

## His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama



Tenzin Gyatso (born Lhamo Dhondup) is the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama of Tibet. He is the religious leader of Buddhists around the world including six million Tibetans. He was born on July 6, 1935, into a peasant family in north-eastern Tibet. At the age of two, he was recognized as the reincarnation of the 13<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama, and thus of Avalokiteshvara (Tib. Chenrezig), the Bodhisattva of Compassion and patron saint of Tibet.

### Early Years

In 1950, at age 15 and while China was making its first military inroads into eastern Tibet, His Holiness was called upon to assume full political power as head of the Tibetan state. In 1954, he engaged in fruitless negotiations with Mao Zedong and other Chinese leaders in an effort to resolve the growing conflict. In March 1959, rumors that Chinese authorities in Lhasa planned to kidnap the young leader and bring him to Beijing ignited a popular uprising during which a reported 10,000 Tibetans died or disappeared and the Dalai Lama was forced to escape in exile. He was given refuge in northern India where he has lived ever since.

### Life in Exile

In exile, the Dalai Lama assumed the responsibility of caring for the welfare of Tibetan refugees and preserving their unique cultural traditions. He established a central administration (government in exile) to oversee the various settlement camps, to provide basic education and healthcare, and to enable the practice of both lay and religious culture. Through his efforts, 53 agricultural settlements were established providing livelihoods and a sense of community for Tibetan refugees. In addition to the Tibetan Institute of Performing Arts, the Tibetan Medical Centre, and the Tibetan Handicraft Centre among others, the Dalai Lama oversaw the establishment of several monasteries and nunneries to keep alive the vast body of Buddhist teachings which are at the centre of Tibet's culture.

### Democratisation

In 1963, the Dalai Lama promulgated the [Charter of Tibetans in Exile](#). Revised in 1991, the Charter outlines the rights and responsibilities of the Tibetan people. It also enshrines the basic principles of democracy, with separation of powers among the three organs of the Government: judiciary, legislature and executive.

Throughout the years, His Holiness has consistently pressed for more democratisation within the Tibetan exile community. In 1990, his reforms led to a revised electoral process that allowed the Tibetan diaspora living on the Indian sub-continent and around the world, to elect members to an expanded [Assembly of Tibetan People's Deputies](#) (Parliament-in-exile) on a one-person, one-vote basis. The Assembly then elected the Cabinet, a responsibility that had previously rested with the Dalai Lama himself.

In September 2001, a second phase of democratic reform allowed the Tibetan electorate to elect the Prime Minister directly. The Prime Minister was mandated to appoint Cabinet members who were then confirmed by the Tibetan Assembly. This reform marked the first time in Tibet's long history that the people elected their political leadership.

In an historic move, the Dalai Lama announced in 2010 that he would devolve all his remaining political power to the elected political leader. This [devolution of power](#) was met with mixed feelings by Tibetans but His Holiness maintained his commitment to the reform despite various appeals. In 2011, the Tibetan Charter was amended to reflect the changes and in 2012, Dr. Lobsang Sangay, became the first elected Tibetan leader with full political power.

## **Peace Initiatives and the Middle Path Approach**

During his long years in exile, His Holiness has been a tireless advocate for his homeland and for his people. Early appeals to the international community were left unanswered but the Dalai Lama's struggling exile government succeeded in securing the adoption of three resolutions in the UN General Assembly in 1959, 1961, and 1965.

In September 1987, His Holiness proposed the [Five Point Peace Plan for Tibet](#) in Washington, DC. His peace plan envisaged a Tibetan sanctuary; a zone of peace at the heart of Asia, where all sentient beings can exist in harmony and the delicate environment can be preserved. In 1989, His Holiness elaborated on the plan in his [Strasbourg Proposal](#), which suggested that Tibet become a "self-governing democratic political entity... in association with the People's Republic of China". Together, these proposals have become known as the "Middle Path Approach" to resolving the conflict in Tibet.

Over the years, the Dalai Lama has not wavered from the Middle Way Approach. In his 2006 statement commemorating the March 1959 uprising, he said "*I have stated time and again that I do not wish to seek Tibet's separation from China, but that I will seek its future within the framework of the Chinese constitution.*"

## **Universal Recognition**

In 1989 His Holiness the Dalai Lama was awarded the [Nobel Peace Prize](#) for his non-violent struggle for the liberation of Tibet and for his consistent promotion of non-violence, even in the

face of extreme aggression. He also became the first Nobel Laureate recognized for his concern about global environmental problems.

His Holiness has travelled to more than 62 countries spanning six continents promoting the values of universal responsibility, secular ethics, and non-violence. He has met presidents, prime ministers and monarchs. He has engaged dialogue with the heads of various religions as well as with internationally acclaimed scientists.

In 2006 the Dalai Lama was awarded [Honorary Canadian Citizenship](#) by the Government of Canada. In 2007, he received the prestigious [Congressional Gold Medal](#) in Washington, DC. In 2012, the Dalai Lama was awarded the [Templeton Prize](#) in a ceremony held at St-Paul's Cathedral, London UK.

### **Contributions to World Peace and Religious Harmony**

A self-described *simple Buddhist monk*, the Dalai Lama has met with people from all walks of life to share his message of peace and universal responsibility. He has relentlessly advocated for tolerance and openness towards other religions, emphasizing their common values including love and compassion. In his lectures around the world, the Dalai Lama touches everyone with the simplicity of his message.

Perhaps the Dalai Lama's approach to peace is best described in his own words: *"To meet the challenge of our times, human beings will have to develop a greater sense of universal responsibility. Each of us must learn to work not just for his, or her, own self, family or nation, but for the benefit of all mankind. Universal responsibility is the real key to human survival. It is the best foundation for world peace, the equitable use of natural resources, and through concern for future generations, the proper care of the environment"*.

Describing the importance of religious pluralism, the Dalai Lama has said, *"I always believe that it is much better to have a variety of religions, a variety of philosophies, rather than one single religion or philosophy. This is necessary because of the different mental dispositions of each human being. Each religion has certain unique ideas or techniques, and learning about them can only enrich one's own faith."*

Today, the Dalai Lama's vision of universal responsibility emphasizes [secular ethics](#) as the basis for society's moral philosophy and values. Among the many books he has written, [Ethics for a New Millennium](#) (Riverhead Books, 1999) and [Beyond Religion: Ethics for a Whole World](#) (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing, 2011) best describe his vision. As he writes in *Beyond Religion*, *"What we need today is an approach to ethics which makes no recourse to religion and can be equally acceptable to those with faith and those without: a secular ethics."*

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