



## UW-Madison researchers to meet with Dalai Lama

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Jonathan Patz, a UW-Madison researcher on global environmental health, has been to countless conferences, as have most academics.

But the meeting Patz will attend this week is like no other.

This week, he and a handful of other scientists will sit with the Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, at the Tibetan leader's residence-in-exile in Dharamsala, India, to talk about an issue dear to Patz — ethics and the environment. The meeting is part of a long-running series of conferences sponsored by Gyatso's Mind and Life Institute and is titled "Ecology, Ethics and Interdependence."

Patz is traveling to India with Richard Davidson, the Vilas Research Professor of Psychology and Psychiatry, a member of the Mind and Life Institute's Board of Directors and a friend of Gyatso. Davidson, whose research on meditation and the brain has fascinated Gyatso, has been involved in many of the conferences, which started in 1987 as a way to bring together scientists, philosophers and other thinkers to talk about ethics and current issues of science and research. Most recently a conference explored the subject of "altruism and compassion in economic systems."

"These are private meetings where he literally spends five days with us," Davidson said. "It is very hard to go back and be the same person you were before the conference. It really is a very precious opportunity."

The conferences have drawn the world's leading thinkers on science and ethics and each has resulted in a book on the subject that was the focus of the meeting, Davidson said. He added that, though it is difficult to pin down practical consequences of the meetings, they have deeply influenced public policy leaders in a number of important areas.

Patz said this meeting is timely because of efforts among scholars as well as political leaders to link world environmental issues such as climate change with ethical behavior. Increasingly, Patz said, the great religions of the world are embracing the importance of environmental stewardship.

In that light, Patz said, something as mundane and political as energy legislation takes on new meaning and importance and can become a practical expression of how we view our role in the natural world. Patz also said he hopes the meeting will inspire his work as director of the UW-Madison's Institute for Global Health.

Patz is no stranger to ethics and environmental issues. In research published in 2007 in the journal *EcoHealth*, he demonstrated how the burden of climate change will likely rest disproportionately on the world's poor.

Davidson said the meetings are intense but rewarding. Scientists are asked to give a 30-minute presentation and then be prepared to answer questions.

"After your first sentence, he'll start interrupting," Davidson said of the Dalai Lama. "He's your model of an intensely curious, really thoughtful student. ... Part of it is just being with the Dalai Lama. There aren't that many people on Earth like him."