

Live to love, and let live

INTERVIEW The 12th Gyalwang spells out his reasons for embarking on a walking pilgrimage through the Himalayan regions

In the hurly burly of the city, we sometimes long for the purity of the hills, where the air is clear and the water rushes cool. People who live in the hills often see things differently though. In reply to our rapturous enjoyment, we are likely to hear them say they wouldn't mind trading in some of that clean air for fancy gadgets, some of that gushing river water for taps inside their kitchens, a few idyllic jungle walks for a corporate job opportunity or two.

Many people today who have been there, done that, realise the dangers of imbalanced development, but if just anyone went to the economically under-developed areas of the country and told the residents their lifestyle was better without the unhealthy development of the cities, they might not be easily welcomed.

When someone like His Holiness the Gyalwang Drukpa suggests something, though, more people are likely to listen. This is partly why

the head of the Drukpa lineage of Buddhist monks is currently on a walking tour – padayatra – to the Ladakh region.

"I am going on a walking pilgrimage," he said on a brief stopover in New Delhi before setting off on the yatra which formally began this past Saturday. "I love to do it, because it allows interaction with the people."

Ladakh is also dear to the monk because of its association with the lineage of which he is the 12th Gyalwang Drukpa. This lineage, a school of Mahayana Buddhism, spread across the region of Tibet, Bhutan, China, Nepal and India, was founded in 1206 by Tsangpa Yeshe Dorje. The story goes that he saw nine dragons flying up from the ground into the sky. This led to the name Drukpa which means "lineage of dragons".

Interacting with people

To meet the current Gyalwang Drukpa is to understand the principles of 'being en-



PILGRIM'S PROGRESS His Holiness Gyalwang Drukpa in New Delhi
PHOTO: R. V. MOORTHY

lightened for the benefit of others" on which the Mahayana Buddhist philosophy rests, and also the focus on practical application of Buddhist teachings that informs the work of the Drukpa masters. He says his main purpose in the padayatra is to interact with the people he comes across and "to give them con-

fidence in their way of life". We tend to refer to these regions as backward, but, he notes, "They are ahead of us spiritually and in contentment. I don't want them to lose this."

People in general are beset by problems of a financial nature and other worries. "This is because of wrong manage-

ment. They always want to be the best. This really destroys peace," he explains, reiterating, "People in the Himalayan region are not backward because they know how to practise contentment and satisfaction and be happy." See the size of the smiles on the faces there, he offers – his own is great competition – to

understand the value of contentment, despite material hardship. "But now there is a risk they may lose the big smile," he points out, due to the aggressiveness and anger that have crept into people's thinking, a certain frustration with their situation, born out of greed.

Significantly, the revered monk, who makes a strong distinction between religion and spirituality, calling religion "a beautiful wrapping for spirituality" but a barrier if it stands alone, says he is not going on this padayatra out of compassion, as some might assume.

"I'm doing it to introduce compassion. Compassion comes before love. I call it live to love, which is the practice of our lineage." Distinguishing compassion from pity, he says, "The bottomline is, compassion is understanding." Thus his yatra is also about preserving the environment.

Also, "it's not just the responsibility of our religions but non-religious people too, like business people, actors, farmers." Pointing out how people are capable of killing in the name of religion, of God and of compassion, he says, "Experience brings real compassion. – I would call it experiential compassion."

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