

Dalai Lama

Dharamshala, September 1968

I listen to him incredulous, shocked, and all the while I scrutinize him intensely: but even this cannot help me explain what he's saying. Seen like this, he's a young man like many others: his features only slightly Asian, his skin only slightly yellow. Put him in a pair of blue jeans and a T-shirt, and you'd mistake him for a student at Yale, maybe even a hippie yelling anti-Vietnam slogans. He certainly doesn't have the air of a monk. He's wearing a monk's robe, though. It's rust-colored, draped expertly around his tall, lean body. In accordance with tradition, his head is shaved. His face is composed, I would almost say impenetrable. But, behind the frames of his gold glasses, his almond eyes are extremely intelligent and cheerful. He is seated on a wooden chair as though it were a jewel-encrusted throne. At his side is an old, solemn monk, who never speaks and looks at him with veneration. Then there's a young monk, very attentive, who acts as his interpreter and seems very eager to please. I would bet that he behaves toward them with all the authority he exhibited in the palace of Potala. We are in a simple house in Dharamshala, a small town in the Kangra district. These green, cool woods are already part of the Himalayas, just as much as those snowcapped mountains with their sharp peaks. North of us is China, to the East, the Soviet Union. The landscape is similar to Tibet. But we're in India, Tibet is down there. It's beyond the blue glaciers this young man crossed nearly ten years ago, chased by Chinese communists, marked by humiliation and defeat, sick and starving. He who was a living god and a king, a sacred child adored by an entire people who would bow so low before him that their heads touched the ground. He is the last of the Dalai Lamas, the end of a fable that is dying with no hope of rebirth. And I listen to him, incredulous, shocked,

because he's telling me that he'd like to be a mechanic; because his ideas seem to be, well, at least partially, a strange kind of Maoism.

Travel back with me thirty-three years and you'll understand my surprise. In Tibet it's the year of the Water-bird, and the thirteenth Dalai Lama has died. In Lhasa, the capital, a Regent is governing and a weeping crowd is gathered along the sacred walls. How much time will pass before the elders find the new Dalai Lama? He must be a reincarnation of the old one: a child born as the last Dalai Lama died. The High Lamas must search all over the country, visiting every village, every hut. But in order for this search to begin, there must be some clue. A series of miracles must guide them, and the first miracle must be accomplished by the dead man. Dressed in gold and silver, the thirteenth Dalai Lama is seated on his throne one last time. And there he stays, propped up, stiff, for days, with his head hung forward: that is, to the south. But suddenly he's shaken by some kind of shiver, a gust of life, and his head rolls toward the northeast. In the same moment, strange clouds appear in the clear sky, and begin moving northeast. Then a star-shaped mushroom appears on a pillar at a temple to the northeast, and the Regent has a vision. He is meditating near the lake, and an image forms on the water's surface, a monastery to the northeast with a jade and gold roof, next to a house with turquoise roof tiles.

The High Lamas leave, traveling northeast. For months and months they travel, stopping in every village, every hut, and after nearly two years have passed, they discover a monastery with a gold and jade roof. It is the Karma Rolphai Dorje monastery, in the Amdo district, and nearby there is a house with turquoise roof tiles. It's a peasant dwelling. The High Lamas dress as beggars and enter, asking for charity. The farmers, husband, wife, and six children, receive them with kindness. The High Lamas are eating when a child bursts in, about two years old, who says his name is Kondun. The age is right, the High Lamas immediately carry out the exam. They carry with them two identical rosaries, two identical canes, two identical drums. But one of the rosaries, and one of the canes, and one of the drums belong to the old Dalai Lama. Apart from the Lamas, the only one who could recognize the correct objects is the reincarnation of

the Dalai Lama. "Choose," they tell the child. And the child chooses the correct rosary. The correct cane, the correct drum. Then he exclaims: "You're not beggars. I want to come with you." The High Lamas throw themselves at his feet, and reveal to the bewildered parents that the search is over: the child they brought into the world is the fourteenth Dalai Lama.

Two years will pass before they are able to bring him to Lhasa. The governor of the province is Chinese, he hates the Tibetans and demands a ransom before he will allow Kondun to leave: the High Lamas have to get the money together. But at the end of the Earth-Hare year, the caravan forms. Three hundred and fifty mules and horses, fifty people. Among these is Kondun's family, who have been taken out of their house with the turquoise roof tiles; the law requires that the parents and siblings of the Dalai Lama live in Lhasa. The journey lasts three months and thirteen days, through valleys and mountains without any paths or roads. The child is carried by the members of the caravan, or on a palanquin. Despite his discomfort, he gives no signs of fatigue or boredom. Sometimes the procession stops near a village, and the crowd rushes toward him, dancing, playing cymbals and flutes, burning rose incense; but even then he doesn't cry or laugh, or behave like a child. He remains solemn, receiving their tributes, as he does when he reaches the gate of Lhasa, where tens of thousands of the faithful are waiting for him. They wait along with members of the National Assembly, the one hundred and seventy-five monks that govern Tibet, the representatives from China, from Bhutan, from Nepal, from Sikkim. He remains solemn when he enters the Potala Palace, when he is transferred to his summer residence in Norbulingka, when they present him at the cathedral. The investiture occurs on the fourteenth day of the Iron-Dragon year, with unbelievable and interminable pomp. For hours and hours the child must remain composed upon his high throne, crushed with the weight of the heavy gold and silver drapery, listening to sacred hymns, prayers, speeches, poetry, accepting tributes of gold, flowers, fruit, watching the sacred dances and the tedious rites. But he never lets a yawn escape, he never makes a mistake.

He is an exceptional child, almost disconcertingly intelligent for his age. And his tutors are as patient as they are strict. At six he is already learning astrology, poetry, composition, and music. At ten he is already studying Sanskrit, dialectics, metaphysics, the art of healing and the psychology of religion. A small part of each day is reserved for rest and playing, but otherwise he stays bent over his books from sunup to sundown. Soon his vision suffers, and it's necessary to have a pair of eyeglasses sent from India. He grows up with those glasses and that wisdom, adored like a God and sacrificed like a prisoner, ignoring everything that happens outside the storybook cage he lives in. More than a palace, Potala is a warehouse of paradoxical riches. It contains all the extravagant gifts from the Mongol and Chinese Emperors, the sumptuous inheritance from the previous thirteen Lamas, and the treasures of the old kings: jewels and rubies big as eggs, sacred parchments inscribed with gold-dust ink, thousand-year-old tapestries, enormous jade statues, precious china, artworks from two thousand B.C. The mausoleums of the dead Dalai Lamas are made of thick slabs of gold, nine meters high. The libraries contain all of the documents from Tibetan civilization. The museums have all the weapons from throughout Tibet's military history. To visit everything—hundreds of salons, chapels, rooms, churches—would take years. And, since the child must visit them all, he hardly ever leaves Potala. He only goes to Norbulingka, where he finds the same ostentation. Norbulingka means Jewel Park: little temples, little palaces, gardens tended to the point of exasperation, full of exotic birds, strange flowers, and of boredom that weighs heavier than lead. The boredom of being not only the spiritual leader of Tibet, but also the secular leader: because of this, he must confront the duties of government, the continual threat of invasion by China. China has been invading Tibet for centuries, only to relinquish it with a treaty and invade it all over again.

The wise little boy with glasses had just turned sixteen when the oracles in the convent began to reveal dark prophecies. The capital of the pillar where the miracle mushroom had grown crumbled unexpectedly. A dragon head on one of the main temples began to spout drops of water which were almost certainly tears. Buffaloes

and cows gave birth to terrifying monsters, earthquakes swallowed whole villages. And the astrologers said that the ancient prophecy, according to which "a great power to the North would conquer the land, destroying religion and imposing its hegemony on the whole world" was about to come to pass. A few days later, in October of 1950, Mao Tse-tung's troops attacked the frontier in six separate points, announcing the decision to restore Tibet to the motherland. Defense was, naturally, impossible. The entire army was no more than 8,500 men, including soldiers and officials. They had only 250 mortars, 200 light machine guns, and 50 pieces of rusty artillery. And, even though Tibet had declared its independence in 1912, the act had not been sanctioned before any nation. The country had existed in total isolation for years, its borders were closed to the rest of the world, and its diplomatic relations were nonexistent. At the time of the invasion, only six Westerners lived in Tibet: one missionary, two English radio operators, a Russian and two Austrians who had escaped from an Indian concentration camp. However, while the monks hastened to send part of the national treasure to India, gold dust and silver bars, the wise little boy did something more. Instead of fleeing, he asked England and the United States—two countries he had only ever heard tell of—for help. And when they refused, he turned to the U.N.—an organization no one had told him anything about. The U.N. refused to intervene, and in spring of 1951 the first Chinese detachments marched into Lhasa, bringing with them enormous portraits of Mao Tse-tung and Chu En Lai. But even then, he did not admit defeat. He sent a delegation to Peking, entered into negotiations with the Chinese generals and, as their prisoner, assumed all the possible responsibilities of a king.

For nine years he was a good king. He proposed and carried out reforms, shrewdly steering a middle course, even going to China to talk to Mao Tse-tung. He studied Marx and English. He tried, all by himself, at an age when other boys are playing football, to penetrate a world that was, for him, farther away than the moon and Mars. A world where social equality was preached, where people traveled on trains and airplanes, a world where people laughed at the fairy tale he had lived in until the age of sixteen. His freedom grew more

and more limited, he was confined to five rooms in the palace, and he began to hear news of monasteries destroyed, convents looted, Lamas tortured and killed, useless rebellions by peasants armed only with pitchforks. When he looked out of the windows through which he had once admired the luxurious processions, he saw Chinese camps and billboards that accused Buddha of being a reactionary. He was no longer in charge of anything. One day he fell ill and a doctor came to see him; he thanked the doctor with a gift, a piece of jade. But as soon as the doctor left the room, the jade was taken by a Maoist official who claimed that the jade belonged to the Chinese people. Gold statues and vases were melted into slabs and sent to Peking. The sacred furnishings were ripped apart and turned into theater costumes. The thousand-year-old parchments were burned, along with the sacred images, the religious images; there was nothing left of Potala but the walls. This state of catastrophe ushered in March 1959, the Tiger-Water year.

The Dalai Lama is, by now, a young man of twenty-two. He has just earned his degree in metaphysics, defending his thesis to his old tutors in a dismal, quasi-secret ceremony. A messenger arrives and tells him that there is a spectacle in progress at the Chinese camp beyond the river that he is strongly encouraged to attend, without his bodyguards or armed escorts. The Dalai Lama knows what this means. Four Lamas have already received this invitation, and they have not returned. A rumor begins to circulate that his life is in danger, and, with the pretext of protecting him, thirty thousand Tibetans surround the palace, shouting "Tibet for Tibetans!" It is revolution, it is massacre. While the Chinese have automatic weapons, the Tibetans have only sticks and knives. This time it is absolutely necessary for the Dalai Lama to attempt escape. So he promises that he will attend the spectacle beyond the river, but when he leaves that evening he disguises himself as a soldier, he removes his glasses so he won't be recognized, and staggering around in the dark, in his myopia, he leaves the palace behind. Only his family and a few faithful follow him, also in disguise. With them he goes through the gardens, where nothing grows anymore, he passes the mausoleums, stripped of their gold slabs, he leaves the looted museums, goes

over the sacred walls and throws himself into the crowd, among the Chinese soldiers, and he reaches the horses and gallops away in the dark. From village to village, mountain to mountain, glacier to glacier, for weeks, hunted by a Chinese airplane that sometimes flies so low that he has to hide in the bushes or in a cave, until finally he reaches the border with India, where Pandit Nehru has offered him protection. It is here that he discovers that Potala was destroyed during his escape, the city bombed. The luxurious fairy tale that he grew up in has been reduced to ruins and thousands of corpses with sticks and knives in their hands.

How can it be that a man educated in the cults of poetry and superstition now exhibits such a strange understanding for the civilization that destroyed his civilization, and for the technology that destroyed his country? From 1959 to 1969 he remained a recluse in this little villa in the mountains for Dharamshala. He descended from the mountain once to go to Japan, and again to visit Thailand, each time as a guest of honor at vegetarian conventions. He left his home another five or six times to go to New Delhi, to the offices of his exiled government.

In Dharamshala he spends most of his day in prayer, waking up at five in the morning to meditate. He receives very few visitors, Tibetan refugees who live in a nearby village for the most part, who are obviously anti-communist and completely attached to the past. Apart from them, he only sees the other monks and the members of his family: his mother, two sisters, and a brother made the trip with him. He is afraid of being killed, or kidnapped. When you pass through the gates of his retreat you are searched, interrogated, and they take your matches, even though you haven't come to set him on fire. His only meal, which he eats at midday, is a solitary affair. The only breaks to his rigorous monastic routine come from the radio and American magazines: *National Geographic*, *Time*, and *Newsweek*. He has no hope of returning to Tibet, he is held prisoner by a past that strangles him mercilessly. In his little universe, everything is more or less as it was before: the same ceremonies, the same traditions, the same obedience to the oracles. And yet, mysteriously, he is a man of our times: modern, liberal, plagued by the same problems we are, the

same needs, the same mistakes. He dreams of skyscrapers and trips to the moon; he compares the melodrama of Tibet to the situation in Czechoslovakia; he discusses Marxism. He is free from every neurosis, every fear, every slavery of thought and taste. What was it that brought about this change? What is it? It certainly wasn't his meeting with Mao Tse-tung, after all the history between them. It certainly wasn't his two trips to the vegetarian conventions. It certainly isn't the American magazines or the radio, especially since his English is quite limited. Was it the mental strain he was put through at Potala, the inhuman study that has opened his brain to every possible choice? Perhaps. But I believe that the real reason is another: that vague something that gathers in the air at each truly historical moment, then flies away like spores on the wind. You never know where a seed carried by the wind will land, it might even fall within the royal palace of a closed society, into the head of a child god, reincarnated.

Let's listen to this hippie dressed like a monk, with the Himalayas in the background. Whether or not you agree with him, he remains an amazing figure. It's morning in autumn, his garden is full of blooming roses, and from the temple a long, low horn sounds, calling the faithful to prayer. His voice, by contrast, is like a bell, and he has a very friendly laugh. He laughs through all his answers as though saying them aloud were useless: what else could he have said? Of course Mao Tse-tung wants to live in a skyscraper, of course he'll call me if he ever comes to New York. When we say goodbye, he'll stop me as I attempt a bow and he'll give me a hearty clap on the shoulders as a salutation. But where on earth would he have seen that? Who taught him? Here is the interview.

ORIANA FALLACI Holiness, if by some miracle or some unforeseen political upset you were allowed to return to Tibet and live there, as it is today, would you consent to govern a communist country?

HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA Naturally. What kind of leader would I be if I wanted to impede the course of things? There are those who like to smoke and those who don't: the fact that I don't doesn't mean I am against those who do. Young Tibetans grew up surrounded by

communist ideology, should I deny them because of it? I am not at all worried about Tibet's communism. Communism only becomes malevolent when it serves imperialism, as with Chinese communism. Thus, Tibet's enemy is the Chinese communism that conceals Chinese imperialism. China has always wanted to conquer Tibet. What is happening today between China and Tibet is nothing but the repetition of an event that has occurred throughout history. Thus, my job is not to agitate for anti-communism among Tibetans, but to keep a sense of national identity alive: remind them that they can be communists, but that they must not forget that they are Tibetans, above all, Tibetans.

OF I did not expect you to answer that way, Holiness.

DL It's the only way I can answer. I am a man who belongs to his own time, not some fossil from the past. I'm a man in love with all revolutionary ideals, I've always been in favor of innovation. Chinese communism produces nuclear weapons, and this is a bad thing. It attempts to conquer the world, and this is a bad thing. It does not benefit the masses, and this is a bad thing. However, despite all this bad, it has achieved some results. Even in Tibet. Remember that democracy did not exist in Tibet, or only existed within the monastic system, in that a boy could arrive at important responsibilities coming from any social class. Don't forget that I'm a farmer's son.

OF Holiness, how could you have even been aware of that, since you were, at the time, locked up in Potala?

DL I was aware of it, nonetheless, because I was a wise child and then a wise young man. A Dalai Lama is brought up in the pursuit of wisdom; I found mine very early and used it to see and understand. The temples and salons of Potala were packed with useless treasures, as were the houses of the rich, while my people were exploited by tax collectors. Of course I knew. And I didn't need the Chinese intervention to bring about reforms. Even before the Chinese descended on us, I was carrying out a social revolution. But a good revolution, well-suited for Tibet, for our history and our religion; not a cheap copy of the Chinese revolution. For us, the Chinese have never been the bearers of revolutionary ideals, they have always been conquerors, pure and simple. I began the reforms, the vital ones, when I was sixteen.

And for nine years I fought with the Chinese, trying to explain to them that we wanted to follow our own path, not Peking's. But to them, the word "revolution" was just that—a word. They wanted us to become a colony of China and nothing more. I even explained this to Mao Tse-tung. I think he understood. But his generals were uninterested in the spread of Marxist philosophy. His generals were interested in domination. And it was this domination that provoked the revolt of 1959. It was a popular revolt, not a bourgeois revolt. It was as though a mass of insects suffocating under a blanket escaped from underneath it to sting whoever was holding it down. The world doesn't know this because the world has never really been interested in Tibet as a real place, but rather as some kind of fairyland: its treasures, its processions, its Dalai Lama. The world doesn't realize that, today, if the opportunity arose, communist Tibet would rebel against China. More or less like what is occurring in certain Eastern European countries, like Czechoslovakia.

OF Holiness, what is your position on communism?

DL I find it somewhat interesting, I'd say. I appreciate the sense of guilt inherent in Marxism, the desire to expose injustice. In order for a cut on your hand to heal, your body must first of all be aware of that cut, otherwise, how will you tend it and help it heal? But I must say, I also appreciate many aspects of capitalism. In many countries capitalism has brought about undeniable economic progress and has taken many important steps towards equality—just look at America. And then, competition in the economy has to exist, and in communism this is essentially impossible. The fact is, today it is useless to think in terms of communism and anti-communism, capitalism and anti-capitalism. It would be better to think of a solution that best suits a people in specific economic, historical, and cultural circumstances. There are countries, like America, where I believe that communism would be inapplicable and ineffective.

OF Holiness, what do you think of Mao Tse-tung?

DL When I went to China, after the occupation, I spoke with him several times. He taught me many things. You must understand that, despite my precocious wisdom, I didn't know much about what was happening outside my country. News arrives slowly and rarely in

Lhasa; my tutors only found out about the Second World War after it had already been happening for quite some time. They learned of it from an old Indian newspaper. When I opened my atlas, I hadn't the slightest idea about what life was like in the countries I traced with my finger. For me they were geographical images and nothing more: a leaf-shaped nation, a fish-shaped nation, a dragon-shaped nation and so on. I did not know anything about the ideas that were shaking them, that had shaped them. I only knew right from wrong through Buddhism, which I still believe is the foundation for my reasoning. Speaking with Mao Tse-tung, I was able to compare Buddhism and communism. Now, in my opinion, Buddhism goes further in its ideology than communism. According to both Buddhism and communism, material reality orders everything. But how does material reality come into being? Through divine creation? No, of course not: by man's creation, by man's physical labor. And, on this point, Buddhism and communism identify with one another. But beyond this point, Buddhism goes further. Because Buddhism explains that man creates reality through his mind, and because Buddhism offers a reason for the existence of the mind. This reason is the beginning and the beginning is God. Mao Tse-tung and I discussed this argument at length. The fact is, that when I reached the conclusion I have just laid out for you, we began to quarrel. Because I said: yes you are right, this is all true, all correct, but Man is not God, and there is a God. And he said: no there isn't.

OF I imagine that these were interesting discussions, Holiness. What else can you say about Mao Tse-tung?

DL One never left a meeting with him feeling indifferent. Physically, I wouldn't know how to describe him: he always had worn-down shoes and wore the same uniform as everyone else. He breathed heavily, he was always short of breath; he wasn't healthy. Despite this he was constantly smoking, even when he spoke. One cigarette after another, lighting them end to end. He spoke slowly and quietly, weighing each word. He never said anything foolish. There was something sad in him, and he often behaved strangely. Once he arrived unexpectedly and he told me that Buddhism was a good religion; that though he was a prince, Buddha had done much to improve the lot of the

poor. Then, as suddenly as he had arrived, he left. He was always very affectionate with me. For example, once he told me that religion was the opiate of the masses because it impeded progress. Soon after he understood that he had hurt me, and he clapped me on the shoulders and urged me to take care of myself.

OF You're unable to see him as an enemy, isn't that true, Holiness?

DL Yes. Speaking as a Buddhist, I cannot accept the word enemy. Speaking as a Tibetan . . . it's possible that today's enemies are also tomorrow's enemies. I have suffered greatly because of Mao Tse-tung, and my people have suffered even more. But this doesn't mean that they are unable to forget. Mao Tse-tung is neither cunning nor diplomatic. I told him what his generals were doing in Tibet, and he understood. Perhaps he couldn't stop them. Or perhaps he has changed. I am unable to reconcile the Mao Tse-tung I knew with the Mao Tse-tung of today. He must be in the grip of some madness or some infirmity. The cultural revolution, for example. The name is lovely, but there is no substance: it's the dementia of an old man. I cannot see him in this dementia.

OF Holiness, you met other communist leaders in China. Did they influence you as well?

DL No, certainly not. I never liked Chu En Lai, for example. He was too cunning. You could see it in his eyes, always moving and always looking, seeing everything. He is very intelligent, but it is a dangerous intelligence. Khrushchev was a little better. Khrushchev seems like a giant pig. He moves and breathes like a pig. But he's an intelligent pig, polite and kind. I believe that one could become friends with Khrushchev, but not with Chu En Lai. I only ever met one other communist as hateful as he was: Bulganin. It is because of men like him that my trip to China was so difficult. I went to ask for mercy for Tibet, and I stayed a year. In that year I was never able to speak to the people I wished to see. I wanted to talk to the Russians, since I knew that they could help me. But my plans never materialized. Once I was able to arrange a face-to-face meeting with the Russian ambassador, but it was cancelled at the last minute.

OF And what do you think of the Americans, Holiness?

DL I don't know them as well as I know the Russians and the Chinese.

I have met only a few. On an individual basis, they seem honest, polite, and modern. But taken all together, in politics I mean, they seem very conservative. It seems that in politics they apply none of their honesty or modernity. Perhaps, to judge them better, I should go to America. Anyway, I am curious about America. Everywhere you hear people talk about this America, everywhere you read about this America; America is everywhere, even in these mountains where everyone is dressed the same way they were a thousand years ago. America is a mosquito that gets into the folds of your robe, and it stings you, it provokes you until you seek it out. America is the obsession that the world carries with it, it cannot be ignored. But the reasons America intrigues me are not ideological. I mean, as far as profound ideas are concerned, I don't think America has much to offer me. My interests are, well, tangible. I am very interested in American technology, American cars, the visit to the moon. When you think of the moon you don't think of Russia, you think of America. I would give anything to go to the moon. Not for the adventure of walking around on it, but for the sheer pleasure of driving the great ship that takes you up there. I truly love cars. If I could choose a profession I would be a technician—or better, a mechanic. I've always thought this, ever since I was a child.

OF Holiness, that's extraordinary. Do you remember how you started, and why?

DL I think it began with that little car. When I was a child I was sent many gifts, from all over the world. They were mostly precious objects, and didn't interest me. Then one day, that little car arrived. It's the clearest memory I have of my childhood, all the rest is blurry. For example, I remember the ceremonies and the dances I watched from behind a curtain. I remember a vague desire to be with other children, I never saw other children. I remember an unconfessed longing for my mother, I only ever saw my mother briefly, once every two months or so. I remember that I didn't like Potala and that I preferred Norbulingka because there were birds and fish and then there was a garden where they grew giant cabbages and huge radishes. But that little car reigns over all those other memories, victorious. When I first saw it I had no idea what it was, or what it was for. But I

knew that it was beautiful, more beautiful than the cabbages or the huge radishes, and when I was with it I didn't need other children or my mother anymore. It moved on its own. I began to ask myself how it worked, and why. I took it apart and put it back together. From then on, every time I come across something mechanical, I felt the need to take it apart and put it back together again. Mechanical things were like fairy tales to me. They were better: they were my fairy tale.

OF Did you have other fairy tales after that little car?

DL Yes, because people found out that I loved fairy tales and so they began to send me more fairy tales. One day an even more mysterious fairy tale reached me: a little airplane. When you wound it, it flew. I took that one apart too, but I couldn't make it fly again afterwards and I cried. Then a very long fairy tale reached me that even made a sound: an electric train. It came to me in a box with instructions, it had to be put together. I ordered everyone not to touch it; I wanted to put it together myself. I was able to do it, and that was the first train of my life. Many years would pass before I saw a real train. And then, one day, I received a wristwatch. It must have been the only wristwatch in Lhasa. I took that apart too, to see how it worked. Then I put it back together and, believe it or not, it still worked. And then I discovered three real cars in a warehouse in Lhasa. They had been sent as gifts to my predecessor, though I don't think he ever used them. There were two 1927 Baby Austins, one red and one yellow, and then a bright orange 1931 Dodge. They were just sitting there rusting. I found a young Tibetan who had worked as a driver in India, and with his help, I got the Dodge in working order. Then, combining parts from the two Austins, we were able to get one working Austin together. To me, it was much more exciting than a discussion of dialectics. The young man also taught me how to use them, and I can't describe how happy I was when I managed to move a car for the first time. But for me, the most beautiful fairy tale has always been electricity. We had an electrical generator at Norbulingka. It was always breaking, and everyone believed that it was breaking because of bad luck. But it was actually me, I was breaking it so I could fix it. I would have been a great electrician or a great mechanic if destiny had had other plans for me.

OF Do you ever feel regret about that, Holiness? In other words, do you ever feel uneasy or angry that you are a king in exile, a deposed pope, ultimately, just a monk?

DL No, because apart from being a mechanic, I can't imagine any other kind of existence for myself. My life has been, and still is, so determined by a path laid out by others before me, that even if I wanted to, I could not and I would not escape it. Indeed, it's true that I didn't choose this destiny, that it was imposed upon me when I was only two years old. But I feel no anger about this imposition. You see, I have often tried to remember how I felt as a child when I realized that I had been torn from my mother, from my brothers and sisters, and placed upon that cushioned throne to act like an old man. But my memory has not revealed a moment of anger. Maybe it's because my memories only become clear in adolescence. But, when I was an adolescent, any possible childish anger was gone, as I had, by then, been a monk for quite some time. And I couldn't imagine being anything other than a monk. I was, in short, content to be a monk. I am still content, though my mind is not completely pure. Since I have set aside my doubts, and my desires, monastic life does not seem like a sacrifice to me. It imposes limitations, certainly, but in exchange it gives me peace in my spirit that others do not have, and seek futilely. And it takes away many fears, like the fear of death. Men are so terrified of the idea of death. I am not, because I know that death is only the transfer from one body to another. In my last body . . .

OF Holiness, do you really believe that you are the reincarnation of the Dalai Lama who came before you?

DL You either believe in reincarnation or you don't. There is no proof of reincarnation, it is an act of faith. I have that faith. It may seem like an anachronism, I know, because I am a modern man and one would think that a modern man should not believe in reincarnation. But I believe it completely, just as I believe in life and death. It is not a mystery to me. Having said this, I will add something that may shock you: I am not at all convinced that I am the reincarnation of the thirteenth Dalai Lama. Or, not necessarily. Perhaps I am the reincarnation of some other Lama, or a farmer. What difference does it make? Isn't it just as well? Do we believe in democracy or don't we?

OF One last question, Holiness. When you are dead, how will they choose your successor? Will it be possible, in today's Tibet, to go looking for the child who was born when you died, the living Buddha?

DL Obviously, it will not be possible. The Chinese have destroyed our temples, exterminated our monks, and outlawed our religion. Even using the rosary is prohibited. The monks who were able to flee are scattered all over India, in Nepal, in Sikkim. And, even if they were to go back, the new generation would not believe any longer. When I die no one will be able to go looking for me in another body. Well, the problem is hardly immediate, given that I'm only thirty-three and have every intention of staying in this body for quite some time. When the problem arises . . . patience. It is entirely possible that I will be the last Dalai Lama. Patience. It won't be a tragedy for anyone. You can be sure that the world will not weep. It will not even suffer.