

# **The Characteristics and Levels of Happiness in the Context of the Bhutanese Society**

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## **Synopsis**

In this paper, some of the characteristics of happiness perceived by the Bhutanese are presented in the backdrop of the Buddhist philosophy of life. Over the last many centuries, Buddhism has played a great role in the shaping of society's perception of happiness and the general attitude towards life. Further, happiness has been divided into various levels, where its parameters or determinants may be common in all the levels, or it might be quite different. These levels have been treated in the context of Bhutan, while at the same time referring to the outside world.

## **Introduction**

The nature of happiness can take different forms in different contexts. For various peoples in many nations, the idea of happiness may not be the same. However, for each locality or a community in the world we could try to look at some of the characteristics of happiness. So in this paper, we try to characterise happiness in the Bhutanese context, where Buddhism has played a great role in shaping the thoughts and attitudes of people. Some of the characteristics of happiness may or may not be identifiable to the reader, while some of them can be similar for other communities as well.

Also to understand the interdependence of happiness at all levels, from the smallest unit to the largest unit of happiness, I propose six levels of happiness. Eventually, these levels form concentric circles of happiness, where each circle has a bearing and the dependence on the other circles—whether outside or inside.

Happiness is more of an internal aspect rather than an outer physical one. The happiness achieved through external means may not be reliable or sustainable, whereas, the type of happiness that comes from individual self-examination and self-development, using certain mind training techniques, would be more effective and only this can ensure present as well as future happiness.

## **Characteristics of Happiness**

### ***Happiness is an Individual Experience***

All humans experience varying degrees of happiness. One person's happiness may be another man's sorrow. From identical means the amount of happiness derived as the end, for different persons, may be different. For example, a rural person may derive happiness just by being able to visit an

urban town, whereas, an urban dweller may or may not be happy to have a prolonged stay in the rural settings.

Depending on one's *karmic* consequences (or accumulated positive/negative merits), one will experience happiness/sufferings of various types, on various scales in the time span of a lifetime, and even beyond this life. (If you believe in the reincarnation of consciousness.)

Another example is a person who meditates in the mountains who would be happy to have a simple soup as a means of sustenance, where as an ordinary citizen would consider the same soup as just a very simple meal. For that matter, it's immaterial whether the meditating person is served a simple soup or a delicious meal. Hence, we could say that the happiness is really in the mind of an individual. It depends on how much a person is able to accept the situation and make himself or herself happy within the context of that situation. With proper training of the mind, happiness can be conditioned.

The government's wise policy and the people's daily practice is to accept those things or situations which are impossible to alter, or inaccessible, or unachievable, but to alter those that can be changed for the benefit (both short and long term) of the country and its people.

### ***Happiness is Transitory or Impermanent***

Even as all of us are mortal souls, happiness, too, is subject to mortality. The happiness is not something that is permanent or eternal (except enlightenment). Happiness is very much impermanent or transitory. For one moment, a person may be extremely happy, later he becomes a very sad, unhappy person. So, we would say that our experiences are ever changing. For example, Mr. A is very happy to have won a lottery worth a huge amount of money, and the very next moment he might become unhappy upon hearing the news of the death of his dear child. We could take another example. In the early part of his or her life, a person may be very happy as everything goes as per her wishes and desire plus she has enough to spend and can afford to live a conformable life. But in the later phase of her life, she might end up being very poor, maybe even a beggar! So, we could say that coming events are unpredictable and mysterious. Even as much as we may not like the things that happen to us, they still happen and affect the happiness in our lives. Conversely, even if we wish some things to happen, they may not necessarily occur, thus increasing our dissatisfaction. Thus, Patrul Rinpoche said about impermanence:

Whatever is born is impermanent and is bound to die.  
Whatever is stored is impermanent and is bound to run out.  
Whatever is joined is impermanent and is bound to fall apart.  
Whatever is built is impermanent and is bound to collapse.

Whatever goes up is impermanent and is bound to fall down.

***Happiness Can't be Sought, but Sowed***

Happiness can't be sought after, but the causes for happiness can be sowed. In Buddhist philosophy, once we are born in this *samsaric* universe, we are bound to suffer in various states. But, the means (or causes) for a rewarding present life, and ultimate freedom and happiness (even after numerous future lives) can be cultivated. For example, Buddhism emphasizes the practice of sixteen pure conducts for ordinary citizens and ten virtuous/ non- virtuous deeds for the practicing Buddhists (refer appendix 01 and appendix 02). Buddhists believe that following or cultivating these means or causes of present plus future happiness (cause and effect) is essential. It is wrong for a person to wait for happiness to happen by itself. It is absurd. Therefore, as His Majesty, the King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck said; "We should not take our good fortune for granted"; we can't afford to be complacent thinking that the things are going fine for the present. Buddhists believe that once earlier merit or good karma exhausts, we will end up in a life of miseries. Therefore, Buddhists are motivated to sow the seeds of happiness and have a good heart and help others, not with an expectation of praise or something in return, but with the motivation to benefit all sentient beings until everyone achieves enlightenment.

The Bhutanese Government places a great importance in preserving these positive social and cultural values, so that the future national happiness is ensured. This is not to say that we could try to preserve and maintain the tradition and culture intact with the onset of development and modernization. Although we may lose some of the aspects of our culture and tradition to the oncoming forces of change and development, nevertheless we should endeavor to preserve this rich culture and Buddhist values for the sake of national as well as global happiness.

Generally, what we are witnessing is a global decline in the moral values. With development and modernization, kindness and compassion is limited only to immediate family members under one roof. It seems to be a losing battle trying to stick to old tradition. But if we really consider, the Buddhist compassion is a broad attitude that encompasses not only immediate family members but also all sentient beings living in the universe. So, if we develop a conviction for this attitude and try to implement it, it could greatly contribute not only towards national happiness but also global happiness.

***Happiness at All Levels is Inter-dependent***

Considering the smallest unit of happiness – that is the individual level (the levels of happiness are explained in the later part of the paper), we can say that individual happiness depends on all the other outer levels of happiness. An individual can't experience happiness if there is no happiness at the family level. In addition to the happiness experienced individually, the presence of happiness at all other levels would only help to increase or supplement individual happiness. Conversely, if there is happiness at an individual level, it reinforces the happiness at family level. Also, the collective happiness experienced at the global level is very much a function of happiness at all other levels. A case in point: Emission of poisonous/pollutants from industries affects all the communities that are within the reach of those pollutants. Similarly, ozone layer depletion has a climate effect for many regions in the world.

From the Buddhist viewpoint, first we wish for sentient beings' benefit and welfare and then we wish to ultimately achieve enlightenment through compassion and wishing for others happiness. So, the interdependence of happiness is very well understood and accepted in Buddhism. Individual freedom and independence is essential up to individuals, but not at the cost of ignoring others rights and harm caused to others. Buddhists believe that suffering comes from attachment to self or being selfish. When "I," "me," and "mine" becomes more important than "other," conflicts and disagreements arise everywhere. Thus, for a harmonious and peaceful co-existence, an altruistic attitude and concern for others are more important. For example, if a country is always having military conflict with some other country, there will be no national peace and security in the two affected countries. So, as a result the people in the two countries can't experience happiness. So, gross national happiness is a function of complex conditions and situations involving all the levels of happiness. Also, if a community initiates a communal conflict with another community, both the communities can't expect to experience a complete degree of happiness and the country's gross happiness would also be affected adversely.

***Happiness can't be Conserved, but can be Ensured***

As much as we humans try to prolong and extend the happiness experience, it tends to become increasingly distant from the seeker. Since happiness is not a tangible subject, we can't afford to preserve or conserve. Rather, happiness is unpredictable and even mysterious at times. When we least expect, some good things do happen and we experience happiness at that moment.

So, instead of seeking happiness or trying to conserve happiness, we can ensure happiness through sowing the "seeds" of happiness. It's a real paradox that without 'ensuring' or sowing the seeds of happiness, we expect and yearn for happiness.

From the Buddhist viewpoint, there are methods and means to practice (sowing the seeds) in this life so that the present as well as future lives' happiness is ensured. But in reality, we often fail to have the faith and conviction in those methods and end up not practicing the means (or sowing the seeds) for happiness.

It's said in the Sutra of a Hundred Actions:

The joys and sorrows of beings  
All comes from their action, said the Buddha.  
The diversity of actions  
Creates the diversity of beings  
And impels their diverse wanderings.  
Vast indeed is this net of actions!

It is further said in Buddhist teachings, "To see where you were born before, look at what you are now. To see where you are going to be born next, look at what you do now."

So, the effects of this life's actions will definitely be there, no matter how small or big. As it's said in the Sutra of the Wise and the Foolish:

Do not take lightly small misdeeds,  
Believing they can do no harm:  
Even a tiny spark of fire  
Can set alight a mountain of hay.

Do not take lightly small good deeds,  
Believing they can hardly help:  
For drops of water one by one  
In time can fill a giant pot.

So, from the Buddhist viewpoint, happiness is an effect or the end that we experience as a result of certain causes which can't be conserved, but can be ensured by practicing the right actions, such as the Ten Positive Actions and the Sixteen Human Principles of Moral Conduct. (Refer appendix.)

### ***Complete, Prolonged and Continuous Happiness is Impossible***

According to Buddhist, as long as we are in this *samsaric* world, we have no choice but to endure suffering. Suffering ceases only upon achievement of enlightenment. Once enlightenment is attained, all the Buddha qualities have blossomed and we enter into the blissful state. So, we may for the time being consider that true, complete, and genuine happiness is experienced only upon attaining enlightenment. Whatever occasional happiness we experience is nothing but dream-like, transitory, temporary and limited. So, a Buddhist's long-term aspiration is to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. But at the same time he or she is aware that presently his qualities are not yet fully developed to be

able to help the sentient beings as did the Buddha. So, in whatever way possible, a Buddhist tries to accumulate as much positive merit as possible to reach Buddha hood. At the same time, a Buddhist knows and accepts that suffering will have to be endured while being born in this *samsara*, and experiences, whether good or bad, are a result of one's past actions committed in previous lives. Thus, a Buddhist tends to accept the state of affairs that he or she is in, and doesn't blame anyone for misfortune or ill luck. This may partially explain the reason for lesser social unrest and frustrations in the Buddhist societies.

The Lotus Born Guru Padmasambhava has said:

When something can be corrected,  
What is the use of remaining displeased?  
When something cannot be changed,  
Why harbour ill-will?

Moreover, even while things are going well (good future, and a satisfying life), a Buddhist, instead of taking it for granted, feels grateful for the kindness and the blessings of the *Kencho Sum* (The Triple Gem), and it further motivates him/her to practice good, positive deeds. Thus, the Buddhists consider that progress is very gradual along the path to enlightenment. So, the Buddhists don't consider this life's happiness experiences as permanent or complete, rather he/she tries not to have any attachment towards the happiness and sources of happiness in this life.

### ***Happiness is Subject to the Law of Diminishing Utility***

The happiness derived from the possession of materials or external comfort decreases or diminishes with the corresponding increase in the quantity. Clearly there is an inverse proportionate relationship between the happiness experience and external physical objects. We can take the example of developed countries or the industrialized nations. The people living in these countries are provided with excess choice of physical comfort. But, we can ask, are they truly happy with material prosperity? The answer to this question is, yes, but only up to a certain point. After this critical point, the increase in material possession doesn't necessarily increase the true happiness of the owner. Yes, he/she may fulfill his/her desire of possessing things or materials, but that is not true happiness and will not last long. It's very commonly observed that the so-called rich often take medicine to induce sleep, maintain working stamina, to cope with the undue stress and depression, etc. This indicates that happiness has diminishing characteristics.

Looking at the Bhutanese society's context, the people consider themselves very fortunate to be born in this country because they are born

into a place where the *Dharma* is flourishing and where there are teachers who are able to teach the *Dharma*. The Buddhists consider human life as the most precious form of existence (Refer appendix 03).

Moreover, Bhutan is a very peaceful and a blessed country, which is frequently mentioned in the prophecies and predictions of Guru Padmasambhava. People revere the king as the manifestation of a *Bodhisattva*, who has chosen to take the form of a king, for the sake of protecting the people and preserving and propagating the *Dharma*. So, the people's belief in this connection of destinies between the king, country, and the people (*Tsa-wa-sum*) is very strong. Every individual Bhutanese considers the coming together of his friends, neighbors, community, and total population is the result of past life consequences.

The people have a great faith in the wisdom and far-sightedness of our king. This is clearly seen from the traditional Bhutanese saying: "The Royal decree: Precious than the gold, and heavier than the mountains." It is also our observation and experience that the Royal orders/decree are fulfilled at every level of the society. During the National Day celebrations across the *Dzongkhags*<sup>1</sup>, one may hear that people have traveled on foot for 2-3 days just to be able to see the king and to join in the celebrations like one family. Bhutanese people believe that the king, being the human manifestation of a *Bodhisattva*,<sup>2</sup> will have boundless knowledge and quality at the outer, inner and the secret levels. The proof of this is right in front of our eyes in the way Bhutan has shaped its own destiny from the 1960's to this decade. The successive monarchs have lived up to their sacred, destined duties and today Bhutan, though economically poor, stands as a living example for other countries to emulate in many ways. I'm sure the people of Bhutan are aware of this fact. The biggest challenge in the future, however, is sustaining these positive aspects. Not many countries across the globe are as fortunate as Bhutan to have the combination of so many factors for the success of gross national happiness.

Although rural Bhutan is not covered fully by development facilities such as electricity, adequate plumbing, etc. yet people are quite happy. People have learnt to live by the song of great yogi, Jetsun Milarepa<sup>3</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup>A district level administration unit in Bhutan. The *Dzongdag*, who represents the highest government representative body at the district level, heads each *Dzongkhag*.

<sup>2</sup> A practitioner on the path to Buddhahood, training in the practice of compassion and the six transcendent perfections, who has vowed to attain enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. Literally translated it means 'hero of the enlightened mind'.

<sup>3</sup> (1052-1135): One of the most famous and beloved poets and yogis in Tibetan history. He was the foremost disciple of Marpa, the translator who, in order to enable him to purify the negativities of killing certain members of his family by black magic, subjected him to years of trial before consenting to teach him. After receiving instruction, however, Milarepa spent the rest of his life meditating in mountain solitudes. He attained supreme enlightenment and left behind a rich heritage of poetry and songs of realization.

“Having wealth is a Happiness, but not having it is a freedom,” implying that material wealth can bring bring insecurity and mental suffering.

### **The Levels of Happiness**

Generally, we can think of happiness at various levels. Starting from the smallest unit of happiness, i.e. at the individual level, to the family level, community, then to regional or *Dzongkhag* level, the national level and finally to the global level, we can think of six levels of happiness. As explained earlier, happiness is precious and all precious things entail a great price. So, to seek a genuine happiness at all levels, there should be responsibilities that have to be borne at every level. We will try to see each level of happiness and their level of responsibilities in the following section. Dividing into six different levels allows us to have the perspective of happiness experience as an inter-dependent phenomenon. The concept of gross national happiness could be better exposed in this pattern whereby the contributors to the overall gross happiness are highlighted.

#### ***Individual Level Happiness***

To quote His Holiness the Dalai Lama; “ If in day to day life you lead a good life, honestly, with love, with compassion, with less selfishness, then automatically it will lead to *nirvana*.” At the individual level, we should practice the ten positive deeds and the sixteen human values/moral disciplines and try to contribute towards the gross happiness, and at the same time help ourselves. To want happiness at the individual level, these are some of our responsibilities.

Again, His Holiness the Dalai Lama has said that “The only true control is internal – a sense of concern and responsibility for your own future and an altruistic concern for others’ well being. Self-examination is most important, and thus the Buddhist theory of self-responsibility is useful as it entails self-examination and self-control in consideration of both one’s own and others’ interests.” Thus, as an individual living in a particular society, we have a great social responsibility. Once we fail to respect those responsibilities, the individual may not find satisfaction within himself, and at the same time, he may not have contributed anything for the society’s happiness. When there is a gradual shift in the behavior/responsibility of people from the good side to the bad side, the result is obvious: unhappiness. Consequently, gross national happiness would also diminish.

If, on the other hand, a person becomes a responsible human being, he/she contributes towards the individual, family, community, *Dzongkhag*, national and the global happiness.

His Majesty the King Jigme Singye Wangchuck has often mentioned in his speeches that the future of Bhutan lies in the hands of its younger

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generations. There is a great visionary message in the above statement for every Bhutanese to understand and live up to.

Again to quote His Holiness the Dalai Lama/ "If we have a good heart, a warm heart, warm feelings, we will be happy and satisfied ourselves, and our friends will experience a friendly and peaceful atmosphere as well. This can be experienced from nation to nation, country to country, continent to continent."

### ***Family – Level Happiness***

For happiness in the family, there has to be a peaceful co-existence of all members. The problems and sufferings become a shared concern in the family. If a member becomes sick, all other members are affected. But at the same time, all members in the family should fulfill the individual roles and responsibilities already explained above. If every member shares love and responsibility, there will be love, peace, and happiness in the family. The social problems like divorce, adultery, drug abuse, and teenage pregnancies can be successfully controlled to a great degree if every family tries to maintain love and peace, and shoulders their expected responsibilities. Researches in social behavior of humans have proved beyond doubt that the root of crimes, substance abuse, and other social evils can be traced to the broken family. In addition to fulfilling his individual responsibilities, an individual in a family also has to have a concern for the other members of the family. For example, the parents in the family have to look after the safety and security of the family and the eldest son or daughter has to care for the younger ones or help his/her parents when they come of age.

Happiness at the family – level is a collective effort of every member. Also, from the Buddhist viewpoint the earlier '*Karma*' of each member also affects the collective happiness of the family. Buddhists strongly believe that every member in the family is meeting in this present life as one family due to the prayers and the powers of earlier *karma*. Thus, the love and respect between every family member is deeply rooted in this understanding. Also, after the death of a family member, other members in the family restrain themselves from knowingly committing any form of moral sins. Some families in Bhutan observe this even up to one to three years after the death of a family member. This is a very positive quality, which contributes towards the community, regional and national happiness. Buddhists consider themselves very lucky if they are born into a family where at least one member is a serious practitioner of the Dharma. A child groomed under the guidance of a Dharma practitioner learns early in life the law of cause and effect and the essence or the meaning of this life. They also learn to be responsible. Such a child when he goes into the society and forms a family unit of his own thus spreads these precious social values to his siblings.

In Bhutan, there is great support from the government and the leadership to have a small family that is happy and peaceful. Ultimately, it

will lead to a healthy and happy nation. So, we can see that the family – level happiness contributes towards the gross national happiness now and in the future.

### **Community – Level Happiness**

This level of happiness is at the community/village/neighborhood level. A community is generally happy if there is an atmosphere of love and concern for one's neighbors. With the presence of this altitude at the community level, during the times of disaster or crisis, members in the community would help amongst themselves. At the same time, the members would be co-operative with each other.

In Bhutan, there is a very deep level of understanding and co-operation at the village or a community level. Many government-assisted projects have been successfully implemented with community participation and co-operation. For example, the community schools, rural access roads, rural electrification etc. have been very successful because of community participation and co-operation.

The level of happiness may vary from community to community. Some communities may be blessed with ideal location, some with fertile land, and some with abundant water supply. Whereas, on the other hand, there would be communities situated in dry areas, which are barren and unproductive for agricultural cultivation. As explained earlier, Buddhists believe that the place or the community into which one is born is also a result of one's past actions or *karma*, in the earlier life times. So, although life may be difficult in some communities as a result of location, one could still find people in that community happy and cheerful. This is because we accept the result of our past actions and know and understand that not much can be done. So, instead of expressing frustrations and sulking over the shortcomings, Buddhists are spurred on to do better in this lifetime so that in future lives their birth conditions are favourable. So, in Bhutanese society, everyone considers the good fortune, wealth, and beauty in this life to be the direct outcome of one's past merits. The poor accept the rich and the rich look toward the poor with compassion, because both understand the law of cause and effect.

### **Regional – Level Happiness**

Now, as the happiness unit grows bigger and bigger, the causes and conditions for happiness also increase. The commitment and responsibility of a region/Dzongkhag also increase tremendously. This requires us to look with broader perspectives. The key- decision makers at the regional level can have a tremendous impact on the lives and happiness of the people living in a particular region. The plans, policies, and strategies drawn up by the regional decision makers could either make or mar the happiness of the people. For example, as we see in many countries, if some politicians due to

vested self-interest encourage the feelings of sectarianism or communalism among the people, the future or the long term happiness of the people in the region is jeopardized. Looking at the events happening across the world, we can see that many social evils such as racism, discrimination, and biases are still present in excess. So, at a regional level, to sustain and ensure the future happiness, the people and the leaders in the region have many responsibilities to bear. The hard work should come from the people to preserve the good social values or positives attributes in the society that contribute towards happiness, now and in the future.

As self-interest and self-importance overtake the altruistic vision of leaders, the people in the region may be easily misled towards the path of un-happiness. So, we understand that for happiness at the regional level, positive contribution from all sections of the population is crucial. Also, the communities, families and individuals in the region contribute towards the regional happiness, as they are the constituents in the region. In addition to being responsible at their particular levels, they should also appreciate the broader perspective of the region.

In Bhutan, at the *Dzongkhag* level we have the *Dzongdag* and his team of officials who guide the people in the communities in shaping their future. Unlike the past, the development process is now fully decentralized, which is due to the self-less vision of His Majesty. The management concept is bottom-top planning and execution with minimal intervention from the centre. The communities set their own priorities, targets, and goals according to their needs and so they have more chance of influencing their own happiness/or unhappiness.

In Bhutan, looking from every angle, we can see that the ingredients for true happiness are always present. The people have faith in the leadership and the leaders have altruistic attitudes towards the people. This tradition has been deeply rooted as a direct result of the precious *Buddha Dharma* over the past centuries. For example, Bhutanese fondly refer to "*Tha Damtsi* and *Ley Jumdrey*," which loosely translated means the regard and respect for the elders, leaders, neighbors and others, and '*Ley Jumdrey*' means the unshakeable faith in the cause and effect or the *karmic* consequences. So, the people strive to achieve happiness as an effect, not only in this present life, but in the future lives to come. This is why even at the layperson's level Bhutanese try to practice the *Dharma* or the positive attributes.

### ***National Level Happiness***

At the national level, the happiness circle becomes bigger and the players even more numerous. The perception and the assessment of happiness might become difficult due to more people involved. The conditions or factors influencing happiness at the national level also become numerous and complicated. The happiness of individual nations might very much depend on the context (i.e., what they value); for example, some

nation might enjoy greater a degree of happiness by achieving the status of a nuclear super power, some by achieving the status of an industrialized or fully developed country. Some nations consider the preservation of tradition and culture as the future source of pride and happiness. We can say that Bhutan is a very good example of the latter. Bhutan, though economically poor, will not rush for industrialization or the quick harnessing of inherent natural resources for the country's prosperity. Rather, Bhutan has adopted the "middle path" philosophy of development; whereby caution and moderation is exercised in all the spheres of country's development. Presently in Bhutan, excellent policies are in place and the only real challenges that the country might face in sustaining are the influences from the outside world, which can be good as well as bad. Bhutan started its development activities only in the 1960', and is very cautious to extract the milk from the 'milk-water' mixture. Of course, it may not be possible for Bhutan to remain unaffected by negative influences. There will be some effects. But looking in a broader perspective, Bhutan tries to preserve and promote the good traditional values, while at the same time be considerate and aware of the existence of other diverse cultures, races, creeds etc. With the Buddhist mentality, every new idea that comes with development is judged and weighed in-terms of short as well as long-term benefits to the country and its people.

Here we can elaborate on the concept of "*The Three precious Roots*", or the "*Tsa-wa-Sum*", the king, the country, and the people as it underscores the basis of policies and decisions. Happiness at a national level will depend almost entirely on the three precious roots and they must be understood in conjunction with "*Tha Damtsi* and *Ley Jumdrey*", or the "Devotion and faith in cause and effect". These concepts have their origin in the Buddhist philosophy or the Lord Buddha's teachings.

In Bhutan, we have the monarch at the helm, supported by a stable and efficient government that plans for the welfare of the country and its people. At the same time, there is devotion and faith in the king and government by the people. People revere and respect the king and have a deep sense of national feeling for the country. So, there is a show of "*Damtsi*" or 'devotion' from the people for the king and country. Likewise, the king and the government have a great "*Damtsi*" towards the country and its people. The common metaphor that we often use to illustrate these concepts of the *Tsa-wa-Sum* and *Tha Damtsi* and *Ley Jumdrey* is the inter-dependence of "beam and column". If there is no beam, there is no point in providing for columns and if there are no columns, a beam would not be able to bear the on-coming load. The "beam and the column" are jointly able to support every load that is coming onto them. Thus, the status of the country is elevated to that of a living entity where there is rich environment, wild life and above all the hidden, sacred, treasures that remain to be discovered. So, the king and the people adore and protect the country as a show of "*Tha Damtsi*". So,

we feel that there is a very strong foundation for Gross National Happiness in Bhutan.

### ***Global -Level Happiness***

The global level happiness or the collective happiness or is the responsibility of every nation, region, community, family, and individual. For world peace and happiness, all must assume responsibility. If we have regard only for our own country's welfare, forgetting other's welfare, then it often results in strife and even war. If nations respect each other's sovereignty and the right to exist, then the seed for world peace is already sown.

For the Bhutanese, it is not difficult to think about global issues, as Buddhist philosophy urges us to practice or adopt an altruistic attitude and compassion for all sentient beings. For example, whether someone is from Africa, or the USA or India, a Bhutanese would perceive him/her firstly as an identical human being, but born in a different country. The color and the creed does not matter. The sameness of the human race is respected. Maybe, this is a big reason why the Bhutanese are able to strike a quick friendship with almost everyone. For Buddhists, all sentient beings are looked upon with compassion. It doesn't matter whether a cow is born in Bhutan, or India, or Australia. What is considered important is that it is one of the countless trillions and trillions of beings which is the subject of our compassion and love.

Many other countries have found the government and Bhutanese people to be very a co-operative development partner because Bhutan believes that to live in the same global village with peace, happiness and co-operation is the only way forward. Bhutan's co-operation in the recently concluded SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) summit in Islamabad, Pakistan, is a very good example of regional cooperation.

Bhutan as a small country tries to contribute towards global happiness by protecting its environment, which contains some of the rarest species of wildlife and medicinal plants and also by preserving and promoting its rich cultural tradition and ancient heritage. Bhutan has taken care of its children's primary education, the health of its people, the GNP of its people and above all the spiritual well being of its people. The result of all these achievements culminates into Gross National Happiness for Bhutan.

On the political front too, Bhutan has lived harmoniously with its neighboring countries. The process of dialogue and negotiation for arriving at a fruitful political solution to the issues - both national and global, has been accorded a great importance by Bhutan and the Bhutanese.

It may be well to appreciate here the fact that Bhutan is a good country and a shining example for others to emulate. A country well managed is an asset for the world.

Looking from the Buddhist philosophy and perspective, it's because of our *karmic* connectivity that we all are born as human beings in this world. So, our fate or destiny is a shared concern of all of us and we all have a role to play to shape our destinies. Whatever good or bad experiences that we go through at individual, family, community, regional, national and global levels are the fruit of our earlier *karma*.

### **Conclusion**

In the above discussions, I have tried to convey to the readers that the actual source of genuine, and lasting happiness at all levels- individual, family, community, regional, national and global, has to come from within us. It in no way seems logical to say that sustained happiness is of external origin. Since human beings are the most superior among the sentient beings, the compassion and love has to be generated in our hearts so that the nature, environment, wild life is conserved for our own happiness as well as for our future generations. The process of self-examination and the universal responsibility has to come from the hearts of us humans. Then we can achieve happiness at all levels.

I would like to conclude by quoting Guru Padmasambhava:

“ Forsake the ten nonvirtues and adopt the ten virtues.  
If you act like this you will have happiness in this life and further  
happiness in the next.”

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