

**HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA**  
***HIS CONTRIBUTION TO THE WORLD***

*by Sogyal Rinpoche*

*Presented at the celebration of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's 74<sup>th</sup> birthday organized by The Tibetan Commemorative Committee in London, July 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009*

I would like to begin by thanking *The Tibetan Commemorative Committee*—the Tibetan Community in Britain, the Office of Tibet, and the Tibet Society—for holding this event here today. Let me also take this opportunity to express my appreciation and gratitude for everything that you do.

This occasion is a celebration of His Holiness the Dalai Lama's 74<sup>th</sup> birthday, and I have been invited to say something about him and his contribution to the world. This is particularly moving for me, as I can remember so vividly His Holiness's visit to the United Kingdom in October 1973, on his first ever journey to the West. I had the honour and blessing of taking some small part in this visit. But we could never have imagined, at that time, the impact and the influence that His Holiness was going to have on the world in the future.

His Holiness has emerged as one of the great leaders of our time, a world leader and a figure of great moral authority, who commands the respect of people everywhere—including heads of state, religious leaders, fellow Nobel Prize winners, scientists, scholars, philosophers, as well as ordinary men and women of good-will all over the world.

People everywhere, rich or poor, whatever their religious beliefs, know and love His Holiness as a great spiritual leader, a spokesman for peace, and a champion of *human values*. His message of compassion has touched the hearts of countless men and women, for whom he is a source of hope and courage in this troubled world of ours. It is no exaggeration to say that he has transformed the lives of millions. Because the *human values* that His Holiness promotes—of love, forgiveness, tolerance and concern for others—in fact hold the key to the inner strength, confidence and happiness that all of us are searching for today.

His Holiness has shown as well that these values are not simply a religious matter, but they are of universal and vital concern for the survival of humanity as a whole. In his book *Ethics for a New Millennium*, for example, he has given us a remarkable vision of how we can all develop these values, to bring about a saner and more peaceful world.

The scale of His Holiness's vision and achievements is simply staggering. You only have to look at the list of countries he visits, the amount he accomplishes and the sheer number of people he reaches and touches. He has devoted his whole life to furthering the well-being of humanity. For almost forty years, he has travelled all over the world, sharing his message of universal responsibility and compassion, and it is a message that grows more important and more relevant as each day goes by.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama is a leader who totally embodies his message: "he walks the talk". One person who worked closely with him said:

*"He is someone who has completely fused his self with his work. His personal life and work are perfectly integrated—so fully integrated, in fact, that there is no separation between his 'personal' life, 'work' life, 'spiritual' life, or 'home' life. And since he does not separate out a particular set of functions and relegate them to a 'job' category, he has no job. ...I have often marvelled, in fact, at how he carries his full self with him wherever he goes—he seems the same in any setting.*

*"He has no 'off-duty personality.' ... He is who he is, the same whether he's at home or 'at work.' There must be an immense feeling of freedom in that kind of life."*

His Holiness himself exudes a peace and contentment that are unchanging, whether he is receiving the Congressional Gold Medal from the President of the United States, or whether he is serving food to homeless people, as he did recently in America. I remember very well the day we heard that His Holiness had been awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in October, 1989. The very next day, he began a major Buddhist teaching in California at Rigpa's request. When I congratulated him, he replied:

*“I consider this prize to be some kind of recognition of my motivation and its sincerity. So essentially the credit goes not to this monk Tenzin Gyatso, but rather to the sincere motivation of altruism.*

*“Every human being has the same potential for compassion; the only question is whether we really take any care of that potential, and develop and implement it in our daily life. My hope is that more and more people will realize the value of compassion, and so follow the path of altruism.*

*“As for myself, ever since I became a Buddhist monk, that has been my real destiny—for usually I think of myself as just one simple Buddhist monk, no more and no less.”*

Let us take a brief look at some aspects of His Holiness’s philosophy. First of all, he always emphasizes our interdependence: the fact that we are all deeply connected with one other, and with our environment. Last year when he visited Lerab Ling, Rigpa’s main centre in France, to inaugurate our temple, he said:

*“The concept of interdependence is a principle that is applicable and relevant to every field of human life today—the economy, environmental issues, religious harmony, international relations, and even our health. The reason why it is so very relevant is because this view of interdependence offers us a more holistic picture.”*

When we come to see that everything we experience and perceive arises as a result of a series of inter-related causes and conditions, then our whole perspective will change. Since everything is interconnected, it means that our every action, word and thought counts. And when we acknowledge our dependence upon one another, it naturally inspires us with a sense of responsibility and altruism.

His Holiness often says that if you want to truly look after your own self-interest, then, at least be “wisely selfish,” rather than foolishly selfish. Take a good look and you will realize that if you truly wish to take care of yourself, it

means giving up harming others, and trying to help them instead. When we think solely of what is beneficial for ourselves, we get it badly wrong; it always tends to boomerang back onto us.

In His Holiness's words: "What is entailed is...a re-orientation of our heart and mind away from self and towards others. To develop a sense of *universal responsibility*—of the universal dimension of our every act and of the equal right of all others to happiness and not to suffer—is to develop an attitude of mind whereby, when we see an opportunity to benefit others, we will take it in preference to merely looking after our own narrow interests."

Today, we urgently need the vision and the courage to overcome our narrow, selfish interests. Our old attitudes and short-sighted ways of treating people and the planet have to change: they have brought us suffering, and they lie at the root of both the economic crisis and destruction of the environment. The heart of His Holiness's message is how we can train our mind—that is, transform our attitudes and ways of thinking by training the mind in compassion, and by discovering inner peace. He explains:

*"If you have contentment and inner peace as a basis, your mind will be relaxed and deeply at ease. Then no matter what difficulties or crises you encounter, you will not be disturbed. Your basic sense of well-being will not be undermined.*

*"As a result, you will be able to carry on your everyday life, your work and your responsibilities more efficiently, and your mind will also have the wisdom to discern what to do and what not to do. In turn, your life will become happier. And, when difficulties arise, you will even be able to turn them to your advantage.*

*"So, for your own inner peace, taking care of your mind and heart is crucial. Once your own mind is more at peace, then both inner and outer harmony will automatically follow."*

This inner peace lies at the heart of what the Nobel Prize Committee called His Holiness's "philosophy of peace". As he says:

*“I usually tell people in order to achieve genuine world peace, firstly we individuals should develop inner peace. 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.”*

One of His Holiness’s great contributions to the world has been his dedication to non-violence, during the long struggle of the Tibetan people for their rights and freedoms. He always quotes Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and Martin Luther King as his sources of inspiration. And his example has inspired people in every part of the globe in their own aspirations for freedom.

What is so striking about His Holiness’s message is how up-to date and relevant it is to the real, and urgent, problems of today. These days, we all talk about creating *a sustainable world*, and this is exactly what is at the heart of His Holiness’s thinking. He points out continuously that issues such as human rights, environmental protection and greater social and economic equality, are all intimately inter-connected.

He has become one of the leading spokesmen for the preservation of the world’s environment. Recently, for example, he gave his support to the Prince of Wales’s campaign to protect the rainforests. He says: “The earth is our only home. If we do not look after this home, what else are we charged to do on this earth?”

His Holiness has spoken out very strongly many times against the damage to the environment caused by the richer nations, and warned of the long-term global dangers of economic and social inequality. At the conference of Nobel Laureates in Jordan last year, he called this inequality “a moral crisis”, that is responsible for world hunger, and is caused by a lack of compassion. In his way, His Holiness has also become a spokesman for the poorer nations of the world.

At the same time, he is deeply concerned about the state of most modern education. He believes that warm-heartedness, human values and a sense of responsibility urgently need to be included in the educational curriculum at every level.

For us Tibetans, His Holiness represents an extraordinary example of leadership. For half a century he has been our guiding light, and led the Tibetan people in our non-violent struggle for survival. All over the globe, he has awakened an awareness of Tibet, and Tibet's unique spiritual culture.

I remember very well, as a member of the Tibetan community here in Great Britain during the 1970s and 1980s, how we sought to create a wider understanding of the question of Tibet. I feel a deep debt of gratitude to all those who did—and continue to do—so much to help us. Naturally, I think of organizations like the Tibet Society, founded in 1959, and Tibet Foundation, who have all made such a huge contribution towards His Holiness's work.

The *Economist* magazine has called the Tibetan refugee community “far and away the most successful on the planet.” We Tibetans owe so much to His Holiness's vision and constant endeavour. And he is rightly, and universally, admired for having brought democracy to the Tibetan community in exile, and for having established it for the future.

In his recent addresses to Tibetans around the world, His Holiness has emphasized the importance of the study of Dharma for the preservation of our culture. He explains that we should not just to rely on blessings and outward ceremonies, but really take to heart and analyze the meaning of the teachings. For him, transforming the mind is always the crucial point and the core of Buddha's teaching.

Equally, he has emphasized the importance of education, encouraging Tibetans to excel in modern fields of education. This is already happening, of course, to a certain extent. He has also underlined how the Himalayan people and the Tibetans share the same spiritual roots and one culture, and how important it is that we support one other.

Of course it is our responsibility, as Tibetans here in the free world, to do all that we can to maintain our heritage, and to keep Tibet and His Holiness's message alive in the minds of people far and wide.

One of His Holiness's great achievements is the influence he has had on the development of Buddhism. For those of us who are Buddhist practitioners, he is not only an example, but a leader, and a pioneer. He has taken the greatest personal interest in making sure that the study and practice of Buddhadharma flourishes authentically everywhere, both in the East and in the West. Meanwhile, his teachings are treasured and studied, like those of the great panditas and masters of the past.

On account of his knowledge, his learning, and his experience, His Holiness is able to translate the teachings so authentically for our time, and to relate the Buddhadharma to the modern world in so many inspiring ways. Last year at Lerab Ling, he said:

*"Buddhism in the 21st century implies fuller knowledge: fuller knowledge of modern science, modern education and today's reality, and at the same time a fuller knowledge of the structure of Buddhism. That is what I mean by 21st century Buddhism."*

His Holiness has shown how the teaching of Buddha transcends religion and has a universal and immediate relevance to the problems of our time. He has had a life-long fascination with science. He believes both science and Buddhism share a common vision of serving humanity, both through compassion and wisdom. Here in London, I remember the great physicist, the late Professor David Bohm, who was a dear friend of His Holiness, and someone he called his 'scientific guru'. Since 1987, with the Mind and Life Institute, His Holiness has conducted an extraordinary and far-reaching dialogue with the world of science, which has shown the depth and power of Tibetan Buddhist meditation practices, and what the Buddhist teachings have to offer the world at large.

Another great friend of His Holiness here in London, and a true friend of the Tibetans, was the late Edward Carpenter, the Dean of Westminster. He

recognized in His Holiness a leader who had a genuine respect and openness towards all religious traditions, and a belief in their importance for cultivating positive human qualities. Truly, His Holiness has been a pioneer in building understanding between the faiths. He has prayed in mosques, temples, synagogues and cathedrals. He has made pilgrimage to holy places, like Jerusalem and Lourdes, and taken part in retreats with practitioners of other religions. What is more, in his Buddhist teachings, there is never any notion of conversion; His Holiness always insists that people stay with their own religious tradition.

Looking back at His Holiness's incredible contribution to the world, it's easy to understand why we Tibetans regard him as the manifestation of Avalokiteshvara, Phakpa Chenrezig, the buddha of compassion. In *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, I wrote:

*"He is, I believe, nothing less than the face of the Buddha of Compassion turned toward an endangered humanity, the incarnation of Avalokiteshvara not only for Tibet and not only for Buddhists, but for the whole world--in need, as never before, of healing compassion and of his example of total dedication to peace."*

I believe that one of the reasons that his presence is so powerful, and that he has achieved so much, is that all the Tibetan people have placed in him their prayers and their deepest aspirations and hopes. Also, I know that the greatest masters of Tibet, that generation who sadly have mostly passed away, like His Holiness's tutors Ling Rinpoche and Trijang Rinpoche, Dilgo Khyentse Rinpoche and Dudjom Rinpoche, and the 16<sup>th</sup> Gyalwang Karmapa, all directed their strongest blessings and prayers into him, as they knew the role he was destined to play.

In fact, His Holiness so much represents Tibet that when you pray for his long life, in many ways you are praying for the long life of the Tibetan tradition and for the future of Tibet. His Holiness embodies the highest hopes of the Tibetan people, and nowadays also the deepest aspirations of so many around the world.

I would like to conclude with a prayer which I think all of us here will feel in our hearts: that His Holiness continues to live for a long time and that his health remains excellent; that his vision and all his aspirations, for the world and for Tibet and the Tibetan people, may be fulfilled; and that during his lifetime he may return to Tibet, and bring the same leadership there as he has for us Tibetans in exile, and indeed for the world at large.

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