

The Dalai Lama of Tibet

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Dalai Lama: Inner peace is essential for world peace

By Lisa Bennett, Cornell Chronicle

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When the Dalai Lama of Tibet was a little boy, he was very short-tempered, he told 12,000 people here Tuesday night.

He usually blamed it on being born in Northeastern Tibet, a region many Tibetans see as a breeding ground of short-tempered people, said the 1989 Nobel Peace Prize winner.

“But then, with my realization of the negative things about anger and the positive things about love and compassion, I changed,” he said. “Now, today of course, occasionally I get a temper. But in most cases, I am quite calm.

“So according to my own experience, it is possible, very possible, to change for the better,” the Dalai Lama said. “We have the potential. Whether we make the effort is up to the individual.”

What is at stake is not only happiness, the attainment of which he considers the purpose of life, but world peace, he said.

Though an individual’s development of inner peace may seem an insignificant step in the direction of world peace, he added, world peace is impossible without it.

The 14th Dalai Lama delivered the 1991 Bartels World Affairs Lecture, entitled “Overcoming differences,” to a full house in Barton Hall and capacity overflow crowds watching via live telecast in Statler Auditorium and the Alberding Field House. Dressed in maroon-and-gold robe, he spoke in English with an interpreter beside him to provide occasional translations.

Asked to summarize Tibetan Buddhism in a phrase, the spiritual and temporal leader of 6 million Tibetans said: If you can help other sentient beings, help – do help. If you can’t, at least restrain from harming.”

1991 BARTELS SPEAKER

But love and compassion are not the terrain of any one religion at all, he added. They are simply the most basic qualities of human nature.

To hear Dalai Lama speak, many people traveled from hours away and lined up outside Barton Hall hours before the lecture began. When the hall filled at about 5 p.m. and people were directed to overflow locations, some resorted to pleading security, some slipped through the tunnel from Teagle Hall, and student Eric Kaufman offered a yellow flower as a ticket in.

Inside, while some waited with arms wrapped around each other's shoulders and others talked about having seen the Dalai Lama at earlier events in his three-day visit, many commented on the good feeling in the crowd. It proved, said one student, the impermanence of apathy.

Samuel Pollock of Ithaca came to celebrate his 75th birthday, saying beforehand, "I'm interested, though I don't think I'll change."

Reasons for coming varied widely: People said they were inspired by the Dalai Lama's commitment to nonviolence; they sought a guru; they were impressed by the patience and kindness of the monks who constructed the sand mandala in the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art; and they heard he was like a little kid and felt, "there's a little Dalai Lama in all of us."

After the talk, several people said they appreciated that the Dalai Lama "threw out the religious stuff and made it so simple." Others said they were moved having been in the company of someone who embodied the love, compassion and calmness of which he spoke.

"I feel grateful for having had the opportunity to be in his presence," said Wanda Strother, 44, from Rochester.

In his lecture, the Dalai Lama reflected Tibetan Buddhism's blending on spirituality and practicality. He focused on the values of enhancing compassion, on evidence that basic human nature is more gentle than aggressive and on ideas about how to develop compassion and reduce anger.

Saying the purpose of life is happiness, the Dalai Lama noted that people often consider sources of happiness to be friends, wealth, fame and a good home. But "these sources are not 100 percent guaranteed" – only a good heart is a definite source of happiness and strength, he said.

It is most basic to human nature, he added. While negative feelings – such as anger, hatred, jealousy – are also qualities of mind, our positive qualities of love, compassion and gentleness are dominant.

"Some argue with this. But if you look at just our physical structure," the Dalai Lama said, holding up his bare arms, "it seems we belong to the animal species that are the most gentle ... we are like a deer, rather than a tiger or lion."

The dominance of compassion is evident throughout the stages of life: from the womb through education to death, he said.

"In the womb, a mother's mental attitude is a crucial factor for development after birth. Then, according to western doctors, the next few weeks is the crucial period for the development of the brain, and the mother's touch is the most important. This proves that the human body itself needs affection," he said.

In education, "the lesson you receive from a person very close to you usually go much deeper in the brain. The lessons you receive from a teacher who doesn't show any feeling toward you usually feel like a burden," he continued. "Then, in the last day of our life, when we know we are definitely departing

from our companions and they are of no more use to us, even a dying person...[in the company of] friends feel much easier. This proves the gentleness of our nature," he said.

Conversely, just recognizing the true nature of anger – “a trouble-maker” – helps reduce it, he said.

“Anger is quite cunning, quite clever. When we are facing a problem, a tragedy, it comes as a protector,” bringing strength and dispelling fear, he said. “But if you look closely, that anger is blind anger...When anger governs, it destroys the best part of the human brain.” That is why when some one gets angry and yells at someone else, the person usually feels embarrassed after the anger dissipates, he said.

Asked in a prepared question about his feelings towards China – which sent troops into Tibet some 40 years ago, banned Buddhism and, through modernization and the squashing of rebellions, caused more than 1 million deaths and prompted him to flee, establishing a government-in-exile in India – the Dalai Lama illustrated his philosophy in practice this way:

“A Buddhist monk’s daily prayer is for all sentient beings. If that is true, there is no point in excluding the most populated nation,” he said.

The struggle to free Tibet, he added, is not a political but spiritual one, which, therefore, “can help contribute to millions and millions of Chinese.”

Always optimistic, the Dalai Lama said he was encouraged by sympathetic feelings toward Tibet shown by the Western public and press. “Now, that feeling should eventually reach the government level. How that will happen, I don’t know,” he said. “You know better.”

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