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BAY AREA
Dalai Lama brings Buddhism to Stanford
Tibetan leader explores theme of nonviolence

- [Dave Murphy, Chronicle Staff Writer](#)

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More than 1,000 Stanford students and guests got firsthand exposure to the Dalai Lama's senses of peace, pragmatism and humor Friday afternoon in a two-hour question-and-answer session in the university's Memorial Church.

The program and a morning meditation session attended by about 6,500 people at Stanford's Maples Pavilion were the first major stops in the latest Bay Area visit by Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama, the exiled spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism.

Other Bay Area appearances include a dialogue on the human experience with doctors, Buddhist scholars and scientists today at the university, then a ceremony Sunday at San Francisco's Ritz-Carlton hotel honoring 48 "Unsung Heroes of Compassion."

His session with the Rev. Scotty McLennan, Stanford's dean for religious life, was called "The Heart of Nonviolence," but the Dalai Lama stopped far short of condemning all violence, although he strongly praised such pacifists as Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. He considers actions taken out of compassion to be nonviolent, even if lives are lost, if those actions reduce future suffering.

"History shows the second World War protected the Western World -- protected democracy," he said, sometimes speaking in English and other times through his longtime principal translator, Geshe Thupten Jinpa. "The Iraq war -- it's too early to say, right or wrong."

He said that generally, however, war and violence led to more war and more violence, more hatred and more resentment. When asked by McLennan about the suggestion that Tibetan people react with violence to oppression by the Chinese government, the pragmatist in him came through, explaining that even if he did not believe in nonviolence, getting major weapons into Tibet would be impossible.

"In our case," he said, "violence is almost like suicide."

The Dalai Lama said that a better way would be to gradually get the support of the Chinese people, and he believes that is happening. Violence would harm that process.

"We must live with nonviolent principles, so that later we can live happily" in the same society, he said.

He also has his stand against violence in perspective. When one question came in through the university's Web site, asking whether all the violent images in the media are so overwhelming that people should turn off their televisions, the Dalai Lama smiled.

"If you switch off the TV completely," he said, "then it will be quite a boring society."

His audience gave the Dalai Lama a standing ovation at the beginning and end of the presentation, and many sat with quiet reverence as he spoke.

"I felt privileged to be here," Roland Garcia, a summer session program manager at Stanford, said after the speech. "He's a good representative of what a good human being is."

"It was really insightful," said Krishna Savani, a social psychology graduate student. "I found it really thought-provoking."

The Dalai Lama's warmth disarmed audience members Alyson Collins of Santa Cruz and Shantal Marshall, another social psychology graduate student.

"He's not an ideologue," said Collins, who went with a friend who won tickets in a lottery months ago to attend the program. "He's very approachable."

"It was really accessible," Marshall said. "I didn't expect him to be that funny."

A mix of all those elements had come when the Dalai Lama was asked how he finds hope when he sees so much suffering, in his native land and around the world. The 70-year-old pointed to his head.

He said he knows that beyond the barriers of Tibet, there is more pressure for people to be free. He can see how such places as the Soviet Union and East Germany are gone, and how more governments around the world are democratic.

"Therefore, there is some reason to be hopeful -- not blind hopeful," he said.

The audience interrupted him with applause, but the Dalai Lama had one more point to make. He pointed once more to his mostly bald head, and smiled.

"Less hair," he said, "so that means more wisdom."

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