



Dalai Lama Teaches Service at Gillette Stadium

by Nicola Burnell

HOW WARM HEARTS BUILD COMMUNITY

To call Gillette Stadium an incongruous venue for an audience with the Dalai Lama is a massive understatement. I've seen the Patriots charge across the 50-yard line, and I'm looking forward to taking my sons to the U2 360 concert in September, but His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama? Are you serious?

The Tibetan Association of Boston (TAB) hosted the event in Foxboro, MA, to raise funds for Boston's Tibetan Heritage Center. After being among the crowd at President Obama's inauguration, where I witnessed firsthand the remarkable power of community, I knew this was a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to experience the healing energy of this incredible man. I was also eager to hear what the Dalai Lama had to say in these times of anxiety and social distress.

Despite being swamped with work and family commitments, I decided to register for the entire day's events: a morning discussion of the "Four Noble Truths" of Buddhist belief, and an afternoon public talk entitled the "Path to Peace and Happiness".

I'd purchased the tickets, while rushing between clients, via my BlueTooth. The irony of using this 21st century technology to gain access to one of the most revered spiritual leaders in history was not lost on me. As I added one more event to my over-scheduled life I wondered if I would ever find the balance I so desperately craved.

My two sleepy teenage sons were less than enthusiastic about getting up on a Saturday morning at 6:30am to make a dash for Foxboro for 9am. With rain in the forecast, I stuffed my purse with napkins (to wipe down our seats) and plastic ponchos from Kmart. Not exactly the most spiritual preparation, but necessary all the same.

I was going to suggest we leave our cell phones in the car, imagining the horror of "Back in Black" shattering the sacred aura of the Dalai Lama's presentation, but I realized they were also our cameras and video recorders. I did, however, forbid my sons to wear their iPods, which hang like permanent fixtures from their ears.

As we hurried toward the entrance gates I overheard people warning that umbrellas were being banned. We returned our umbrella to the car. We were almost at the gates when someone stopped to tell me that I wouldn't get in with my shoulder bag. My sons groaned as we ran back to the car to dump my purse in the trunk. We were so annoyed that we barely spoke to each other as we waited in line to clear security and push our way through the crowds gathering around the concession stands.

By the time we found our seats, the 73-year-old Buddhist leader was already comfortably nestled in the lap of an elaborate hand carved teak throne. Speaking in a combination of broken English and Tibetan, his words echoed from speakers across the field. I saw confusion cross my younger son's face. "What the hell?" he frowned. "Shut up and listen!" I snapped, straining to understand him too.

We all sighed with relief when an interpreter stepped in to translate the more obscure dialogue. Aware that I was not in the calmest of moods, I took a deep breath and hoped for a miracle - surely this man could slow me down and teach me how to adjust my perspective.

Wide angle vision allows room for problems to shrink & not overwhelm

I must have had a direct psychic line to the Dalai Lama because he spoke about shifting perspective. "A wide angle vision allows room for problems to shrink and not overwhelm us," he explained. "A narrow focus can make problems feel so much bigger and can lead to illness and heart attack." The palpitations in my chest increased as I realized just how narrow my focus has become. Everything in my life is overwhelming. And here I am blaming it all on the economy!

Gathered under a perfectly blue sky, the audience peeled off their rain gear and tried to roll up long sleeves to catch a few rays. That's when I noticed my older son was wearing his "Got Tolerance?" t-shirt. I marveled at how calm and grounded he had become since his hormones had settled. It was comforting to know that my younger son would soon be through the tumultuous raging hormone stage of adolescence. I squirmed under the heat of my black skirt and woolen top. Stupid weatherman!

I used the QWERTY keyboard on my cell phone to save detailed notes into the NoteBook file. No, I wasn't texting! My phone camera took grainy shots of the giant scoreboard showing His Holiness speaking into his small microphone, next to giant advertisements for Toyota and McDonalds. These contrasting images only



Exiled Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama, speaks to a crowd about the 'The Path to Peace and Happiness' at Gillette Stadium in Foxboro, MA on May 2, 2009. Photography courtesy of REUTERS/Adam Hunger/Landov



Nicola Burnell lives in Harwich with her sons.

Nicola Burnell
Nicola@capewomenonline.com
is Publisher of this magazine,
a freelance writer & writing
class instructor.

She is also a Reiki Master &
leads workshops in creativity
development & personal
empowerment.

Nicola is a member in Letters
of the Cape Cod Branch of
the National League of
American Pen Women
www.nlapw.org & an active
participant in the Cape Cod
Time Bank
www.capecodtimebank.org

increased my sense of peculiarity.

Our inner values come from our mother

I stopped typing when the Dalai Lama exclaimed "our inner values come from our mother." I glanced at my younger son. He avoided my eyes. After sharing a personal story of his own mother's compassion and love for strangers His Holiness asserted "Compassion is first taught from our mother – when we feel loved as a child we learn how to love others – we pass along the joy of compassion and feeling safe, loved and happy." As I swiftly resumed documenting his words I wondered if I'd loved my son enough when he was a child. I'm sure I did, but now he's a teenager, and it's okay for him to be grumpy.

Throughout the day our teacher blended the ancient wisdom of Buddhism with simple, crowd-pleasing humor. When his red New England Patriot's hat blew off his head he giggled. "It's a bit windy," he said as he struggled to free his arm from beneath his traditional scarlet and yellow robes to retrieve it. The crowd laughed out loud. My son smiled. Briefly.

I took a moment to embrace the humor in the delicious vision of the Dalai Lama grinning from beneath the rim of his Patriot's cap, teaching his mind-bending philosophies from a stage decorated with sacred Buddhist tapestries and symbols.

The teachings on shifting perspective continued when His Holiness was asked how one can deal with tragedy. "No one tragedy is possible," he replied. "All events are related to many factors, maybe from years or generations past. Try to look at tragedy from different angles to see the positive aspects created by the event," he suggested. "My being exiled from Tibet, for example, led to me traveling the world and meeting new people...expanded consciousness and physical experiences that I would never have had if the tragedy had not occurred." "Seeing an event as the result of many previous events may help to alleviate anger. His advice on dealing with loss was similar. "A realistic attitude helps us to deal with loss, tragedy and illness...if we believe in causality, or karma, we believe sorrow comes from our past mistakes. When we own our reality, we no longer blame it on others." The Buddhist concept sees things as interrelated – not one event but many events combining to create our experiences. He asked us all to take responsibility for our experiences. I glanced at both my sons. They smiled.

When asked how to handle the problem of terrorism, the Dalai Lama's response was grounded in the teachings of non-violence. "If you try to 'handle' the problem of terrorism you get one Bin Laden," he said. "The next time you get one hundred Bin Ladens, the next time after that you get thousands of Bin Ladens because anger and fear breeds violence, then resentment, hence no-one can truly eliminate their enemy."

The key to building society is found in warm heartedness

His advice was simple. "We need to approach our foes with warm heartedness, not violence. Fear and hatred divide us making elimination of the 'enemy' impossible." This when I began to connect the dots between what the Dalai Lama was saying and how I had felt at the inauguration in January. The path to building a safe, loving society begins with the individual deciding to love and nurture themselves. The Dalai Lama explained that physical health and peace of mind can create a peaceful atmosphere in our lives which can then be extended into our community.

"The key to building society is found in warm heartedness," he asserted. "The inner quality of peace and contentment is important. Change must come from within the individual," before it can be shared with others.

In a crowd of over 15,000 people, His Holiness declared that an individual's future is within the community. "We are all social animals, therefore, we need to feel we are a member of a community to feel happy. Negative social attitudes go against our instincts for compassion and warm heartedness." Echoes of President Obama's "we are one nation" speech replayed in my mind as I tried to understand how I could implement these teachings into my own life. They made it sound so simple!

Perhaps the work has already begun. Publishing this magazine is my way of sharing words of support and compassion with you. When I became aware of the Cape Cod Time Bank I realized that this was another opportunity for me to help build the community the Dalai Lama and President Obama are hoping for. I have become a member of the Cape Cod Time Bank not just because I want to help my neighbors, but because I know my neighbors can help me.

The Law of Causality is to do good for others

As the Dalai Lama closed his teaching my younger son turned his back toward me in a silent request for me to rub his shoulders. The tension between us had dissolved and I knew that both my sons had heard the message being delivered to us all. "The Law of Causality is to do good for others and you will receive good, therefore, I ask you to serve others as much as you can." In the spirit of serving our community, I ask you to please take a moment to read the article on Time Banking in this issue of CapeWomeOnline. After all, the Path to Peace and Happiness may begin with just a single step, or a phone call to a neighbor.