

EAST AND WEST

Knowing of the Dalai Lama's interest in gadgets, I decided to begin our first dialogue by presenting the Dalai Lama with a small tool, which contained a knife, a screwdriver, tweezers, scissors, and other devices. Many times in the first session, the Dalai Lama picked the tool up, apparently sorely tempted to play with it, but each time he restrained himself. Though it was not my intention, the gadget seemed later to represent a theme of our conversation: the Dalai Lama's openness to engaging with the scientist's tools and my interest in engaging with Buddhism's tools.

EKMAN: I have a small gift for you.

DALAI LAMA: Thank you. How kind.

EKMAN: When I showed this gadget to Jinpa before you came in, he asked me to tell you not to put this in your carry-on bag. Otherwise, they will take it away.

DALAI LAMA: One time, in Japan, I had a tweezer; it was attached to a knife. At the airport, they took it away. As soon as I arrived I made sure that this thing was being sent to me. (*Everyone laughs.*) Thank you much.

TWO TRADITIONS

EKMAN: I am very grateful for the time you are giving for this series of conversations. My hope is that by bringing to bear our two very different intellectual traditions—Buddhism and Western Psychology—we will spark in each other ideas we have not already had, hopefully ideas that might be of benefit in understanding emotion and compassion.

You have written that we must train our minds to observe. Would you agree that both how we train our minds and how we can motivate people to want to undertake such training can be addressed scientifically?

DALAI LAMA: (*Translated.*) No one denies the existence of emotion, feeling, or mind. In daily life, we have emotion; it is *there*. Science and technology are concerned, basically, with physical comfort. When it comes to difficulties or problems with emotions, then, technology cannot do much. I think injection, some drugs, to reduce your anxiety, these are temporary. So now the time has come to explore the trouble, which is faced by our emotional mind, the method or means to tackle this wicked mischievous nature of mind.

EKMAN: Television teaches everyone the message, “If I become rich, if I become famous, I’ll be very happy.” Very few people find out that that is untrue because most people do not get rich. (*Dalai Lama laughs.*)

How can we reach people who want happiness but have been misled by television to think the path to it involves fame and riches and power? How do we reach them with the message that this is a false path? Can you think of any way that scientists can help correct this misperception?

DALAI LAMA: For the last almost a hundred years, the whole concept of material development was that it would solve all our problems. The real problem is poverty. But we didn’t realize that solving poverty doesn’t provide inner peace. I can give one

example—the Chinese case. I think Deng Xiaoping felt once people are rich, then all problems reduce. He even extend[ed] it that, no matter what method you adopt, the goal, so long you get rich, okay. In the seventies, he started, or developed, a movement. He said, It doesn't matter what color the cat is as long as it catches mice. So, the implication, even through the wrong method [capitalism], you can get rich. (*Laughs.*) So now today in China, they are getting richer—and more corruption. Poor people suffer more. And rich people, many are not happy.

EKMAN: Yes.

DALAI LAMA: For many people simply, they think if you are rich, you will have plenty of money and then they suppose all their problems are solved. Or if you have power, then no problem. That is not the case. Rich people, powerful people, very famous people have been mentally very unhappy. It is obvious. Hatred and other emotions create more problems.

EKMAN: Yes.

DALAI LAMA: In the eighteenth century, nineteenth century, the early part of the twentieth century, no government says what is the importance of peace of mind. Only say: economy, economy, economy. Why? Because poverty is urgent. So, therefore, people everywhere, putting every effort, including our education, into eliminating poverty. No?

EKMAN: Yes.

DALAI LAMA: Also, on the television, all you see, is about improvement of the poverty: to improve the economy, prosperity. But, you see, people, at least those people, who are no longer much worried about their physical needs, now they are experiencing problems, but mainly at the mental level. That mental unrest brings a lot of suffering on humanity. Therefore, now we have to think or explore another field, and that is mental health. We cannot change mental health overnight.

Scientists have focused on what is relevant to material welfare. Now [scientists] begin to realize, there is possibility, to develop

proper, healthy mental attitudes, which [are of] benefit when we are facing problems. You, as a scientist, you do that—and you should do that.

SCIENCE, RELIGION, AND TRUTH

DALAI LAMA: In the past, the circumstances were such that science was applied toward material development, not toward mental things. In the West, traditionally, religion means Christianity, Judaism, and Islam. Those are traditions of, mainly, faith. There is not much emphasis on investigation. Science demands trying to find the reality through investigation, through experiments. According to that, we can say that science has nothing to do with religious faith.

EKMAN: No, it does not.

DALAI LAMA: Clearly. But, that does not mean, of every person who is in the world of science, that a scientist is *necessarily* a nonbeliever.

EKMAN: Yes. That is true.

DALAI LAMA: Science, in the past, was mainly involved with material development. So, you see, in that domain, science has nothing to do with religious faith.

EKMAN: Yes. Yes.

DALAI LAMA: In individual cases, some scientists are very religious-minded. But their profession, their professional field, has nothing to do with religion. Now, I think, society is now facing a new crisis, or a new problem; it is mainly an emotional problem. Therefore, science begins to deal with that. So modern science—their exploration or their sort of interest or their concern not only matters, but also emotions. I think that is the way. Is it not?

EKMAN: Yes. That is a very accurate way of putting it. With the works of Wilhelm Wundt, Sigmund Freud, and Charles Darwin at the end of the nineteenth century, psychology began. That

was the beginning attempt to deal with the mind, but we had science before then. And even in the twentieth century, the preponderance of science dealt with the material. For a hundred years, a question was largely ignored in academic research: How can we achieve happiness? There has not been much progress.

Scientists are now beginning to look outside of Western thinking to see what they could learn and study scientifically that might be relevant. A growing number of scientists are interested in what we can learn from Buddhist thinking on this.

DALAI LAMA: Now, “soft” science and “hard” science—what is the demarcation?

EKMAN: It used to be a clearer demarcation. “Hard” sciences were the natural and biological sciences. “Soft” sciences were the social and behavioral sciences. Now cognitive neuroscience crosses the two, because it is using some very biological measures—brain measures, blood chemistry measures—to look at psychological phenomena.

I measure the movement of the facial muscles—you cannot get harder science—but I do it to study emotions. We cannot see an emotion; the facial movement is just a display, but we can learn a lot if we can measure that display precisely. Many scientists today, certainly in cognitive neuroscience, and even in fields like emotion and memory in psychology, are using very objective methods, some of them biological, some of them not.

There is the greatest disregard among some scientists for findings on the basis of what people tell you in a questionnaire. I think what people tell you is interesting; it may not be what they really think, or what they know may only be part of what they actually are and do, so it has limits, but it is not without merit. Studies that only use questionnaires are considered to be very “soft.”

DALAI LAMA: And Darwin?

EKMAN: Psychology came out of philosophy. I myself consider Darwin to have been the first writer in psychology, in his book on the expression of emotions, in 1872. For large parts of psychology, I think it is very hard to determine, Is it biological or

is it psychological? They are just two sides of the same coin. Everything is both; the questions are in what way, in which phenomena does each play their role.

DALAI LAMA: In the West, there is not much of a tradition of investigation in religion. Whereas, in the nontraditional religions, in India, particularly in Buddhism, it was different—they experimented or investigated in the traditions.

The reality is that science is not all antireligious. Simply, is it trying to know the reality, find out the reality through investigation, through experiment? Not by faith. That is not antireligion. Even the pope—the new pope is a very intelligent person, a very wonderful person—emphasizes that faith and reason must go together. Actually, he mentions he started this idea with some of his followers: If people have faith without reason, then people would not get the feeling of relevance of religion to their life, so reason must be there.

But only reason, no faith, like with some scientists—they are great scientists, but mentally unhappy. (*Laughs.*) So faith also is necessary.* That is the way; I think that way. So, even Christians are now compelled to realize the importance of reason. As far as Buddhism is concerned, there is no problem. We have the courage to say, True investigation is something. If our findings—through investigations, through experimentation—contradict Buddhist ideas, then we have the liberty to reject the old ideas. That is the Buddha's own words.

Chinese Communists say that Tibetan Buddhism, because there is a lack of science knowledge—“those foolish Tibetans, they were full of blind faith or superstition.” So that is their attitude in the early sixties, seventies, eighties. I think that from the beginning they feel that not recognizing Buddhism encourages an investigative attitude and rejection of dogma.

* Neuroscientist Clifford Saron, of the University of California-Davis Center for Mind and Brain, commented, “Scientists have faith in their method and hypothesis—it's full of faith—just not necessarily faith in God.”

On one occasion, I was in Moscow meeting with some scientists. I think that was my first visit or my second visit. So, at that time the Marxists or Communist ideology was still fresh. Some scientists believe or feel science is something that must be anti-religion, but that is not the case. Science is only the method to investigate what is the reality. Religious matters deal mainly with the subjective side.

EKMAN: The motivation of most scientists and physicians, at least when they start, and for many it remains, is to relieve suffering. Some would say they are motivated religiously.

DALAI LAMA: Religiously?

EKMAN: They want to do good.

DALAI LAMA: Oh, yes.

EKMAN: They want to relieve suffering.

DALAI LAMA: Oh—compassion.

EKMAN: Yes.

DALAI LAMA: Their sense of concern. About suffering. That's right. I think that is in every human activity, all human actions, activities. I think human beings, everyone, do not want suffering and do not want to see pain.

EKMAN: Virtually everyone does not want to suffer themselves.

Although science is an investigatory method, there are very few scientists whose motivation is not to do good in the world, which gives them some overlap with religious motivations. Whether they believe in a Creator does not really matter. In the Jewish religion, if you do service to your community, you are a religious Jew. You need not believe in a Creator. It depends on the religion. In my view, most good scientists are motivated by the spiritual value of wanting to be of service, to be of help, in the world.

DALAI LAMA: There are now some institutions, some schools, some people, people dealing with education, quite a number now, showing interest about how to cultivate the awareness of the importance of compassion. Hopefully, some media people eventually may take interest.

We cannot change all our lives or worldviews. Our message, our voice, is very small. Very small! The other is very shiny! But as time goes by, when I talk about this inner value in the West, people want this very strong, whereas in India, they want it not that much. In Africa, I think it is very difficult; the people's main concern is if there is food or shelter—these things. So why the interest in the West? Because as far as material comfort is concerned, this is already achieved, yet they are not happy. So now, through their own experience, they are looking for an alternative.

EKMAN: In *The Threepenny Opera*, the German playwright Bertolt Brecht wrote, "First feed the face. Then, tell right from wrong." The next line is, "Even honest men may act like sinners unless they've had their customary dinners."

DALAI LAMA: (*Chuckles.*) Very good.

THE FILTER OF MOODS

EKMAN: Before we go much further, I think it is important to consider how emotions differ from moods. Unless we do so, we may not always know whether we are talking about emotions or moods, as they are easily confused. I recall seven years ago, when I first met you and described this distinction, you told me it did not exist in the Tibetan view of mental states, and that you found it very useful. As I describe it in more detail, I hope you will continue to find it of interest.

I believe moods get us into a lot of trouble, even more so than some of our emotions. One difference between emotions and moods is a person's understanding of what triggers each of them. He or she may not know what triggers an emotion when it first begins, but afterward can almost always easily figure it out. The person may not think he or she should have become angry, but knows, at least afterward, what set it off. By contrast, when some-