



«Ocean of Wisdom»: Dalai Lama, 1939

TONGUE GREETING OF PEACE - THE GENTLE DALAI LAMA IS BEING PILLORIED UNFAIRLY AROUND THE WORLD:

Waves went up on social media after His Holiness the Dalai Lama stuck his tongue out at a boy and asked him to lick it. "This is child sexual abuse!" Says a Twitter user. An association of abuse victims in the United States speaks of a "blatant sexual act": "We are just as appalled as any other viewer at the actions of the Dalai Lama. Our primary concern is the innocent boy who was the subject of this heinous solicitation by a revered spiritual figure."

The video of the incident went viral, media around the world picked it up, including in Switzerland. The Dalai Lama, a world icon of peacefulness and spirituality, is supposed to be a child molester?

Cultural Misunderstanding:

The Dalai Lama himself has spoken in a short statement and regrets the incident. "His Holiness would like to apologize to the boy and his family, as well as his many friends around the world, for the hurt his words may have caused," it said on its website. His office further explains: "His Holiness often teases people he meets in an innocent and playful manner, including in public and in front of cameras."

One sticks one's tongue out in greeting to show that one is not the reincarnation of Lang Darma.

Various Tibetan dignitaries and organizations have backed the Dalai Lama and denied the allegations. Penpa Tsering, head of the Tibetan Central Administration in Exile in Dharamsala, India, said the Dalai Lama was "unfairly referred to by all sorts of names". Penpa Tsering speaks of an "innocent, grandfatherly loving attitude" of the 87-year-old, which was misinterpreted.

It sounds similar in the Tibetan community around the world. The Zurich-based Tsering Foundation, which is dedicated to supporting and promoting Tibetan Buddhist culture, writes that the Dalai Lama's apology is not an admission of guilt, but rather a "sign of his irreproachable conduct". The excitement about the gesture is based on a "cultural misunderstanding". Also, in the context of the entire recording it is completely absurd to put the excerpt in a connection with abuse. The Dalai Lama would be the last one who "wanted to harm other people".

So very different assessments collide. Important for an appropriate assessment is the fact, also emphasized by the Dalai Lama, that the incident took place in public. It did not take place in some dimly lit back room, but in front of an audience, including the boy's parents, and the encounter was recorded and documented, as the Dalai Lama knew. So, you can't accuse him of bad intentions.

In addition, what you can read in any travel guide to Tibet: Sticking out the tongue is a greeting ritual there. A German travel magazine writes: "If someone sticks their tongue out at you in Tibet, they are usually not cheeky, they just want to say hello." The greeting was invented by monks as a "sign of peace". Elsewhere we learn that the gesture, frowned upon in our part of the world, has a "very profound meaning": It goes back to the Tibetan King Lang Darma, who lived in the 9th century and was known for his cruelty. Due to his evil nature, he is said to have had a black tongue. That's why to this day people stick out their tongues in greeting to show that they are not the reincarnation of the cruel Lang Darma.

In the Amdo region, where the Dalai Lama comes from, there is also the expression "eat the tongue". A Tibetan woman explains the meaning as follows: "If you give a child everything and it continues to squeeze, then you say: 'What else do you want, do you want to eat my tongue?'" Some Tibetans are convinced that the 87-year-old Dalai Lama, is perhaps not quite as proficient in English, wanted to say "eat" instead of "suck my tongue". Because the Indian boy was with the Dalai Lama at the beginning of the event and brought him gifts. Towards the end of the event, the boy came back and asked, if the Dalai Lama would give him a hug. He was just standing in front of the Dalai Lama and didn't walk away - a situation where the idiom would have been appropriate.

Positive energy:

And what does the boy concerned think about all the hype? It is unspeakable how "blessed" one feels around His Holiness, he said in a television interview. The Dalai Lama has "very positive energy". Overall, it was a "very positive experience". That's quite a different picture, than we are presented with, in the Western outrage media. The Tibetan Community believes that an apology from the media for the serious allegations against the Dalai Lama would be appropriate - although the "Ocean of Wisdom" has certainly already forgiven them.