



Cox News Service

**HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA** is greeted in Atlanta by many of his devotees holding a Kata, a ceremonial greeting cloth.

## JOURNEY

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delay their own heaven to live on Earth a while longer so they can serve humanity.

Holy men found the child in the Tibetan countryside by following mystical signs they trusted. He and his family were taken to Lhasa, the nation's capital, where during years of rigorous education, he studied logic, Buddhist philosophy, nature, traditional medicine and other subjects, earning the equivalent of a Ph.D. by age 23. By then, Communist China had invaded his country.

A brutal crackdown by Mao's troops in 1959 forced him to escape one night and travel on foot for 15 days through the Himalayas to India. Since then he has lived in Dharamsala with other Tibetans in their adopted mountain home.

The Chinese call him a "monk" and name him

broken English" he says, but uses Tibetan with a translator for complex Buddhist topics. Before each message, he gave white scarves, or kata, to his hosts and event organizers.

Listening to him, I saw the humor I'd read and heard about. When sound malfunctioned during the university president's remarks, the Dalai Lama held a microphone for him, laughing as if imitating a TV reporter. He jested that he didn't know what to say for his first lecture, and that all the attention was going to give him "a big head."

It was easy to forget this man is decorated with the world's highest honors, that he confers with presidents and parliaments, routinely addresses crowds of thousands and meets with private visitors, often desperate, who come to him for answers.

For his part, he calls himself a simple Buddhist monk. His affection for others comes across no better than in these

opening words:

*In describing presidents, professors and students, I usually prefer to call you dear brothers and sisters. I think that's pretty important.*

*'Professors,' 'presidents,' 'dalai lama'—all these are of secondary importance. More importantly, we are human beings. We are human brothers and sisters. So I prefer to just call you human brothers and sisters.*

Before it was all over, I experienced a little of Shangri-La myself. During his appearance in Centennial Park downtown, clouds enrobed the cityscape, creating the possibility that instead of buildings, we were surrounded by mysteries.

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His Holiness the Dalai Lama is 72 and always rejects violence and anger, even when they are used against him in

the long stand-off with China. A servant to the servant, he promises to give of himself "until the day I die."

The institution of Dalai Lama may not survive him, as Chinese officials say only a state appointee can claim the title after his death. The Dalai Lama has asked Tibetans to decide for themselves how, or if, another Dalai Lama is chosen.

I think of the bloodroot at woods' edge, presenting its white blossom to the world, menaced by tangled trees, vines and asters with their chaotic branches and roots. How easy to destroy such a plant. Only that remarkable bloom, with its promise to seed the world, protects it.

Everything passes and in the end, I feel comfort in thinking that it's not the bloom, or the kata, or the man, Tenzin Gyatso, that really matters.

It is the promise and the seed, and how they change us.