

Dalai Lama and the Warm Heart

Vancouver is an interesting place and exciting. How many cities in the world bring together such interesting people as the Buddhist Dalai Lama from Tibet, the Muslim female human rights activist Shirin Ebadi from Iran and the Christian apartheid foe Bishop Desmond Tutu from South Africa? Three races, three nationalities, three religions, three Nobel prize winners and three gifts of God to this one world. Then our city joins them to Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, a Jew, and to Jo-Ann Archibald, a BC First Nations leader. And all of that crowd to be moderated by our own Vancouver Michael Ingham, the most controversial Anglican bishop in the world. The menu just doesn't get more exotic than that!

Welcome to all of you great people! Thanks to the orchestrators of this event. Thanks also to Michael Buckley and George Fetherling, both of *The Georgia Straight*, and to the *Straight* itself for their generous coverage, especially of the Dalai Lama and his insights concerning the "warm heart"(Feb. 19-26, 2004).

Though the intention of *The Georgia Straight* was obviously to present a positive image of this globe-trotting monk, they were objective enough to tell of some shadowy aspects of his life as well. Hey, that makes him all the more human and thus one of us. Who doesn't have a few shadows tucked away? There is the fact that before he turned himself into a rebel against the Chinese invaders of his native country, he lived in a mansion with a thousand rooms, while his people lived in abject poverty and slavery was practiced openly. Then there is the question of an apparently intimate and long-standing relationship to the CIA, with the possibility that the CIA may have funded his transformation into the international apostle of peace and harmony he has become. Well, who knows.....

But the main message in *The Georgia Straight* is about the Dalai Lama's teaching of the "warm heart," a concept that is described as one of his core convictions. The concept is part of his central message here in Vancouver. It is the major discussion topic in relationship to education. Modern education needs to be rebalanced by joining emphasis on the mind to the warm heart. Students in BC's highschoools, UBC and SFU are encouraged to participate in an essay-writing contest

on the subject. The idea is so important in his scheme, in fact, that Buckley ends his story with the prediction that the concept of the warm heart may well become the monk's greatest legacy. Something that important is obviously worthwhile discussing.

Victor Chan of UBC's Institute of Asian Research, one of the main organizers of the Dalai's visit to Vancouver, explained what can happen when that warm heart is missing. The most catastrophic example is that of 9/11. It was a case of highly intelligent and highly technical people who did not have the input from the warm heart. As a result, they used their knowledge "in a very destructive way."

The example immediately reminds me of the Biblical story of the fall, the event where something like the warm heart was replaced by an egotistic, cold and calculating heart. That distorted heart, though it did not prevent further developments in technology and art, now led to putting further developments to egotistic use, in the service of human beings who now were concerned only with their own reputation and greatness. In both stories the heart plays a central role in the development of life and community and it makes all the difference whether that heart is warm, turned towards God or whether it steers people and cultures into directions that produce monsters like 9/11 and concentration camps.

Here we have, of course, the reason various religions set up their own educational systems: to ensure a "warm" heart that leads to compassion and all other positive components that go into a humane society. The secular public educational system has eliminated that warm heart. It is more than interesting that public funds will now apparently be expended to promote the warm heart concept. Secularism is seen as wanting and along with it public education. It is peculiar that it takes a foreigner to jumpstart a conversation on this subject, when Christians and other religions all around us have been saying this all along! Thanks, Dalai Lama, for putting our secular society back on track! Perhaps your presence will help lift the fog from our secular minds. If it takes one from afar like you to make us listen to what locals have been repeating over and over again, well, so be it!

I do not share the wishy-washy idea that all religions are the same. They have too many contradictory teachings for such a claim to be valid. However, they

do share the world with each other and its environment. They have many common concerns, though they often approach them differently. They can also remind each other of common truths that may be forgotten under certain cultural pressures. One religion may emphasize something very valuable that another does not realize. And so we learn from each other.

Christianity and the Dalai Lama both place the heart at the centre of human affairs. A society is blest when the hearts of its members are “warm” or “turned to God.” Unfortunately, according to *The Georgia Straight*, the Dalai is uncertain as to how or where one finds or develops such a heart. Or how to work with it. Here’s where Christianity has something to contribute to the mix. It teaches how the heart can be “warmed up” or turned to God. It offers a new heart that, in turn, guides reason and intellect so as to produce the balance the Dalai is searching for. That’s what Christian education is all about. Their schools have developed quite definite procedures to develop that warm heart.

So, Dalai, before you leave, I hope you will check out this issue with our mutually esteemed friend, the Bishop. We would not want you to only share your insights with us without your gaining some new insights into the warm heart as well. Mutual sharing is of the essence of dialogue. Farewell with an even warmer heart for Vancouver than when you came.