



# TIBET AND THE DALAI LAMA



*“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.”*

– Eighth century Buddhist Scholar, Shantideva



*Nobel Peace Prize winner, the Dalai Lama is acknowledged as one of the world's greatest men of peace*

**His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama of Tibet, Tenzin Gyatso**, was born to a peasant family on July 6, 1935 in the village of Taktser in the Amdo area of north-east Tibet (present-day Qinghai Province). At the age of 2, he was recognized by a search committee of senior monks and Lhasa officials, in accordance with Tibetan tradition, as the reincarnation of the previous Dalai Lama. He was enthroned on February 22, 1940 in Lhasa, the Tibetan capital.

The Dalai Lama is believed to be the manifestation of Avalokitesvara, the Bodhisattva of Compassion and the protector deity of Tibet, who chooses to re-incarnate to serve and help ease the suffering of the people. The successive Dalai Lamas, from the fifth to the present 14<sup>th</sup>, served as both the temporal leader of the Tibetan people and the spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism. While over the centuries, influence over the Tibetan nation had expanded and contracted according to the ambitions of Tibetan leaders and their Chinese and Mongolian neighbors, from 1911 Tibet was effectively an independent country, with full control over its domestic and international affairs.

Soon after the establishment of the People's Republic of China, Mao Zedong announced his intention to liberate Tibet from “foreign imperialists” and, in 1949-1950, the People's Liberation Army invaded Tibet. The Regent in Tibet, holding governmental authority until the Dalai Lama reached his maturity, decided to install the 15-year old Dalai Lama immediately as the country's temporal leader. In 1951, the Lhasa government sent a delegation for peace talks in Beijing. The delegation was compelled to sign the “Agreement on the Peaceful Liberation of Tibet.” Subsequently, the Dalai Lama made efforts at peaceful co-existence with the Chinese Government for a number of years. Three years later, the 19-year old Dalai Lama himself traveled to Beijing where he was hosted by Mao. It was during their final meeting that Mao famously told the Dalai Lama, “Religion is poison.”

During the 1950's, thousands of Tibetans fled eastern Tibet to Lhasa, following Communists takeover of their area. In 1959, an uprising erupted provoked by the fear that an invitation to the Dalai Lama extended by the Chinese garrison in Lhasa would result in his kidnapping or worse. Subsequently, the Dalai Lama



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fled to India. Since 1960, he has resided in Dharamsala, India, where he has established the Central Tibetan Administration, and sought to implement a democratic system of governance for the refugee community numbering around 130,000 today.

In 2011, the Dalai Lama announced the devolution of his historical political authority to the elected Tibetan leadership. Following Tibetan exile elections that same year, Dr. Lobsang Sangay, a Tibetan scholar in international law, became the Sikyong or the political leader. He was born in 1968 in a Tibetan settlement in Darjeeling, India, and completed a Doctorate in Law at Harvard Law School.

In the tradition of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr., the Dalai Lama has become one of the great proponents of non-violence and advocated peaceful solutions based on tolerance and mutual respect. For this, he has won the admiration of the world and was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 and the U.S. Congressional Gold Medal in 2007.

2014 marked the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the award of his Nobel Peace Prize. Unfortunately, however, the Chinese government perceives any outward displays of reverence to the Dalai Lama as a form of splittism, and those calling for his return to Tibet or caught in possession of his image face harsh punishments from Chinese authorities.

The Dalai Lama's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday was celebrated in 2015. All around the world, special celebrations took place to honor him for his life-long commitment to non-violence, human values and inter-religious harmony.



*Early photo of His Holiness the 14<sup>th</sup> Dalai Lama*