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The Dalai Lama Center for Peace and Education

A Canadian Cultural Institution in downtown Vancouver

“My religion is kindness,” the Dalai Lama famously stated. The Dalai Lama Center for Peace and Education (Center) is aligned with this ethos and to His Holiness’ belief that each person must “cultivate the heart, and work for peace within yourself and in the world.”

The vision of the Vancouver-based Center reflects the Dalai Lama’s life-long commitment to compassion and inner well-being. Founded in 2005 by Victor Chan and the Dalai Lama, the Center will be a world-class institution, grounded in Vancouver yet global in nature. While its physical home will be here, its reach, due to the Dalai Lama’s far-flung connections, will be world-wide.

The Center will have no religious or political affiliations. It will promote peace through education, personal transformation, and dialogue. The Dalai Lama believes that vital, sustainable communities depend upon many small, individual acts of compassion and helpfulness. By thinking less about ourselves and more about the well-being of others, we actually enhance our growth and happiness. By helping others, we contribute to the greater good. Along the way, our lives and the lives of others are touched.

“Educating the heart” is the Center’s tag line. The Center will provide an educational environment that cultivates mindfulness: the integration of mind, body, and spirit. It will encourage heightened awareness within diverse practices of art. And it will offer a venue to examine the world’s wisdom traditions through creative interpretation. By bringing peace into our own lives, the Center will help to bring peace into the world.

What makes the Dalai Lama Center special?

When built, the Center will be the only institution in the world that bears the Dalai Lama’s name. As a repository of the Dalai Lama’s ideals, the Center is committed to advancing his twin goals of personal growth and acting for the greater good.

The Center is also special in its cultivation of two essential dimensions of our humanity: our need for intellectual sustenance and our yearning for emotional and spiritual well-being. The Center is a venue designed for active, experiential participation.

Its programs will optimize chance encounters and interaction between people and ideas. They are designed to maximize synergies between our minds and hearts.

Where will the Dalai Lama Center be located?

The Center will be located in the heart of downtown Vancouver. The high volume of pedestrian traffic, throughout the day and evening, will help to anchor the Center in the community. Over time, the venue will become a hub, a vital link in Vancouver’s cultural DNA.

Who will design the Dalai Lama Center?

An eminent architect will design the Center. Our choice of architects will not be based on their grandiose vision, but on their outstanding sensitivity to Vancouver's landscape and spirit. Most importantly, our architect will excel at creating spaces that promote psychological and emotional comfort for all who come within the Center's orbit. Their artistry will create a structure that encourages visitors to connect meaningfully with each other. Our architect will be attuned to the dual personality of the Center: on one hand, an energetic setting for animated dialogue and interaction; on the other, a cloister-like oasis for contemplation.

How will people experience the Dalai Lama Center?

The Center will be experienced both actively and reflectively. A wide array of different-use spaces within the building will promote engagement between individuals and groups, people and ideas, communities and spiritual rejuvenation.

In Toronto, the multi-million-dollar addition to the Royal Ontario Museum (the Michael Lee-Chin Crystal) was designed by Daniel Libeskind to enhance people's contact with iconic objects. In contrast, the DLC will be designed to generate direct interactive experiences between participants. And to push the potential for serendipitous encounters.

The Center will have a low psychological threshold for entry. All it takes will be the purchase of a cappuccino at its sidewalk café or a stroll into its light-bathed, free-admission gallery. The Center will be designed to warmly welcome all who gather – or wander – into its premises. People from every walk of life and social strata will be made to feel at ease. They will be encouraged to drop in, and linger, at all hours of the day.

What programs will the Center offer?

The Center is conceived as an open cultural bazaar, embraced by residents and visitors alike. It will have a smorgasbord of compelling programs that offer sustenance to the mind and spirit.

The following are some examples:

Literary evenings: Local and international authors will give readings, followed by informal discussions in a Dialogue Lounge. Renowned writers such as Pico Iyer, Doug Coupland, Malcolm Gladwell, or Anne Lamott may be on hand for casual conversations.

Philosophers' Café: Informal discussion groups will explore diverse ideas and issues in another Dialogue Lounge.

Film and video screenings: Thought-provoking documentaries and other genres will be presented every night, followed by moderated discussions.

Nobel Laureates lecture series: Nobel laureates will give public lectures and facilitate extended seminars. Our current Board of Advisors includes five Nobel Peace laureates: HH the Dalai Lama, Shirin Ebadi, Desmond Tutu, Mairead Maguire, and Jimmy Carter. Other possible invitees include Elie Wiesel, Oscar Arias Sanchez, Mikhail Gorbachev, Steven Chu, and Daniel Kahneman.

Science and spirituality dialogues: Workshops by prominent researchers and spiritual leaders will explore the intersection of science and spirituality. Faculty may include those at the forefront of positive psychology: Andrew Weil, Deepak Chopra, Richard Davidson, Ed Diener, and Martin Seligman.

Contemplative programs: Contemplative practices foster wisdom and allow people to plug into our natural capacity for compassion, forgiveness, and inspiration. These ways of knowing, and in particular, the cultivation of empathy, are at the heart of moral development. Eminent teachers such as Thich Nhat Hanh, Pema Chodron, Sharon Salzberg, Father Thomas Keating, Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, and Jack Kornfield will be invited to lead intensives and workshops.

A special emphasis on the arts

Modern aesthetics and art practices have been strongly influenced by the mindfulness teachings of spiritual traditions, both Eastern and Western. These principles are now a major force in contemporary art, and they continue to inform the global art community. Artists of differing beliefs are integrating meditative practices and awareness techniques into their work. For many people, creative endeavours are powerful tools to further their personal growth.

The Center will provide an educational environment that cultivates mindfulness, integration of mind, body, and spirit, and heightened awareness within art practices. We will develop an artistic resource center for Vancouverites, local in operation yet global in influence. The creative process will be used to cultivate openness to the wisdom of mind and heart, allowing participants to mature as artists and human beings.

Educating the Heart

The Center will work to balance the education of the mind with the education of the heart. We believe that the learning process should be holistic: a full engagement of our physical, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. The objective is to advance peace in ourselves and in the world. The Center will embody spirit, intellect, and wisdom in service to the greater good.

The Center recognizes the need for all of us to acquire practical skills for the contemporary workplace. Yet the cultivation of emotional intelligence and inner fulfillment is also an urgent need, in light of society's rapid changes and unpredictability.

Our founder, the Dalai Lama, believes that the most essential knowledge arises not from the head but from the heart. The Center will seek to foster an education that combines both cognitive development and spiritual self-reflection.

Will the Center collaborate with institutions of higher education?

The Center will raise a significant research endowment fund to support research in British Columbia and elsewhere. It will foster collaboration among scholars, financially support new faculty positions at universities and colleges in B.C., and seek to attract distinguished researchers, academics, and student visitors to the province. These efforts will be achieved largely by establishing chairs and scholarships and by funding research projects based on independent peer-review selection processes.

The Center offers an unprecedented opportunity to bring together existing research projects, to sponsor exciting new initiatives and to share these works with other institutions around the world. Our colleagues at the University of British Columbia and Simon Fraser University are already engaged in critical research on compassion and kindness in learning practices. These programs represent the types of research projects the Center will support.

What does the Dalai Lama Center mean for Vancouver?

The Dalai Lama's landmark visit to Vancouver in 2004 generated many fruitful results. A small group was inspired to initiate the InterSpiritual Center project. Victor Chan, chair of the 2004 visit, was motivated to create the Dalai Lama Center. Similarly, the Center can be likened to the imperceptible flap of a butterfly's wings: an event with unpredictable and profound consequences. We know that His Holiness' commitment to peace and universal ethics has profound resonance for many people around the world. The Center will undoubtedly act as a beacon, drawing like-minded people and institutions to Vancouver. The city will have the potential to become the model of a socially sustainable metropolis. And the Center may act as a powerful catalyst, giving Canadians the vision to create a kinder, more altruistic society.