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## Discovering Meditation: My Life with the Dalai Lama

An interview with Dr. B. Alan Wallace by Raimondo Bultrini

From a degree in Physics to a Buddhist monastery. The yogi Alan Wallace explains the contemplative training. “Samadhi brings mental activity to the same level of the nature of consciousness, and it is in this state that many contemplatives and scientists with profound insights have discovered things that have later been found by science.”

Alan Wallace graduated in Physics more than 30 years ago before receiving a PhD in Philosophy and Religion, followed by 14 years in a Buddhist monastery under the guidance of the Dalai Lama and other meditation masters. It is through this experience at the confluence of mysticism and science that the ex-monk became one of the most active speakers of the Tibetan leader’s research projects on the effects of the ancient Himalayan sutra and tantra practices on the human psyche.

Being invited all over the world to lead lectures and spiritual courses, Dr. Wallace has been working for years to build in Italy a centre where yogis will be invited to be part of an experiment that has never been done before on a large scale, in which they will be monitored at the physiological and biochemical level during and after long-term meditative practices, for up to three years.

“Since Galileo – Wallace says – our knowledge of the world has been entrusted to a science that is ever more precise in quantifying, measuring, and discovering the laws governing the phenomena of the cosmos. Since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as far as the study of the mind is concerned, the research has been limited to the objective observation of the human brain, but regardless of the advances of Freud, Jung and of psychoanalysis, we did not understand that “mind” is not something material that can be subject to measurement and calculation.”

### **How would you define it then?**

“The mind can be likened to an invisible state of consciousness, something that the scientific community is unable to define, and nobody knows what is its cause or the relation between mind and brain, not to mention what happens after death. Indeed, the hypothesis that mind and human brain are the same thing is simply a speculation, a belief: although states of consciousness are strictly linked to brain activity, this correlation between brain functions and human mind does not mean that they are identical, nor that the two things are located in the same physical place.”

### **Do you have an example that the uninitiated can understand?**

“We can think about a light switch. When you press the button, you turn on or off the light, but it doesn’t mean that the light is located at the place where you click. It is well-known that the brain affects the mind and vice versa, as in when you generate expectations or feel disappointments that affect mental activity. Nobody can negate that all the branches of science are making progress in the research about the causes of phenomena and of “thinking”, but science is not able to observe the introspective mind. It’s Buddhism, like Hinduism, the only contemporary tradition able to develop very sophisticated methods to bring the attention on what everybody now calls mindfulness, introspection or samadhi in Sanskrit. Indeed, the direct observation of the mind can be likened to what the telescope represents for astronomy.”

**You wish to open in Castellina Marittima, in the Tuscan countryside, a centre for “professional” meditators willing to undergo scientific tests. But is it possible to verify with some technology a truth as mystical as a state of consciousness?**

“It is an unprecedented experiment, but in the same way as a scientist needs a laboratory, a contemplative needs a conducive environment that allows for high levels of attention and concentration, where it would be possible to demonstrate that the states of samadhi can be measured and repeated by others just like mathematical formulas, as long as the individuals are equally trained in these profound states of consciousness. Psychologists and neurologists will be able to observe the meditators not only as subjects of study, but as collaborators who are capable of enabling direct observations on the brain and behaviour, with a reciprocal benefit based on their mutual experience. It is a true revolution in the science of mind.”

**Have your theories been already demonstrated?**

“The research that we intend to do in Castellina will be the continuation of a scientific project called “Shamatha” that I began 12 years ago – a well-known pilot experiment in the study of contemplative training and samadhi, which is a state of continuous single-pointed concentration and clarity. In reality this state is applicable to any type of activity, but it brings mentation to the level of the nature of consciousness itself, and it is in this state that many contemplatives and scientists with profound insights have discovered things that have later been found by science. For this reason, I feel the research in Castellina could demonstrate that Buddhist meditation – from the profound peace of shamatha to the observation of energy by means of vipashyana practices – is not simply a religious belief. His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said many times that certain discoveries about the power of the contemplative mind could be made public for the benefit of human knowledge, in a world that is more and more difficult to interpret and to govern. I’m not afraid to affirm that, as in the first mathematical postulates, in the future contemplatives can be the key for the third scientific revolution. And I feel that a place like Castellina is greatly auspicious, nestled between the heart of the Renaissance and the birthplace of Galileo’s great discoveries.”

On the 2<sup>nd</sup> April Alan Wallace will give a lecture in Bologna, then in April and May he will lead a spiritual retreat in a Buddhist centre in Pomaia, Tuscany.

Italian version available at: [https://www.repubblica.it/salute/alimentazione-e-fitness/2019/02/12/news/cosi\\_la\\_mindfulness\\_ci\\_aiuta\\_a\\_indagare\\_la\\_relazione\\_tra\\_mente\\_e\\_cervello\\_-218940835/#gallery-slider=160076176](https://www.repubblica.it/salute/alimentazione-e-fitness/2019/02/12/news/cosi_la_mindfulness_ci_aiuta_a_indagare_la_relazione_tra_mente_e_cervello_-218940835/#gallery-slider=160076176)