

THE DALAI LAMA OF TIBET VISITS THE WEST

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AN event of great significance and of considerable interest to Theosophists has just taken place, with the first-ever visit of a Dalai Lama of Tibet to the West.

Exiled in India, His Holiness the Dalai Lama is nevertheless still regarded by many as the spiritual and temporal leader of His country and people. Readers may remember that on His first visit to India in 1956 for the Buddha Jayanti celebrations, He and the Panchen Lama were the President's guests at a tea party under the Banyan Tree in Adyar. Since 1959, when the Dalai Lama and many of His countrymen sought asylum in India, He has resided in Dharamsala, in the north Indian State of Himachal Pradesh.

Though the Dalai Lama has visited several countries in Asia, including Thailand and Japan, this was the first time He has been to the West. Commencing on 29 September 1973, the six weeks tour included visits to major cities in ten countries of Western Europe: The Vatican, Switzerland, Holland, Republic of Ireland, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, United Kingdom, Germany and Austria, after which the Dalai Lama returned to India on 12 November. The visit was a private, non-political one to thank the organizations who have helped the Tibetan refugees, to meet Tibetans who are settled or studying in the West and also to exchange views with religious leaders and Western thinkers regarding the problems confronting mankind today.

The Dalai Lama's visit demonstrated the wide tolerance of Tibetan Buddhists, for He met people of all denominations, beginning His tour by meeting Pope Paul VI in the Vatican and continuing in every country to be received by Protestant, Roman Catholic, Jewish and other religious leaders, as well as attending services with representatives of the Hindu, Sikh, Buddhist, Moslem and other Faiths and having discussions with Sufis, Theosophists, Anthroposophists and others.

During His visit to Holland, the Dalai Lama and His entourage stayed at St. Michael's Theosophical Centre in Huizen, where, in addition to a panel discussion and press conference in Besant Hall, He met some of the members at a reception. Theosophists were also present at His talks in other countries.

Though the Dalai Lama, on occasion, gave some very profound expositions of Buddhist philosophy, such as a talk at Cambridge University and answers to numerous questions, basically His theme was a very simple message which touched the hearts of all those who had the privilege of hearing Him. He stressed that what is most needed in the present world atmosphere is a sense of universal responsibility and that if we can achieve this then many problems can be solved, saying that:

“Unless we have universal responsibility, the feeling of other people's suffering, a true sense of brotherhood, love for others, without this good heart it is rather difficult to achieve genuine co-operation. I believe that if you have such a true feeling, then whether you are a scientist, an economist or a politician, whatever profession you may follow, you will always have this concern for your fellow being.”

Another time He said, “When we talk about the welfare of mankind we all have a responsibility in that direction and it

is my hope that every one of us will make a common effort towards that goal."

Regarding the preponderance of materialism in the West, about which so many people spoke, the Dalai Lama said: "There are many signs which indicate that material progress alone is not sufficient for man, that something is lacking," adding that "Materialism should serve man and not man serve material progress." He considered that material progress was absolutely necessary for the well-being of man, but while it provided physical comfort it could not by itself give peace of mind; therefore a combination was needed of external material progress and inner mental development, and on this depended the very survival of man himself.

When asked whether Western people can benefit from Eastern religions and philosophies, His Holiness said that though there are many superficial differences, basically we are all human beings, we all want happiness and do not want suffering, adding that in religions there are no national or man-made boundaries, that religion should be used for any people or for any person for whom it may be found beneficial. "I believe," said His Holiness, "that each religion has its own qualities, its own values and that in past centuries the various kinds of religion have benefitted, in their own way, the many different kinds of people on this earth." Because each individual has his own attitude and approach, His Holiness considered that what is important is for each person to choose the religion which is most suitable to him. He spoke of the development of a kind heart, or a feeling of closeness for all human beings, as not just for people who believe in religion but for everyone, regardless of race, religion, faith or whether a person believes in religion or not.

Perhaps one of the most difficult of all the views expressed—not so much to understand as to implement in one's daily

life—was the Buddhist teaching which says that one's enemy is actually one's best friend, the greatest teacher, because only when one is confronted with a person who is considered an enemy, is there an opportunity to test one's tolerance and inner strength. His Holiness quoted a verse which says: "I consider all living beings as a source which helps me to develop a great goal and therefore I will hold every other living being as sacred."

"If you consider the importance of yourself with others," said His Holiness, "then the others, who are always in the majority, are much more important than oneself, therefore it is worthwhile to sacrifice your own benefit for another. The aim is a good heart, a true sense of brotherhood, love, respect for others—these are the essence of religion. If we can develop these qualities, not outside, but inside our heart, then I think really we can achieve true peace."

A simple message—the essence of Buddhism—and with it His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet brought happiness and upliftment to all who were fortunate enough to hear or meet Him. His visit to the West is seen by many as a new impetus for peace in the world—the teachings of the Lord Buddha being shared with us and expressed so clearly and beautifully by one who is Himself the embodiment of humility and compassion, who in all His contacts with people radiates a deep feeling of love, simplicity and warm human kindness.