Dalai Lama engages with next generation

Tibetan leader answers to local winners of essay contest at Loyola University event

BY MANYA A. BRACHEAR Tribune reporter

What did the Dalai Lama with whom he had known when he was 17, before he became the world's most famous Buddhist monk. On Thursday, Gavin Sullivan, 17, of Deerfield, asked the Dalai Lama, "What knowledge which we gain with enthusiasm tends to last longer and go deeper," replied Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th dalai lama.

"Things we learn out of duty, we don't keep them for long."

Sustaining the focus on today's youth, that the Dalai Lama and other Nobel Peace laureates promoted in Chicago this week, the Tibetan spiritual leader and 1989 Nobel Peace Prize winner invited three local high school students on stage at Loyola University to share their views on nonviolence and its role in creating a better world.

The teenagers, winners of an essay contest in which they responded to a question from the Dalai Lama, got to ask him questions of their own before an audience of more than 3,000 packed inside Loyola University's Gentile Arena.

Earlier in the day inside Loyola's chapel, he addressed Chicago's small Tibetan community. Later, he discussed interfaith collaboration in front of more than 3,000 Loyola students, faculty and alumni again at the arena.

The Dalai Lama, 76, acquired his title at age 5. He fled Tibet in 1959 after the Chinese suppressed an uprising and still lives in exile in Dharamsala, India. Widely revered as Tibet's spiritual leader, he relinquished his role as political leader last year.

Offering a mixture of humor and humility, the Dalai Lama describes himself as a "semiretired simple Buddhist monk." But truth is, he has been showered with numerous accolades. Most recently, he was named the winner of the Templeton Prize, a $1.7 million award annually given to someone who exemplifies the marriage of science and religion. He also has earned a Congressional Gold Medal for his pursuit of peace and reconciliation.

Pointing to the sold-out morning crowd, the Dalai Lama indicated how heartening it was to see more and more people realize peace must come from within.

"We are all a maroon visor to match his robes, we teetered back and forth in his chair, listening intensely and occasionally nodding affirmation, as the students read from their winning essays.

"Our world is on fire," she said. "It is those who do nothing to stop it who are responsible ... often the notion of 'I'm only one' goes in vain ."

"We must make it en vogue to be compassionate," she added. "It must be the fashionable thing to do."

Essang Gonzong, 16, a junior at Niles West High School in Skokie, read from her essay, writing traditional Tibetan attire. She had greeted the Dalai Lama earlier in the chapel, where he addressed her community in the Tibetan tongue and urged the young people to preserve their language, culture and heritage.

"Teaching nonviolence should be as important as teaching math," Gonzong told the audience. "Violence doesn't always mean guns or wars. It can also mean bullying."

Sullivan also encouraged changing the world by starting small and starting local. "With 7 billion steps across the globe, we can surge toward peace and prosperity," said the junior at Loyola Academy in Wilmette.

Each student donned a white scarf blessed and bestowed by the Dalai Lama before the readings.

"These people already know these things," the Dalai Lama said after Academy Award-winner actor Sean Penn delivered the customary celebration introduction. "They don't need my talk."

But many in the audience said they appreciated his sermon of common ground and common sense.

"There's so much to be angry about these days, it seems," said Sharon Stef- fenson, 60, a yoga instructor from the Edgewater neighborhood. "So you want to hear from a kind soul, a loving person. We eat it up. We need it. We love it."

"And he delivers.

Drawing a chuckle from the audience, the Dalai Lama recalled sitting on his mother's shoulders as a child. Though she didn't always listen when he tried to steer her from above, she always loved him.

"My mother spoiled me," he said, encouraging everyone, especially parents, to act compassionately and practice "maximum affection.

mbrochear@tribune.com
Twitter @TrlSeeker

flexicor@tribune.com/dalalama

See a video of the Dalai Lama's visit at Loyola University.