



The 14th Dalai Lama remains a rare voice of moral clarity, offering compassion in exile and resistance without anger.

FEATURES

Dalai Lama at 90: The monk who became the world’s conscience through compassion

The 14th Dalai Lama, who turns 90 on July 6, remains an ambassador for peace in a fractured world, reminding us that empathy, not power, may be our final shared language

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The 14th Dalai Lama will turn 90 on July 6, 2025. But it is not the number of years that feels significant so much as the impact of a life spent in service — to compassion, to listening, and to the deeper work of inner understanding.

In a world increasingly pulled apart, the Dalai Lama has come to stand as a kind of global conscience, reminding us that empathy may be our last shared language.

He is one of the most recognisable figures in the world, yet if you ask him who he is, he will quickly reply, “I am just a simple Buddhist monk.” In addition to his boundless compassion, it is this humility that remains so remarkable.

The Dalai Lama was born in the tiny village of Taktser in northeastern Tibet. By the time he was two years old, he was recognised as the reincarnation of the 13th Dalai Lama.

In Tibet, the Dalai Lamas are considered to be manifestations of Avalokiteshvara — the Bodhisattva of Compassion — who postpones enlightenment in order to remain with humanity, alleviating suffering, and providing guidance.



The Dalai Lama would spend his early years getting a monastic education in Lhasa, where he was exposed to the philosophical teachings of the Nalanda tradition, covering Buddhist metaphysics, logic, Sanskrit grammar, medicine, and poetry.

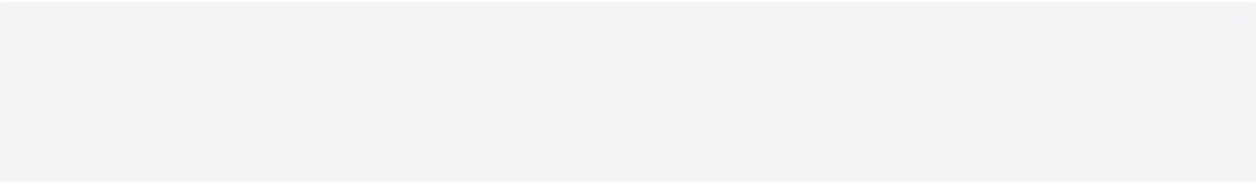
Leaving Tibet, his homeland

At the age of 15, the life of the young monk was completely upended as China began its invasion of Tibet in 1950 and the Dalai Lama was thrust into the centre of a geopolitical vortex.

The Dalai Lama travelled to Beijing, where he would meet Chou Enlai, Deng Xiaoping, and Mao Zedong but the Chinese leaders reneged on many of their pledges.

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In 1959, after the violent suppression of the Tibetan uprising, the Dalai Lama went into exile, leaving behind a whole country trembling under an oppressive occupation. He arrived in India as a refugee carrying only his teachings, his robes, and the memory of his homeland.



In 1963, he established a democratic charter for Tibetans living in exile that guaranteed the freedom of speech, belief, and movement. He established his base in Dharamshala, in the foothills of the Himalayas, and by 2001, political power had shifted from the Dalai Lama to an elected leader for the first time in Tibetan history.

Once held in high regard as a spiritual and political leader, His Holiness decided to withdraw into the peaceful anonymity of life as a monk. Perhaps this is what makes him unique in this increasingly troubled world we find ourselves in.

He has never seemed interested in power, and he is a man who speaks to listen, not to proclaim, to understand, not to conquer. He has often described what has happened in Tibet as “cultural genocide”, but he still insists that the path forward lies in non-violence.

Global recognition

Instead of using weapons, the Dalai Lama has resisted with compassion, kindness, and unwavering clarity. He received the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989.

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In his acceptance speech, he said, “I feel honoured, humbled and deeply moved that you should give this important prize to a simple monk from Tibet. I am no one special. But I believe the prize is a recognition of the true values of altruism, love, compassion and nonviolence which I try to practise, in accordance with the teachings of the Buddha and the great sages of India and Tibet.”

His Holiness has visited over 67 nations. Each of the more than 110 books he has written or co-authored is a gentle map pointing toward the inner landscape of the mind.

He has had meetings with presidents and popes, psychologists and physicists, rabbis and imams, and he has frequently talked about our common humanity in a world split by dogma.

The Dalai Lama talks of kindness as a universal language, of religion as a bridge rather than a badge. His association with science is perhaps one of the most remarkable aspects of his life. He has had open discussions with quantum physicists and neuroscientists since the 1980s, fusing traditional Buddhist wisdom with new scientific findings.

As a result of these conferences, science was introduced into Tibetan monastic education, marking a previously unheard-of combination of internal and external research.

The reincarnation

As he ages, His Holiness has reminded his followers that he is not the only one who can respond to the question of whether the 15th Dalai Lama should exist. He has declared, “The Tibetan people own that decision.”

On Wednesday (July 2), the Dalai Lama officially confirmed that the 600-year-old institution will continue after his passing, bringing clarity to years of speculation about the future of one of Tibet’s most revered traditions.

In 2011, he published precise rules for acknowledging any reincarnation in the future, specifically cautioning against the perils of political meddling, particularly from the Chinese government.

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He has written that if there is another Dalai Lama, it must be acknowledged by sacred means, not by political appointments; by consultation with senior Lamas, visions, oracles, and signs.

‘My religion is kindness’

The Dalai Lama’s lightness, in addition to his wisdom, is most often what impresses people the most. He frequently chuckles, sometimes in the middle of a sentence and he has an innocence that diffuses politics and disarms cynics. He has this extraordinary capacity that every person whom he comes in contact with feels an aura of being loved and blessed.

Despite the loss of his country, the extreme oppression his countrymen are living under and the fact that he has been living in exile for most of his life, he doesn’t have a trace of bitterness about him.

When the world is veering into a time of greater conflict and violence, perhaps it’s time to remember the quiet voice of the monk from Taktser. His Holiness, the Dalai Lama says, “This is my simple religion. There is no need for temples; no need for complicated philosophy. Our own brain, our own heart is our temple; the philosophy is kindness.”

Sometimes words whispered in kindness can travel farther than a shout.