

## *Venerable Geshe Thupten Phelgye*

Venerable Geshe Thupten Phelgye was born in 1956. At the age of 17, after graduating from high school, he joined the renowned Sera Jey Monastic University in South India and became a Tibetan Buddhist monk. In 1991, after 18 years of studying and living in the Gelugpa tradition (the largest lineage of Tibetan Buddhism), he obtained the Geshe degree from Sera Jey.

In 1979 he was appointed head teacher of the monastic school and brought the school into a new era. In 1984 he began to campaign for vegetarianism and the ethical treatment of animals. On October 6, 1986, His Holiness the Dalai Lama appointed him as guardian-tutor to Canadian Tulku Tenzin Sherab (Elijah Ary, the inspiration for the film “Little Buddha,” starring Keanu Reeves).

In 1993, with blessings from His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Geshe Phelgye went to a hermitage retreat in the mountains of Dharamsala, India, where he stayed for 5 years until December 1997. In 1998, after receiving support and blessings from His Holiness, he founded the Universal Compassion Foundation and campaigned for vegetarianism and universal compassion around the world. He also worked closely with Ms. Maneka Gandhi and vegetarian groups in India and the United States for many years.

In 1999, elected as the founding president of the International Gelug Society (IGS) in Dharamsala, Geshe Phelgye published the journal, *Kadam News*, and sponsored resolutions promoting a vegetarian diet in Gelugpa monasteries, among other important resolutions. In 2001 he was elected to the Tibetan Parliament in Exile and served for 10 years.

Geshe Phelgye worked with Sulha Peace Project in the Middle East from 2004 to 2007 seeking reconciliation among Judaism, Islam and Christianity. In 2005, after five years of service, he wanted to resign from Parliament but was encouraged by His Holiness to continue for another term and was re-elected to the Parliament in 2006. Apart from his parliamentary work, he has been travelling around the world, giving talks and teachings promoting peace and compassion. Promotion of vegetarianism, human values, diversity and interfaith dialogue are the mission of the Universal Compassion Foundation.

He has spoken at over one hundred colleges and universities across North America and Asia. He has taught in all lineages of Buddhist Centers and Christian churches of various denominations. In 2011, the Jesuit-founded Gonzaga University invited him to be their first Global Scholar-in-Residence. In 2012, Eastern Washington University invited him to their campus as a special Faculty-in-Residence, where he currently teaches. You can learn more about Geshe-la at his website ([www.universalcompassion.org](http://www.universalcompassion.org)).

A note on terminology: “Geshe” is a term designating monastic training; Geshe-la is a term of both respect and endearment. There are four main lineages/schools of Tibetan Buddhism. Geshe-la is a member of the Gelugpa lineage, which is the lineage of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the largest lineage of Tibetan Buddhism.