

His Holiness the Dalai Lama (January 2009)

Yet another exciting Saturday in Delhi. I love living here so much. Most days I have to pinch myself just to make sure I'm not dreaming. It is going to be so hard for me to leave! This morning I heard His Holiness the Dalai Lama speak for the second time but this was the first time I heard him speak in English. His Holiness gave the keynote address at the Global Congress on World Religions After September 11th at Jamia Millia Islamia University in Delhi. After he spoke Rajiv Mehotra chaired an interactive session with His Holiness where he only answered 3 questions and mine was one of them!

Religions can be a force for good when they work with each other. His Holiness spoke about how he is just a simple human being, a simple monk and we are all the same in that we desire happiness and want to overcome suffering. We all come from a mother who has immense affection for her child and this affection has planted a seed of affection in ourselves. In our blood an appreciation of affection is there. He also said that those of us that have loving, affectionate mothers are usually inclined towards greater happiness—maybe this is why I'm usually just so very happy! He stressed the importance of compassion and caring as the foundation for a happy life. Destructive emotions hurt our health and it is essential that we promote human values and the message of love and compassion. The more interaction we have between faiths the more harmony we can have and it is our global responsibility to promote religious harmony. He did stress that spiritual and political institutions should remain separate which is interesting given the fact that he is both a spiritual and political leader.

I asked His Holiness to speak about Education and Ethics and for some practical guidance as a school teacher that believes in the importance of promoting harmony and awareness among her students. He told me that education is to teach reality. I interpreted that to mean not only is it was important to teach my students that everything is related and interconnected but to also make sure they had discernment. He spoke at great length about teaching warm heartedness but a teacher MUST model warm heartedness and that is how it is taught to her students. This warm heartedness would promote a sense of responsibility among students and is an important element of what he calls secular, moral ethics. Anger and hatred eat away at our immune system but compassion strengthens our immune system.

Aside from my question he answered a question about the Tibet situation. Aside from stressing nonviolence he talked about how President Hu Jin Tao is promoting harmony but harmony depends on trust. But in a nation with censorship there is no trust so how can you have harmony?

He also joked around about the Guru Chela relationship between Tibet and India. His Holiness has such a special presence and when he answered my question I was just a few feet from him and I could feel compassion radiating from him and my eyes welled up in tears. It was such an inspirational morning.

Not only did I hear His Holiness speak but I also ran into so many wonderful familiar faces and friends I had not seen since a conference I went to last March in West Bengal at Shantiniketan in honor of my mentor, Ramuji.

After hearing His Holiness speak I went to a beautiful space in Tilak Marg for our monthly Delhi Day of Mindfulness led by Dharmacharya Shantum Seth. We engaged in our usual sitting and walking meditation practice and gathered as an all Delhi Sangha. I feel so blessed to have found my guru, Thich Nhat Hanh. I love Thay so much! As a special treat we had Indian Buddhists from Nagpur speak with us. Our guests actually took refuge in the Three Jewels and were given diksha into the Buddha Dharma by Ambedkar himself on October 14, 1956. A Theravandan Monk, Vimla Kirti Ji, one of the Buddhist leaders in Nagpur spoke about how 85% of Indian Buddhists live in Maharashtra. His Sangha brother, Mr. Patil, also from Nagpur spoke about how the Buddha Dharma has transformed the lives of so many Dalits.

The more I delve into the dharma and think seriously about social change it becomes clear to me that the only way we can transform society is by first transforming ourselves.