Future of Compassion in the context of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Technology

Matthieu Ricard

in conversation with
Sujeev Shakya

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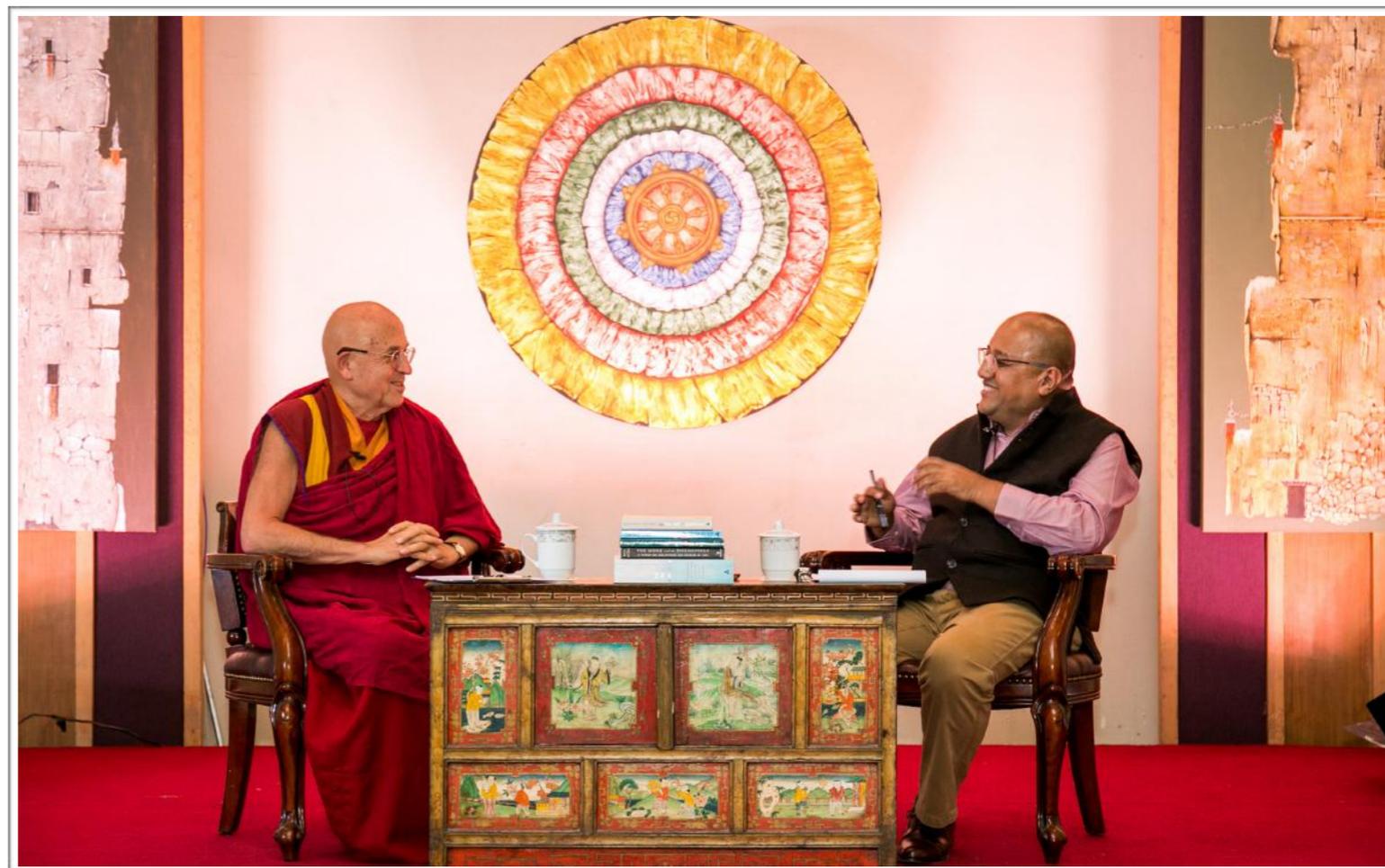
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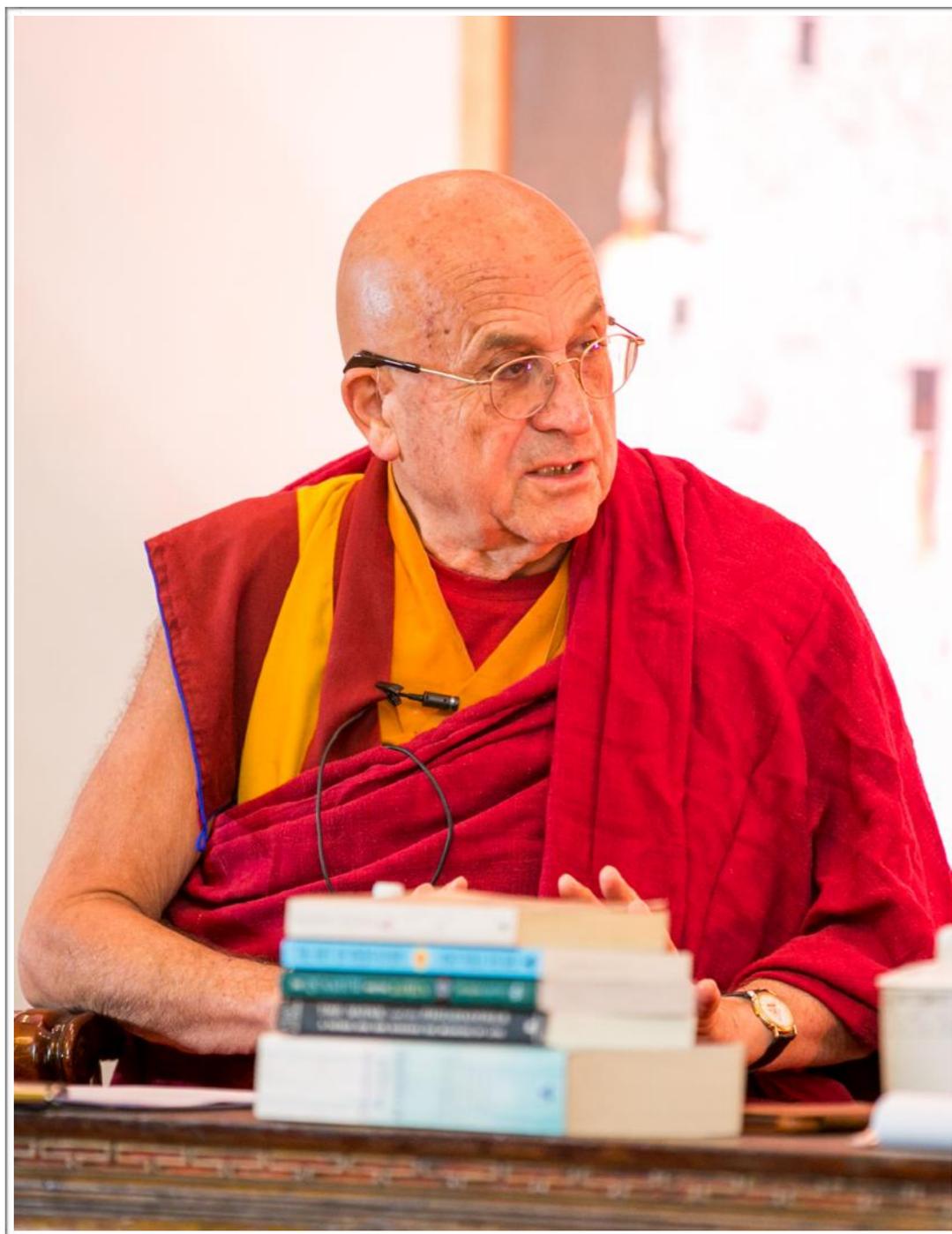## Proceedings Report
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Background

Matthieu Ricard is a French Buddhist monk, humanitarian, writer, translator, and photographer. He is one of the French citizens who has spent many years in Nepal since the 1970s.

This conversation, 'Future of Compassion in the context of Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Technology', is a part of the 70th anniversary of France-Nepal relations where Matthieu shared his experiences about Nepal. He also offered some insights on how his background brought him to interconnect spirituality with science.

The session hosted over 200 participants and, as such, brought together a unique mixture of many disciplines in a conversation which is central to the achievement of new technologies. It further encapsulated queries and notions around the potential and challenges brought by technology in the human world.

Matthieu Ricard

Matthieu Ricard believes that his journey to Nepal, which started in the late 1960s and went through Darjeeling, set the contextualization for his later years of living in Nepal as a French Buddhist monk. The kind of exposure that he got towards building a career around this was influenced and inspired by many people who, in their different fields, had the personal capacity to continue in their respective walks of life. The people who he met during his journey had a credible mixture of compassion, wisdom, strength, and freedom, and were also drawn by the belief of '*nothing to lose or gain*'. With the motivation to walk a few more steps in their direction, he started studying genetics. Though he went back and forth many times, he was drawn by the passion of the people he was surrounded with. With this, when he was in Darjeeling, he vowed to focus on the Buddhist studies and experience life in the Himalayas.

Moving on, he mentioned that it was after the loss of his teacher in Darjeeling that he decided to stay in Nepal. While reflecting on his life living in the Himalayas and being surrounded by monasteries, he apprehended that interacting

with the visitors in the monastery and preserving the Himalayan heritage had been a good choice for him. Although Nepal has gone through a lot of ups and downs throughout the years, he shared that the resilience of Nepalese is admirable. In his words, there has not been any lasting hatred, whereas, on the other hand, the culture of openness has further helped to bring more harmony.

Apart from the study of Buddhism and Himalayan heritage, he has worked in a lot of other areas as well. Amongst them, AI has been one of his key interests. With changing times and the advent of technology, AI is being increasingly used. In this context, he believes that while everybody is concerned about emotions getting encroached by technology, he has his own values which he follows and lives by. He accepts that AI can make a lot of difference, but at the same time, he views AI as a kind of mystery with a capacity to evaluate certain things quickly and more accurately. For this reason, he emphasized that people will be unemployed not because AI is superior to humans, but rather of its capacity to work faster and better. AI which is a bunch of algorithms just has enhanced capacity and performance with no element of experience. This is why, he acknowledged that there is nothing wrong with technology and that there just needs to be the right blend of everything. Elaborating more on this, he highlighted the need for a different economic model to re-adjust a greater concentration of work that AI is going to create.

On a similar note, Matthieu explained that when he pictures compassion, it is about driving oneself to be at peace and putting all of one's individual efforts towards service. It is about reconciling and connecting short term, midterm, and long term needs. Basically, short term is the financial world whose ups and downs is something that nobody is certain of; midterm is the quality of life and how one thrives in their family, career and their lifetime; and long term is a challenge that contains the faith of future generations and other inhabitants who share the same planet. He attached a lot of weight for the need for reconciliation because, in the past, the harm that the population could do was little. However, the case is not the same today. Thus, given this threat, he stressed on the possibility that future generations might be betrayed of a positive economy if such lack of consideration and compassion continues.

Carrying the conversation forward, he drew attention to the fact that resolving these issues about compassion is a big challenge as people are exposed to a lot of negative effects of violent video games and media. With negative news flooding people's lives on a daily basis, he pointed out that speaking of goodness and sharing news about decency is equally important. Citing his own example, he claimed that he had witnessed the Maoist insurgency in Nepal and had been to a lot of troubled places, but he was not a war correspondent. He believed in being a "peace correspondent" as it only takes an individual to take an initiative. When people can ideate and create a powerful idea, there is nothing more transformative than that. If this change can be coupled with compassion, cooperation, working together and bringing the best of ourselves at the surface, such kind of awareness can be long-lasting.

While concluding his remarks, he vouched for value-based education to supplement this process, so that can children learn about it early on. The potential wisdom and goodness in human beings need to be brought to the surface, polished and taken care of. He stressed that the power of transformation of human beings and their minds should not be underestimated. Consideration about one another which will lead to a positive economy and bridge the gap of inequality ensures that compassion has a bright future because it is the only future.

Sujeev Shakya
CEO, beed Management

Sujeev Shakya revolved his discussions around the inter-linkages between science and Buddhism. He also talked about the various changes and challenges that Nepal has seen in the past 3-4 decades, which has helped and transform the nation into its current state.

He emphasized on the advent of technology and the use of AI in our daily life. Technology can resolve many issues; provided that it is applied to the right problem at the right time. He also spoke in length about the numerous complex features of AI and its effects on the human mind. Every outcome is a result of a preceding event. The current encroachment of technology is making individuals to be more creative problem solvers, but at the same time, it is also making them more selfish and self-centered. This is slowly reducing their sense of gratitude, which is one of the most crucial Buddhist values. Thus, more interaction among humans is required if we are to build a shared world and a shared future.

Achievements and Lessons Learned:

- Real communication, exposure to the natural environment, experience, and an inner drive to be at peace is needed for compassion to take place.
- It only takes an individual to initiate a change. However, cooperation and working together are required in bringing the best of ourselves.
- Happiness is not the endless pursuit of presence and sensation, it is a way of being in the form of benevolence, freedom, inner strength and wisdom.

Next Steps:

- In a world of technology and AI, a different economic model and a new system with a different direction towards building values has to be thought of.
- Reconciliation between scientists, environmentalists, politicians, decision-makers, social workers, financialists and all other groups of people has to take place for a positive economy.
- For compassion to grow amongst kids, they have to be exposed to positive news and nature from a younger age.