

Welcome

Dr. Edward Kessler MBE Founder Director, Woolf Institute

Lord Rowan Williams and His Holiness the Dalai Lama share the attribute of being willing to ask searching questions and to oppose the shallow certainty that we understand all there is. These two days of dialogue together epitomize the respect that takes the Other as seriously as one demands to be taken oneself. This is an immensely difficult task, as most of us know, because we find it all too easy to relate to others in a casual way, perhaps lacking sincerity or concentration on the reality of the Other. For dialogue to take place, there must be a genuine hearing of the Other.

During the next two days, we will witness a personal meeting of two people noted for their wisdom and humanity. Lord Williams and His Holiness the Dalai Lama will speak to each other, as they habitually speak to others, with full respect of what each is and has to say. We are privileged to have been invited to join this conversation.

My hope for this dialogue can be best expressed by the story of the Nobel Prize winning physicist Isadore Rabi, who was asked how he first became interested in science. He explained that his mother made him a scientist without him knowing it. All the other children would come home and their mothers would ask, "what did you learn at school today?" My mother would say, 'Izzy, did you ask a good question?'"

When faith suppresses questions, it dies. When it accepts superficial answers, it begins to wither. The greatest prophets asked questions of God, but perhaps most trenchant was Job, and God replied with a few of His own. In an interdependent, as well as interconnected world, the ability to allow for conflicting positions is essential. It is assumed that the opposite of truth is falsehood, but I wonder whether the opposite of one truth may well be another more profound truth.

Please ask a good question in this dialogue and take advantage of the privilege of engaging with Lord Williams and His Holiness the Dalai Lama – and the whole group. Motivated by these two great teachers, may we all use the critical intelligence and good heart, which is the gift God gives all humanity. I suspect we will discover that there will be more than one answer.

Ed Kessler