

DALAI LAMA, from page 1

desperate. On some level, I am also homeless. But being homeless sometimes is useful, because you realise that in many places you can find a new home. If you have just one home, in some way you can get stuck in that.

D.B.: In recent years we have seen within the street paper movement many new people becoming vendors as a result of the global recession. People haven't got enough money to live on or lose their jobs and end up on the streets. What do you feel about austerity measures introduced by governments to tackle the crisis?

D.L.: This is a very complicated situation. Immediately, I think governments have the responsibility for the country as a whole, so sometimes maybe these measures are necessary. But if you take an overall view, the real causes of the present difficulties started with the past governments and some companies. I think, without a proper plan in place, they are simply concerned about immediate profit and are not concerned about the long-term consequences. From that level, of course not seeing it from an individual person, but government or organisations which have the responsibility, the results now are due to their own actions. Only now, when difficulties have come, they put some sort of restrictions in place. It is complicated. Either way, for thousands of people, their livelihood is almost zero, which is really very, very sad. Very sad. But then, how to handle these things, I don't know.

Two or three years ago, one newspaper, I think in Mexico, reported of one family whom, because of the economic difficulties, had to abandon their dog. The dog was now truly homeless. There was a picture of the dog and he looked very sad. Now really nobody took care of him. When I saw that picture, I myself almost felt some kind of hopelessness. Taking that to a human level, you can certainly see how life has become more difficult.

However, whenever I meet people who are in a difficult situation, I always share with them, in spite of a lot of difficulties, as a human being you should keep self-confidence and work hard. Due to certain difficulties, if you completely lost your self-confidence, hope and will, then inevitably difficulty will continue and it will lead to real disaster. So it is very, very essential to keep hope and determination."

D.B.: You have often said about your own situation that it is important to keep hope. In your autobiography you write that as far back as in 1953 you were convinced that 'no matter how bad things become, they will eventually get better.' Given the current situation in Tibet, how do you succeed in that?

D.L.: In my own case, at age 16, I lost my freedom. Difficulties had already started. Then, at 24, I lost my own country. Over the last 52 years, there have been a lot of problems. The news from within our own country has mostly been very heart-breaking

news, very sad. In the meantime, Tibetans have put their trust in me, trust and hope. I cannot do much, so sometimes I really feel hopeless and desperate. But then, as I mentioned earlier, it is much better to keep my own enthusiasm and optimistic attitude, rather than allowing myself to completely lose hope and demoralize. That is of no help. So to other people I also say that no matter what difficulties, we should keep our self-confidence and determination.

D.B.: When people fall upon such hard times, including in your country, how do you manage not to let feelings of anger, frustration or hatred take over?

D.L.: Our emotion is a master check through our intelligence. On an intellectual level, we analyse each situation. If a situation is as such that we can overcome it, there is no need to worry. If there is no way to overcome a situation, there also is no use in too much worrying, as usually worry brings frustration and frustration brings anger. It is therefore always better to try not to worry too much. The emotion itself cannot do that, but with the help of human intelligence we can do that. I think whether God-created or nature-created, emotions are sometimes very troublesome. So God or nature also provided us with a kind of counter-balance, which is human intelligence. When animals face a problem, they almost crash and black-out. But as human beings, because of our intelligence, we have a way to judge and measure our response. That is my view."

D.B.: In your autobiography "Freedom in Exile," you blame the Chinese state media for misleading the people by grossly misrepresenting the situation in Tibet from the 1950s onwards. How important is the role of independent media in today's society?

D.L.: Independent media are extremely important. The media, as I see it, are almost like a third eye. Now, sometimes the third eye itself is a little bit biased (laughs). That is a problem. If media first objectively analyse and then report and make a story known to people, their role is extremely helpful and very effective. When I meet media people, I tell them that they should have a long nose and investigate all sides; not just the front side, but also behind. They must undertake thorough investigation to find out what the reality is. People have every right to know the reality, particularly in democratic countries. Media should undertake full investigations, present their findings objectively, without a biased view and then inform the public. If they work this way, they have a very important and great role to play."

D.B.: Street papers often cover issues that would otherwise go unreported. What stories regarding your own country are the most important ones that need to be told?

D.L.: As for the Tibetan issue, it is that the very nature of the Tibetan struggle is strictly non-violent and very much in the spirit of reconciliation. Therefore, our struggle needs worldwide support. It must succeed, because if it fails, it will encourage

those people who carry a different method, including force and violence.

Also, some aspect of the Tibetan story is not just a political matter, but an environmental issue. The Tibetan Plateau (part of the Himalayas) plays a greatly important role in global warming. Nearly all major rivers in that part of the world rise on the Tibetan Plateau, so the preservation of Tibetan ecology is not only in Tibetan people's interest. More than one billion people's lives depend on these rivers.

Another top priority is the preservation of Tibetan culture, which is a culture of peace, a culture of non-violence and compassion. It is not only an ancient culture, but also one that is very relevant in today's world. We live in an increasingly materialistic world, which is all about consumerism. And there are moral problems which sometimes lead to violence, particularly among the youth. Whenever they face problems; the response of some of them has become more violent."

D.B.: You have 4.5 million followers on Twitter and 4 million fans on Facebook and many people discuss your ideas and teachings online. One of your recent popular tweets read: "I am increasingly convinced that the time has come to find a way to think about spirituality and ethics beyond religion all together." Why do you believe that?

D.L.: Obviously among seven billion human beings there is quite a big portion of people who have not much interest in religion. And within the group of believers, again I think, there is quite a big portion of people not very serious about it. For many, religion has become just a daily ritual, but is not taken seriously. So the indication that they may attend Sunday church or a temple, including Buddhist, does not mean much. They pray to Buddha or God, but in their real life they have no hesitation to get involved in creating injustice, telling lies, corruption, bullying and cheating. These activities are, I think, against every major religion and traditional teaching. That indicates that a group of religious believers has a lack of conviction.

Traditional spiritual teachings and principles are an immense benefit to one's self. The people who do not take their religion seriously lack this knowledge, and religion is of no relevance to their lives. Therefore, we need a wider way to spread the conviction that moral ethics are really the basis of a happy life. This is true on an individual level as well as on a family, community and humanity level. That is something common for all major religions and traditions, as well as non-believers. Everybody wants to be happy and have a happy family.

Many people have the attitude that if you have money or power, your life becomes something meaningful and makes you happy. That is a mistake. Happiness and sorrow itself are part of the mind; they are a mental experience. The real way to reduce pain and sadness and increase happiness and joyfulness must be found through mental training. Some of my friends are very rich, they have plenty of money. And of course,

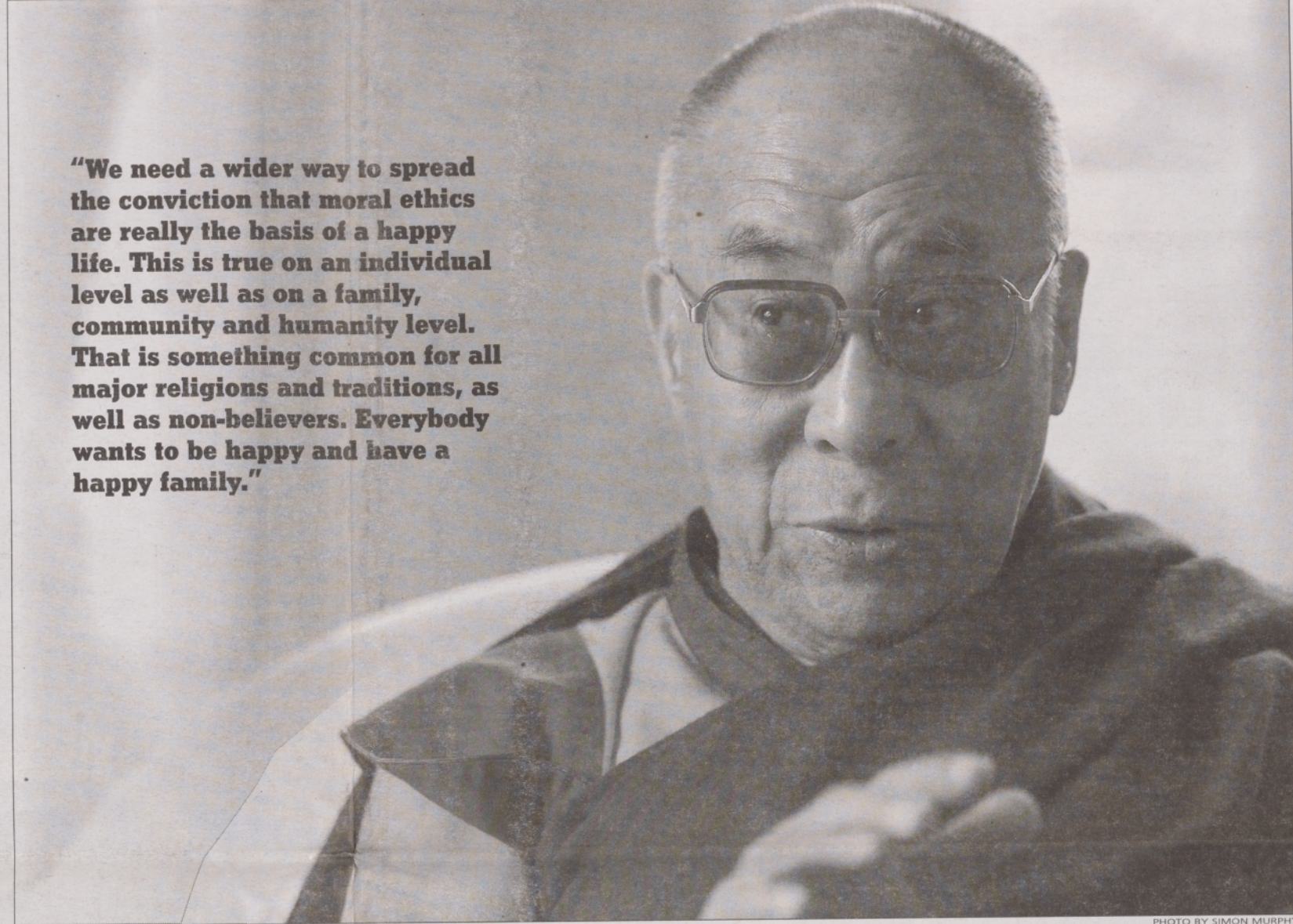


PHOTO BY SIMON MURPHY

"We need a wider way to spread the conviction that moral ethics are really the basis of a happy life. This is true on an individual level as well as on a family, community and humanity level. That is something common for all major religions and traditions, as well as non-believers. Everybody wants to be happy and have a happy family."

because they are a wealthy person, they are also quite influential in society. But as a person, they are very unhappy. I noticed that. That shows that money, vanity and power are not an adequate source of happiness.

D.B.: Since 2009, 37 people have set themselves on fire, according to the Tibetan Centre for Human Rights and Democracy. That figure covers the latest incident in Lhasa on May 27, the first in the capital, where one young man died and another got seriously injured. China has responded to the wave of self-immolations by banning foreign visitors to Tibet. How do you feel about the fact that some of your fellow countrymen go to such extremes to make their voices heard? And do you think China's efforts to cover up the protests from the outside world are effective?

establishment of Tibet as a zone of peace.

But he did not move from his stance of peaceful resistance and in 1989 was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize. The committee praised his policy of non-violence, which it called "all the more remarkable when it is considered in relation to the sufferings inflicted on the Tibetan people."

Increased tension

Despite their disagreements, the Dalai Lama has continued to seek dialogue with Beijing. Talks between the two sides broke down in 1993 and there were no more for nearly a decade. Discussions resumed in 2002 and have continued intermittently but with no apparent progress.

Tensions between China and the Tibetan government-in-exile worsened in

been in exile for over 50 years and have become one of the world's most recognizable global figures. How do you manage to stay connected to the lives of ordinary people inside and outside Tibet?

D.L.: Inside Tibet, there were a few occasions whilst traveling where I was mixing with ordinary people. Some people asked me: 'Where is the Dalai Lama?' Then I told them: 'Oh, the Dalai Lama is over there'. Then, afterwards, I held a public meeting and I recognized one lady whom I had talked to in disguise. When she saw my face and realised it was the same person, she could not believe it (laughter). Such things were always quite fun. My main motivation for mixing with them was to get clear information about what was going on. When people know you are the Dalai Lama they may not be as frank as to an ordinary monk.

Living in a free country, my contact with people is open. And from the responses from the audiences I meet nowadays, it seems that they also have that kind of attitude towards me. That means I get the right information and a real picture of the reality. In the past, even my own officials answered not very clearly if I asked them about something. So I always asked the sweepers, who were uneducated, innocent people. They would always tell me whatever they had heard straightforwardly, including criticism about a Regent, criticism about some high officials and high Lamas. They had no hesitation to tell me all the negative things like that (laughter)."

D.B.: Our street paper vendors around the world face different kinds of social and economic difficulties, but when asked what the hardest thing about their situation is, their answer is often the same: the feeling of loneliness. A search party recognised you as the 14th Dalai Lama when you were two years old; you spent your childhood among adults in monasteries and faced the huge responsibility of protecting your people from foreign invasion and being their spiritual leader at age fifteen. With your experience of loneliness in your life, what advice would you give to them?

D.L.: In my own case, if I only think of myself as "I am a Tibetan" or "I am a Buddhist," that in itself creates a kind of distance. So I say to myself: 'Forget that, I am a human being, one of the seven billion human beings. By saying that, I immediately become closer. If people put the emphasis on their situation by thinking "I am poor" or "I am homeless" or "I am in a difficult situation," they put too much of an emphasis on a secondary level. I think that this also is a reality, but still another reality is that we all are human being, one of the seven billion human beings on this planet. I know that in a practical sense that might not be of much help, but emotionally, it can be very helpful.

Photographer Simon Murphy donated the photographs for this interview. For more of his work, see www.simonmurphyphotographer.com. ©International Network of Street Papers. www.street-papers.org

issue. But from the Buddhist view point, every action, whether it is positive or negative, ultimately depends on the motivation. For those people whose motivation is mainly a more compassionate one of sincere faith in Buddha Dharma, it is different. But at the moment, it is very much driven by anger and hatred, and then it is basically negative. We cannot generalize, we have to look case to case from a Buddhist viewpoint. But politically, I always consider Tibetan people inside Tibet as my boss. For the past 52 years, I consider myself as the free spokesman of the Tibetan people. So from that level, I have no right to judge the boss' activities.

D.B.: In your autobiography you refer to the invaluable experiences you had when you traveled in disguise. You said it was a chance to find out "what life was really like" for your fellow countrymen and women. You have now

very short-sighted, narrow-minded and unreasonable. I think that they will realize these things and that eventually, they will change. The Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao on many occasions expressed that China needs political reform, and he even mentioned that China needs Western-style democracy. That includes freedom and free information and transparency. So I hope that things eventually will change. It is in their own interest, which is very important for them to realize."

The events (self-immolations) that have happened in Tibet are, of course, very, very sad. In one way it shows that Tibetans very much believe in non-violence. They do not want to harm others, so they harm themselves by burning themselves. This is certainly an indication of desperation. There is no question about that. In terms of right or wrong ... Firstly, it is a sensitive political

the wake of unrest in Tibet in March 2008 — the worst in 20 years. Protests sparked by the anniversary of the 1959 uprising turned into riots on the streets of Lhasa. Violent protests were also reported among Tibetan communities in neighboring regions. China says at least 18 people were killed by rioters. Tibetan groups say as many as 200 people died in a crackdown by Chinese security forces.

In March 2011, the Dalai Lama showed his political responsibilities to an elected representative and proclaimed he would only continue as Tibet's spiritual leader. The move was seen as a way to transform the Tibetan government-in-exile into a more assertive and democratic body in the face of Chinese pressure.

Self-immolations

Lobsang Sangay was elected prime minister of the Tibetan government-in-exile in northern India. In April 2012 he urged Tibetans not to celebrate Losar, the traditional new year, and instead to pray for those "who have sacrificed and suffered under the repressive policies of the Chinese government."

At least 35 Tibetans have set themselves on fire since March 2011 in protest against China's six-decade rule over Tibet, according to Tibetan rights groups. At least 27 have died, most of them Buddhist monks in Tibetan parts of Sichuan and Gansu provinces, next to what China calls the Tibet Autonomous Region. China branded the self-immolators "terrorists" and criminals and

has blamed exiled Tibetans and the Dalai Lama for inciting them.

Diplomatic rows

By stepping back from political power last year, it was believed that the Dalai Lama could find it far easier to travel and be seen greeting Western leaders who can often be reluctant to meet him amid worries it could upset diplomatic and trade ties with China. However, diplomatic rows over Dalai Lama visits have continued in recent months.

During his U.K. tour in June, the Dalai Lama walked into an Olympic row with China on a visit to Leeds, the city chosen as the base for the Chinese Olympic team this summer. The BBC reported that China had urged Leeds City Council to

stop his visit and threatened to pull out of the city, but the council insisted the visit to address a business convention was private.

It was the latest low-level diplomatic tussle between China and Britain since Prime Minister David Cameron angered the Chinese by meeting the exiled Tibetan Buddhist leader in London in May. China told Britain's envoy to Beijing the meeting had "seriously interfered" with China's internal affairs.

The now 77-year-old Dalai Lama shrugged off the controversy, telling reporters that Beijing's displeasure over his foreign trips were commonplace. "That always happens. It's almost like routine." (Sources: Reuters and BBC) www.street-papers.org / INSP

A lifelong journey - in summary

— By Danielle Batist

The Child Leader

The 14th Dalai Lama was born July 6, 1935, in a small village just outside the current boundaries of Tibet. His parents, who named him Lhamo Dhondub, were farmers with several other children.

When he was two years old, a search party of Buddhist officials recognized him as the reincarnation of the 13 previous Dalai Lamas, and he was enthroned before he turned four. He was educated at a monastery and went on to achieve the Geshe Lharampa Degree, a doctorate of Buddhist philosophy.

But in 1950, when he was 15, the troops of Mao Tse-tung's newly-installed Communist government marched into

Tibet. As soldiers poured into the country, the Dalai Lama — his title means Ocean of Wisdom — assumed full power as head of state.

In May 1951, China drew up a 17-point agreement legitimizing Tibet's incorporation into China. When Tibetans took to the streets in 1959 demanding an end to Chinese rule, troops crushed the revolt, and thousands of protesters were killed.

The Dalai Lama fled to India on foot and settled in Dharamsala, in the north of the country, which is now home to the Tibetan government-in-exile. He was followed into exile by about 80,000 Tibetans, most of whom settled in the same area.

Exile in India

In exile, the Dalai Lama began the task of trying to preserve the culture of the Tibetan people and publicize their plight on the world stage. He appealed to the United Nations and persuaded the General Assembly to adopt resolutions in 1959, 1961 and 1965 calling for the protection of the Tibetan people.

He has met political and religious leaders throughout the world and visited the late Pope John Paul II on several occasions. The Dalai Lama has advocated a "middle way" to resolve the status of Tibet — genuine self-rule for Tibet within China.

In 1987, amid protests in Lhasa against the large-scale relocation of Han Chinese into Tibet, the Dalai Lama proposed a five-point plan, in which he called for the