

A letter from Rinpoche to the Sangha

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Hello

I'm writing to you as a dear member of our Sangha, and therefore someone who has a special place in my heart. As you probably know, recently a number of people have been speaking out very critically about my behaviour as a Buddhist teacher. Some who have been my students, and whom I love, have expressed feelings of hurt and distrust from their experience of following me as a teacher. I understand, too, that this news has given rise to a certain amount of pain and confusion within our community. I cannot begin to express to you just how much all of this saddens and distresses me.

I have spent my whole life trying my best to serve the Buddhadharma, to bring these teachings to the West, and not a day goes by when I am not thinking about the welfare of my students, holding them in my heart, and feeling concern and responsibility for their spiritual path. It's clear now, though, that a number of people do feel very disappointed and hurt, and are looking for answers and changes. Please know that I take this very seriously and I will not ignore it. I am clear in my own mind that I have never, ever, acted towards anyone with a motive of selfish gain or harmful intent. This is unthinkable for me.

At the same time, I need to hear and acknowledge the experiences that some of my students have spoken of, and over the last few days I have been reflecting very deeply on what course I need to take, how to address these issues.

Already, I am seeking advice from masters who have a genuine care and concern for Rigpa, such as Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche and Mingyur Rinpoche and others, about what we should do. And I will honour their guidance.

As I have mentioned to you before, according to astrological predictions, this year and the next two years are a period when obstacles can arise for my health and for my life in general. This was confirmed to me a number of years ago by Kyabjé Trulshik Rinpoche, and then again later by Orgyen Tobgyal Rinpoche. I have decided therefore to follow their advice and to enter into retreat as soon as possible. This is something I have been yearning to do for many years and I feel now is the right moment to do this. While I am on retreat, I intend to reflect deeply about myself, about how best to support students, and about the future of Rigpa.

At the moment, I am focusing deeply on the Lojong teachings—training the mind in compassion—and one verse in particular that guides me, and is continually on my mind, is:

"In all my actions may I examine my mind,

*And whenever a negative thought or emotion arises,
Since it endangers myself and others,
I will firmly face and avert it."*

I am constantly watching my own mind, with mindfulness and awareness, so as to be truly compassionate in all my words and actions. So the teachings of Dzogchen and Lojong are very much the focus of my own reflection and practice right now. In some ways, you could say that my retreat has already begun.

My being on retreat like this will open the opportunity for other teachers to take a more prominent part in guiding and advising the Rigpa Sangha, and I will request them to do so. Simultaneously, it will also be the right time for me to hand over the work of Rigpa to my trusted students and to take a full step back.

If you just think about all the many extraordinary teachings I have given over the years, there is an incredible wealth of Dharma. In some ways, there is not much more teaching that you need—there is enough for one whole lifetime, at least! So let's focus on putting these teachings into action, through reflection and practice.

Yet I will of course still be there for you all, sharing teachings and guidance from my retreat, and meeting with you whenever the time is right. I will plan this out therefore please don't for one moment think that you will be left alone or abandoned!

In a way, going into retreat now will be a real preparation for my own death. After all, you need to realize: life is impermanent. We all have to die one day. And we never know when. As one great master once put it, 'Teaching the Dharma and helping people is wonderful, but remember: you have to die.' Every one of us will need to face ourselves when we die; therefore we really need to be prepared.

I am so grateful to you all, for your dedication, and especially for the love and support that you are showing to each other in this challenging time. It is extremely important now that we strengthen and build upon the deep spirit of friendship, openness, and genuine care that already exists in our Sangha.

I encourage you all to reach out to one another, and look after one another, to listen to each other, and care for one another in the loving, compassionate and open spirit of the Buddha's teachings.

I know that many of you are wrestling with uncomfortable questions and doubts, right now. At the same time, please don't forget all of the good things and the bigger picture of our work. I know many of you have directly experienced the incredible blessings of the teachings, and the transformations they can bring, and that many of you feel love and gratitude towards me.

Don't ever forget the most important thing of all: these incredible teachings that we have shared together, and especially the priceless teachings of Dzogpachenpo. We

have lived through such extraordinary moments together, where we all experienced the very deepest aspect of our bodhichitta, our buddha nature, the ultimate nature of mind. How can we not remember? We need to keep these teachings constantly in our minds and to hold them, so they will last long, long into the future. They can not die.

I will also pray and practice for healing and understanding to prevail and, in the spirit of the great Kadampa masters of the past, take the suffering upon myself and give happiness and love to others. From the bottom of my heart, I encourage all of you to never ever give up on the teachings or on each other, but to focus single-mindedly on practising the genuine and unfailing Dharma, fuelled by the vast motivation of bodhichitta, held within the profound and spacious view of non-duality and guided by the blessings of all the masters of our lineage.

These are the immediate thoughts I felt a strong urge to share with you right now. I will reflect further and have more to say soon.

With love & blessings,

Sogyal Rinpoche

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