

A blossom, a man, a promise

Journey to see His Holiness
the Dalai Lama during his
visit to Atlanta brings hope

Editor's note: Marion Blackburn is a former news reporter and an occasional columnist for The Daily Reflector. She traveled to Atlanta in October to see His Holiness the Dalai Lama. Below is her account of that journey. To read more, visit www.marion-blackburn.net and click on "On the Saffron Path." A three-part audio diary of her trip will air this month starting Monday on Public Radio East, www.publicradioeast.org.

By Marion Blackburn
Special to The Daily Reflector

Walking by the woods near our home once, I came on a bloom so modest it's a wonder I spotted it at all. It was bloodroot, a native wildflower named for its tubers that bleed red when cut. Turning toward the sun so perfectly, it seemed illuminated from within.

Likewise, I nearly walked past a book on a library shelf a few years ago, but something drew me to the benevolent-looking, grandfather-type on the cover. It was His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

The book was "The Art of Happiness," and I read every word. Other books by the Dalai Lama followed, and gradually, through his writings, I came to feel I knew him. I certainly felt he knew me.

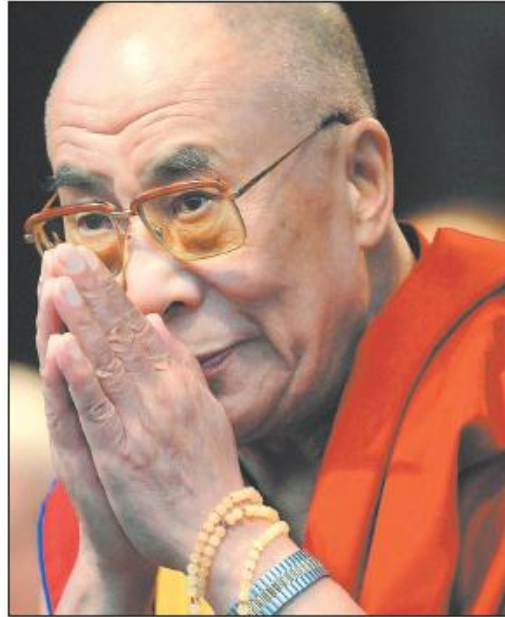
In "How to Practice," he recommends what he calls being "wisely selfish," using his trademark sense of humor.

After all, even though you may not be concerned with other people, you are very much concerned with yourself — no question about it — so you must want to achieve a peaceful mind and a happier daily life. If you practice more kindness and tolerance, you will find more peace. There is no need to change the furniture in your house or move to a new home.

Reading books by this spiritual leader gave me a private joy. Practicing his suggestions somehow improved me — I ate less junk food, found myself trying to be nicer to people. Anger passed sooner. I felt an unfamiliar inner calm.

Other times, after struggling through a complicated passage, I'd close my book and experience a sublime sense of being connected to every living being.

That was how I came to embark on a pilgrimage to see His Holiness the Dalai



Cox News Service photos

HIS HOLINESS the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet acknowledges the crowd prior to his talk, "Educating the Heart and Mind: A Path to Universal Responsibility," at Centennial Park in Atlanta in October.

Lama. Not to Dharamsala, India, where he lives in exile from his native country of Tibet.

No, chance brought this great holy man of the East to the heart of the Deep South during a U.S. visit last fall, when he was in Atlanta for three days.

It would be an exceptional pilgrimage, but seeing someone I believed so kind and wise also carried a risk: What if in real life he were fussy or a complainer, the way some important people are? Even a little sense of self-importance or egotism, and I would be irreparably disappointed.

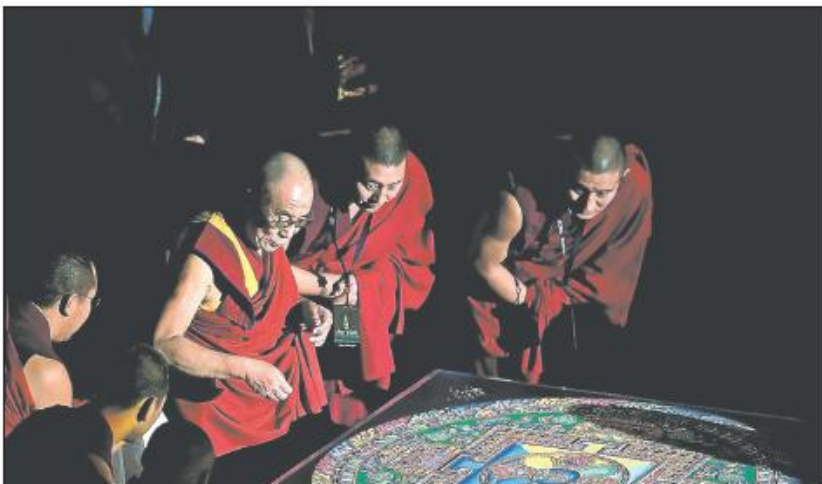
If he proved too human, I feared, something precious could be lost. Still, I had to take the chance.

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I'm not a Buddhist, but in my readings I've learned a few things: The man we call the Dalai Lama is also known as Tenzin Gyatso, or "Ocean of Wisdom." His country, Tibet, is considered by some to be the legendary Shangri-La.

He is believed to incarnate Avalokiteshvara, the bodhisattva of compassion. Bodhisattvas are enlightened beings who

See *JOURNEY*, F5



DREPUNG LOSELING MONKS of The Mystical Arts of Tibet stand by as their mandala sand painting is blessed by the Dalai Lama at Emory University. The monks created the sand painting in honor of the Dalai Lama's visit. Above, the completed sand painting.