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VAJRA REGENT ÖSEL TENDZIN

SHAMBHALA: THE SACRED PATH OF THE WARRIOR

The Shambhala teachings were introduced in the West by the Vidyadhara, Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche, the Eleventh Trungpa Tülku, who fled Tibet during the Communist takeover in 1959. Shortly after that he came to the West, and for the next several years he taught the traditional path of Buddhism in which he was trained. Beginning in 1975, he introduced a body of teachings which we now know as the wisdom of Shambhala, which had never before been introduced in the West, or for that matter, taught in the English language. Prior to this time, these teachings had been known only to those initiated into the highest tantric tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, known as the *Kalachakra*. Kalachakra means *the wheel of time*, and it teaches the realization of the nature of existence, that is to say, the nature of past, present, and future. While the Shambhala teachings taught by Trungpa Rinpoche bear similarities to the Kalachakra, they are not the same. The path of Shambhala is entirely separate and unique in that it transcends dependence on any particular spiritual tradition.

According to the history, the kingdom of Shambhala was said to exist somewhere north of the Himalayan range in the area between Russia and Tibet. It is said that this kingdom can be found only by those who know the way, and to know the way one has to have a particular kind of wisdom. So in one way the history of Shambhala is a myth, and in another way it is an actual reality in the form of a body of teachings. Shambhala is continually existent, but it can only be perceived by those whose view is pure. It is further said that the kingdom of Shambhala was founded on the principles of harmony and warriorship. Everyone who lived

there had a notion of their own basic goodness, and acted with fearlessness, intelligence, and gentleness. The first ruler of Shambhala, King Dawa Sangpo, had heard of the Buddha Shakyamuni and his teachings and invited him to visit Shambhala to teach the dharma. The Buddha went to Shambhala, and there in the capital city of Kalapa he taught the Kalachakra tantra, which is how that particular teaching was transmitted to human beings. So because of the mutual appreciation of King Dawa Sangpo and the Buddha, a meeting point occurred between the wisdom of Shambhala and the Buddhist teachings.

In the same way that it happened historically, Trungpa Rinpoche touched two things together: his Buddhist training and the wisdom of Shambhala. At first, when Trungpa Rinpoche introduced the Shambhala teachings to his students, it was very unsettling for us. For centuries, Buddhists have been teaching their doctrine, which is very precise and orderly and follows a specific progression. The students who had become accustomed to the Buddhist teachings found the Shambhala teachings quite challenging. Because the Shambhala teachings have nothing to do with religion and in some way nothing to do with doctrine, they are difficult to grasp in a conventional way. When Trungpa Rinpoche introduced the Shambhala teachings, they were like a sudden, brilliant flash of light. They had nothing to do with the past, and they did not project anything particular in the future. They had to do with *now*. To begin with, we were amazed and shocked that a whole body of teaching like this could exist, and that we had no knowledge of it. That shock was good for us, because we soon realized that we could not rest on our so-called knowledge or experience, but we had to open our minds to the very basic, ordinary truth of Shambhala.

The Shambhala teachings could be called secular dharma. *Dharma* is a Sanskrit word meaning *teaching*, or *way*, or *things as they are*. The Shambhala teachings speak the language of ordinary life, of things as they are in ordinary situations. These teachings are not meant to be used to transcend this life in order to reach some higher goal. They are meant to refine and perfect this life so that everything in it, everything that we as human beings recognize as being part of our life, becomes completely illuminated, completely perfect.

Trungpa Rinpoche's wisdom was vast. He had a gift of tuning into wisdom and expressing it in language accessible to everyone; and language is the key to understanding the Shambhala teachings. Language has to do with how we exist together in society as human beings and how we relate to each other and to the things around us—our parents, to our

governments, our clothing, our supermarket. All of that has to do with language, or communication.

The Shambhala teachings speak in particular about sacredness. *Sacred* is a fantastic word; just saying it creates a certain atmosphere. However, if sacredness is misunderstood, it is seen as a dream-like existence or angelic quality; or, negatively, merely some kind of hocus-pocus. Sacred in the Shambhala sense means that every moment of existence we experience is in itself innately good, and that goodness cannot be compromised, manipulated, or distorted. Every single atom of our existence is sacred because it is basically and primordially good. *Good* does not mean good as opposed to bad. Good means primordial, before we even thought of it; you might say that good is prehistoric, or pre-thought. According to the Shambhala teachings, that primordial quality of goodness is the essence of all experience and of all existence as we know it. This primordial goodness is the very basic stuff of existence, and therefore its manifestation is sacred. What is sacred about your hair? What is sacred about your teeth, your clothes, or your apartment? What is sacred about your toothbrush, your comb? What is sacred about the birthday card your mother sent you? What is sacred about the endless talk on television? What is sacred about the collapse of the stock market? Sacredness has to do with living life as an expression, a manifestation of primordial goodness.

The quality of sacredness does not exist in any particular thing. If that were the case, we would try to keep sacred things on one side and everything else on the other. As a rule, if we take a religious view, we think that the world is not that sacred. We think that sacredness refers to some other quality, some other world, or some other life that should be attained. Even the Buddhist teachings speak about rebirth and realms of existence; but the Shambhala teachings emphasize this life. However, the emphasis is not on taking this life to be so important that we lose our sense of humor, but on understanding that everything that occurs in our life—in our body, speech, and mind, in our relationships—is in its own nature sacred.

In the Shambhala teachings, sacredness is connected with the principle of warriorship. Otherwise, goodness, or sacredness, has no teeth or claws. The truth is that basic goodness has teeth and claws, but those teeth and claws are not necessarily there to carve out survival, or to protect goodness from evil, or to frighten evil, which is the enemy. The teeth and

claws of basic goodness simply express the fact that goodness is primordial and therefore manifests as total confidence. *Primordial* means having no particular origin, having no particular reason to be; it just is. So that particular kind of teeth and claws are the mark of warriorship: of how to be without fear, how to be, naturally and easily.

Sacredness is the experience of hard and soft at the same time. Softness is the underbelly of experience. We're always soft, all of us, always on the verge of collapse or extinction. We are always on the brink of losing it, because we really don't have a strategy. No matter how much we educate ourselves in the ways of the world or how much we believe that our course is set, in the moment, we have no strategy. We simply feel a softness and gentleness that is always underneath our occasionally boisterous attitude about who we are. Everyone feels that. I have never met a person, no matter how hard-nosed and tough they may seem, who doesn't express some tenderness and softness. However, because we think that we should be strong and conquer this world, if we press that point, if we push that soft underbelly too much, it tightens up and stiffens, and the defenses begin to appear. The world and the life that we live are full of so many pitfalls, so many traps, so many ways of causing us to feel disappointed, to feel that we are not as good as we could be, not as strong as we should be, not as bright as we would like to be. We have to trust ourselves more than that so that our whole being, our whole life is not based on piling up credentials and descriptions of ourselves in order to face the world. Real strength does not depend on artificial analysis, artificial logic, or any kind of psychological fortification. All of that will disappear in a moment when we are faced with a shocking situation, a radical change in our life. It can happen in the time it takes to snap our fingers—in a moment our notion of defending ourselves and being strong evaporates. However, we can learn to trust the goodness that is without defense and without strategy.

The tradition of warriorship and the principle of intrinsic goodness, values which have been talked about for thousands of years, are addressed in the Shambhala teachings. That is why the Shambhala teachings are timeless. The Shambhala teachings are like a wax museum coming to life in the sense that they are not presenting anything new. In reality, there is no such thing as a totally new teaching. We are simply uncovering the language that teaches the gentleness, dignity, and grace which are common to all human beings. This language does not speak about a particular point when it all began, or about a moment when we reach our

final destination. The Shambhala teachings speak to this very moment, which we call *nowness*, and to the quality of our existence that is in tune with or synchronized with our environment. When we are synchronized in our body and mind, we become synchronized with each other. As our bodies move through space, they move with a grace and gentleness that is almost like a dance—in fact, it is a dance. When we speak to each other, when we work with each other, when we think about each other, it is an expression of dignity, gentleness, and fearlessness, and out of that human society arises as all of our bodies moving through space, creating a tremendous, harmonious dance.

Having studied and practiced these teachings myself, it seems to me that, apart from laziness and doubt, there is no particular reason why we cannot wake up and realize that this very life is the ground of sacredness and the expression of dignity, and that our relationships with others are the expression of confidence. It is necessary for us to take an entirely new attitude, or maybe an entirely old attitude. We always look for a spark of brilliance in our life, and if one appears, we pursue it. However, because we have accustomed ourselves to living in a small way, we only pursue it for a little while, and then we find it more comfortable to retract, to become less than a warrior. Especially in this age, we have to make an effort to open our minds, our hearts, and our bodies to the possibility, however remote it may seem, that there is a harmonious way of being and that we can accomplish such a thing. At the same time, we have to be careful not to create a self-styled fantasy.

That is why it is necessary to have discipline. In the way of Shambhala, discipline is a means of connecting with our body and mind and environment, and therefore it is very good and useful. Trungpa Rinpoche borrowed the discipline of meditation practice from the Buddhist tradition, because that discipline transcends any particular reference point. Meditation is the simple practice of sitting and being with ourselves. Meditation involves using what we have, and so does not create further stories and further confusion. We have a body, and we can use that body in a very simple way by putting it in an ordinary place, a simple place, and allowing it to relax and be there, and for a time we can let go of the need to do anything. Meditation does not depend on an external deity or a visualized object; it doesn't require anything other than being with ourselves. It is the simplest and most direct way to contact the primordial goodness which has no origin.

In reality, we don't need any method in order to catch our own awareness or to know that we are good. However, these are very difficult times. We view the world as something that we possess or have dominion over, and we expect so much and complain so much. Therefore, it's necessary to have a method that allows this mask to fall away. According to Trungpa Rinpoche, and according to my own experience, meditation is the best way of doing that, especially in the beginning. Then it becomes a matter of allowing your own intelligence to come forward.

This particular technique is sometimes accused of being nihilistic. People have asked, "Why would you just sit and do nothing when the world needs our help so badly? Isn't that a waste?" Perhaps for a while we could relieve the world of some of its burden. But when we practice the discipline of meditation, we begin to see that there is no reason to be rushing to our death. Rather, there is a way to just be, a way to learn how to work with time and space and synchronize our body and mind. We have the intelligence to know how to do this, and that intelligence has no particular origin. It is simply there, all the time. It is basically what it is, which is good.

Discipline takes effort; it can't merely be adopted as a philosophy of good intentions, where we think, "I'm basically good; things are as they are; and I can just enjoy my life." We know from our experience that even with the best intentions we can fall into depression or degraded behavior. The only really useful approach is to develop a discipline that undercuts those habitual patterns. If we don't have the discipline to do that, we can talk and talk about goodness and warriorship and it won't make any difference. As soon as we encounter a situation that is not to our liking, or as soon as we lose energy and grow tired, we fall prey to degraded thinking. In a very short time we find ourselves involved in a series of thoughts which become another series of thoughts which become a series of actions. Very rapidly, those actions cause us to completely forget the spaciousness and openness of discipline. So the way to proceed is by practicing the discipline of putting ourselves in a situation that is not compromised by our usual activity.

We have to know how to continually spark ourselves. We can do that by learning to appreciate the ordinariness of our experience. Whatever occurs in our experience doesn't have to be made into something else. We can appreciate every aspect of experience, whether we regard it as good or bad, happy or sad. But we have to tune our mind in a

certain way: We have to be able to be very, very still, and be able to really appreciate. To appreciate, we can't move fast. If we move fast and jump to conclusions, we miss the bigger picture. There is always more than we think, even though on the surface it may not seem that way. The only way to do that is to practice meditation, to slow down long enough to see beyond our own opinion about who we are. Otherwise, it's not easy to be friendly with ourselves.

It is also important to practice a discipline that is not based on the promise of a result. However, to simply sit without the promise of a result makes most of us a little crazy because we're so conditioned to thinking that whatever arises in our mind should be immediately followed by something else. If it's eggs, it must be bacon. If it's bacon, it must be toast. If it's toast, it must be orange juice. If it's orange juice, it must be what? Indigestion. We are so conditioned to the flow of habits that even the idea of a discipline with no promise is unnerving. If we have any confidence at all, if we have any sense of who we are, we should investigate what it's like simply to be with ourselves, by ourselves, for a short period of time. That is meditation. When we begin to see that we don't have to rush to our own death, we can look at our life and appreciate it, appreciate our relatives, appreciate our friends and enemies, appreciate our environment. Appreciation is the language of sacredness, and we begin to see, hear, smell, taste, and touch sacredness. We become aware of every moment and every thought, so aware that we can feel the dance of our body moving through space, and we become appreciative of others and of their pain and confusion. Then we begin to think that our life can be of benefit to others.

These Shambhala teachings are meant to be useful right now. They are not meant to undo or rearrange the past, and they are not meant for the future. It is possible to lead such a life, and in such a way that when we die we leave something behind which is good—not a monument nor an autobiography nor a shopping center, but a legacy that people can tune into and that can be felt in the environment for a long time. That legacy is the lineage of warriorship, the lineage of hard and soft at the same time, the lineage that appreciates everything as it is in its sacred quality.

The Dorje Dradül, Trungpa Rinpoche, introduced these Shambhala teachings, and I worked closely with him to bring about the vehicle for these teachings, which is the Shambhala Training program. Shambhala Training is a program of stages that people like us

can do. They are based on recognizing basic goodness, which is primordial and unconditional; seeing the world as sacred; and stabilizing that vision through the path of the warrior. In the Shambhala tradition, a warrior is not one who makes war; a Shambhala warrior is one who has the courage to be exactly who he or she is. That kind of warriorship is an ancient ideal, not the product of some latest trend. The lineage of warriorship is like a very fine silk thread passed continuously from generation to generation. It is very fine and very thin, but it's very tough and doesn't break.

QUESTION: Could you say a bit more about the actual connection between Shambhala and Buddhism? They seem to be presented as quite distinct, and yet they both use the practice of meditation.

VAJRA REGENT: Trungpa Rinpoche touched two things together: his Buddhist training and the Shambhala teachings. In my experience, if one follows the path of Shambhala, it is entirely separate and not dependent on any theology. The process of using meditation practice, I think, is purely practical, especially in the present time.

QUESTION: Buddhism is a very old tradition with a track record of realized teachers. Who are the realized teachers in Shambhala?

VR: The qualities of gentleness, confidence, and fearlessness are common to all of us. We call those who have realized those qualities Shambhala warriors.

Q: Could we say that those qualities are always present and available, and Chögyam Trungpa has brought them forth in a body of teaching?

VR: That's right. When the Shambhala teachings are authentically presented, more people can wake up to them. Over the centuries there have been individuals who have exhibited the qualities of warriorship and so have been a delight to the world, but their lives, like all others, don't last. Their particular star burns out and it's gone, and people forget. We all forget. The point of these teachings is to bring out those qualities in everyone, not only in the great ones. *We* are the great ones. I think that's the point: it's not positive thinking, which doesn't go anywhere; it is positive *being*.

QUESTION: I think a warrior would put him or herself in fearful situations in order to overcome them. Would you agree that one should not avoid something because it is fearful or uncomfortable?

VR: We all spend a lot of time trying to make our life comfortable. Nevertheless, there are moments when it just doesn't work. Then we panic and try to rely on something: an idea, a spiritual tradition, or a memory of what our grandfather or our ancestors did; or we read a poem or hang a slogan on a wall; all of those things. That may be well and good, but when it comes right down to it, it's simply you and your world. We don't necessarily have to put ourselves in situations that are demanding; if we are open to them, they will be there. What is more important is not to continue trying to create further diversions in order to avoid reality.

Q: Sometimes certain situations keep coming up, and each time they can be fearful and a challenge. I have the feeling that if I faced them they wouldn't keep coming back.

VR: We all know who we are and what scares us. However, we can't use these teachings to make ourselves secure so that when that fear comes up we know how to conquer it. It's not a matter of waiting for the monster to arise and confronting it, doing battle with the enemy. We have to take a sacred view, knowing that whatever arises in our life, whether it's good or bad, whether it's something we habitually avoid or habitually confront, there is no enemy as such. There is simply the experience of good and bad, pleasure and pain, happy and sad. If we're honest, we can't say we know precisely what will happen next. We never know what people are going to do or say or what kind of situation we're going to find ourselves in. It might be shocking, or it might put us to asleep. Sometimes we're disappointed, or a peaceful experience becomes aggressive and we're faced with a further challenge. Warriorship is not about confronting what is uncomfortable, but about being in the state of nowness. In that state of nowness, we take all experiences as our own meal, so to speak, as what we have to eat. We live on the very basic stuff of our existence. That is much more challenging.

QUESTION: You spoke about illuminating what is good, and about good as opposed to bad, and you said that everything in life is sacred and therefore nothing is bad. Yet in this life there are things that are not as positive as they should be.

VR: Everything is sacred does not mean that nothing is bad; there are definitely things that are degraded. At the same time, the notions of pro and con are deceptions. On the one hand, we're constantly battling between right and wrong, good and bad. On the other hand, we can adopt an idealistic philosophy so that we don't have to battle. Neither of those is accurate. The reality is that what becomes degraded and what becomes uplifted is simply the

difference between falling asleep and being awake. Falling asleep means falling asleep to our dignity; being awake means being awake to our dignity. Every moment is separate and distinct, and we can approach every moment with a fresh mind. Why don't we know that? It's not that difficult. No one needs a morality lesson to know what that is. In fact, from the Shambhala point of view, dogs and cats know that. We're stuck with a world so chock-full of ideas that they make the whole environment kind of thick. Because we have lost touch with our own warrior quality, we produce more and more ideas, more and more things, more and more cluttering of space, and then there is nowhere to go except pro and con or some silly universalism, neither of which works. The remedy is the slogan of Shambhala Training, "Living in the Challenge," which means that every moment is fresh and new, without any particular reference, and we can look at it with a mind of total appreciation for what it is.

QUESTION: I'm interested in how the Shambhala teachings apply to social activism.

VR: Social action, meaning the principle of enlightened society, is the real fruition of Shambhala Training and the goal of the Shambhala teachings altogether. Enlightened society is based on natural hierarchy, which means that there is a natural way to be in the world. That understanding makes society much more workable. What we have now is totally confused. What should one be? Who or what is there to emulate? There isn't much in the way of role models, individually or collectively. In the West, we are familiar with the political philosophy of democracy, the rule of the people. Democratic social action is based on the notion that people are equal in intelligence, and when you trust in the intelligence of the people, the action will be enlightened. We are also familiar with communist philosophy, which believes that the collective consciousness is the measure of social action, so one should rely on collective rather than individual intelligence. We've also seen monarchy, in which the view is that one trusts or relies on the intelligence in the relationship between the ruler and the subjects.

Shambhala Training is more aligned with the notion of monarchy, not in the sense of the divine right of kings, but in the sense of a connection between heaven and earth through the principle of man, the Shambhala warrior. The principles of heaven, earth, and man are ancient ideas that transcend relative political philosophies. Earth is solidness and all that is below, anchored in the earth. Heaven is the sky, openness, and all that is above—the higher principles. Man is the connection between the two. In this case, man includes the warrior

ruler, the warrior subjects, and everyone who aspires to be a warrior. The realized Shambhala warrior connects heaven and earth, and therefore manifests harmony in body and mind.

Some people say that this is the most enlightened time; but according to the Shambhala tradition, this is the waning time, when things become darker. These days, the world is not that decent. That is one of the reasons why these teachings have come about. There have been many types of teaching in the world—religious, philosophical, psychological—mostly aimed at awakening people to their own basic goodness. When those teachings are based on conditioned logic or a momentary dream, they are unable to create an atmosphere in which people can wake up to their basic nature.

However, it is possible to effect a change that will in turn affect the future. We have to go beyond our own personal happiness, which is annoying; no one wants to do that. “I would like to have something that works now. If it works now, then I’m interested. I’ll sign up.” We’ve had so much of that nonsense. At this point we should know that none of that works. We can’t prolong a comfortable life by taking special supplements or reading special books or mumbling special prayers or anything like that. It takes more than that. It takes one hundred percent dedication to moment-to-moment awareness. That’s why the Shambhala teachings came about here, and why Trungpa Rinpoche introduced them. It’s precisely because we’re at a point in the history of this particular planet where those warriors are missing. Those people who demonstrate what is good and solid in the world, what is brilliant and compassionate in the world, are not with us right now. That means we have to do it ourselves.

Q: Do you see this as laying the groundwork for that to emerge?

VR: I think that’s the point. However, I don’t expect that because of the Shambhala teachings, the world is going to change dramatically in the next few years. We have to take a broader view and look at a much longer time frame. At the same time, if we don’t act now, then that view becomes indistinct, and we can’t see it properly.

QUESTION: You said that we should live in the moment without reference. I assume you mean that our inner goodness would make us decide to live moment to moment in the right way. When making a better world or society, do we not need reference points from the past by which to judge our actions?

VR: Yes, we do. Those reference points from the past are extremely important, not to store up as memories, but to understand in terms of the present moment. We confuse reference to the past with the adoration of memories. Obviously, the past is gone, and we can't bring it back. On the other hand, the past has a cumulative effect on our present awareness. If people hadn't worked so hard to make this building, we wouldn't be sitting in it and talking about these things. Someone in the past made all of the systems we use—heating, traffic lights, flush toilets. People worked hard to figure out how to do all of those things. We should venerate the effort of those who wanted to make life better for the people who came after them. That is a good reference point, because that's what life is made of.

QUESTION: The Shambhala teachings as well as Buddhism talk about the notion of enlightenment. Are those different ideas or are they the same?

VR: I think that any state of being that is primordially good and without made-up nonsense is basically the same. That applies to any endeavor, anything that is purely what it is. It's so good and so direct, and it is what it is. When you come into contact with it, it opens up your perception, whether it's a person or a thing or a time. Today, the rain broke and the clouds opened up, and we could see the mountains. Here it is! It is so good and real, just as it is. We don't have to be enlightened to appreciate that.

Thank you for your patience and generosity in coming here and listening to this talk and engaging in this discussion. I am working continually to perfect my understanding of these teachings, and tonight I have been sharing with you the journey of my teacher, my journey, and the journey of all those who have practiced the path of warriorship. I hope that what we have discussed has shed some light on the intelligence that we all possess and that it can be useful to you. I wish you great success in your life. I hope you will strive to exhibit those qualities of warriorship that are so worthwhile and so needed in this world. I have great faith that all of you can do so. Thank you very much.