



Jim Wheat goes to Dharamshala to learn more about the Dalai Lama and finds the Tibetan monk to be 'powerful yet modest, unifying and silencing'

'I felt something...'

Hot off the Osho trail ((group hug)) from Pune, India, I thought I'd get a grip of reality and aim for triple D's.

Namely Delhi, Dharamshala and back home to Dubai before my rupee travel fund goes overdrawn and I knuckle down to earning a crust again...

With only 24 hours in dusty Delhi, the throne of chivalry by successive dynasties with oodles of history, I worked through nose to tail traffic where horn blowing is compulsory, I headed off to smell some flowers at Lodhi gardens, the Mecca of nature close to the town centre...

...It was time to catch my flight to Dharamshala in northern India. Sitting 1600m above sea level (Dharamshala that is, not in the plane, that was a lot higher) it is the capital of the Central Tibetan Administration, a Tibetan government in exile led by Tenzin Gyatso, better known as the 14th and current Dalai Lama.

'We can live without religion and meditation, but we cannot survive without human affection.'

—His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama

The flight was full and as we touched down — that pointless impatient bit when 80 per cent of the flight do the overhead locker dance and grab their belongings only to stand for 20 minutes. At luggage collection I overheard a couple:

'Let's hope we make it in time tomorrow so we can get a great spot to meet HIM?' Said a pig tailed Israeli girl.

It turned out that the Dalai Lama himself was scheduled to be at home for his bi-annual open Q&A session along with some teaching right where I was headed in Dharamshala, in the Kangra valley in the Dhauladhar Mountains to be precise.

On the way to the Clouds End Hotel in Dalia Lama territory, I learned that the government's headquarters are located in McLeod Ganj, a suburb that is also referred to as Upper Dharamshala or "Little Lhasa"....

FLOWERS MEET THE DALAI LAMA

October 4, 2008 by Jim

Location: Dharamshala, India, amongst the Tibetan settlements and the residence of Noble Laureate, His Holiness the Dalai Lama since 1959. He is at his temple — I am staying 15 minutes walk away at the Clouds End Villa.

Altitude: Between 1,250 and

I'VE ONLY FELT SIMILAR WHEN PRINCESS DI'S COFFIN WAS WHEELED PAST ME AROUND HYDE PARK ON THE DAY OF HER FUNERAL AS WAVES OF SILENCE ENSUED... WHATEVER THE ARM-FOLDING TAKE ON THIS IS I FELT SOMETHING

3,000 metres.

Attitude: Open minded.

Temperature: Maximum 38 degree C in June; minimum 0 degree C in January.

Annual Rainfall: Varies between 290 and 380cm. Monsoon season is July to September so it's dry now and great for trekking.

Mission: To find Mona Lisa impersonators and to learn more about the Dalai Lama (I'll refer to him as HH in the rest of this article as he often is), China and Tibet. It's OK — the Tibetan people here encourage a sense of humour. My timing here is more luck than judgement, as it happens with HH giving bi-annual teachings and an open mic Q&A session in front of a public audience. I strolled up to his main Tibetan temple armed with a cushion, an FM radio for Tibetan — English translation and a bottle of water I wedged myself in between a few Tibetan elders in a place where I was likely to see H.H himself. Security checks were tight as locals, Tibetan exiles, Israelis, Brazilians, Koreans, Taiwanese, Mexicans and Europeans gathered in nervous anticipation for his arrival.

...My best and only chance of understanding what was occurring for the next 2 hours of Q&A was to make a plan. As soon as H.H and his entourage had passed and entered his temple, I'd have to move quickly without ruining the moment and muscle in to a reasonable spot to catch the rest on telly.

Why did I feel like an assassin in the making — this? Were security looking at ME or was I imagining it?

The only other way to meet H.H was to head up to the Tibetan Welfare Office and submit a written request for a private audience to the Private Office of His Holiness the

Dalai Lama at his residence. These are rarely granted and required advance planning with just cause, so I settled for this chance 'audience with the H.H.D.L'....

This was the scene as HH approached so imagine him walking a few more steps (I swear he looked at me — so did everyone else) and taking a left towards the Nelson Mandela lookalike in the orange shirt.

I can only describe his presence as powerful yet modest, unifying and silencing — you could just feel it.

I've only felt similar when Princess Di's coffin was wheeled past me around Hyde Park on the day of her funeral as waves of silence ensued.

Maybe it was the build-up. Like when your football team runs out onto the field on a Saturday, bride and groom

finally make it down the aisle or you get served that beer after a long wait at the bar. Whatever the arm-folding take on this is I felt something. My pivot around to the TV after the entourage had passed was effortless, Bond like and ahead of the game. With earplugs in, cushion leaning against a column for back support I was good to GO!

The Q&A session kicked off but I have to admit it despite the magical setting it was confusing. The English translation

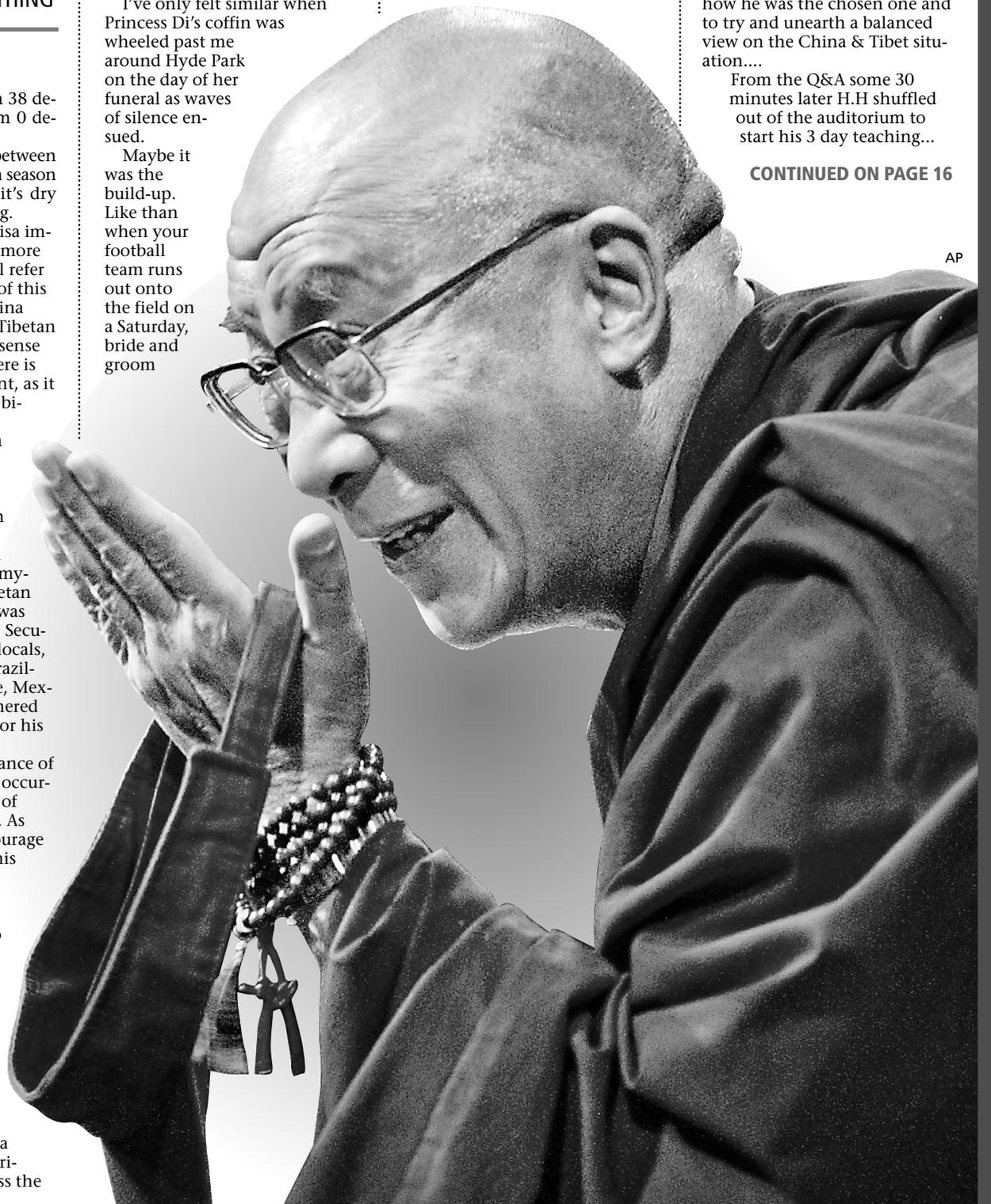
only kicked in as a summary 10-12 minutes after each question was fired in and H.H answered. I picked up it was relating to peace, China, the Olympics.

As the Tibetan exiles listened in ahead of us, sometimes laughing, an occasional tear and even looks of reassurance as their H.H waxed lyrical....

This may come across as ludicrous with the once in a lifetime opportunity but for me this served as a catalyst for me digging deeper in understanding what H.H was all about, how he was the chosen one and to try and unearth a balanced view on the China & Tibet situation....

From the Q&A some 30 minutes later H.H shuffled out of the auditorium to start his 3 day teaching...

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