

Talking about Peace and Hope – Part 1

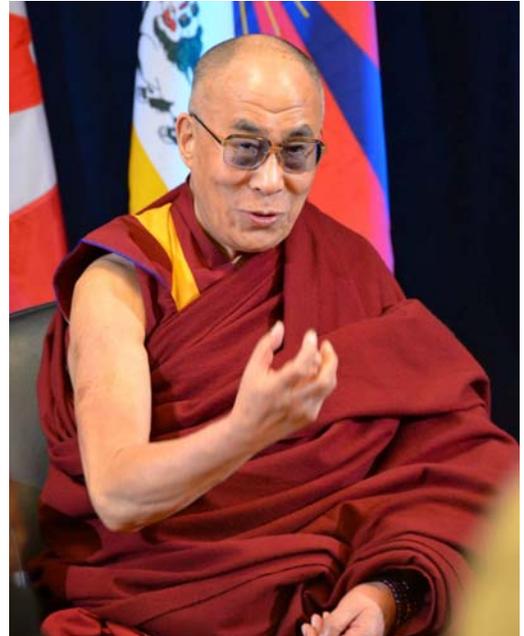
By Naj Wikoff
Lake Placid News

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"Tibet does not belong to the Dalai Lama. Tibet belongs to the 6 million Tibetans. The best way for them to take responsibility for Tibet is to choose their leaders and so I felt now is the right time," said His Holiness the Dalai Lama speaking about his decision to let go his role as a political leader to the gathering of world parliamentarians held at the Senate Conference Chamber in Ottawa last Friday.

"I have been working on this for 50 years. The Dalai Lama has been both the spiritual leader and the political leader of Tibet for over 400 years. Both our new Speaker and our new political leader were born in India, raised in India, educated in India and now they take the leadership, they take the responsibility. That night when I handed over the responsibility I had an especially sound sleep. I slept for eight hours!" he said laughing. He went on to discuss how he wanted to focus his time on promoting Tibetan values and religious harmony.

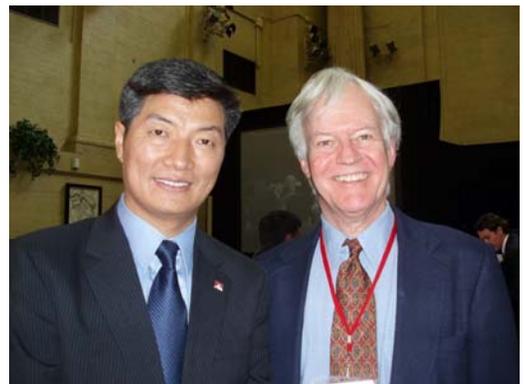
"I want to share two things with you. The first is about the environment. The major rivers that affect the Chinese, Indian, Vietnamese, Pakistani and other peoples of Asia begin in the Tibetan Plateau. Hundreds of millions of people depend on these rivers for their water. This plateau has the third largest ice cap in the world. Tibet is effectively the "Third Pole."



His Holiness the Dalai Lama.
Photo by Naj Wikoff



Dan Plumley with Tenzin Norbu.
Photo by Naj Wikoff



Naj Wiloff with Lobsang Sangay, the first popularly elected political leader of the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile. Photo by Dan Plumley

"The second is that the Tibetan Buddhist religion is quite unique in terms of the study of logic. It helps us improve human emotions. It can be quite useful for the non-Buddhist as well as the Buddhist, and its logic can be adapted in other fields. The preservation of this tradition can be useful in other worlds, in many other traditions even in lawyers, it can help them become more sharper and more articulate," this last part said with a laugh.

"Buddhism is a culture of peace and can be used to address peace not through prayer not through meditation, but through education, through here," said pointing at his heart. "Violence comes from within, and the end of violence can come from within. Peace can only come from within. Yet today we face the very real danger of our ancient culture dying."

The conference, this sixth of its kind, was organized by Sen. Consiglio Di Nino, chair of the Parliamentary Friends of Tibet, Canada and chaired by the actor Richard Gere, the chair of the International Campaign for Tibet. It was the first world conference held after the election of Dr. Lobsang Sangay as the first popularly elected political leader of the Tibetan Parliament-in-Exile, and the election of the first members of the Tibetan Parliament, all of whom were present as well. Other parliamentarians in attendance came from the world over.

Dan Plumley, of Keene, and I were invited as speakers, people with a long history of developing programs that address key concerns of the leadership, and to give practical suggestions for shifting concepts into action. Indeed he and I were both given places of high honor and visibility, he as a closing speaker for the first day and myself as the closing speaker for the second.

Dan along with Mr. Tenzin Norbu spoke to the importance of environmental stewardship. Dan provided an overview of the history of the Adirondack Park, its land classification system and mix of public and private land, and how it was used as a model to develop land classification to protect the Lake Baikal watershed in Russia, and to create an international park that covered an environmentally important region located half in Russian and half in China. Further he discussed his work with the nomadic reindeer herders of Russia and Mongolia, and the importance of their way of life and value system to protecting sensitive environments.

Norbu added flesh to Dalai Lama's concerns about the environmental importance of Tibet to the well-being of the millions of people living outside its borders and how the massive mining, damming of rivers, and relocation and destruction of the way of life of the traditional

peoples of Tibet, was putting the future of all Asia, and of consequence, the world, at risk. It drove home how lucky we were that Verbank Colvin and the New York State legislature had created the Adirondack Park to protect this land as a vital resource for the entire state.

I spoke to the historic role of the arts as a tool for social change and healing, opening my presentation with a photograph of Planet Earth taken from space by the Apollo astronauts, an image of our small blue, white and green orb floating in the vast universe of darkness with no political boundaries of human structures in evidence. I proposed that this view created a shift in human understanding of who we are and where we live, which contributed to the collapse of the repressive systems in the Soviet Union, South Africa and elsewhere and a greater push for environmental sustainability.

I went on to show how the creation of an arts program in a tiny hospital in the Sayan Mountains of Russia led to a multicultural collaborative effort to create arts in health initiative in hospitals in Ulan Ude and the establishment of an arts in health initiative at the East Siberian Academy of Culture, which most recently launched an arts in health effort to reduce the outcomes of stress on the Russian police amongst many others. I also shared how we at Creative Healing Connections use the arts to help veterans deal with the emotional and physical outcomes of service.

I said that all these changes took place within six years, and was possible because we used the arts to provide a safe place for people to express their emotions, work in a cooperative manner to achieve common goals, and because we used local artists. They were amazed by the work of the Academy in transforming the hospital spaces, seeing images of students, adults and others all working together, and of the Russian police dancing. They were inspired by how the arts could be used to create healing communities and foster collaboration.

There were way more speakers than the two of us, plus a protest staged by the Chinese government outside, and the creation and adoption of the World Parliamentarians Conference for Tibet 2012 Ottawa Declaration and Action Plan, to which we were invited to contribute ideas and help shape.