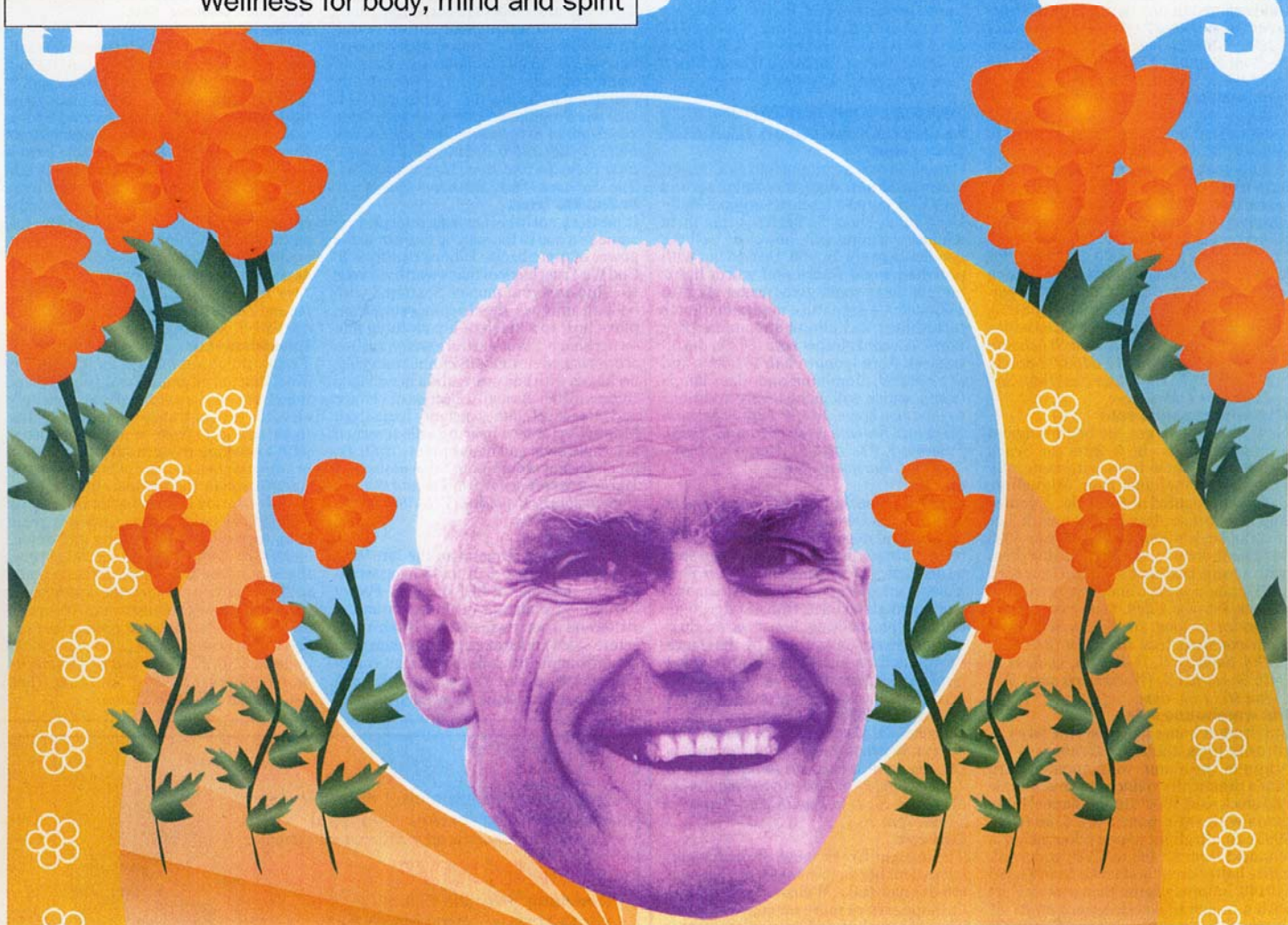


# ChillOut

Wellness for body, mind and spirit

CHILL OUT



## Wild Westerner

As a parachute-jumping, motorcycle-riding teacher, Lama Ole Nydahl is hardly your typical Buddhist guru **By Kate Williams**

As a child in German-occupied Denmark during the Second World War, Lama Ole Nydahl dreamed of fighting for his people—not of battling Nazis in the streets of Copenhagen, but of a struggle in the mountains to protect men clad in red skirts. It would stand to reason, then, that the founder of more than 450 Diamond Way Karma Kagyu Buddhist centers throughout the world, and one of the few Western lamas, is not experiencing his first pass on earth. Since meeting his first Buddhist teacher while honeymooning in Nepal in 1968, Lama Ole has worked tirelessly to bring Buddhism to the West, and will be

the primary speaker at Buddhism in the City, a lecture series June 9–12. We telephoned the spiritual teacher on May 23—a day that holds great significance for Buddhists. On a retreat in the mountains of Spain, he stood on a rooftop overlooking the Mediterranean, and with the patience only a Buddhist lama could muster, moved around and around until he found a spot with good reception.

**Time Out New York:** Today is the anniversary of Buddha's enlightenment. What does that mean?

**Lama Ole Nydahl:** It means that today, about 2,500 years ago, he discovered that his

mind was clear light, and then he taught for 45 years. What he taught in that time is Buddhism today.

**TONY:** How did it happen that you met your first Buddhist teacher, His Holiness 16th Gyalwa Karmapa?

**LON:** I was doing my thesis at the University of Copenhagen on Aldous Huxley, gratifying vision, doors of perception—you know, all these things. We had heard that there were people in the Himalayas who were able to get these experiences without drugs. We thought this was quite impressive because, at the time, we were losing our whole generation in



Europe [to drugs]. We thought, This is something we should examine. So we went there and were eventually introduced.

**TONY:** You and your wife, Hannah, were the 16th Karmapa's first Western students. What difficulties arose from this?

**LON:** First, because he was so great, we swallowed everything whole. 16th Karmapa was amazing. If he laughed, you heard it five houses away. It was when we were sent home in 1972 to start teaching that things changed, because we were responsible and had to create results. We had to examine what Tibetan things belonged in our culture—our Western reservations, direction of democracy, women's rights, all these things—and which ones didn't.

**TONY:** You encourage your students to ask questions and come to conclusions on their own.

**LON:** Well, that is Buddha, that is not me. He told people to ask questions, but there are also some things that are given in Buddhism: that there is a goal worth getting, we call that Buddhahood or full enlightenment; that there are methods bringing us there, certain teachings that will help different people; and that one can trust one's friends on the way. These three things are like the basis of being Buddhist. And one needs also some belief that if you plant rice, you get rice, and if you plant cactuses, you get cactuses. Meaning that cause-and-effect works.

**TONY:** When you're in New York, you'll be lecturing on view, meditation and action. Why these three topics?

**LON:** Diamond Way Buddhism aims at totality, that life and meditation are part of the same. I always thought there must be something for the people who are very strong, who are independent and who still want the spiritual life. Usually it is the sheep and the meek who come to religion, but with us it seems to be the lions and the wild ones. I have been parachuting with 1,200 of my students so far, which I think is quite good.

**TONY:** Are there particular challenges for Buddhists living in a place like NYC?

**LON:** Cities are the places where the best people bring their best stuff. One just has to decide to enjoy it and keep one's mind open to see it: On every corner there is a beautiful house, every meter there is a beautiful person, wherever one looks there is a nice car. Trying to see the beauty and somehow making the automatic wish that all beings may have happiness: This is the great challenge for staying in town.

**TONY:** Christian fundamentalism is growing, not so much in New York, but in the U.S. What's your take on that?

**LON:** You have some creationists in America, and in Europe we just roll on our stomachs and laugh. We don't take it very seriously. They are funny, they are not dangerous.

**TONY:** What are your thoughts on religious fundamentalism in the rest of the world?

**LON:** We have two big problems in the world today: Islam and overpopulation. Overpopulation makes everything into a slum and lowers

people's quality of life. And of course there are other fundamentalist religions, but the dangerous one is Islam. I have been traveling in Muslim countries since the mid-'60s, and you see a lot of men, but you see no women. It is not healthy.

**TONY:** Is a fundamental problem with the religion, or does it have to do with how certain people are approaching it?

**LON:** I think it is the religion. I have read the Koran, and it says kill the Jews, kill the Christians; everything is there. I think it is a political manifesto, to be quite honest, more than a religion.

**TONY:** You do so much traveling. Is there any place you feel particularly at home?

**LON:** In America, I like New Mexico a lot. When you drive there, it's like you own the world. And because I drive motorcycles, I like Highway 1, right on the border, all the way up to San Francisco. There's no police there and you can really drive as you like.

**TONY:** You drive motorcycles and you like to parachute. Any other daredevil hobbies?

**LON:** Well, I only have time to parachute and motorcycle. I boxed when I was young, for four years, but then I decided I would never hit somebody's face again.

**Lama Ole Nydahl speaks at Buddhism in the City June 9–12. Visit [www.diamondway.org/buddhisminthecity](http://www.diamondway.org/buddhisminthecity) for further information.**