

THE Aspen IDEA

Winter 2008/2009

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE

Plus:
The 2008 Aspen
Ideas Festival
An Urgent Call
For Education
Reform

THE DALAI LAMA

At the Institute

President
Jimmy Carter
Explores the
Arctic



Harman-
Eisner Artist-
in-Residence
Damian
Woetzel

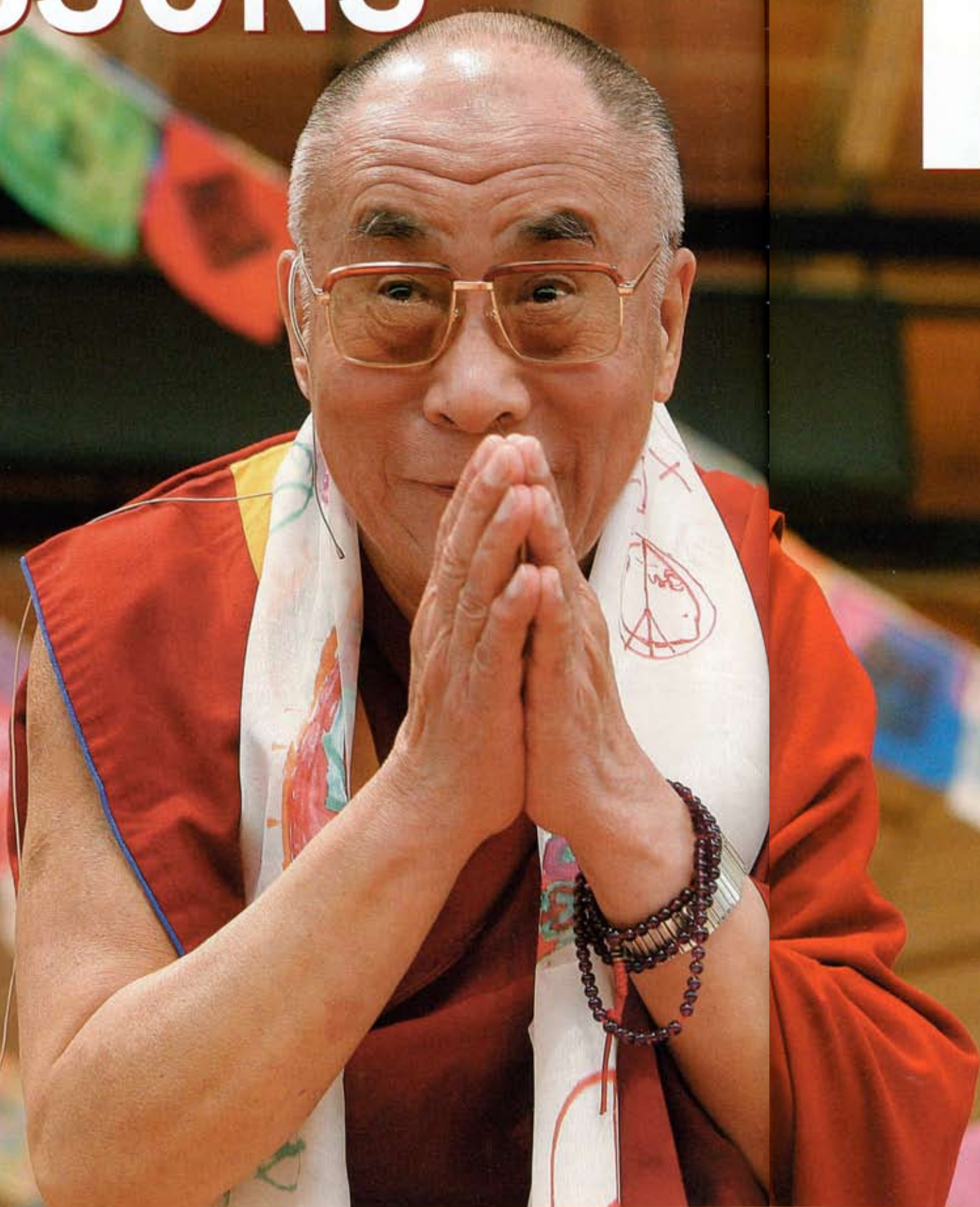


Words and
Music from
Secretary
of State
Condoleezza
Rice



LESSONS FROM

TIBET



His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama joined spiritual leaders, scholars, and others for a three-day exploration of one of the world's most compelling cultures.

In late July, the Aspen Institute and the Conservancy for Tibetan Art and Culture welcomed scholars, thought leaders, the general public, dozens of Tibetan Buddhist monks and spiritual leaders, and, not least, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama to the Institute's Aspen campus for a symposium on Tibetan and Himalayan art, culture, science, medicine, spiritual practice, and history.

The in-depth, three-day event was spearheaded by co-chairs Margot Pritzker (an Institute trustee) and investment banker Richard Blum — both longtime friends and admirers of the Dalai Lama and champions of the Tibetan cause. Opening the symposium, Pritzker praised the Dalai Lama for embodying the ideal of values-based leadership — the core principle of the Institute's mission — and urged attendees to “savor the connection between our aspirations and the reality of his example. We have so much to learn from those rare individuals whose lives are thoroughly consonant with the values they profess,” she said. “In examining Tibetan culture, ... we are examining the wellsprings of those values.”

In addition to the Dalai Lama's two keynotes, the symposium featured a number of eminent scholars, teachers, practitioners, and tradition-bearers from around the globe who shed light on the historical and philosophical significance of Tibet and its impact on current global issues. Attendees took part in panel discussions, presentations, and breakout sessions, as well as interactive demonstrations of ancient Tibetan and Himalayan arts. Sessions covered topics such as Tibet's Buddhist heritage, happiness and Buddhist meditation, life and death as viewed through the Tibetan lens, and the riches of Tibetan poetry. Meanwhile, experts like Buddhist scholar Robert Thurman, former US Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, and journalist Pico Iyer probed the future of the Tibetan province and its relationship with China.

During a Saturday morning talk to more than 3,500 people in the Benedict Music Tent and at various locations around the Aspen Meadows campus, His Holiness stressed the importance of interdependence among the world's citizens, the importance of finding inner peace, and a sense of global responsibility.

In a Friday evening appearance at the symposium, His Holiness sat for a candid onstage conversation with Institute CEO Walter Isaacson and Iyer, author of *The Open Road: The Global Journey of the Fourteenth Dalai Lama*, which he based on three decades worth of interviews and conversations with the Dalai Lama. The following are selected excerpts from that conversation.



Event co-chairs Richard Blum (left) and Margot Pritzker (right) greet His Holiness with the traditional exchange of ceremonial scarves.

Walter Isaacson: You have a deep interest in science. What can Western science teach Buddhism, and what can Buddhism teach science?

His Holiness the Dalai Lama: In Buddhism we are learning more about matter, or particles, and I think for me personally, and all those who are Tibetan, as a rule we are learning about cosmology. My concept now of the whole universe is, in particular, more realistic. Before, we believed that Mount Meru was the center; then the sun and the moon go around it. That is outdated cosmology.

One small story: When the spacecraft landed on the moon, we saw some pictures of rocks. I showed one of the monks, "Now, moon like this," and also from there the view of the world: Blue planet. Round. My colleague still was doubtful: "Oh, maybe spacecraft landed on some part of Mount Meru!" Now, I think, among Tibetan scholars that view is gradually changing. This is useful. We are becoming more realistic.

I think the benefit, in any way, is the recognition that we are living beings, sentient beings, so peace of mind, inner tranquility, is very important.

Michael Brandt



A Buddhist monk tends to prayer flags before one of the symposium's dawn meditations.

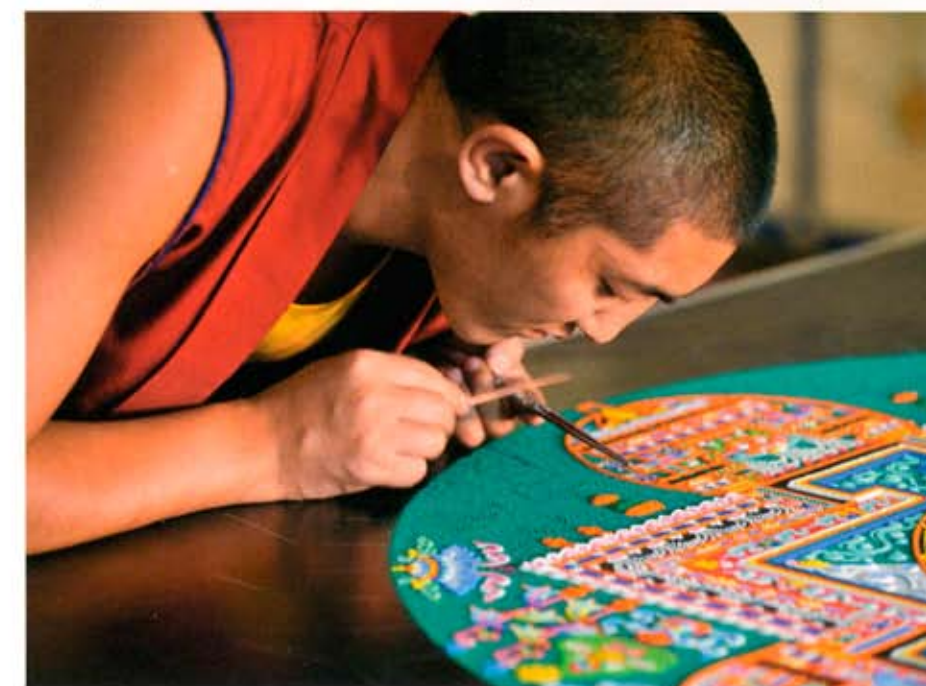
As far as inner peace and calm mind — machines cannot produce that, and businessmen or millionaires or billionaires cannot buy peace of mind, although you have plenty of money. You can't offer someone in a shop, "I want to buy peace of mind, so one hundred thousand dollars or a million dollars now already, here." Nobody can sell you peace of mind, clearly. That's a fact. We are taking care of the physical as much as we can. So why don't we take care of our mental health? In fact, physical health also is very much mental health.

Modern scientists and some doctors also are saying that too much stress, too much anxiety, agitation, is very bad for our health. So calm mind, peace of mind is something very good for our health. Then there is family life, also. Sometimes I tell people happy marriage, I think, is much related to inner beauty. External beauty with makeup or cosmetics — millions are spent on the cosmetic beauty of the face. But in a marriage based on just external beauty, after one week, after one month, gradually the level of inner beauty becomes clearer and clearer. Marriage cannot be happy based on external beauty alone. That's very clear. So, ultimately, inner beauty is more important than external beauty.

In the early '60s, one Tibetan monk official left the monkhood. He found a wife. So then I teased him, "Oh, your wife is not that attractive." His answer was, "Oh, externally, not that much

attractive, but the inner beauty is very, very good!" So then I had no argument!

Material richness is important. That brings physical comfort. But equally important is mental richness. It is very, very important in order to keep a happy mind, a calm mind. Another beneficial aspect is if your mind remains calm, then if some difficulty, some tragedy happens, you can deal with that much better. If your mind is not calm and is already in a bad mood, then some small



During the event, some of the attending monks created a traditional Tantric Buddhist sand mandala — a work of art comprising millions of grains of brightly colored sand meticulously laid in an intricate pattern on a flat surface. Following ancient tradition, the monks ceremonially destroyed their beautiful and painstaking creation at the end of the symposium — a reminder of life's impermanence.

tragedy, a small problem, can disturb you a lot.

If we have more knowledge about our minds, and particularly our emotions, then it's very important to learn how to deal with the emotional level. That, I think, we can learn from traditional Indian traditions, particularly Buddhism.

WI: Do you think that's true of societies as well as individuals — that a society like America's might be materialistically wealthy but could have a spiritual yearning?

HHDL: Yes, of course. Americans already know something about Tibetan culture or Buddhist culture and these things. But American society as a whole, I don't know. I think we need some research. Generally, in human society the material requirement for just the survival of this body is not sufficient; therefore the thing we call religion can have an impact on the mind.

That's a clear indication that we need something to provide inner peace. So, the concept of God is when you face some problem, and such problem is beyond our control. Then a person who

Biographer Pico Iyer, Institute President Walter Isaacson, and the Dalai Lama in conversation (the Dalai Lama's translator is to his right)



Michael Brandt

has no faith is really desperate, helpless. But people who have some faith, then still your hope can help you. Although things now are so terrible, "beyond my control," still you can put your faith in God. That's the theistic way. America is basically composed of the Judeo-Christian background, to some extent Muslim, so these religious values, I think, are still working and helpful. But in the meantime, many nonbelievers also are now coming into this society.

My effort, my view is that I think everybody agrees we need warm-heartedness, because that brings inner peace, inner strength, self-confidence. There are three ways to promote these inner values. The theistic approach, the concept of God — very good. The concept of Allah — very good. Then second: nontheistic religion such as Jainism and Buddhism. I'm not talking about a creator, but about the law of causality. Then there must be a third

approach that I call the secular way, based on common sense, common experience, particularly our experiences when we are young.

I heard a very beautiful story from one of my American friends after the Iraq war had already started. A young boy asked his father, "When Saddam Hussein was a kid, he must have been really loved by his mother, and he also must have shown love to his mother." Very nice explanation by a boy. I said every human being comes from childhood. We come from mother's milk, we come from mother's affection. We survive today because of mother's or someone else's maximum care. Without that, we cannot survive. We cannot be here today. That's clear. So, therefore, even these people also have the seed of compassion. Must be. Must have.

My belief is that everybody has the same great potential. That is our common experience, on that basis. Then,

obviously, we know those children whose families are full of affection — these young children are mentally healthier, physically healthier. Their studies are also much better. Then most important, the rest of their lives they become more sensitive about others' pain. Yet they show not much interest in religion. Then you must find the ways and means to bring conviction to human nonbelievers about affection, warm-heartedness. This is something that is very, very important in order to be a happy person or have happy families.

Pico Iyer: What values should we look for in our leaders? Your Holiness has known so many leaders, from Chairman Mao to Prime Minister Nehru to so many others. What should we look for in a leader?

HHDL: I think compassion, certainly, is a real motivation for every action,



Nora Feller

His Holiness meets with a group of local children — one of his favorite activities during his travels — who created the artwork that decorated the Benedict Music Tent stage where he would speak.

for global action as well as physical action, and certainly for policy — and also compassion to think about others' well-being rather than self-centered attitude. That's, of course, important. But then, of course, leadership must have vision and honesty. I think that's very, very important. Particularly in a democratic country, in order to get the vote, people's trust is very important. In order to gain trust, you should be honest. ... Remain honest, truthful, transparent, compassionate, long-term vision. I think these are important. Of course, it's easy to say, but doing is not that easy!

For extensive video coverage and more images from the event, visit www.aspeninstitute.org.

Kate Bailey, Missy Daniel, Bethany Lee, and Jamie Miller contributed to this story.



Michael Brandt

Mike and Doug Starn

Artists, Local Kids Team Up on a Masterpiece

In honor of His Holiness's visit, the Institute enlisted prominent New York-based artists (and identical twins) **Doug and Mike Starn** to transform the Aspen Music Festival's Benedict Music Tent — the majestic venue where the Dalai Lama would deliver his keynote talk — into a work of art. In a project orchestrated by the nearby Anderson Ranch Arts Center, the Starns in turn enlisted several hundred local children to decorate a colorful backdrop and more than 1,200 original Tibetan prayer flags. Inspiration for the work came from the Dalai Lama's own fondness for children and being surrounded by their creative output. "I feel these young children, their minds are not yet spoiled," he said as he began his talk, wearing a scarf the young artists had

decorated for him. "I think, including myself, people — what we call 'experienced' people, wise people — I think what we've got experience in is how to cheat other people, how to sort of pretend, all these negative things. I think these children are really very, very open-minded." The installation was made possible with funding from the Frank Stanton Foundation, which has donated funds to help integrate visual artists into the work of the Institute.