



SATDHARMA

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Address to the Satdharma Community and Guests
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Introduction

Welcome, Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, to Ojai. The tone of our community meeting so far has been one of harmony and of trying to click into the mind of the guru, the mind of the Vidyadhara, the mind of the Buddha. That mind is free from fixation, free from fear, and is a mind that is able to let go and take a fresh start, looking nakedly at reality and not blinking, not hesitating to be skillful and precise and compassionate. This moment is a moment that I personally have been waiting and longing for, for 15 years.

I am extraordinarily grateful to the Sakyong, who has been a great friend of mine and a great teacher to me in how to bear the burden and the delightful gift of this lineage. The fact that we can actually draw together and for one moment practice in the same mandala—that alone to me is magical and worth all the effort it has taken to arrive here. And to have Shibata Sensei, who holds the heart of the Great Eastern Sun in every cell of his being, here with us, and to have Lady Rich, who was one of the Vidyadhara's heart students and wife and consort of the Vajra Regent, here—to have us all here together and just to appreciate that, is a big deal.

Given that ours is a lineage of transmission, a lineage of faith and devotion and trust, we thought it would be extremely appropriate to supplicate that lineage with a full heart. We will chant both Buddhist and Shambhala supplications to rouse that mind of fearlessness that was Trungpa Rinpoche. Then we will nakedly rest our minds in that space free of hope and fear, free of clinging to the past and anticipating the future. From within that space, hopefully we will figure out what has happened. Given that we've put together the curriculum for this community meeting about seven minutes ago, I think we're going to have a very brilliant afternoon! So I ask you please to support us with your practice by holding your seat and holding your mind as we attempt to actually transcend the seeming certainty of the past.

Letter of Agreement

[President Reoch reads the text of the Letter of Agreement between Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche and Patrick Sweeney. Dr. Joseph Parent then requests Mr. Sweeney to comment on the Letter of Agreement.]

Thank you. Even after reading that document about 35 times, I'm still shocked. I think it might take us all a little time to fully assimilate and integrate what the Sakyong and I

have come to, but the basic message has left me feeling quite joyous, quite fulfilled, and quite relieved. Because of the Sakyong's brilliance as a human being, and because of our friendship, we've been able to continue talking about this over fifteen years. We've continued to circumambulate the same issues and to foster a friendship that has not been contingent on whether or not it worked out. It seems that attitude has allowed us to arrive at this place where this agreement between us feels very natural and very organic, like the unfolding of a long relationship.

Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche has one of the most difficult jobs in the entire Tibetan Buddhist world. I was talking to some lineage holders in our Kagyü-Nyingma tradition who consistently pointed out to me that what the Sakyong is trying to do is actually extraordinarily difficult. The Sakyong sits in the middle of a mandala that is very diverse. As we know, people have a variety of views about all manner of things, but in particular about the Vajra Regent. The binding factor of our community here has been a very natural connection to the fulfillment of Trungpa Rinpoche's work in empowering his Vajra Regent. As dharma heir, the Vajra Regent also took on students, and the Sakyong, over these fifteen years, has kept his heart open to that. He has been able to hold his heart open to me and to our community and to the Vajra Regent, and to the fact that the basis, the *raison-d'etre*, so to speak, of our community is that we see the Vajra Regent and the Vidyadhara as an inseparable spiritual entity. That is our experience. We are students of the Vajra Regent. We prostrate to his manifestation with our body, speech, and mind as the way into Trungpa Rinpoche's heart.

Trungpa Rinpoche, right at the beginning of his teaching journey in the West, gave Vajradhatu the slogan, "the proclamation of truth is fearless." That slogan has been the reference point for me in this fifteen-year journey. It has guided me in trying to stay close to the truth that I experienced with the Vajra Regent, and in trying to hold that truth without falling into the two extremes of exaggeration or grandiosity on the one hand, and denigration on the other. I have tremendous gratitude to the Sakyong for not giving up on our friendship, and for not giving up on the fact that the truth could actually be told in a very direct way, without apology and without overstatement.

A distinction we have come to in our discussions is that the Vajra Regent held, in a sense, two seats in Trungpa Rinpoche's world. He was the Vajra Regent of Trungpa Rinpoche, which is to say that he had responsibility for maintaining Trungpa Rinpoche's world. He was vice-president of Vajradhatu, he was co-founder of Shambhala Training, and he helped propagate the Vidyadhara's vision of both the buddhadharma and the Shambhala dharma. As long as he was alive, his loyalty and his activity were always contextualized by his relationship with the Vidyadhara and maintaining the Vidyadhara's world. At the same time, as it says in the empowerment proclamation made in 1976 by His Holiness the 16th Karmapa and the Vidyadhara, the Vajra Regent was also empowered as a holder of the Karma Kagyü and Nyingma lineages, and as such was a lineage holder, authorized and empowered to give abhisheka.

After Trungpa Rinpoche's death, the Vajra Regent was encouraged by his Holiness Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche and other lineage holders to take on students. At that time of the Vidyadhara's death my relationship with the Vajra Regent changed. He became my vajra

master, my guru. I think this distinction has been lost on a lot of people. A lot of people have perceived that the relationship between the Sakyong and me has been a kind of zero sum game—an “either-or” or “win-lose” situation. That is actually not the case, and it has never been the case over this whole period of time. The Sakyong and I have been really clear about that. The Vajra Regent didn’t need and didn’t appoint a regent. His regency, so to speak, dissolved at the time of his death. What he was regent of has been inherited by Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche. That is what he holds. As President Reoch says in his letter, the Sakyong is the sovereign of the mandala, which includes the Shambhala dharma as well as the buddhadharma of Trungpa Rinpoche. That is his charge and his responsibility.

However, within that, there is an authentic lineage stream from the Vidyadhara that was transmitted to the Vajra Regent, and which it is very important to honor. That lineage stream is not in conflict with what the Sakyong holds. At the same time, in reality, it has nothing to do with me. It’s very ironic that 15 years later I’m still talking about this, but I think it is very important to understand that what I have tried to maintain over these years is the principle that the Vajra Regent stood for. That principle, that enlightened mind can be transmitted from East to West, was expressed by Trungpa Rinpoche in his foreword to *Buddha in the Palm of Your Hand* in this way:

“Many oriental advisors have said to me, ‘Do not make an Occidental your successor; they are not trustworthy.’ ... through working with Ösel Tendzin as my Regent, I have come to the conclusion that anybody who possesses tathagatagarbha is worthy of experiencing enlightenment. Moreover, Ösel Tendzin is my prime student. ... He is absolutely capable of imparting the message of buddhadharma to the rest of the world.”

The Vajra Regent is an extremely important person to study and to understand in terms of the transmission of dharma from the Tibetan tradition to a Western manifestation of vajrayana dharma. This seat, my seat, is to simply maintain the continuity of Trungpa Rinpoche’s intention through the Vajra Regent by propagating the transmission that I received from him. This is a very important distinction, and one that allows, as President Reoch puts it, a harmonious rapprochement between our communities. This is not about a power struggle or about politics, but about honoring the efficacy of spiritual transmission and seating it properly so that it can actually flourish.

We came here to Ojai with the Vajra Regent, and we served him until his last breath. For me, the Vajra Regent was like a father, like an older brother, like a lover, like a best friend—and though he was like all of those things, he was also none of them. He was my teacher, and he was my guru. As such, he was a brilliant mirror that pointed out the very nature of mind, not only to me, but also to all the people who served him until his death. Not only was he a mirror, but he continues to be a bridge for all of us. Our devotion is the light that makes that mirror available to us, and by that light we are able to walk across the bridge of his wisdom manifestation to a full understanding of the Kagyü and Nyingma dharma. I think that needs to be understood.

This stupa here in Ojai represents the inseparability of Trungpa Rinpoche and the Vajra Regent. That is our personal experience in our journey as practitioners—not as politicians, but as students of the dharma. We experienced the Vajra Regent as Buddha! In our lineage, that experience is very important. Without that experience, there is no mahamudra or dzogchen dharma. Without that experience, it doesn't work. So this is our unique charge, and it is very appropriate that this stupa is unabashedly the Vajra Regent's Wisdom Stupa, because that's how we experience it. I'm very pleased that the Sakyong has made the decision to seat this stupa within the larger Shambhala mandala as a reliquary of wisdom and an object worthy of devotion, and we will maintain it as such.

From 1989 to 1992, we learned very directly that if you try to legislate devotion, if you try to tell people what they should feel in their hearts, it is spiritual imperialism. It doesn't work. We can't shove something down someone's throat and say, "Believe it. Accept it. [Snaps fingers] Get it. That's the way it really is." For those students of the Vajra Regent who experienced the Vajra Regent as a Buddha, it was not a matter of being talked into something. The Vajra Regent, as he liked to say, manifested for us as a bird with three legs. You looked, and there he was, human. You looked again, and it was a Buddha. You looked again, and it was very human; you looked again... That experience of constant contrast was our way into the wisdom mandala of the Buddha. We hold that without apology. That's our lineage. At the same time that lineage must be contextualized in the sense that Trungpa Rinpoche's unique vision was that if the buddhadharma is going to flourish—not only in the twentieth century but now and into the future—that buddhadharma must be contained and seated within a vision for creating enlightened society, enlightened culture, an enlightened way of life that draws on all the various aspects of the relative world we live in and transmutes them into Great Eastern Sun culture.

So for 15 years I've felt like a bird with one wing, and the Sakyong in a sense has given me back my wing. I feel that together, our sanghas can actually fly, because quite frankly, the world needs what we have to offer. If not us, then who is actually going to penetrate the hardness of the religious and materialistic theism that we see dominating our culture? Trungpa Rinpoche, and now the Sakyong, holds the key to the creation of a culture that is not based on fear. How can we not be a part of that? Whether we've been acknowledged or not, we still practice all of the Shambhala teachings, we still try in our way to contribute. Now it feels very, very good! The blessings are here, and Rinpoche, thank you. I owe this to your kindness and your incredible stubbornness. You're so good in that way! [Laughter]

In essence, my life would not be not worth living if I had not met the Vajra Regent. My life was somewhat confused, and because of the grace of Trungpa Rinpoche working through him, I've had a little bit of space to enjoy this life, and I'm very appreciative. Whatever benefit I can bring is a direct result of the Vajra Regent's grace. Having lived through the catastrophe, I feel stronger and better for it. There is no need to process it any more. My connection with him is like this [holds up a vajra]—strong, indestructible.

We have that same indestructibility here today with Shibata Sensei. I have fallen in love with Shibata Sensei, and I've fallen in love with kyudo over these years. Sensei gave us a

teaching many years ago, which I feel cuts right to the heart of the three-yana journey and right to the heart of the Shambhala teachings. That teaching is the principles of *Chi*, *Jin*, and *Yu*. These are the principles I'm trying to live in a very simple way, and the message that I would like to communicate to all of us is to consider working with them. The first principle, Chi, is learning how to listen and how to hear what's going on with the other—listening, as the Vajra Regent would put it, with new ears, in such a way that you are sensitive to the suffering of others. The second principle, Jin, is responding, being able to respond, being able to skillfully step in. The last principle, Yu, is never giving up. The Sakyong embodies that, the Vajra Regent embodied that, and Trungpa Rinpoche embodied that. We need to aspire to embody that. As Trungpa Rinpoche said to the Vajra Regent, and the Vajra Regent said to me, “Never give up, never give in.” Never give up on yourselves and the community as the location for wisdom. Never give in to the voices of confusion that say, “no, you're just a confused schmuck.” Never give up, never give in. That's the mantra of our lineage, and that is what Shibata Sensei has given us.

Concluding Remarks

We'll conclude now with some aspirations. I would like to offer a song that arose out of the process of relating to the Sakyong when he visited Pullahari last December. Each morning Khenpo Tsültrim Gyamtso Rinpoche would get up and come into my room and sing and dance for a period of time, and then we would drive together up to Pullahari so that Khenpo Rinpoche could teach the Sakyong. Each day the Khenpo would give me a Tibetan lesson, and it was the same every day. Excuse me for mispronouncing, but it went something like *gyamtso balap chenpo do*, which means “the ocean waves are big today.” [Laughter] As I was driving he would have me repeat that over and over again, and then he would request me to sing a particular Milarepa song. One day he inserted a word into the song and told me to sing it a lot, so I want to offer it. I have a very bad voice, but I'll offer it anyway [sings]:

*E Ma! The phenomena
Of the Kingdom of Shambhala
While not existing, it appears
How incredibly amazing!*

That was the Khenpo's pith instruction on how to proceed.

Finally, I want to acknowledge the incredible debt that I feel to both Thrangu Rinpoche and to Khenpo Tsültrim Gyamtso Rinpoche. Without their support over the last 15 years, I would have dissolved in a puddle of ridiculousness and lack of confidence. With their support and encouragement, we as a community have been able to persevere. In particular, in the early 1990's Thrangu Rinpoche was adamant about not giving up on the Vajra Regent's transmission. He actually insisted that I not give up, so without his support, we wouldn't be here. I want to acknowledge that and also acknowledge that one of the supplications we'll be concluding with, *Fulfilling the Aspirations of the Vidyadhara the Venerable Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche*, was written by Thrangu Rinpoche. The other aspiration that we'll chant, *Rainclouds of Wisdom*, was written by the Vajra Regent.