## The Dalai Lama

### The rôle of the Dalai Lama

Potala Palace, the Dalai Lama's residence until 1959

The Dalai Lama is the head monk of Tibetan Buddhism and traditionally has been responsible for the governing of Tibet, until the Chinese government took control in 1959. Before 1959, his official residence was Potala Palace in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet.

The Dalai Lama belongs to the Gelugpa tradition of Tibetan Buddhism, which is the largest and most influential tradition in Tibet.

The institution of the Dalai Lama is a relatively recent one. There have been only 14 Dalai Lamas in the history of Buddhism, and the first and second Dalai Lamas were given the title posthumously.

According to Buddhist belief, the current Dalai Lama is a reincarnation of a past lama who decided to be reborn again to continue his important work, instead of moving on from the wheel of life. A person who decides to be continually reborn is known as tulku.

Buddhists believe that the first tulku in this reincarnation was Gedun Drub, who lived from 1391-1474 and the second was Gendun Gyatso.

However, the name Dalai Lama, meaning Ocean of Wisdom, was not conferred until the third reincarnation in the form of Sonam Gyatso in 1578.

The current Dalai Lama is Tenzin Gyatso.

Tenzin Gyatso, 14th Dalai Lama, as a child [**©**](http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/copyright.shtml)

### Choosing a Dalai Lama

After the death of a Dalai Lama it has traditionally been the responsibility of the High Lamas of the Gelugpa Tradition and the Tibetan government to find his reincarnation.

The High Lamas search for a boy who was born around the same time as the death of the Dalai Lama.

It can take around two or three years to identify the Dalai Lama, and for the current, 14th Dalai Lama, it was four years before he was found.

There are several ways in which the High Lamas might find out where the next reincarnation will be found.

* Dream
	+ One of the High Lamas may dream about some mark or location that will identify the boy.
* Smoke
	+ If the previous Dalai Lama was cremated, High Lamas will watch the direction of the smoke and search accordingly.
* Oracle Lake
	+ High Lamas go to a holy lake, called Lhamo Lhatso, in central Tibet and watch for a sign from the lake itself. This may be either a vision or some indication of the direction in which to search.The home and village of Tenzin Gyatso was identified in a vision from this lake.

Once the High Lamas have located the home and the boy, they present a number of artefacts which they have brought with them in preparation, to the child.

Amongst these artefacts are a number of items that belonged to the deceased Dalai Lama. If the boy chooses the items that belonged to the previous Dalai Lama, this is seen as a sign, in conjunction with all of the other indications, that the boy is a reincarnation.

This procedure, however, as Tenzin Gyatso has said himself, is not set in stone; if two thirds of the Tibetan people wish to change the method of identifying the next reincarnation, this would be just as valid.

The search for the Dalai Lama has usually been limited to Tibet, although the third tulku was born in Mongolia. However, as Tibet has been taken by the Chinese government, Tenzin Gyatso says that if he is reborn it will not be in a country run by the People's Republic of China, or any other country which is not free.

Interestingly, Tenzin Gyatso has also expressed doubts over whether he will be reborn at all, suggesting the function of the Dalai Lama may be over. However, until Tibet is reunited with its spiritual leader, it seems likely that there will continue to be a Dalai Lama.

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## Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama

Tenzin Gyatso is the fourteenth Dalai Lama of Tibetan Buddhism. He was born in 1935 and recognized as the reincarnation of Thubten Gyatso at a young age.

Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama

His Holiness, Tenzin Gyatso, was born Lhamo Dhondrub on July 6 1935 to a peasant family in the province of Amdo, in a village called Takster in northeastern Tibet.

The High Lamas of the Gelugpa tradition had been searching for many years for the next reincarnation of the Dalai Lama, but according to reports, there were incidents which marked out Lhamo as the correct child.

The face of the embalmed thirteenth Dalai Lama is reported to have mysteriously turned north east. This, combined with a vision a High Lama had when looking in the sacred lake Lhamo Lhatso, indicated that Amdo was the village they should search. Furthermore, the vision also clearly indicated a three storey monastery with a gold and turquoise roof, and another vision of a small house with odd guttering.

A monastery at Kumbum in Amdo fitted the description given by the High Lama and, after a careful search of the neighbouring villages, the house of Lhamo Dhondrub was identified. Lhamo was around three years old at the time.

The search party went to his home and observed him without revealing their reasons. They came back a few days later with the formal intention of performing the final test.

They presented some items to the child, including a mala, or rosary, and a bell that belonged to the deceased Dalai Lama. Lhamo instantly identified the items shouting "It's mine, it's mine!"

At just over five years old, he was enrolled in the local monastery and began his training. He was also trained by the highest monks in the land at Lhasa, Tibet’s capital city, at that time his official residence. He was enthroned at the age of 15 in 1950 amidst the start of troubles with China, but continued to study until the age of 25, receiving the highest honours available.

The young Lhamo Dhondrub, who was renamed Jamphel Ngawang Lobsang Yeshe Tenzin Gyatso, took leadership of a country that was, according to traditional maps, still a Chinese province.

Around 1950, the political landscape of China was changing. Plans were made to bring Tibet officially under Chinese control. But in March 1959, Tibetans took to the streets demanding an end to Chinese rule. Chinese People’s Republic troops crushed the revolt and thousands were killed.

Fearing that the Chinese government would kill him, the Dalai Lama fled from Tibet to India with thousands of followers, where he was welcomed by Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru.

Nehru gave him permission to form The Tibetan Government in Exile in Dharamsala in India. The Dalai Lama, and the refugees who followed him, created a society in which Tibetan language, culture, arts and religion are promoted.

He is the first Dalai Lama to travel to the West, and his charismatic manner has helped to draw much support for Buddhism and the Tibetan resistance movement.

In 1989 he received the Nobel Peace Prize for maintaining a policy of non violence with the Chinese government, despite the knowledge that many Tibetans would be happy to take up armed resistance to return him to his position as their leader.

Source: http://www.bbc.co.uk/religion/religions/buddhism/people/dalailama\_1.shtml