

## Altruism and Societal Transformation

A Dialogue with Dr. Matthieu Ricard and Acharya Fleet Maull

[0:00:08.5] Acharya Fleet Maull: Hi, Fleet Maull here for Shambhala Mountain Center, and the Science of Meditation Conference. Welcome to day five and we're having a conversation today, I'm very happy to say, with Matthieu Ricard, this day is focused on altruism, compassion and <inaudible 0:00:28.7> practice and I think we're going to focus this conversation primarily around altruism and compassion, we'll see where it goes, so welcome Matthieu.

[0:00:37.5] Matthieu Ricard: Thank you so much, nice to talk to you again.

[0:00:40.8] Acharya Fleet Maull: Great to have you with us today, I'm sure many of our audience are well aware of who you are and your very significant involvement in the world, is best in the world of contemplative spirituality and its application in our world for the benefit of humanity and also your focus on taking care of our others species and animals and the environment and so forth, but I'm just going to mention a few things. Matthieu was born in France and the son of a quite well-known French philosopher, Jean-Francois Revel and his mother was an artist as well. And he grew up among the kind of artistic and intellectual circles in Paris and Matthieu is quite an interesting combination of a university trained scientist as well as being a long time contemplative and monastic and a social transformation and peace activist in many ways. Matthieu earned his PhD in cell genetics at the Pasteur Institute, studied under nobel laureate Francois Jacob and then in the late sixties Matthieu travelled to India and met many of the spiritual teachers of the Himalayan region, especially masters from Tibet, and then after completing his doctorate he returned to India and Nepal and Tibet and decided to forgo his academic career and scientific career and embrace the contemplative life and the monastic life and a life of study and training in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition completely, but he's emerged out of that life of deep deep contemplative practice and training to become an itinerant teacher and speaker on the world stage with influences in many areas, was involved in the Mind and Life Institute for a long time, bringing together the Dalai Lama with leading scientists to explore the science of mindfulness, the science of compassion, the science of altruism, has written many books, has a TED talk that's been used by millions, have been the subject of research yourself and been hooked up to all the instruments and had your brain scanned and so forth in different meditative states and had written many books and the most recent book is about protecting animals, and so really a seminal figure in our current evolution of spirituality and mindfulness and meditation and science and philosophy and all of our shared concerns about the environment and the sustainability of life itself, so it's great to be here with you today Matthieu.

[0:03:48.6] Matthieu Ricard: Thank you.

[0:03:52.7] Acharya Fleet Maull: So, I think I'd like to start, you know actually when I was doing my first attempt at doing my PhD dissertation, I'm now involved in my second attempt, my first attempt was quite a long time ago, and I was doing my research, my initial research around altruism and at that time I read all the papers on altruism, research files but this was back around, this was in the nineteen nineties and a lot has happened since then, but it was quite controversial in that research at that time and that was an open question as to whether there such a thing as true altruism or whether there was always some sense of self-interest involved. And then of course even today in human society there's a lot of, I think probably a lot of people believe an culturally there's a lot of sense in beings are kind of innately selfish, and yet there are other views where we are innately harbouring and innately altruistic, so I'm just curious as to your thoughts on that. Yeah, maybe we can start there with what's the ground in terms of where do we start as human beings and what our intentions really are?

[0:05:06.8] Matthieu Ricard: Citing all those extreme views, you cannot hold to investigation, so we are neither a hundred percent you know the deep measure would be a hundred percent altruistic or a hundred percent selfish, just we are as human being a mixture, the point is, to refute this idea it was prevalent in western philosophy and in psychology the first half of the twentieth century that it's called a psychological egoism, but actually it means universal selfishness, that whatever beneficial behaviour you can witness, if you are smart enough to go deep, you will find a selfish motive. So just to make it very clear, there's not a single psychological, sociological proper study that ever comported that hypothesis, as someone put it, this is arm chair science, there's nothing saying that. So the question was, yeah we know people behave sometime in harmful ways or beneficial ways to others, but can we ascertain their motivation, not just look at their behaviour, because you could be very very kind for several years to an old grandmother when the only hope is to get an inheritance there, so it would be beneficial for that person for the time, but your motive is selfish. So that's the work of pioneers like Daniel Benson for instance, who spent basically twenty, twenty five years going to increasingly refine experimental sort of situations created in the lab in order to be able to precisely <inaudible 0:07:08.5> the selfish explanation for our behaviour that looks altruistic from the outside. So he could tease out by offering alternative choice, looking at the behaviour, so something that could be either refuted or sort of supported by the results and what he concluded after twenty five years of research is that we have many doubts and unless any new explanation which the people who were somehow doubtful about his work that on proposing all those were sort of dismissed by, sort of experimental situations that he devised, so far it is clear that there are occasions in which they are in people's mind, that they do things, even though they have a choice, they do things which is meant to benefit others and relieve their suffering without a hidden selfish motive, the primary reason, their ultimate goal is... and it doesn't mean that you do it all the time, that everyone does it all the time, but clearly it is present in a very significant way in human beings, so that's good news, because if we were completely, forever inherently selfish, there's no point to try to cultivate altruism, to bring it in education in a bigger way, it will be a lost cause, but it is not, and that's the good news. And of course that's exactly what the Buddhist view is about, that's exactly the message of the Dalai Lama and then there are many more studies now showing that even in very young infants, that's wonderful work, they're actually almost unconditional cultivators and they do prefer, significantly, I mean ninety five percent of one year olds and even they could show that in three month old babies, they lean towards or they gaze towards, ninety five percent, puppets to behave nicely to another puppet, rather than the nasty puppet that did something terrible, not to them, but among themselves. So there's a clear predisposition as a social animal, towards cooperation, benevolence, appreciating that and engaging in that.

[0:09:32.4] Acharya Fleet Maull: In my own experience in the years working in the criminal justice system and so forth, it seems that absent fear, that as human beings we're fairly naturally disposed to be partnering and cooperative and collaborative and kind, but when fear arises, when we're afraid that our needs won't be met in some way, then other things can happen. When we feel safe and when we have a sense of wellbeing and there's not so much fear it seems that we are naturally inclined towards being partnering and collaborative, if not it, probably the world couldn't even function the way it does today.

[0:10:16.7] Matthieu Ricard: Yeah, so you see then again, you will always have competing motives, some are turned to increasing your wellbeing, some are turned to increasing the wellbeing of others. So then of course in decision making you balance, you try to evaluate the respective costs of helping others, so sometimes you see for you you have the means to do so, the time to do so, to do so is not dangerous for you, you don't have to put your life in danger or sacrifice something too big, and when the cost is too high, of course in real life many people would sort of move back from doing something that might be very

costly for themselves, and then you say less and less people do it, but still people would do it in sort of heroic acts, where people put their life in danger to save someone and all the more so if they can save a lot of people. So then as you move towards increased cost of doing an altruistic act, you know you get less and less people who would do it, but the fact that you still may decide that it is too costly, but it doesn't mean that you didn't have an altruistic motive in the... together with, you know counterweighted by you know do I risk my life or the lives of my dear ones or too much resources for that, so it is competing motives, but there is clearly still the altruistic one present, and sometimes it might get eclipsed for other reasons. So it depends then on how much predisposition you have for altruism, how far you want to go, how far you feel happy to do so or you feel like "no no, that's too much", so again it doesn't mean that we don't have genuine altruism, but really at some point it becomes really too costly and some people might even continue even in that case.

[0:12:27.4] Acharya Fleet Maull: Probably when we say totally, we hear a lot from people reporting what inspired their altruistic behaviour and especially what we consider sometimes heroic altruistic behaviour, they didn't really think of themselves as being altruistic, they were just trying to be who they are and responding in an almost spontaneous natural way.

[0:12:47.5] Matthieu Ricard: And that's why we come to the idea that altruism is also a way of being, because when you have not much time to compute the pros and cons of a decision or make a whole sort of list of what is good, what is not good, what will be the consequences, we've really had to act on the spur of the moment. In those times it's really what you are within that will come out spontaneously, whether you will jump in the icy water or give your hand to someone or something. And I think our friend Francisco Varela used to remind that the truly altruistic person, it isn't there to think for a long time, it is spontaneous and I think philosopher, Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor said ethics is not only what is good to do, but what is good to be, because if you become a genuinely altruistic, loving person and you develop altruism to a vast extent, then naturally when you <inaudible 0:13:54.6> that's what will come out almost immediately. So I discussed with Daniel Benson because some people say well, it almost looks like instinctive behaviour, so people say sometimes oh, I had no choice, I had to save that person, that's quite silly, what they mean is the guy didn't have to take four hours, the decision was made in a split second but of course there was a decision, I mean people are not like robots, I mean especially when they risk their life. But the fact is that it didn't take a long time because it is part of what they are and so they didn't have to think for half an hour should I give my hand to this kid that is in the water or not, should I jump or not? They did it, but it's not like they didn't make a decision, it's that the decision was so obvious that it happened in a split of a second.

[0:14:46.2] Acharya Fleet Maull: I'm curious, again from what we know scientifically as well from the Buddhist tradition and other spiritual traditions that value altruism and compassion, whether you know you could look at altruism and compassion as values, it's a good way to be and it seems to be good for humanity for us to be altruistic and compassionate with each other and it could be kind of how I think about others, how I relate with others, who I want to be in relation to others, and from another viewpoint possibly it's the whole self-other boundary is becoming perhaps a bit more fluid and rather than it's that I'm heroically caring for someone else, I'm just naturally responding because someone else's pain is not separate from my own pain or suffering in other words there's perhaps you know a less dualistic understanding, I wonder if you could speak to that?

[0:15:44.0] Matthieu Ricard: I think it's not really that we are confusing self and others, I think this is more I think in psychology what we call emotional contagion, you know someone is very fearful and you feel fearful but you don't know why but you will also start

freaking out, but you don't know why, so it's a contagion. The entity is the resonance with the other emotions, whether its joy or suffering, but you know that you are different from that other person. And then altruism is something much vaster, which we have that deep wish of benefiting that person and alleviating suffering. Now what you are mentioning about a less rigid barrier between self and others, is not that you are getting sort of you know hazy, you don't see the border anymore, is simply that if you don't grasp so strongly to me, as a very concrete, unitary entity that you must please and protect by all means because you think it's the core of your being, so that misconception will widen the gap between you and others, there will be me, in the centre of the world and everyone else and the rest of the world, this huge sort of gap. So it's not that suddenly you sort of don't know who you are and you're sort of blessed with some kind of cosmic consciousness, it's more that the me or the self becomes so transparent, that it becomes much less relevant when having to take a decision about let's say saving my life and saving your life, you know very well that it is you and others, but those do not have such a weight that me as almost infinite value and others you know, so so, could be very little, could be little more if it's someone dear to me, my children, then it goes quite high, still not quite like me, so it's more like this grasping being loosened, then you will be much more actually sort of able to decide this decision in a more realistic way, if I'm really saving the life of twenty people, then why not? Then it becomes clear, it's not that suddenly see who is twenty people and who is you, so you must be careful about that, it's more about losing the grasping.

[0:18:27.2] Acharya Fleet Maull: Yes, so clearly we're not talking about some kind of co-dependency or emotional contagion but from a very integrated sense of self, one's self-clinging can lessen as you're saying and also sometimes people talk about, from a very integrated sense of self but that kind of expanding to include family, communities, society even what people sometimes call the ecological self so that maybe our locus of decision-making becomes less self-centred and more about the concerns and needs of all of us or something like that.

[0:19:01.1] Matthieu Ricard: Well, you know, I remember when we met with the Dalai Lama in Delhi, with some representatives from the Vendanta, the Rami Krishna, the sort of swami, and it was interesting because he says, you know, you Buddhists, you sort of resolve the duality by dissolving the grasping to the self. We Hindu's, we resolve that by expanding the self to the whole universe so there's nothing outside of the self. So in a way it's sort of the same, and the Dalai Lama said well, someone who believes in a god, in a creator, then everything is created by god, so basically there's no such thing as this big separation because we are certainly created by god so again, we expand that thanks to realising that, so whichever way suits you, the Buddhist way is more that you see that the self is not such a concrete, solid entity at the heart of your being, so then you stop grasping onto that and then of course then being transparent, it's easy to put yourself in the place of others and to see it out of the perspective of others, and to take that decision that actually will result in the most wellbeing that can be done and reducing suffering as much as can be done without pressing this kind of embedded importance on just yourself. Then you can have a very holistic view because you can really really think what is good for the, as the Dalai Lama says, first I have to look, is it a selfish motivation or a turn toward others, if it's a turn toward others is it turn for a small number or for a large number, if it's for a large number is it for a short term or a long term? Ideally you would want to do something for the greater number and for the long term for their benefit.

[0:21:07.1] Acharya Fleet Maull: Well if we would, you know I think all of us are often acutely aware at time of our lack of compassion or the kind of places where we get very self-focused and you know let's say we would like to become more altruistic, we would like to become more compassionate and so we begin to engage in some kind of spiritual training in different traditions, perhaps practices like the loving kindness meta-practice,

basic meditation training, even compassion training, tonglen, these kind of practices. Isn't it inevitable that initially our effort to want to evolve in a compassionate, altruistic direction, also kind of involves some self-interest as well? Do these things kind of go parallel?

[0:21:54.8] Matthieu Ricard: You know this notion of self-interest as a co-emergent of benefit is interesting because it has been used by the proponent of universal selfishness as an argument to say that there's no real altruism, they say look, you help someone, even anonymously, but you feel the warm glow, you feel so wonderful to have helped someone, and so basically you feel good, you feel terribly good about having given your wealth to save someone's life, I heard actually someone in the, you know one of those panels like the World Economic Forum, someone in Paris say you know, I started charitable work because really I feel so good about doing that. So there you could say there's some kind of self-interest, but I think it's a wrong argument. Why? Because if you were not at all caring for others, imagine the extreme situation, you heard from somebody that helping others makes you feel really good, so you really do that you say "I don't really give a damn about those guys but I will do it because I feel it is a big difference, I want to feel better." So if you really maintain that selfish ideal to it all the way, you will not feel the warm glow, because the warm glow doesn't come just from doing something good, it comes from whatever part of your mind has been genuinely kind, generous, altruistic, benevolent, compassionate, and that itself carries this feeling of goodwill, so you cannot, you know, if it comes as a bonus, it's a secondary effect. You will never get it if it's your primary goal and 100% only that goal. Then you cannot say oh, it's selfish because it's almost like acting something impossible, you say, I want to fire the birds, but they make no heat, produce no heat. So love and compassion does produce some kind of feeling of harmony, of integration, of wholesomeness which is very rewarding, but that's just like a side effect, so that's why if it's a bonus like when you grow a crop, you'll do it for the grain, for the wheat, for the rice, but you also get the straw, you didn't want to get the straw but you get it on top of it, so I mean to say the best way is the twofold accomplishment of others' good and your good. So it's fine, there's nothing selfish in that, nothing wrong in wanting to be happy too, but that should not be the primary motive because then it becomes sort of not real altruism.

[0:25:00.7] Acharya Fleet Maull: Well, how about the science of that? I know in the brain we have certain reward systems, and I believe there's research demonstrating that when we act altruistically or even witness an altruistic act, there are certain sort of neurochemical rewards released in the brain. Is there research that shows that it depends on sort of how genuine the altruism was in terms of its motivation?

[0:25:22.6] Matthieu Ricard: Yes, so Daniel Banson did a nice experiment to precisely address that issue, that question and that sort of hypothesis that people put forward. He made people you know do some games and if they were getting good at it, they would spare someone else getting electric shocks or something. And so they were trying really hard and they were succeeding and they were very happy about it, and then they made a situation where sometimes it was used, sometimes it was someone else's performance that would help the person and then seeing the degree of satisfaction when it's you, and when it's someone else who actually does the job, so a real altruistic makes no difference, the main thing is that the person isn't getting electric shock and they're absolutely equally happy if they did it or someone else did it, the main point was to get avoid the person doesn't get the shocks. So if it's just about the warm glow you know I did something fantastic, then those people who were sort of rewarded by I did it, I'm good at this thing and thanks to my skill I could help that person, all that, if they're less happy if it's the other one who'd done it of course they all really want to be the guy who did it so that's why you could differentiate among the population some who were again here genuinely altruistic and others who have mixed motives.

[0:26:55.0] Acharya Fleet Maull: Excellent. So let's talk a little bit about the process of becoming more altruistic, more compassionate, less self-clinging through the practices of meditation and practices like loving kindness and compassion meditations and so forth in terms of the phenomenon we've all heard so much about today, neuro-plasticity. That actually our brain can restructure itself to where we become more predisposed to expose altruism as a way of being. So what is that process like and how do we cultivate it?

[0:27:28.9] Matthieu Ricard: So there are two aspects and this is the Dalai Lama really insists on those, one is analytical meditation, that is not what we do usually, and then there is the actual meditation of cultivating a meta, loving kindness, cultivating karuna, compassion as a skill, and enhancing our level from whatever baseline we begin with to a much higher level by training systematically meditating on meta or karuna. Now the first one, the analytic meditation is very helpful, first of all to motivate us to be altruistic and also to dissolve the grasping to the self, so there's one type of analytic meditation that will examine that self saying is it really such a big thing at the heart of my being, the heart of my stream of mind, so then there's a whole analysis or investigation, is it in my body, outside my body, no I can't find it anywhere, is it in the consciousness, well great yes, but well, past thoughts are gone, future there's no reason yet, the moment is ungraspable, where could that entity sit? Anyway there's a whole thing going on and at the end of this investigation clearly you say well, I can't find that, I can't put a finger on that self, so perhaps it's not as truly existing as it appears to be, so that's one. The other analytical meditation is to think oh, I don't want to suffer, I don't wake up in the morning thinking may I suffer the whole day or even my whole life, so then I'm concerned about not suffering and I value my aspiration not to suffer and work at trying not to suffer and achieve some wellbeing, so then I can transform, I feel that same for my children or close relatives, but then it doesn't take much you know you don't have to look at science, to say oh, analytically I put myself in someone else's shoes, even someone who behaves in wrong ways, but that's confusion, that's you know kind of madness, but deep within that person doesn't want to suffer, I can understand, value that, therefore being concerned by that aspiration and we look at a doctor, if the person misbehaves, he's a mad person but mad persons fundamentally don't want to suffer, he just turns their back to happiness and runs towards suffering. So that's a powerful way to expand the circle of your altruism and then you need to cultivate that other state of mind, so it's a different kind of meditation. Purposely, so the first one is based on wisdom, understanding, and then you get a clear picture of the more attuned to reality about the self and the difference between the self and the others and so forth. The second one is you identify in yourself the feeling of the emotion or the state of mind linked with loving kindness, so you imagine a beautiful child in front of your eyes or someone you have no difficulty to feel unconditional love, and you can clearly taste, feel, leave that emotion let it feel your emotional landscape, and then instead of letting go after ten seconds, you cultivate, maintain it, nurture it, if it declines you revive it, if it restarted you come back to it, if it becomes dull you make it more vivid, all those maintain for ten minutes, fifteen minutes, one hour, whatever, so that's called cultivating today. And then of course as you said neuroscience has shown now, if you do that for three months, your brain changes structurally, functionally, and of course, if only the brain says so what, but you'll definitely notice that you'll also have changed it, your level of loving kindness, of care, of concern, of compassion, will have grown up. And if you keep on doing that you will become a more altruistic, more compassionate person, there's no doubt.

[0:31:42.2] Acharya Fleet Maull: Is there research on both the analytical meditations where we're refining our view, our understanding of the nature of self and other and then the cultivation type practices, has there been research done on both and how they work together or separately to actually change the brain and lead us into more altruistic behaviour?

[0:32:02.8] Matthieu Ricard: There hasn't been much research on the analytical part, and the Dalai Lama has been encouraging the scientists to do so. There's a little bit in the Tania Singer longitudinal studies, because they did three months of perspective taking, of course it was not the full sort of analytical approach of Buddhism, it was just trying to imagine other situation, so there's no clearly instruction on imagining that then you're becoming aware of the suffering, the cause of suffering and so forth, it was simply trying to imagine other situation. So it was more like cognitive empathy, in some cases you know if you don't cultivate altruism at the same time, you know you might imagine the situation of people in great suffering in Syria or animals in the slaughterhouse and then oh, you know, I can't it's too much, you have to back up from that sort of empathic distress so it doesn't guarantee that you will increase altruism, so that's what Tanya Singer's studies have shown. It doesn't necessarily increase pro-social behaviour, so I think we need to combine both and I think most meditators do that, but the main studies have been chiefly, what people really cultivating altruistic love and compassion and seeing the result after three months, and seeing what happens in the brain of people who have done that for fifty thousand hours over thirty years.

[0:33:36.7] Acharya Fleet Maull: Well, Matthieu you travelled the world as well as being a deep contemplative, you spent a lot of time in retreat and you're a scholar and frequent translator for His Holiness, and you're also a photographer and a naturalist and I know you have a deep love and appreciation for our natural environment as well as all the species we share this planet with, and your latest book is about that, so I know that His Holiness has said that compassion is not a luxury, it's now a requirement for the very sustainability for life on this planet, so I'm wondering if you could talk about the need for us to become more altruistic as a society, as communities and how that might unfold and maybe the call to enter a path to altruism.

[0:34:26.1] Matthieu Ricard: Well, there are two things, in general the fate of the planet and that means not just you know the physical planet obviously but the biosphere and human beings, so now that means future generations, so it is the ultimate challenge to altruism, why? Because you know emotionally, it's very hard to be moved by something that will happen in twenty years, thirty years, hundred years, and beyond that we know we won't be there, but at least we won't be there, so to be really concerned, it is not as easy as to be concerned by someone who is suffering under our eyes, so that is the ultimate challenge, but in fact we know that there's billions and billions and billions of humans that will be there, and then our decision today for the first time in our history since we entered the anthropocene, the age where the human activities are the major factor that dictate the fate of the planet, so we know that, it's clear, so now we cannot say oh, you know, let's do our thing and we'll see how others will manage in the future. That was true twelve thousand years ago when there were five million human beings on earth, whatever they do there's not much impact, power has multiplied, being for the electricity, atomic energy, industrial revolutions, scientific revolutions, so we have immense power, but we don't have the same amount of care, the problem is. So that's something that we really if we want to be altruistic, that's the main challenge today is to be altruistic for future generations, that's one thing. Nowadays the other aspect is not only for humans, why? I know somehow we may use progress and civilisation in ethical sort of behaviour, where we abolished slavery, we abolished torture, even though there are still slaves and there are still torture being practiced, but at least it was internationally condemned, it's against the law, it's against international law and conventions, so it's not ok to do so and before it was ok to do so. People would do it proudly on the public arena, they would torture on Sunday afternoon and you go out there and took your family to see that as they go to see a football match today. So that has changed, the universal declaration of human rights, now we are emphasising on the rights of women on the rights of children, so that's news progress of civilisation. Still there's a huge incoherence and gap

when it comes to other species, rightly so there's no more price tag on human life except for some human traffickers, but we cannot say today human life is valued fifty thousand dollars or whatever, it's beyond calculation. So we cannot put a price on interested value of a human life, but when it comes to animals, the interested value is, other species I mean because we are one animal species, it is the interested value to ours is almost like zero unless it has an instrumental value or commercial value, so that's very puzzling and I think there's an ethical gap that's probably the next step of civilisation, include other species in our benevolence and to consider us closer in this world, that they also don't want to suffer, they want somehow that's not as intellectualised as we do. Yes, power to live the full span of their life, no-one wants to die early, only in deep suffering. So to recognise that and value that, to respect that, have consideration for that you know it doesn't require that we start loving animals more than humans, this is a stupid idea, but we extend, we include them in our benevolence and I'm convinced that if we also learn how to extend loving kindness and benevolence and altruism to other species, the quality of our love towards human beings will be better, because it will be more complete, it will be not biased, it will be without moral dissociation we are very good with behaving terribly with others, we know that it's called cognitive dissonance, and people are doing that in many occasions, even in the concentration camps there were people who were very kind to their kids and torturing people all day long in the camps, so they do this cognitive dissonance. So we do that with other species today when it's not satisfactory dissonance, so we need now to address that issue, to have a coherent ethic.

[0:39:32.6] Acharya Fleet Maull: It would seem we're kind of ending the time of this wonderful conversation here Matthieu, it would seem we take the long view, and you talked about sometimes it's hard to really be concerned about these things that may not happen in our lifetime, the really dire consequences, or the sustainability of life on this planet, but I think that most of us as human beings, I mean there are those you know there was a famous I don't mean to pick up Malcom Forbes the founder of Forbes Magazine, but he was said to have said he who dies with the most poise wins, so there is that very materialistic view, but I think most human beings are naturally concerned about their legacy, about their children, their grandchildren, the life we're leaving for them, and so it would seem in the long view it would be really important to focus on our children and how we're educating our children because as you said we know from research that a one month old infant, a three month old infant, is naturally predisposed to altruistic behaviour, and in a sense they unlearn it and so they learn to be more self-interested. So it would seem even though genuine altruism doesn't arrive out of self-interest, it does seem to be in the interest of humanity to train in altruism as a skill and a way of being, so I wonder if you could speak to us a little bit to that, about how we could try to encourage a more altruistic society in future generations and the way that we cultivate that in our children.

[0:41:02.0] Matthieu Ricard: Definitely. Definitely, I mean we can assume, even though there are terrible things happening today I mean we see a lot of them on the media, but most of the time most of seven billion human beings behave decently toward each other, that's basically the baseline. There are terrible people, there are unbearable behaviour, inexcusable behaviour, sometimes even unthinkable behaviour but most of the time most people behave properly to each other. Not only that but we have this social animal predisposition, tempting most of us, even sort of very cold minded sort of speculators, financiers, basically they all agree that it is nice to have a better world where more people are happy with less suffering and who would be against that, this kind of haven that we imagine. So then, if we give them a concept that can reconcile the needs of the short term you know getting what you need, surviving, making a good life, the good term of flourishing in your life, not to hold if you don't have a life where you have a deep satisfaction year after year then you feel no, why should I live, and then the long term

fate of future generations. So selfishness would not do the job, if you don't care for future generations then you would not care for the environment, there's no problem, you would not <inaudible 0:42:39.3> them. So the idea of having more consideration for others is the single concept that can reconcile those three times scale and somehow makes people work together, now the environmental scientist who know and tell you what's going to happen in fifty years, politician, decision makers, social workers, educators would deal with them twenty years raising a new generation of altruistic people, and then people who have to either reach people who wants to make more money or people in Africa who just need to gather food for the next day, you can reconcile those concern for having more consideration for others, if you have more consideration for others, you will care for the poverty in the midst of plenty, you will have a caring economics. If you do care in the midterm, then you will have an education and a social life and an institution that are more towards cooperation, to helping each other, welfare and so forth, and if you do care for future generations for the long term then you will have serious consideration for future generations. So you see, that concept is no more some kind of nice, utopian bit naive, it's a very pragmatic concept that can enlighten our decisions, our policies, our orientation, and it's completely win win situations, so we did a documentary for the German TV channel called Achtung, called the altruism revolution, and it has all the scientists that are into research and are writing the book and there's no English version of that and it's quite you know convincing because there's a lot of science and also economists, people who teach leadership and they all converge in saying that altruism and cooperation is really the way forward, we need to become more superior co-operators than we are already.

[0:44:50.7] Acharya Fleet Maull: I think also you know what you said, we made a lot of progress in terms of human rights in the value of the preciousness of human life but we still do this cognitive disowning around the value of other animal species, and it seems in my experience that young children before they learn otherwise are kind of natural environmentalists and have a natural concern for other animals.

[0:45:17.4] Matthieu Ricard: I mean so many children they are shocked when they learn that the meat comes from live animals, first they don't want to eat and then the parents go oh no you have to eat because it's good for health. First of all it's not good for health, no, the WHO made an analysis of six hundred studies that show it's just not good. That if you eat red meat every day you increase your risk of mortality fifty percent, so it's basically no good for health, so there's no excuse. There's even an insurance company in England that gives twenty percent rebate to vegetarian on life insurance, so they know their numbers, so yes, children do that and I read a study done in a city, in Chicago in fact, where you ask children between five to ten where does meat come from and they say from the supermarket. And then before that? Oh, from the factory, and they don't get the idea that it comes from a living animal that has to be killed and one day they here that and they get shocked, and then they go over that because the parents say no, you have to do. So it's this natural wish not to cause suffering and to suffer when we see those animals suffer, like any other sentient beings, but you know we are told that we shouldn't know that. So then we are taught this cognitive dissonance which is really not necessary, because today, except for a few remaining hunter-gatherers, a few eskimos very few, very very few people whose lives depend on hunting or fishing, there are, but not so many and less and less it is, but for most of us it is not necessary to inflict those sufferings. So if you ask a very simple question, is it just and moral to inflict unnecessary sufferings on sentient beings? Everybody will say no, so today it is not necessary to inflict, to cause pain and death of other sentient beings to be alive, healthy, to care for the environment, to care for poverty in the world, to ruminate in the qualities. Actually, to vastly reduce our meat consumption we'll achieve that and that's what I try to show in the brief of the animals, is that basically everyone is losing today, the environment is, the single cause for greenhouse

gassing is the industrial farming for livestock, poverty in the world, you know we ship seven hundred million tons of grain every year from South America and Africa to cattle rich country to produce meat, then eat ten times, twenty times more meat, that could be used to feed more than a billion people in poor countries. It's not good for human health and the numbers for animal is staggering, you know it's sixty billion land animal and a thousand billion, one trillion sea animal every year, that's a hundred and twenty million per hour, that's a wholesale massacre basically. So I'm thinking so, it's not good for poverty, it's not good for the environment, it's not even good for human health, so where is the benefit of all that?

[0:48:24.4] Acharya Fleet Maull: An incredibly compelling argument. Well thank you Matthieu, this has been wonderful to be with you today, I really encourage our audience to check on Matthieu's work, all of his amazing books. You can go to [Matthieu Ricard.org](http://MatthieuRicard.org), or you can go to Matthieu's other site, [karuna-shechen.org](http://karuna-shechen.org), and I really encourage you to learn about Matthieu's wonderful work around the world and to enjoy the depth of wisdom that comes from someone who's been completely dedicated to the contemplative life, to really draw...

[0:48:59.5] Matthieu Ricard: You know, if I may say one word, for people who argue that we better take care of human than animals, last year karuna shechen helped four hundred thousand people in North India, Nepal and Tibet in the fields of education and social services. So I think we do our part with human beings too, so we can afford to care and do something for the sake of other species as well.

[0:49:29.0] Acharya Fleet Maull: Scientist, monk, contemplative, humanitarian Matthieu Ricard, thank you so much and I know this is going to create a wonderful dialogue with the participants and the Shambhala Mountain Centre Science of Meditation Conference, so just thank you so much, I wish you all the best in your work and that many many resources are magnetised toward the continuation of the work that you're doing.