

10 Questions

The first Gyuto Monastery was founded in 1474 in Tibet. This one, in India, is a residence of the Karmapa Ogyen Trinley Dorje



He's an environmentalist, he's friends with the Dalai Lama, and, at 29, the 17th Karmapa may be Tibet's next hope

The Dalai Lama is turning 80. Do you worry what will happen to Tibetans when he dies?

All Tibetans have placed our hopes in His Holiness, and we depend on him so profoundly. While the communist invasion was obviously a disaster for the people and culture of Tibet, it also had the side effect under His Holiness's leadership of uniting all Tibetan lineages in a way that had never happened. When he passes away, I worry we will be like a body without a head.

Many think you will be the next spiritual leader for all Tibetans. Will you?

People say this a lot, and it's out of affection. But to be direct: the Dalai Lama has been both the political leader and also the spiritual leader of the Tibetan people, and it's highly unlikely anyone else would be universally accepted like him as the leader of all Tibetans.

You were discovered at age 7 as leader of the Kagyu school, one of the six main lineages of Tibetan Buddhists. At 14, you fled Tibet for India. Why?

In Tibet I was not free to travel, and the holders of my lineage, from whom I needed instruction, lived outside of China. I was unable to meet with them. I also feared that as I aged, China might try to give me some kind of political role and use me as a propaganda alternative to His Holiness the Dalai Lama. So I wished to avoid that very much.

You haven't seen your parents in 14 years—Fifteen.

Fifteen. Do you miss them?

When I first reached India, I dreamed of them and of Tibet practically every night. At some point I realized if this goes on, it's going to be very, very hard. I had to put them out of my mind. But now that they're somewhat aged, I'm concerned about being able to see them again.

What does a lama do when he feels sad?

I don't feel I have anyone to bring my problems to. So I suppose when I feel sad I really just close my door and I let myself cry. I try to work things out for myself.

China has encouraged migration into Tibet. Does that worry you?

If many people settle in Tibet, it's going to affect the natural environment—and that's not only important to the people who live there. The source of all of the great rivers of Asia is the Himalayan gla-

ciers and snow. For the sake of all of Asia, China needs to recognize the need to preserve it.

You've said nothing's more dangerous than apathy. Why?

Scientists say we are all hard-wired to feel love and compassion. Unfortunately, we've developed some kind of on-off switch, and now our apathy extends to any danger that's not right in front of us. Climate change is one of them.

So what should we do?

Recognize we are interdependent. That we need to take responsibility for the welfare of others and break down the wall of selfishness and pride that gives us a false sense of separation. Each of us possesses a natural resource in our hearts. We need to explore it.

You've been on a long tour of the U.S. What has stood out to you about Americans?

The tremendous dependence on technology and material things. It's a mental dependence. India of course has modern technology. But Indians have not lost the understanding that they need to seek happiness within.

Do you wonder what life would be like if you weren't the Karmapa?

Well, I don't have much experience being anything else. I suppose I would be an ordinary monk.

—SIOBHAN O'CONNOR

