

Dear friends,

I would like to draw your attention to a brilliant talk by Khandro Tseringma Rinpoche entitled “A Conversation about Material and Buddhist Science.” I hope all of you will find the time to listen to this 2-hour analysis of the interface between modern science and Buddhism, including a critique of the Buddhism and science conferences in Dharamsala that she has attended over the years. One crucial point she makes (at 50:00) is that during these meetings, while the Western scientists are given plenty of time to share their insights, His Holiness’s role is reduced to one of a “respondent,” who has the opportunity to ask questions of the scientists, but isn’t given much of an opportunity to share his own insights. Given his vast knowledge and experience of Buddhism as a whole, and specifically the Nalanda Tradition, this was a precious opportunity that was lost.

Looking to the future of dialogues and collaboration between scientists and Buddhists, she emphasizes the importance of including individual participants who understand the insights and perspectives of both science and Buddhism. Noting how rare such people are, she says it’s important to invite people to such meetings who are knowledgeable in both fields. She adds that it is crucial to invite contemplatives who can speak from experience about the subtle nature of the mind, specifically about aspects of the mind that do not depend on the brain. This is especially important due to the superiority of contemplative knowledge over material science through knowing subtle dimensions of the mind, which transcends what can be known by studying the brain (1:00:00).

Another point she makes, often remarked by H.H. the Dalai Lama, is not to succumb to blind faith, either that of religious believers or that of scientists who believe that if they can’t perceive or measure something, it doesn’t exist. She further emphasizes (1:25:00) aspects of consciousness that remain unknown to modern science, such as the different dimensions of mental consciousness, including the substrate consciousness; what happens at death; how we came into this life; and how children of the same parents can be so different. In short, in contrast to many of the Buddhism-science meetings that have taken place thus far, she says that dialogue between science and Buddhism should be focused on the nature of mental consciousness and on first-person experience of joy and sorrow.

Secondly, I invite you to listen to the two talks I gave on April 4th and April 18th, on “Believers, Contemplatives, and the Future of Human Civilization.” These lectures, which focus on the cultivation of “cognitive intelligence” (the fourth of six kinds of intelligence), are to be regarded as a response to Khandrola’s provocative talk. I contextualize this theme thoroughly within the 21st century by critiquing the disastrous consequences on global mental health due to scientific materialism’s reduction of mental diseases to brain disorders. This delusion, which has been utterly discredited by scientific studies, is derivative of the broader, materialistic belief that the mind is nothing more than a function of the brain. While science has enriched our lives in many ways, it has also produced a myriad of weapons of mass destruction, and the morally irresponsible use of science and technology is wreaking havoc on the natural environment, wantonly destroying wildlife and imperiling human civilization.

As a response to Khandro la’s closing emphasis on first-person experience of joy and sorrow, I then turn to the *Kālāma Sutta*, in which the Buddha encourages his listeners to be skeptical of sectarian, divisive claims to truth, and to rather focus on their personal experience of

the three poisons—attachment, hatred, and delusion—as the roots of mental distress and unethical behavior. Core to the whole of his teaching is identifying through one’s own experience the true causes of both joy and sorrow, of ethical and unethical conduct, and by so doing, cultivate wholesome mental processes, while counteracting unwholesome ones. In our Center for Contemplative Research we are following these sacred teachings, seeking to realize our core mission: Fathom the Mind. Heal the World.

Wishing you all well,

Alan