

Transcript Carl Sagan en de dalai lama, Cornell University, maart 1991

Carl Sagan (CS): 'Dalai Lama. You along with many other world religious leaders have endorsed an appeal by scientists, saying that it is vital that scientists and religious leaders work together, to safeguard the world environment.'

Dalai Lama (DL): 'Basically, we human beings—all sentient beings, including human beings—are like children of the planet. So, no matter how we have the ability—including technology and these things—ultimately we have to go along with natural law. This small planet, as far as we know, the only planet where we human beings can live happily. Therefore, this is our only home. So naturally, the taking care of our own planet is like taking care of our own home, our own house.'

CS: 'Do you believe there is some special responsibility that human beings have to the other animals and plants on the planet?'

DL: 'Certainly, because human beings—at least on this planet—are the most intelligent species of mammal. So, naturally, with more intelligence you have more responsibility.'

CS: 'So let me ask now, if I may, some questions on religion. What happens if the doctrine of a religion—Buddhism let's say—is contradicted by some finding, some discovery—in science, let's say—what does a believer in Buddhism do in that case?'

DL: 'For Buddhists that is not a problem. The Buddha himself made clear that the important thing is your own investigation. You should know the reality, no matter what the scripture says. In case you find a contradiction—opposite of the scriptures' explanation—you should rely on that finding, rather than scripture.'

CS: 'So, that is very much like science?'

DL: 'Yes, that's right. So I think that the basic Buddhist concept is that at the beginning it is worthwhile or better to remain skeptical. Then carry out experiments through external means as well as internal means. If through investigation things become clear and convincing, then it is time to accept or believe. If, through science, there is proof that after death there is no continuity of human mind, of life, then—theoretically speaking—Buddhists will have to accept that.'

CS: 'So what would that do to the doctrine of reincarnation?'

DL: 'Well, I do not think, you see, that with regard to the existence of a continuity of mind or life...'

CS: 'After death?'

DL: 'After death, yes. That concept, I think [has], more [cogent] reasons. Although the acceptance of that kind of theory may not solve all your questions, and may not give you complete satisfaction, still that theory is better than the theory of non-existence. If there is no continuation of life or continuation of being, than the [the question remains]: why did the original cause of all galaxies, including this planet—for instance big bang theory, which is allright if it happened like that, it doesn't matter—happen? Than either you have to accept that things happen accidentally, without a particular cause, which is uncomfortable because a lot of questions remain. Another [explanation], would be a creator. From a Buddhist viewpoint that is also not a sound answer. Why does a creator create these things? More questions would remain.'

CS: 'So, do you believe in God?'

DL: 'God in the sense of some kind of ultimate reality: yes, we accept that. But God in the sense of an almighty creator Buddhists do not accept.'

CS: 'So there's no conceivable finding of science which would make you say that Buddhist doctrine is wrong or that you're no longer a Buddhist?'

DL: 'I think that a scientific finding through careful experiment Buddhists will have to accept at once. No problem. Some scientists—or, some scientifically minded Buddhists as I think I should call them—say that they do not consider Buddhism to be a religion, but rather a science of mind. Sometimes they call Buddhism an inner science. So according to my own experience, as a result of meeting with scientists—in recent years I developed much contacts with scientists, mainly in the field of cosmology, neurobiology, physics, quantum mechanics and, of course psychology—[I find that] in these fields there are many common parallels. I find that from the discussions [that we have held] at length in these fields, as a Buddhist I gained much benefit, learning from their findings. It is very helpful to a Buddhist.'

At the same time, some scientists also show a genuine and keen interest in Buddhist explanations of the concerned subjects. One thing is quite clear: As far as mental sciences are concerned, Buddhism is very highly advanced.'