

EDITORIAL: 'Out There' and Back

Anyone who's looked through a telescope, read books on astronomy or simply gazed at the night sky can't help being awed by the vastness of the universe. You can't help but ponder humankind's place in the cosmos. The popularity of movies like *Contact*, NASA explorations of Mars, and UFO theories indicate human beings' ongoing fascination with what's "out there." This fascination could suggest the unconscious longing of our internal microcosm to find a connection with this outer macrocosm of space.

The exploration of both the outer and inner universes — both infinitely vast — is the subject of a just-published dialogue between SGI President Ikeda and noted Sri Lanka-born astronomer Chandra Wickramasinghe. *Space and Eternal Life* (soon to be in SGI-USA bookstores), covers everything from the origin of the universe and human life to science and religion, from creating a global civilization to the Buddhist mission for peace. In between they tackle AIDS, euthanasia, abortion, nuclear weapons, education and a host of other important topics — all coinciding with a Buddhist point of view.

Dr. Wickramasinghe, along with Sir Fred Hoyle, developed the idea that life originated in the cosmos and was carried to Earth on cosmic dust. They also are advocates of the so-called steady state theory of the universe, a theory at odds with the more popular Big Bang theory. Dr. Wickramasinghe and Mr. Ikeda discuss the scientific evidence and philosophical implications of each theory.

An individual's world view has much to do with which theory he or she ascribes to, according to Dr. Wickramasinghe. "The fact that Big Bang cosmologies appear to be so deeply rooted in our modern scientific culture must, I think, be connected with the fact that such cosmologies were developed in the context of Judeo-Christian traditions where some form of a creation is 'required,'" he says.

The book also delves deeply into life and the nature of death, dealing with ethical questions that arise from technological advances such as in vitro fertilization. "In order to build a social consensus about this issue, it is necessary, I believe, that each individual, considering the profound meaning of giving birth to life, asks himself or herself the fundamental questions: 'Why do I wish to have children?' and 'For what purpose do I want children?'" Mr. Ikeda says.

Throughout the book, prevailing trends in science are questioned. As Dr. Wickramasinghe says: "In my view, science as a whole faces a crisis from being over-cluttered with dogma. The situation is so bad at the present moment that if facts go against a prevailing dogma, they are ignored. This is an exceedingly dangerous trend. Science must always respect empirical facts, and intellectual honesty must be paramount."

The dialogue is not completely about science, however. Anyone looking for Buddhist insights on life and crucial questions of the day can find them here. As President Ikeda says elsewhere in this issue of the *World Tribune*, "Through my continued dialogues with outstanding specialists in various fields, I hope to pass on precious jewels of wisdom for posterity."

Space and Eternal Life does that and more.

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