

BEYOND
THE
ROBE



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SCIENCE FOR MONKS AND ALL IT REVEALS ABOUT TIBETAN MONKS AND NUNS

By Bobby Sager

With forewords by Robert Thurman and Matthieu Ricard

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Seeing the tremendous importance of science and recognizing its inevitable dominance in the modern world fundamentally changed my attitude to it from curiosity to a kind of urgent engagement. I wanted to understand science because it gave me a new area to explore in my personal quest to understand the nature of reality. I also wanted to learn about it because I recognized in it a compelling way to communicate insights gleaned from my own spiritual tradition. The central question—central for the survival and well-being of our world—is how we can make the wonderful developments of science into something that offers altruistic and compassionate service for the needs of humanity and the other sentient beings with whom we share this earth.

HIS HOLINESS THE DALAI LAMA

The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend personal God and avoid dogma and theology. Covering both the natural and the spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense arising from the experience of all things natural and spiritual as a meaningful unity. Buddhism answers this description. If there is any religion that could respond to the needs of modern science, it would be Buddhism.

ALBERT EINSTEIN

Knowledge speaks, but wisdom listens.

JIMI HENDRIX



Pacific Ocean, 14,000 feet closer to sea level than Tibet.



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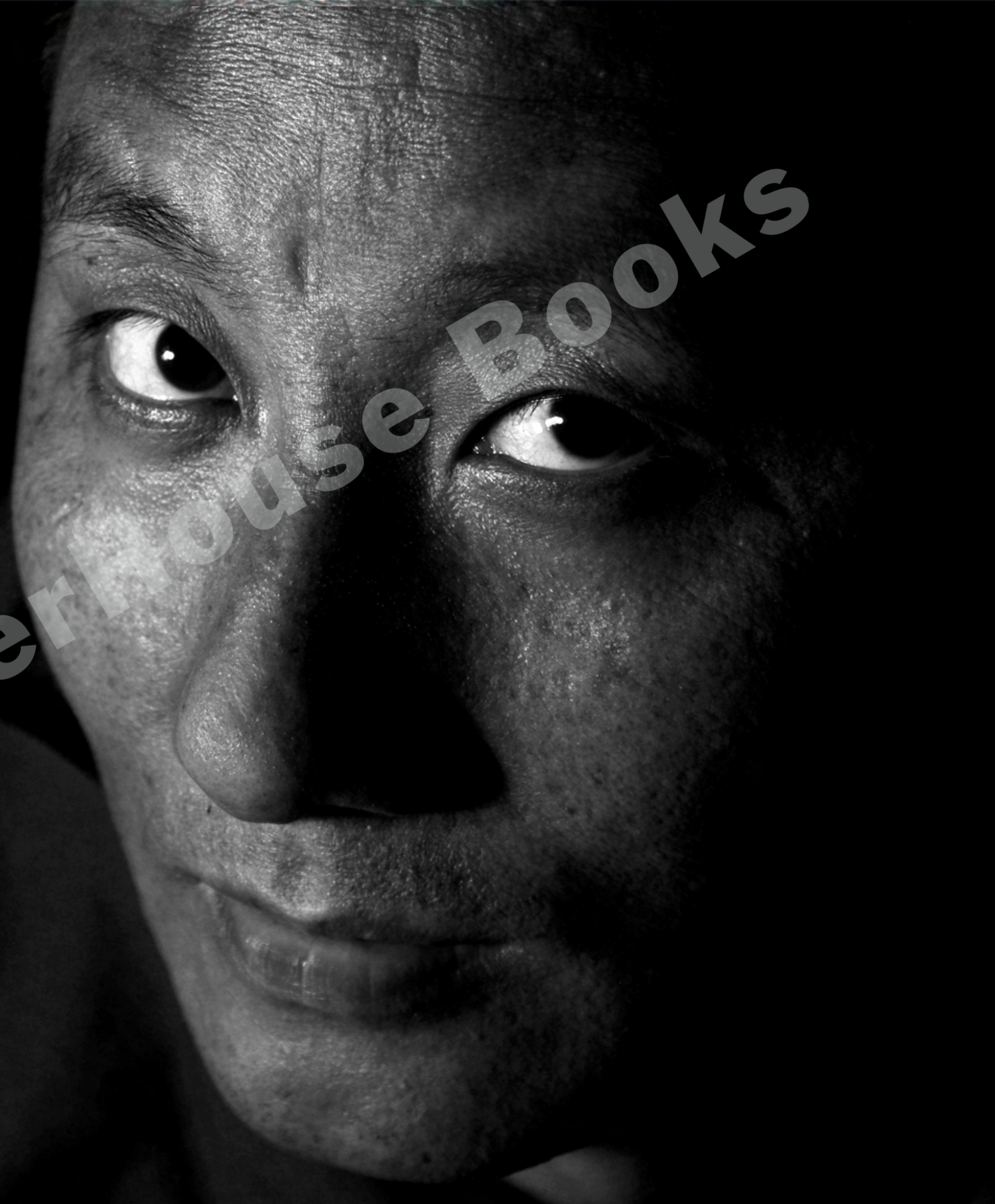
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We are persons whose bodies can be objectively studied according to the impersonal laws of physics but whose minds are subjectively experienced in ways science has not yet been able to fathom. In short, by radically separating science from religion, we are not merely segregating two human institutions; we are fragmenting ourselves as individuals and as a society in ways that lead to deep, unresolved conflicts in terms of our view of the world, our values, and our way of life.

ALAN WALLACE



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Buddhist research is, above all, based on insights perceived through direct life experience, and is not bound by rigid dogma. It is ready to accept any vision of reality that is perceived as authentic. One of its main goals is precisely to bridge the gap between the way things really are and the way they seem to be. The Buddha often put his disciples on their guard against the dangers of blind faith. He said, "Investigate the validity of my teachings as you would examine the purity of gold, rubbing it against a stone, hammering it, melting it. Do not accept my words simply out of respect for me. Accept them when you see that they are true."

MATTHIEU RICARD



AUTHOR'S NOTE

Unfortunately, many young Tibetans don't see the relevance of traditional monastic studies in a 21st-century world. The number of young people joining monastic institutions has hit a historic low. In response, some Tibetan monks have realized the need to create a new model, a "21st-century monk." In fact, they have come to understand that it's essential for the survival of their community.

What China has done in Tibet is very sad. But China's occupation of Tibet has also created an opportunity. Living in a diaspora gives Tibetan monks a much larger global footprint. And part of that footprint is the Science for Monks program.

Our initiative began with a meeting between the Dalai Lama and myself in May 2000. The meeting took place in an almost surreal setting: the The Westin Bonaventure Hotel in downtown Los Angeles. It was a bizarre experience sitting across from the Dalai Lama in his hotel room with his chair next to the minibar.

After polite formalities, I opened the meeting by explaining to His Holiness that I wanted to find a project to work on together. I was willing to consider virtually any proposal. I was surprised at how quickly he responded with the idea of teaching science in the monasteries. His Holiness said he had been looking for financial support for more than a year, but was having difficulty. I thought it was shocking that the Dalai Lama found it hard to raise money for anything, but more importantly, I was amazed by the fact that this would be the first time in the history of Tibetan Buddhism that science would be taught as part of the monastic curriculum.

How is it possible that no one had done it before? It's kind of like when people say that everything that can be invented has been invented. The incredible statistic is that something like 90 percent of all inventions since the beginning of time happened in the last ten years.

Excited by His Holiness's vision, we got right into a real world discussion of the dollars and cents of the initiative. His Holiness emphasized that if it was something I was thinking of doing for just a year or two, I was the wrong partner. I looked into his eyes and told him that I, too, require a long-term commitment from my partners, and we agreed to each contribute half of the funding.

The first Science for Monks workshop I went to with my family Elaine, Tess, and Shane was at Gaden Monastery in South India in 2001. We had arrived at the monastery the night before, feeling sick from the five-hour drive from Goa on winding roads. That's when we discovered the four of us would be sharing a bathroom with 30 monks.







Almost all Tibetans feel highly fortunate to live in what they call a "central" country, where the Buddha Dharma is at the center of life. They preferably make their lives most meaningful by becoming monk or nun, opting out of reproduction and production responsibilities in order to focus full-time on self-transformation for the sake of all beings. Here it must be clear that one becomes a Buddhist renunciate not merely to retreat into silence and prayer in worship of a deity, but to re-educate oneself critically and meditatively from the intellect to the instincts, in order to transcend the self-centered perception and habit of the ordinary human animal, and become a Bodhisattva, a higher being of self-fulfillment through wisdom.

ROBERT THURMAN



DEBATE

The central purposes of Tibetan monastic debates are to defeat misconceptions, to establish a defensible view, and to clear away objections to that view. Debate for the monks of Tibet is not mere academics, but a way of using direct implications from the obvious in order to generate an inference of the non-obvious state of phenomena. The debaters are seeking to understand the nature of reality through careful analysis of the state of existence of ordinary phenomena, the basis of reality. This is the essential purpose for religious debate.

DANIEL PERDUE



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**Science for Monks
and All It Reveals
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and Nuns**

All of the author's proceeds from this book are going to support programs that promote teaching Western science to Tibetan monks and nuns.
For more information, please visit www.scienceformonks.org.

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Essay on pages 95 to 100 is based on a talk given by the Dalai Lama at the annual meeting of the Society for Neuroscience on November 12, 2005 in Washington DC.
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