

Lectio Magistralis
by Tenzin Gyatso, XIV Dalai Lama

I am deeply honoured to have been awarded a Honorary Master's Degree in Clinical and Health Psychology by the University of Pisa. This recognition, coming from one of Europe's most eminent and historic universities, represents a powerful affirmation of my enduring efforts to create a bridge between the insights of the ancient Indian science of the mind and contemporary psychology.

Today, we live at an exciting time when knowledge and educational or therapeutic methods developed in different parts of the world are increasingly embraced as important to our human heritage. They are no longer treated as the proprietary legacy of a specific society or culture. It is from such a perspective that I have endeavoured over the last four decades to initiate a genuine dialogue between the ancient Indian science of the mind and contemporary disciplines of neuroscience, psychology, and clinical research.

Contemporary science emphasizes an objective third-person approach, which involves measurement, quantification, and intersubjective verification. The ancient Indian understanding of the workings of the mind, on the other hand, is based on a first person approach to the disciplined observation and investigation of the observer's own mind.

The long tradition of mental training in Buddhist practice in particular possesses a rich array of techniques, such as the refined application of attention, the strengthening of meta-awareness, the cultivation of self-awareness, and such self-regulation strategies as mindfulness and the management of emotions. Buddhist training also possesses a special category of contemplative practices aimed at tackling emotions, through meditation on such positive values as loving-kindness and compassion.

It is my conviction that a genuine collaboration between contemporary psychological sciences and the ancient Indian science of the mind is possible. It has the potential to make a significant contribution to scientific understanding and the development of useful educational and therapeutic techniques. We are already seeing significant benefits in the clinical field through the integration of science and contemplative practice. The application of mindfulness and practices involving loving-kindness and compassion are particularly effective. Techniques drawn from contemplative traditions are being used to treat such conditions as depression, chronic pain, addiction and post-traumatic stress disorder.

In the field of contemporary science too, with the discovery of brain plasticity and the development of powerful brain imaging tools like Magnetic Resonance Imaging, there is both a conceptual framework, as well as the technology, to observe key features of the human brain in action. This suggests it may be possible to develop a more integrated understanding of the human brain, one that takes account of both third-person objective knowledge as well as first person lived experience. I am happy to note that the Mind&Life Institute, an organization I co-founded with the late Chilean neuroscientist Francisco Varela, has been at the forefront of this new integrated way of approaching science. In bringing together perspectives and insights from multiple disciplines, including those of Buddhist traditions, it has served as a catalyst and convenor in this emerging field.

Many people predict that the twenty-first century will be the time when we really come to understand the way the brain works. If this is true, it will necessarily be the time when we come to understand the workings of the mind better too. I take great satisfaction in having been able to make some contribution to this burgeoning understanding.

As a Buddhist monk I am committed to encouraging harmony among the world's religious

traditions. As a Tibetan I am committed to preserving Tibetan language and culture, the heritage we received from the masters of India's Nalanda University, while also speaking up for the protection of Tibet's natural environment. But essentially, as a human being, I am concerned with encouraging people to be happy – encouraging them to understand that if their minds are upset mere physical comfort will not bring them to peace, but if their minds are at peace even physical pain will not disturb their calm. It is this context that I am also committed to reviving the ancient Indian understanding of the workings of the mind and emotions and making these things better known among interested scientists and educationalists.