



Humble before the Void: A Western Astronomer, his Journey East, and a Remarkable Encounter Between Western Science and Tibetan Buddhism

Chris Impey

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“This book will provide readers with a greater awareness of the spirit of curiosity and inquiry that lies at the heart of the Buddhist tradition, as well as the fruitfulness of maintaining active communication between the Buddhist and scientific communities.” —**from the Foreword by His Holiness the Dalai Lama**

In *Humble before the Void*, Impey, a noted astronomer, educator, and author gives us a thoroughly absorbing and engaging account of his journey to Northern India to teach in the first-ever “Science for Monks” leadership program. The program was initiated by His Holiness the Dalai Lama to introduce science into the Tibetan Buddhist monastic tradition.

In a vivid and compelling narrative, Impey introduces us to a group of exiled Tibetan monks whose charm, tenacity and unbridled enthusiasm for learning is infectious. Impey marvels not only at their enthusiasm, but at their tireless diligence that allows the monks to painstakingly build intricate sand mandalas—that can be swept away in an instant. He observes them as they meticulously count galaxies and notes how their enthusiasm and diligence stands in contrast to many American students who are frequently turned off by science’s inability to deliver easy, immediate payoffs. Because the Buddhist monks have had a limited science education, Impey must devise creative pedagogy. His new students immediately take to his inspired teaching methods, whether it’s the use of balloons to demonstrate the Hubble expansion or donning an Einstein mask to explain the theory of relativity.

Humble before the Void also recounts Impey’s experiences outside the classroom, from the monks’ eagerness to engage in pick-up basketball games and stream episodes of hip American sitcoms to the effects on his relationship with the teenage son who makes the trip with him. Moments of profound serenity and beauty in the Himalayas are contrasted with the sorrow of learning that other monks have set themselves on fire to protest the Chinese oppression in Tibet.

At the end of the three week program, both the monks and Impey have gained a valuable education. While the monks have a greater understanding and appreciation of science, Impey has acquired greater self-knowledge and a deeper understanding of the nature of learning and teaching in the East and West. This understanding leads to a renewed enthusiasm for making his topic come alive for others.

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