

DEAR  
Margo

MARGO HOWARD

## Creepy hugs

Dear Margo: My husband and I are in our early 30s. We live in an upscale townhouse community with mostly retirees. A couple in their mid-60s lives across the street and keeps an eye on our house and checks on the dog if we're out of town. Over the past few months, the husband has given me the creeps — hugging me too long or brushing his hand against my breast at the end of the hug.

Yesterday I was walking back from the mailbox, and the husband stepped out of his front door and called me over. I walked over and said hello, stepping inside the front door but going no further. I thanked him for watching our dog while we were out of town the previous week, and he smiled and hugged me, grazing my breast again. I stepped back from him and told him I needed to get home. He then hugged me again, but this time he cupped my breast and said: "Can I feel you?". I jumped away and turned to leave, but he grabbed my hand and tried to place it over his crotch. I jerked my hand back and raced out the door. As I walked down his driveway, he called out: "Can I have another hug?"

I was shaking and crying by the time I got home and immediately told my husband what happened. Now I don't know what to do. Should we say something to the man's wife? We're moving out of state in two months, and I'm wondering whether we should just say nothing and avoid this couple for the remainder of our time here.

Repulsed in Raleigh

**Dear Rep:** As I was reading your letter, I thought, well, the old lech is trying to cop a feel. But by the end, I had the idea that the man's governors were off and he may be in early-stage dementia. Hyper-sexualisation is a clue. You're lucky you're moving. The only reason I can think of to mention it to his wife is perhaps to suggest he see a neurologist. But there's always the possibility that she is aware of the situation. Do whatever is comfortable for you.

Margo, regrettably

## Ranting email

Dear Margo: Please tell me how to deal with "helpful" relatives who forward political emails that are not fact-checked, promote fear and spew political hatred. I researched some of these emails and found them to be untrue, but when I shared my research with the senders, they argued that the information might be true anyway. My husband says I should just delete these emails and ignore them, but I don't want to see this rubbish every time I open my email. I have already tried asking the senders to not send me these emails anymore, but they still do, explaining that they just had to send "this particular email" because they felt I would want to see it.

Exasperated

**Dear Ex:** I think your husband gave you good advice. If you delete these emails from the proselytisers without opening them, you won't have to look at the non-factual rants, plus you can avoid being annoyed. In this particular situation, trying to correct misstatements of fact is pointless, because the flat-Earth types who will buy into anything that supports their position are not interested in facts. It is just this side of nuts to respond to accurate corrections with the remark that "the information might be true anyway".

To engage with ideologically driven people is a bad idea of the ulcer-inducing variety. As Dwight Eisenhower said of Sen Joe McCarthy, he wouldn't "get into a pissing contest with that skunk". Not that your relatives are skunks, but you get the idea.

Margo, logically

THIS IS Life  
MICHAEL WELBECK

## The highest calling

Fred Tibbitts Jr explains how he has combined his spiritual life with a successful business life and made many friends



Fred Tibbitts Jr. "I'm in the hospitality business and at the core is service to others. For me, service to others is the meaning of life."

A dinner party in the Ballroom of the Sheraton Grande Sukhumvit last month was packed with luminaries of the hospitality and food and beverage trades. There were restaurateurs, food and beverage directors, wine and spirit suppliers, executive chefs and one guest claimed that 42 of the 90 people present were hotel general managers.

The atmosphere radiated a high level of amiability and the music came from a polished Beatles tribute band featuring early numbers of the "peace and love" variety, such as *She Loves You*, *Hey Jude* and *All You Need Is Love*.

The evening was entitled, "A Summer Evening in Bangkok with Very Special Friends" and the host was smiling, 60-year-old Fred Tibbitts Jr, whose gleaming specs and slightly too-large suit gave him a schoolboyish air.

His speech of welcome was interesting: "Hospitality is about service and in particular service excellence," he began.

"Service is truly the highest calling. It is not what we do for ourselves, but what we do for others that is the measure of our worth to humanity."

Refreshingly different, I thought.

We know that he is a Buddhist and that he is a consultant to many hotel groups and food suppliers who divides his time between Albany, New York, and Bangkok and global food and beverage events; that he holds these dinners regularly in New York and annually in Beijing, Bangkok, Hong Kong, Kuala Lumpur, Mumbai and Singapore to bring together leaders of all facets to the hospitality industry. But we wanted to know more about what drove him, and he agreed to questions at the Sheraton Grande's Living Room the following week.

**Did you grow up in the food and beverage trade?**

In a way, yes. My father had a food service business supplying hotels and restaurants in New York state, which is where we lived in an upscale neighbourhood of Albany.

**Did you decide to follow in your father's footsteps?**

Not really. I used to help him make deliveries when I was a kid, but my heart was set on being a writer. I went to a good prep school, Salisbury, and I used to write satirical stuff about the teachers which got passed around the class and eventually round the school. I enjoyed being noticed and thought it might be a good way to make a living.

**Did you follow it up at university?**

I found that English at university level was not very exciting unless you wanted to be an English teacher, which I didn't. I was also studying economics and clinical psychology and they became the centre of interest for me. They're also useful subjects if you want to go into business.

**Is that what you did?**

I had to. I was a clinical psychology intern, and I met my wife, who was a nurse, and I was also doing some work for Marriott In-Flite airlines catering. But when we got married she told me that if we were going to bring up a family, I couldn't go on being a professional student: I'd have to find a real job.

**What was the "real job"?**

Selling insurance. I found I was good at it. In fact, when I was working for one of the USA's biggest insurers, I was second in sales for the whole of

the USA. But that didn't last.

**Why, what happened?**

I had a call from my dad. The business was going downhill and he wanted me to come in and run it for him. Now, I knew something about the business and I knew I could sell, so I started as a salesman and worked my way up to being vice president, and dad was able to retire happily. Then I began working for big food and beverage companies based in New York, starting at a high level and moving up.

But let me tell you something about working in New York: you take no prisoners. I was a sales assassin! People would not have liked me then.

**But obviously there was a change in your life.**

I changed totally. I began to study Buddhism. But I'll come to that later, because there was something else that plays an important part in the story.

One of the big food suppliers I worked for was Wechsler Coffee, and they made me their vice president for national accounts. National accounts are chain hotels and restaurants that take decisions and issue mandated policies system-wide on all or most of their purchases at their HQ or divisional offices. All major suppliers and brand owners have a national accounts department run by highly qualified people who work out the best deals for their companies.

With the national accounts experience I'd gained, I moved on to the Seagram Corporation in New York City, and that was a great ride. I was there for 11 years and was director of sales for the USA east of the Mississippi and national accounts manager for the region. Then for two years I was with the Kobrand Corporation as director of National Accounts for the whole of the USA.

So, it's now 1990, I'm in my early 40s and this is when I started to study

Buddhism, specifically Tibetan Buddhism.

**Where did this lead you?**

Eventually to Karma Triyana Dharmachakra monastery on Overlook Mountain above Woodstock. It's a Tibetan Buddhist retreat centre with meditation and teaching by resident lamas. I'd been studying on my own for about five years before I made the decision to go there and ask the abbot for Refuge — the right to become a Buddhist.

I was interviewed through interpreters, and the abbot decided I was pure in my intention and agreed. Later, I went through the ceremony promising to live by the Five Lay Precepts and was given the dhamma name Karma Jampal Samtem.

**But you were a wine consultant as part of your work. Didn't this make things difficult?**

You have to bare your soul completely when you take refuge and

my teacher, the Rinpoche, knew everything about my business. He granted me an exception for tasting wine occasionally. And I do, recognising my imperfection and knowing that I exist for the benefit of others, so I'm at peace with myself. I continued to visit the monastery for meditation and instruction, and was accepted as a resident.

**How did you balance this with working in the city?**

The short answer is I commuted. By this time I'd started my own National Accounts sales and marketing agency to help chain hotels and restaurants develop their beer, wine and spirits programmes. Now, I was concerned with service and not the operations side.

**When did you leave the monastery?**

When it was the right time to leave. Learning how I could dedicate my life to others, I had accomplished something I never thought possible: I was able to be consistently in a low state of meditation while still continuing to inhabit my regular life. And by the time I left in 1997, I had given away everything I owned.

**Didn't you find that hard?**

The real estate, investments, the tables, chairs and carpets were no big deal, but my collection of DVDs and music dating back to The Beatles, Stones and Beach Boys — that took some effort. But afterwards I felt a huge weight lifted off my shoulders.

You see, I knew what makes us unhappy is "things" — attachment, aversion, and what I call the grand illusion — that this life is real.

We are all human, and if humans can limit attachment and don't reject others or don't take ourselves too seriously, we have a chance of being happy.

**So far all this has been happening in New York. What brought you to Bangkok?**

I wanted to look at the business possibilities in Asia Pacific after the crash of '97, and I discovered that there seemed to be no national accounts wine and spirits companies. All the global hotel and restaurant chains had offices here, but not all their policies were decided globally: they had to take into account local conditions and idiosyncrasies. So I went into their offices and said: "I'm here to help you put together a national accounts wine and spirit programme."

**What was their response?**

The first hotel group president I went to see said: "What kept you? This is what we've been waiting for." Everywhere I went I was like the only car salesman in a neighbourhood where everyone wanted a car. So I began commuting between New York and Bangkok and the Asia Pacific region helping wine and spirits suppliers place their brands in chain programmes around the world.

**So you're running a global business but you've given away everything you own?**

I don't need money. I don't need things. Look at this suit. Too big for me, I bought it years ago when I was bigger than I am now, but I don't need another suit. The business provides everything I need and provides me with money I can give to help people — which is what I'm here for. I'm in the hospitality business and the core of the business is service to others. And for me, service to others is the true meaning of life.

## What type are we?

The rainy season is finally here in full force. And who doesn't love the rain's refreshing effect on plants and trees? Even in the ponds, the lotuses seem to smile at the sky as it breaks into a beautiful blossom.

This brings to mind how we used to discuss in this column about Lord Buddha's comparison of different stages of a lotus bloom to different types of people, according to their readiness to grasp the heart of Dhamma.

Today we are going to talk about a different kind of human categorisation in Buddhism. But, first of all, let us understand that the purpose of the introduction of this categorisation is not for us to use it to judge others, but rather for our self-reflection.

After all, mind-training in Buddhism, be it Theravada or Zen style, is all about self-reflection, getting to know yourself, what you really are, so that one day you can transcend beyond the idea of that "self" altogether. That's when you will be free. Free from suffering, of course.

Now, let us get to know Buddhism's five types of human.

1. Called "Manussa Nerayiko" or "Hell-Creature in Human Form", this type of human is the fiercest and most raw of all. They kill without restraint. They are the most feared criminals of society who not only rob but also rape, torture and kill without remorse.

In short, they do not have any of Buddhism's Five Precepts in them at all. Those Precepts prescribe refraining from: killing and torturing, taking other's possessions, committing adultery, lying and intoxicating one's mind. This first type is regarded as being human in name only because their physical, verbal and mental deeds are that of a hell creature.

2. "Manussa Peto" or "Human with characteristics of those in the Pret Realm". They are those that are always filled with desire. They like to steal and are always hungry for other people's possessions. They are those that do not understand the word "sufficiency". They

always want more and more. Those who always beg from others also fall into this category. By the way, the Pret Realm is similar to Hell, but slightly better.

3. "Manussa Tirajjanno" or "Animal-Like Human". With the current craze for werewolves in Hollywood films, let us get it straight that this type of human in Buddhism has nothing to do with those. The Animal-Like Humans are full of ignorance. They do not know what is right and what is wrong. They are oblivious to the Law of Karma. They do not know that they are indebted to their parents and teachers.

On top of that, they like to drink and intoxicate their mind in every way and always behave against the wholesome and skilful (*kusala*) deeds.

4. "Manussa Bhuto" or "Typical Human". The Typical Humans keep the Five Precepts diligently but, unfortunately, they do not perform any other wholesome deeds such as giving or learning Dhamma.

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NASH SIAMWALLA

5. "Manussa Devo" or "Angel in Human Form". In addition to the adherence to the Five Precepts, Angels in Human Form also do other wholesome deeds regularly such as making donations, learning Dhamma, praying, and having genuine fear of and shame for unwholesome deeds. This means that they wouldn't even think of doing any unwholesome, unskilful deeds even if they are by themselves, away from the eyes of others.

On top of this, Manussa Devo also have "the

7 Dhamma of Angels" which are: 1) Taking good care of their parents, 2) Being modest and humble to those that are more senior than them, 3) Always using kind words and having gentle speech, 4) Never speaking in a cynical, ironic or satirical way that may hurt others, 5) Always giving and never selfish, 6) Always keeping their word, and 7) Never becoming angry.

Now that we know what the five types of human are, it's time to reflect on ourselves and set goals. Don't feel contented to be just a "Typical Human" but aim to be "Angel in Human Form". If all of society can think and behave that way, we will really become the "City of Angels" as the meaning of Krungthep, the Thai way to call Bangkok, implies.

See you in two weeks' time. Until then, let us stay mindful. And strive to be an Angel in Human Form, of course.

Questions, comments and recommendations are welcome at <http://zen-sense.blogspot.com>