inner and outer disarmament

During the public talk he gave in San Jose, California, last year, His Holiness the Dalai Lama reflected on world peace and universal responsibility. This is an edited excerpt.

We are all human beings, and we all share this planet. We are members of one big human family. And we also have the same sort of experiences – when you smile at me, I feel happy, and when someone smiles at you, you feel happy. We have the same basic human nature.

Our future as human beings is very much interlinked. Because of our neglect of the environment, for example, changes in weather patterns are experienced all over the world. No matter how powerful one individual nation is, it cannot solve these problems unless humanity worldwide gets involved to take care of the planet and the environment.

So under these circumstances, it becomes quite clear that we need some kind of sense of global responsibility, not only taking care of one's own family, or one's own community, or one's own nation, but having a sense of caring for humanity in its entirety. Because the interests of oneself and the interests of the other are always interconnected, I therefore sometimes feel the very concept of "we" and "they" are no longer there. So in order to have a happier life, or a happier future oneself, you have to take care of others' interests.

As a human being therefore everyone has the right to be happy and to have a happy family and a happy society. So we have to have some responsibility for the happiness of humanity, and for a peaceful world.

One arrives at peace mainly through inner peace. First the individual mind should develop peace, and this will eventually extend into family and society. In this way the public can influence the leadership. While anger and hatred destroy our inner peace, compassion, forgiveness, a sense of brotherhood or sisterhood, contentment, and self-discipline are its basis. Peace can develop through practice in strengthening these good inner qualities. We should then propagate this 'inner disarmament' in family life and educational institutions.

External disarmament is equally important. If we look at the human capacity for destruction purely from the point of view of the ability of the human body then it is rather limited. But because of our sophisticated intelligence, we have this tremendous capacity for destruction, especially now in the nuclear age.

War means to kill deliberately. Death is not usually celebrated, and it is an unwanted thing. But in war it is deliberately created. War is like mobilized violence, and in some cases, legalized violence. We call someone a "murderer" if they kill one individual, yet in a war where maybe millions are killed, we call its perpetrators "heroes" or "victors."

Even so, I think our concept towards war is actually changing. Earlier, when nations declared war on enemy states, the citizens of that country, without question, would happily join the war effort. But nowadays when one nation declares war, a majority of its citizens question their government, and demonstrate against this. This is a healthy sign that human beings worldwide feel frustrated with violence.

It is difficult to achieve total external disarmament immediately, however, as there are still regimes in this world

> We should think seriously about the arms race. The banning of landmines, and the reduction of nuclear weapons is a good start. We should hold these points in our minds and, at every possible opportunity, express them and therefore make a step-by-step contribution towards the goal of global demilitarization. In this way genuine world peace can be achieved.

disarmament

that worship the military. But we should have the long-term goal of a demilitarized globe. Those factories then, which produce tanks or weapons, could shift to more constructive missions, like to producing bulldozers, for example.

We should think seriously about the arms race. The banning of landmines, and the reduction of nuclear weapons is a good start. We should hold these points in our minds and, at every possible opportunity, express them and therefore make a step-by-step contribution towards the goal of global demilitarization. In this way genuine world peace can be achieved.

I made the point once in Europe, that of course Saddam Hussein's greedy, ruthless attitude is bad. However, any totalitarian regime/dictatorship needs a powerful military with modern equipment as its basis. The equipment that created the powerful army of Iraq was not produced in Iraq itself but supplied by some European countries, etc., who had a hand in therefore building this totalitarian regime/dictatorship. We should therefore understand that the arms trade actually causes a lot of problems.

Additionally, in Africa poor nations are engaged in civil war, using weapons while local people face starvation. I think it is very unfortunate that these nations have an insufficient food supply but have plenty of weapons and ammunition, produced and sold to them by other nations who make profits through this.

I have shared some of my feelings on world peace here. If you feel they may be of interest, then think more and see what would be possible to implement and practice. ◉
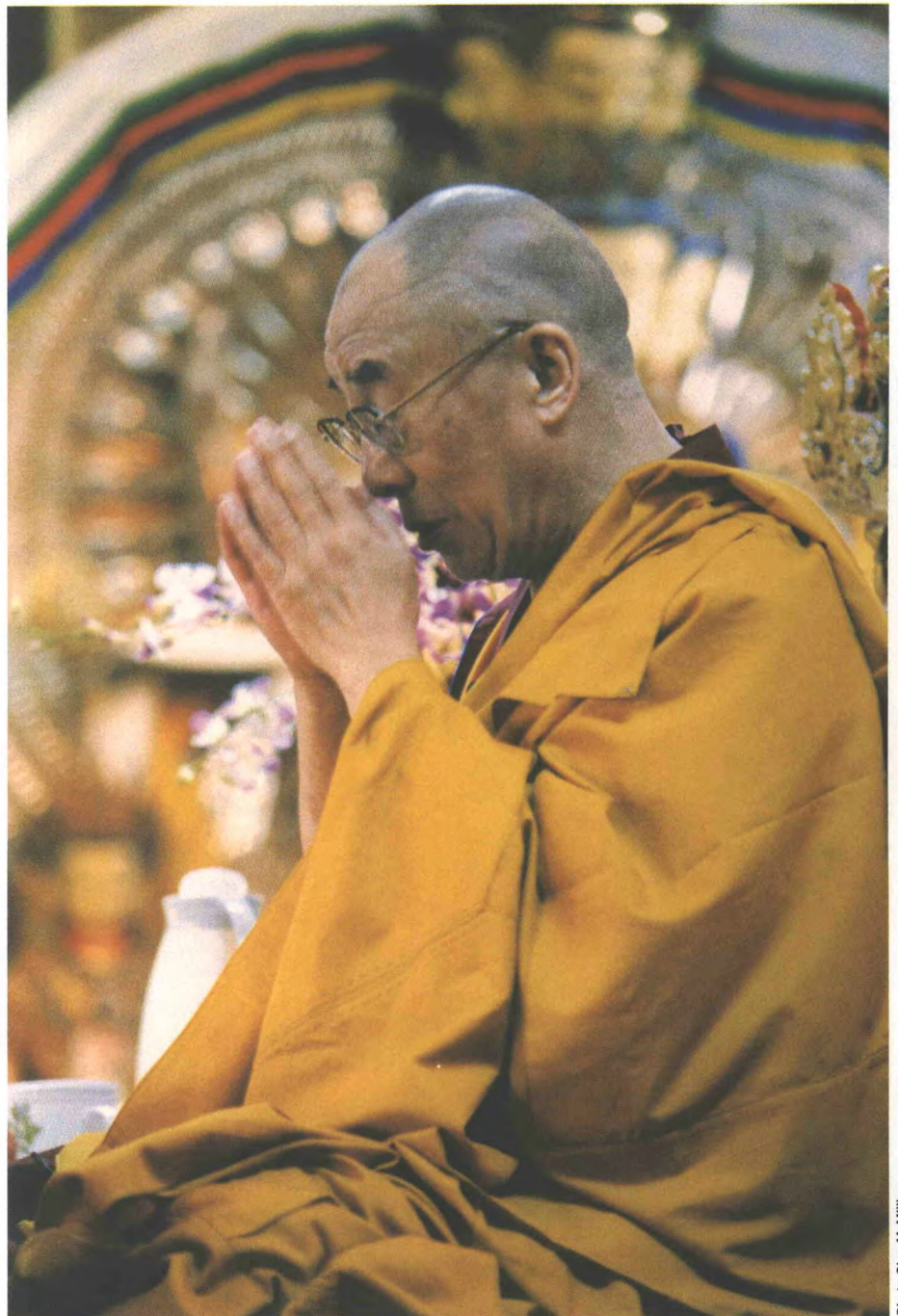
Photo Glen McMillion