just here; also, I was out in Ojai, where his group hosted me, and he and I are discussing trying to find ways of working together. We are communicating. I don’t want to say much more than that, because we are right in the process of talking about what the issues are and so forth. But I can say that there has been a lot of warmth and communication. I will keep you posted on that one.

With Reggie and everything he is going through, again, I have been in contact. Even though there have been up and downs in terms of recent history with him, my line of communication with him is always open. We are working with the situation in terms of his role as an acharya and what he feels like he wants to do. These are issues that come up with the acharyas. I have vested a certain amount of power and authority in that group in terms of their responsibility to Shambhala; the basic criterion is that they are here to support the activities that are going on within Shambhala. That’s an important issue; I have compassion for how people want to teach, and at the same time I have to make it very clear what the various responsibilities are. I am certainly not empowering people here and there and telling them they can go off and do whatever they want. I am here because I am committed to this particular situation. I can’t tell people that whatever they do is totally okay. We have a common bond; there are certain things we need to do in order to be in Shambhala and to participate in it. There are certain things that we give up, and there is a lot to be gained.

Having the acharyas has helped bring our group together. Over the years, the group dynamics even within the acharyas has changed tremendously. When I first appointed them, they were senior students who had respect and were good at teaching, who had a lot of heart and so forth. I empowered them to be able to teach more, because there are more people to teach, and they acknowledged that. Now that there are more of them, they realize that they have to work together. In terms of the nature of Shambhala and how people are engaging, the role of the acharyas—what they are doing and how they are teaching—has developed. What is required of an acharya has developed. With Reggie’s situation, people are now addressing that issue. There have been several conference calls and talks concerning what an acharya is. What are they expected to do? For how long? All these issues are being discussed in terms of where we are and what those individuals can do.

In terms of Reggie’s situation, obviously I am very concerned about the confusion of the students. I think it is unfortunate. I am trying to do whatever I can, while acknowledging that we are at a time when all of these issues are coming up. We need to figure out what the issues are and what to do. They are all interconnected. How do we work together? I think sometimes people want to be empowered to teach and then to do whatever they want without any kind of connection. In Shambhala and a lot of these other big sanghas, teachers encounter a lot of praise and a lot of criticism. It is ongoing. Often people want to get out of that situation; it is almost impossible. But it is also part of being a teacher in a time when people’s predominant reaction is to be very critical. That seems to be how we begin to analyze something. Within our culture, being critical or having doubt have certain benefits, and at the same time they are obstructions. Where one draws the line is individual and personal.

It seems to me, with the timing of various people trying to do various things, especially in building up to the Rigden abhisheka next summer, that there is a lot of churning of the ground taking place. It is probably good to be able to look at what is going on and see it, because our sangha needs to find a fresh ground on which we can work together. That is the fact. I understand how difficult it is for a lot of you to be in a situation where the facts are not all clear. For me, it is not like there is this blueprint up here saying that this is exactly the answer to give, or that this is what to do. As I said in my letter to the sangha in January, we have a rich history, and what comes with richness is options, choices, and diversity. That is what we are facing here. One of the key elements of that kind of richness is the full unraveling of the Shambhala terma and teachings. Hopefully that can be some kind of binding factor for everybody. In some ways the sangha has kind of plodded along and let things be. Now Shambhala is taking shape and going in a certain direction, which is bringing up a lot of issues. When nothing is going on, your patterns

do not get disturbed. Now that something is actually happening, people are asking, "Am I out? Am I in?" and so forth.

You can blame me if you want, but time is changing. That's what I was saying before. Even if I wanted to say I am not going to change a goddamned thing, it is going to change. Unless I were Superman and could make the world go backwards, it is just going to change. Right now, do we want to be thinking a little bit about the future? It would be nice to get our situation into some kind of order, because while I do not mind talking about me and us all the time, there is them and they; we have so much to offer to the world if we just organize a little bit. We are obviously often preoccupied with what we feel and think about what has happened and so forth, which is natural. That's why there are all these coffee shops, because people like to talk about themselves (laughter) and what they are going through.

Q: First I want to say that I really appreciate all the work that you have done, and I am really happy that the vajrayana path has opened up. I think some of us were kind of stuck for a while. Personally, I was kind of stuck, even though I had done Shambhala programs. Now I feel that the vajrayana path is not something that is unattainable. It feels more like something I can aspire to. It sounds more workable for me. It sounds more inclusive. I think that more people will have more access to it, which is wonderful.

I do not know about the issues that people had before, but what I do know is that it was pretty scary thinking about having to do fifteen-million or whatever. (laughter) Ngöndro was pretty scary for me and for other people I know. One of my friends is doing dathün at DDL right now, because she wants to go to vajrayana seminary. In the past, that wasn't something she was looking forward to. So maybe the changes are something that other people are finding difficult to accept, but there are some people who now feel that the vajrayana path feels attainable, something for us to aspire to. I want to express my appreciation for that. I was speaking to Jeremy Hayward the other day, and I said, "Please explain this to me," and the way he explained it to me is that you are following exactly what your father has said for us to do. (laughter)

SMR: Oh, okay. (chuckles)

Student: That is how he told me. (laughter, clapping) But here's my question. In my community, the black community, people tell me that they would like to meditate, but just that. They do not want to become Buddhists. Some people are Muslims, some are Christians; they just want to meditate. It seems to me that you are saying that there will be a way for people to be able to do this. Could you elaborate a little more on that?

SMR: I am glad that there is at least one person who has benefited (Laughs, laughter) In terms of meditation, clearly it is important for people to learn. That was my inspiration to write the book. I wanted to make the distinction that meditation practice is something that Buddhists use, and that it is part of how they stabilize their understanding of reality and nature, but meditation itself is something that anyone can do. That is a message that really needs to be propagated and expressed; I certainly try to do it in my programs. We have a tool, a method for working with your mind, and it does not matter what tradition you are. Anyone can benefit from that kind of practice. We need to be able to teach meditation in a very basic and open way to whoever wants to do that. And we don't need to put in the environment of, "By the way, if you do not become a Buddhist, you are not getting the whole thing." We just need to give people the confidence that they can work with their mind, and have a tool in their life for doing it. That in itself is fulfilling our Buddhist and Shambhala vows, because we are trying to help people.

It may be that somebody is perfectly happy being able to have a basic level of practice in their life. It's almost an environmental thing. Sometimes after I have given a meditation talk, people say, "Well, you did not mention this and this and this." I say, "They do not need to hear about all that, it is not necessary right now, and it is not even really helpful." The Buddha told us to look at what is happening right now and figure out how we can try to help people where they are. In terms of what we do, it would clearly be good to have a meditation path that people can do without feeling like they have to go to the next step—even if the next step is going to Shambhala training.

I have been working with people to create a free and simple language to be able to communicate how to meditate. In writing my book, I focused on that. I just kept it as simple as possible, knowing that

we can express all this without having to use a lot of technical terms. It is easier that way. We have to have a level of confidence that allows us to introduce people into the community with, "There is a practice that you can use in your life and we can offer it here at the Shambhala center." Then if they ask, "Gee, do you offer Buddhism and all the arts and stuff?" we can answer, "Yeah, we offer that, but it's up to you if you want to do it." We offer meditation instruction, and it is not something that just leads to the next step. I would like to be able to come up with a very basic meditation program. Once it is done, it is finished. Then if you want to continue to another level, you can do another level.

Q: I'd actually like to address you as Sakyong.

Sir, I recall your father, the Druk Sakyong, saying that he would crawl on his hands and knees in a future rebirth to see the Sakyong. That's somewhat the emotion I feel that motivated him, as well as what motivated the birth or dawn of Shambhala, or constantly motivates it. There was never any question that you as a young sawang would be the Sakyong. There was absolutely never any doubt of that. I think there were some concerns that were expressed. For example, Pema Chödrön in the introduction to your book, *Turning the Mind into an Ally*, mentions the story of how when she was your meditation instructor, the Druk Sakyong said, "Well, I don't want to turn him into a monk, I have other plans for him." So...

SMR: He's not here now. [Laughter]

Q: So.. I guess I'm trying to express something about looking for the Sakyong. The flip side of that is feeling that in a sense there is a Sakyong there, but he's been swallowed inside the Buddhist teacher. And so Shambhala Buddhism in a sense has swallowed Shambhala. And there is a Shambhala there - myself as both a Buddhist and a Shambhalian, I very much appreciate that. But in thinking of others, who aren't like myself, I still feel that same need for a Shambhala that can speak to people on its own, so people can meet Shiwa Ökar with their own vocabulary out of their own traditions with their own versions of refuge and bodhisattva and luminosity and emptiness. All the way, without reservations, so they could do werma and the Scorpion Seal retreat. That was the answer Shiwa Ökar gave to that question, "What should we give sentient beings in this dark age in terms of what they can cultivate, and what they can refrain from?"

SMR: Is that a question or an aspiration?

Q: I think it's a question.

SMR: There may be others who have thought about the role of a sakyong more than I have, but I feel like I've put my fair share of time into it. One thing that I've thought about is that the role has a particular objective. If you look at the imagery of the twenty-five Rigdens, some are depicted as traditional spiritual teachers, some are depicted as warriors, and some are depicted as household- yogi types. Some are holding lotuses, some are holding swords, and so forth. They were all kings of Shambhala. It's like looking at the lineage of the various Trungpas or Karmapas or Dalai Lamas—some were poets, some were scholars. One never knows what one's going to get. It's a karmic situation, but at the heart of it, the Sakyong represents the ability to join heaven and earth, and to be able to propagate a society where people can discover their basic goodness and share that discovery. There is a big vision of that. There is a specific vision of people actually being introduced to the series of teachings that we are talking about in terms of Shambhala terma.

Obviously, I lived with Rinpoche day in and day out for many, many years. And it's always funny for me when people who may have spent a lot of time with Rinpoche, come to me and tell me about something he said, like "Don't let him become a monk." I'm not saying that this is what you are doing, but what I usually say when that happens is, "Yeah, he said that, but then the next afternoon he said something else." So it's hard to say what would have happened if Pema had shown up on a different day.

A few years before he passed away, I wanted to go to India and receive some teachings and see Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche—or at the very least, see my mother. I asked Rinpoche, and he didn't want me to go. I said, "It's a two-week trip. I could just go and come back." And he was adamant that he didn't

want me to go. As sons do, I kept persisting, and one day he said, "Okay, you can go." So I started preparing to go. And then about ten days before I was supposed to go, I reminded him that I was leaving in a few days, which was a big mistake. He said, "Where are you going?" I told him, "I'm going to India." He said, "You can't go to India!" I said, "You gave me permission to go to India." And he said, "Well, I'm changing my mind." It was interesting, because generally speaking, he was always very loving and supportive. But right then, he was almost upset. "You have to stay with me," he said. "In the future, you will go and study with Khyentse Rinpoche, and he will know what to do. But right now, I need you to be with me." He said that several times.

When I went to see Khyentse Rinpoche, when my father was ill, he said, "Now you have to come with me. This is something I have talked about with your father. You understand the minds of those people"—meaning some of you. "Now," he said, "You have to receive your full heritage, which is my responsibility." He wanted me to teach all the dharma.

And before Khyentse Rinpoche passed away, Penor Rinpoche came up to Nepal and I got a message that he wanted to see me. I went to Khyentse Rinpoche's bedroom, and there were Khyentse Rinpoche and Penor Rinpoche, just the two of them, sitting by themselves. Penor Rinpoche had come from South India—quite a long way. When I walked in, Khyentse Rinpoche introduced me to Penor Rinpoche, saying, "In the future, you need to study with him."

This is how my life has unfolded. Part of that is inheriting this. I remember coming back to Halifax from visiting Penor Rinpoche after he had recognized me as Mipham Rinpoche, and getting a call from Dzigar Kongtrül Rinpoche, who said, "Oh I'm so happy Penor Rinpoche has done this." I grew up with Dzigar Kongtrül Rinpoche when we were in India, him and Khyentse Yeshe. I said, "Yeah, it's funny, because years ago when I was in India, various lamas said I was a couple of different kinds of tulku. I remember people prostrating and calling me 'Rinpoche.'" Dzigar Kongtrül Rinpoche said, "We all remember, because you had this very strong connection to dharma, and you would come to the monastery. We were wondering why you didn't come back, and why you weren't enthroned." I said, "Rinpoche wanted to keep me out of that situation so he would be able to train me and educate me. A lot of it was cultural, but also my responsibility is to try to bridge these two worlds. But I needed to come back for some education."

For me, it's been a long path in terms of how the whole thing has come together. Myself, and also all of you, may have an idea about a sakyong, but in some ways, even though there have been sakyongs in the past, we don't know exactly what a sakyong is supposed to do these days. I myself have ideas about how a sakyong is supposed to be. I certainly feel that doing this retreat was very helpful, and I will do it again.

Over the years, who's to say what will actually develop and what the various manifestations are meant to be? I feel like although I can rely on other people's advice, ultimately I have to rely on what I feel in my heart I should do. I have learned that you cannot please everybody all the time. Therefore I need to completely adopt and accept my heritage as a sakyong. When I went to Surmang, the monks and nuns said, "I hope that you are including us in the kingdom of Shambhala." We cannot exclude them because they are monastics wearing different clothing. For me, speaking of clothing, when I went and talked about my book, I did all these very public interviews, and not a single interviewer brought my robes up. They said, "We're listening to what you're saying." It was interesting for me because I thought they'd think I was some kind of holy guy, but they were interested in what I was expressing. I did these big public talks, and people felt like they could understand meditation. It is an interesting balance. Khyentse Rinpoche and Penor Rinpoche have said, "Please wear robes, for the dignity of the dharma." So that's one thing that is taking place. And at the very least, my mother has very strong ideas about what I should be doing. First on the list is eating more.

So I think that a lot of what you're saying is true, but ultimately I do have to listen to what I feel. I also think this is an evolving situation, and we all have ideas about what a sakyong should be. Obviously, people know I run. When they see me in my workout clothes, some people don't even recognize me, and then other people think it's really cool, and other people say it's not respectable. I get it all. Then there are people saying, "You should be wearing a suit, because that's what a sakyong does." Well, that's what some sakyongs do. But if you look at the whole lineage of individuals, each one is different.

I'm not saying that I'm doing the best thing, but I will say that these days I feel comfortable. The point is that internally, I have to understand what my role is. What has even allowed this meeting to occur

is people seeing that I feel comfortable. I can put on different outfits easily, but that's going to be a very short-lived fantasy for people. People also have to realize that I am totally committed to this situation, but karmically—and I've always known this—I do have a responsibility to the bigger Tibetan Buddhist world. So I find myself trying to bridge the gap. It's not a simple thing, but I'm getting used to it for sure. But anyway, that's enough about me.

Q: Sir, could you say more about monasticism and Shambhala?

SMR: Being in India and Tibet recently, I've seen that the monastic tradition is changing. There's a very high turnover. A lot of the senior lamas are looking at how to provide a container where monasticism is appreciated and can actually be developed. Because the role of monasticism is specifically connected to the notion of sangha and community, it's very hard to be a monastic on your own and to be able to maintain that.

I remember talking with Tulku Ugyen Rinpoche about how monks and nuns come and go in terms of their vows, and he said that it seems that people—Tibetans and others—last for about five years. It's better to take a shorter-term vow and to commit to that as opposed to taking the whole lifetime vow. There are various modes. With the three-year retreat, for example, Thrangu Rinpoche has tried to do six months in and six months out.

So I think we are also at a crossroads in terms of how one is able to practice monasticism. Obviously, the environment at the Abbey, which I recently visited, is stronger, enabling people to be able to maintain their vows. Our world now is becoming more extensive. We need to understand that within Shambhala, there will be monasteries and nunneries; there will be a whole group of people who are engaged in the Shambhala vision in that particular way. If the monastic path is helpful for an individual, I feel that that person should kind of enter it. Right now we have a variety of ways people can do that—three months, one year, and so forth. I think that's very helpful. Our Shambhala community needs to understand and appreciate that there is a way for people to be involved like this. We often take pride in saying that we're householder yogis, meaning that we're not monks and nuns. But our vision includes the monastic element.

It's interesting that the Buddha manifested as an ascetic and as a monastic who in the vajrayana context gave the tantric empowerment to Dawa Sangpo as a king of Shambhala. Again, we have to look at the situation from the point of view of what is at the heart of it. In many Buddhist kingdoms, the monastic body was an important aspect in maintaining the kingdom's stability in terms of spiritual strength and so forth. On my recent visit to Tibet, people at particular monasteries specifically asked to be included within our Shambhala mandala. So we do have monasteries in Tibet, and now there's even discussion of building one in India. I think the monastic element will increase; we need to appreciate all of the monastic communities within Shambhala, not just the one that's isolated on the most remote corner of Cape Breton. They're all included. Some of you have noticed that in the ngöndro, we have monastics involved.

It's like talking about clothes, the way I wear robes, which probably most people don't know. The way I fold my shamtap, the bottom part, is called the king's fold, or the royal fold. Kagyü people fold it one way, and Nyingma people fold in another way. At Surmang, they have a particular way of folding it that goes back and forth. The way I fold it indicates that I am a lay practitioner, not a monastic, and that I hold a family lineage. Often when people see me, they just think I'm a monk, because obviously, whatever the variations of this, you're a monk or a lama. Most people don't understand that even in how I wear my robes, I'm manifesting as king, a family lineage holder. I know it's a very fine point for most people, but in the Tibetan world, it's a distinction, as opposed to wearing a traditional tonga. And I don't wear a regular yellow chögö, which indicates the vows. But Penor Rinpoche and the lamas wanted me to wear the chögö that Guru Rinpoche has. So they offered me the vajra-linked chögö or the outer robe, which represents all the vajrayana vows, as well as the vows of the mahayana and hinayana.

Q: In your activity as Sakyong, where's the place for the kingdom of Shambhala in Nova Scotia?

SMR: Over the years, especially having a house here now and being here more consistently, I have come

to feel that this is home. It's been interesting for me to be here and develop my own personal relationship with Nova Scotia.

In terms of this discussion of who we are, I think we need to clarify that Nova Scotia and the Maritimes altogether is the capital of the mandala. The centers need to have some kind of relationship with this place, and that relationship needs to make sense. The centers need to appreciate the role of Nova Scotia and at the same time, Nova Scotia needs to appreciate the roles of those centers. We shouldn't see this in terms of taking energy away, or of feeling left out or included.

Eva Wong, the feng shui master, picked a particular place for me to do a retreat in Kalapa Valley. She told me that when I do retreat there, just from a feng shui point of view, I will be connected to all the centers within Shambhala. Walking up the valley, it wasn't even theoretical. Part of the valley looked like Dechen Chöling, literally. As we got up towards the cabin site, it looked like some of the Rocky Mountains or Tibet. Just sitting there, I felt totally connected to everything. It has that quality. I remember feeling a very special energy there years ago when we did a lhasang with the Druk Sakyong.

It's important for me to go through the process of developing an intimate feeling with this place. That's partly behind my decision to shift the notion of the Kalapa Court. It's just not my house; it is the center of the mandala, thought-wise, emotion-wise. There are certain things I would like to do in order to bring about the next level of development in Halifax, in particular in terms of Kalapa Center. As some of you know, I'm planning to build a stupa on the court property to be able to magnetize more blessing energy. I'm also planning to build a shrine room—a Rigden hall, with a statue.

This last time I returned to my house, I felt like there was something missing in terms of the environment. I don't need to be just in a house in the suburbs; I would like the place where I am living in to be more of a compound, to have more of a practice element. I want to build this hall where meetings can take place and people can come teach and practice. I want to begin to foster that kind of energy at the Kalapa Court.

It's interesting for me to balance my time and energy between being here and traveling, which is a constant challenge. When I am traveling it is important to have the complete court mandala as much as we can, so that people can benefit from that environment. It is also my home, the place where I feel comfortable. So being here is a matter of balancing all those elements.

Over this next period of time—and this is something that I'm discussing with Mr. Janowitz and other Warriors of the Lodge—we will be looking at how we can correlate the importance of this place with our global centers. What is the relationship? With this effort to understand the basis of Shambhala, the relevance of this place and the reasons we are here will become clear.

Q: When you describe the intentions to enhance the court practice compound, to me that seems an inward focus. I understand Eva Wong's feng shui principles with the Kalapa Valley; I've been there myself and have seen—though not through your eyes—some of the same correspondences. As a subject of the kingdom of Shambhala, what I've felt over the last several years is the disappearance of the kingdom in Nova Scotia as an active presence in the mandala at large. For example, the kingdom, as far as I could see, was not mentioned in any of the important documents that have come out of the Mandala Governing Council. I feel concerned that the activity of the subjects here is somewhat invisible. In terms of your interest in Nova Scotia, I would like to see a greater curiosity into the non-Buddhist, even non-Shambhala culture. I feel is that there is a centering on the court aspect rather than the kingdom aspect. One last thing that occurs to me in this regard is the choice of doing the Rigden abhisheka at RMDC rather than—excuse me, SMC—I'm an old student . . .

SMR: I figured that. (laughter)

Q: I felt perplexed at that. You could say that it's for organizational reasons, but I'm bothered by the bigger picture and the relative invisibility and centering of interest inside the mandala rather than the kingdom of Shambhala as Nova Scotia.

SMR: I understand. First of all, I'm working on it. It's difficult, because being here is sort of evolutionary. There has to be a level of inspiration; I feel like that is evolving in myself personally. There's also timing and many other factors, including myself. I've been thinking about how to actually engage in that kind of

activity. It has to make sense to me. I know what it's like traveling tirelessly, and also I know what it's like when you mention these principles, saying I should be engaging in this, and then I'm the one out there engaging in those principles, but where are you or anyone else? It has to make sense to me, which it is. I also feel like the notion of kingdom has been secret, and I'm trying to bring that out. But it has to happen in a step-by-step way so that it's not just thrown at people, so that they appreciate it. There's a new level of students who have to appreciate it and dive into it. There is no blueprint. I'm also finding that I am more interested and want to engage more. I also see that our involvement here has to fit in terms of everything else that we're doing. With or without a plan, we are having a certain amount of influence in the province. I think it comes down to resources, and also to where we are. Right now, we are in the vacuum of many different karmic streams.

You have a certain idea, which I hope we're able to fulfill. There are other people who have other wishes that I hope we can fulfill. But in terms of the general plan, I feel that we need to move forward in empowering and further developing our seat here and our relationship with all the centers. It has to make sense for all the sangha at an international level.

I feel that we are doing as much as we can. It's an interesting balance, my living here, because there's an exterior thing that some people, like you're saying, want me to be doing. Other people really want me to be developing the Kalapa Court. They feel that that's how we're going to magnetize. I'm sure that everyone's right on one level. But I feel we are trying to do everything at once, and that's hard. Having the Shambhala Congress here is certainly a move in the right direction. In terms of things being neat and tidy, for whatever reason, receiving *The Primordial Rigden* and the inspiration to offer that abhisheka occurred at SMC. When I was at the base of the stupa, it felt like that is where it needs to happen. I am sure it will happen in other places, but I have to go along with a certain amount of inspiration that allows me to be here.

Q: Rinpoche, we have eleven groups that we are working with during the congress. Being the only person here from my center, I joined the communication group because communication touches everything. For me, this question-and-answer session with you is really a beautiful example of communication.

SMR: Maybe for you.

Q: For me. I feel trusted and respected when you answer the questions in the way that you have answered them, and when you open yourself up in the way that you are doing.

In our talking circle, we were each asked to say what for us was at the heart of whatever group we were in. I would like to ask you to help guide us as we work further with this group by telling us what is at the heart of communication for you.

SMR: Well, I'm trying to make it more my mouth, but I think that it's intention. Right now my intention is to be genuine. In many ways I'm very happy to participate in sessions like this, which I've done at other places and even at some programs. People have all kinds of questions, and I'm happy to share what I know. But what allows me to be here is that I can only answer what I know and feel. We are in an interesting period, because internationally and culturally, many of us are frustrated with our leaders. I can understand why certain people would be frustrated with what I'm doing, because I'm probably not doing exactly what they want me to be doing. I accept that. But from my point of view, that doesn't mean I'm not going to do anything. I have to respond. I have to try to do things. I also want people to know that I can hear what you are trying to say. I can hear what you want to happen. In this kind of environment, focusing on me allows people to see that there are a lot of complicated issues. If I move one inch to the left, the right says, "You moved an inch away from me." And if I move to the right, the left says that.

Being genuine is just holding your mind. Fundamentally, everybody's here because they care, and they want something to happen. That care may come out as love, as anger, as pride, as jealousy, as memories. It may come out as thoughts about the future. This time is an opportunity for us to reevaluate where we are. Many things have occurred, and it would be hard for me to make one move that would magically solve all the issues. Fundamentally, solving the issues is not really about one particular thing I could do, it's about the relationship that we have altogether. Of course, when I presented the ngöndro, I

knew what I was getting myself into. But it came out of a genuine mind that knows that sometimes I have to make these moves in order to try to bring our relationship to the next level. Then I have to let it settle, and look again at where we want to go. I have the ability to do that. But I have no ability to force people to practice the ngöndro. I can't really think that way; I just have to offer it.

We're all in this situation where there's so much yearning, so much wanting something to occur. We don't want our lives to go to waste. We want something meaningful to come out of this. For that to occur, people come up with all kinds of ideas that get projected onto what this sangha should be. As leaders, we have to communicate genuinely. But at the same time, communicating genuinely might mean knowing when you're not going to tell someone everything that is going on. It would be pointless, actually detrimental. There are lots of things I have to keep to myself, in terms of the Tibetan politics and other stuff. Most people don't even want to hear about it, but that's something that weighs on my mind. It comes from an inspiration to try to have a level of humbleness, of genuineness, in communication.

People are beginning to pick up on the fact that there is really not one issue in the sangha any more. There are many different issues; it's a multi-layered situation. It's hard to say that they just concern the older or newer students, or the ngöndro, or this or that. In some centers, you bring up an issue and they don't even care. In other places, if you don't bring it up, it creates a scene. It really depends on where we are. I've noticed that even in the same city, listening to certain people, you think there is some sort of issue going on and there isn't. In other areas there is a whole other thing going on. There are certain issues that are important. I know that people project a lot, but I have learned over this past time to really try to communicate as much as I can. The way I am going to try to do it here is by meeting with everybody individually. I know David Brown just had a heart attack. (Laughs, laughter) But I want to meet with people, whatever the questions are.

This last year I visited many centers and had reception lines where I would meet and talk to people. It was so funny showing up on the first day and hearing that people were worried about something. Then I would talk to one hundred and forty people and find that three people had an issue with that particular thing. Everybody else had issues in other areas. We do have hot spots in certain areas to talk about, but that has to be mixed in with communicating about the other things. That is just where we are. For this next period of time, I will continue to try to meet people and encourage them to express how they feel. I do not mind people bringing up issues. I know that the ngöndro and other changes have sometimes been confusing; when I try make it clear, other issues come up. That does not mean that we need to create an environment of panic.

When I was in retreat, I discovered that I had basic goodness, even me. (laughter) So out of basic goodness, I am trying to help here. I am no fool; I am not going to pretend that it is going to be any better in ten years. It may be bigger (laughs), there may be more, but it is not necessarily going to be better. I have to settle into being in a leadership role and what that brings. We are a consumer society; we're into gossip and rumors and everything. When we are practicing, we realize that what seemed so important at one time ultimately seems less important now.

As leaders, we are in a situation where we can gain strength from our life. That's what the teachings say. Sometimes you see someone like the president of the United States, who looks a lot older after four years. There is a lot of stress, because their mind is churning. I do not know whether it is because there is a lack of genuineness. But the kind of leader we should be is one who still has energy and looks youthful after being center director or whatever. That has to do with connecting with our genuineness. That's one of the six ways of ruling—that notion of being genuine. The tantric path teaches us that adversity makes us stronger. As the great Jigme Lingpa was saying, may sickness and obstacles be my yidam, my deity practice.

What is it that we are trying to communicate? If we communicate this one memo correctly in the relative sense of skillful means, yes, that's important, but if we do not connect with some kind of genuineness, then the whole thing will drag us down. That is so much at the heart of our society. We are swimming upstream. We are living in a society where information is only going to proliferate; that is the environment that we live in. We have to try our best to be genuine and communicate, because we are all trying to do something good. If any of us wanted to have it easy, whatever easy is, we would not be here. Okay, I hope this has been helpful.

(Dedication of merit.)

