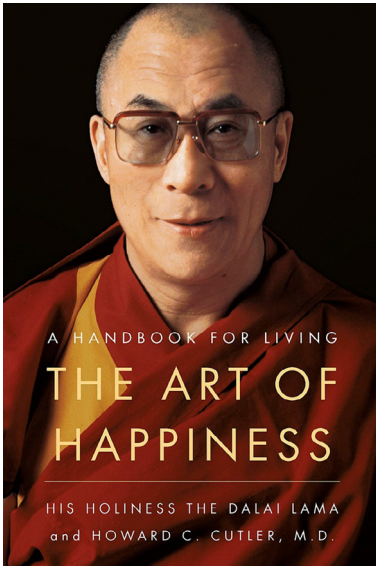


The Interconnectedness of Human Beings

Source Sheet

Why should I care about someone I don't know?

The Art of Happiness, "Dependence on Others vs. Self Reliance", the Dalai Lama & Howard C. Cutler



"Within all beings there is the seed of perfection. However, compassion is required in order to activate that seed which is inherent in our hearts and minds..."

With this, the Dalai Lama introduced the topic of compassion to a hushed assembly. Addressing an audience of fifteen hundred people, counting among them a fair proportion of dedicated students of Buddhism, he then began to discuss the Buddhist doctrine of the Field of Merit.

In the Buddhist sense, Merit is described as positive imprints on one's mind, or "mental continuum," that occur as a result of positive actions...

At one point in the talk, my mind tuned in to hear him say:

"...the other day I spoke about the factors necessary to enjoy a happy and joyful life. Factors such as good health, material goods, friends, and so on. If you closely investigate, you'll find that all these depend on other people. To maintain good health, you rely on medicines made by others and health care provided by others.

"If you examine all of the material facilities that you use for the enjoyment of life, you'll find that there are hardly any of these material objects that have no connection with other people. If you think carefully, you'll see that all these goods come into being as a result of the efforts of many people, either directly or indirectly. Many people are involved in making those things possible. Needless to say, when we're talking about good friends and companions as being another necessary factor for a happy life, we are talking about interaction with other human beings.

"So you can see that all these factors are inextricably linked with other people's efforts and cooperation. Others are indispensable. So, despite the fact that the process of relating to others might involve hardships, quarrels, or cursing, we have to try to maintain an attitude of friendship and warmth in order to lead a way of life in which there is enough interaction with other people to enjoy a happy life."

As he spoke, I felt instinctive resistance. Although I've always valued and enjoyed my friends and family, I've considered myself to be an independent person. Self-reliant. Prided myself on this quality in fact. Secretly, I've tended to regard overly dependent people with a kind of contempt – a sign of weakness.

Yet that afternoon, as I listened to the Dalai Lama, something happened. As "Our Dependence on Others," was not my favorite topic, my mind started to wander again, and I found myself absently removing a loose thread from my shirt sleeve. Tuning in for a moment, I listened as he mentioned the many people who are involved in making all our material possessions.

As he said this, I began to think about how many people were involved in making my shirt. I started imagining the farmer who grew the cotton. Next, the salesperson who sold the farmer the tractor to plow the field. Then, for that matter, the hundreds

or even thousands of people involved in manufacturing that tractor, including the people that mined the ore to make the metal for each part of the tractor.

...And all the designers of the tractor. Then, of course, the people who processed the cotton, the people who wove the cloth, and the people who cut, dyed, and sewed that cloth. The cargo workers and truck drivers who delivered the shirt to the store and the salesperson who sold the shirt to me. It occurred to me that virtually every aspect of my life came about as the result of others' efforts.

My precious self-reliance was a complete illusion, a fantasy. As this realization dawned on me, I was overcome **with a profound sense of the interconnectedness and interdependence of all beings. I felt a softening.** Something. I don't know. It made me want to cry.

From The Art of Happiness, "Dependence on Others vs. Self Reliance", written by the 14th Dalai Lama & Howard C. Cutler, M.D.; Pages 71-75

After reading the text try to answer the following questions:

- *What is the role of compassion according to the Dalai Lama and how do you think one can grow and develop compassion?*
- *Based on the text, reflect: Are we really able to be alone in this world? Why not?*
- *Think of an item you use or an action or activity you like to do in your life. How is it interconnected and dependent on other*

CLOSING INTENTION

After examining the value of empathy that derives from the idea that we are all connected and dependent on each other, what do you plan on doing differently in your daily life?

Take one small action immediately on behalf of the hostages, in captivity, suffering far away and dependent on your deeds. Call your representatives right now, via oneminaday.com.

Now, commit to one small ongoing daily action that you will take on: wearing the number of days every day until they return, or calling representatives every day until their return. Or even better, do both.