

Dear .....

Letter from Acharya Richard John

20-Feb-2019

Thank you for your message. You don't really need to leave Shambhala—Shambhala has already left itself. You could go your own way, or you could do what most of us are trying to do, which is to re-ignite our path, re-build the mandala, and actually create an enlightened society. It will take a long time, but this is what we signed up for—think “Mishap Lineage.”

Two weeks ago the acharyas worked like mad on a letter to the sangha, then that open letter from the kusung made it obsolete, and now a new letter (edited by 30 acharyas) just went out, as did letters from Lady Diana, senior Kusung with a more balanced view than the other one, etc. The new acharya letter was of course also obsolete within seconds, but in a nutshell we are shifting our deepest loyalty from representing the Sakyong to protecting and teaching the dharma in a broader sense, and to serving the sangha as our utmost responsibility.

Incidentally, the widespread fixation on "all the acharyas being complicit" is an absurd fantasy. We have had so little contact with the Sakyong for many years that our particular pain has been feeling excluded, and having to represent him while hardly ever seeing him. Once a year he downloaded the next SSA to us for three days. It was brilliant teaching and very good to be in his presence, but we have not even had Q&A with him for the last four or five years. It is now apparent that our formality and separation from him has ironically become very fortunate.

My time is very tight right now (besides the storm of communications, I'm in the midst of a 9-day Mahamudra Retreat at SMC). So I will try to piece together a few thoughts here.

Most important of all: Embed yourself deeply in your practice mind, then look at the firestorm of opinions with a wiser view, as a wild display of phenomena. All of it—the pain of victims, the wretched experiences of some kusung, the very real dilemmas, mistakes and precious gifts of the Sakyong, the unsurpassable magic and power of the teachings of both of our gurus and our three lineages, the imaginary organization of Shambhala—all like the imprint of a bird in the sky.

An aside: Two charming slogans about truth just emerged here at SMC: "If it's not a paradox, it's probably not true" (Joshua Mulder) and "Everything is true for a nanosecond" (me).

Finding your practice mind is very literal: You absolutely must make time to open your heart and remember what matters. Your meditation and reading should be whatever is most meaningful to you, not anything you are "supposed" to do. I think the best at this time is to do a group retreat, but if necessary do a solitary retreat. Or go spend time in the woods.

If you don't find your practice mind, you will be trying to resolve samsaric dilemmas with a samsaric mind, which—as we've heard a million times—is utterly hopeless. It can cause a giant nation to cheerfully elect a childish egomaniac as president, and it can cause the sangha—professing to believe in basic goodness and filled with noble intention—to tear itself apart.

Nothing compares to practicing the dharma together with other committed practitioners, and being able to share our hearts and feelings within that context. I am doing that right now at SMC, where 25 of us are doing a 9-Day Mahamudra Retreat. It has provided such an excellent context for our wisdom path, and for looking into our deepest hopes, fears and aspirations—alone and together.

A Mahamudra Retreat will also happen next week at Casa Werma, from Feb 28 to March 11. If by some quirk of fate you can make the time, come on down. And there will be many other opportunities.

I wish you the very best in your life and path,  
Richard  
*Acharya Richard John*