

**BEYOND
THE
ROBE**

Bobby Sager

SOME WORDS ABOUT BEYOND THE ROBE FROM ROBERT THURMAN'S FOREWORD



It is a special pleasure to introduce a book that opens such a beautiful space and tells such an exceptional story. *Beyond the Robe* has many fascinating dimensions and makes a critical contribution to Tibet, to Buddhism, and to our world today. The space it opens is the world of the Tibetan Buddhist monastic universities, still thriving in Indian exile (after the originals were destroyed by the Chinese invasion and occupation of Tibet, and the culturecide being committed there). Within that world, we encounter, in beautiful and thought-provoking ways, the

living tradition of Buddhist monastics, their realms of study, debate, prayer, and meditation, and their living intellectual and experiential encounter with the modern worldview, with its discoveries, technologies, and anxieties. The story it tells is that of an ongoing project—Science for Monks—to mobilize Tibetan Buddhist monks and nuns to learn about modern science, to teach it, and even to contribute to its progress, especially of its cognitive sciences, which include the disciplines of philosophy, psychology, neuroscience, and computer science, among others.

This inspiring and illuminating book enables us to peek into a unique and important project of world-transformation so sorely needed today, as we struggle as human individuals and communities to figure out what we are doing wrong that is causing us to be so unhappy, destroying ourselves and our environment so rapidly, and what we are doing right that opens us up to realistic wisdom and beneficial compassion and love and contentment, on the basis of which we can turn our mass behavior as a planetary community from destructive to creative, from life-extinguishing to life-enhancing. And so, welcome, as I join the monks, nuns, and scientists in inviting you to enter the book and enjoy your tour of what wonders still live in the Tibetan Buddhist civilization, far and away “beyond the robe!”

Robert A. F. “Tenzin Dharmakirti” Thurman

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The Boston Globe

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Millionaire helps science meet faith

By Taryn Plumb



RICK FRIEDMAN/SAGER FAMILY FOUNDATION

The Dalai Lama, spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhists, speaks with Bobby Sager while visiting Sager's home in Boston last month.

Spartan recluses who chant, pray, and meditate, closing themselves off from society in the mountains, hidden beneath billowing robes.

That is how much of the Western world views Tibetan Buddhist monks.

But, according to millionaire philanthropist Bobby Sager, it is a misleading stereotype, and it does not represent who they truly are: well-rounded, cerebral, and inquisitive, lifetime students and debaters with fertile minds who possess a true desire to spread peace and knowledge. This is particularly underscored by the Dalai Lama's landmark "Science for Monks" program, a 13-year-old initiative — financially supported by Sager — that incorporates the study of modern science into traditional monastic teachings and Buddhist philosophy.



JIM BOURG/REUTERS/FILE 2003

The Dalai Lama, assisted by Yama Chopel (left) and Eric Lander, prepares mouse DNA for sequencing while visiting an MIT research lab.

What Sager calls the untapped potential of this dedicated and waning group of individuals, as well as their ability to provide a larger contribution to the human race, is emphasized in his new book, “Beyond the Robe.”

“It’s an opportunity to interact with [Tibetan] monks and nuns on a different kind of basis, to develop a broader and deeper sense of who these men and women really are,” the world-trekking Malden native, 58, said in an overseas call from his room at the InterContinental hotel in Hong Kong.

As with the strict orders in other religions, Tibetan Buddhist monks leave behind families and abstain from sex and other earthly pursuits. But, as stressed in Sager’s book — a heavy, atlas-sized volume rich with

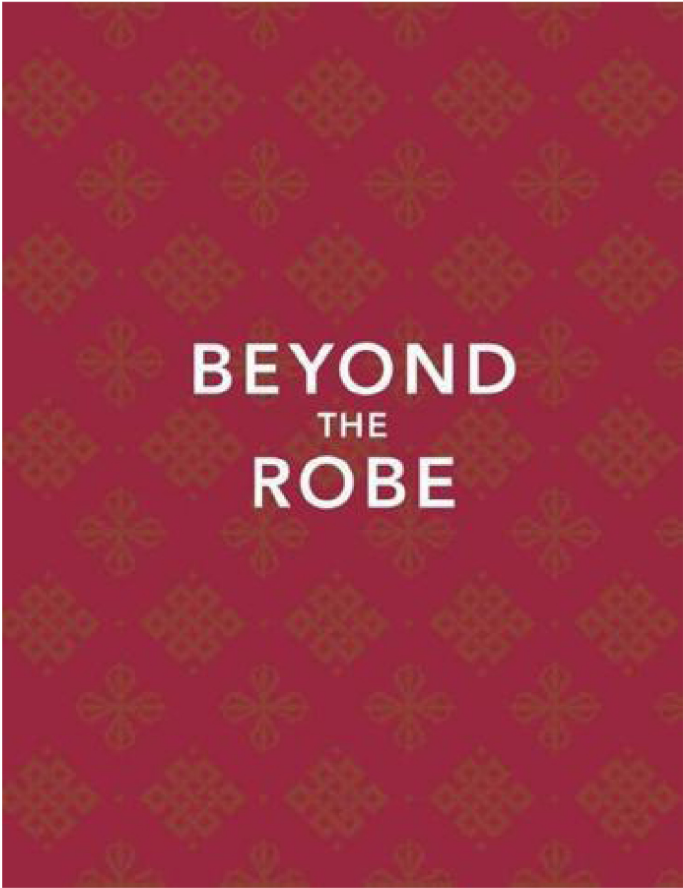
essays, quotes, portraits, and photographs — they are not bound by dogma. Rather, they study, engage in critical debate, meditate, reflect, and believe that the mind is the primary instrument in scientific research.

But up until just over a decade ago, their analysis of science had been based on archaic principles largely drawn from ancient India. So in 1999, the 14th Dalai Lama launched the Science for Monks program at the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives in Dharamsala, India. A year later, 50 monk scholars were selected to participate in the first workshop.

In 2001, the effort got an infusion of support from the Sager Family Traveling Foundation & Roadshow, through which Sager and his wife Elaine, 58; daughter, Tess, 22; and son, Shane, 18, travel in the developing world to give guidance on making things work in areas of conflict and crisis. Since then, dozens of scientists have come from colleges throughout the United States to teach workshops in India.

More than 200 monks and nuns have learned principles of mathematics, biology, physics, quantum mechanics, cosmology, and neuroscience, as well as basic foundations of science such as the periodic table of elements and the structure of the atom and DNA molecules.

“This is the first time in the 1,500-year history of Tibetan Buddhism that western science is being taught in the monasteries,” said Sager, who, through his family’s foundation, has made more than three dozen trips around the world to assist various populations.



BEYOND THE ROBE

Sager recently helped to launch the Science, Monks, and Technology initiative at Massachusetts Institute of Technology, which was celebrated in October with a private reception at Sager's Boston home (the event also launched his book, the proceeds of which will go to the foundation). The Dalai Lama and Sting — both close acquaintances of Sager's — were in attendance. The pop singer, sometimes a travel companion, describes Sager on the foundation's website as "a big brash guy from Boston — flamboyant, eccentric, inexhaustible world traveler, and practical philanthropist."

The MIT effort, Sager said, teaches monks practical technologies such as solar power and clean water that they can use in the Tibetan community.

"Monks have long served as leaders and community organizers in the Tibetan diaspora in India and Nepal," Tenzin Priyadarshi, director of the Dalai Lama Center for Ethics and Transformative Values at MIT, said in a written comment. The program, he noted, will enable an "additional dimension to their societal contribution."

Sager has dedicated himself to this crusade to better

the world for the past 12 years. In 2000, after making millions with the Boston-based Gordon Brothers Group, he established the family foundation. It has assisted with micro-loan and entrepreneurship programs in Rwanda and in the Palestinian community, encouraged female doctors in Afghanistan, and trained teachers in Pakistan.

His entrepreneurship started early: Growing up in Malden, he worked as a newspaper boy and also assisted his jewelry salesman father. Later, he flirted with the idea of becoming an actor. Instead, he went on to study economics at Brandeis University and earn a master's degree in management from Yale.

Since his success at Gordon Brothers Group, he has been an executive producer of the 2006 film "A Guide to Recognizing Your Saints," an author, photographer, and inspiration for the 2009 NBC show "The Philanthropist." He is now trying to revive Polaroid as the chairman of its board.

Ultimately, though, he describes what he and his family do as "selfish." They simply want to be involved in "hands-on, eyeball-to-eyeball philanthropy."

Their participation in the Science for Monks program has been both "very challenging and incredibly rewarding," said Sager, who said he is not a practicing Buddhist, but that he meditates. He and his family have had the experience of living, eating, and overcoming obstacles with the clerics — what he called a privilege.

Although other tradition-based religions might get stuck on the topic of how science integrates with their beliefs, eminent Buddhists consider them interconnected.

"There is no contradiction between the two," the Dalai Lama said in Sager's book. "Each gives us valuable insights into the other. Both science and the teachings of Buddha tell us of the fundamental unity of all things."

Throughout the 10-year cultivation of the program, there have been some obstacles. Most notably, Sager pointed to the translation issue: not just of language, but of scientific terms that had no comparable Tibetan words. Similarly, there was the lack of a baseline science background for many of the monks and nuns.

But even so, the initiative has flourished and is now a core part of the monastic curriculum, with a goal to make it sustaining by getting monks and nuns to teach one another and, hopefully, to eventually make their own contributions to science. Similarly, Sager said, the hope is to train as many monks and nuns as possible in a broad range of technologies, and to encourage them to take that knowledge into leadership roles that can help the Tibetan community.

“This is as much about monks as leaders as it is about monks as budding scientists,” he said. “It’s important for their voice to be part of the chorus of voices that are trying to figure out who we are, where we’re going, and how to make the world a better place.”

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DALAI LAMA LUNCHEON AT BOBBY AND ELAINE'S HOME

HOW TO BUY THE LIMITED-TIME COLLECTOR'S EDITION OF BEYOND THE ROBE



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