

A LIFE IN THE DAY OF OLE NYDAHL

When I wake up, I try to recollect whatever dreams I've had, 'The last third of a night can be really important for signs. ' Then I focus on the Buddha, my friends and my helpers. I think: "Today I will really benefit beings." Or "Today I will be really useful to people." There's a meditation I like to do every morning, so that the water in the shower takes away the suffering of all beings. I'm never grumpy, even in the morning. I won't say I'm highly enlightened all the time, but I am deep-down happy. It's part of the job.

The clothes I wear aren't formal. I have to be able to sit anywhere, so don't want to wear robes. Besides, I'm Danish, and we wear trousers, right? I usually travel with a knife - it's probably a habit from my last life, when I protected the civilian population of eastern Tibet. I'm a hands-on person -I would protect my friends if we got into trouble. I trained as a boxer. But I once got kidnapped by the FLN, one of the most violent groups in Colombia. We got held up with machineguns, and were very lucky to get out. I really felt the Buddha behind us that day.

Visiting all the Buddhist centers and lecturing, I travel twice around the world every year. I don't have my own house. I have no possessions. I just have rooms in different centers - Copenhagen, San Francisco, Zurich. I'm happy to sleep on a floor. I don't want to spend money on a hotel. I always think that the money I'm spending actually belongs to my friends.

I'm 57, and I would like to live a long time, because I think I'm useful. So I avoid things that are too fatty, too salty and too sugary. Besides, I like to stay in shape without having to run around the block. I was vegetarian, but my Buddhist teacher said: "you travel all the time, and if people have to make special food for you, it's no good." If something is already dead I will eat it, and make wishes for a good rebirth for the animal.

I believe in reincarnation. In 1986 my wife and I were visiting eastern Tibet. We went to a place where they'd never seen white people before. I recognized it. My wife, Hannah, recognized it too. When I was a child in Denmark, during the German occupation, I was always dreaming about mountains, and that I was protecting men in red skirts. I had never seen a monk before. I had never even seen a mountain. But the first time I got a pencil, I drew pictures of mountain warfare. Especially- how to take out snipers. I'm a frequent flyer. Sometimes I visit the airport shops. In India, whisky is very good for speeding up the bureaucracy - it sorts out any visa problems. We're trying a homeopathic

remedy for jet lag. Some friends say you just have to hold your ring finger. But then you can't write, and I write all the time when I'm traveling.

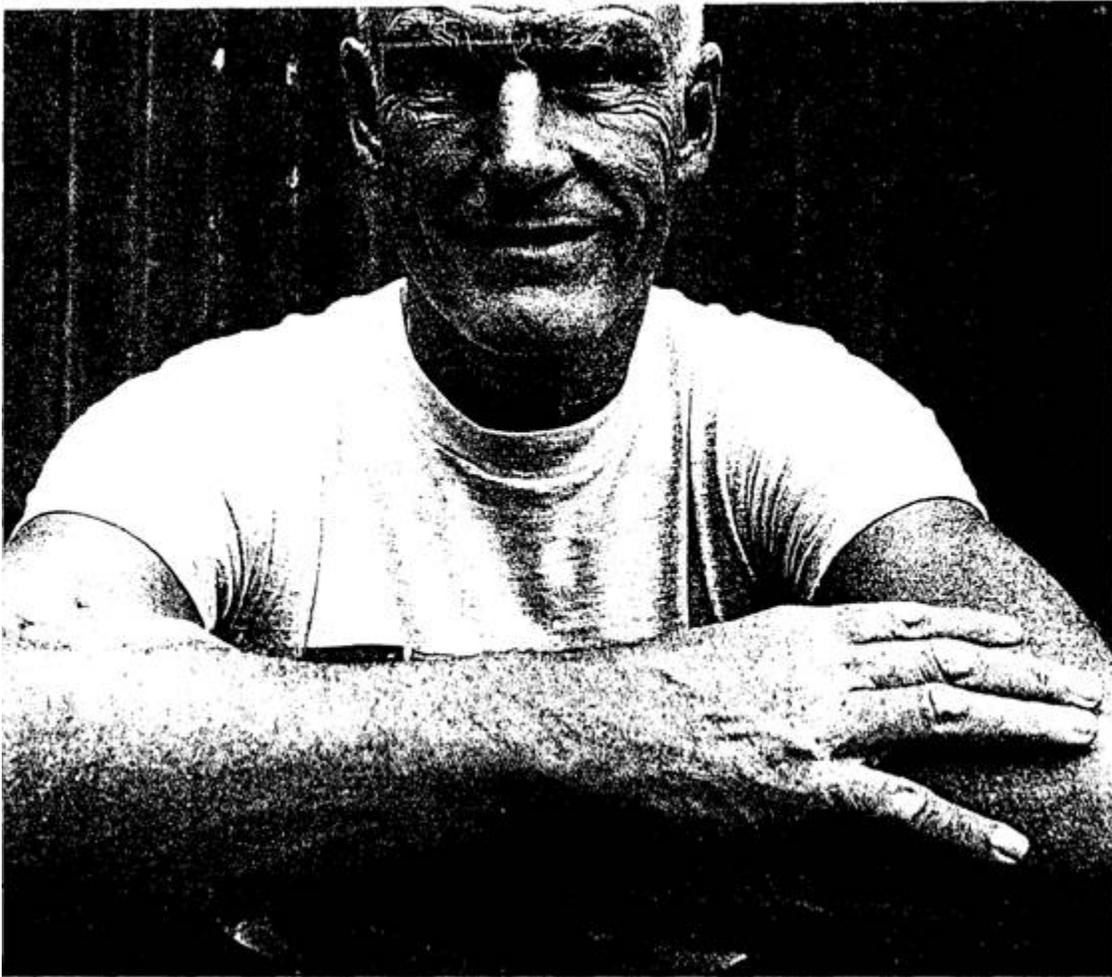
Six months of the year I travel with Hannah, who is also a lama. The other six I'm with Caty, my girlfriend. "The ladies are great friends. and we don't find monogamy necessary. Caty deals with e-mail as we travel (we get up to 100 e-mails a day). We talk business in the car. We have a collection of CDs. My assistant, Tomek, has got some bad rappers. Every one - I guarantee - with an IQ of less than 80.

Traveling can be hard. I've been married for 30 years, and we've had to give up the idea of having children. You can't put a child on the back seat and say: "Next stop is Frankfurt." I communicate with my Buddhist teacher in Tibet by e-mail, and I'll keep traveling unless he gives me another order. I only have four days of holiday a year. Then I get on a motorcycle with some friends - all Buddhists - and we do 20 passes in the Alps at really high speeds. Or I go parachuting. The freefall comes very close to a level in meditation called "one taste", where you're aware without being aware. The last time I jumped out at 4km - all this free open space, but the clouds are much more fun. When we arrive at the next Buddhist centre, there's always a Meal waiting. Very often there's press, so I get whisked off to talk to somebody. Ten minutes before the lecture I take it easy for a moment. Shifting from English to German to Danish to French isn't so difficult. What's difficult is shifting from written mode to spoken mode. Tire lecture will usually be an introduction to Buddhism, with something about absolute truth, karma, or death and rebirth. Then there's a meditation and a blessing.

People come afterwards for a chat. One might bring a child for a blessing: one might ask for a divination -- "Will I get this job? I use my beads, but I always check the results with common sense. Because I'm not a monk, there's a lot o(questions

about love and .sex. We recently had the Dalai Lama over. People were saying to its they Couldn't use his teachings because they were all about abstinence. We say what the Dalai Lama gives are the teachings for monks, but there are also teachings for lay people. Tibet was a medieval society, but today we live in the modern world. By the time we're back at the Buddhist centre, for a beer and a chat, it's usually 2am. More than two or three beers is not good. The next day you're not clear-headed.

I'm in bed by 4arn - you need less sleep if you meditate. But I rarely let a night go without love. Speaking as a layman, being able to give love and not giving it is neurotic. Our bodies fit together so well. I think a life without love is wasted.



The lama Ole Nydahl, 57, was on his honeymoon in Nepal in 1968 when he was chosen to bring Buddha's teachings to the West. Since 1972 he has launched 215 meditation centres around the world. Danish by birth, he has no permanent home. He will be lecturing at University College London on November 15

Interview by Richard Johnson. Photograph by Stephen Dupont

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