

SUSTAINABILITY

CYCLING FOR CLIMATE PROTECTION:

LOVE IS ACTION!

Live To Love Germany initiated the first European Bike Yatra from Hamburg to Copenhagen under the motto "Cycling for climate protection - slowing down CO2". Guests of honor from the Himalayas were the Gyalwang Drukpa and six Kung Fu nuns from the Buddhist Drukpa order. The Bike Yatra as "meditation in action" became a lasting collective experience.

"To change the problem of climate change, you first have to change your mental climate – otherwise, you won't get very far." (Gyalwang Drukpa)

According to the latest data from the US weather agency NOAA, CO2 levels in the air are rising faster than ever before. The values are now far higher than they have been throughout human existence. Everyone is now experiencing the consequences of global warming: humans and animals, although unfortunately, little attention is paid to the latter when fires or floods hit the country. 2023 was the hottest since records began, with heatwaves and droughts accompanied by floods, forest fires, and storms. What to do?

The Gyalwang Drukpa: "Everyone is suffering from climate change. There needs to be a big push in politics. Politicians are the leaders of the world. They have the responsibility to lead the world. They should drop their weapons and wholeheartedly take care of nature and, thus, the next generations. However, resignation due to disenchantment should not be an option for us. We humans must all change our attitudes and support each other. We should all go out and take action. Quite simply: save nature by serving nature in the same way that nature serves us humans."

Last year, the Gyalwang Drukpa reaffirmed the desire and importance of organizing the first Bike Yatra for Europe ("Yatra" translates as "spiritual journey with a goal"). Gianna Wabner, President of the Live To Love Germany Foundation, was entrusted with this task. She immediately launched this meaningful project with her team on European soil, following the example of the internationally renowned "Yatras" in the Himalayan region and on the Indian subcontinent.

ACHIEVING GREAT THINGS TOGETHER

Gianna Wabner criticizes that the climate protection goals are still being implemented by government leaders inadequately – or not at all - and sees far-reaching consequences: "We should learn to understand that the pillars of the already fragile democracies in this world are fundamentally linked to this. A further increase in climate catastrophes will increasingly weaken democracies. The lack of drinking water and food is an ever-present problem in the affected areas. Where the need is greatest, food is rationed, and only people with high incomes receive drinking water and food whenever they want."

Gianna Wabner addresses everyone in their responsibility: "Again and again, people refer to 'the state,' which bears the responsibility. But the state is you; the state is us.

And you or we have elected these politicians to implement our wishes. Since they have yet to implement the justified and concerned demands for climate protection, we should take action individually. As citizens learn to understand that they have power, we can achieve great things as soon as they contribute to climate protection.

She sees the "sustainable reduction of fossil fuels, the avoidance of plastic, of denatured food, of this overconsumption of meat, which leads to factory farming - i.e., great suffering of animals - and the resulting deforestation for monocultures" as a way to significantly improve the climate on this planet. "Supply and demand - something worth considering in this context. Our needs determine the supply."

PREMIERE FOR EUROPE

Most participants for the "Bike Yatra" came from Germany, but interested parties were registered from Mexico, Hong Kong, the USA, France, and England. The symbolic start was a tree planting on Hamburg's Außenalster: three bluebell trees were planted in the ground. A further 12 of the "climate trees," so called because they grow remarkably quickly and have huge leaves, followed along the route. They absorb 40 times more CO₂ than oaks or beeches, for example.

"Let's finally act, not just talk about it, let's do it! That is the real reason why we are here in the world." (Gyalwang Drukpa)

ACTING OUT OF LOVE

For decades, the Gyalwang Drukpa, head of the 1000-year-old Drukpa order, has been calling on his school's followers to take a more active approach to climate protection and equality and become more active 'out in the world' instead of just sitting on their meditation cushions and practicing for their enlightenment. In 2007, he founded the secular movement "Live to Love" to give all people opportunities and inspiration to actively participate in shaping life for the earth and all its inhabitants.

The Gyalwang Drukpa and the Kung Fu nuns are impressive role models. The melting glaciers in the Himalayas, the earth's "third pole," due to climate change was reason enough to inspire and educate the population in mountain villages and towns publicly and effectively. Prayer and meditation alone are no longer sufficient for them. In 2002, they took off their robes for the first time, got on mountain bikes, and overcame thousands of kilometers and meters of altitude.

The Gyalwang Drukpa has established an unprecedented revolution in equality in his order. The nuns in his monasteries practice methods exclusively reserved for men for thousands of years. They are trained in languages, solar technology, construction, electrical engineering, organic farming, etc., and run the Druk Amitabha Mountain Monastery, one of the most beautiful in Nepal, entirely independently. For 20 years now, they have been traveling through India and Nepal to tell the inhabitants of the Himalayas about the causes of air pollution and climate change and to convey an understanding of the interrelationships. On their tours, they collect tons of plastic waste to protect the environment, water, and animals.

Gianna Wabner, President of the Live To Love Germany Foundation and spokesperson for the Gyalwang Drukpa in Europe, has been involved in the internationally active humanitarian movement since 2007. "Live to love is a great concept for better understanding life's contexts and strengthening our awareness of the positive and light-filled, including the experience of suffering and its causes. Only through understanding can humans achieve compassion and true love, an indescribable power that connects us all and leads to healing in the broadest sense."

The Bike Yatra from Hamburg to Copenhagen was the start. Live To Love Germany is planning further trips by bike and on foot. The next major pilgrimage in the north of the world is scheduled for 2026. Bike Yatras for environmentally friendly travel and climate protection are also taking place in England. May many feel inspired and follow this example!

Environmental protection right on your doorstep can make a big difference.

"Planting a tree, just one tree, would be a huge help to the world. Because a tree will never destroy anyone - these beings will always help, help nature, help the world."
(Gyalwang Drukpa)

Bike Yatra, let's go! After a dignified reception of the guests of honor at Hamburg City Hall and an inspiring exchange with the second mayor, Katharina Fegebank, the tour started from Jungfernstieg and traveled through the city, escorted by the Hamburg police. Vans transported the necessary luggage, tents, kitchen utensils, and food. The team stayed in tents at a campsite every evening.

The route led through untouched nature, fields of rapeseed, poppies, and other colorful flowers and grasses, forests, past lakes, and beaches. The longest stage of the day was 62 kilometers. Occasional heavy rain and wind did nothing to dampen the bikers' spirits.

Meditations took place every morning to start the day. The Gyalwang Drukpa taught stepped paths of meditation and encouraged the group daily to contemplate and apply the essence of his teachings throughout the day.

On their way to Denmark, the Live To Love pilgrims accepted an invitation from Rainer Kloth, the mayor of Trebbow. He had learned that the Bike Yatra route passes close to his village and spontaneously invited the team to plant a maple tree and enjoy a chat and snack in the village hall. Rainer Kloth works tirelessly and voluntarily in the region to expand cycle paths, among other things. Climate protection is taught in schools. He is a role model for how environmental protection can have a significant impact right on your doorstep. More and more people in the region are now switching to bicycles. Thanks to his initiatives, Klein Trebbow was awarded the title "Village of the Future" last year.

COMPETENT WOMEN

The Gyalwang Drukpa, the Drukpa Kung Fu nuns, and Gianna Wabner were warmly welcomed by the Danish environmental politician Ida Auken and her companions as soon as they arrived in front of the Copenhagen parliament building. After a guided tour

of the historic building, it became clear once again during the open exchange of experiences how many people in this world are tired of moral pressure and all the dramatic events, such as wars and environmental disasters. Ida Auken has also created positive incentives that have a significant impact. Many similarities became clear. The Gyalwang Drukpa also emphasized the critical role of Europe at this meeting.

The Gyalwang Drukpa is not only an environmental activist but is also stringently committed to equal rights and women's empowerment. The Gyalwang Drukpa let the Kung Fu nuns speak in all meetings with politicians and the media. He had already made it very clear to Gianna Wabner that the women of his order should be given precedence, both in the meetings and the interviews. Lopön Tingdzin Zangmo appeared as the spokesperson for the Kung Fu nuns, Jigme Konchok Lhamo as a Kung Fu teacher, and Yeshe Lhamo as an ambassador for Live To Love Nepal in front of the TV cameras, confidently, knowledgeably, and wisely answered the questions of the editors of various regional magazines and exchanged views with the politicians.

SPIRITUAL DIMENSION

Each participant had individual experiences during this pilgrimage, which went far beyond the almost 500 kilometers to Copenhagen.

- Noe from Mexico felt anything but exhausted: "It gives so much strength to be connected with the message of the Bike Yatra to make the earth a more beautiful place, not only for us but also for the generations to come."

- For Claire from England, it was one of the most precious times of her life: "I got so much inspiration about what I can do when I get back home. 'Love is action' is the mantra."

For Frauke from Westphalia, the time was pure freedom: "You don't need much on the road—that's what freedom means to me. And working together towards a common goal for the benefit of others always gives me goosebumps. You can live and work together peacefully and respectfully as a collective."

- Jill from Miami, USA, thoroughly contemplated the Gyalwang Drukpa's teachings during the trip: "Just being in nature for ten days was incredible and unforgettable. We are nature and a part of nature - we must keep reminding ourselves to take care of our spirit. We can work with our minds anytime and free ourselves from our personal 'box.' We have grown together as a group and have learned to move and act as one."

In essence, every one was fulfilled by this journey under the vast open sky. Living in the great outdoors - even if it is only for a very short retreat period - increases social skills and awareness. In a subtle yet powerful way, the message of Mother Earth and all who live on and from her became a living experience of self. All the bikers expressed their heartfelt gratitude that the Gyalwang Drukpa had given this journey such a high and wide spiritual dimension. His teachings, laughter, and love for Mother Earth and all sentient beings have left deep impressions.

Text: Jigme Yangchen Drolma
Photos: Agnes Forsthuber

Information & Inspiration

A documentary about the 1st European Bike Yatra can be seen on the YouTube channel of Live To Love Germany:

https://youtu.be/xMrslwFVYjg?si=ldchMItp0_tCrRgB