

HEALTH & WELL-BEING

Finding peace in mind



CIRCLE OF LIFE: In Tibetan Buddhist teachings, death is not a simple end to life. Rather, it is a process that takes an individual on a journey of multiple stages that may take about seven weeks.

HE'S ADDICTED to fast motor-bikes, admits to having spent much of his youth taking drugs and has spent time in prison, but when Lama Ole Nydahl speaks to a crowd, the overwhelming impression he leaves is one of peace and wellbeing.

When the Danish-born Buddhist teacher visited Canberra last year to talk about finding happiness in the fast lane, more than 200 people had to be turned away.

In 2004, he was commissioned by the Athens Olympics organising committee to provide international Olympians with a suitable setting in which to meditate during the Games.

Nydahl and his wife, Hannah — who is also a lama but doesn't teach — discovered Buddhism together on their 1968 honeymoon in the Himalayas. There, they met their first Buddhist teacher, the 16th Gyalwa Karmapa, and became two of the first Westerners fully qualified to teach in the Karma Kagyu tradition, one of the main schools of Tibetan Buddhism.

Gyalwa Karmapa is the spiritual leader of the ancient Karma Kagyu lineage.

In 1972, the 16th Karmapa directed Nydahl to found the first European Karma Kagyu centre in Nydahl's hometown of Copenhagen, Denmark.

Since then, the 64-year-old has travelled the world, establishing about 500 meditation and study centres, including Mahamudra House in Canberra.

He will visit Canberra again next week but

Danish-born Buddhist teacher Lama Ole Nydahl is coming to Canberra to speak about a subject many find harder to contemplate than happiness: death and rebirth.

Karen Ingram reports

this time Nydahl will speak about a subject most Westerners find harder to contemplate than happiness: death and rebirth.

Many Canberrans are already familiar with Nydahl's teachings, through his previous visits and the books he's written which explore different areas of Buddhism.

On this visit, he will be asking listeners to change some of their ways of thinking about death, which he regards not as something to fear, but rather a great opportunity to work with our minds.

"If we were always aware of mind itself, dying would be like changing our clothes," Nydahl says. "The mind's ability to be aware, and its joy, power and activity would never stop. The radiance of mind itself is much richer than the joy most of us strive for, that is conditional upon our situation in life."

In Tibetan Buddhist teachings, death is not a simple end to life. Rather, it is a process that takes an individual on a journey of multiple stages that may take about seven weeks, similar to how Buddhists describe the

Open to the public

What: *Beyond Life and Death: Tibetan Buddhist Teachings on Death and Rebirth.* An evening with Buddhist teacher Lama Ole Nydahl followed by a panel discussion with:

- Peter Dunn, Emergency Services Commissioner.
- Mal McKissock, bereavement counsellor.
- Louise Maher, 666 ABC Canberra.
- Dr Andrew Skeels, Hospice Medical Director.

When: Monday, February 6.

Time: 7-11pm.

Where: The hall at the National Museum of Australia.

Bookings: Ph: 6208 5021. Visit: www.nma.gov.au

stages of a human life. "Beings experience little but intermediate states throughout their lives until they attain the state of enlightenment, when mind recognises its own timeless clear light."

Waking, sleeping and dreaming are states of consciousness, or "bardos", and, while alive, humans and animals move between these three states. But rather than ending with death, the consciousness lives on when an individual dies, and three further bardos appear.

"First comes the process of dying itself, the centring of energies in one's body. Whether death is quick or slow, this is a profound transformation. After three days of unconsciousness, a week follows where mind continues in habitual flow from the previous life. During the next two weeks, the recognition that one is dead surfaces ever more often."

Then, in the last three of the seven weeks of the journey of death, the individual comes, through rebirth, to one of six realms of existence.

It's a process through which a being must realise they have died, and come to terms with the shock, before they can embark on a new course of life.

For the uninitiated it sounds complex, but people who embrace Buddhism say the religion's philosophies of life, death and rebirth help them bring true simplicity into their lives.

Much of this philosophy revolves around an understanding of karma, which Nydahl says means cause and effect — not fate, as many people believe.

"The understanding that each of us is responsible for our own lives makes it possible to consciously generate positive impressions which bring happiness while avoiding the causes of future suffering. Positive states of mind may be effectively strengthened through the methods of the Diamond Way, while negative impressions waiting to mature, can be transformed into wisdom."

Little horrors easy to forgive when

WHY DO your children make it so easy to forget past indiscretions? They may have been little horrors all day and into the night, and when you go to check on them later and they're sleeping like angels, you forget so quickly about the hair-pulling fights and the throw myself on the floor type tantrums.

There's nothing like a good night's sleep to change a child overnight. They wake up chirpy and smiling and eating their bubble bix — as Blossie and The Monster have taken to calling the leftover Rice Bubbles from a chocolate crackle making session — like



KAREN HARDY

Motherload

they've never tasted anything so delicious, and you forget all about the night before.

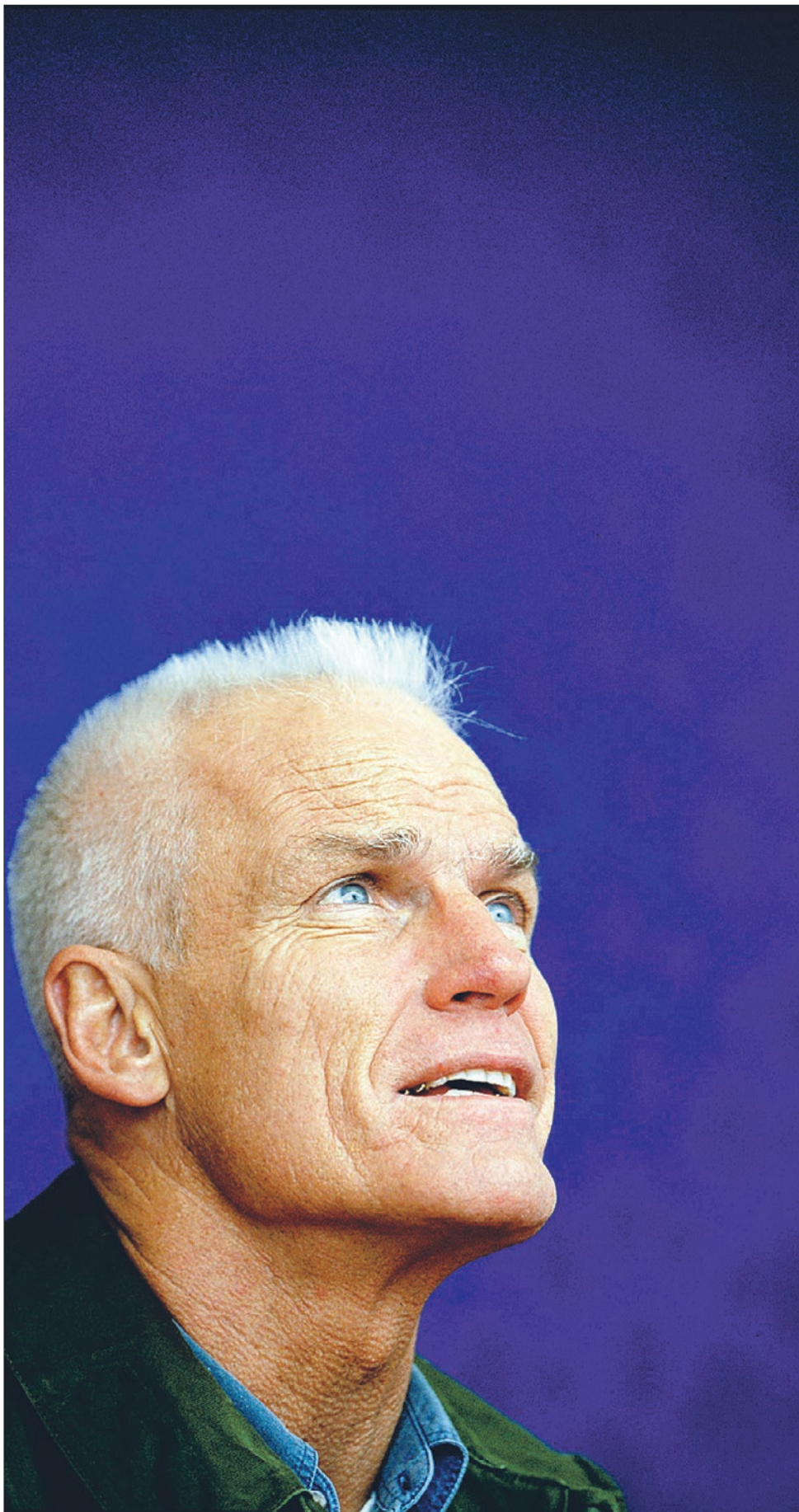
Which isn't an easy thing to do when the night before has involved a marathon

session of returning The Monster to his bed. For some unknown reason (and I know there probably is a reason, he's had a bit of a cold, he's changed rooms at day care, it's been too hot to sleep) he's decided to become a night waker. Much scarier than any night-stalker memory I have from the 1970s.

It's not that he's creating havoc, just wandering through the house to tell you how tired he is, how sorry he is, how this is the "last day, mummy" that he'll do it.

You can't help but love him for wanting to spend time with his mummy at 3am but he's stretching the limits of our relationship.





SPIRITUAL HEALING: When Lama Ole Nydahl speaks to a crowd, the overwhelming impression he leaves is one of peace and wellbeing.

Karma also determines the body one is born into, the environment into which one is born and the motivations that, when enacted, lead to one's next existence.

As part of this ongoing cycle, Nydahl says every person needs to meditate regularly to be in touch with their own being.

But given his non-stop international tours to fulfil the demands of a public hungry to hear him speak, he has little time of his own for sitting meditation.

"My schedule, which has included a new

town nearly every day for the last 22 years . . . does not permit that. Instead, I leave my mind in its own place and let my legs run around."

And a fast set of wheels is always good for a spot of inner peace.

During a visit to Australia in 2003 Nydahl told a Sydney newspaper that he would often get his motorcycle off the plane and head out on the open road.

"You have these lovely little curvy roads with no policemen," he said.

"You're free in nature. It's a wonderful thing and there are no uniforms in sight. I also like the German autobahns where there are no speed limits."

He has also professed his love of skydiving, saying freefall is a very good meditation, a "naked awareness". And Nydahl does look more like an adrenalin junkie than a spiritual teacher — with his chiselled cheekbones, tanned skin and short silver hair, he is a vibrantly healthy-looking man, almost impossibly youthful for his 64 years.

Biographical material on the Internet suggests he has lost friends who used heavy drugs, and that he began using drugs himself in Denmark when he was just out of his teens.

For a time, drugs provided the young Nydahl with the higher level of consciousness he sought, and he made frequent trips overseas to bring back hash to his friends in Denmark.

One such trip ended badly, though, and he was jailed for six months for trying to bring 10kg of fine hash back into the country.

He has spoken openly about drugs without condemning them absolutely, and says the bardo of dreaming may include most drug-induced states.

Nydahl has also spoken passionately about world politics and, on a previous visit to Canberra, he revealed a more conservative world view than one might expect.

Asked what he thought of the world situation, he praised the qualities Australia had shown as America's ally in Vietnam, and said he could understand why, with our proximity to Indonesia, Australia nurtured a friendship with a big bodyguard such as the United States.

He also praised Prime Minister John Howard's handling of illegal immigration, saying it was a huge problem in Europe that no political leader had been able to contain.

Whether or not one agrees, many of Nydahl's descriptions of the actions that determine how one is reborn ring very true in today's world.

For example, a life of jealousy may lead to a rebirth into a life of aggression for people who are deeply disturbed when others enjoy more happiness than they.

Likewise, greed makes not only this life miserable, but also the next.

"The more some people have, the stronger their possessions imprison them," he says.

But the worst pollutant of the mind is hatred, which can manifest in rebirth as heavy paranoia and pain.

However, he says, we have the control in our hands to influence our own paths, and "by doing what is useful and avoiding harm, one may inspire others to experience, and also share the best of the impermanent happiness inherent in mind".

The key, he says, is meditation — "awareness independent of anything, beyond birth and death, without coming or going".

Meditation is a precious opportunity that allows the after-death bardo states to become gateways to enlightenment. "They give us our best chance to confront mind with its true nature and to set it free."

■ Great Seal Meditation Course, Tuesday, February 7, Mahamudra House, Wattle St, Lynham (opposite shops). Session times: 10am-1pm, 3pm-6pm, 8pm-11pm. Cost: \$80/\$60 concessions. Ph: 6249 7090. Visit: www.diamondway.org.au



JANE BARRY

Parenting

Q I've almost eliminated everything from my diet to see if what I'm eating is causing our six-week-old baby to be so unsettled. Nothing has helped and I feel like giving up breastfeeding altogether. What else can I try?

A Some people mistakenly believe that a maternal diet while breastfeeding has a direct affect on babies' behaviour. In reality, there is very little correlation between what mothers eat and how settled their babies are. Wakefulness and crying at this age, in thriving babies, is often due to overtiredness, gut discomfort or a general need for soothing and comfort. The days of eliminating many foods such as vegetables, fruit, cereals and dairy foods from the diets of lactating women are fortunately over. Dietary restrictions caused generations of mothers to become hungry and miserable with little measurable improvement in their babies' behaviour. We know that breast milk is produced from the nutrients of the foods mothers eat, rather than directly from the food itself. However, some babies are particularly sensitive to strong smelling and tasting foods in their mother's milk. Garlic, onions and cruciferous vegetables such as cabbage and broccoli have long been blamed for causing colic, though as long as these foods are eaten in moderation and in balance with a healthy diet, there are generally no problems. Weaning is no guarantee that your baby will become calmer and it's important to eliminate other causes for his/her unsettledness.

Q Our darling two-year-old girl overheard me swearing and now she's like a parrot repeating what I said. We try not to react, but it sounds so severe to hear her and she's saying it in public now. What can stop her?

A Two-year-olds can't comprehend the meaning of swearing, though they quickly learn that they get a response when they make those sounds. This is what tends to perpetuate the swearing cycle — a simple cause and effect. Toddlers love attention and animation from adults and she's learnt that doing this is a winner. The answer is to completely ignore her when she swears and don't show any response, not even eye contact. Distract her, focus on something else and just gloss over those little gems which come out of her mouth. Avoid appearing shocked and don't laugh or give her reason to think you find it funny, as sometimes it can be. Ask others to do as you are, so there's consistency in your responses. Swearing can be automatic for many of us, but it's worth remembering that there are little people around who will pick up on new words. The other issue is that many swear words are one syllable and for children, who are learning to talk, easily repeated.

Did you know?

US researchers have found evidence that in times of economic or social stress, male foetuses are less likely to survive in the uterus. It has long been thought that the stress hormone cortisol plays a vital role, as it can have damaging effects on male foetuses, leaving females reasonably unaffected. But current research states that during stressful pregnancies, cortisol is unconsciously produced in an effort to ensure survival of the fittest. Female embryos and foetuses are known to be stronger than males. Research was based on Swedish birth records over 160 years, because of its history of extreme weather conditions, wars and economic hardship.

■ Jane Barry is a mother, registered nurse, midwife and child-health nurse. Send questions to parentingqueries@yahoo.com.au

■ The advice in this column is of a general nature only. For individual parenting guidance, it is recommended that you speak with your own health-care provider.

all is fresh in hazy, crazy morning

I counted the other night — 30 times in an hour and a half. He didn't even give me time to sit back down on the lounge before he'd be opening his door again. A couple of times on the nights before that he'd scream the house down, waking Blossie, the dog and probably the neighbours, but usually it's a very sedate affair. It's just bloody tiring. Up, down, up, down. I should be grateful for the work my quads are getting.

Having been through the fabulous Queen Elizabeth II Centre with Blossie, a life-changing and life-saving four days, I'm an old hand at the techniques needed, but how

can you control the crying when there's no crying involved. One book I have suggests tying the door closed with a rope, leaving a gap big enough for a peak out but nothing more, but I think that's going a little too far. So we've decided if it's attention he's after he won't get it and the returning technique involves nothing more than accompanying him back to his room and pulling up his blankies. No chat, no eye contact, no giving in to his requests for cuddles or water or teddies.

It's time for bed. I think he's getting it. He's a smart boy.

Because there he was the next morning, probably having noticed that mum was spending the wee hours on the lounge watching the tennis, whacking a balloon around the lounge room with a wooden spoon, "me tennis mummy, me tennis" and there was his sister, practising balancing on one leg with her stuffed dog sitting on her head and trying to ribbon dance at the same time.

It's like waking up in a whole new world, albeit one viewed — by the parents at least — with blurry, sleep-deprived eyes.