

An audience with the Dalai Lama

The visit of the Dalai Lama to the United States last month brought back memories of an audience with his holiness last June in Dharamsala, the scenic hill station in northern India that serves as the headquarters of the Tibetan government in exile. With two Indian friends, I was privileged to have an hour's meeting with the spiritual and government leader of Tibet who was 1989 Nobel Peace Prize recipient.

The Dalai Lama told us about his upcoming trip to the Soviet Union to visit three major sites where Buddhism once flourished, and he asked our opinions about the elections that had been held in India earlier in the month.

He reminisced about a meeting with Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru when the Dalai Lama first came to India as a refugee in 1959. Nehru could not understand how the Tibetan leader could seek both independence from China and non-violence, and lost his temper with his determined guest. Later (after the Sino-Indian War of 1962) Nehru became an accommodating host for the Tibetans in exile.

When asked why India, possessing a common culture and spiritual tradition, was conquered by the Mughals and the English, the Dalai Lama replied that India consisted of several hundred principalities, and the invaders divided and conquered.

After a pause, he added that the same tactic had worked in his country: "Tibet is united spiritually and culturally but not politically. We are divided by regions, and the Chinese played regions against each other." He noted that traditionally Tibet's relations with her neighbors had been spiritual rather than political and that

Point of view



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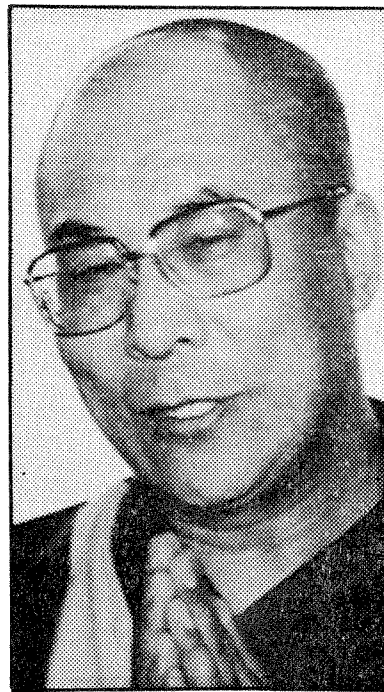
a "priest-patron" relationship had developed with China.

Although Tibet was occupied briefly by a Manchu army in 1912, it was never a part of China until its forcible occupation by the People's Republic of China in 1950. Ethnically, racially and linguistically, the Tibetans and the Chinese are different.

One of our party asked why communal (religious-inspired) killing and violence were so prevalent in India. The Dalai Lama replied that non-violence preached by Mahatma Gandhi had been forgotten by many Indians. His holiness abhors the violence that exists and thinks the doctrine of *ahimsa*, of not injuring living things, is badly needed.

He predicted that violence and the need for heavy security would continue for the next several years. At an earlier time, in the 1950s, when security concerns were less common, his holiness recalled meetings in Beijing with Mao Tse-tung with only an interpreter present. Now in Delhi, when he meets the Indian prime minister, black-uniformed soldiers with machine guns are all around the office.

Last April, President Bush met with the Dalai Lama at the White House — ending three decades of official U.S. boycott of the Tibet-



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an leader and his captive nation. A few days later, his holiness spoke to a receptive gathering of members of Congress in the Capitoll rotunda, and the Senate passed a resolution supporting Tibet's right to self-determination.

In his remarks at the Capitol, the Dalai Lama had spoken about what he termed "universal responsibility." When asked to explain the concept, he responded that violent conflicts — the destruction of nature, poverty, hunger — are mainly problems created by humans. They can be resolved, but only through human effort, understanding, and the development of a sense of brotherhood and sisterhood. To do this, his holiness recommended the

cultivation of "a universal responsibility for one another and for the natural environment, based on a good heart and awareness."

When asked about the inter-monastic exchange that he had helped establish during a visit to the United States, the Dalai Lama stated that it had proved to be an extremely useful exercise for both parties.

Under this exchange that aims to foster interfaith dialogue, nine Tibetan monks and nuns have stayed for a few weeks at Osage Monastery in Sand Springs, and at other Christian monasteries, while a similar number of Christian religious (including at least one priest and three nuns from Osage) have gone to India.

"In particular, it enabled us to gain a deeper understanding of other people's way of thinking," said his holiness. In explaining this exchange to a Thai Buddhist leader, the Dalai Lama stated that "Tibetan Buddhists enjoy better relations with Christians in the United States, than with their brother Buddhists in Thailand."

At the end of the audience, the Dalai Lama gave each of us a *kata*, a white silk scarf, the traditional Tibetan gesture of propitiation upon departure. His holiness was a warm, charismatic host, and one senses great inner peace and strength in this remarkable man who for more than 40 years has sought, through peaceful means, an end to the oppression of his people and to the occupation of his land. Last month, he indicated his willingness to return to Tibet to bring about a peaceful solution to that troubled region.

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