



# Homeless for 50 Years

By Lakha Lama (2009)



*H.H. Dalai Lama XIV Crossing the Himalayas from Tibet to India, 1959  
Photo by courtesy of The Tibet Museum; [www.tibetmuseum.org](http://www.tibetmuseum.org)*

*This year, 2009, it is 50 years since H.H. Dalai Lama and over 100,000 Tibetans became homeless.*

I was among the first Tibetan refugees to escape across the snow-capped Himalayas. Leaving just after H.H. Dalai Lama, I was barely alive when I crossed the border into India on a cold day in March 1959. We had really lost everything: our homeland, families, homes and all our personal belongings. Before us, we had an uncertain future as refugees in a country with major poverty problems for their own people. However, we had the greatest value intact—Life, with all the opportunities and challenges it gave us to create new lives and make relationships with people from other countries we would otherwise never have met.

In 1949, President Mao and the Communist Party seized power in China and Chinese troops crossed the border into Tibet. The Tibetans feared that their culture and religion would be

destroyed. Therefore, the people of the lama house in Batang in eastern Tibet arranged for me to leave my homeland and travel to Lhasa in Central Tibet.

After I arrived in Central Tibet, I heard that the Chinese Red Army had bombed and destroyed several monasteries in Eastern Tibet. The East Tibetans formed a resistance movement of guerrilla soldiers and established a stronghold in the mountains, but after a few years they could no longer holdout against the superior Chinese army. The guerrillas fled to central Tibet, where they organized themselves into a camp north of Lhasa.

The Red Army reached Central Tibet in 1951. First, Chinese diplomats came to Lhasa. In the beginning the Chinese asked with great politeness if they could borrow a house or piece of land, but after some time they took it over completely and considered themselves to be the owners. Then a large number of soldiers came to Tibet; first with the aim of helping the Tibetans. The Tibetan government also had soldiers, but they were mostly a kind of ceremonial guard who were neither trained for combat nor had up-to-date weapons.

In March 1959, H.H. Dalai Lama was in his summer palace in Norbulingka and the situation had become very tense. On March 10, there were large demonstrations in front of Norbulingka with slogans such as, *"Tibet is Tibet. China go home!"* The demonstrations created a lot of anger and increased the tension. The guerrilla soldiers from the resistance movement guarded Norbulingka and protected H.H. Dalai Lama. My big brother was one of them. After a few weeks, the Red Army attacked Lhasa with heavy weapons. Fortunately, H.H. Dalai Lama had managed to escape just before the bombings.

My big brother came to Drepung Monastery, where I was staying, with the news that H.H. Dalai Lama had fled. During the night we woke up in shock as the monastery was attacked with cannon fire. I fled in panic with my master and five monks up into the mountains. Behind us we saw Lhasa city and the summer palace covered in dust after the cannon fire.

We headed as fast as we could towards India. We had no food and nothing to drink, and had to cross icy rivers where sharp ice flakes cut our legs. I am very grateful to the poor villagers along the way who shared their food and helped us. That way, after two weeks on the run, we managed to reach the Indian border. Two days after we crossed the border, I met H.H. Dalai Lama at Mon Tawang <sup>1</sup>.

I have great appreciation for the Indian government and the Indian people. More than 100,000 Tibetans crossed the border into India and the Indians welcomed us with open arms. Although India was a poor country, they provided us with food and shelter and helped with transportation. Everyone was received with open arms, with no one asking whether we were political or economic refugees. We have a saying in Tibet:

*"Unfortunately, I fell off the horse. Luckily I landed in the soft sand."*

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<sup>1</sup> Tawang district, North East India



*At back from left: Ai Lama, Bangon Rinpoche, Kartak Tulku and at front Lakha Lama, in front of their home in Dalhousie, India in the early 1960<sup>th</sup>*

Unfortunately, H.H. Dalai Lama and the Tibetan people lost their homeland. Fortunately, H.H. Dalai Lama and Tibetan Buddhism, with its message of "non-violence, love and compassion," became world famous.

For the Tibetans, Buddhism and a deep belief in the spiritual aspects and the masters are very strong in their hearts. That faith and devotion has continued for generations and is still being passed on today to the current younger generation.

Faith is the life energy of Tibetans—they will not trade it for the riches of the world. The loyalty of Tibetans cannot be bought with money and material goods. It is important to show respect and understanding for their faith and culture.

I myself have lived in Denmark since 1976, so my people in Batang in Eastern Tibet have only met me a few times since I left. But whether they are rich or poor, illiterate or learned, the strong faith of the people in Lakha Lama as the spiritual leader of the province is equally deep.

Tibetans' belief in H.H. Dalai Lama is so deep that their greatest desire is to see His Holiness just once in their lives; then they can die happy. They do not perceive H.H. Dalai Lama as a political leader, but more as a spiritual liberator.

The escape of H.H. Dalai Lama in 1959 gave the rest of the world the opportunity to meet H.H. Dalai Lama, listen to his message and gain insight into his wisdom. While we in the West have had this good fortune, for all these years the Tibetans in Tibet have been longing to see their beloved leader. We must all pray that the Tibetans will have their longing and highest wish fulfilled.

The demonstrations taking place in Tibet are the result of frustrations over the lack of basic human rights in Tibet and it is the youth born and raised under Chinese rule who are protesting. But the

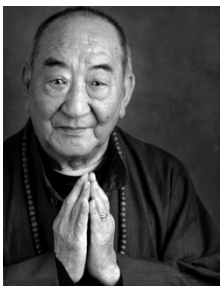
Chinese leaders accuse H.H. Dalai Lama of being behind the riots. Sooner or later, the Chinese people will accuse the Chinese leaders of mistreating the Tibetan minority, and also of ignoring human rights for large sections of the Chinese population.

My experience of H.H. Dalai Lama is that he has incredible power. His power is not political or economic. His power is of the power of compassion and non-violence. He has never hated the Chinese. H.H. Dalai Lama has offered direct negotiations with the Chinese leaders, but unfortunately his offer has not been accepted. Open negotiations will be good for both parties and I have confidence that they will come. If the Berlin Wall can fall, and if President Barack Obama can open dialogue with the USA's opponents, why should it not also be possible to change China's policy?

Four times [ed.: five up until 2021] I have invited H.H. Dalai Lama to Denmark to give Dharma talks about love and compassion and the Buddhist way to peace. Each time H.H. Dalai Lama has refused a fee for his participation. Any money left after paying the necessary expenses is donated 100% to charity.

Anyone who cares for the Tibetans should not just feel pity. You can help the Tibetan people get an education and the opportunity to preserve their culture and identity as a people by supporting Tibet Charity at [www.tibetcharity.dk](http://www.tibetcharity.dk).

I urge everyone to pray for Tibet and the Tibetan people.



Lakha Lama, born Thupten Dorjee in Tibet in 1942, was appointed as a spiritual leader for around 100,000 inhabitants in eastern Tibet at the age of five. In 1959 he fled to India as a refugee and then came to Denmark in 1976, where he settled and started a family.

Based on basic human needs, Lakha Lama shares the Dharma and its message in a unique and simple way that makes the philosophy and methods accessible to all.

Lakha Lama's many humanistic and cross-cultural activities have attracted thousands of followers within Scandinavia and throughout the world. One Swedish follower commented: "*Lakha Lama is to Scandinavia and many Tibetans what the H. H. Dalai Lama is to the world.*"

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