

## **Portrait of the Gyalwang Drukpa**

The Gyalwang Drukpa, spiritual leader, Drukpa lineage of Buddhism in the Himalayas (Photo: Agnes Forsthuber, Live to Love)

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The man with the title Gyalwang Drukpa is considered one of the most modern religious leaders of the present day - and he is an environmental activist. As the spiritual leader of the Drukpa lineage of Buddhism in the Himalayas, he opposes traditions, is committed to gender equality, and fights to protect the environment through his organization Live to Love. In 2010 he received the United Nations Millennium Development Goals Award. In an interview in Berlin, he explained his motives to Tagesspiegel Background Energie & Klima.

In Europe, the Drukpa tradition, the dragon lineage of Buddhism of the Himalaya, is largely unknown. But that is changing, especially since the current twelfth Gyalwang Drukpa, with the bourgeois name Jigme Pema Wangchen, appears as an environmental activist in public. He has been touring the world for several years, trying to draw attention to environmental issues, as a speaker at the UN Climate Change Conference in Katowice in 2018 or at the 2016 Munich Security Conference. "If you go through life with your eyes open, you inevitably have to think about environmental issues and act" he says in the conversation. "We humans need clear air and clean water. Without an intact environment, we cannot survive. "

His native region in particular, the Himalayan Mountains, is threatened by climate change and environmental degradation. Melting glaciers and the construction of dams by the Indian and Chinese governments endanger the water supply. "Every government tries to secure its influence in the region," he says. "It is a problem of power that is difficult to solve."

### **150,000 trees planted**

The Gyalwang Drukpa has therefore chosen a different starting point and in 2007 he has founded the secular organization Live to Love, which besides the environmental issue is committed to education, gender equality, medical aid and acute crisis intervention, for example after the devastating earthquake in Nepal in 2015. "We want to educate people," says the Gyalwang Drukpa. "Only mature and active citizens can bring about a positive change."

His approach is inclusive and holistic. "You cannot force people to lead a conscious life," says the leader of the Drukpa tradition. "That's why Live to Love

is about setting a good example and opening the door to everyone." The organization is aimed at all people, regardless of their denomination or beliefs. "It is time to break the dividing lines," says Gyalwang Drukpa. "For too long, we have given away valuable time. We have to work together to tackle problems like climate change."

Since its establishment the humanitarian organization has implemented various projects, notably in the Himalayas. Live To Love planted more than 150,000 trees following a mudslide in northern Indian Ladakh to rebalance the fragile ecosystem. The Gyalwang Drukpa says that he is particularly proud of the schools that have been built, since they enable many children to get a proper education. And the so-called Yatras. These are thousand kilometers long pilgrimages by bike, which are initiated to draw attention to the environmental degradation. Contrary to tradition, the Gyalwang Drukpa also rides himself and swaps his robe for trekking clothing. "I look very fashionable in my bike outfit," he jokes.

### **From the age of four in the monastery**

Resistance to the well-tryed is a constant trait through the actions of the Gyalwang Drukpa. "To be honest, I don't particularly like traditions," he says. "All of these deadlocked conventions and restrictions are man-made and make you sick. I am happy to be able to break it." The real teaching of Buddha is to find your own answers to life.

The same goes for him on gender equality: The Gyalwang Drukpa allowed nuns to take part in traditional practices such as Kung Fu or dances, formerly reserved for monks. For his decisions, he was sharply criticized by many Buddhist scholars. "The criticism does not hurt me. I believe in equal rights," he says. "Women can contribute a lot to this world, but culturally they are prevented from doing so in many places."

Above all, spirituality, less the religious teachings, would help him choose the right way of life, he says. The Gyalwang Drukpa meditates for four hours a day - one of the routines he learned as a child. As a reincarnation of the Eleventh Gyalwang Drukpa he was taken to a monastery at the age of four and taught there apart from his parents. "My childhood was also challenging. I was unable to have an everyday experiences and was isolated in the monastic environment," says the 56-year-old today. "It is actually sad looking back. However, I consider Live to Love as a result of this spiritual training, as the positive side of this effort. "

Today the Gyalwang Drukpa lives in India, Nepal and sometimes in Australia. His free time also reflects his desire to reduce thinking patterns - he likes to play table tennis, squash and football. "People see me playing squash and their eyes fall out of their heads. They think I shouldn't do things like that," he says. "I am very happy to overcome such cultural barriers."

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During his visit to Berlin in November, the Gyalwang Drukpa met Fridays for Future activist Luisa Neubauer, Maja Göpel, Secretary General of the German Advisory Council on Global Change (WBGU), and took part in the "Change Congress".

**Who will save the climate? Politics or the individual?**

Both.

**Which flight would you never do without?**

The flight to a place where I am called to help, as far as my help is helpful and really needed.

**Who in the energy and climate world has impressed you?**

There are now many people who have impressed me. The last few days I've met people I have to add: Maja Göpel, for example, who impressed me with her profound scientific reasoning, filled with heart and deep feelings. Her colleague Carsten Loose, a biologist whose scientific explanations coincide with my insights, is one of them. In addition, the meeting with Luisa Neubauer was very moving. Although she is so young, she fights with such intelligent and warm arguments - to which nothing needs to be added - to make it clear that something should have been done long ago to combat climate change. As I said, I know a lot of impressive people and new ones have been added in the past few days.

**What idea gives the energy transition new momentum?**

The people who actively implement ideas on a large and small scale and those who walk the talk. After all, we not only have to find theoretical solutions, we have to put words into action.