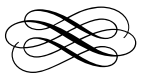


Kindred Spirits



Affirming Our Interdependence

We Are All Ground Zero

Time is always moving forward. With each passing moment, beginning from the instant of our birth, we come closer to the end, to our death. That is our nature, and the nature of the universe. . . .

*His Holiness the Dalai Lama,
Essence of the Heart Sutra*

I am riding the Amtrak rails to Washington, to hear the Dalai Lama's September 11th address at the National Cathedral. Outside the windows of the café car, where the relics of New Jersey's industrial past slide by, the sun is a red ball on the horizon, smudging it with magenta, like spilled gasoline on snow.

The broad earth turns in majestic inexorability, rising before the darkening sun and gradually covering it with the silhouettes of trees. I am acutely aware that each of us, in our irreversibly aging bodies, will be privileged to witness this sight only so many times—only so many heartbeats allowed us before we must exit the diurnal stage and make room for the burgeoning tide of new beings.

Sadly—if we are attached to those we love, as most of us are—we must acknowledge that His Holiness the Dalai Lama, now 68 years of age, his mortal body somewhat stooped, and gradually bending under the immense load he so gracefully carries as the living exemplar of Buddhism and the personification of peace, must eventually leave this earth too.

Probably no one else on earth has the security and support system that he has—except possibly the pope. Surely no one person is as widely and universally loved and cherished—his mortal manifestation as tenderly cared for as the crown jewel of a supreme masterpiece in the terrestrial museum. But like all phenomena, he is only an ephemeral effect of causes and conditions, whose persistent transformation will soon render his material existence a matter of memory.

To be attached to it—to grasp it and cling to it—is, as he would teach us, only a waste of energy better spent on relieving suffering, wherever we

find it in our lives. For nothing inherently exists—everything is only relatively existent—and all that exists is perfect, in that it is eternally and infinitely subject to change.

This is the kind of wisdom he teaches—the perfection of wisdom—with the acceptance of impermanence and the joyful embrace of emptiness.

what the Dalai Lama will have to say on this commemorative occasion. The pillared interior of the neo-Gothic cathedral is vast, and the Episcopalian pomp and ceremony—a kind of interfaith High Mass—is as spectacular as it gets.

His Holiness, in his usual maroon and saffron robe, stands in the high

was transfixed by the sight of the people trapped inside and struggling desperately to get out. The pain and suffering on shocking display were almost more than he could bear to watch. And then the collapse of one—then the other—and the enormity of the loss of life . . .

“We have the moral responsibility to pray for the victims and their families,” he says, “and to show solidarity with them in their pain. In our individual lives,” he adds, “we need to ensure that nothing like this happens in the future.”

At the same time, he says, although the historic event is still a source of sadness, “it's important to come to terms with a tragedy that has already occurred . . . it's important not to be depressed and paralyzed by what is in the past, but to use it as an opportunity for personal growth and forgiveness.”

There are two specific measures we can take:

Since this catastrophe happened “because of hatred and jealousy, and immense destructive emotions,” we can make an effort “to promote positive emotions; and to reduce these negative, afflictive emotions.”

Second, “We need to promote compassion; forgiveness; contentment; self-discipline, through the education of future generations.”

Not kill. Not bomb. Not destroy. Not assassinate. But address the needs of those who have been driven to such desperate lengths as desperate in their own way as the people trapped in those burning buildings—and win their trust for the sake of all future generations.

“To win trust with violence?” he asks rhetorically, with a shake of his head. “Impossible.”

It is the same message contained in his letter to “Your Excellency,” the U.S. President, sent on the eve of his invasion of Afghanistan:

“I personally believe we need to think seriously whether a violent action is the right thing to do and in the greater interest of the nation and people in the long run. I believe

The September 11th Address

In all levels of our existence—family life, social life, working life, and political life—inner disarmament is, above all, what humanity needs.

Essence of the Heart Sutra

It is the same kind of warm, late-summer day in Washington, with crystalline blue skies, as the September 11th of 2001 that wells up this day in everyone's memory. The National Cathedral is filled wall to wall with people who have waited in line all day under the sun to hear

pulpit, with his indefatigable translator Thupten Jinpa, in western suit and tie, alertly at his side. “Honored to be here in this august and sacred cathedral,” although hard to hear, the Dalai Lama seems genuinely humbled, but more by the nature of the event than the location.

“We pray for peace,” he says, “and for the victims of unimaginable tragedy in New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania.”

He tells the story of how he first saw the burning buildings in New York on BBC television, and



violence will only increase the cycle of violence. . . .”

On this day, the Dalai Lama has just come from a personal meeting with the President and the Secretary of State, who are said to sympathize with the Tibetan political cause. Diplomacy rules out any report on what was said, but clearly there is a lingering disagreement about basic political tactics. Luckily, China is too formidable a foe for the Washington warriors to do more than offer their sympathies.

The Dalai Lama mentions a “good sign” from which we can all take heart—that when the electricity recently failed in much of the Northeast, New Yorkers were notably more helpful and compassionate with each other than had been the case at similar times of crisis in the past.

Since the 9/11 tragedy, there is now “more of a sense of community,” he says. “Helping each other in times of difficulty . . . this is a sign of progress, a sign of hope.” This is “conducive to personal growth and spiritual maturity.”

And indeed the city has felt transformed in the past two years—less driven, self-serving, and paranoid, though apprehensive, with good reason, about the future, in a world in which all the grievances that give rise to terrorism are being systematically exacerbated by a political leadership most diplomatically characterized as spiritually immature.

“We need education in equality,” says the Dalai Lama from his ecumenical pulpit. “Inside all religions, it is the same message, with the same potential: to help humanity—through promotion of basic human values and religious harmony—to reduce sectarian violence.”

When it comes to the Abrahamic religions, of course, sectarian violence has been the rule, more often than not, for the past three thousand years. But His Holiness reiterates, in his “broken English”:

“All religious traditions have same potential. It’s mistake to conclude Muslim religion is more violent. *No harm*,” he says, is the ethical principle at the core of every religion—“if *harm*, not Muslim. Not right to blame one tradition as a whole.”

Education in equality—it’s something New Yorkers specialize in, but is direly needed throughout the country and the world. If we study and experience other cultures and their religions, we stand some chance of finding our common humanity there.

As the Dalai Lama says in conclusion, “Our experience increases

respect for religion. Sincere respect promotes religious harmony.”

Afterword

On the way back to Union Station, as we slowly make our way through rush-hour traffic in Georgetown, the cab driver offers his opinion that the Capitol Building in Washington is the most beautiful building in the world, both for its neoclassical architecture and for what it stands for—or at least what it once stood for.

“I look at that dome every day,” he says. “And I can’t look at it now without thinkin’ of how they were goin’ to fly that plane right into it—the one that crashed in Pennsylvania. Can you imagine, if they’d done that?”

I tell him that I can well imagine—that there must be more people than ever who would like to do that.

“They’re spendin’ billions every day, all over the world—*billions*. For what? For *nothin’!* I don’t think that buildin’ is any safer than it ever was.”

On the train back to New York, I sit cross-legged in my seat and meditate on the blackness and the occasional blur of lights flashing past the window. It could be the stars of a whirling galaxy, or it could be the bright spots I occasionally see on the back of my eyelids. The perceiver and the perception are so relative—the causes and conditions of our very lives in such constant flux.

Emptiness, they call it in Buddhism, this perpetual interdependence of everything on the preceding succession of causes and conditions that recede into infinity. If we realize how the very self that we cherish is only another manifestation of that basic emptiness, we will tend to be less absorbed in ourselves and more compassionate with the suffering of others—they say.

As the train leaves Newark’s Pennsylvania Station and nears the tunnel in the Palisades that bores under the Hudson River into Manhattan, I can see across the darkness of the flatlands two preternaturally powerful beams of light piercing the night sky. I realize that it can only be the memorial “towers of light” at the World Trade Center, shining up from the “footprints” of the missing buildings, turned on now for the first time in months as another of the day’s commemorative events.

They could be moving searchlights seeking out the camouflaged fuselages of enemy bombers amidst death-dealing explosions. But in tonight’s reality, they glow silently, and are perfectly still, *in memoriam*.

—William Meyers

The art accompanying this issue’s *Kindred Spirits* is a Zen Buddhist symbol called an *Enso*, or a “circle of enlightenment.” The *Shinjinmei*, written in the sixth century C.E., refers to the Great Way of Zen as “a circle like vast space, lacking nothing, and nothing in excess,” and this statement is often used as an inscription on Enso paintings.

This Enso, from an oxherding picture series by Gyokusei Jikihara, Sensei, was painted in 1982, when he was visiting Zen Mountain Monastery in Mt. Tremper, New York.

The inscription on the original says:

Both Bull and Self Transcended

Whip, rope, person, and bull—
all merge in No Thing.
This heaven is so vast,
no message can stain it.
How may a snowflake exist
in a raging fire.
Here are the footprints of
the Ancestors.

This is the eighth of ten pictures.
Traditionally the eighth step is illustrated
by an Enso.

