



SATDHARMA

Patrick Sweeney

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Transcript of talk and discussion at Dechen Chöling

Mas Marvent, France

Jeremy Hayward: It is my pleasure to introduce Mr. Patrick Sweeney. This is all very impromptu and informal, but the point, as you may know, is that Patrick is the dharma heir of the Vajra Regent Ösel Tendzin, and therefore one of the dharma heirs of the Vidyadhara, Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche. As you also may know, there's been a certain amount of unrest, a difficulty in the sangha, for the past fifteen years. I speak for myself, and I hope I speak on the behalf of all of you, in saying that we're utterly delighted by the recent events. Inspired by Khenpo Rinpoche, there has definitely been a rapprochement, and it feels like there has been some healing and binding again. It is all very much due to the presence and generosity and decency, if I may say so, of Mr. Sweeney and Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche and it's a wonderful example of genuine leadership. So, welcome, Patrick.

Patrick Sweeney: Thank you for that, Jeremy, thank you very much.

PS: Well, good evening. I thought we could begin with a bow. [All bow]

I was very moved today by the events in London. [Bus and subway bombings on 7/7/05.] I was moved once again by the interconnectedness of all of us. In particular I am thinking of one of the people I've become very close to through this process of rapprochement: Richard Reoch, who is in London right now.

A gentleman told me about what happened in London today, right before dinner, and it has caused me to contemplate yet again the brilliance of the Vidyadhara, the Dorje Dradul, in presenting the vajrayana teachings and the Shambhala teachings. So much of the violence that we encounter in the world today seems to happen in the name of religion, in the name of God, in the name of various theisms. And it seems that as a sangha, the one unifying, binding factor that we have is a way to renounce theism as a reference point. We have the teachings—for those of us who have entered fully into the vajrayana path we have the samaya vow, and for those of us who have fully entered into the kingdom of Shambhala we have an oath of loyalty. Both bind us to a very strong personal experience of non-theism. And I just simply wanted to acknowledge that to begin our discussion.

Please join me in supplicating the lineage and invoking the texture of the Vidyadhara's mind, which is the texture of the Khenpo's mind, the texture of lineage mind, and the

texture of basic goodness. Please join me in simply resting in that momentarily. Then perhaps we could do a bit of spontaneous, uncontrived Tonglen—for the victims in London today, but also for the terrorists, and for all people who do not have access to a way to turn away from theism as a basic reference point for understanding their spiritual journey.

I thought we could use the seven line supplication as an all-inclusive way to invoke the lineage, then just rest briefly, and out of that resting allow some natural taking and sending to occur.

[All chant Seven Line Supplication to Padmasambhava]

Initially I would like to thank Jeremy and Pat Hayward for inviting me to meet with you all. Jeremy and Pat have been very good friends and Jeremy, in particular, has been an instrumental teacher for me who has helped me to connect to the Vidyadhara's mind over many years. In general, I'm just happy to be here. This is my first trip to France. I was very happy that I would be able to come to a place that is a seat of the Vidyadhara's dharma to meet Khenpo Tsultrim Gyamtso Rinpoche, the person who has become my living teacher since the Vajra Regent's death. I'm enjoying my time here very much.

Many of us are having a difficult time with America these days. Even for someone like me, born in Chicago, right in the heart of America, in 1959, it's a difficult place right now. There's a real gap between the predominant people in power and people who have alternative views. It's very difficult to heal the gap. Being here in this very gentle space of dharma, this space of great bliss, punctuated by the Khenpo's teachings, is quite pleasing to my mind. It's very good to be here.

As Jeremy mentioned, tonight is a bit unscripted and spontaneous. Both Jeremy and Pat have expressed their support for the process of rapprochement that began last summer. It all started with an e-mail I received from Khenpo Rinpoche that went something like this [Patrick reads the e-mail message]:

Dear Patrick,

Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche has requested teachings from me on the Six Dharmas of Naropa. I have invited him to receive these teachings from me from December 3-11 at your Pullahari Retreat Center, and he has eagerly accepted. This is a very auspicious circumstance, because you are a student of Trungpa Rinpoche and Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche is also Trungpa Rinpoche's student and his son. So it makes a good connection.

From Khenpo Rinpoche

So with that, the journey began. The basic view that both Khenpo Rinpoche and Thrangu Rinpoche have been expressing to the Sakyong and me for many years is that we have the good fortune of holding and being a part of a lineage of transmission. It is a lineage that

is contingent upon the direct human relationship between teacher and student and the direct human relationship among sangha members. As we know, the binding factor of that human transmission is samaya, the quality of ongoing sacred outlook.

The sangha as a whole experienced what you might call a samaya earthquake back in the late 80's and early 90's. Both Khenpo Rinpoche and Thrangu Rinpoche have encouraged me to do whatever I can not to perpetuate that difficulty. The issues have been framed for me not as political issues, but as spiritual issues. Essentially, for us as a community to turn our backs on each other in any way, or to think that it is possible to fully stabilize and practice the dharma without casting the widest possible net of inclusion on our practice, is really a tragic mistake. That isn't actually the dharma. Even though certain very difficult things occurred—probably for some of us in this very room—and very difficult emotional issues arose, if we have any faith in the dharma at all, we know that the difficulty can be purified. The minute we turn our back on that process of purification and start to solidify self and other then we know what happens. It happened in London today. It happened in our sangha.

A process of purification, which we called a rapprochement, was begun last December when Khenpo Rinpoche, the Sakyong and I came together. It continued through the winter and came to fruition on May 29th in Ojai, California where we had quite a wonderful ceremony. The Sakyong, myself, Richard Reoch and the local community in Ojai, as well as people from around the United States and Canada, came together to participate. At the heart of this ceremony was a Letter of Agreement, read and signed by Richard Reoch, which expresses the Sakyong's and my shared views. Shortly thereafter, this process was questioned and resisted by a few people with strong opposing views, which is to be expected, I guess.

The basic view that the Sakyong and I agreed upon is that the Vajra Regent was charged with continuing the Vidyadhara's lineage. Unfortunately, as we all know, he contracted HIV which cut his life short. Both he and the Vidyadhara died at the age of 47 and it was tragic for all of us. In the period of time shortly after the Vidyadhara's death, the Vajra Regent took his seat as lineage holder. In that seat he felt that, based on his understanding of both the Vidyadhara's will and the instructions he had received from the Vidyadhara, it was his responsibility to train a western student who could maintain the continuity of the lineage that the Vidyadhara had passed to him. Unfortunately for all of us that process didn't get a chance to fully mature before the Vajra Regent's death. Nonetheless, during the two years before the end of the Vajra Regent's life, he transmitted the lineage and teachings to me, and asked me to devote the rest of my life to fulfilling the Vidyadhara's command. The Vajra Regent commanded me not to give up, no matter how difficult it got. He warned me, as he had been warned by the Vidyadhara, that if I turned back, the dharmapalas of the lineage would eat away at my heart. So, as you see, I'm still alive and I haven't turned back, and now we're sitting here having this conversation.

There was a misunderstanding, I think, at the time of the Vajra Regent's death. As Jeremy knows, and saw very vividly, there was a great deal of misperception and confusion then, and the community split into camps based on a solidification of opinions

and views. At that point, the community members didn't have the ability to talk fully to one another.

It has taken this much time for there to be enough relaxation within the community for the Sakyong and I to feel that we could state, in a clear and simple way, that we want to work harmoniously with each other. In particular, the Sakyong and I have come to understand that there is no fundamental conflict between our positions as lineage holders. Its not an either/or situation, and it never was. We both have taken the vow, which almost everyone in this room has taken, to perpetuate the Vidyadhara's world. And it's a big world. We need to exert ourselves beyond our concepts in order to realize it. So we came to the conclusion that it would be far better for us to work together than to allow an artificial barrier to continue. The ceremonial reading of Letter of Agreement in Ojai was an attempt to begin dissolving the barriers.

The Letter of Agreement has several aspects to it. There is an attempt to articulate the fact that the lineage transmissions of the Sakyong and myself are not in conflict. There is an indication that we want to create the basis for a common curriculum for the Satdharma community in Ojai and the Shambhala community. I re-commit myself to the Kingdom of Shambhala as a subject of the Kingdom and make the aspiration to serve the current Sakyong in whatever way I can. The Satdharma community is offered a seat on the Shambhala Mandala governing council.

There is a clarification of issues around the stupa being built in honor of the Vajra Regent. For many years, certain people supplicated the Sakyong for permission to build a stupa for the Vajra Regent at Shambhala Mountain Center, and, having been granted it a few years ago, have been attempting to complete it. Some people have had resistance to the building of this stupa. During the course of drafting the Letter of Agreement, one of those people, Lady Diana, insisted that we not go forward with that stupa. So, for the sake of harmony, I agreed that the Stupa for the Vajra Regent that was built in Ojai would be the Stupa for the Vajra Regent for the entire Shambhala sangha. This seemed appropriate, since the *raison d'être* of the Ojai community is that we see the Vidyadhara and the Vajra Regent as inseparable with regards to our vajrayana path.

The last point of the Letter of Agreement is an intention to re-include Lady Rich, the Vajra Regent's widow, within the larger world of Shambhala. This will not only be to give her a way to share her extensive knowledge of Shambhala Training and its origins as she received it, understood it and propagated it, but also to help her with her financial situation, which has become quite difficult.

Those are the main points of the agreement that we came to and that Richard Reoch signed and read in Ojai on May 29, 2005. The situation felt quite good at the time. Whatever obstacles have arisen subsequently, both the Sakyong and I have begun to contemplate the best means to bring everyone along the path of harmony and understanding.

That's it. That's as much as I know about that. [Laughter]

I thought it might be helpful to have a discussion about the period of time at the end of the Vajra Regent's life. For those of you who had a dharma connection with the Vajra Regent, I know that one of the very important things for you is to have access to an understanding of the process that he went through. Within the Shambhala community, for a period of time, there was considerable solidification of views about the Vajra Regent. Unfortunately, I think it cut people off from knowing the process of growth and transformation that he went through from the time of his last contact with the Vajradhatu Board of Directors in Boston in January of 1989 until his death in August of 1990.

In my own experience, as his student, that was actually the most vital and potent time of his spiritual life. Those were the months when his realization blazed forth. There was a period that was quite poignant, where there was a relaxation of any kind of solidification of what we might call a perverted or egoically driven spiritual identity. To put it in another way, there was the complete humility of the death process and the nakedness of the Vidyadhara's transmission to him, simply coming together. As his student, I found it to be extremely inspiring.

For those of you who knew him well, then I'll say a bit more. There was an acknowledgement on his part that he had made mistakes. There was an acknowledgement on his part that he had misunderstood the relationship between relative and absolute truth. And, as anyone who has taught in this lineage knows, as Jeremy knows, as I have found out the hard way, if you sit in a chair like this, with your back to the shrine, and you receive the projections of people sitting in front of you, a very interesting thing occurs. [Laughter] You actually start to believe the projections. You have to work with what in therapy is referred to as the counter-transference. You have to work with your own mind in terms of believing that somehow the seat you're sitting in protects you from a certain level of relative manifestation. And on a more positive level, you actually want to live up to it. You actually want to manifest as the Vidyadhara's mind. You want to manifest as the lineage mind. And I think this is something that has been lost with regards to the journey that the Vajra Regent went through. He held that mind brilliantly. For those of you who knew him and received teachings from him, there's not really much I have to say. For Jeremy, who was his vajra brother in a very profound way, and who shared a deep mutual appreciation with him, well, what can you say? He got it. But the path of purifying karma through the Vidyadhara's transmission, and in particular with the responsibilities that Vajra Regent was given, is a very steep path. The feedback was intense. And as a result, the Vajra Regent had the opportunity to reconcile himself with himself. That was my experience of his last months. That was my experience of his death.

Again, for those of you who weren't around at that time, or were here in Europe and weren't able to come to San Francisco when he died, something extraordinary happened. I don't think we need to solidify it, one way or another. I'll just simply tell you that he had a very convincing samadhi. It was convincing to the Tibetan lamas who were there, in particular to Lama Lodro, who is one of Kalu Rinpoche's lamas who lives in San Francisco. Lama Lodro was at the hospital when the Vajra Regent died. He instructed me and several others on how to deal with the Vajra Regent's body, how to arrange him at the San Francisco dharmadhatu. What happened there was a quite an impressive display.

His heart remained warm for three days, and he did not exhibit the ordinary signs of decay. In fact, it became so extraordinary that Lama Lodro invited his chöd students to come and do chöd practice in front of the Vajra Regent's body. The abbot of the San Francisco Zen Center brought many of the Zen Center students to do a Zen practice in relation to the Vajra Regent's body. And then it became so groundless, in that the Vajra Regent's samadhi was lasting so long, that Lama Lodro finally said to me, "Patrick, as the Vajra Regent's main student, you need to supplicate him to come out of this." [Laughter] Being a young man from Chicago, not really being familiar with these things, I did as I was told, and within an hour or two the blood started to come from his nose and his ears, and the samadhi was over.

All in all, my feeling is that to appreciate the Vajra Regent, you must appreciate the ongoing process of transformation which is the vajrayana path. It doesn't end. No matter how difficult the confusion, that confusion can be purified. What happened with the Vajra Regent is something for us all to consider in terms of our own life and how we're going to live in relation to the Vidyadhara's teachings, to his life example, to his command, and to how our karma ripens. It ripens in an unpredictable way. How you meet that ripening seems to be the whole point. My experience was that the Vajra Regent met it fully and courageously.

So, if you'd like to have some discussion. Yes?

Student: I want to share with you that I was at RMSC in 2000, and there was a celebration at the site there that was meant for a stupa for the Vajra Regent. For me, it will always be the stupa for him, whatever changes happen.

PS: It's not my choice. This was not my preference. I don't know what's going to happen. It's the Sakyong's choice.

Student: But the stupa is the seed for the next generation that will come, and without it, maybe the whole story will be lost. For me it will always be that seed. The same day I was there, a rainbow appeared over the Vajra Regent's purkhang [the structure in which the Vajra Regent's body was cremated]. I saw a picture from ten years ago, and it was the same rainbow that appeared at the Vajra Regent's cremation. So for me it's clear. I just wanted to share that with everybody and with you.

PS: Thank you.

Student: I am very happy that there is some harmony manifesting. I lived Boulder at the time of the Vajra Regent's death, and the whole thing for me was very hard. I loved the Vajra Regent very much and I had a hard time with the transition. Also, we couldn't participate in his death process. He just stepped out of the picture and all that was left were these wild stories. I feel that it's important for us as sangha members to participate in each other's deaths, because we're all going to do it. It felt very painful not to participate in his, and I would be very happy if there could be more information for us.

PS: We attempted to put together a preliminary biography of the Vajra Regent, which has been posted on the Satdharma website. It includes some of the events I've described and more around the time of his death. But in general I agree with you, there needs to be more information.

Student: Thank you very much for speaking. I realize how precious it is to hear these stories. I was kind of raised by the Vajra Regent, and then was close enough to Ojai to hear a little bit about what was happening, but it seems that in the middle of the purification process that's happening now, where there's openness, these stories are important to hear. And I supplicate not only for the stories to come out, but also some of the teachings that the Vajra Regent gave at the time of his death, particularly on Vajrayogini, to be made public, because they're amazing. So I just really thank you and supplicate that they come forth.

PS: Thank you. Ironically, it has been fifteen years since his death, and this is the first invitation I have ever received from a Shambhala center to speak in any way. So, I think I'll come back to Europe. [Laughter and applause]

Student: When you were talking I was reflecting back on old times, also old times in Europe, and my own experience as a teacher at that time. For a young dharma practitioner, the power and blessings of the Vidyadhara when one was teaching were so strong that to make a mistake of confusing absolute and relative truth was very easy. So, I've taken what happened with the Vajra Regent as something to learn from.

PS: Yes.

Student: Almost as a gift, to learn from. That's what I wanted to say. And I'm very glad that you're back.

PS: Thank you.

Student: Walking along the path the other day I spoke to you and told you just simply that my wife and I loved the Vajra Regent and so there's so little to say about it, it was so straight forward. But, at the time what we called "the current situation", I was on the European council. My impression was that in Europe there was much sadness. People were hurt, quite a lot of people left. But there was much less feeling of split and dissension and anger than what we heard about from the United States. People went to visit the Vajra Regent with Steve Baker and came back and tried to hold the middle. I was quite proud that Europe was doing that, and not becoming split. People were sad, and some of them left, but there wasn't that same feeling of split and anger.

PS: Thank you. Maybe one more.

Student: I'd like to ask you if you have any suggestions how we, from afar, could help this reconciliation process. When you're far away, obstacles come up and yet our

opinions don't matter that much. Do you or does the Khenpo have any suggestions about how we could purify these obstacles?

PS: Well, the first point is not to rely on aggression in any way, but to soften. Tonglen for people whose fixed views are so strong that they can't let go would be very good. And then, it would be helpful to create an environment of spaciousness around this process, while not letting that spaciousness turn into ignorance. Meaning, don't forget.

Something needs to happen at this point. There was a major shift that occurred. We did attempt to come to this rapprochement. Now, it's being blocked in a certain way. But the important thing is that the sangha as a whole doesn't ignore the progress that has been made.

What exactly we're going to do, well, let's come to it. But we can't ignore it any longer. We can't suppress it. We can't pretend it didn't happen. From both sides. I can't pretend that I can exist independently from the larger sangha. I don't want to pretend that. At the same time, there needs to be dignity and an honest acknowledgement and a letting go of any kind of historical revisionism around our legacy.

In my view, the best thing, as the Vidyadhara said, is to tell the truth: "The proclamation of truth is fearless." Why don't we just say exactly what happened without drawing such hard and fast conclusions, and then work together? That was the view that the Sakyong and I took. Tell the truth, be friends about it, and then work together. I think that's the best. The challenge is to continually let go of fixed views. And theism, again, creeps in. We can't create an absolute firewall between the Vidyadhara and the Vajra Regent, as if the Vajra Regent was this bad seed that developed in isolation from an environment of vajrayana culture that was evolving. We can't create an evil object and say, "that was then, and its over and it won't ever happen again and he was bad, and we're all good." That doesn't work.

When I look at the Vajra Regent's life I see my own life. The so-called shadow issues, the issues that we keep in our respective closets, they come out periodically. And they arise as demons, which dominate our consciousness and drag us here and there. But when looked at properly and transmuted, they're also the way into the Vidyadhara's heart, the way into our wisdom mind. I think that's a more skillful way to regard the journey. The Vajra Regent, in a certain way, was all of us. And, yeah, it blew up. Don't all our lives?

Student: Is he back? Do we know if he's back?

PS: Lacking the higher perceptions, I can't really say.

So again, thank you very much. One of the last teachings the Vajra Regent gave was a very pithy teaching:

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Someone asked him, almost in a confrontational way, “Sir, what is the ground, path and fruition of dharma? I’d like to know.” Without missing a beat, he said, “Maitri, death and sentient beings.”

First, you must make an unconditional friendship to the whole display, both the good and the bad. Then you must put yourself in a crucible of transformation where you allow yourself to die to that which is based on fear. The result of that process is that you open up unconditionally to sentient beings. That was his last gift. I offer it to you.

[all recite Dedication of Merit]