

A GIFT OF INSIGHT



HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA AT THE MINDSCIENCE OF REALITY
SYMPOSIUM, ORGANIZED BY ISTITUTO LAMA TZONG KHAPA AND
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PHOTOS BY OLIVIER ADAM.

BUDDHIST MIND SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY

By His Holiness the Dalai Lama

The English translation of the first volume of a new series, *Science and Philosophy in the Indian Buddhist Classics: The Physical World*, was published by Wisdom Publications in November 2017. The series is the English translation of a compilation of material drawn from the Kangyur and Tengyur that discusses the physical world, mind science, and Buddhist philosophy. Described as a heart-project of His Holiness, a committee of Tibetan geshe created this compendium, which was published in Tibetan in 2014 as four volumes. Translations of these volumes are being made into Chinese, English, Italian, and other languages.

We are pleased to be able to share in this issue of *Mandala* an excerpt from His Holiness's introduction to the first volume. In this introduction, His Holiness explains his interest in science and articulates his belief that the wisdom and thinking of the Buddha and the Nalanda masters can be shared in a non-religious way in order to help people of any faith or of no faith develop their inner potential and create a more peaceful world.

MY ENCOUNTER WITH SCIENCE

In my childhood I had a keen interest in playing with mechanical toys. After reaching India in 1959, I developed a strong wish to engage with scientists to help expand my own knowledge of science as well as to explore the question of the relationship between science and religion. The main reason for my confidence in engaging with scientists rested in the Buddha's following statement:

*Monks and scholars, just as you test gold
by burning, cutting, and polishing it,
so too well examine my speech.*

Do not accept it merely out of respect.

The Buddha advises his disciples to carefully analyze when they engage with the meaning of his words, just as a goldsmith

tests the purity of gold through burning, cutting, and rubbing. Only after we have gained conviction through such inquiry, the Buddha explains, is it appropriate to accept the validity of his words. It is not appropriate to believe something simply because one's teacher has taught it. Even with regard to what he himself taught, the Buddha says, we must test its validity for ourselves through experimentation and the use of reason. The testimony of scriptures alone is not sufficient. This profound advice demonstrates the centrality of sound reasoning when it comes to exploring the question of reality.

In Buddhism in general, and for the Nalanda masters of classical India in particular, when it comes to examining the nature of reality, the evidence of direct perception is accorded

greater authority than both reason-based inference and scripture. For if one takes a scripture to be an authority in describing the nature of reality, then that scripture too must first be verified as authoritative by relying on another scriptural testimony, which in turn must be verified by another scripture, and so on, leading to an infinite regress. Furthermore, a scripture-based approach can offer no proof or rebuttals against alternative standpoints proposed by opponents who do not accept the validity of that scripture. Even among scriptures, some can be accepted as literal while some cannot, giving us no reliable standpoints on the nature of reality. It is said that to cite scripture as an authority in the context of inquiring into the nature of reality indicates a misguided intelligence. To do so precludes us from the ranks of those who uphold reason.

In science we find a similar approach. Scientists take experimentation and the logic of mathematics as arbiters of truth when it comes to evaluating the conclusions of their research; they do not ground validity in the authority of some other person.

“ Whatever hypothesis science puts forth must be verified by observation-based experiments, and similarly Buddhism asserts that the evidence of direct perception must ultimately underpin critical inquiry.

This method of critical inquiry, one that draws inferences about the unobservable, such as atomic particles, based on observed facts that are evident to our direct perception, is shared by both Buddhism and contemporary science. Once I saw this shared commitment, it greatly increased my confidence in engaging with modern scientists.

With instruments like microscopes and telescopes and with mathematical calculations, scientists have been able to carefully analyze phenomena from atomic particles to distant planets. What can be observed by the senses is enhanced by means of these instruments, allowing scientists to gain new inferences about various facts. Whatever hypothesis science puts forth must be verified by observation-based experiments, and similarly Buddhism asserts that the evidence of direct perception must ultimately underpin critical inquiry. Thus with respect to the way conclusions are drawn from evidence and reasoning, Buddhism

and science share an important similarity. In Buddhism, however, empirical observation is not confined to the five senses alone; it has a wider meaning, since it includes observations derived from meditation. This meditation-based empirical observation grounded in study and contemplation is also recognized as part of the means of investigating reality, akin to the role scientific method plays in scientific inquiry.

Since my first visit to the West, a trip to Europe in 1973, I have had the opportunity to engage in conversations with great scientists, including the noted twentieth-century philosopher of science Sir Karl Popper, the quantum physicist Carl Friedrich von Weizsäcker, who was the brother of the last West German president and also a colleague of the famed quantum physicist Werner Heisenberg, and David Bohm. Over many years I have had the chance to engage in dialogues with scientists on a range of topics, such as cosmology, neurobiology, evolution, and physics, especially subatomic-particle physics. This latter discipline of particle physics shares methods strikingly similar to those found in Buddhism, such as the Mind Only school's critique of the external material world that reveals that nothing can be found when matter is deconstructed into its constitutive elements, and similarly the statements found in the Middle Way school treatises that nothing can be found when one searches for the real referents behind our concepts and their associated terms. I have also on numerous occasions had dialogues with scientists from the fields of psychology and the science of mind, sharing the perspectives of the Indian tradition in general, which contains techniques of cultivating tranquility and insight, and the Buddhist sources in particular, with its detailed presentations on mind science.

Today we live in an age when the power of science is so pervasive that no culture or society can escape its impact. In a way, there was no choice but for me to learn about science and embrace it with a sense of urgency. I also saw the potential for an emerging discourse on the science of mind. Recognizing this, and wishing to explore how science and its fruits can become a constructive force in the world and serve the basic human drive for happiness, I have engaged in dialogue with scientists for many years. My sincere hope is that these dialogues across cultures and disciplines will inspire new ways to promote both physical and mental well-being and thus serve humanity through a unique interface of contemporary science and mind science. Thus, when I engage in conversations with scientists, such as in the ongoing Mind and Life dialogues, I have the following two aims.

The first concerns expanding the scope of science. Not only is the breadth of the world's knowledge vast, advances are being made year by year that expand human knowledge. Science, however, right from its inception and especially once it began to develop quickly, has been concerned primarily with the world of matter. Unsurprisingly, then, contemporary science focuses on the physical world. Because of this, not much inquiry in science has been made

into the nature of the person—the inquirer—as well as into how memory arises, the nature of happiness and suffering, and the workings of emotion. Science’s advances in the domain of the physical world have been truly impressive. From the perspective of human experience, however, there are dimensions of reality that undoubtedly lie outside the current domain of scientific knowledge. It is of vital importance that the science of mind takes its place among the current fields of human investigation. The brain-based explanations in contemporary science about the different classes of sensory experience will be enriched by incorporating a more expanded and detailed understanding of the mind. So my first goal in my dialogues with scientists is to help make the current field of psychology or mind science more complete.

Not only do Buddhism and science have much to learn from each other, but there is also a great need for a way of knowing that encompasses both body and mind. For as human beings we experience happiness and suffering not only physically but mentally as well. If our goal is to promote human happiness, we have a real opportunity to pursue a new kind of science that explores methods to enhance happiness through the interface of contemporary science with contemplative mind science. It is my belief that, while acknowledging the great contribution that science has made in advancing human knowledge, our ultimate aim should always be to help create a comprehensive approach to understanding our world.

This takes us to the second goal behind my dialogues with scientists—how best to ensure that science serves humanity. As humans, we face two kinds of problems, those that are essentially our own creation and those owing to natural forces. Since the first kind is created by we humans ourselves, its solution must also be within our human capacity. In contemporary human society, we do not lack knowledge, but the persistence of problems that are our own creation clearly demonstrates that we lack effective solutions to these problems. The obstacle to solving these problems is the presence in the human mind of excessive self-centeredness, attachment, anger, greed, discrimination, envy, competitiveness, and so on. Such problems also stem from deficits in our consideration of others, compassion, tolerance, conscientiousness, insight, and so on. Since many of the world’s great religions carry extensive teachings on these values, I have no doubt that such teachings can serve humanity through helping to overcome the human-made problems we face.

The primary purpose of science is also to benefit and serve humanity. Discoveries in science have brought concrete benefits



FROM TOP: AMERICAN ACTOR RICHARD GERE OFFERS A GREETING AT THE MINDSCIENCE OF REALITY SYMPOSIUM; HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA DURING A DIALOGUE SESSION, PISA, ITALY, SEPTEMBER 2017.

in medicine, the environment, commerce, travel, working conditions, and human relationships. There is no doubt that science has brought great benefits when it comes to alleviating suffering at the physical level. However, since mental suffering is connected with our perception and attitude, material progress is not enough. Even in countries where science has flourished greatly, problems like theft and violent disputes persist. As long as the mind remains filled with greed, anger, conceit, envy, and so on, no matter how perfect our material facilities, a life of genuine happiness is not possible. In contrast, if we possess qualities like contentment and loving kindness, we can enjoy a



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life of happiness even without great material facilities. Happiness in life is primarily a function of the state of the mind.

If contemporary society were to pay more attention to the science of mind, and more importantly, if science were to engage more with societal concerns, including fundamental human values, I believe that this could lead to great advancement and novel outcomes. Although science has not concerned itself with the enhancement of ethics and the cultivation of basic human values such as kindness, since science has emerged as a means to serve humanity, it should never be completely divorced from the values that are of great importance to the flourishing of human society.

In Indian philosophical traditions in general, and in Buddhism in particular, one finds many techniques for training the mind, such as the cultivation of tranquility (*shamatha*) and insight (*vipashyana*). These definitely have the potential to make important contributions to contemporary psychology as well as to the field of education. The mental-training techniques developed in these traditions are uniquely potent for alleviating mental suffering and promoting greater inner peace. So my second goal for my dialogues with contemporary scientists is to see how these techniques, as well as their underlying insights, can be best harnessed to the task of transforming our contemporary

education system so that our society does not suffer from a deficit in basic ethics.

Today no aspect of human life is not impacted by science and technology. Science occupies a central place in both our personal and our professional lives. It is critically important that we reflect on the ultimate purpose of science, on what larger consequences and impact science can have in our world. In the

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early part of the twentieth century, many believed that the spread of science would erode faith in religion. Yet today, in the beginning of this twenty-first century, there seems to be a renewed interest in ethics in general and, in particular, the insights of those ancient traditions that contain systematic presentations of mind science and philosophy.

THREE DOMAINS IN THE SUBJECT MATTER OF BUDDHIST TEXTS

In our society, all sorts of immoral acts are committed on a regular basis. We observe murder, theft, cheating, violence against others, exploitation of the weak, misuse of public goods, abuse of alcohol and other addictive substances, and disregard for societal responsibility. We also see people suffer from social isolation, from vengefulness, envy, extreme competitiveness, and anxiety. I see all these as consequences primarily of our neglect of ethics and basic human qualities such as kindness. It is essential for us to pay attention to the means that would help promote basic ethics. The profound interdependence of today's world calls us to create a society permeated by kindness.

What kind of foundation is necessary for this? Since religion-based ethical teachings are grounded in the philosophical views of their respective faith traditions, an ethics contingent on religion alone will exclude those who are not religious. If ethics is contingent on religion, it will be ignored by those who adhere to no religious faith. We do not need to be religious to see the value of kindness; we can discern it by observing our everyday life. Even animals survive by relying on the care of others.

Furthermore, impulses for empathy, kindness, helpfulness, and tolerance seem naturally present in small infants, well before the influence of religious faith begins. Looking to these innate qualities and their associated behaviors as a foundation, I have striven to promote an approach to ethics and basic human values that does not rely on the perspectives of a specific religious tradition. My reason is simply this: We can enjoy a life of peace and happiness without religion. In contrast, if we are divorced from human love and kindness, our very survival is at risk; and even if we do survive, our life becomes devoid of joy and trapped in loneliness.

We can promote ethics on the basis of a specific religion, but prioritizing the perspective of one religion over others is problematic in today's deeply interconnected and global society, which is characterized by a multiplicity of religions and cultures. For an approach to the promotion of ethics to be universal, it must appeal to the fundamental values we share as human beings. If we neglect these basic human values, who can we blame for the negative consequences? Thus, when I speak of secular ethics, I am speaking of these fundamental values that are inherent to human nature, and that are in fact the very foundation of the ethical teachings of the world's religious traditions.

Historically, there have been societies where respect was accorded to the perspectives of both believers and nonbelievers. For example, although the materialist Charvaka school was the object of vehement critiques from other schools in ancient India, it was a custom to refer to the upholders of that viewpoint in honorific terms. Consonant with this ancient tradition, when

India gained its independence in the twentieth century, the country adopted a secular constitution independent of any specific religious faith. This establishment of a secular constitution was not to show disrespect for religion; it was to promote peaceful coexistence among all religious faiths. One of the major forces behind the adoption of this secular constitution was Mahatma Gandhi, himself a deeply religious person. Conscious of this important historical precedent, I feel no apprehension in promoting a secular universal approach to ethics.

My own personal view is that, in general, people should remain within their own traditional religions. Changing faith can lead to difficulties for oneself, and it can also undermine the basis of interreligious harmony. With this belief I have never harbored any intention to make converts or convince followers of other religions to become Buddhists. What is appropriate for believers is to contribute to the common good by practicing those aspects of the teachings that can serve humanity as a whole. Such teachings are definitely present in all the world's main religions.

Within Buddhism, for example, I see two things with the greatest potential to serve everyone, regardless of their faith. One is the presentation on the nature of reality, or "science," as found in the Buddhist treatises, and the second encompasses the methods or techniques for training the mind to alleviate mental suffering and promote greater inner peace. In this regard it is important to differentiate among three distinct domains within the subject matter of the Buddhist sources: the presentations (1) on the natural world, or science, (2) on philosophy, and (3) on religious beliefs and practice. In general, when one speaks of religion or religious practice, it is linked with faith in a source of refuge. In this religious sense, Buddhism, too, is relevant only to Buddhists and has no particular connection to those who follow other religions and those who have no religious faith. Clearly presentations rooted in religious faith are not universally applicable, especially when we recall that among today's world population, as many as a billion human beings identify themselves nonbelievers.

Buddhist philosophy contains aspects, such as the principle of dependent origination, which can be relevant and beneficial even to those outside the Buddhist faith. This philosophy of dependent origination can of course conflict with standpoints that espouse a belief in a self-arisen absolute being or an eternal soul, but for others, this philosophy can help expand their outlook and enable them to see things in life from multiple angles, which prevents the narrow fixation that blames everything on a single cause or condition. I see great benefit in extracting the scientific and philosophical explorations found in Buddhist texts and presenting them independently of the strictly religious

teachings. This allows someone who is not Buddhist to learn about the Buddhist scientific explorations of reality as well as Buddhist philosophical insights. It also gives many people the

ON THIS COMPENDIUM OF BUDDHIST SCIENCE AND PHILOSOPHY

The teachings of the Buddha are so vast that the Buddhist tradition speaks of 84,000 heaps of Dharma. Based on their subject matter as well as their forms, they are classified into twelve or nine branches of excellent teaching. When condensed, these classes are subsumed within the three baskets of the canon. Unlike the world's other major religions, the Buddhist tradition's canons contain an extremely large number of texts. Even in the case of the part translated into Tibetan, there are more than five thousand individual texts in over 320 large volumes. The size of the collection means that it would be difficult for a person to read the entire collection even once. So a tradition emerged, from the period of the trailblazers, to extract the essential points from this vast body of scripture and present them in accord with the interests and capacities of the aspirants, in accessible formats such as compendiums and manuals. For example, Nagarjuna composed the *Compendium of Sutras*; Shantideva too composed a compendium of sutras as well as the *Compendium of Training*; the

opportunity to learn how Buddhist traditions have developed their worldview and their philosophical outlook on the ultimate nature of reality.

glorious Atisha too composed the *Extensive Compendium of Sutras* (*Mahasutrasamuccaya*); and the trailblazer Asanga composed his *Compendium of Abhidharma*. Similarly, Dignaga wrote his *Compendium on Logic and Epistemology* (*Pramanasamuccaya*), bringing together the essential points of numerous works he had authored previously, such as his *Analyses* and his short verse texts. All of these various compendiums proved to be of tremendous benefit to subsequent students of Buddhism. ...

In conclusion, I would like to share my hope that these volumes on the presentations on the nature of reality and their associated philosophical concepts from the Buddhist sources will make an important contribution to our collective human knowledge by offering the gift of a new set of insights. I pray that these volumes become a source of great benefit to many people.

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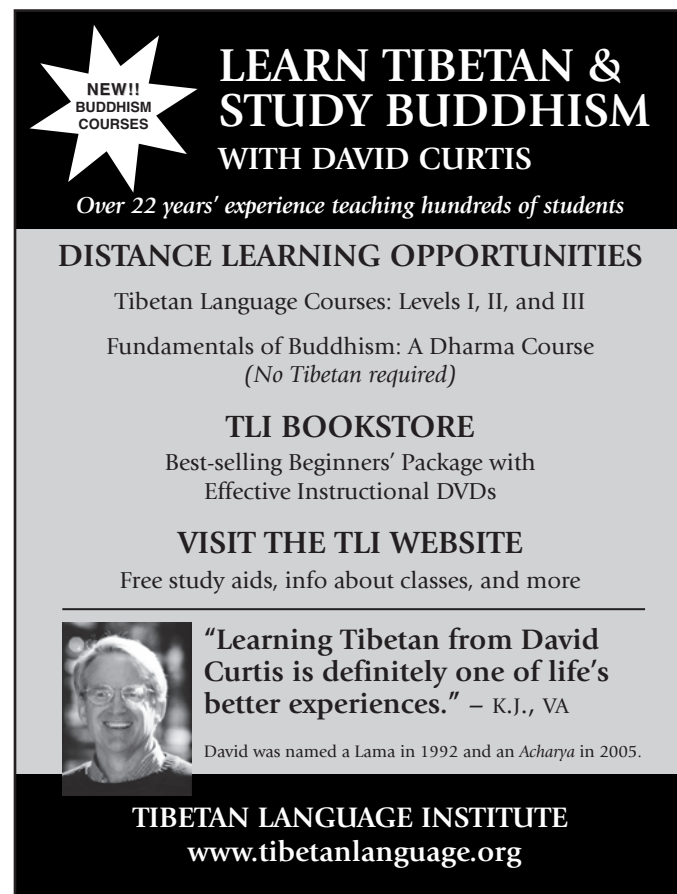
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