

Dear Rinpoche

We are students of Tibetan Buddhism concerned by revelations in the past year that some lamas have harmed their students (most notably, the abuse of students by Sogyal Rinpoche of Rigpa and Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche of Shambhala). We find it highly problematic that so few Tibetan lamas have spoken out against such behaviour. We are writing now to ask you to please clarify your position regarding the kind of unethical and harmful behaviours committed by Sogyal Lakar/Rinpoche of Rigpa. It is our hope that we will gain sufficient replies to reassure students that Tibetan Buddhism is a religion that never strays from its fundamental principle of non-harming and maintains the highest ethical standards

In July 2017, eight former, senior Rigpa students wrote a letter to Sogyal Lakar/Rinpoche detailing his abusive treatment of them and other students. We have enclosed a Tibetan translation of this letter so you can be clear on the details of the harm he caused, the reason why the students spoke up, and how Sogyal's abusive behaviour affected the students concerned.

We are also enclosing a report from Lewis Silkin, the law firm commissioned by Rigpa to investigate the allegations in the letter. This report found that, based on the evidence available and on the balance of probabilities, the behavior outlined in the letter did occur and “some students of Sogyal Lakar have been subjected to **serious physical, sexual and emotional abuse** by him.”

The behaviours described in the letter are not only harmful but are also morally and ethically unacceptable. Most of them are illegal in the countries in which they occurred. However, aside from HH Dalai Lama, Mingyur Rinpoche, and Tsoknyi Rinpoche, no other Tibetan lama has made a public statement condemning these kinds of actions.

We are writing to ask you to break the silence and provide a statement reassuring all Dharma students that the abusive behaviours outlined in the attached letter and confirmed by the Lewis Silkin report are unacceptable to you. Not only do students want to avoid being harmed themselves, but also they do not want to support or learn from a lama who harms others, or who supports harmful behaviour. We believe that the teachings from such a lama cannot be reliable and that a lama should provide an ethical example for adults and children alike. We also do not want to follow someone who might ask us to compromise our ethics by accepting abusive behaviour without complaint or criticism—as Sogyal Lakar expected.

Many students are now questioning whether or not they can truly trust any lama to behave ethically if he or she has not made a public statement that makes it clear that they do not see abusive behaviour as acceptable. Also, parts of the Vajrayana have been used by Sogyal Lakar and other lamas to justify his abuses, which has caused some students to question the legitimacy of the religion. We are seeking clarity about this. Some are leaving the religion altogether.

So please read the translated letter and send us your statement in reply to this question: Do you think the behaviour of Sogyal Lakar/Rinpoche as described in the 2017 letter by 8 close students and confirmed by the Lewis Silkin Report is ever an acceptable way for Tibetan Buddhist teachers to behave towards their students?

When considering your reply, it may be helpful for you to refer to Mingyur Rinpoche's examination of the issues in his Lion's Roar article: <https://www.lionsroar.com/treat-everyone-as-the-buddha/>

We will publish all replies to this question on the What Now Blog. Thank you very much. We look forward to your reply.

Sincerely