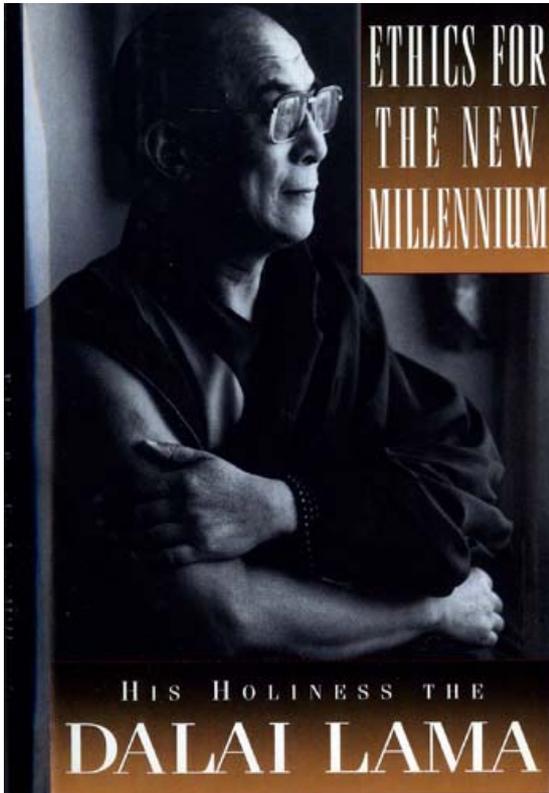


Book of The Century



Dalai Lama. (1999). Ethics For The New Millennium. Riverhead Books. Penguin Putnam. New York.237 pp

His Holiness the Dalai Lama is the spiritual and temporal leader of the Tibetan people.

"Despite the body of opinion suggesting that human nature is basically aggressive and competitive, my own view is that our appreciation for affection and love is so profound that it begins even before our birth...A happy mother bears a happy child...Almost without exception, the mother's first act is to offer her baby her nourishing milk--an act which to me symbolizes unconditional love...What we see instead is a relationship based on love and mutual tenderness, which is totally spontaneous. It is not learned from mothers, no religion requires it, no laws impose it, no schools have taught it. It arises quite naturally." (pp66-67).

Additional Commentary

"In CALLING FOR A SPIRITUAL REVOLUTION AM I advocating a religious solution to our problems after all? No" (p.19).

"There is thus an important distinction to be made between what we might call ethical and spiritual acts. An ethical act is one where we refrain from causing harm to others' experience or expectation of happiness. Spiritual acts we can describe in terms of those qualities mentioned earlier of love, compassion, patience, forgiveness, humility, tolerance, and so on which presume some level of concern for others' well-being" (p.61).

"We see this appreciation of kindness reflected in our response to the human smile. For me, human beings' ability to smile is one of our most beautiful characteristics. It is something no animal can do. Not dogs, or even whales or dolphins, ...(p.66). (The bonobo chimpanzee is an exception, which includes kissing behavior--jwp).

"Actually, the reader does not need to accept my proposition that human nature is basically disposed toward love and compassion to see that the capacity for empathy which underlies it is of crucial importance when it comes to ethics. We saw earlier how an ethical act is a non-harming act" (p.72)

"To me, this suggests that by means of sustained reflection on, and familiarization with, compassion, through rehearsal and practice we can develop our innate ability to connect with others, a fact which is of supreme importance given the approach to ethics I have described. The more we develop compassion, the more genuinely ethical our conduct will be" (p.74).

"Could anything be more sublime than that which brings peace and happiness to all? For my own part, the mere ability we human beings have to sing the praises of love and compassion is a most precious gift" (p.76).

"Actually, I believe there is an important distinction to be made between religion and spirituality. Religion I take to be concerned with faith in the claims to salvation of one faith tradition or another, an aspect of which is acceptance of some form of metaphysical or supernatural reality, including perhaps an idea of heaven or *nirvana*. Connected with this are religious teachings or dogma, ritual, prayer, and so on. Spirituality I take to be concerned with those qualities of the human spirit--such as love and compassion, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, a sense of responsibility, a sense of harmony--which bring happiness to both self and others. While ritual and prayer, along with the questions of *nirvana* and salvation, are directly connected to religious faith, these inner qualities need not be, however. There is thus no reason why the individual should not develop them, even to a high degree, without recourse to any religious or metaphysical belief system. This is why I sometimes say that religion is something we can perhaps do without. What we cannot do without are these basic spiritual qualities. (p.22).

"Those who are dedicated practitioners meanwhile follow a multiplicity of religious paths. From this, it becomes clear that given our diversity, no single religion satisfies all humanity. We may also conclude that we humans can live quite well without recourse to religious faith" (p.20).

"These may seem unusual statements, coming as they do from a religious figure. I am, however, Tibetan before I am Dalai Lama, and I am human before I am Tibetan. So while as Dalai Lama I have a special responsibility to Tibetans, and as a monk I have a special responsibility toward furthering interreligious harmony, as a human being I have a much larger responsibility toward the whole human family--which indeed we all have. And since the majority does not practice religion, I am concerned to try to find a way to serve all humanity without appealing to religious faith". (p.20) and

"We have, in my view, created a society in which people find it harder and harder to show one another basic affection. In place of the sense of community and belonging, which we find such a reassuring feature of less wealthy (and generally rural) societies, we find a high degree of loneliness and alienation" (p.8).

(It should be emphasized that Spirituality is a basic property of the Human Spirit--"love, compassion, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, a sense of responsibility, a sense of harmony--which bring happiness to both self and others", and is not a property of the Divine Spirit, which commands fidelity to the disembodied love of Divine Love in contrast to the embodied love of human and sexual love. The Dalai Lama affirms that mother's breastfeeding is an act of "unconditional love", an observation that is consistent with the results of studies reported on this website that 77% (20/26) of cultures with weaning age of 2.5 years or greater are rated low or absent in suicide and 82% (14/17) of these cultures which support youth sexual love are rated low or absent in suicide. Additional studies found that 86% (31/36) of cultures with weaning age of 2.5 years or greater were rated low or absent in suicide. Compassion and unconditional love are first learned at the breast of mother). --jwp.