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S H A M B H A L A
N E W Y O R K C I T Y

To the New York Shambhala Community:

A few weeks ago, on December 29, the international Shambhala Board announced their decision to join with Dechen Choling in inviting Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche to confer the Rigden Abhisheka in June 2020.

We in the Interim Governing Council of the Shambhala Center of New York do not support this decision.

A brief background: In the summer of 2018, a number of reports claimed that Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche had engaged in sexual misconduct with female students. In the wake of these reports, Shambhala International hired the Nova Scotia-based law firm Wickwire Holm to investigate the allegations. The Sakyong stepped back from his teaching and leadership activities and has largely been on retreat. On February 3 last year, the Shambhala Board released Wickwire Holm's report on its investigation, which concluded that the Sakyong had engaged in sexual misconduct on at least one occasion. Later last year, a group of 125 European students expressed a desire for the Sakyong to confer the Rigden Abhisheka, which among other things, would initiate them into an important advanced practice. Dechen Choling (the European Shambhala land center, located in France) agreed to host the abhisheka, and now the Shambhala Board has signed on.

We believe that the time has not yet come for the Sakyong to return to an active role.

On releasing the Wickwire Holm report last year, the members of the Shambhala Board wrote: "The Interim Board feels strongly that the Sakyong must take responsibility for the harm he has caused and be directly involved in the healing process. We, like the rest of the community, are awaiting his response and actions in this regard." We wholeheartedly agree with that statement, but we are still waiting. In our view, the Sakyong has not yet taken responsibility. He has issued apologies, but they have lacked specificity. One cannot truly take responsibility without being clear, direct, and specific about what one is taking responsibility for.

We appreciate that offering an abhisheka (a blessing or empowerment) in a closed setting to students who have requested it is not quite the same as a full return to teaching. And we appreciate that 125 devoted students want the

abhisheka in order to move ahead in their practice. The Sakyong, Dechen Choling, and the Shambhala Board care about them and are responding to those students' longing. But there are hundreds, if not thousands, of other devoted students who also long for a caring response from the Sakyong. They too want to move ahead in their practice but find it difficult in the midst of the turmoil in the mandala. The faith and trust of these Shambhalians is being tested, and the Board's recent decision has led some to leave the community.

We believe the Sakyong genuinely does care about us all, but in our view he hasn't demonstrated it beyond words. The Shambhala Board has promised a new Code of Conduct. Presumably, when it comes, it will prescribe steps that a person who has committed misconduct must take before a return to teaching. We believe that the Sakyong must take concrete steps to address the harm he has caused and to help the community heal. We don't see enough evidence that such steps have been taken in advance of this abhisheka. There isn't enough evidence shown that things have fundamentally changed. Without that fundamental change, this abhisheka looks like a first step in a return to business as usual. That is profoundly disappointing and disturbing.

There is a vast range of feelings and opinions about these issues. We realize that many of you may feel differently, but we feel it is important to let you know where we on the Council stand: We oppose the Shambhala Board's decision.

We all have wisdom and confusion. We don't know what will happen, or when, in the larger Shambhala mandala, but we trust in basic goodness. We trust in practice. We trust in the third jewel, the community of practitioners. We want to say to everyone who feels a connection to Shambhala (whatever that means to you): You are welcome at the New York Shambhala Center. At this time of upheaval and uncertainty, we invite your involvement, your questions, your intelligence, your sad and tender heart, your voice. You are welcome here.

We invite you to contact us at governingcouncil@shambhalanyc.org. Or—even better—**come join us at the [Community Gathering on Tuesday, January 28](#)**.

Yours in the Vision of Basic Goodness,

Joy Gutierrez

Jane Heyer

Betsy Kenyon

Vito Lesczak

Parlan McGaw

Enrique Redondo

Interim Governing Council

Shambhala Meditation Center of New York



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Shambhala Meditation Center Of New York

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