

# Neykor

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## Get Isolation Inspiration from a Bhutanese Monk

Stephanie Zubiri gets inspiration from isolation with a venerated Bhutanese monk. Photographs by Scott A. Woodward.

Earlier this year, as the world came to a grinding halt and citizens around the globe were forced into some form of isolation, one man in the tiny nation of Bhutan embraced the change, retreating for three months into a cave in one of the Kingdom's peaceful mountain forests.

Meet His Eminence Khedrupchen Rinpoche, a fifth reincarnate and head of Sangchen Ogyen Tsuklag Monastery in Trongsa, who assumed responsibility for the temple at 19, and at 30 travels the world imparting Buddhist principles and how they can be applied to everyday living. Barely a week out of

his meditation retreat, he shared with us his thoughts on how to navigate our lives and travels mindfully and peacefully.

**What have you personally learned from your time in isolation?**

You'd be surprised that even as a monk I was so busy! With so many commitments, this downtime has personally given me the opportunity to deepen my realizations and do something great for my future followers. I learned that if I don't have the time to enlighten myself, I cannot enlighten others.

**Anxiety due to uncertainty is very common at the moment; how can we allay some of this worry?**

It is, of course, much easier to say it than to put it into practice, but everything depends on your mind. Anxiety is in the mind. Oftentimes we overthink our problems and exaggerate them. It is much more productive to think about the solutions to our problems rather than just worry about them. We can use this time to plan our future or to learn a new skill. Don't panic.

Stay calm, so when lockdown is over, you can start implementing your plans. Don't forget to love yourself and have compassion for yourself. The blessings are always there when we look for them.

**How can we incorporate mindfulness into our everyday lives?**

The easiest way to begin a mindfulness practice is to start immediately. Whatever you do, try to do it fully. Give it your full concentration. You can meditate during other activities, like gardening, for example. You are not just planting a flower; you are growing nectar for the bees, you are creating beauty for your home, you are making a gift for someone—this flower can be more than just a flower; it can bring joy. Try to see everything you do as a gift.

Another way is to take five to 10 minutes in the morning. Relax yourself, get comfortable, and empty your mind. Don't let your mind follow memories of the past or the plans for the future; let your mind be just in the present moment—and by just being in the present, it will bring peace.

**What are some lessons we can take from these unusual times?**

From my own Buddhist perspective, it has become very clear to me that everyone is equal. Everyone is affected by this pandemic, regardless of age, status or background. This time offers a reset of sorts, an opportunity to think about what kind of future we want. It has become evident that there are no real tangible or permanent things in our lives and whatever you choose to do needs to be meaningful.

