

Lama Ole Nydahl unravels mysteries

Buddhism's goal is to understand the way things are

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Even as Canada prepared to welcome the Dalai Lama, Calgary was visited by Danish Buddhist lama Ole Nydahl.

Lama Ole Nydahl is one of the few Westerners qualified as a lama and meditation teacher in the Karma Kagyu Buddhist tradition. He holds the "transmission" for the Karma Kagyu practice of phowa, the technique for transferring one's consciousness at the moment of death to a state of highest bliss. He claims to have taught this to 50,000 people since 1987.

Ole and Hannah Nydahl went to Nepal in 1968 for their honeymoon. There, they met their first teacher, Lopon Tsechu Rinpoche, who sent them to Rangjung Rigpe Dorje, the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa or head of the Karma Kagyu Buddhism, as his first Western students.

After three years of intensive meditation, in 1972, Lama Ole started teaching Buddhism in Europe at the request of Rangjung Rigpe Dorje. He has since established 400 Diamond Way Buddhist centres around the world.

He has also written six books, including *Entering the Diamond Way*, *Riding the Tiger*, *The Nature of Mind* and *The Way Things Are*.

Q: What is Buddhism?

A: Buddhism is a system for fully developing human potential, given by the Buddha ("the enlightened one") in northern India, over 500 years ago.

Q: Is Buddhism a religion?

A: It's not a religion; it's a religion. Re-religion means bringing people back. But Buddhists don't think people once had something and lost it. We think people have always been ignorant.

Buddhism works to develop all the qualities of body, speech and mind. It's a philosophy but one you work with. It's a psychology but beyond

the personal. It's understanding the way things are, dharma. Enlightenment.

A religion like Islam means submission. Buddhism isn't submission. It's understanding the way things are.

Q: What is the way things are?

A: Cause and effect. And Mind. The mind is space, and space is mind. In space, the mind is playful joy. In its expression, it's active compassion.

Q: There are many varieties of Buddhism. What unites them all?

A: They are all united by the teachings of Buddha. But the Buddha taught for 45 years; he left 84,000 teachings in 108 books. So people choose to stress different things in their observance.

Q: There is a Buddhist term maya, translated as illusion. Is this world maya?

A: Everything experienced by my senses is in constant flux. My senses tell me these things are solid, but we know through science that nothing is solid. Everything is in flux, changing.

Q: What sense can be made of human suffering? What causes it?

A: Ignorance. We make mistakes, then through cause and effect, we get into trouble. If we use our suffering as a motivation to remove ignorance, it is good. If we keep making the same mistakes, our suffering is meaningless.

Q: What is karma?

A: Karma is cause and effect; it's not fate, not destiny. We build the maximum power, karma, by knowing our situation, wishing to do something about it, doing it, and feeling happy about it afterwards.

Q: What is the fate of the soul in death? Does it stay individual, or melt into Mind like a raindrop in the ocean?

A: The Mind is always, and yet it is both the ocean and the streams flowing into it. The radiance of the mirror is always the same, but the images that come and go in the mirror are different. We need to meditate on the mirror, or we will only see the images.

Q: So what happens when we die?

A: Depending on our karma, that period between death and when we enter a human body again, coming between a mother and father, that period will be pleasant or unpleasant.

Then our karma will determine what kind of body we will have, pleasant or unpleasant. Where we are reborn, Canada or the Congo, pleasant or unpleasant. What kind of motives we will have, positive or oppressive.

To change those motives, we need a more positive attitude. We must use mediation, try not to do the negative things, and try to do the opposite.

Q: Is the cycle of death and rebirth eternal?

A: The moment you are aware of Mind itself, you can choose to stay in the radiant space or live in the world.

Q: Why would someone choose to live in the world?

A: Because he likes people. I don't think in a single lifetime I could help all the people understand what is happening and achieve a higher level of functioning of body, speech and mind.

Q: Buddhism has been described as pessimistic; is it?

A: No; people think it is pessimistic because the first Europeans who came were very dualistic in their thinking -- good-bad, being-nonbeing. When they heard the Buddha's teaching, "everything is empty," they thought he meant it was bad. But he meant it has no weight, no colour, size or shape, so it can't be destroyed. Saying Mind can't be destroyed is optimistic.

Q: Some Buddhists in the West have said God is love; is this eclecticism?

A: They can't be well-educated. We don't have gods. We think gods are strange. If there was a god like Allah, he'd be a criminal. Maybe what they said was, truth is love.

We believe space itself is pregnant. Inner space creates thoughts and feelings; outer space creates worlds and universes. Space plays with itself and produces everything.

Q: What's the meaning of history?

A: The meaning of history is that people keep making the same mistakes again and again. That's all.

Q: What about the history of Tibet?

A: Tibet is destroyed. All that's left is superstition. All the real teachers were killed. The Tibetans aren't a majority there anymore. I think I've heard six million Tibetans to seven million Chinese?

Q: Is that regrettable?

A: They had gotten so stiff and ritualistic, so superstitious, it really had to happen. The benefit, though, is that Buddhism has had to come to the West.

Q: What does that mean?

A: Creating a society friendly to human knowledge. But people have to wish it. Liberation is easy; that can happen to anyone. But enlightenment, that's a big jump. Feeling no separation between you and everything else. Knowing what Mrs. Miller is cooking, five houses away, and knowing what she is thinking.

In my 12 years of studying, I met only one lama who'd reached that stage of enlightenment. He knew when someone was leaving his house to visit, when he was approaching the door.

Q: The unity of space and mind?

A: Hmmm.

For more information, visit www.diamondway.org, www.lama-ole-nydahl.org,
or call the Calgary Diamond Way Buddhist Centre at 255-8423.

Interview with lama Ole Nydahl