

PRESS RELEASE

Subject: International Conference on Cosmology and Consciousness, Dharamsala, 16-18 December

Date: 5 December 2011

Leading international scientists join Buddhist philosophers to discuss such intriguing questions as life after death, the possibility of extraterrestrial life, and the nature of consciousness at a conference in Dharamsala later this month.

The three-day meeting, titled ‘Cosmology and Consciousness – a Dialogue between Buddhist Scholars and Scientists on Mind and Matter’, will promote the integration of spiritual values and scientific investigations.

The conference will see presentations from top Indian and Western scientists and senior Tibetan Buddhist scholars. The event is an initiative of the Science for Monks program under the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, which has taught science to Tibetan monks since 2001 under the inspiration of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

Conference partners include the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives, and the Exploratorium, a science museum in San Francisco, USA. The event is made possible by a grant from the John Templeton Foundation and the ongoing support of the Sager Family Foundation.

“It is not only the vision of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, but the need of the time for Tibetans, and particularly Tibetan Buddhist monastics, to become conversant with modern science,” says Geshe Lhakdor, Director of the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives. “Monastics studying modern science is a historic step in the history of monastic education and Tibetan Buddhism. Through becoming well-versed in traditional philosophical studies and modern science, it is our hope that monks and nuns can make a significant contribution to the betterment of the physical and mental health of people everywhere.”

The conference will be held at the Tibetan Children’s Village School, Upper Dharamsala, from 16 to 18 December, 9am to 5pm.

Themes under discussion will be The Nature of Mind and Consciousness, Life and Consciousness in the Universe, Limits of Knowledge and Knowing, Mind, Awareness, and Behavior, and Serving Humanity. Participants will discuss how best to advance investigations at the intersection of science and spirituality.

“As a museum dedicated to science, art, and human perception, the Exploratorium has a broad view of learning,” says Dr Paul Doherty, Senior Scientist at the Exploratorium, who will deliver a paper titled ‘The Boundaries of Science’. “This conference is bringing together individuals from different learning traditions. Thinking and questioning the world from different perspectives mutually enriches our ways of explaining the world we experience.”

The conference opens up the dialogue to the monastic community in an unprecedented way. In addition to the presenters, eighteen Tibetan scholars from thirteen monasteries and nunneries are leading the development of the panel discussions and will be engaged in the dialogue with scientist for the first time. The conference is preceded by a four-week workshop aimed at engaging these eighteen Tibetan monastic scholars with modern science.

“For over 10 years, Science for Monks has brought science to select groups of scholarly Tibetan Buddhist monastics and developed science leadership within the monastic community,” says Dr Bryce E Johnson, Project Manager of Science for Monks and Staff Scientist at the Exploratorium. “Our workshops, 15 of them so far, have engaged the monastics in scientific inquires into the nature of matter and mental phenomena. This conference provides a new opportunity for the cross-fertilization of ideas, and new relationships between scientists and Tibetan scholars. The conference and workshop will position a new cadre of monastics to support and grow the dialogue between Buddhism and modern science.”

The conference is part of a larger set of initiatives spearheaded by the Library that include the Sager Science Leadership Institute (also part of the Science for Monks program), and the Emory-Tibet Science Initiative a partnership between the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives and Emory University.

Conference presenters –

Indian:

Dr Sisir Roy, Indian Statistical Institute

Dr Rajesh Kasturirangan, Indian Institute of Science

Tibetan:

Khen Rinpoche Geshe Jangchup Choeden, Gaden Shartse Monastery

Geshe Lobsang Tenzin, Emory University

Geshe Nyima Tashi, Sera Monastery

Dr Pema Dorjee, Tibetan Medical Institute

Western:

Dr Bruce Greyson, University of Virginia

Dr Chris Impey, University of Arizona

Dr David Presti, University of California

Dr Paul Doherty, Exploratorium

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