

His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama



Jeffrey Hopkins, Ph.D., served for a decade as the interpreter for the **Dalai Lama**. A Buddhist scholar and the author of more than thirty-five books, he is Professor Emeritus at the University of **Virginia**, where he founded the largest academic program in Tibetan Buddhist studies in the West.

THE DALAI LAMA IS COMING!

When Inner Words learned that the Dalai Lama was coming to Northern California, we commissioned prize-winning visionary novelist, Stephen Hawley Martin, to interview Professor Jeffrey Hopkins, FOUNDER of the West's largest Tibetan and Buddhist studies program, which is offered by the University of Virginia.

Martin: I understand that you know the Dalai Lama personally.

Hopkins: I was his chief interpreter on tours he took to English speaking places for ten years, from 1979 to 89, thus in a sense was on his personal staff while on those tours.

Martin: Doesn't he speak English?

Hopkins: His English was quite broken at that time, and it's pretty good now. But still, when it comes to technical Buddhist matters he still needs an interpreter.

Martin: do you think he really is the fourteenth incarnation of the Dalai Lama in a unbroken chain?

Hopkins: According to Tibetan Buddhist tradition he is the fourteenth in a line that traces back to the fifteenth century. But I've heard him say several times that he feels that it's not the reincarnation of the person of the last Dalai Lama, but that he was chosen because he would be an apt person at this time. So, if I understood him correctly, he feels he is the Dalai Lama without having to be in the mental continuum of the last one (before him, who died in 1935).

Martin: I suppose this has been a difficult time for the Dalai Lama and Tibet. Briefly, what is the history?

Hopkins: The Chinese communists began overrunning Tibet in 1950 and they completed this process in 1959. The Dalai Lama set up a Government-in-exile Northern India where how has lived since then, Martin. And, of course, he would like to have Tibet back as a separate nation.

Well, part of the reason why he's awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 is that he set forth a five-point peace plan in which he was not calling for independence but rather of some sort of structure within the China federation. He didn't specify what that structure would be, but he did give up calling for complete independence in 1978.

Martin: Shifting gears, let me ask you, do you personally believe in reincarnation?

Hopkins: Since I was a little child I felt that we didn't come from nothing, and it struck me as very unlikely that we're created by a higher being, and so I had a strong feeling for it. In fact I argued with my mothers about this (When I was grown) those memories were reawakened. One might say I have a strong preconception toward accepting rebirth. But I don't think people from lifetime to lifetime necessarily get better.

Martin: Can we actually regress?

Hopkins: Yes

Martin: But in the long haul are we evolving toward something, or is (rebirth) something that continues forever?

Hopkins: In the long haul we all evolve because of our basic nature. No matter how much we try to go against it, the basic nature is there – in a sense calling us toward ENLIGHTENMEEMTN.

Martin: But can we get sidetracked along the way?

Hopkins: Yes, EVER for a long time

Martin: Do you have any memories of past lives?

Hopkins: I don't talk about that.

Martin: Okay. I understand that the Dalai Lama is coming to Northern California.

Hopkins: Yes, He's coming to the West Coast and briefly to the East Coast to Washington.

Martin: What is his mission?

Hopkins? I assume it is to spread his message of compassion, of not accepting the way things appear---the need to develop the wisdom to penetrate appearances.

Martin: Is it also to help the Tibetan cause?

Hopkins" He's definitely drawing people's attention to the dire circumstances in which the Tibetan culture finds itself.

Martin: I've heard people say he has a very calming presence. Is that true?

Hopkins: I'll give you a simple example that come to mind. In Toronto we were for security purpose coming out into the parking garage of the hotel and as we passed through two doors a woman saw him and jumped around him. It happened so fast, and yet he was totally unfazed. He didn't even look to the side or anything.

Martin: What else would you say to describe him?

Hopkins" I'd say that he has worked very hard to develop a message that would be suitable not just for Buddhists, not just for religious people, but for the whole world.

Martin: Can you distill that message for us?

Hopkins: It is to recognize that everyone wants happiness, and doesn't want suffering. That everybody is like oneself in that very important respect, and that we need to act from within that recognition. It's very easy just to say, "oh Yeah," and then go on being selfish. But to recognize this and to see that other people have a right to get rid of suffering, and that we should not be using them to try to gain our happiness, and to make the kindness (that results from this realization) the very basis for society. The Dalai Lama once said, and it's in my boo, that 'society is kindness.' I thought, well, that's his broken English. But now I realize it wasn't broken English. In fact, what he said has a real wallop to it.

Martin: So the idea is that someone you might consider your enemy, or totally unscrupulous is striving the same thing you want through their own methods?

Hopkins: Yes, but we cannot fail to notice that some people's methods for gaining happiness and getting rid of suffering are really weird and wrong. We need to help them learn how to stop those methods. Never the less, their goal is happiness, just as ours is.

Martin: Isn't that what the purpose of karma is? To teach us what works and what doesn't?

Hopkins: I don't know if it's the purpose of karma. Karma just is. Often we suffer and don't learn a thing.

Martin: But if the boomerang keeps coming back at us, when what goes around eventually comes around, after a few

times wouldn't we say, "Wait a minute, how come this keeps coming back at me?"

Hopkins: That is the purpose of teaching – to let one to what's possibly going on. To encourage people to reflect.

Martin: Tell us about your new book.

Hopkins: The principle is just that one that the Dalai Lama keeps repeating, which is "Just as I want to alleviate my suffering, so does this person." It tells how to cultivate this attitude in mediation by reflecting on individual persons one after another, starting with friends and working to less strong friends, then working to people who you know but haven't paid much attention. Then you progress to difficult people, then to the least of your enemies, and one by one proceed hopefully to some of your worst enemies.

Martin: Jesus also said that God makes his rain to fall and his sun to shine on the wicked and the good.

Hopkins: Yes, and there is also a lot of emphasis on helping the poor that downtrodden.

Martin: If someone reads you book, Cultivating Compassion, and they strive to do just that, what is the end goal to be achieved?

Hopkins: The goal in this system is to get to an increasingly more developed level where one can help others more and more. It's not to disappear in Nirvana or anything like that.

Martin: So, the helping of other though service is the path?

Hopkins It is both the path and the goal itself. The perfection of mind and body is for the sake of enabling one to provide service.

Martin: What else do you want people to know about your book?

Hopkins: It lays out the steps for developing compassion and provides techniques for getting around problems that arise in trying to do this. The exercises given are very clear.

Martin: Would you classify your book as a workbook?

Hopkins: It certainly is a workbook. The meditative exercise are in bold type and in between are descriptions of how to do it. It's designed to help lead the person towards the development of compassion. At minimum, one gets an idea of what some other people are doing. At maximum, one does it oneself and improves a little. What more can one ask?

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