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Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, Boulder-bred ‘king’ of Shambhala, chosen by his father to lead Buddhist community

In 1995, Tibetan teacher decreed Ösel Mukpo to be reincarnation of Mipham the Great



Cliff Grassmick, Daily Camera file

Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, left, the spiritual leader of Boulder-born Shambhala, presents the Living Peace Award to the Dalai Lama at the Shambhala Mountain Center in Red Feather Lakes, west of Fort Collins, in 2006.





[Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche](#) — the [Shambhala](#) leader [sidelined by a sexual-misconduct scandal](#) — was born Ösel Rangdröl Mukpo in India in 1962, the result of two monastic Tibetans abstaining their celibacy vows for the conception of a future Shambhala king.

The title of Sakyong translates to “Earth protector,” or king, in Tibetan. Rinpoche is a title for reincarnations of Tibetan teachers that translates to “precious one,” and Mipham is the name of the teacher he is said to be the reincarnation of.

Mipham, 56, spent his first years in the Tibetan refugee community in India with his mother Könchok Paldrön, while his father — Shambhala founder [Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche](#) — went to study in the United Kingdom. Young Ösel joined his father when he was 7 and then followed him to Boulder in 1972.

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Until [her death last month](#), Paldrön had lived in Boulder in the Marpa House, a property [Shambhala International said it intends to sell](#) to help cover the steep financial hit after the allegations against Mipham became public last summer.

In Boulder, Mipham grew up under the long shadow of his charismatic father. After Trungpa’s death in 1987, Shambhala was left with a leadership void that Mipham one day would need to fill. Between Mipham’s and Trungpa’s reign came Ösel Tendzin, born Thomas Rich, who was known as the “Vajra Regent.”

Tendzin was a close confidant of Trungpa and was selected to lead Shambhala for a period following Trungpa’s death. Trungpa also had picked Mipham to follow in his footsteps as the next king of Shambhala.

Tendzin was accused of knowingly infecting students with whom he had sex with the HIV/AIDS virus, according to a [1989 report in the New York Times](#). The scandal threw

“He is the most deeply insecure man I have ever met,” Allya Canepa, a former longtime student and Kusung, told The Denver Post.

Mipham was able to claim power through ancient Tibetan rituals. Penor Rinpoche, a revered Tibetan teacher, decreed Ösel Mukpo in 1995 to be the reincarnation of Mipham the Great, a scholar who had previously stated he would not reincarnate. The recognition gave Mipham the Tibetan credentials to try and live up to his father’s legacy — and his new name.

Two years later, Penor [recognized film actor Steven Segal](#) and other westerners as reincarnations of Rinpoches under a cloud of doubt. Several people close to Mipham, including his half-brother, Gesar Mukpo, as well as Tibetan Lamas involved in the recognition, extend that cloud to Mipham’s recognition.

After his recognition, Mipham consolidated power by cutting off outside teachers and merging the secular Shambhala teachings and religious “Buddhadharma” his father had carefully curated, said Julia Sagebien, a former student of Trungpa.

The moves caused old-school students like Sagebien to chafe with Mipham and his new direction for Shambhala. The new direction changed some long-practiced teachings and created “Shambhala Buddhism,” a merger some former students disapproved of.