

Question 24:

You mention that one should not inquire about the nature of the universe, yet individuals such as Einstein, Feynman, and Hawking have spent their lives doing precisely that and have advanced human knowledge way beyond anything that Buddhism could possibly hope to do. I am referencing the article entitled ***Modern Society and Buddhist Spirituality*** by Ven. Dr. Belligalle Dhammajoti, where he says that complete knowledge of these four spheres is impossible, and they are *acinteyyani* – thoughts not to be thought out. Although we can obtain knowledge to a certain extent, there would be no end to seeking or researching those fields. They are unthinkable, unimaginable, impenetrable and incomprehensible, and they transcend the limits of human thinking. If people did not think about those things and actually understand them, we wouldn't live in the kind of world we live in today. *From Michael Moshenrose*

Answer: Knowledge and understanding of our physical world is necessary for us to protect it and to ensure our survival. As we learn more through our modern scientists and increasingly powerful instruments, the human mind can grasp more and more information about the universe. It takes enormous resources of time, effort and funds to attain, which ideally should be balanced with the real benefit to the world, not just pursued for satisfying curiosity. The Buddha taught many things about the cosmos. He described the universe and its contents in terms of wheels and spheres, which describes the structure of atoms, solar systems and galaxies at a time far before microscopes and telescopes and discovery of these structures by scientists. But he taught that which is conducive to attaining enlightenment, and accordingly, his descriptions of the vast cosmos and its many celestial beings help to encourage humility and detachment from the human form and from individuality. He focused on the science of the mind, i.e, knowing how the mind works and how to control it, so that man can develop his concentration, awareness and insight to a high degree for the purpose of developing the wisdom that leads to enlightenment. That wisdom leads to knowledge about the universe without using scientific methods or instruments; when the Buddha attained enlightenment, he knew all about the universe without using his physical senses. Although he taught some things about the universe which are beyond sensory experience, he cautioned against trying to understand them by mere human reasoning, which is conditioned and limited by our sensory experience. Even when it is aided by scientific instruments and computers, human reasoning cannot attain knowledge of cosmic facts which have no relationship to anything that the human mind has been exposed to (through the senses), and are beyond the range of our scientific instruments.