

Promoting Health and Happiness: A Buddhist's Perspective

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Abstract

Bhutan is known to the rest of the world as the country of 'Gross National Happiness' (GNH). His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the fourth Druk Gyalpo coined this term with farsighted vision of building an economy that would not only enable the country to preserve its unique culture but also ensure everlasting peace, happiness and wellbeing of His people. The Bhutanese are blessed with all the conditions and physical facilities that are required for happiness: fresh air, clean water, good governance, free education and health care, and many others.

However, there is no evidence to prove that all Bhutanese are enjoying true inner happiness deep within. This is because happiness is not something that can be found outside of us and moreover, happiness derived from external sources is only temporary and fleeting. True happiness is within our mind, which can only be achieved by skillfully observing our inner world. A number of recent studies have identified happiness as an important factor that determines the state of health and wellbeing. Further, happy people not only lived longer but were also found to be more sociable, tolerant, helpful, loving and forgiving than unhappy people.

Happiness is something that every human being wants and in fact, we spend our entire life blindly chasing after it, only to land up in sorrow. Perhaps the best way to begin our journey in search of happiness is by drawing inspiration from the Buddhist teachings of *Phar-chin drug*, or the six *paramitas*, meaning the six invaluable qualities of an ideal human being. This paper attempts to elucidate how one can achieve true, inner and lasting happiness by infusing the virtues of *phar-chin drug* into our daily life.

Key words: Happiness, health, *phar-chin drug*, *paramita*, *Jin-pa*, *Tshul-thrim*, *Zod-pa*, *Tson-dru*, *Sam-ten*, *She-rab*

Introduction

Bhutan, also known as Druk Yul, is a small Himalayan nation, which is known to the world as the country of 'Gross National Happiness' (GNH). The term GNH was coined by our beloved fourth King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck in the early seventies, when he declared that - "Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross Domestic product". His Majesty created this philosophy with the farsighted vision of building an economy that would not only enable the country to preserve its unique culture but also ensure everlasting peace, happiness and wellbeing of His people. Since then, GNH has been highly valued as a priceless treasure and a gift received from the fourth Druk Gyalpo, as a symbol of His unconditional love and compassion to us, the citizens of Bhutan.

Consequently, the people of Bhutan are blessed with all the conditions and opportunities that are required for happiness: fresh air, clean water, good governance, free education and health care, and many others. Nevertheless, despite the availability of many external factors for happiness, certain evidences show that not all the people are happy. For instance, patient records at both the western and traditional medicine hospitals in Thimphu, clearly shows a significant number of patients with mental illnesses such as anxiety and depression. A number of our youths are getting into drugs and suicide cases are on the rise. Domestic violence and divorce cases are also becoming more common.

Therefore, as a complement to the available external factors for happiness, it is also crucial for each of us to understand what happiness is and what can make us happy, because happiness is something that all of us want and it is important indeed as it determines the quality of our life in many ways. Many recent studies have identified happiness as an important factor that determines the state of health and wellbeing. For instance, a study by Gerdtham and Johhannesson (2002) confirmed that good health has positive effect on happiness. They have clearly shown that the probability of being happy all the time is much higher in people with good health than those with poor health. On the other hand, there have been studies which indicated that happiness has positive effect on health and longevity. People with positive feelings (cheerful people) were found to live longer than those with negative feelings or less cheerful ones (Layard, 2005. P23).

Interestingly, the connection between and the inseparable nature of health and happiness has also been recognized very much by our Bhutanese since time that has no beginning until the present.

Bhutanese have always believed that happiness is the result of good health, which as evidence is visible in our popular statements and also in many folk songs – “*Lue lu na tsa meth-na gha, Sem lu dhu ngyel meth-na ki*”, meaning “if there is no physical illness, there will be happiness and if there is no mental illness, there will be peace”. Due to this strong correlation between health and happiness it is very important for us to be happy and cheerful in order to enjoy good health and longevity; but how do we go about it?

Many spiritual masters have very clearly explained that happiness is not something that can be found outside of us. It is within our mind, which can only be discovered by skillfully observing our inner world. Further, happiness derived from external sources and conditions is only temporary, while happiness derived from the inner world, from within our mind is ever lasting (G. D. Rinpoche, 2012; S. T. Rinpoche, 2012; Tashi, 2011; Sui, 2011).

This paper attempts to elucidate how one can achieve true, inner and lasting happiness by infusing spiritual teachings by great masters into our daily life. More specifically, it discusses about how one can incorporate the Buddhist values and principles of *phar-chin drug*, the six invaluable qualities of an ideal human being.

Cultivating happiness through the virtues of *Phar-chin drug*

Human beings are social animals. We are not only interdependent on each other but also with the immediate surroundings. Hence, we cannot be happy if all others around us not. To bring about real happiness to oneself and to others around us, the Buddha taught us the six invaluable qualities of a perfect human being. The six invaluable qualities are known as “the six paramitas,” or *phar-chin drug*. *Paramita* is a Sanskrit term meaning “perfection” and *Phar-chin drugin Choe-key* (dharma-Language) literally means “gone to the other shore” The six *paramitas* are: (1) *Jin-pa*,

(2) *Tshul-thrim*, (3) *Zod-pa*, (4) *Tson-dru*, (5) *Sam-ten* and (6) *She-rab* (T.S. Rinpoche, n.d.) The six *paramitas* are the practices of Bodhisattvas (awakened beings) who are dedicated to helping all sentient beings. However, we can all learn from them, as they are meant to help us lead a happy and fruitful life. Whether at home, work place, or anywhere, drawing inspiration and being guided by the values and principles of *Phar-chin drug* can provide fulfillment and happiness, which will contribute significantly to the national goal of achieving GNH.

1. *Jin-pa* (generosity): *Jin-pa* is the first *paramita* that Lord Buddha taught which is easy to understand and can be practiced by anyone. It is the act of cultivating an attitude of generosity. *Jin-pa* has been classified into three types: (i) *Zang- zing nor-gi Jinpa*, (ii) *Dam-pai choe-ki Jin-pa* and (iii). *Me-jig chap-ki Jin-pa*.

(i) *Zang- zing nor-gi Jinpa* is a kind of generosity which involves the act of giving in terms of goods or material things to the poor and the needy.

ii) *Dam-pai choe-ki Jin-pais* giving the priceless gift of Dharma to others, especially to those who have respect for the spiritual teachings.

(iii). *Me-jig chap-ki Jin-pa* is giving support and protection to those who are suffering from fear of - being harmed by others, falling sick, losing life, and falling victims to natural calamities, etc.

One can practice at least one of the generousities mentioned above in whichever way suits best. For instance, *me-jig chap-ki Jin-pa* can be generously given away by the doctors, lawyers, policemen, teachers and many others to their clients as a part of their profession. Parents can give this *Jin-pa* to their children. Organizations such as NCWC and RENEW are established to protect women and children from being harmed. It is a great an opportunity for those people working there to practice the *me-jig chap-ki Jin-pa*.

Similarly, people who are wealthy, including the middle income people can practice the *Zang-zing nor-gi Jinpa* by developing a sense of compassion for the poor and the needy. In the Golden Lotus Sutras, it says, “The soul develops by giving, not by accumulating! You have to plant in order to harvest. When you give, it is like planting seeds. It comes back to you many many times” (Sui, 2011). So do not forget to share what you have with those in need. Master Choa Kok Sui (2011) teaches us that giving away about 10 percent of what one earns for charitable and spiritual purpose will generate prosperity karma. Generosity is believed to bring good luck!

The spiritual teachings that we receive from our holy masters are examples of *Dam-pai choe-ki Jin-pa*. That is why many spiritual teachers are selflessly spreading the priceless teachings with pure motivation to bring about peace and happiness to the people around the world.

(2) *Tshul-thrim* (ethics): The second *paramita* or perfection is *Tshul-thrim*, which in a more literal sense, means abiding by the precepts. However, in general sense, it means ethical behaviour, moral conduct or ethical conduct. His Holiness the Dalai Lama teaches that ethical behaviour is a feature of inner discipline that leads to a happier life. Great spiritual teachers like the Buddha teach us to perform wholesome action and avoid indulging in unwholesome actions. Whether our action is wholesome or unwholesome depends on whether that action or deed arises from disciplined or undisciplined state of mind. Incidentally, it has always been felt that a disciplined mind leads to happiness and an undisciplined mind leads to suffering (Lama and Cutler, 1998). Nyenpa Rinpoche in his recent teaching at the Royal Thimphu College mentions that GNH is within each of us and

can manifest itself only by developing morality. Thus, it is important for us to utilize our knowledge and intelligence properly to bring changes from within to develop a good heart.

Buddhism teaches us to avoid ten unwholesome actions and instead, practice ten wholesome actions in order to live correctly. The ten unwholesome actions are - killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying, slander, harsh speech, useless speech, covetousness, ill-will, and misguided beliefs. Alternatively, the ten wholesome or virtuous actions are - charity, self-restraint, meditation, reverence, and service, transference of merit, rejoicing in other's merit, hearing the dharma, teaching the dharma, and straightening one's views.

Similarly, in the Golden Lotus Sutra, it says, "Stealing generates poverty karma" (Sui, 2011). Likewise each negative action would have their corresponding negative results, which comes back in many folds. The same rule applies to every virtuous action accumulated. "Life is like an echo. What you send out comes back to you many many times!" (Sui, 2011). Therefore, we need to be mindful to practice what is good for others. Do not forget to share what you have with those who are in need. Be kind to the animals by not eating their meat because there is no way one can practice ethical conduct without becoming vegetarian. Happiness and satisfaction are the results of being in service to others, including the *Tsa-wa-sum*, our parents, students, clients, patients, etc., and all those who need our hands to the best we can. The ultimate goal of this *paramita* is to free oneself and others from suffering.

(3) *Zod-pa* (tolerance, patience, forgiveness, and acceptance): The third *paramita* is about the practice of patience, tolerance, forgiveness and endurance. These qualities help us to counter anger, hatred, and vengeance when someone hurts or abuses us, be it at work or at home. Many spiritual teachers emphasise that anger and hatred are considered to be the greatest evils of all the afflictive or negative emotions, because they greatly obstruct the development of compassion and altruism, destroying one's virtue and calmness of mind. In the words of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, "The only factor that can give you refuge or protection from the destructive effects of anger and hatred is your practice of tolerance and patience" (Lama and Cutler (1998). Similarly, His Holiness the G.D. Rinpoche (2012) supports that things or situations look so much better when viewed with patience, because patience creates space to think and room to breathe. Depriving oneself of patience and tolerance will allow anger to take over making one's life miserable.

Zod-pa also means patience and perseverance with work. These days many of us feel overwhelmed by the heavy work load before us, especially teachers and health professionals. Here too, patience and tolerance can help us by not letting us give up, but instead motivating us to continue to think and do good things for the benefit of others. Whenever we suffer from stress and 'burnouts' let's derive inspiration from the fact that Lord Buddha practiced intensively for six years before he attained enlightenment under the Bodhitree at Bodhgaya. The result of His great patience has not only benefited our planet earth but also the whole universe. Therefore, when confronted with stress and 'burnouts' at work, let us meditate on this *paramita* and the subtle reward associated with each hard work. Don't we, at the end of each day's hard work, enjoy a feeling of satisfaction that we are capable of working hard?

Further *Zod-pa* can be practiced in almost everything we do. At school, we need *zod-pa* to persevere in our study. At work, it helps us to perform better by accomplishing our tasks willingly. At home, *zod-pa* is the foundation for a happy family (no domestic violence) life; while for

ourselves, *zod-pa* allows us to develop our personality by knowing and understanding ourselves more deeply.

(4) *Tson-dru* (joyful endeavour, diligence, zeal): The fourth *paramita* is about diligence, enthusiastic effort or zeal to carry out the tasks in hand. The word *Tson-dru* in strict sense means taking immense delight in benefiting others. Thus, the moment you know what you are doing is beneficial to others; you tend to go ahead with deep enthusiasm. Such enthusiastic effort counters laziness, and brings joy to our lives as we feel a sense of accomplishment in finishing what we have started. *Tson-dru* allows us to experience true delight that arises from deep within us whenever we are able to do something that is wholesome. It enables us to keep going when we feel tired or overwhelmed. It is refreshing and inspiring.

This *paramita* teaches us to bring positive energy and effort to everything we do. It enables us to arouse the will to do “good” and make virtue a part of our life. It also helps us to maintain any virtue that has arisen, not allowing the good to decrease or vanish, and exerting great effort to increase beneficial qualities by helping others. Wisdom teachings often state that- by developing compassion and helping others tirelessly, we are only helping ourselves. This may sound philosophical but many recent studies support the idea that developing compassion and altruism has positive effect on our physical and emotional health. For instance, a research study on the “healing power of doing good” by Luks (2012) has shown a number of health benefits that are derived by developing the virtue of compassion, kindness and altruism. The following are some of the benefits of helping others among many others:

1. *Helping others contributes to the maintenance of good health and can diminish the effect of minor and serious psychological and physical diseases and disorders.*
2. *The rush of euphoria after performing a kind act triggers physical sensations and the release of the body's natural painkillers, the endorphins. This is followed by a longer period of calm and improved emotional well-being.*
3. *Helping can enhance feelings of joyfulness, emotional resilience, vigor, and can reduce the unhealthy sense of isolation.*
4. *A sense of self-worth, greater happiness, and optimism is increased, and feelings of helplessness and depression decrease.*
5. *Caring for strangers leads to immense immune and healing benefits*

The results of the above scientific study are very much consistent with the Buddhist concept of the ‘*Ley Judrel and Tha Dam-Tsik*’ (the Law of Karma). This study can be a source of inspiration for those suffering from chronic health problems, the health conscious, and especially for those who are in the helping profession.

5. *Sam-ten* (Meditative Concentration):

The fifth *paramita* is *Sam-ten*, or meditative concentration. Meditative concentration is defined as the capacity to remain undistracted. The perfection of *Sam-ten* (meditative concentration) is invaluable because it enables us to practice the other four preceding *paramitas* effectively. The perfection of *Sam-ten* is about training the mind to focus and to follow clear intentions. Few people care for their own minds as they do their own bodies, their clothes, or their possessions. Care of the body is a daily task for everybody and given utmost attention by most people. The mind too needs regular care, exercise, and training in order to free ourselves from suffering.

The Buddha said,

*“Mind is the main and forerunner of all.
All things are mind made.
With a pure mind, if one speaks or acts
He will enjoy happiness, as a shadow never leaves”.*

If our mind is peaceful, then all our thoughts, words and actions will manifest peacefully; thus making us a source of peace for those around us. Hence, if you wish to have a peaceful, joyful, enlightened, and beneficial life, you must improve and guard the qualities of your mind by using the power of mind itself (Gatsel publishing, 2012). The simplest way to do this is by practicing mindfulness meditation. Mindfulness is all about developing our inner awareness rather than allowing our thoughts to take over. Mindfulness encourages appreciation, which helps us to be more generous and kind to others, which in turn will ultimately bring us long lasting happiness (G.D. Rinpoche, 2012). Further, mindfulness will help to reveal mental conflict within oneself or others, and help us understand the unpredictable nature of life. Such conflict if allowed to grow can take the form of aversion, confusion, anger, despair, ambition, or discouragement all of which will only add to our suffering.

Experts have rightly pointed out that mindfulness is a skill we can all develop to bring balance to our lives and to complement modern medical practice. The benefit of mindfulness practice includes reduced stress reactivity, improved immune defence, more positive emotions, lowered heart rate, increased memory, improved sleep quality, increased emotional intelligence, etc.

In the mindfulness practice (*zhe-ney*), we often use the sensation of breath as the main object of our attention. By returning over and over again to the focal point, the mind and emotions become still and stable. With regular practice, we develop composure, tranquility, and mental clarity. The Buddha discovered how a restless mind creates suffering by separating us from what we are experiencing. Therefore, the practice of *Sam-ten* has been taught to allow us to experience the deep insight necessary for transforming habitual misperceptions and attachments that cause confusion and suffering. This transformation allows us to directly experience the joy, compassion, and wisdom of our true nature.

6. *She-rab* (discriminating wisdom-awareness, insight):

The sixth *paramita* is wisdom-awareness. There are three types of wisdom-awareness (*shes-rab-gsum*), which can be translated as “ordinary knowledge, lesser transcendent awareness, and highest wisdom-awareness.” They are that which is born of receiving instructions through hearing, that which is born of reflection, and that which is born of meditation.

We learn how everything is made, how things function, and the interconnectedness of all things. Mastering the minor and major fields of study is the way a practitioner wins outer knowledge. Lesser transcendent awareness is marked by realization of the ten virtuous actions. A disciple who has attained a very good understanding of transcendent awareness knows that non-virtuous actions cause suffering and virtuous actions lead to happiness (S.T. Rinpoche, n.d.)

Wisdom counters ignorance, and enables us to understand the true meaning of helping others. This wisdom is not only that which is gained through intense study in various fields, but more accurately, it is our innate, all-knowing wisdom. It is not possible to describe wisdom-awareness fully in words. It can only be experienced by oneself through constant practice.

Conclusion

Happiness is something that every human being wants. In fact, the very purpose of our life is to seek happiness and the very motion of our life is towards happiness (Lama and Cutler, 1998). However, true abiding happiness can be achieved only through training our mind and cultivating the virtue of loving kindness and compassion. Perhaps the best way to begin is by drawing inspiration from the Buddhist teachings of *Phar-chin drug*, the six qualities of an ideal human being. The values and principles underlying *Phar-chin drug* strongly indicate that it is not possible to achieve true happiness unless we consider the 'others' as important. These values and principles have been acknowledged by many scientific findings, which have shown that 'unhappy' people are the ones who tend to be mostly self-centered, socially withdrawn, brooding and often even antagonistic. On the other hand, happy people are found to be more sociable, accommodative, creative, tolerant and helpful. Most importantly, they are found to be more loving and forgiving than unhappy people (Lama and Cutler, 1998).

Therefore, as fortunate citizens of a happy nation, the Druk Yul, let us all begin our path towards genuine happiness by practicing *Phar-chin drug*, the six invaluable qualities of a good human being. Because by doing so, we will all begin to look in the right direction, and gradually awaken to the perfect goodness, perfect contentment, and perfect joy that are already within our true nature, our Buddha-nature. We can begin in small measures every day and let it grow constantly. Abiding by the precepts of *Phar-chin drug* will not only help us find the path to true inner happiness but also to achieve our beloved Monarch's vision of gross national happiness.

May all be happy; May all be auspicious!!!

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