

INSTANT CALMER

Your spiritual guide, Lama Ole Nydahl, has the answers when it comes to beating stress – and finding happiness along the way

BY IAN COCKERILL

YOU KNOW THE guy at work who looks as though he could catch knives with his teeth? The one who never caves in when the pressure's on, never produces even a bead of sweat when everything's going to hell? Valium aside, chances are he's drawing on the kind of inner calm that comes from keeping it all in perspective. The kind of perspective where one missed deadline matters not one iota in the grand scheme of things. The perspective we often associate with Buddhism, in which you get not just one spin on the merry-go-round of life, but another and another and another . . . Bottom line, there's an infinite number of deadlines stretching ahead of you, whether you're a project manager or some ant sent out to find food.

All of which might help explain why – in materialistic, time-poor, stressed-out Australia – Buddhism is our fastest-growing religion. Of course, it doesn't hurt that, in the religious celebrity stakes, the Dalai Lama is the only figurehead who comes within cooee of the Pope. Better still, he's someone you could imagine having a beer with.

Lama Ole Nydahl, on the other hand, is someone you could *actually* have a beer with. A former street-brawling, hard-partying bohemian who enjoys a nightcap, red meat and – with a broad smile towards his blonde wife, Hannah – “a healthy night life”, 64-year-old Lama Ole is one of the world's best-known Western Buddhist teachers. A regular visitor to Australia since 1991, the blue-eyed, square-jawed Dane is also testament to the benefits of his beliefs. Up close, you have no trouble believing him when he says he's conquered stress and captured a rare kind of happiness by living according to Buddhist ideals.

He might be nearing pensionable age, but he still carries the kind of trim, hard body that suggests you'd need a few gods on your side if you wanted to test him. And despite a punishing schedule that would break most people – he's been punching out 16-hour days and jumping on planes every third day for more than three decades – he looks, well, serene. So Lama Ole, what's your secret? >>

IT'S TRUE, WE DON'T have any internal stress," observes Lama Ole, who, *Fight Club*-style, used to compete in bare-knuckle bouts for cash as a youth in Copenhagen. That starts, he explains, "with not thinking we are our bodies; instead, we think we have our bodies. In Buddhism, we believe the mind is indestructible. When you know your essence cannot be harmed, you can become fearless and more intuitive. That way a lot of loss and stress and pain simply falls away."

The eternal, evolving soul. Yes, there's some comfort in that; in accepting it's all transitory. But how does that help the guy who's on the trading-room floor, riding every fluctuation on the market, right now? How does he get his blood pressure down without ripping off his jacket, walking out the door and booking his passage to some ashram in India?

"There's something called karma, where if you just enjoy the things in this life and don't put back you will have less in your next life. So if the stock exchange goes up 20 you can keep enjoying it as long as you wish other people similar happiness. And if it goes down 20 you should think that it's good that someone else is benefiting and, in time, they may be able to send some of it back your way."

"THE GREATEST EFFORT IS NOT CONCERNED WITH RESULTS."
- BUDDHIST SAYING

Roll with the punches then? Lama Ole, whose enthusiasm frequently propels him forward in his chair, smiles one of those beatific smiles Californian dentists dream about.

"Happiness is more likely to be found in the ability to be present, grounded in the here and now, than in material pursuits and possessions. Which is wonderful - it means it's there, right in front of us. Your car will not make you happy. Your home will not make you happy. The only happy thing is our mind, which you should constantly feed with good impressions. Think of happiness for others. It's a big mistake to just think of yourself. That only leads to problems. If you think of others, if you see the potential in them and then make aware how rich they are inside, then the world is full of interesting jobs to do."

Certainly, it's made for an interesting life for Lama Ole since he and Hannah emerged from four years' "training" in Tibet with instructions to spread the word in the West. That was in 1972. Since then they've been in almost constant motion, spinning around the globe opening meditation centres, giving talks and generally inspiring people with their apparent lust for life.

Beyond his belief in a transmigratory soul, how does he maintain his equilibrium despite spending so much of his time mid-air in row 34 - surely the unending airport shuffle is one of the most stressful situations you could wish upon anyone?

PARACHUTES AND FAST BIKES

There are, it seems, several factors, covering fitness, nutrition, meditation - and parachuting. "In order to sustain my lifestyle I need to be physically capable," Lama Ole explains. "So every year I check myself by going parachuting and motorcycling."

Those "checks" - measuring reaction times and suppleness - typically involve three or four days ripping through the French Alps on a 1200cc BMW motorbike at speeds of up to 250km/h, in the company of fellow Buddhists. "All the police are at the coast to catch the tourists," he laughs. Then there's the parachuting in Germany that has turned "The Flying Lama" - he's completed around 100 jumps - into a favourite of the local media.

"When you free-fall it's like a genuine meditation experience - a feeling of oneness and shininess," he explains. "That minute while you're dropping from four kilometres to 1km is the longest minute - during it you are totally free. It sharpens you and makes you very happy."

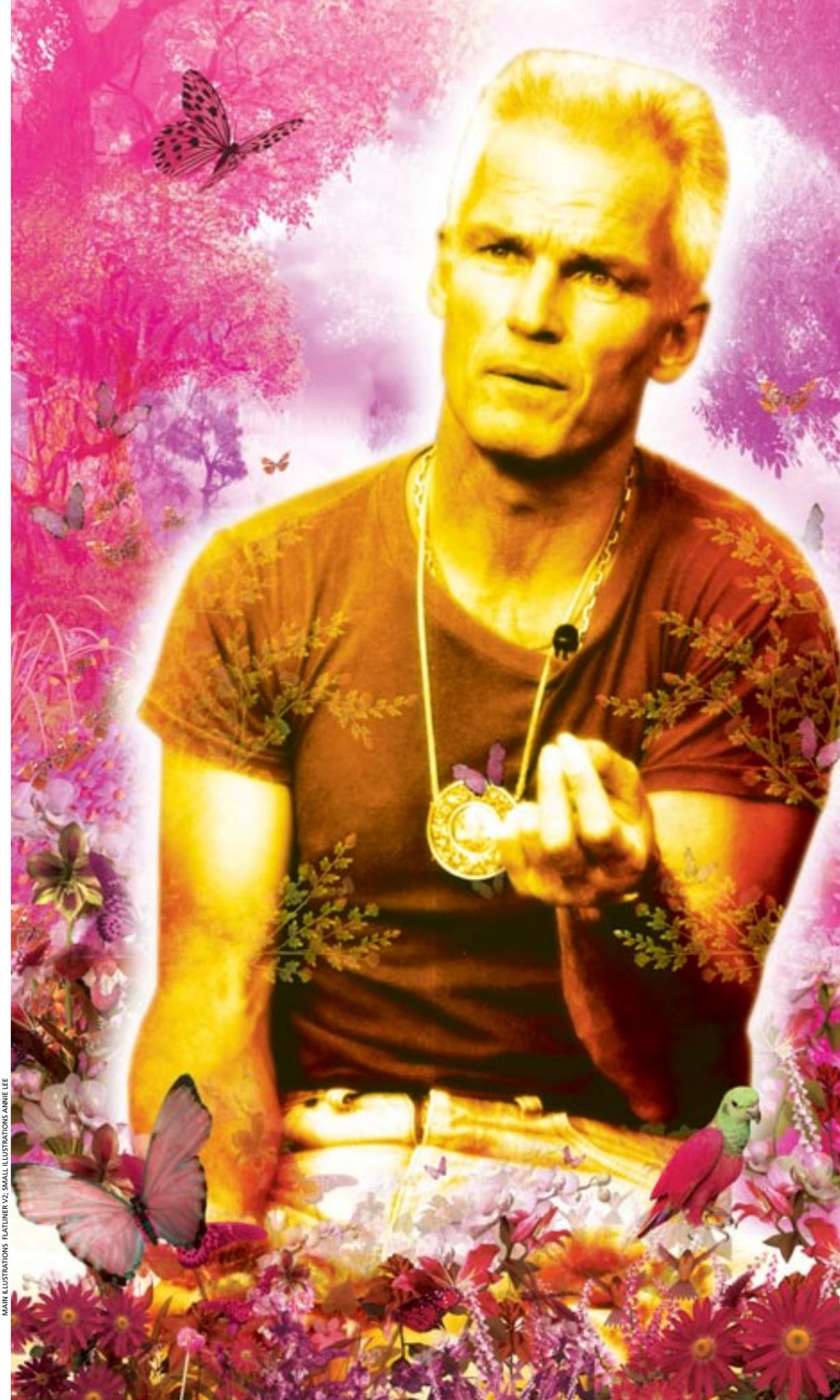
And, after his latest self-tests, how would he mark himself? "So far," says a beaming Lama Ole, "my faculties are okay."

"THE GREATEST GOODNESS IS A PEACEFUL MIND."
- BUDDHIST SAYING

Indeed. We should all look so... *powerful* at 64. Cheerful, too. But the question remains - how has he kept himself in such good shape - and so unruffled - over all these years to be able to fly through such tests in the first place? His answer is surprising.

"If we think of our bodies as instruments for protecting others, then I think the kilos are naturally deposited in the right places," he explains. It's all in the mind, then? "Yes. I run a bit, I swim a bit. I try to avoid salt, sugar and fat. I swallow vitamins. But mainly it comes from thinking that 'if this one attacks, then I should be able to pacify him with the minimum of damage'. I think the mind will then put the kilos where they are needed."

Meditation completes the package. "Everyone should spend 20 to 30 minutes in meditation each day," insists Lama Ole. "This allows you to take >>>



MAIN ILLUSTRATIONS: FLATLINEER VZ; SMALL ILLUSTRATIONS: ANNIE LEE

WHAT WOULD A BUDDHIST DO?

Worry no longer, Grasshopper. Lama Ole has the answers to life's curly questions

My boss praises me in private, but berates me in public. I hate it. What would a Buddhist do (WWABD)?

"Get his praise on a tape recorder and play it to everybody. Tell them all your boss is a bit shy and has difficulty expressing himself in public, but this is what he says in private."

I'm having my buck's party when a stripper suddenly walks in and starts to perform, something I would never have wanted myself. WWABD?

"Enjoy her healthiness, wish everybody happiness and maybe talk to somebody else. We're grown-ups. We've all done biology in school."



If I cheat a little on my tax return this year I'll be able to afford the maintenance payments desperately needed by my ex-wife and our three kids. WWABD?

"If it was in a dictatorship I might not pay because they'd use the money in a bad way. But in a democratic society I would pay the tax and maybe work a couple of hours overtime."

I'm shopping when I see a teenager stuff a cheap toy into their school bag. WWABD?

"Go to them and say that it's a bad idea and suggest they put it back. I wouldn't report them."



WHAT WOULD A BUDDHIST DO?
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I'm a diligent team player at work, but keep getting pipped for promotion by colleagues more adept at office politics. WWABD?

"I would wish them happiness. Genuinely. And I would do what I was paid to do."

I've found \$1000 in a wallet belonging to someone I know to be a criminal. WWABD?

"I would give it to the police and they could give it back to him – if he decided he wanted to ask for it."



I've discovered that my sister's husband is cheating on her – and that the woman concerned is my wife. WWABD?

"If they genuinely like each other, I would definitely back out. I would never stand in the way of others' happiness. If kids are involved it's different. Then I would make an extended family, where I stay together with my former wife, but find another partner. I think that's the most civilised way to do it."

I'm in a bar when my partner accidentally knocks over someone's drink. Despite her apology, he raises his fist to strike her. WWABD?

"I'd pull my partner out of the way quickly and be there myself. If he was drunk, I would take him pre-emptively – I would get him before he got me."



Leap of faith: Lama Ole Nydahl bungee jumping with a friend.

good thoughts from your head to your heart, before you then put them into the world and get feedback – and then put them out again to show people their perfect qualities."

In doing so, you apparently not only relieve stress, but anchor yourself in the moment and control your emotions: "Since becoming a Buddhist I've had two cases where I had to take someone down," recalls Lama Ole. "I remember thinking as I was hanging in the air before making contact, 'How excellent is meditation? I'm not angry at all!'"

Not angry? Not stressed? A "healthy night-life" at 64? Buddhism's appeal isn't so mysterious after all. 

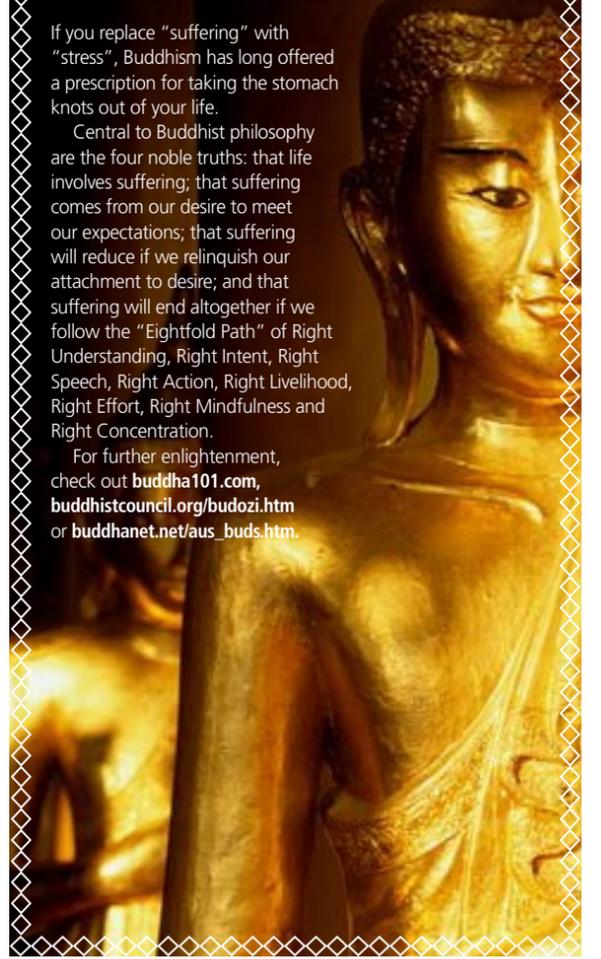
**"DRINK YOUR TEA SLOWLY AND REVERENTLY, AS IF IT IS THE AXIS ON WHICH THE WHOLE EARTH REVOLVES SLOWLY, EVENLY, WITHOUT RUSHING TOWARDS THE FUTURE; LIVE THE ACTUAL MOMENT. ONLY THIS MOMENT IS LIFE."
– BUDDHIST SAYING**

FINDING BUDDHA

If you replace "suffering" with "stress", Buddhism has long offered a prescription for taking the stomach knots out of your life.

Central to Buddhist philosophy are the four noble truths: that life involves suffering; that suffering comes from our desire to meet our expectations; that suffering will reduce if we relinquish our attachment to desire; and that suffering will end altogether if we follow the "Eightfold Path" of Right Understanding, Right Intent, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration.

For further enlightenment, check out buddha101.com, buddhistcouncil.org/budozi.htm or buddhanet.net/aus_buds.htm.



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