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Buddhism, the Oil Business, and the Environment
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Even before the Exxon Valdez dumped thousands of barrels of oil into Alaskan ocean waters, some people considered oil companies to be thoughtless polluters. In the aftermath of that environmental disaster, oil companies scrambled to improve their operations—using the latest scientific knowledge and technological advances to anticipate, prevent and clean up environmental damage. But some companies, thinking that the problem lay in attitudes as well as procedures, have taken further steps. Last year Shell Oil invited Lama Yeshe—the leader of the largest Tibetan Buddhist monastery in Great Britain—to speak to their top executives at their annual, global meeting in the Netherlands. Shell scheduled the Lama to speak for 80 minutes, the same amount of time allotted its own chief executive. His appearance was so successful that Lama Yeshe was invited to participate in the week-long Global Business Network conference in San Francisco this year, which brought together top executives from some of the world's largest corporations.

What is the link between Buddhism and the environment? Buddhism emphasizes balance and harmony, the same way Christianity emphasizes sin and forgiveness. This balance is personal as well as cosmic. That is, individuals must on the one hand seek harmony with the people with whom they interact on a regular basis. On the other hand they should live in harmony with the natural world around them, with nature's place on the earth, with the earth's place in the universe, and with the universe's place in the divine, "heavenly" realm of the cosmos. It is only when a person is in balance with the people and natural forces around them that they can attain their own inner harmony. Since high-powered business—especially the oil business—is not conducive to inner harmony,

Lama Yeshe thinks he has an important message to share.

The Lama brings his message to oil and other business executives not by preaching dogma, theology or morality, but through teaching a habit, that of meditation. Buddhists believe that meditation is the tool that leads to harmony and balance, for it enables one to see where matters are out of balance in one's own life. Once these are identified, steps can be taken to resolve the imbalances. Daily meditation leads, Lama Yeshe teaches, to more stable thought, sharper perception, and deeper wisdom. It helps get beyond the superficial turbulence of daily life to a greater respect for the lives—of all living things—that each person impacts.

Buddhism, like many other religions, brings new ways of transforming attitudes and thinking about life on our planet. Rather than remaining excluded on the sidelines, Buddhism now plays an ever growing role in shaping multinational businesses and the way they operate.