

ANCIENT INDIAN WISDOM FOR THE MODERN WORLD:

An Update on Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa's Academy of Mind Science and Valid Cognition



HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA DURING A PUBLIC TALK IN PIAZZA DEI CAVALIERI, PISA, ITALY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2017. PHOTO BY OLIVIER ADAM.

In 2014, His Holiness the Dalai Lama advised Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa (ILTK), the FPMT center in Pomaia, Italy, to create an academy focused on Buddhist mind science. This September, ILTK representatives had the opportunity to report to His Holiness, during a visit to Pisa, on their progress toward creating the Academy of Mind Science and Valid Cognition. Here's an update on His Holiness's visit and the institute's activities.

Established in 1977 with Lama Yeshe's oversight and blessings, Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa has become a center for Buddhist study, hosting introductory to in-depth study programs, including FPMT Education Services' *Basic Program* and *Masters Program*.

During a June 2014 visit to the institute, His Holiness the Dalai Lama had a private meeting with Lama Zopa Rinpoche, who is ILTK's spiritual director; Geshe Tenzin Tenphel and Geshe Jampa Gelek, the institute's resident geshe; and ILTK education program board members. His Holiness gave clear instructions to the assembly to develop an international center of study devoted to the dissemination of the mind science and philosophy of the ancient Indian Nalanda tradition and to offer secular programs at both the university level and for the general public.

In February 2016, ILTK signed an agreement with the Università di Pisa, which is a prestigious university located

nearby, creating the framework for the development of research, training, and programs based on complementary approaches to the study of the mind from the perspective of Western science and the ancient Indian tradition. As a first step in this agreement, ILTK students and teachers joined with faculty from the university in a series of dialogues.

In December 2016, representatives from ILTK and the university traveled to Drepung Monastery in South India to invite His Holiness to participate in the jointly organized Mindscience of Reality Symposium, which took place September 20-21, 2017, in Pisa. Three panel discussions comprised the symposium, covering the topics of mind science and quantum physics, mind science versus neuroscience, and mind science in philosophy. Preceding the symposium, His Holiness gave a talk in a public square in Pisa, attended by students and citizens. The

mayor of Pisa welcomed His Holiness and said that he would like Pisa to be known as the city of the science of the mind.

Between symposium sessions, His Holiness had a private audience with the ILTK mind science academy organizers. Ven. Connie Miller, who serves as the education coordinator at ILTK, shared with His Holiness a list of their accomplishments on the path toward creating the academy. They include the creation, in collaboration with the Università di Pisa, of a master's degree in neuroscience, mindfulness, and contemplative practice as well as the development of programs for the general public that embody His Holiness's approach to inter-disciplinary dialogue, and the creation of trainings for teachers of meditation and ethics.

His Holiness was updated on the translation into Italian of the multi-volume compendium of mind science and valid cognition, a collection of materials from the Tibetan Buddhist canon that cover topics of science, the mind, and Buddhist philosophy. (See page 32 for His Holiness's introduction to the English translation.) His Holiness indicated in the 2014 meeting that these volumes should serve as foundational texts for the academy. Fabrizio Pallotti, a long-time student and translator for His Holiness who was at the meeting, has completed the Italian translation of the first volume and is working on the second. He reported that ways are being developed to insert the Italian translation materials into the current university curriculum. Also, a new publishing house has been established to publish these Italian translations.

Filippo Scianna, director of ILTK, was also at the meeting with His Holiness. "It was a great opportunity to explain what we have done for the mind science academy over the last three years," he told *Mandala*. "Then His Holiness talked to us, emphasizing that since we are in a non-Buddhist country, we have to offer to the people here a secular way for them to improve the quality of their lives."

His Holiness explained to the group that the ancient Indian tradition of the Nalanda masters offers timeless instruction in topics that he considers to be academic and non-religious. These topics, such as the nature of reality, logic and reasoning, the mind and mental factors, His Holiness said, can help people transform their minds and develop their inner qualities through methods grounded in analysis and wisdom, not faith. The objective is to better understand how the mind works and through that be able to tackle the negative emotions. Throughout his half-hour talk to the group, His Holiness

emphasized the importance of a non-sectarian approach and that the trainings, programs, and materials should be appropriate to people of any faith.

During the mind science symposium, Paolo Mancarella, the rector of the Università di Pisa, awarded His Holiness an honorary master's degree in clinical and health psychology. "It was the first time for His Holiness to receive this kind of degree," Filippo said. "It was a great moment. And the rector was very touched by meeting His Holiness and is very supportive of our work."

Looking ahead, Filippo said, "From our side, it is very important to continue the relationship with the university for the future of the academy and for us to further develop this exchange of knowledge. Having courses inside the university as part of the master's degree in neuroscience, mindfulness, and contemplative practice, and making it possible for students to study the ancient Indian science of the mind—the philosophy and psychology—it's so beneficial."

As plans unfold, the institute's two resident geshe as well as other ILTK teaching staff will become more involved in offering instruction at the university. Filippo added that they are receiving much outside interest in the development of the mind science academy, but the main focus right now is to further develop organizationally.

For more information on Istituto Lama Tzong Khapa, please visit their website: www.iltk.org/en/.



REPRESENTATIVES FROM ISTITUTO LAMA TZONG KHAPA AND UNIVERSITÀ DI PISA MEETING WITH HIS HOLINESS, DREPUNG MONASTERY, INDIA, DECEMBER 2016. PHOTO COURTESY OF FILIPPO SCIANNA.