

"Does anger have a religion? Does worry have a nationality?" asks the monk, looking very intently at me.

I am sitting alone in an auditorium with Geshe Dorji Damdul. One of the most renowned Buddhist scholars, the Dalai Lama's personal interpreter, and co-author of a number of the Dalai Lama's books, Damdul was in Chennai for a talk as part of the Applied Buddhist Psychology course being held at BALM (Banyan Academy of Leadership in Mental Health).

My first question to him is whether the term "Buddhist" in Applied Buddhist Psychology would make people think that the talk and the course is about religion and hence put them off.

He waits for my response and when none is forthcoming, he continues. "Anger, jealousy, hatred, worry, anxiety are human afflictions and there is nothing Buddhist, Muslim or Christian about them. Everyone seeks peace and harmony, because this is what we lack in our lives. Life presents us with multiple challenges on a daily basis, and coming to grips with these challenges is crucial for inner peace. This course is about healing the mind by knowing the mind, and how Buddhist wisdom can help us cope with these challenges".

Living digitally

Talking about living in a digital age where people are always busy and stressed out he says, "Compared to people living a few centuries ago we have a lot of luxuries. But over the years these luxuries have become necessities, and we have now reached a point

The interpreter of thought

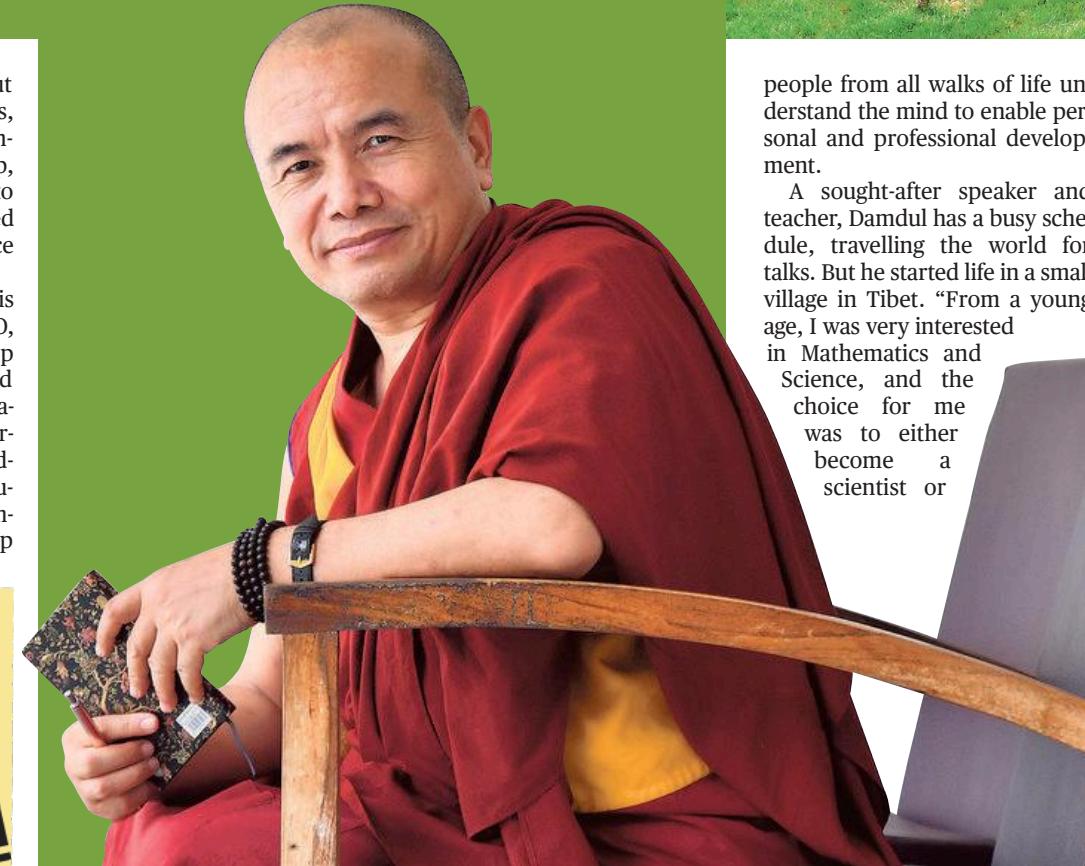
The issues that human beings deal with today are the same, regardless of their religion, believes Buddhist scholar Geshe Dorji Damdul

where we can't live without them." He adds, "Mobile phones, washing machines, cars, dishwashers, computers, WhatsApp, email have all been invented to make life easier and more relaxed – but have they? Or has the pace of life just got faster?"

The course by BALM, (which is the academic partner of the NGO, The Banyan) was in partnership with ARTH, a Mumbai-based mental health and wellness initiative. It combines the 2,500-year-old Buddhist teachings on mindfulness, to teach them in a secular, modern, scientific way. Damdul says the purpose is to help

EVERY WORD COUNTS

The Cambridge University library with well over 3,000,000 volumes is one of a handful in the country that is entitled to a copy of every book published in Great Britain.



A soothing message
Geshe Dorji Damdul (left) has also helped the Dalai Lama with a number of his books

■ B VELANKANNI RAJ

people from all walks of life understand the mind to enable personal and professional development.

A sought-after speaker and teacher, Damdul has a busy schedule, travelling the world for talks. But he started life in a small village in Tibet. "From a young age, I was very interested in Mathematics and Science, and the choice for me was to either become a scientist or

pursue Buddhist studies. After much, deliberation I chose the latter," he says. "In 1988, I joined the Institute of Buddhist Dialectics, Dharamsala, for formal studies in Buddhist logic, philosophy and epistemology. After 15 years of study I finished my Geshe Lharampa Degree, which is the equivalent of a PhD in Tibetan Buddhist studies, in 2002 from Drepung Loseling Monastic University."

In 2003, the Office of the Dalai Lama sent him to Cambridge University, England. "I have been a visiting fellow at Girton College, Cambridge University for a number of years since then. For two years from 2004 to 2005, I worked as the Philosophy lecturer for the Emory University Study Abroad Program which was being held in Dharamsala and in 2005 I was appointed official translator to HH the Dalai Lama."

Damdul is also a well known author and has worked with the Dalai Lama and psychologist Dr Paul Eckman, Professor Emeritus

at the University of California Medical School on their best-seller *Emotional Awareness*. He has also worked on a number of other books by the Dalai Lama, such as *Ethics For The New Millennium*, *Beyond Religion*, *The Graded Path* and also the blockbuster *The Art Of Happiness* by the Dalai Lama and Professor Howard Cutler. The book was on *The New York Times* bestseller list for 97 weeks and has been translated into 50 languages.

A parting thought

The auditorium is filling up with people and it's time for me to leave. But before I go, I ask – "You have mentioned that mindfulness and the teachings taught here have nothing to do with religion. What then is Buddhism?"

Geshe Dorji Damdul smiles and says, "As His Holiness The Dalai Lama often says, there is no need for temples, no need for complicated philosophy. Our own brain, our own heart is our temple and our religion is kindness."