

PRESS RELEASE

Subject: International Conference on Knowing and Action (Cosmology and Consciousness II), Songtsen Library, Dehradun, 15-17 November, 2013

The three-day meeting, titled ‘Cosmology and Consciousness II – Knowing and Action’, will promote the integration of spiritual values and scientific investigations. The conference will see presentations and panel discussions 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.

The public conference will be held at the Songtsen Library, Dehradun, from 15 to 17 November, 9am to 5pm. Themes under discussion will be How Do We Know, How Do We Extend Our Knowing, and How Do We Know How to Act? Participants from diverse backgrounds and experiences will discuss how best to advance investigations at the intersection of science and spirituality. The conference is an exploration of how science, technology and wisdom come together to address the challenges of the future, and specifically the ethical issues that have emerged in the field of neuroscience.

“Science is a powerful way of knowing about the natural world, but the scientific perspective is enriched by insights from the Buddhist tradition,” says Dr Chris Impey who will deliver a paper titled ‘How We Know What We Know’.

“I trust that the purpose of both science and Buddhism is to enrich and ennoble life,” says Geshe Lhakdor, Director of the Library of Tibetan Works and Archives. “This is possible only if the truth and wisdom obtained from them are lived and practiced. How can we do this is the real issue at hand. This is much more than something to just talk about.”

“Science can move at an incredible speed,” says Eric Chudler, Executive Director, Center for Sensorimotor Neural Engineering, University of Washington, who will deliver a paper titled ‘Neurotechnology: Promises and Perils’. “Sometimes our technical ability to do something progresses without asking questions about how or even should we proceed down a particular scientific pathway.”

“Scientific and technological progress is changing what it means to be human, a topic that traditionally belongs to the world of contemplative inquiry.” say Rajesh Kasturirangan, Professor at National Institute for Advanced Studies, who will deliver a paper titled ‘Dharmanauts: Contemplation and Science in the 21st Century’. “In the next few decades, contemplative questions will become mainstream.”

The conference opens up the dialogue to the monastic community in an unprecedented way. In addition to the presenters, 25 Tibetan religious and educational leaders from almost a dozen monasteries and nunneries are guiding 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 25 Tibetan monastic scholars with modern science.

The conference is part of the Science for Monk's Monastic Graduates and Dialogue project funded by Templeton and also 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.

“Cosmology and Consciousness II – Knowing and Action” is the second conference in a four part series made possible by the generous funding of the Templeton Foundation. The first conference: “Cosmology and Consciousness – a Dialogue a Dialogue between Buddhist Scholars and Scientists on Mind and Matter” was held in Dharamsala, India in December, 2011, and was inaugurated by 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.

“Our workshops, seventeen of them so far, have engaged the monastics in scientific inquires into the nature of matter and mental phenomena and trained select groups to be leaders of science education, says Dr Bryce E Johnson, Project Director for Science for Monks, and Staff Scientist at the Exploratorium. “This conference series positions a new cadre of monastics to support and grow the cross-fertilization of ideas between Buddhism and modern science.”

Conference presenters –

Indian: Dr Rajesh Kasturirangan (Indian Institute of Science), Geet Oberoi, (Orkids Foundation), Nishant Seth (Indian Institute of Science)

Tibetan: Geshe Tenpa Phakchok (Drepung Gomang Monastery), Karma Thupten (Library of Tibetan Works and Archives), Geshe Lhakdor (Library of Tibetan Works and Archives), Dr Sonam Dolma (Mentse Khang Institute)

Western: Dr Gaëlle Desbordes (Harvard Medical School), Dr Chris Impey (University of Arizona), Dr Eric Chudler (University of Washington), Bobby Sager (Sager Family Foundation)

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