

Rigpa's vision

Introduction

It is over one year since the Rigpa Vision Board was formed following the retirement of Sogyal Rinpoche as spiritual director of Rigpa. When we first set out in these uncharted waters, one of the commitments we made was to clarify and reaffirm Rigpa's vision as we move forward.

Over the last year, the Vision Board spoke with many people in our community as we have gone through this process of transition together. As a sangha, we have also received so much advice and support from the great teachers of our tradition such as Dzongsar Khyentse Rinpoche, Jetsün Khandro Rinpoche, Khenchen Namdrol Rinpoche, and others. We have learned and continue to learn so much.

This document is not yet a vision statement, it is the outcome of a process with our community to clarify the many questions that have arisen on who we are now.

One thing that stands out is the commitment, love, wisdom and openness among the sangha. We are bonded by our friendship with one another, as well as our love of the Buddha's teachings, the lineage we follow together, and the teachings and the practices that have transformed our lives. For many of us, this has kept us determined to continue together as a Dharma community to uphold the Dharma in the West. We all have our own backgrounds, qualities and unique ways of seeing, as well our personal connection with the path, and yet the vision of Rigpa is something we feel confident that we can uphold together, united in all our diversity.

We wish here to reaffirm the unchanging purpose of Rigpa as a vehicle for the Nyingma and Dzogchen lineage, as well as to highlight all that we have learned in moving forward as a Dharma community. One thing is clear: holding Rigpa’s vision is not the responsibility of a handful of people, it is something we collectively embody and honour.

It is also clear that the Rigpa leadership has made mistakes that we need to learn from. This includes not hearing, supporting or guiding some of our students appropriately. We are truly sorry for the hurt this has caused, and feel a strong commitment to making deep changes and ensuring that we do not repeat these mistakes again under any circumstances.

Here is the vision of Rigpa as we have come to understand it from our masters and from the collective wisdom of our sangha:

Rigpa’s Vision as a Vehicle of the Nyingma and Dzogchen Lineage

Rigpa is a Tibetan word, which means pristine, pure awareness. It signifies the unchanging awakened mind that Buddha recognized upon his enlightenment and which he realized is the inherent nature of every single sentient being.

Discovering and realising this pristine, pure awareness, the innermost nature of the mind—this is what Rigpa wishes to make possible for everyone.

The lineage

Rigpa’s lineage is the Nyingma (“Ancient”) lineage, traced back to the extraordinary figure of Padmasambhava who brought Buddhism to Tibet in the eighth century, and especially the ‘Heart Essence’ teachings of the Great Perfection. In particular, we follow

the cycle of teachings and practice of the Longchen Nyingtik, along with practices from the traditions of Lerab Lingpa, Dudjom Tersar, and others.

Rigpa as an organization was founded by Sogyal Rinpoche, a student and master of this Dzogchen lineage, following the vision and aspirations of his masters, including Jamyang Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö, Dudjom Rinpoche, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche and Nyoshul Khenpo. It has been dedicated to translating and sharing this unique body of teachings with anyone who has sincere interest and devotion to this path, in a way that is accessible to the modern mind.

Over the last 40 years, many great lineage masters have advised Rigpa, and guided the study and practice of Rigpa students, giving transmissions and the highest teachings. Rigpa is the home of these great masters and our community continues to be guided by the great teachers of the Nyingma lineage, as well as the new generation of trainee Western teachers and instructors from Rigpa.

Rimé

Rigpa upholds the non-sectarian, open-minded tradition of Rimé, as exemplified in Tibet by Jamyang Khyentse Wangpo, Jamgon Kongtrul Lodrö Thaye and Jamyang Khyentse Chökyi Lodrö, who emphasized the importance of respect for all schools of Tibetan Buddhism, and for all religious traditions.

The essence of Rimé is to show openness, while being clear that when it comes to our own practice, we embody the unique style and methods of our tradition.

We aspire to apply this spirit to everything we do, by inviting masters from all traditions and lineages to enrich our understanding of the Buddhadharma, while at the same time offering clear guidance and support for following our practice lineages.

Path

Rigpa offers a complete and authentic path of Buddhist study and practice, both for those who aspire to follow it in its entirety, and for anyone who wishes to apply the compassion and practical wisdom of the Buddha's teachings in their lives.

We have many committed Vajrayana and Dzogchen students who wish to accomplish these teachings in this lifetime. Equally, as the *Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* has shown, many people wish to gain a deep understanding of the mind, and how this wisdom can guide them in all aspects of life and at the moment of death.

In action and for the world

Rigpa also has a unique legacy of bringing wisdom and compassion into activity, and to show how all levels of Buddhist view and practice can be integrated into everyday life, in an immediate, dynamic and evolving way. This body of teachings and advice will continue to be shared to guide and shape Rigpa's culture and values.

We are a vehicle for bringing wisdom and compassion to the wider world, in the spirit of universal responsibility, dialogue and social engagement, embodied and championed by His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

How the vision is upheld

It is clear to us that the way forward for Rigpa is to be vision-led. It was always Sogyal Rinpoche's intention and long-term vision that Rigpa would be held and led by a body of students who understood and collectively embodied the depth of Rigpa's vision.

Rigpa must be guided by those who are dedicated to upholding our unique lineage. This means that all of us, Rigpa's students, instructors and practitioners, are part of upholding Rigpa. Sogyal Rinpoche has said many times, that Rigpa is the manifestation of his vision and aspirations, and part of his legacy. It has always been his wish that we all continue his work and activity.

Rigpa as a Dharma Community Growing and Learning

All the lamas and teachers we have met since Sogyal Rinpoche's retirement have pointed out that Rigpa has played, and continues to play, a key role in the evolution of bringing the teachings of the Buddha to modern Western society and culture. More than ever, this process of translation and transmission demands heartfelt effort, open-mindedness, creativity and patience. As challenging as it may be at times, it is only through learning from our mistakes that collectively we are discovering the most appropriate, effective and genuine approach to carry on this lineage of study and practice in our present day.

The last two years in particular have been a wake-up call, demanding more than ever that we step back, listen, and look deeply at what it is we need to learn and change, both individually and as an organization.

Clarifying the connection between the student and the teacher

One of the first steps we have taken together as a sangha is to establish the [Code of Conduct](#) and [Shared Values and Guidelines for the Rigpa Sangha](#), which include a clear framework for healthy communication and boundaries between student and teacher. This is a very important step for Rigpa because in the lineages of Vajrayana and Dzogchen, the special emphasis on the connection between student and teacher can all too easily be misunderstood or misused.

In addition to setting clear boundaries, we have learned the importance of emphasizing that the decision to practise Vajrayana or Dzogchen with the guidance of a teacher is a personal choice. It is not a condition for being part of the Rigpa community. What is more, it has become clear that it is the responsibility of the teacher to adequately prepare the student for the Vajrayana path. This is something that the student must consciously decide to embark upon through proper preparation and a formal request.

Recognizing the diversity and different needs of our community

As a Dharma community we must always respect and value our diversity, not just in terms of our personalities and views, but with respect to the fact that we each have our own individual relationship to the path. We wish to provide students with an environment where they can relate to and engage with their path according to their level and needs, without judgement or bias.

It is our responsibility, as sangha, to offer encouragement, support and help to one another on the path, to establish a culture of open dialogue and critical analysis in the true spirit of the Buddha, and to make sure that no one ends up in a situation in which they feel unprepared or isolated.

The student-teacher relationship is a personal choice

The student-teacher relationship is something very personal and is said to continue beyond this life. Rigpa is, and will continue to be, a place where Sogyal Rinpoche's teachings can be studied and practised, and where one can follow the graduated path of study and practice that he taught according to our lineage.

At the same time, there is no assumption that students in Rigpa are students of Sogyal Rinpoche. What unites our sangha is the lineage of teachings that we practise, and our respect and commitment to the vision of the masters who have brought it to us.

Embodying the teachings

For many years, we recognize that there has been a culture in Rigpa of 'racing to the top', trying to 'get' to the Dzogchen teachings as fast as we can. Our spiritual advisors have reminded us of the importance of offering a path that ensures there is a full and thorough understanding of the key principles of the Buddhadharma, with clear guidance at each level on study, based on classical texts, and on practice.

The masters have given us profound and thorough instructions, transmissions and teachings, and we are so grateful to them. What we have received as Rigpa students is very precious and now is the time for each one of us to study, review and reflect on what we have understood and need to further contemplate and practise.

It is our heartfelt wish that we truly embody these precious and transformative teachings and become servants of peace in the spirit of *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*.

Conclusion

Over the last two years we have been through so much together, and we continue to learn from it. As daunting as it may seem for us personally and as a community going forward, we must remember that this is what transmitting the Dharma actually entails in its rawest form. In the more than 2,500 years that the Buddha's teachings have been transmitted from one culture to the next, there have always been obstacles, mistakes and challenges.

We have made mistakes, and no doubt many more challenges are yet to be faced. What is important as Dharma practitioners is what we do with mistakes and challenges, how we can use them as the fuel for awakening and transforming our minds. Rather than blame or judge or run away from difficulties, the teachings encourage us always to stay open, to investigate, to look within, and to act with compassion and wisdom.

As difficult—and, at times, distressing—it has been for us, the teachers keep reminding us that the truth of the teachings and their blessing remains unchanged. Now, more than ever, we have the opportunity to put this truth to the test in our minds and hearts and embody the Dharma in our being. No one else can do it for us.

The immense contribution of the teachings given in Rigpa over the last 40 years is undeniable—it has changed, transformed, inspired thousands, if not millions of people. This jewel of Dharma and this priceless lineage of Dzogchen is in our hands, for us and for the world.

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With thanks to all those who took part in this process!