

The 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet

Before speaking of the 14th Dalai Lama, it might be helpful to say a few words about this title and what it means. To Tibetans, the Dalai Lama is a living Buddha, the earthly manifestation of Avalokiteshvara, a real Brahmin boy who achieved enlightenment according to Buddhist beliefs, and who became known as the Bodhisattva of Compassion because he made a vow to protect all living beings. In Tibetan Buddhism there is a belief that certain beings, called *tulkus*, of whom the Dalai Lama is one, are sufficiently enlightened or spiritually evolved to be able to choose the manner of their rebirth. Further, *tulkus* usually choose rebirth in

order to return to this world to continue to work for the benefit of all other sentient beings until such time as each one is liberated from the wheel of suffering. Tibetans believe that all of the Dalai Lamas are intentional, continuous, incarnations of Avalokiteshvara, each one committed to fulfilling the vow to protect all living beings.

Llamo Thondup was born in 1935 to simple farmers in the village of Taktser in far north-eastern Tibet. His mother bore sixteen children in all, of whom seven lived. Llamo's oldest brother had already been recognized as the reincarnation of a high lama (the word "lama" in Tibetan means something like "guru" or "wise teacher") and was a monk in a famous monastery.

For the first two years of Llamo's life, no one had idea that he might be anything more than an ordinary baby. In fact, it was almost unthinkable that more than one "tulku" could be born into the same family. But the 13th Dalai Lama had died in 1933, and the search for his reincarnation had been underway since then. Following dreams, omens and signs, high lamas and other Tibetan dignitaries eventually came to Taktser and, finding the Thondup household, administered a series of tests to the toddler Llamo. They became convinced that Llamo was the incarnation they were looking for. Thus, at the ripe old age of four, Llamo and his parents and family left their village and traveled to the Tibetan capital of Lhasa, where it was thought that Llamo would spend the rest of his years in study and prayer as a Buddhist monk, and in the administration of his country as the Dalai Lama.

The Chinese had other ideas. In October 1950, 80,000 soldiers of the Chinese People's Liberation Army invaded Tibet. Llamo was only 15 years old and not

finished with the studies and training that were to prepare him for his role as the Dalai Lama, but the Tibetan people needed their ruler, not a Regency ...and so he was enthroned. The young Dalai Lama and his Prime Ministers and other officials then fled secretly to Dromo in the south of Tibet, to be closer to India should they need to go into exile.

For the next nine years, the Dalai Lama did his best to come to terms with the Chinese, trying to negotiate political and practical outcomes that would allow his people to retain their culture and some measure of autonomy under Chinese rule. As he writes in his autobiography, he “took note of the Buddha’s teaching that in one sense a supposed enemy is more valuable than a friend, for an enemy teaches you things such as forbearance, that a friend generally does not.” And there is no doubt that the young Dalai Lama, in trying to maintain some degree of compromise and peace for Tibet in the face of China’s demands, was receiving an education very different from that of his previous incarnations. His efforts initially had some limited success and he had hope for the country’s future.

However, by 1959 the situation had deteriorated drastically. The people had begun to fight back in a guerrilla warfare that was generating widespread uprisings and mass demonstrations. The Chinese were retaliating with unbelievable ferocity. The Dalai Lama realized that the situation was slipping beyond his control, and finally it was clear that he himself was in imminent danger. With 80 bodyguards, monks and officials, the 24-year old Dalai Lama fled to India, and into an exile that exists to this day.

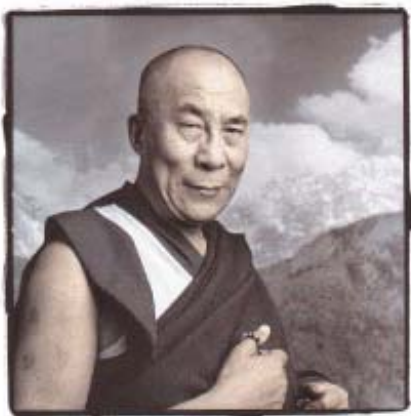
For the past 40 years the Dalai Lama has worked ceaselessly to garner the world’s support in liberating his country from Chinese oppression through non-violent means. He has transformed himself into a world leader even though his own country continues to be lost to him. His efforts on behalf of human rights and world peace are internationally recognized. He is the recipient of the Wallenberg Award, the Albert Schweitzer Award, and the Nobel Peace Prize.

Despite his personal experiences, he believes that in time, humanity’s love of peace, justice and freedom will always triumph over cruelty and oppression. The Dalai Lama fervently believes that the promotion of compassion will help us reduce the possibilities of war, help us to share the natural resources of the world in a more equitable manner, and teach us to take care of the environment. He teaches that peace begins within each of us. As he says, “When, as individuals, we disarm ourselves internally – through countering our negative thoughts and emotions and cultivating positive qualities – we create the conditions for external disarmament. Indeed, genuine, lasting world peace will only be possible as a result

of each of us making an effort internally.... Our every act has a universal dimension.”

In closing, I'd like to share with you a prayer that the Dalai Lama says fills him with inspiration and determination:

**“For as long as space endures,
And for as long as living beings remain,
Until then may I, too, abide
To dispel the misery of the world.”**



Many times I am asked if I am angry at the Chinese for what has happened. Sometimes I lose some temper, but afterwards I get more concern, more compassion towards them. In my daily prayer, I take in their suffering, their anger, and ignorance... and give back compassion. This kind of practice I continue.