

Ruling with Wisdom

Chapter 22 from *Ruling Your World*, c 2006 Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche.

By resting in a big mind, we can conquer small mind.

When I formally assumed my responsibilities as a sakyong, I was to lead one of the largest meditation communities in the West, as well as take my seat as a spiritual leader in Tibet. I saw two elements: possibility and chaos. Although I had always known I would eventually take this role, it was only now that I could fully see the issues at hand. There was factionalism. Also, I was young. Many people I was to lead had been students of my father; they had strong opinions about how I should proceed. Newer students wanted to change how things were done. There were also financial issues. In addition, people were coming to me with their personal problems and business concerns. I was to guide people on their meditative journeys as well. I was also acting as a cultural bridge. The Tibetans wanted me to behave in a traditional way. They were concerned that I was spending too much time with Westerners. The Westerners thought that I was paying too much attention to Tibetans and the old ways. It would have been easy to feel crushed by the weight of these responsibilities. How was I to create harmony?

The Buddha taught Dawa Sangpo, the first king of Shambhala, how to rule by joining heaven and earth. Earth is where we live, and heaven gives us the ability to live with meaning. Following the paths of the tiger, lion, garuda, and dragon, we learn to balance heaven and earth. Heaven is wisdom and equanimity. Earth is contentment and delight in helping others. Then we are all-victorious, able to accomplish what we want, by ruling our world every day. The Shambhala teachings tell us that to join heaven and earth, we need to be benevolent, true, genuine, fearless, artful, and rejoicing. These are the six ways of ruling.

The first three ways of ruling—being benevolent, true, and genuine—are related to heaven. They are qualities of justness. Being just arises from wisdom, unwavering certainty in basic goodness. This is the first step in bringing heaven down to earth. We have discovered our own sanity by conquering confusion. People look up to us because our life has purpose. Our presence is benevolent, true, and genuine, like a beam of light breaking through the clouds.

Benevolence is rooted in patience, which results in gentleness, absence of aggression. Our mind is spacious because we have total confidence in it. This is not blind compassion or an anything-goes attitude. As rulers, we understand that people suffer, which connects us with the earth. We use the tiger's exertion to keep our feet on the ground. Earth gives us purpose. It's saying, "Since the sakyong is the earth-protector, bringing peace, compassion, and wisdom to earth is your responsibility."

If we want to fulfill our mandate, we can't take suffering too personally. If we take it too personally, we lose touch with heaven. We become attached, letting every scenario draw us in. Our mind becomes a little box. We begin to panic because we have no room to maneuver. For example, a project is taking longer than expected and

our colleague starts blaming us. We become angry. Our benevolence begins to dissolve. We make excuses, or perhaps we blame someone else. We're up against the wall, and aggression is putting us there. Our windhorse weakens, and our doubt strengthens. Basic goodness seems like a myth; wisdom, compassion, and courage seem like faint ideals. At this point we don't need to be less gentle—we need to be more gentle. That panic is telling us that we're holding on too tightly. It's time to let go into space, like the garuda. Then we can play like the dragon, moving with the elements as they arise.

In my situation, I felt like first I needed to listen to all the problems and perspectives. I could just let people express themselves. I tried to be open-minded and inquisitive. Some people were friendly, and some were aggressive. In both cases, I got a closer look into people's minds. I learned that when others are acting out of aggression and speed, they can't quite trust benevolence. Small mind cannot understand big mind, so the wisdom ruler often encounters blame and criticism. Others try to usurp our power by moving us away from being gentle, attempting to hook us into negative emotion. But gentleness is always the best whip, one that everyone respects, because it is devoted to the welfare of others.

Benevolence requires the steadiness of an elephant—a sense of trusting ourselves and remembering the suffering of others—because it is easy to become irritated with people. If we feel cornered in the hallway by irritation, it seems overwhelming and we're likely to react aggressively. Since we're trapped not in a building, but only within the confines of our mind, we can be patient. Patience creates space beyond the logical conclusion of negative emotion, like a large meadow in which our irritation can stomp around. After a while, it looks silly.

In some situations, being wrathful might appear to be the most compassionate thing we can do. At such times, we need to look carefully at our mind and heart and ask, "Is this really compassion? Or is it negativity in disguise?" Discernment stands back and takes a look at what is happening before acting. Discipline remembers the delight of helping others. Equanimity releases attachment and concept. Wisdom knows that we will often make mistakes; our training in rulership is ongoing and never-ending. If we want to know whether our wrath is compassionate, we can look at the result: the result of compassion is joy and happiness; the result of anger is that our reputation suffers, and those around us are hurt and stressed.

Benevolence is infused with being true, the second way of ruling. We are true to ourselves in moving forward on the path of virtue. We will not be deterred. This is conviction grounded in confidence, like the force behind a strong breeze. The breeze might be warm and pleasant, but it is constantly moving. Being true to the strategies of tiger, lion, garuda, and dragon grounds our benevolence. Without the unshakable quality of being true, benevolence becomes protocol or politics.

Being benevolent and true to the view of basic goodness gives us natural diplomacy. Having worked diligently with our own mind, we're familiar with realms of anger, jealousy, and ignorance, as well as those of generosity and joy. We can see where people are coming from and what their tactics are, and we know what game they are playing.

Even our friends will sometimes try to manipulate us or reinterpret our intentions in order to mask their incompetence or insecurity. If we are true, they will soon discover that this behavior doesn't work, because our gentleness is weighted with conviction. We no longer believe that we can get what we want with negativity. We're using different strategies. We understand how power flows: by resting in a big mind, we can conquer small mind.

With benevolence as our base, the spirit of being true will strengthen and build. It is a process of constantly sharpening our wisdom on the whetstone of experience. It can be lonely. Our connection with heaven gives us the strength to make decisions without feeling doubt, but at times we have to make decisions that others don't like. In my own situation, people are quite liberal in giving me advice. One person's advice is always contradicting another's advice. It would be easy to crumble under the weight of others' hopes and fears. In the end, whatever the issue is, I have to be just. "Just" means not straying from the path of virtue.

Being benevolent and true is how to arrive at genuineness—the third way of ruling. This is not even *our* genuineness particularly. It is just genuine, a star in the sky that everyone can see. We all recognize the truth when we see it. With a mind elevated by wisdom and anchored in a noble heart, we know we're doing the right thing, because whether we're a ruler or a pauper, it is the right thing to do. If we're in doubt, we need to reconnect with being benevolent and true. With these three ways of ruling, whatever we do will be just.

When we are just, others are willing to carry out our wishes. The Sanskrit word for spiritual teacher—*guru*—connotes heaviness, a deep understanding. When my teachers speak, even ordinary words seem laden with meaning and potency. This kind of power carries a natural command—a penetrating influence that is neither a threat nor a trick. Clearly, truth is being expressed, so we listen.