



HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA WITH (FROM RIGHT) GESHE JAMPA GELEK, LAMA ZOPA RINPOCHE, VEN. CONNIE MILLER, FILIPPO SCIANNA, GESHE TENZIN TENPHEL, FABRIZIO PALLOTI AND OTHER STUDENTS AT ISTITUTO LAMA TZONG KHAPA, ITALY, JUNE 2014. PHOTO COURTESY FILMPRO ITALY.

BUILDING A BRIDGE

THE ACADEMY OF MIND SCIENCE AND VALID COGNITION AT ISTITUTO LAMA TZONG KHAPA

His Holiness the Dalai Lama visited Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa (ILTK) in the Tuscany region of Italy in June 2014. During the visit, His Holiness advised the institute, which already runs many successful Buddhist education programs, to create a center of study that opens Buddhist knowledge up to universities and the general public, including people of different religious traditions. This was the seed for the proposed Academy of Mind Science and Valid Cognition to be created by ILTK.

ILTK was established in 1977 with FPMT founder Lama Yeshe's oversight and blessings. Currently the center offers classes for introductory through advanced students. ILTK's residential study programs draw dedicated practitioners from around the world to study in the two-year *Basic Program* and the seven-year *Masters Program*, in-depth Buddhist study programs developed by FPMT Education Services. Dozens of graduates of these programs have gone on to become FPMT-registered teachers, sharing authentic Dharma in centers around the globe.

The education programs offered at ILTK place particular emphasis on the great treatises of the Nalanda Tradition, which cover, in part, science of the mind and valid cognition. This emphasis on teaching the five treatises to Western students makes ILTK uniquely qualified to help bridge the gap between classical Buddhist knowledge and the Western scientific tradition.

During the 2014 visit, His Holiness had a private meeting with Lama Zopa Rinpoche, who is ILTK's spiritual director, along with the institute's main resident teachers, Geshe Tenzin Tenphel and Geshe Jampa Gelek, and ILTK education program board members. His Holiness gave clear instructions to the assembly to create a center for international studies, focusing on the science of the mind and the secular approach His Holiness advocates around the world.

The course of study will be based on two volumes on Buddhist science that His Holiness had created, which are a compilation of materials from the *Kangyur* and *Tengyur* related to mind science and valid cognition. The Tibetan version of this compendium of Buddhist science was completed in

2014 and translations of the materials into English, Italian and many other languages are forthcoming. Additionally, His Holiness advised that ILTK develop a dialogue and exchange with modern science and other religious traditions, with the emphasis on experience and practice.

When His Holiness returned to Italy during a visit to Rome in December 2014, His Holiness continued to encourage ILTK to move forward with the academy. His Holiness told ILTK director Filippo Scianna, “When you open the academy, I will come.”

“This project means a lot in terms of energy, people, time and money. And ‘mind science’ means thousands of things. There’s a huge amount of possibilities,” Filippo told *Mandala* in May 2016. Those working on the initial project at ILTK consulted with Dr. B. Alan Wallace and others with experience in creating programs suggested by His Holiness about how to move forward.

In one of the first concrete steps towards establishing the academy, in March 2016, ILTK reached an agreement with the Università di Pisa, which is a prestigious university in Italy, and began a series of dialogues between ILTK students and teachers, and faculty from the university. “There are three professors at the Università di Pisa whom we have been fortunate to meet and they are very interested in this project. They are not Buddhist practitioners, but they have open minds and enough knowledge for us to start a dialogue,” Filippo said.

“The very good thing about these dialogues is that the people from the university are coming to learn what the Tibetan Buddhist view is. In these meetings, we didn’t want to just hear one side talk and then the other. We want to go deeper, so we need to learn from each other. We need to understand each other’s models of the mind. And we’re discovering that they are different, but what we are also discovering is that one of the difficulties we face in understanding each other is in understanding the terminology we use. So we are learning each other’s terminology,” Filippo explained. “These are very interesting meetings. They are scheduled for two to three hours, but are running for five to six hours.”



REPRESENTATIVES FROM ILTK AND UNIVERSITÀ DI PISA DISCUSSING BUDDHIST AND WESTERN UNDERSTANDINGS OF MIND SCIENCE, ITALY, MAY 2016. PHOTO COURTESY OF FILIPPO SCIANNA.

Currently six people from ILTK and four from the Università di Pisa are involved in the ongoing dialogues. While these kinds of talks have been happening for many years as part of the Mind and Life Institute – an organization that hosts international conferences, symposia and dialogues inspired by His Holiness that explore the interface between science and Buddhism – Filippo highlighted that this is a first for FPMT in Italy.

He also pointed out that the academy is being designed to reach a large audience. “We want to bring this information to the people. Not to keep the information only with scientists or Dharma teachers, but have it accessible and useful for anyone who is interested. We want to be able to share this information with a wider variety of people and, following His Holiness’ advice, benefit them.”

ILTK continues to consult closely with Lama Zopa Rinpoche as plans begin to unfold for the academy. Filippo emphasized that they keep Rinpoche informed of new developments. He said that eventually they hope to have a teacher from Sera Je be part of the program, but before finding teachers, they need to be very clear on what will be taught and the development of the curriculum.

Filippo said they hope to start developing the curriculum and program later in 2016, but that it is a process that cannot be rushed. Initial plans include both residential and online programs to be taught by qualified Tibetan and Western teachers of philosophy and science, guaranteeing a solid and fruitful bridging of modern scientific research and traditional contemplative studies. They also propose to have a variety of programs focused on contemplative-cognitive practices aimed at different levels of education.

His Holiness is scheduled to be in Milan in October 2016 and Filippo hopes to have an interview with His Holiness to inform him of the progress and, if possible, receive more advice. Most important for ILTK is their principal aim: to fulfill the wishes of His Holiness and create vast benefit for future generations and the world at large. ■

You can find Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa online at www.iitk.org.