

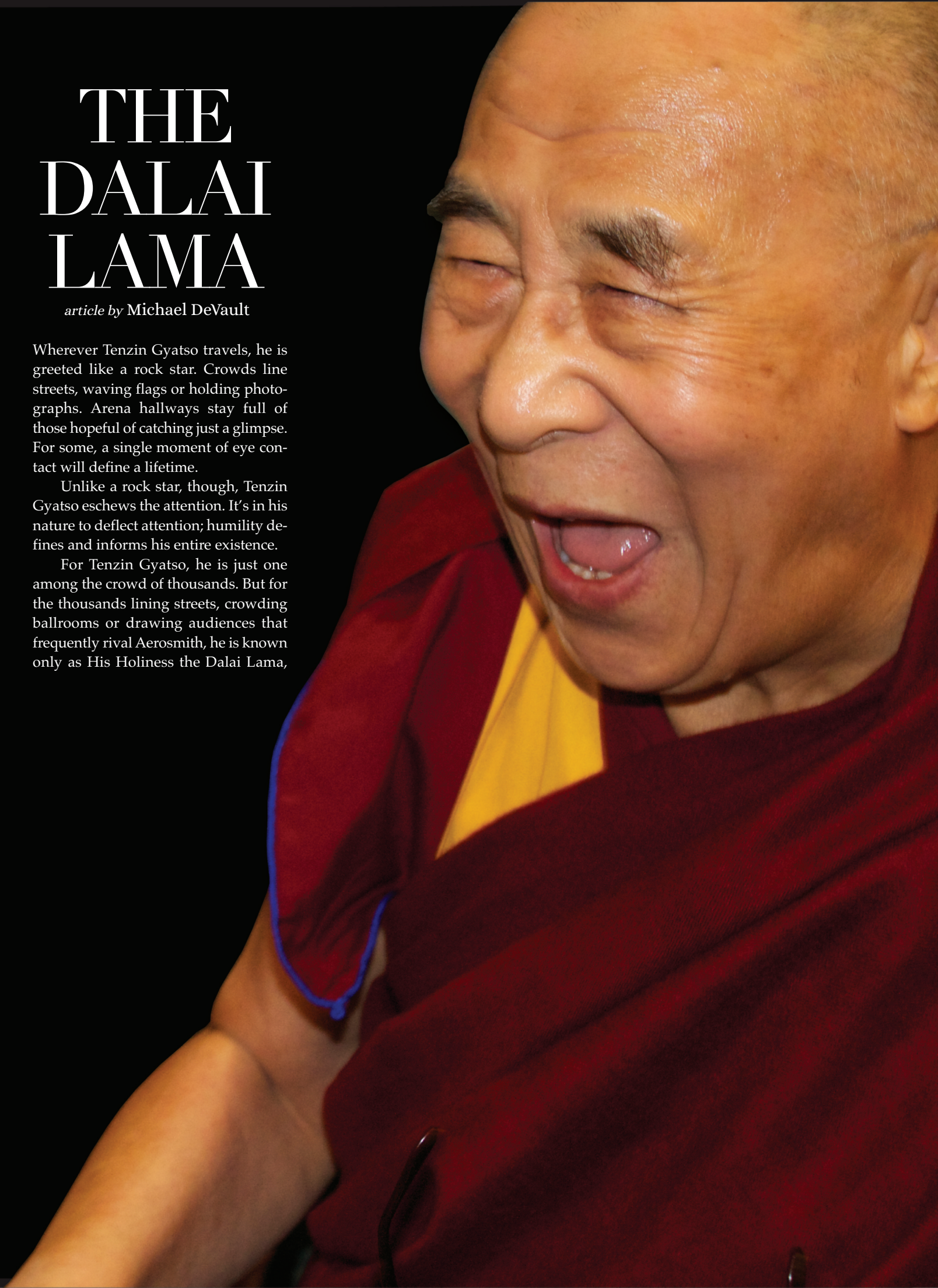
THE DALAI LAMA

article by Michael DeVault

Wherever Tenzin Gyatso travels, he is greeted like a rock star. Crowds line streets, waving flags or holding photographs. Arena hallways stay full of those hopeful of catching just a glimpse. For some, a single moment of eye contact will define a lifetime.

Unlike a rock star, though, Tenzin Gyatso eschews the attention. It's in his nature to deflect attention; humility defines and informs his entire existence.

For Tenzin Gyatso, he is just one among the crowd of thousands. But for the thousands lining streets, crowding ballrooms or drawing audiences that frequently rival Aerosmith, he is known only as His Holiness the Dalai Lama,





ABOVE: Gelug Monks from Dharmasalam, India prepare to perform a traditional chant prior to the Dalai Lama's speech at the New Orleans Theatre.



ABOVE: The Dalai Lama blesses the traditional khata worn by writer, Michael DeVault. Photo courtesy of Nathanael Jones, Pacific Coast News

and whenever he visits a city, the city is changed.

Less than one week after the Mother's Day Second Line shooting, he was in New Orleans.

More than 25,000 people turned out for public talks, seminars and the chance of a lifetime to experience just a moment with a part of living history. To Shea Siefertman of Lafayette, seeing the Dalai Lama was a "bucket list" moment. At 77, the Dalai Lama's age is beginning to have an effect on his travel schedule and public appearances.

"I just think he embodies what we all strive for," Siefertman said. "We all strive for happiness, and I think he embodies that."

The idea that the Dalai Lama embodies happiness is a common one. He is frequently seen smiling or laughing with crowds—and with individuals. During a press event prior to Friday's festivities, the Dalai Lama and one reporter joked about how they "had the same haircut."

As a Buddhist monk, he keeps his hair shorn. It took but a moment for His Holiness to touch the man's forehead and point out another shared commonality. "We have the same--," he said, but forgot the English word. So he resorted to pantomime.

Reaching to his forehead, he pulled at his eyebrow and laughed. "Gray!" he said. "Eyebrows are gray!"

He laughed. And everyone laughed with him—just one more moment of humor, a brief respite of joy from the daily trials facing people everywhere.

Yet, amid the boisterous and jovial greetings and infectious, warm laughter, the Dalai Lama also demonstrated his hallmark compassion.

Though the visit of His Holiness to the Crescent City was more than two years in the making, the

timing of a visit on the heels of the Mother's Day shooting was not lost.

Frequently during his three-day visit to New Orleans, the Dalai Lama expressed his condolences to victims of the shooting, in which twenty revelers at a Mother's Day parade were injured.

Speak to any one of the more than 25,000 people who turned out for public talks at the New Orleans Theatre, New Orleans Arena or the Louisiana Superdome, and one thing will be clear: the empathy expressed by His Holiness is genuine and heartfelt.

"My whole life, I've witnessed violence in different forms," he said during a speech about building strength through compassion.

He outlined the violence of almost a century of events in his life so far, including the rise and fall of the Soviet Union, the communist revolution in China and the invasion and occupation of his homeland, Tibet.

"This immense violence included using nuclear weapons--and innocent people suffered immensely," the Dalai Lama said.

While some might say that at least some of the violent acts brought about a better world, the Dalai Lama disagreed.

"That is not the case," he said. But he did offer a reason for the violence.

"These acts of violence, tragedies, are a symptom of past mistakes," the Dalai Lama said.

He also offered a path forward for a more peaceful future.

Speaking at the 2013 Tulane University graduation, His Holiness implored the graduating class to work towards that peaceful future.

"You really are now our hope," the Dalai Lama said. "Please try to think how to build a happy century, a hopeful century."

To Safe Travels

A symbol of purity and compassion, the Tibetan khata is a traditional gift given at weddings, funerals, births and graduations.

Traditional Tibetan khatas are white and made of silk. In addition to being worn and circulated among family and friends, khatas are frequently draped over statues, paintings and other religious affects.

Another use of the khata, less frequent and far more dear, is as an offering to His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

In this exchange, the individual extends first his respect to His Holiness by bowing, with the khata held between hands and pressed to his forehead. Afterwards, the khata is offered to His Holiness, who accepts the khata, unfolds it and then blesses it.

The individual then bows again, palms folded and His Holiness places the khata around the neck of the giver. Once given, it is held as a treasured, personal talisman and must never be sent into re-circulation again.

The theme returned time and again throughout his visit as he spoke to social workers, to members of the media, to the general public, and in the hundreds of individual moments he spent with people who were lucky enough to meet him.

He noted frequently that, while there are natural disasters in the world that are beyond the control of people, many of the problems are created by human action—or worse, human inaction. Among many societal ills, he ranked crime, hunger, and violence among the world's greatest problems.

"I think we can reduce these things, not necessarily through religion or prayer, but through common sense," the Dalai Lama said. "We are one community."

His Holiness frequently referred to dishonesty and theft as "unwise selfishness," and said crime and violence are two of the biggest side effects of such practices.

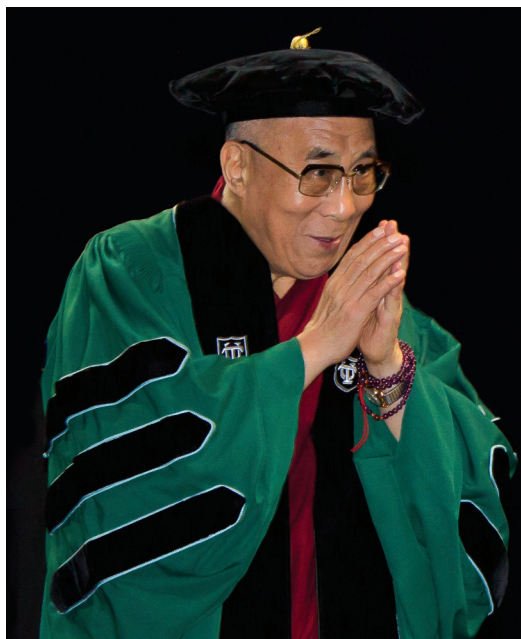
"We are a social animal," he said. "We want friends. If we always tell lies, how can we gain friends?"

He counseled violence should never be the answer and, instead, that conflicts should be settled through understanding.

"Friendship comes only when you show them your sincerity," he said. "You are honest, truthful, transparent."

To that end, the Dalai Lama suggested developing a sense "wise selfishness." People must recognize that self-interest is good, but only so long as it is tempered by compassion, affection, and—most importantly—honesty. Only when people express compassion and affection can they begin to make an effort to change the shape of global relations.

Those efforts do not begin with religion or with politicians, His Holiness said, but on a much



CAPTION: Decked out in full Tulane regalia, His Holiness blesses a packed New Orleans Superdome.

smaller scale.

"Meaningful life starts from the individual. So, changing our way of life starts with one individual," he said, indicating first himself then turning his attention to individuals in the audience.

The point: the only people individuals can change are themselves. Through that change, they can engage in global change. And it was clear, too, that the Dalai Lama meant change through action, not thought.

"Peace will not come from the sky," he said. He chuckled and, with a warm smile, pressed forward.

He noted that prayer is an important part of the spiritual health of an individual. He noted he frequently prays, as do millions of Christians,

Buddhists, Muslims, Hindus and Jews. But he reiterated that so many of the problems that drive people to pray for relief are caused not by the hand of God or Nature, but by the hand of man.

"Real change must take place through our actions, not prayers," the Dalai Lama said. He began to laugh again and winked at the audience.

"If the problem starts with God, then we can pray to God for change," he said. "In the meantime, pray to 'me'."

He pointed at his head and his heart to drive home the message that ultimate peace and compassion must begin with one's own head and heart.

"Many of these problems are our own creation," he said. "They are self-created. Therefore, we must have the ability to address these problems, too."

It is the same message the Dalai Lama has been preaching for more than sixty years. Amid the throngs of onlookers in New Orleans, that message seemed to resonate.

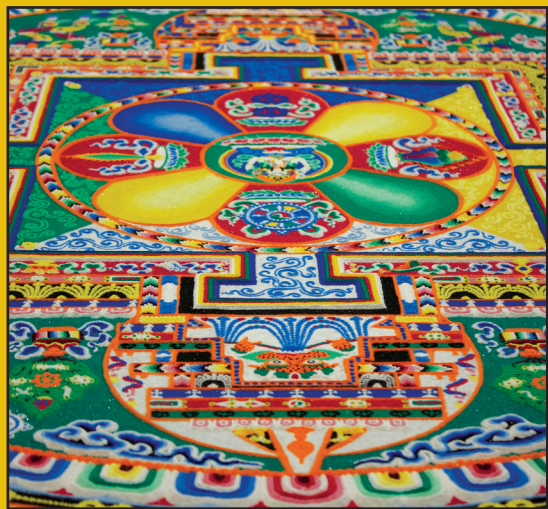
"I feel like his message of peace and kindness is really beautiful and is something we should all work on cultivating for ourselves and those around us," said Leyla Aykin.

Aykin traveled from Gainesville, FL to see the Dalai Lama speak Friday afternoon. She said the world's challenges are great, but she had hope. "As we enter into the future, things seem uncertain," Aykin said. "I think the best things we can do are to be kind and compassionate."

That was the thrust of his message the next morning at Tulane, when he stood before more than ten thousand people and implored them all to work towards happiness.

"I always believe the very purpose of our life is happiness, a happy life," the Dalai Lama said. "The very existence of our life is based on this hope."

Sacred Sands and Second Lines



For four days, the monks spend hours hunched over a table, dispensing colored grains of sand one at a time to create a masterpiece.

Known as a sand mandala, the colorful display is for Tibetan Buddhists a roadmap to enlightenment. Each element of the mandala, which covers almost thirty square feet, represents an essential component of Buddhist thought.

The construction of the mandala begins from a single grain of sand laid into place and continues for several days, until the mandala is complete.

The mandala is an act of extreme devotion and excruciating attention to detail. Each component of the mandala must be placed in precisely the same place each time the monks undertake construction.

Once placing the sand is completed, though, the process is only half-finished. For a Buddhist, the path to enlightenment is as much about creation as it is

about destruction.

The mandala is left to rest for a while, during which time visitors take pictures and meditate on its meaning. After a prescribed period of time, though, the monks return.

They sweep the mandala into a pile, distribute portions of the sand to visitors who would like a memento, and then, in a processional, disperse the remaining sand into a nearby waterway.

For His Holiness the Dalai Lama's visit to New Orleans, monks from the Drepung Loseling monastery in Atlanta, GA constructed the mandala over four days.

The mandala was deconstructed Friday, May 17, and given the perfect New Orleans sendoff as a crowd of more than 1,000 second lined the sands from the Morial Convention Center to Mardi Gras World, where the Drepung Loseling monks distributed the sand into the Mississippi River.