

The Canberra Times

TO SERVE THE NATIONAL CITY AND THROUGH IT THE NATION

Death can be a ride into a pure realm, says lama

By IAN WARDEN

Lots of us agree with Woody Allen when he says, "I'm not afraid of death, I just don't want to be there when it happens," but Lama Ole Nydahl thinks we should not only take pains to be there but to be alert enough to enjoy the ride into a "pure realm".

Lama Ole, a Dane, a Western meditation master of a school of Tibetan Buddhism and founder world-wide of more than 400 Buddhist institutes (one of the newest is in Lyneham) was speaker at the National Press Club yesterday.

He recommends phowa, an ancient Tibetan practice of "conscious dying", and has just been teaching it at a retreat near Canberra.

Phowa, the T-shirted lama explained, "aims at a practice which helps us to die on automatic pilot".

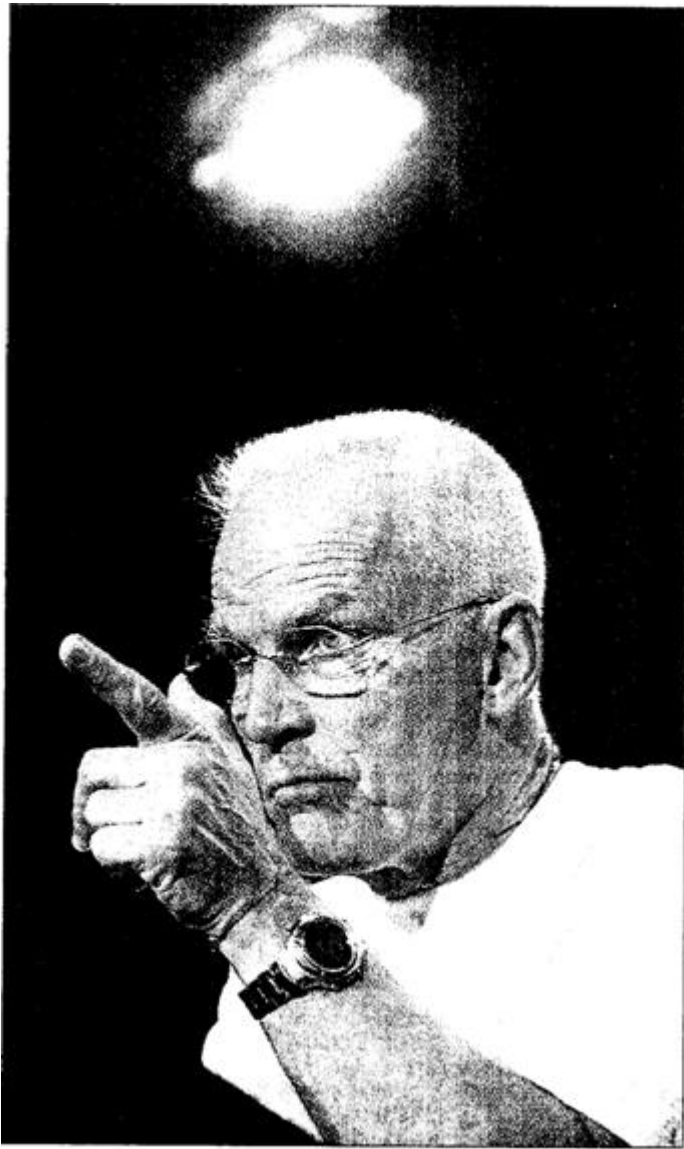
"When the signs of dying appear," he said, "if we have this process called phowa then we will be aware of certain processes happening inside.

"We'll notice a white energy appearing from the top of our head gradually moving down through the body to the centre of our chest at the heart level. We'll hear sounds like [here he made a buzzing, humming noise] and we will see a very pleasant clear light like a moonlight, and 33 kinds of anger that we may have inside become a state of very great clarity and awareness.

"Then when the clear light has arisen at the heart level a red light appears from below, four fingers below the navel in the centre of the body and this moves up through the body. And this red light is a very beautiful light like a beautiful sunset ... and at that time we experience the transformation of 40 kinds of attachment and desire into an immense bliss ...

He described several other stages of the journey, and ended by saying that if we can only manage the "formidable powers" of concentration that the process asks then our rewards, as we die, will be "a state of enlightenment" and of moving, still on automatic pilot, into "a pure realm".

With someone of such infinite wisdom in the room it was inevitable that someone would ask him what he thought of the world situation and Lama Ole revealed a very conservative world view. He praised the qualities we'd shown as an ally of the United States in Vietnam and said he could understand why, with "a big neighbour in the north" (Indonesia), it was wise for us to nurture a friendship with a big bodyguard like the US.



Picture: RICHARD BRIGGS

And he had kind things to say about our Prime Minister.
"I know it's always the job of the Press to pick on the people who are in power and of course John Howard is getting [his share] right now but I will admit that there are many people in Europe who'd like you to clone him and send us a few of him, because he's the only one who has handled illegal immigration. We have a big problem with illegal immigration in Europe right now."