

Rigpa Vision Board email to the Rigpa Sangha - April 2018

Email subject: News from the Vision Board - April 2018

30 April 2018

Dear Sangha,

We send you this message with our warmest greetings and good wishes. It was not until Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche's whirlwind tour of Europe that we were finally able to meet as a complete Vision Board, all seven of us being present. That immensely clarifying and timely visit provided the ideal springboard for us to begin our work together.

We recognize and feel ourselves the anguish and shock, and sense of loss and pain, that our community has been through these past nine months. There have also been moments of extraordinary openness, togetherness and shared resolve, that have shone through.

We believe the willingness of our Sangha to be open, to listen to each other and to exchange, has shown the strength and big heartedness of our community. We recognize we are a diverse community with differing relationships to Sogyal Rinpoche, and other teachers, and our path. We, as a Vision Board, feel a deep and humble sense of responsibility, and will do all that we can to support this way forward for the Sangha.

Alongside all those who hold positions of responsibility in Rigpa, we are deeply concerned that anyone in our community should feel hurt or harmed in any way, and are resolved to hear any such complaints openly, respectfully, and sensitively. It is for this very reason that initiatives such as the independent investigation and **listening and healing** (in the U.S.) were initiated, which we fully support. We are also committed to looking into what we need to learn from this situation, and what we need to change, in order to provide the most safe and conducive environment for everyone in Rigpa.

Meeting with Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche

Our very first meeting was, in fact, with Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche, at the end of his tour, in London. Even though it felt as though he had covered every conceivable point and question in his talks, we didn't want to miss the opportunity to receive any further advice that he might have. He was very encouraging and supportive towards

us, which was deeply touching. We expressed our gratitude to him – the gratitude of our whole Sangha – for the bold and courageous step that he took in coming to Rigpa, to address the many challenges that we face. His clarifications about the Vajrayana path and his willingness to respond to the most thorny and confounding questions that have arisen, were extremely helpful. Of course, some of what he had to say was not comfortable for us, but there was never a doubt of his sincere best interests for the Rigpa community.

Here are some of the main points that Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche communicated to us:

- Rigpa's own teachers and instructors should take a more leading role in presenting our courses and programmes, rather than 'importing' teachers from the East. In particular, we should engage the well-trained, well-educated students who have attended the Shedra and Milinda (teacher training) programmes.
- We should develop a more innovative, meaningful and graduated way to introduce the Buddhist teachings to new people who come to Rigpa. Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche himself is brimming with ideas about this, but lacks the organization and infrastructure to implement them. Rigpa, however, is well placed to do this.
- We need to continue to cultivate a closer connection to Larung Gar (Tibet) and the highly respected Khenpos who are based there, inviting them to teach in our centres on a regular basis. The connection our two communities share with the great Khenpo Jigmey Phuntsok is a strong dharmic bond that we should honour and cultivate.
- Finally, how important it is to demonstrate the fact that Rigpa is changing, in a real and significant way.

We next look forward to hearing from one of our other principal spiritual advisors, Jetsun Khandro Rinpoche, during her visits to Rigpa centres this spring and summer. Her brilliant, incisive mind and practical wisdom will be invaluable, to complement the advice we have already received.

Meetings in London

Straight after that session with Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche, the Vision Board met for a further two days in London, at the Rigpa centre.

What was the first thing we spoke about? It was about how we wanted to work together, how we wanted to be with each other, and to support one another. We are equals, fellow practitioners on the path. We respect one another, we are not afraid to voice our opinions, and we welcome our different points of view.

We need to take better care of ourselves. The past nine months have been a fraught and anguished time, and profoundly unsettling; a responsibility and expectation has been placed on us that might subject us to even more stress and burden. Too many

key people in Rigpa have experienced burn-out in recent years – we need to understand why it happens and prevent it from repeating again. We will do our best to model a way of working that is inspired and balanced and sustainable, and will help support the Sangha to offer their time and service in the same way.

We will honour study and practice as our primary goal. We are a Dharma organization, we must support each other to evolve on our path, to continue to receive teachings, to study them, and to put them into practice. If one of our members is studying erudite philosophical texts at the Rigpa Shedra in Nepal, that's wonderful! If one of our group decides to enter intensive retreat for a month on the windswept cliffs of Dzogchen Beara, that's wonderful!

Here are the key outcomes of our meeting that we are ready to start working on:

- *The role of the Vision Board*

We understand the Vision Board's role is to safeguard the spiritual integrity of Rigpa, helping ensure all its activities remain true to its spiritual vision, values and culture. We do this by listening closely to the Sangha, working collaboratively with the rest of the organization, and by gathering the spiritual guidance of the Lamas advising Rigpa.

- *A culture of open communication*

We will further support open communication within the Sangha; what has been facilitated to date, since last summer, has been excellent. We will continue to recognize our diversity, respect our different points of view, and make an effort to understand each other. We especially need to be open and compassionate to anyone who may feel hurt or aggrieved, and not judge or shun them. We need to find healthy ways to process and reconcile conflicts in our community and bring about resolution. We are committed to supporting these efforts through the development of the Code of Conduct, Grievance Procedure, and so on.

- *Closeness to the Sangha*

The Vision Board will, as much as possible, make itself available to the Sangha, to listen to their insights, points of view, and concerns. Members of the Vision Board will attend the main national retreats and will be available – formally and informally – to be with the Sangha, especially at Lerab Ling in the summer. We have also established an email address through which any member of the Rigpa community can contact us.

- *Rigpa's path of study and practice*

Rigpa's path of study and practice is our foremost focus. What do we need to learn from the past year? What are the bigger lessons that we and other Tibetan Buddhist organizations need to take on board in light of the challenges that have come up? How can Rigpa continue to balance being simultaneously an open, public Buddhist organization, and an authentic vehicle for the Vajrayana? The Vision Board pledges to support the Clear Path group and our teachers and instructors in looking at these questions, and the development of our educational programmes. In the same vein, we wish to recognize and empower Rigpa's own

teachers and instructors, through the formation of a Teachers Faculty. This would include clear titles and designations, and systems of supervision and support. Our learned teachers and scholars, and experienced practitioners, need more recognition and support.

- *Unity in the organization*

The Vision Board fully supports the effort to federate the Rigpa organization into an intelligent structure that facilitates genuine collaboration. Rigpa spans many different countries and cultures, and includes national organizations as well as major city and retreat centres. A shared vision, mutual concern for our whole mandala, and willingness to find common agreements, are essential for our long-term future. The Vision Board itself will be integrated into the governance structure of this new federation.

- *Working in a healthy and sustainable way*

As mentioned before, we consider it vital that Rigpa teachers, directors, staff and volunteers, find a way to offer their dedication and service in a way that is sustainable in the long-term. We will make this a topic of discussion with our Rigpa colleagues in the coming months.

- *Renewing the board*

We may be the first members of the Vision Board, but we consider it very important that the board is renewed and that our roles are not permanent. There are many, many people within the Sangha who can and should contribute to Rigpa by being a part of this board. We will especially look towards the younger generation to apprentice into vision-leading roles. The renewal of our board will be included in our charter that will be confirmed at our next meeting.

Visit to Sogyal Rinpoche

Following the meetings in London, five members of the Vision Board went to visit Sogyal Rinpoche on his retreat, to enquire about his health and inform him about the Sangha and how we plan to function as a Vision Board. Rinpoche was appreciative of our efforts and said that he prayed each day for unity and healing in the Sangha. While Rinpoche's health continues to be frail, we are reassured of the treatment that he is receiving, and the conditions for his rest and retreat.

Renewing Rigpa's vision

We realize, acutely, that Rigpa needs to renew its vision. And rightly, there is expectation that the Vision Board should lead this process.

Several threads of consultation and enquiry will need to come together in order for us to build this picture, therefore we ask for your patience. The process cannot be hurried if we wish the best possible outcome – a well-considered, complete and truly integrated vision.

What do we need to bring together?

- Guidance from our main spiritual advisors (Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche, Jetsun Khandro Rinpoche and Khenchen Namdrol), as well as other progressive, experienced Buddhist teachers, such as Dzogchen Ponlop Rinpoche.
- Input from the Sangha – your expressed wishes and aspirations, calls for change, wisdom and insight. At our next meeting we will develop a plan for how this can best happen.
- The result and recommendations arising from the independent investigation, which we hope will be delivered by the summer;
- The finalized code of conduct that is currently undergoing extensive consultation and revision.

Final thoughts

We feel it important to recognize that we, as a Sangha, still need time to heal and process the upheavals that we have been through. As mentioned earlier, we need to appreciate and be sensitive to our diversity. Rigpa has been many things to many different people. Some of us remain deeply devoted to Sogyal Rinpoche and will continue to follow his teachings. Some of us are uncertain about our relationship and are still in a process of reflection and uncertainty. Some of us relate to Rigpa as a place where we receive teachings from multiple teachers. It is important that Rigpa remains a home to all, open to all, and as inclusive as possible.

We will do our best to support the development of a renewed vision, in recognition of this. The vision will remain true to Sogyal Rinpoche's original intention of offering a clear and authentic path to enlightenment for the modern world. When might this picture come to light? The earliest would be autumn, it may however take a little longer, so please do bear with us.

We will, of course, continue to remain in touch with you through the coming months to share our progress. This will include:

- the charter for the Vision Board;
- the process by which you can give input to the forward vision of Rigpa;
- what we have learned from the past year.

We next plan to meet in Berlin, at the end of May, when all seven of us will again be present.

Thank you! We look forward to your further feedback and comment.

With love and best wishes,

The Vision Board.

Valerie Baker, Seth Dye, Patrick Gaffney, Mauro De March, Verena Pfeiffer, Philip Philippou, Vinciane Rycroft

<http://www.rigpa.org/rigpa-vision-board>