

## **Ruling with Power**

Chapter 23 from *Ruling Your World*, c 2006 Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche.

Our power comes not from suppressing others, but from uplifting them.

Recently I asked Stanley, a scriptwriter friend of mine, about the movie business. He said, "It's so transparent, so elusive. Even if you did something great before, if you're not doing something now, people treat you as a has-been. It's exhausting to keep up your power, which is very short-lived." The king and queen know that power that depends on manipulation of circumstances is not genuine power. Power that depends on bombarding others with our ambition or terrorizing them into submission does not last, because it requires constant maintenance.

In order to be genuinely powerful, the ruler balances the next three ways of ruling: fearlessness, artfulness, and rejoicing. These three connect us to earth. True power is grounded in fearlessness, a natural expression of our confidence, knowledge, and understanding. We are fearless in jumping into our own wisdom, because we are beyond doubt about basic goodness. We are not afraid of the power of windhorse, which brings worldly and spiritual success. Because it does not need to prove itself, this fearlessness has a gentle quality, rooted in unwavering compassion.

If we fear our own power, we have lost our connection with heaven. As a result, we lose our connection to earth, and we become political. Then, like fools, we think that we need to manipulate or steal the power of others, imagining that someone else has something we need and that going after it is how to obtain it. Because conventional politics is rooted in fear, power rooted in politics doesn't last. Others see that we're not being totally honest, and our lack of stability becomes a weak piece they can wiggle.

If we fear the power of others, we have lost our connection with earth. Trying to rule our world single-handedly, we are not really ruling. We are giving up. We may believe that independence is a sign of power, but not wanting to work with others is a sign that we haven't conquered self-absorption. We're saying, "I don't want to work with others, because it makes me angry. It takes too much patience. People are stupid." The reality is that we can't handle our anger, we can't develop our patience, and we can't cultivate our wisdom without working with others. How can we practice not yelling when we're angry if there's no one around to push our buttons?

We have to be fearless in making decisions. The decision may concern something that affects a whole community, like determining a course of study, or it may concern something that affects only one person, like deciding what time we're going to be home so that our partner can use the car. Making decisions in a tentative way—especially since the anxiety of others often manifests as criticism—only creates more fear. Our own fear can create havoc in our business, family, relationships, or country. If our fear translates into reticence, people will pay no attention to our words. If our fear translates into being heavy-handed and forceful, they will resent our power and resist us. We have to be fearless, because people are depending on our power. That power comes not from suppressing others but from uplifting them. Fear is a state of mind. Fearlessness is our nature. In ruling from fearlessness, we are ruling from our roots. Like fear, fearlessness can spread.

Some years ago, when we were planning to expand our facilities at Shambhala Mountain Center, people in the administration were hesitant. They came up with all sorts of reasons that building was not a good idea. They asked me, “Are you sure that this is all going to work?” Underneath their hesitation was fear. I told them that, as elders in positions of power, they had to be fearless, because our intention is to benefit others.

The next aspect of power is artfulness. Rulership is an art. The enlightened king and queen know how to balance power’s inner and outer aspects, and they arrange the kingdom of their life accordingly. The circle of people around us gives us a base from which to generate power. As rulers we need domestic partners and family to promote decency in our home. We need ministers—administrative helpers and friends who promote our efforts to create harmony in the world. We need generals—fearless protectors in the guise of caring friends and teachers who remind us to hold the view of basic goodness.

Our circle of friends, family, and work associates is our treasury, because they provide a container in which we practice virtue. If we are to rule, we need someone to protect and care for. Working with others artfully engages all the strategies we’ve learned on the tiger, lion, garuda, dragon path. It hones our discernment, increases our exertion and discipline, enlarges our joy, engages our fearlessness, and sharpens our wisdom and skill.

Establishing the people around us in their positions is like wearing jewelry. Certain pieces go on the head and others on the wrists. The king and queen use discernment to reflect on the qualities of each person and determine her or his place. We might appreciate the creativity of our friend who stays up until all hours writing television shows, but that kind of creativity isn’t what we’d look for in choosing an accountant. Some friends we reflect deeply with, confiding our innermost concerns; with others we only play golf. There are people at work whom we greatly appreciate, but we would never invite them to our home.

Some people in our circle will be able to take on more responsibility; others would be overwhelmed by it. Which of our siblings can be responsible for the care of our aging parents? There will be different times for different people. Our assistant was a perfect trainee when he was fresh out of school, but now he is bored. Shall we move him into a more challenging position? Fitting the person with the position with the time—this results in harmony. Good people in good positions increase good fortune like a wish-fulfilling tree.

Choosing the wrong person for a position will hurt the kingdom as a whole. Putting a small-minded person in a position of influence is like having a leak that requires continuous attention. That person’s lack of synergy with others will drain the windhorse of the entire situation. If our mother or child marries someone who influences her in a negative way, for example, the windhorse of our family will weaken.

Putting someone with bad behavior in a high position only fuels further bad behavior. If we choose to work for an employer who encourages us to lie or steal, our windhorse will erode. So will everyone else’s; one person’s negativity has the power to sabotage the collective inspiration, and obstacles will arise. With people properly chosen and the harmony that naturally grows, everyone becomes powerful, and our work proceeds smoothly.

Artfulness has the tiger's payu, discernment. We continually examine the influences in our environment. If we favor people with money, we will contort our principles. Then virtue is no longer ruling; money is ruling. Similarly, if we favor close friends and consorts, desire will begin to rule. When we are manipulated by our own attachment, our windhorse spirals downward. If everyone in our circle flatters or agrees with us, our self-awareness will become cloudy, like a faded mirror. We will lose our ability to determine what to cultivate and what to discard. If we listen to rumors and slander, we will begin to take sides. This will create friction, which makes an aggressive environment.

Acting artfully means we know what we are going to say and what it means to others. Before we speak, we ask ourselves, "How will this help?" We determine whether we should talk to our mother or our father first. Always considering others, we communicate our wishes with impeccable skill and timing. We may have good news for our family, our business. We're going to change neighborhoods; there's a new product on the horizon. If we bombard people with our inspiration, it loses its effectiveness. We need to allow space in which they can absorb the information. If we are overly anxious in the beginning, or too exuberant, others may back off. If we hesitate in relating the news to others, they may feel hurt that we didn't tell them sooner. A conversation here, a conversation there—as small as it may seem—builds harmony all around. When we know a change is on the way, well-timed words to our parents, our children, our neighbors, our secretary, our boss—all reflect consideration. What distinguishes this kind of communication from manipulation is that it is not clandestine. Many people are afraid of change. If we are artful with our power, they will see our fearlessness and grow from it.

Consideration of others is the root of being artful. This is consideration based on trying to be genuine, not on fear of stepping on people's toes. In that case, we are ruling not from fearlessness, but from fear of retribution. If we fear retribution, we are hiding something. We fear being exposed. Then we are not conducting ourselves from the genuine source of power—emptiness and compassion beyond attachment to "me."

In the practice of artfulness, we're considering how best to help others, not how best to avoid hurting their feelings. Of course, we must be sensitive to how others are feeling. Peter the Great once dressed as a commoner in order to listen to the needs of the people with open ears. Similarly, the more confidence we have in our own wisdom and compassion, the more artful we will be in listening to others and knowing how to help them. We should ask questions, because answers often reveal both good and bad intention.

With artfulness, we open a difficult situation up with wisdom rather than close it down with our own negativity. We want to draw people out, not suppress them. When people have acted badly, we can ask, "What do you think happened?" "Did this behavior bring the result you wanted?" "How did it make you feel?" "Would you like to do things differently?" Instead of forcing our opinion on them, we try to create space in which they can learn to use discernment and discipline to discover their own wisdom. The questions we ask are often as important as the answers we offer.

We are artful in acknowledging the virtuous efforts of others, even if their work is not obvious to anyone else. When people do good work, we offer appreciation, praise, affection, or a gift. Our encouragement brings delight; it infuses their work with

meaning. When people are feeling discouraged, we can foster inspiration. On a journey in Tibet, it is traditional to stop and look back to see how far we have come. Pausing and reviewing our accomplishment strengthens our resolve to keep going. Sometimes we can encourage people by helping them see their priorities more clearly, with the motivation of leading them to a more positive state of mind.

In order to get things done, sometimes we have to go slowly, and sometimes we have to move quickly. But with artfulness, whatever the pace of our activity, it looks seamless. This kind of power stems from our genuine appreciation of the moment—from how we drink a cup of tea to how we wear our clothing. In ancient Japan, samurai warriors mastered many arts—flower arranging, tea ceremony, and conversation. They were able to contain their power in the most delicate of activities. A cup of tea conveyed the warmth of perfect friendship, an arrangement of flowers brought the cosmos into a dish. With the same elegance, they could draw their sword and strike a fatal blow, or release an arrow and pierce the heart of an enemy. Such perfect balance and timing attracts drala. It overtakes others before they know it, like the sun moving from morning to midday. When people feel our warmth, they are delighted. This is the art of power.

After we have studied Buddhist metaphysics and practiced debate for long hours, my teacher Penor Rinpoche often calls me out to share some tea. We talk about birds, the weather, or flowers. He loves to talk about animals. He is balancing my intellectual training with the art of conversation, which involves the equanimity of the garuda, letting go of our own concerns and making space to really hear what others have to say. Whether physical or intellectual, power has to be balanced. Expressing it artfully creates harmony.

When we communicate power artfully, everyone feels included, because we have each person's interests in mind. Because our power is not oppressive, communication is healthy and open. We feel fortunate in one another. This love brings the delight of the snow lion, because virtue gives birth to virtue. From the ground up, virtue manifests as basic decency—respect for the environment and care for each other. We have fearlessly rejected self-absorption, so joy and celebration arise. This brings us to the sixth way of ruling—rejoicing.

At Shambhala meditation retreats, both teachers and participants are working the principles of the tiger, lion, garuda, and dragon. We try to maintain our connection to heaven—confidence in basic goodness. We try to ground our view in earth—our everyday activity. In bringing heaven and earth together, we're attempting to generate harmony and create an enlightened world.

At the end of these programs, there is always a celebration. Inevitably, a series of toasts arises. Students toast teachers and meditation instructors in appreciation of their guidance; meditation instructors and teachers toast students in appreciation of the challenges and dedication they offered. This isn't the only time I feel the sense of rejoicing and celebration in our community, but in this dark age, when it's so easy to succumb to aggression, our mutual exchange feels very powerful. It reflects how hard we are working together.

When I walk into a room where one of my teachers is sitting, I often feel as if I have just missed some kind of celebration. There is an air of crescendo. It's not that anything special is happening; I have just walked in on a cheerful, uncluttered state of mind—the tiger's contentment, the lion's delight, the garuda's equanimity, and the

dragon's selflessness, all in one. My father exuded an air of celebration that included a big smile and a sense of playfulness and invitation. A ball of tsampa—roasted barley flour—from my teacher Khyentse Rinpoche tasted more delicious to me than a piece of chocolate cake.

The natural celebratory energy of balancing heaven and earth can arise anywhere. Celebration can be spontaneous—we can put on some music and dance—or it can be formal—we can schedule a picnic in the country with our co-workers after we've finished a project together. When we have an important announcement to make, we can gather our friends or family together for a special meal. We can express our joy by doing something we were scared to do before, or just by taking an afternoon off to see a movie with a friend. If celebration is missing from our life, we can take it as a sign that we have not been ruling our world. Our love and care are blocked. Negativity has crept in. We don't see anything to celebrate. When this happens, we need to remember basic goodness.

In Tibet, the lunar New Year—usually observed in February—is like Christmas, New Year's, Easter, and our birthday all rolled into one. I asked an old Tibetan lama how he felt about the celebration as a child. He said, "Of course we were excited. We could barely sleep the night before. Not only was there the lhasang—the juniper-smoke ceremony—the many offerings, the ceremonies, but we also had a delicious meal." I wondered what that was, and he told me it was yak head. They would sit at the table and eat the aged and preserved innards of the yak—a far cry from ice cream and cake, but a celebration, nonetheless.

Celebration is an attitude. We are happy in our skin. We are happy in our family. We are happy in our work. We are happy in our country. This is the ultimate appreciation of daily life, because we experience it as a cause for celebration. We're not just in it for ourselves; we're in it because we want to offer wisdom and compassion to others, who feel the power of our love and care. This kind of relationship with our kingdom creates harmony, a friction-free environment. As we overcome fear and aggression, there is less bickering, jealousy, and competition. Thus as a group we have strong windhorse, which makes us all-victorious.