

Buddhist Leaders and Environmental Activist Make a Symbolic Gesture – at Strandlykkja, Norway!

By Dan Cato Røe

Published: 25.08.26 11:00 · Updated: 31.08.26 08:30



PLANTING A TREE: Live To Love has planted many hundreds of thousands of trees around the world. This time, one oak was planted at Domkirkeodden and one at Mjøsli. Photo: Dan Cato Røe

STRANDLYKKJA, NORWAY: The Buddhist spiritual leaders Gyalwang Drukpa and Gyalwa Dokhampa, together with Live To Love, came to Strandlykkja, Norway, to symbolically plant an oak tree and walk through the common land.

Gyalwang Drukpa is the spiritual head of the Drukpa lineage, a 1,000-year-old branch of Tibetan Buddhism rooted in the Himalayan region. He is regarded as the 12th incarnation of this lineage. The spiritual leader, who has many millions of followers, recently visited Strandlykkja. Why?

Well, to plant a tree, and to walk through the common land. Or, as they call it, a “Pad Yatra.”

Gyalwang Drukpa is an environmental activist and the founder of Live To Love, an international humanitarian movement. The organisation focuses on secular, community-benefiting work in the Himalayan region and other parts of the world.

Planted at Mjøsli

One thing the organisation has done since its founding is plant trees – several hundred thousand in the Himalayan region, and now at Mjøsli as well, and at Domkirkeodden.

– “An oak is now going to be planted here in our garden,” say Gunnar Østgård and Elisabeth Gulbrandsen.



GREETING THE HOSTS: Gyalwang Drukpa greets the hosts Elisabeth Gulbrandsen and Gunnar Østgård. Photo: Dan Cato Røe



LIVE TO LOVE: The head of Live To Love Germany, Gianna Wabner, together with Gyalwa Dokhampa and Gyalwang Drukpa, is welcomed by Elisabeth Gulbrandsen and Gunnar Østgård. Photo: Dan Cato Røe

They have a close connection to Live To Love, which sent a large delegation from Germany. Gyalwang Drukpa, the founder of the Live To Love movement, and several other guests of honour came from India and Bhutan.

– “Not only is Gyalwang Drukpa here, but also Gyalwa Dokhampa, a prominent Tibetan Buddhist master within the Drukpa tradition,” Østgård explains.

Gyalwa Dokhampa is one of the foremost masters in the Drukpa tradition and is said to be one of Gyalwang Drukpa's two spiritual sons.

A special ceremony

The representatives from Live To Love Germany, including its leader Gianna Wabner, planted the oak together with the Buddhist monks and the two spiritual leaders. There were prayers, and signs and stones marked with Live To Love were set up. Rose petals and flowers were scattered to bless the tree – a spiritual and powerful ceremony, made even more special for participants by Gyalwang Drukpa's presence.

– “An oak tree can live for a thousand years – as long as the Drukpa lineage has existed,” says Gunnar.



BUDDHISTS: Buddhist monks and nuns helped plant the oak at a beautiful spot at Mjøsli. Photo: Dan Cato Røe



VISIBLE MARK: The oak was visibly marked with the Live To Love sign by Gyalwa Dokhampa, beside the spiritual head of the Drukpa lineage, Gyalwang Drukpa. Photo: Dan Cato Røe

Live To Love's work is not limited to planting trees around the world. The organisation is also involved in collecting plastic waste and protecting vulnerable ecosystems in mountain areas.

In addition, Gyalwang Drukpa has initiated and supported schools and education projects in sparsely populated areas, including the Druk Padma Karpo School in Ladakh. Live To Love also organises free health clinics and eye surgeries for disadvantaged people in isolated communities, as well as the preservation and restoration of the Himalayas' cultural and architectural heritage.



FLOWER PETALS: Gyalwang Drukpa scatters flower petals over the roots of the oak. Photo: Dan Cato Røe

– “They have also started the Kung Fu Nuns, so that women can become more confident and able to defend themselves,” says Gunnar Østgård.

Work is also being done to strengthen women's rights and standing, including through the well-known Kung Fu Nuns initiative, in which Buddhist nuns learn martial arts, lead environmental campaigns and provide emergency relief.

Pad Yatra

Pad Yatra means “a spiritual journey on foot.” Live To Love Germany organised the Pad Yatra, and the group will walk through the Almenning forest.

For the Buddhists, this is a spiritual or religious pilgrimage – a long walk on foot to holy places, undertaken out of devotion or in search of inner peace. The participants walked through our local area, with a focus on nature, community, and our shared responsibility for the future and coming generations.



FLOWERS: A ceremony with prayer took place after the tree planting itself. Flowers and petals were then scattered over the roots of the oak. Photo: Dan Cato Røe



NOT MUCH OF A CROWD: Elisabeth Gulbrandsen doesn't think many people will make the trip to their farmyard to see the planted oak. Photo: Dan Cato Røe

Conversation

The old schoolhouse was filled with guests from many parts of the world, as well as local residents.

– “My view, after cycling 6,000 kilometres and walking 5,000 kilometres on various Pad Yatras, is that trees and water are extremely important. Trees and water weren't personally important to me, because I lived in a modern society. I was disconnected from nature, because I lived in the city. But today I understand that clean water matters, and that trees are important for clean air,” says Gyalwa Dokhampa.



CONVERSATION: A conversation at Mostu school where Gyalwang Drukpa and Gyalwa Dokhampa spoke about nature conservation, modern society and the Kung Fu Nuns. Photo: Dan Cato Røe

– “We have to look at all the elements – trees, soil, rivers and air. Everything gives us life! When you're young, no one cares, and they're not wise enough to take care of themselves. We must teach them that, so everyone can have a better future. Not just talk about it, but actually do it – like planting trees, as we're doing here. And we must live more in and with nature,” says Gyalwang Drukpa.



INTRODUCING STANGE: Mayor Truls Gihlemon spoke about Stange, and wished the Buddhist leaders a good trip through the common land. Photo: Dan Cato Røe



A WARM MEETING: A warm meeting between Gyalwang Drukpa and Truls Gihlemon. Photo: Dan Cato Røe

The conversation, which included a number of questions put to the spiritual leaders, lasted an hour and a half – about education, the Kung Fu Nuns, the digital society, and a good deal about nature and faith in the future.

The mayor of Stange, Truls Gihlemon, was also present. He was told a little about Stange, Lake Mjøsa, agriculture and nature.



On 21 August, an interfaith dialogue also took place with Bishop Ole Kristian Bonden, Gyalwang Drukpa, Gyalwa Dokhampa, the Drukpa nun Lupon Tingdzin Zangmo, Gianna Wabner and representatives of various other religious and faith communities. It was a very pleasant and inspiring conversation.