

EVOLUTION

of the HEART



Discussion Guide



MIND & LIFE
INSTITUTE

About the Mind & Life Institute

At the Mind & Life Institute, we bring science and contemplative wisdom together to better understand the mind and create positive change in the world. We recognize that many of today's challenges—from loneliness and anxiety to racial injustice and growing polarization—have roots in the human mind. Building on our legacy, we seek to better understand the role of the mind in creating these problems—and its potential to solve them. Our grantmaking, convenings, and digital education programs fall into three main focus areas: nurturing personal well-being, building compassionate communities, and strengthening the human-earth connection. Ultimately, we seek to spark a global transformation toward a society where we embrace our shared humanity. Learn more at: www.mindandlife.org

Mind & Life Dialogues with the Dalai Lama

Mind & Life Dialogues with the Dalai Lama began in 1987 as intimate discussions and have grown to include large public and private events at locations around the world and digitally. By 2019, 33 Dialogues with the Dalai Lama had been hosted. The format then shifted to shorter, more frequent conversations between leading thinkers and spiritual leaders such as the Dalai Lama on critical issues of modern life at the intersection of scientific and contemplative understanding.

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“This beautiful film reveals a path to real hope for our future through the transformative power of compassion.”

—Sharon Salzberg
author of *Lovingkindness* and *Real Change*

“As we face threats to our very existence, ‘Evolution of the Heart’ conveys a critical message—that we can consciously evolve to promote our collective well-being. The film offers hope of a world where compassion, forgiveness, and connection overcome hatred, greed, and apathy.”

—Patricia Jennings
Professor of Education, University of Virginia

Welcome

We are delighted that you will soon watch and discuss “Evolution of the Heart.” The 36-minute documentary film chronicles profound conversations between His Holiness the Dalai Lama and two prominent thought leaders: evolutionary biologist David Sloan Wilson and social scientist Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela.

The film emerged from a Mind & Life-sponsored event, “Conversations on Compassion, Interconnection, and Transformation,” held in Dharamsala, India on October 31 and November 1, 2019. More than a half million people in 60-plus countries tuned in to the livestream or recorded conversations.

“Evolution of the Heart” explores questions at the heart of the human condition. Can we consciously evolve to be kinder and more compassionate? How do we reconcile the needs of the individual with those of society? And what makes true forgiveness possible?

The short documentary presents valuable insights and practical wisdom for our times, which is why we have developed a series of discussion questions about the film’s content to help guide conversations within classrooms and among community groups. This guide also incorporates facilitator notes, background on Pumla and David, and resources where you can access additional information related to themes presented in the film, along with a list of organizations whose missions align with the film’s core messages.

Our hope is that you experience a meaningful learning journey through “Evolution of the Heart” that reinforces your appreciation of our shared humanity, while providing you with insights and inspiration to live with greater compassion and in the spirit of true community.



Susan Bauer-Wu
President
Mind & Life Institute

Film Synopsis

“Evolution of the Heart” takes the form of a literal and metaphoric journey as evolutionary biologist David Sloan Wilson and social scientist Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela travel to Dharamsala, India to meet the Dalai Lama for the first time. Each shares their work and engages in meaningful conversation with the revered spiritual leader, and members of the audience, around issues of profound significance for our time.

David introduces his work by pointing to a sea change that has occurred in evolutionary science over the last 50 years. Previously, evolutionary science was limited to the study of genetic evolution, he explains. “Everything that evolved by evolution was said to be selfish, a form of self-interest. Anything called true altruism, true compassion, was thought not to evolve at all.”

“Thankfully things have changed,” he adds, and the three core ingredients that describe evolution—variation, selection, and replication—“can actually describe cultural change and personal change. Altruism, compassion, everything we associate with goodness can evolve as a product of evolution,” he says. Furthermore, evolution can be a conscious process that humans can—and must—guide to achieve an ethics for the whole world. Based on his ongoing research, David sees positive change rooted in how groups function and establishing norms of behavior.

In response, the Dalai Lama underscores the importance of nurturing and assuming individual responsibility and training the mind to work with difficult emotions. Such training needs to begin early in the way children are educated, he affirms, adding that the time has come when we must teach children universal values such as kindness, compassion, and altruism, while cultivating an understanding of our shared humanity.

*Altruism, compassion,
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as a product of evolution.*

On the following day, Pumla introduces her talk by describing the African philosophy of ubuntu that laid the groundwork for healing in the aftermath of apartheid in South Africa. Ubuntu conveys the idea that “a person becomes a human being through other people,” she says. She goes on to describe her work through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a court-like restorative justice body assembled at the end of apartheid which invited victims of gross human rights violations to give statements about their experiences. “It was part of the work of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that we be guided by the principle of interconnectedness,” says Pumla, “setting aside... vengeance and looking to the possibility that we can connect as human beings.”

Embedded in the concept of ubuntu is “the possibility that you can transcend yourself even if you’re wounded, you’re hurt, or carrying trauma,” says Pumla, who refers to such moments as the “emergence of the unexpected.” She uses the term ‘repair’ to describe the long-term process of healing both individuals and communities. Repair refers to the moment-by-moment, day-to-day act of extending warm-heartedness to others in the face of the pain “that is always in the world,” she explains. It’s about being caring and consciously doing good.



(left to right) Richard Davidson, Founder, Center for Healthy Minds; Aaron Stern, Founder/President, Academy for the Love of Learning; David Sloan Wilson, discussant; His Holiness the Dalai Lama; Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, discussant; Susan Bauer-Wu, President, Mind & Life Institute; Thupten Jinpa, Chair, Mind & Life Institute

She also calls for creating safe spaces where stories and experiences can be shared. “When we witness [the] stories of others... there’s always the possibility we might be touched by them,” she says, adding, “It’s the reciprocal, mutual witnessing of the other that creates the sense of community.”

The Dalai Lama concludes their conversation by reaffirming the importance of warm-heartedness, and of the world’s seven billion people working together to overcome shared challenges. “Individual survival is entirely dependent on the community,” he says, “so taking care about the community is ultimately about taking care of yourself.”

Discussion Questions

Below are questions for use in facilitating discussion on themes presented in “Evolution of the Heart.” We encourage you to also read the Facilitator Notes (pages 7-8) for additional background.

Note: Mind & Life is eager to learn about conversations and actions that result from the film and this guide. Please share your reflections with us at communications@mindandlife.org.

1. For over three decades, the Dalai Lama has been engaging in dialogue with scientists, scholars, and changemakers on a host of topics related to better understanding the human mind and fostering mutual understanding and compassion. What do you see as the benefits of bringing together diverse perspectives and disciplines to explore questions at the heart of the human experience?
2. David Sloan Wilson points to a sea change that has occurred over the last 50 years in evolutionary science. What is “conscious evolution” and how does it differ from traditional notions of evolution?
3. David describes two experiments conducted with chickens. In one, the researchers separated out the most productive hens to breed a new generation of chickens. In the next, they separated out the most productive cages of chickens. Which of the two groups laid the most eggs? What do the researchers attribute this to?
4. The Dalai Lama emphasizes that humans are social animals whose survival depends on the community. How does this reinforce the results that the scientists discovered in the chicken experiment? Can you share an example of how cooperation has served a group or community that you belong to? What contributed to positive results?
5. David says that all groups are vulnerable to the “wolves of selfishness.” Where have you seen such behavior threaten a group or community? Can you share an example of a group that has successfully dealt with self-serving behavior among a subset of members?
6. Thupten Jinpa, long-time translator to the Dalai Lama, then elaborates on the importance of “fierce compassion” in addressing threats to peace and justice. What do you think he means by exercising fierce compassion?

7. The Dalai Lama refers to the role of the Bodhisattva, which means “enlightened being” or someone who works toward developing kindness, compassion, joy in others’ success, and peace of mind. What are steps toward nurturing the development of these wholesome qualities among members of a group or community?

8. In describing the concept of ubuntu, Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela says a person becomes a person through other people. What do you think she means by this?

9. As she relates the story of a group of mothers who, during South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, end up forgiving the young man responsible for the murder of their children, Pumla describes how the women felt physically connected to him through the *inimba*, the Swahili term for umbilical cord. How might the embodiment of these emotions contribute to their ultimate act of forgiveness?

10. Pumla says “it’s the reciprocal, mutual witnessing of the other that creates the sense of community.” What do you think she means by this and why is it important in today’s world?

11. The Dalai Lama emphasizes the need to educate humans about the importance of combining warm-heartedness with intelligence. Is this something that schools should do? And if so, what examples do you see of what the Dalai Lama calls the “education of the heart?”

12. In the final moments of the film, the Dalai Lama emphasizes that individual survival depends entirely on the community, and that taking care of the community is ultimately taking care of yourself. What do you think he means by this? And do you agree?

13. How does the principle of ubuntu articulated by Pumla fit within David’s definition of conscious evolution? How can you see both these ideas reflected within the Dalai Lama’s call for an “ethics for the whole world?”

Facilitator Notes

“Evolution of the Heart” condenses more than three hours of conversation with the Dalai Lama—and years of in-depth research—into a 36-minute film designed to spark conversation within classrooms and among community groups. Below is additional context on David and Pumla’s research, and points of intersection, to inform broader discussions.

The focus of David’s work is human evolution beyond the confines of genetic evolution. He notes the important role social factors have played in the development of the human species. While much is made about competition and “survival of the fittest”—especially in the Western world—human societies have largely evolved through our sense of cooperation with others. In fact, as David notes, humans are the most cooperative mammals on earth. So, competition and cooperation have engaged in a long and interesting dance as part of our evolutionary history.

David’s work also explores the concept of multilevel selection (not referenced in the film) where scaling from the individual through smaller to larger groups reveals the interplay of competition and cooperation at various levels. At each scale, David notes the conflict inherent in our survival, “what is good for me might be bad for someone else,” or “what’s good for my family might be bad for the community.” This can be seen through various acts of selfishness or self-serving behavior at each level. A simple example would be that of an individual hoarding food and not sharing it with another person. So, the hoarder benefits while the other person suffers.

In a more cooperative setting where the food is shared by the individual with both people being nourished, the two together might prove more successful at gathering additional food, building a shelter, or protecting themselves from danger. This is the process by which humans developed into cooperative groups, scaling up through families, clans, communities, states, and nations.

The nature of this scaling, however, is complicated. As we move up in scale, the complexities inherent in social interactions reveal themselves. We end up with groups competing against groups. This scaling on a group level has led to the suffering inflicted on others through violence, oppression, greed, and injustice in many forms. Given these challenges, in his book, “This View of Life,” David highlights the work of Elinor Ostrom and her Core Design Principles that offer a structure for building more egalitarian and compassionate communities. Ultimately, David’s work strives for an “ethics for the whole world,” an aspiration shared by the Dalai Lama and many others.

These principles offer practical steps toward what David refers to as our conscious evolution. The natural processes of evolution have delivered us to where we are in

the modern world today, a world full of remarkable developments in language, art, technology, and commerce. It has also wrought the grave challenges we face at the individual level with loneliness and depression and at the societal and planetary levels with systemic oppression and climate change, among many other issues. It cannot be overstated that these challenges are detrimental to individuals and represent a host of existential threats to the human race. It's clear that what's needed is the ability to transform ourselves, understand each other, and heal injustice.

Given these factors, we turn to Pumla's work and the philosophy of ubuntu. At the heart of ubuntu is the very notion of our interconnectedness: "I am because you are," and "a person becomes a human being through others." Pumla's work and insights take on the very real problems that surface in David's outline of our evolutionary history. The violence, oppression, and self-serving behavior that has occurred in every society throughout history requires accountability, forgiveness, and healing. The process is complicated. Pumla talks about the importance of understanding the role of the body as part of our shared humanity. There we connect to each other beyond the intellect, beyond words even, in a place of compassion where we sense the pain and joy of others.

These efforts require a much larger and deeper understanding of what it means to be human. If we are to survive and evolve as a global society, our notions of self and other must also evolve. As Pumla notes, "when we witness the lives and stories of others, it is as if we are reconstituting the self."

And here we find the connection between David and Pumla's work. The philosophy of ubuntu, along with other prosocial perspectives, is a deeply embedded cultural form of conscious evolution. It recognizes the complexity of our social differences and lifts up the value of acknowledging our shared humanity. Conscious evolution can be understood on two levels. The first is the simple and direct act of offering kindness and compassion to others because of moral implications. On a deeper level, it is to acknowledge the potential for transformation within ourselves and our societies as we connect with others who are different from us.

It is through these connections, this sense of interconnection, that we may ultimately create an ethics for the whole world. And inside of this work, we as a species evolve, consciously. We may never completely erase the core problems we face. There will likely always be forms of oppression and injustice. However, conscious evolution is available to us now as it always has been. As Pumla, David, and the Dalai Lama note throughout the film, it is possible for us to heal and grow, to reduce suffering, to embrace our differences, to celebrate each other's joy, and to allow humanity to continue its evolution into a future beyond our current imagining. —Phil Walker, Producer

Background on Discussants

David Sloan Wilson

David Sloan Wilson is an evolutionary biologist and SUNY Distinguished Professor of Biology and Anthropology Emeritus at Binghamton University. He has made foundational contributions to Darwin's theory of evolution. His work expands the horizon of evolutionary thinking beyond genetic evolution to include all of the fast-paced changes taking place around us (cultural evolution) and within us (each individual as an evolving entity). This expansion allows evolutionary theory to be related to religious and spiritual traditions more than ever before, including the necessity of an "ethics for the whole world."



David's most recent nonfiction book, and the one most relevant to his conversation with the Dalai Lama, is "This View of Life: Completing the Darwinian Revolution." David has also entered the fictional realm with his novel "Atlas Hugged: The Autobiography of John Galt III." David's other books include "Darwin's Cathedral: Evolution, Religion, and the Nature of Society;" "Evolution for Everyone: How Darwin's Theory Can Change the Way We Think About Our Lives;" "The Neighborhood Project: Using Evolution to Improve My City, One Block at a Time;" and "Does Altruism Exist? Culture, Genes, and the Welfare of Others."

David is co-founder and past president of [The Evolution Institute](#), which works to apply science-based solutions and use evidence-based best practices to solve pressing social issues to improve quality of life.

He is also co-founder and current president of [Prosocial World](#), a non-profit organization that seeks to "consciously evolve a world that works for all." Inspired by scientists, it bases its methods on the most recent developments in evolutionary, complex systems, and contextual behavioral science to enhance cooperation and inspire positive change for the well-being of others.

The community of practice within Prosocial World has built the Prosocial ARC Process, a method for helping any group, anywhere in the world, work better together. The Prosocial ARC Process is a unique, practical, applied, behavioral approach that contributes to a significant worldwide research effort using evolutionary theory as a unifying theoretical framework.

Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela

Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela is Professor in the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at Stellenbosch University, where she holds the South African National Research Foundation Chair in Violent Histories and Transgenerational Trauma. Her research interest is in historical trauma and its intergenerational repercussions, and exploring what the “repair” of these transgenerational effects might mean.



From 1995–1998, Pumla served on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of South Africa and chaired the Human Rights Violations Committee and its public hearings in the Western Cape. She has published extensively on victims and perpetrators of gross human rights violations, and on forgiveness and remorse.

Pumla is the author of “A Human Being Died that Night: A South African Story of Forgiveness,” which won the 2004 Alan Paton Award and the Christopher Award in the United States. The book has been published seven times, including translations in Dutch, German, Italian, and Korean.

Her other books include “Narrating our Healing: Perspectives on Healing Trauma” as co-author; “Memory, Narrative and Forgiveness: Perspectives on the Unfinished Journeys of the Past” as co-editor; “Breaking Intergenerational Cycles of Repetition: A Global Dialogue on Historical Trauma and Memory” as editor; and “Dare We Hope: Facing Our Past to Find a New Future.”

Pumla’s accolades include the 2020 Harry Oppenheimer Fellowship Award, the Harvard Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study Fellowship, the Alan Paton Award, the Christopher Award, the Distinguished African Scholar Title at Cornell University’s Mario Einaudi Centre for International Studies, and the Eleanor Roosevelt Award.

On December 11, 2020, Pumla was featured in a New York Times magazine interview, [What Can America Learn From South Africa About National Healing](#).

Resources

Organizations & Programs

Below are the names of organizations and programs that are working to advance key principles articulated in the film.

Center for Healthy Minds

Driven by its vision of a kinder, wiser, more compassionate world, the Center for Healthy Minds at the University of Wisconsin–Madison conducts rigorous scientific research to bring new insights aimed at improving the well-being of people of all backgrounds and ages. Founded by Richard J. Davidson, PhD, it has investigated the science of emotions, contemplative practices, and qualities of mind it suspects affect well-being, including attention, resilience, equanimity, savoring positive emotions, kindness, compassion, gratitude, and empathy. Visit the Center’s website to access tools to improve well-being in the workplace, schools, and beyond.

centerhealthyminds.org

Centre for Restorative Justice

Restorative justice is a process based on the principle that the people most effective at finding a solution to a problem are the people who are most directly impacted by the problem. Based in Australia, the Center facilitates and provides opportunities for those involved in a conflict to work together to understand, clarify, resolve, and work together towards repairing the harm caused.

restorativejustice.com.au

Compassion Institute

The Compassion Institute is a global nonprofit advocate for compassion education. It offers practical compassion-focused trainings based on the latest psychology, neurology, and contemplative science. Visit its website to access videos and information on training options, including its flagship Compassion Cultivation Training (CCT)© course designed at Stanford University.

compassioninstitute.com

Compassionate Schools Project

The Compassionate Schools Project in Louisville, Kentucky is a partnership between the University of Virginia and Jefferson County Public Schools with support from the Louisville Metro Government. It seeks to implement a curriculum developed by world-class educators, scientists, and practitioners that teaches elementary school students to cultivate focus, resilience, and well-being for academic success. Facilitating the integrated development of mind and body, the project interweaves support in academic achievement, mental fitness, health, and compassionate character.

compassionschools.org/

Flourish Foundation

The Flourish Foundation is dedicated to inspiring systemic change through heart-mind cultivation, promoting personal well-being, benevolent social action, and environmental stewardship. Since 2010, it has innovated and facilitated programs that nurture life skills and transformation through ethics and values, meditation, and experiential inquiry. At the heart of its work is revealing the human potential for leading a wise, moral, and compassionate life.

flourishfoundation.org

Greater Good Science Center

Since 2001, the Greater Good Science Center (GGSC) at the University of California, Berkeley has been at the fore of a scientific movement to explore the roots of happy and compassionate individuals, strong social bonds, and altruistic behavior—the science of a meaningful life. GGSC is unique in its commitment to both science and practice. Not only does it sponsor groundbreaking scientific research into social and emotional well-being, it helps people apply this research to their personal and professional lives.

ggsc.berkeley.edu

Restorative Justice Baltimore

Restorative Response Baltimore is a conflict resolution and community building organization that provides space and a process for people to transform their conflicts into cooperation, and by doing so, contribute to a vision of justice rooted in equity, community, and collaboration. Its work has been recognized nationally and internationally for its use of restorative justice and conflict management strategies in a variety of settings, including criminal justice, education, neighborhoods, and the workplace.

restorativeresponse.org

Restorative Practices International

Restorative Practices International (RPI) is a not-for-profit, independent, professional member association that supports the development of restorative practice in schools, prisons, workplaces, organizations, families and communities.

restorativepracticesinternational.com

Mind & Life Resources

Dialogues with the Dalai Lama

2020 Mind & Life Conversation with the Dalai Lama: Resilience, Compassion, and Science for Healing Today

In a world besieged by the COVID-19 pandemic and rocked by anti-racism protests, more than 1.3 million people tuned-in to this livestream event, simultaneously translated into 14 languages, to hear the Dalai Lama offer insights on the way forward. Over 90 minutes, the global leader spoke to the urgency of managing destructive emotions, the primacy of recognizing our essential oneness, and the role of education

in equipping emerging generations to do both.
mindandlife.org/healing-today

Mind & Life podcast

The Mind & Life podcast addresses fundamental questions that arise through bridging science and contemplative wisdom. Episodes relevant to the film include:

Thupten Jinpa, [Cultivating Compassion](#)
Anne Klein, [The Wisdom of the Body](#)
Jack Kornfield, [Wisdom for Our Times](#)
John Powell, [Othering and Belonging](#)
Mingyur Rinpoche, [Awareness, Compassion, and Wisdom](#)
David Sloan Wilson, [Conscious Evolution](#)

podcast.mindandlife.org/

Inspiring Minds Series

Inspiring Minds is an online conversation series that brings together thought leaders and contemplatives to engage with one another and the audience in exploring the role of the mind in human flourishing. Relevant episodes include:

[Mindfulness & Racial Healing](#) with Ruth King and Sharon Salzberg
[Finding Connections: Pathways to Embodied Wisdom](#) with Peter Wayne and Willa Blythe Baker
[Transformative Change: Where Research and Action in the World Meet](#) with Doris Chang and Reggie Hubbard

Digital Dialogues

Digital Dialogues are interactive multimedia sites designed to publicly share presentations, discussions, and resources from our Mind & Life Dialogues and Conversations.

Education of the Heart

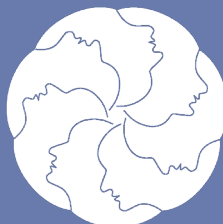
This multimedia site summarizes presentations and discussions from the Mind & Life Institute's 33rd Dialogue with the Dalai Lama held in Dharamsala, India in March 2018. For five days, leading scientists, scholars, and educational practitioners gathered to explore new frontiers in education and social and emotional learning rooted in science and contemplative wisdom.

educationoftheheartdialogue.org

Ubuntu Digital Dialogue

Captured in this interactive multimedia site are presentations and discussions from the 32nd Mind & Life Dialogue, Botho/Ubuntu: A Dialogue on Spirituality, Science, and Humanity, held in Gaborone, Botswana in August 2017.

ubuntudialogue.org



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I N S T I T U T E

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