

[Home](#)
[Contact Us](#)
[Log in](#)


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Community News Magazine

- [Home](#)
- Current Articles
 - [Community Articles \(657\)](#)
 - [Featured Stories \(638\)](#)
 - [Dharma Teachings \(248\)](#)
 - [Mandala Projects \(226\)](#)
 - [Scene and Heard \(234\)](#)
 - [Arts and Poetry \(236\)](#)
 - [Video, Audio, Photos \(137\)](#)
 - [Sakyong and Family \(237\)](#)
 - [Northeastern States \(23\)](#)
 - [Pacific Northwest \(22\)](#)
 - [International Programs \(107\)](#)
 - [Opinion Pieces \(90\)](#)
 - [Regional Announcements \(28\)](#)
 - [Regions \(24\)](#)
 - [Uncategorized \(42\)](#)
 - [VCTR Tributes \(48\)](#)
- News
 - [Shambhala News Service \(207\)](#)
- Links
 - [Shambhala Network](#)
 - [Shambhala Online](#)
 - [Shambhala Media](#)
- [Submissions](#)
- [Advertising](#)

Feb 19

Tuesday

[Letter from Lady Diana Mukpo](#) [- comment](#)

Filed under [Community Articles](#), [Opinion Pieces](#)



OFFICE OF THE DRUK SAKYONG WANGMO

Dear Members of the Shambhala Community,

I write to you today with a very heavy heart. This is an incredibly painful time for all of us. However, in many ways, I feel that the situation we find ourselves in as a community was inevitable. The deep dysfunction and unkindness at the heart of our organization has been like a festering boil that finally burst. The revelations that have come to light over the last year have been horrifying. It has been so shocking to hear how women have been harmed. The abuse of power and violation of trust that allowed this to occur is unimaginable. As an organization and as individuals, we need to do whatever we can to support not only the women who have been abused but, as we now know, the men who are victims as well.

I have been heartbroken for years as I have watched the expansive vision of the Vidyadhara becoming more and more reduced. He used to say that Shambhala was a vast umbrella that would encompass many different activities and levels of practice. Over the last two decades, our community has become fractured, and the teachings that promise the way toward manifesting an enlightened and compassionate society have become hollow words.

During my seventeen-year marriage to the Vidyadhara I saw him manifest and teach in many different ways. The priority for him was always to find the best way to connect with people. I am sure that if he were alive today, he would be using totally different forms to interact with his students than those he employed during the era in which he was teaching. During his lifetime, he created the Kalapa Court to be a vehicle for students to have access to him. The current interpretation of court is a perversion of the initial intention. The Vidyadhara's court was designed to build a bridge for his students to interact with him. The current model has built a wall.

I feel that the model of the court and of monarchy has become an obstacle, within which, as we have recently heard, there were abuses and cruelty. I have avoided the court situation for many years, having felt increasingly uncomfortable in that environment. It has been very sad for me, but I felt that I had to

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publicly about what I perceived to be a misunderstanding of the teachings. I have watched so many of the beautiful parts of our culture disappear and be replaced by what I have perceived to be a culturally bound religiosity. Like many others, I also have felt marginalized and have been subject to unhealthy power dynamics. If I had thought that speaking out publicly would have helped, I would have done so. In many respects, I now regret that I did not do so earlier. Privately, over the years, I have tried to give the Sakyong advice, but his reaction has been to avoid communication with me. I wrote to him twice last summer imploring him to take responsibility for his actions. We spoke on the phone, and I made a similar plea. Ultimately it is up to him to do what he can to repair the harm he has created.

There has been much discussion about the Sakyong's childhood. He had a very difficult time growing up. When he arrived in this country as a traumatized ten-year-old child, I, his stepmother, was nineteen. I did not have the parenting skills to help him sufficiently. I am sorry about this and wish it had been different. His father was always loving toward the Sakyong but did not give him as much attention as he needed. This too is sad, but we all have different degrees of trauma. It is the nature of life and doesn't really excuse his abuse of power and all that went along with it.

There also has been plenty of discussion about the Vidyadhara over the past year. I feel that it is my duty to be completely honest about his life. He was the most brilliant, kind, and insightful person that I have ever met. He was also ultimately unfathomable. When one examines his life, it is easy to make judgements, since his behavior was so unconventional. He was a human being and was not perfect, but he was unrelentingly kind and helped many, many people. During this difficult time, many people have spoken up about how he saved their lives. This is how they have put it, and I can connect with that completely.

In general and understandably, people – especially those who did not know him and only are hearing second-hand stories – may pass negative judgements on him. I know that there is one person who has prominently spoken up about feeling traumatized by the Vidyadhara and those around him. As his wife, the last few years of his life were very difficult for me. There is no question in my mind that alcohol had a devastating effect on both his body and mind in his latter years. My sense of this is quite different from some of the students who were close to him at that time. I have heard from a number of close students that they had positive experiences during that era, and I honor that. I think this is a time for us to honor one another's experience, rather than judging or dismissing it. Simply speaking for myself, however, this period was very difficult. Nevertheless, it does not negate the brilliance of his teachings both in his words and in the sacred environments he created as learning situations.

The Vidyadhara taught that the Shambhala teachings should be practiced along with the Buddhadharmā, and that the two must support one another. He wrote, for example: "We can plant the moon of bodhichitta in everyone's heart and the sun of the Great Eastern Sun in their heads." (Collected KA, page 194.) The Sakyong's de-emphasis and outright omission of the Kagyu and Nyingma teachings in the last 15 years has been a great detriment for our community. As much as the Vidyadhara conducted Kalapa Assemblies where he opened the Shambhala terma, at the same time he also taught Vajradhatu seminars where he transmitted the Buddhist teachings of the three yana's in a traditional manner. Not long before his death, when he was very ill, he made it a priority to give the Chakrasamvara Abhisheka to several hundred students. This was an important Buddhist ceremony empowering people to practice advanced vajrayana teachings. He felt that it was imperative that he give this transmission to senior practitioners. I truly believe that he saw the Shambhala and the Buddhist teachings as equally important.

At the first Kalapa Assembly, in 1978, there was a lot of discussion about what problems might arise from propagating the Shambhala vision. In that era, people often openly questioned the Vidyadhara and each other about any number of things. The following question was posed to him:

"As someone who has been worried about fascism and the possibility of the degeneration of Shambhala into that, could you say something that might be a safeguard against that?"

His response was: "Gentleness, meekness. Most of the warriors are meek persons. That's it. And also they are practitioners of Buddhadharmā." (Collected KA, page 148)

There are many other examples of how the Vidyadhara viewed the two aspects of his teaching as equally important and supportive of one another. I do not think it was his intention to combine these teachings into one "Shambhala Buddhism", as the Sakyong did after the Vidyadhara's death. This move has created deep and painful rifts, not only with Trungpa Rinpoche's heart students but also with respected members and teachers within the Tibetan community. So I think we need to look to the buddhadharma, as well as to the Shambhala teachings, to help us find the path forward. This does not invalidate the path taught by the Sakyong, nor the diligence of his students in applying themselves to it or the genuine experience of devotion many have had. Rather, it is a call for us to incorporate a bigger version of our relationship to the dharma.

I am writing to all of you and sharing my innermost thoughts with you today because I do believe so strongly that this community is worth fighting for. The incomparable practice of meditation and all the valuable teachings we have received have helped numerous people. Clearly, everything has to be re-evaluated and a healthy organizational structure needs to grow out of this. Over the past year, I have worried that the unfolding of events would be the destruction of Shambhala, but now I am wondering if, in fact, these disclosures might be what actually saves our precious community. I truly pray that we can get back on track and become what we profess to be, becoming a safe and nurturing home for those who seek these teachings. I don't have the answers, nor do I know how all this is going to happen. There is certainly going to be more difficulty as things unfold.

Please know that I am willing to help in any way I can. I will make myself available if anyone would like to reach out to me.

In closing, I would like to discuss the role that I have played as the copyright holder for all the Vidyadhara's written and other intellectual properties. Since his death, almost thirty-three years ago, there have been close to thirty books published, and many more could appear in the years to come. It always has been and will continue to be my intention to make his work accessible and available to all those who wish to practice and learn from his teachings. I consider this legacy as a sacred trust and will continue to work to protect and safeguard his teachings so that they will be available to people for years to come. I will do whatever is necessary to honor this commitment to all of you.

Holding you all in my heart,



Diana J. Mukpo

Contact Lisa Fiore at: fiorelr@aol.com

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Kyudo is Not a Shambhala Art



Sensei illustrates the position of the arms in kyudo: a circle, meaning "peace." article by Carolyn Kanjuro photos courtesy of Sue Kranzdorf Kyudo, "standing ... [continue](#)

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Shambhala Vision is rooted in the principle that every human being has a fundamental nature of basic goodness. This nature can be developed in daily life so that it radiates out to family, friends, community and society. According to the Shambhala tradition we are living through an age of greed and aggression. We harm ourselves, each other and our planet. The Shambhala teachings offer an antidote to this crisis. [read more...](#)

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- [Community Articles](#)
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- [Featured Stories](#)
- [Mandala Projects](#)
- [Regional Announcements](#)
- [Arts and Poetry](#)
- [Dharma Teachings](#)
- [International Programs](#)
- [Opinion Pieces](#)
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- [Shambhala News Service](#)
- [Regions](#)
- [Uncategorized Video, Audio, Photos](#)
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- [Atlantic Canada](#)
- [California, Arizona](#)
- [Great Lakes](#)
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- [Pacific Northwest](#)
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