

Tears and Laughter: Promoting Gross National Happiness Through the Rich Oral Traditions and Heritage of Bhutan

A. STEVEN EVANS

The Old Man and His Grandson

There was once a very old man, whose eyes had become dim, his ears dull of hearing. When he sat at the table, he could barely hold the spoon, and spill the broth upon the table-cloth or let it run out of his mouth. His son and his son's wife were disgusted at this, so the old grandfather at last had to sit in the corner behind the stove, and they gave him his food in an earthenware bowl, and not even enough of it. He used to look towards the table with his eyes full of tears. Once, too, his trembling hands could not hold the bowl, and it fell to the ground and broke. The young wife scolded him, but he said nothing and only sighed. Then they bought him a wooden bowl for a few [rupees], out of which he had to eat.

They were once sitting thus when the little grandson of four years old began to gather together some bits of wood on the ground. "What are you doing there?" asked the father. "I am making a little trough," answered the child, "for father and mother to eat out of when I am big." The man and wife looked at each other for a while, and presently began to cry. Then they took the old grandfather to the table and henceforth always let him eat with them, and likewise said nothing if he did spill a little of anything.

This tale, or ones similar to it, has been told for centuries around the world, from South America, to Europe, to the Far East. It not only reflects the wisdom of the innocent child, but is also a poignant reminder of the age-old adage to honor your father and your mother and to respect your elders. It reminds us how easy it is to become dissatisfied with life, but gently eases us back to a state of satisfaction and happiness with our everyday circumstances.

Introduction

"Like the bat of Bhutanese folklore, does His Majesty's Royal Government bare its teeth or show its wings?"

Up to 70% of the world's peoples are oral cultures, meaning they require or prefer to communicate through narrative presentations, storytelling and other traditional art forms. Storytelling entertains, instructs and informs, and for thousands of years cultures around the world have used folktales, heritage stories, proverbs, drama and songs to promote morality and values among their peoples. Bhutan has a rich heritage in its

folktales and famous masked dances, setting the stage for the promotion of Bhutan's Gross National Happiness through the time-honored traditions of oral communication.

His Majesty the King of Bhutan desires to develop the philosophy of Gross National Happiness within the Kingdom, accentuating Bhutan's vision of development beyond material economics and growth. In order to balance and even outweigh creeping outside influences of materialism and self-centeredness, in addition to saying there is a better and more applicable standard than the United Nation's Human Development Index, a national emphasis on storytelling and the oral arts at the indigenous grassroots level is needed. This integration of entertainment, information and education through a grassroots initiative contributes to a sense of community, satisfaction and happiness. The utilization of these "people-powered media" through such an initiative develops a sense of "ownership" at the level of the people, allowing for its acceptance, use and growth among the citizens of the Kingdom.

A dichotomy of contrast and conflict seems to exist, however, in the Land of the Thunder Dragon (or is it the Land of the Peaceful Dragon!?!): modern education vs. traditional education; rigsar (popular music) vs. traditional music; mass media vs. traditional media; modern, western morals and values vs. traditional, Buddhist morals and values; etc. Sometimes in the pursuit of development, the ends and means get confused, even reversed. Debate over form and content constantly arises. Like the bat of Bhutanese folklore, does His Majesty's Royal Government bare its teeth or show its wings? Does it concentrate on the drop of water that falls into the pond and merges with its waters, or does it concentrate on the same drop of water that falls into the pond and causes ripples on the surface; or, does it not concentrate on the drop at all, but focus on the ripples?!? The questions that must constantly be asked and applied are, "What is the ultimate goal or aim? What is right for Bhutan and its citizens? What contributes to Gross National Happiness?" These will help clarify end and means, form and content. The challenge is to move from theorizing to operationalizing. The question is, "How?"

In an effort to contribute to the cross-fertilization of ideas from various disciplines and cross-sectors concerning operationalizing the concept of "Gross National Happiness," a national plan on promoting "Gross National Happiness" within the Kingdom by way of the rich oral traditions and heritage of Bhutan should be developed, with the implications of such a plan to be explored.

The World of Oral Communication

"Oral cultures are centered in the practice of storytelling."

Large numbers of the world's population are oral communicators. They learn best through communication that is not tied to or dependent on print. The definition, however, is somewhat elastic. At minimum the term "oral communicator" refers to people who are illiterate, around 1.5 billion. Many, though, who are functionally illiterate or semi-literate, express a strong preference for oral communication as opposed to literate or print-based communication. When they are included in the definition of "oral communicator," it is estimated that more than two-thirds of the world's population, or over four billion people, are oral communicators by necessity or preference. However, preferences for oral communication span all educational, social, gender and age levels. Many literates around the globe express strong preferences for oral communication, as well, when tested by appropriate tools to identify their communication patterns and choices. (An academic dean and a professor in Nairobi, both with advanced university degrees, were surprised to learn that their results showed oral preferences, but were quick to agree with the findings!)

Primarily through story, proverb, poetry, drama, and song, oral communicators house their knowledge, information, teachings, concepts, lists, and ideas in narrative presentations that can be easily understood, remembered and reproduced. Oral people think in terms of these stories, and not in outlines, guidelines, principles, steps, concepts, or propositions, which are largely foreign to their way of learning and communicating. If they have a teaching, a concept, or a principle they want to remember, they will encase it in a story. This is the common vehicle that oral communicators use to process, remember and convey information. Through the story, as well as proverbs, poetry, songs, art, and rituals, they preserve and transmit valued truths and teachings, since it is difficult if not impossible for them to learn through lists of principles and precepts, outlines, analysis, and syllogistic argument (deductive reasoning in which a conclusion is derived from two premises).

Oral cultures are centered in the practice of storytelling. It is their primary means of communication, normally in their heart language. They prefer these integrative ways of learning rather than the fragmenting, analytical approaches that are common in contemporary education. Western-style education emphasizes analysis – breaking things apart and focusing on extracted principles. Oral communicators prefer holistic learning, keeping principles embedded in the narratives that transmit them. Oral communicators learn better through the concrete, relational world of narratives than they do through the abstract, propositional framework of western educational systems. Both learning approaches deal with propositional truth, but oral communicators keep the propositions closely tied to the events in which those truths emerged. People who are steeped in literacy can more easily detach the propositions and deal with them as

abstract ideas. In both cases people are learning “truth,” but the way the truth is packaged and presented differs dramatically.

Those of a literate-print culture mistakenly believe that if they can outline information or put it into a series of steps or principles, anyone, including oral communicators, can understand it and recall it. That is a misconception about learning and how different individuals process information. Most oral communicators do not understand outlines, steps, or principles, and they cannot remember them. For that matter, neither can those of the literate-print culture! They store information in notes, books, archives, libraries, and computers, and “look it up” to refresh their memories!

As His Majesty’s government seeks ways to implement Gross National Happiness in Bhutan and to ensure satisfied and content citizens at the grassroots level in local communities, it will be important to consider the realities of the oral world and its communication and learning preferences.

Setting the Agenda: Gross National Happiness

“Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product.”

(His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, Bhutan)

There has been much talk, discussion and debate concerning the concept of “Gross National Happiness,” especially in academic and development circles. Needless to say, many don’t see eye-to-eye on the topic! Time has come however, to stop the talk, quit the debate, and come up with solutions! The Centre for Bhutan Studies is challenging all to move forward, from theory to practice, forcing us to consider the question, “What is it going to take to implement Gross National Happiness?” In doing so, two things must first be considered: 1) How is the concept of Gross National Happiness offered by His Majesty the King of Bhutan to be understood; and 2) Why is there conflict and confusion over some of the solutions currently being offered?

“His Majesty has proclaimed that the ultimate purpose of government is to promote the happiness of the people,” said Lyonpo Jigmi Y. Thinley, Chairman of the Council of Ministers of the Royal Government of Bhutan. “This point has resonated in many of his speeches and decrees, which stress both increasing prosperity and happiness. His Majesty has said, ‘Gross National Happiness is more than Gross National Product,’ and has given happiness precedence over economic prosperity.”

Stressing that happiness is a shared desire of all people, Thinley said, “It is possibly the ultimate thing we want while other things are wanted only as a means to its increase.” He pointed out that Gross National Happiness is a “non-quantifiable” development objective in Bhutan. “Happiness has been usually considered a utopian issue,” he said. “The

academic community has not developed the tools we need to look at happiness, one of our primary human values. This has led to a paradoxical situation: the primary goal of development is happiness, but the subject of this very goal eludes our analysis because it has been regarded as subjective. "Thinley said that scientific proof was not needed to assess happiness meaningfully, but that Bhutan must raise policy and ethical questions about happiness. "Its absence in most policies contrasts sharply with the primary concern of each individual human being in his or her daily quest for happiness. But we infer rather boldly from improvements in socio-economic indicators that there might be growing happiness behind it," he said.

"I wish to propose happiness as a policy concern and a policy objective," Thinley said. "In turn this may call for a new policy orientation. This also implies new departures in research, if the concept is considered important. " Thinley stated that Gross National Happiness is the main purpose of development and is rooted in Bhutan's philosophical and political thought. "We asked ourselves the basic question of how to maintain the balance between materialism and spiritualism, in the course of getting the immense benefits of science and technology," he said. "The likelihood of loss of spiritualism, tranquility, and gross national happiness with the advance of modernization became apparent to us. "

Thinley said that within Bhutanese culture, inner spiritual development is as prominent a focus as external material development. "Suffice it to say that, in varying degrees, the contemporary world may be too acutely preoccupied with the self in the sense of paying excessive attention to our selves, our concerns, needs and likes," Thinley said. "There is a paradox here: excessive preoccupation with our selves does not lead to a real knowledge of our self. Happiness depends on gaining freedom, to a certain degree, from this particular kind of concern. " Thinley pointed out that a growing income does not always lead proportionately to an increase in happiness. "In a world where everyone who has less is trying to catch up with everyone else who has more, we may become richer but happiness becomes elusive," he said. "People may become richer but they will not have a greater gift for happiness. Nations will not rank higher on the scale of happiness as they move up on the scale of economic performance. As is widely known, this is due to the fact that the value of money in giving happiness or utility diminishes as the amount increases. "

Consider the following story, called "The Barn That Wasn't Big Enough":

Life is not defined by what you have, even when you have a lot.

The farm of a certain rich man produced a terrific crop. He talked to himself: "What can I do? My barn isn't big enough for this harvest. " Then he said, "Here's what I'll do: I'll tear down my barns and build bigger ones. Then I'll gather in all my grain and goods, and I'll say to myself, 'Self, you

done well! You've got it made and can now retire. Take it easy and have the time of your life!' Just then God showed up and said, "Fool! Tonight you die. And your barnful of goods - who gets it?"

That's what happens when you fill your barns with self and not with God!

Human Development and Happiness: Do They Go Hand in Hand?

"If happiness is among the cherished goals of development, then it does matter how this happiness is generated, what causes it, what goes with it, and how it is distributed - whether it is enjoyed by a few or shared by all. " (Bhutan National Development Report 2000)

According to the Bhutan National Human Development Report 2000, no one can guarantee human happiness, and the choices people make are their own. However, the report said that the process of development should at least create a conducive environment for people to develop their full potential and to have a reasonable chance of leading productive and creative lives in accordance with their needs and interests. People have a right to make their own decisions and chart their own course, the report implies, and it is government's responsibility to create the environment in which good choices and courses can be determined. At the same time, however, there is a widespread growing disenchantment with the use of income and income growth as indicators of well-being and progress. "Clearly there is more to life than a expansion of income or accumulation of wealth," the report said.

The Human Development Index assumes, however, that by adding increased life expectancy and increased education to increased income, chances of life satisfaction and happiness are almost guaranteed. The question remains, though, whether this is true.

"Consistent with the human development approach, from a Bhutanese perspective, His Majesty the King Jigme Singye Wangchuck has called for focusing more broadly on Gross National Happiness - and not narrowly on just Gross National Product," the report said. "Already in the 1960s, the late King Jigme Dorjii Wangchuck had declared that the goal of development should be to 'make people prosperous and happy.' Development did not mean a blind expansion of commodity production. Instead, a holistic view of life and development is called for that augments people's spiritual and emotional well-being as well. It is this vision that Bhutan seeks to fulfill. " The report said that the concept of Gross National Happiness was articulated by His Majesty to indicate that development has many more dimensions than those associated with Gross National Product, and that development should be understood as a process that seeks to maximize happiness rather than economic growth. "The concept places individuals at the centre of all development efforts, and it recognizes that the individual

has material, spiritual, and emotional needs. It asserts that spiritual development cannot and should not be defined exclusively in material terms of the increased consumption of goods and services," the report said. "A grumbling rich man may well be less happy than a commercial farmer, but he does have a higher standard of living than the farmer. It is the sense of discontentment or emptiness that the rich farmer experiences that constitutes unhappiness. Happiness may be subjective, but this subjectiveness is shared by all, regardless of levels of income, class, gender or race."

The following story, about a farmer and his two sons, is one of three stories told in succession - the first about a shepherd who leaves his flock behind and searches for a missing sheep, and the second about a poor widow who searches for a lost coin. This third story is called "Time to Go Home."

There was once a man who had two sons. The younger said to his father, "Father, I want right now what's coming to me." So the father divided the property between them. It wasn't long before the younger son packed his bags and left for a distant country. There, undisciplined and dissipated, he wasted everything he had. After he had gone through all his money, there was a bad famine all through that country and he began to hurt. He signed on with a citizen there who assigned him to his fields to slop the pigs. He was so hungry he would have eaten the corncobs in the pig slop, but no one would give him any. That brought him to his senses. He said, "All those farmhands working for my father sit down at three meals a days, and here I am starving to death. I'm going back to my father. I'll say to him, 'Father, I've sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son. Take me on as a hired hand.'" He got right up and went home to his father.

When he was still a long way off, his father saw him. His heart pounding, he ran out, embraced him, and kissed him. The son started his speech: "Father, I have sinned against God, I've sinned before you; I don't deserve to be called your son ever again." But the father wasn't listening. He was calling to the servants, "Quick. Bring a clean set of clothes and dress him. Put the family ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Then get a grain-fed [cow] and roast it. We're going to have a feast! We're going to have a wonderful time! My son is here - given up for dead and now alive! Given up for lost and now found!" And they began to have a wonderful time.

All this time his older son was out in the field. When the day's work was done he came in. As he approached the house, he heard music and dancing. Calling over to one of the houseboys, he asked what was going on. He told him. "Your brother came back. Your father has ordered a feast - barbecued beef! - because he has him home safe and sound." The older stalked off in an angry sulk and refused to join in. His father came out and

tried to talk with him, but he wouldn't listen. The son said, "Look how many years I've stayed here serving you, never giving you one moment of grief, but have you ever thrown a party for me and my friends? Then this son of yours who has thrown away your money on whores shows up and you go all out with a feast!" His father said, "Son, you don't understand. You're with me all the time, and everything that is mine is yours – but this is a wonderful time, and we had to celebrate. This brother of yours was dead, and he's alive! He was lost, and he's found!"

"If happiness is among the cherished goals of development, then it does matter how this happiness is generated, what causes it, what goes with it, and how it is distributed – whether it is enjoyed by a few or shared by all," the Bhutan development report said. "Ultimately, a happy society is a caring society, caring for the past and future...Establishing such a society will require a long-term rather than a short-term perspective of development...Happiness in the future will also depend upon mitigating the foreseeable conflict between traditional cultural values and the modern lifestyles that inevitably follow in the wake of development." The reports concludes, "As economic and social transformation gathers momentum and Bhutan becomes increasingly integrated with the outside world, people's lifestyles are changing along with family structures. Assimilating these changes without losing the country's unique cultural identity is one of the main challenges facing Bhutan today.

Conflict, Contrast and Confusion

"...there is a need to provide a sense of continuity amidst change. In addition, since culture and traditional values form the bedrock of Bhutanese national identity it is important for the Bhutanese to ensure that its culture and values are not undermined...It is more necessary than ever to ensure the intergenerational *transmission of values.*" (Tashi Wangyal)

Five articles appeared in various issues of the Journal of Bhutan Studies a few years ago that, while not directly addressing the topic of this paper, influence it to a degree. The articles are: 1) "On the Two Ways of Learning in Bhutan" by Karma Phuntsho; 2) "Ensuring Social Sustainability: Can Bhutan's Education System Ensure Intergenerational Transmission of Values?" by Tashi Wangyal; 3) "The Attributes and Values of Folk and Popular Songs" by Sonam Kinga; 4) "Mass Media: Its Consumption and Impact on Residents of Thiumpu and Rural Areas" by Phuntso Rapten; and 5) "Folktale Narration: A Retreating Tradition" by Tandin Dorjii.

These five articles, coupled with a series of papers on development in Bhutan found in Gross National Happiness: A Set of Discussion Papers (published by the Centre for Bhutan Studies) and Bhutan National Human Development Report 2000 (published by the Planning Commission

Secretariat - Royal Government of Bhutan), all point toward an underlying situation that greatly affects Gross National Happiness and its success in Bhutan. As mentioned in this paper's introduction, a dichotomy of contrast and conflict seems to exist and is brought out in these papers and articles: modern education vs. traditional education; rigsar (popular music) vs. traditional music; mass media vs. traditional media; modern, western morals and values vs. traditional, Buddhist morals and values; etc. Sometimes in the pursuit of development, the ends and means get confused, even reversed, and debate over form and content constantly arises.

Phuntso said, "The primary factor that determines the difference in outlooks and approaches between the two [education] systems [- traditional and modern -] is the ultimate goal they aim to achieve - learning is not an end in itself in either system." At the same time, he makes a strong case for "modern" education while not seeming to recognize the full value of traditional methods. It is important to understand that education is more than merely importing knowledge, and that traditional education transcends mere learning and is an experiential process directly linked with life itself. Phuntso said, "...modern curricular structures and methods by far excel the traditional styles." However, I believe that we can indeed use an old and traditional art form to teach a new generation. As well, we can have the integration of both systems of education meeting in the embodiment of the storyteller! In having more and better literacy and education as the goal or end, we can fail to see that it is to be merely a means to something far greater - in our case Gross National Happiness! Phuntso is right in saying that many Bhutanese equate traditional education with monastic Buddhist instruction and want nothing to do with it! Two issues are raised here that need to be addressed, those of "form" and "content." Perhaps we need to keep some of the form of traditional education and provide new and appropriate content!

Wangyal raises an important and valid question: "Can Bhutan's education system ensure intergenerational transmission of values?" He then makes an excellent appraisal of the values of Bhutan. "Traditional values based on Buddhist culture have a profound influence on the lives of a majority of the Bhutanese people," he said. "Traditional Bhutanese values not only address individual self-discipline and the conduct of interpersonal relationships but also delineate responsibility of all sentient beings...Such traditional values are, however, being gradually undermined, as people become more self-centered, and materialistic...Thus there is a need to provide a sense of continuity amidst change. In addition, since culture and traditional values form the bedrock of Bhutanese national identity it is important for the Bhutanese to ensure that its culture and values are not undermined." Wangyal points out that Bhutanese society is now witnessing a shift in values, attitudes and expectations. "External influences arising from the values accompanying economic development, the media

and the modern education systems, among others, challenge continuance of the national values," he said.

According to Wangyal, one of the main challenges in preserving values in modern Bhutan is the need to reconcile the fact that the social, cultural and economic context in which these values developed through the past centuries is very different from Bhutan today. "Apart from the influence of foreign travel and tourism, the mass media is perhaps one of the greatest sources of external influences and values," he said. "The recent introduction of television and the Internet has enabled the Bhutanese to have instant access not only to global news and information but also whetted their appetite for consumer goods. The process of modernization has thus had a profound influence on the social, economic and political outlook of the Bhutanese people leading to a gradual shift in their values, attitudes and expectations. " This, he said, has created an insatiable appetite for material acquisition. "It is now more necessary than ever to ensure the intergenerational transmission of values," Wangyal said. "Otherwise, unbridled modernisation may destroy the very spiritual and cultural fabric that has enabled the Bhutanese society to live in harmony with each other and with the natural environment. " Wangyal praises the introduction of "value education" into the school system and calls for more of it. He recognizes that it is the stories found in this "value education" that impacts a student, inspiring them to be different. The question remains, however, can we shift over from the world of literacy to the world of orality and impact an even greater segment of society with these stories?

Going beyond education, Kinga pulls into the picture the attributes and values of folk and popular music. While Kinga says that songs and music are integral parts of Bhutanese culture - "not only as mere forms of entertainment, but also as highly refined works of art reflecting the values and standards of society," he also says that rigsar or popular songs and music lack the artistic depth and seriousness of traditional songs. Kinga concludes, "In their similarity and association with English pop songs and songs of Hindi films, rigsar songs no longer function as a repository of and a medium for transmitting social values. " I don't know if this means that they did at one time but no longer serve in transmitting social values or not, but they certainly could and can! There are numerous case studies from around the world that show how popular music has been a powerful tool in transmitting social and moral values. Kinga has a concern, though, and rightfully so, that "the popularity of rigsar songs and the specialization of music studios in producing them are gradually challenging the sustainability of the culture of traditional folk songs and music. " Concerning education, we asked if new content could be put into old forms. With music, might we ask if old content can be put into new forms! In addition, we can be assured that traditional and folk music will see an

unbelievable rebirth with the advent of national storytellers advocating Gross National Happiness, since song and story go hand-in-hand!

Rapten takes us into an even different direction. "The media in Bhutan have progressively enhanced individual awareness by widening the scope of information transmission beyond the traditional face-to-face oral interaction to literacy-oriented communication and now to electronic media," he said. "They have helped to share information about the past and present, depict social, cultural and historical aspects of Bhutan that helped to create a common culture, tradition and system of values." He said that the mass media and information technology are increasingly becoming powerful instruments for the penetration of global culture and the values of a global market into Bhutan. "This presents one of the greatest challenges to Bhutan as it transitions from a traditional society into the age of information and technology," he said. "While the aim is to reap the benefits of mass media, its excessive influence threatens to undermine indigenous culture and value system." In his study, Rapten observes, "It is also a fact that advertisements create desires, which cannot be satisfied by people's current economic situation. Crimes and corruption are often born out of economic desires." He concludes: "The greatest challenge that Bhutan is facing at the moment is to make a conscious and informed choice in order to benefit from mass media and information technology, and at the same time keep its negative forces at bay."

Phuntso wonderfully and memorably paints a vivid picture of the dilemma portrayed in the various articles and papers, and the dilemma before us as we consider how it is best to integrate Gross National happiness among Bhutan's people:

Bhutanese folklore has it that the bat would show its teeth to the birds in order to avoid the bird tax and show its wings to the beasts in order to avoid the beast tax. But come winter, when the food supplies are distributed, the bat would show its wings to the birds and teeth to the beasts to claim its share from both...

This story forces me to not only ask the question of what to do, but to also ask, "What is right?" As long as we focus on the external, we can never fully impact or influence the internal. "Let's change the environment or the circumstances of our communities," some say. "That will give us better, happier people!" Others say, "Let's change their actions - changed actions lead to changed people!" Still others say, "Change his belief system, then we can fully change the person!" Changing how people live, what they do, how they think, and what they believe, can't guarantee a happier, more content and satisfied people. These issues are complex, but thankfully, some solutions are not. You see, our lives are shaped by the stories and events of our individual selves, our families, communities, nation, etc., as they are conveyed to us and/or lived by us. These stories and events become threads woven together to form the tapestries of our lives. In the academic world,

this is called worldview, and it is, illustratively, the particular pair of glasses one wears that determines how he or she sees the world. To completely integrate Gross National Happiness into the lives and very core of the people of Bhutan, we must insert new threads into the tapestries or lives of Bhutan's people. With the introduction of new stories and narrative events, the tapestry - or worldview - changes, and the mind's eye sees the world from a different perspective, with a new pair of glasses, so to speak. A changed worldview, does in fact, create a changed person.

Interestingly enough, Jesus recognized this principle. Holy writings say that Jesus never taught without using stories, fitting a story to people's experiences and maturity. "He was never without a story when he spoke," the writings say. Concerning the life-changing power of his stories, he himself said, "These words I speak to you are not incidental additions to your life...They are foundational words, words to build a life on. If you work these words into your life, you are like a smart carpenter who built his house on solid rock. Rain poured down, the river flooded, a [strong wind] hit - but nothing moved that house. It was fixed to the rock. But if you just use my words in...studies and don't work them into your life, you are like a stupid carpenter who builds his house on the sandy [shore]. When a storm rolled in and the waves came up, it collapsed like a house of cards."

An old story from Japan, called "Empty-Cup Mind," illustrates the value and sometimes necessity of changing worldview, that of replacing the old with the new:

A wise old monk once lived in an ancient temple... One day the monk heard an impatient pounding on the temple door. He opened it and greeted a young student, who said, "I have studied with great and wise masters. I consider myself quite accomplished in [Buddhist] philosophy. However, just in case there is anything more I need to know, I have come to see if you can add to my knowledge."

"Very well," said the wise old master. "Come and have tea with me, and we will discuss your studies." The two seated themselves opposite each other, and the old monk prepared tea. When it was ready, the old monk began to pour the tea carefully into the visitor's cup. When the cup was full, the old man continued pouring until the tea spilled over the side of the cup and onto the young man's lap. The startled visitor jumped back and indignantly shouted, "Some wise master you are! You are a fool who does not even know when a cup is full!"

The old man calmly replied, "Just like this cup, your mind is so full of ideas that there is no room for any more. Come to me with an empty-cup mind, and then you will learn something."

It is important to realize that the "end" is happiness, and the "means" are what it takes to get there, whether it's "old form" with "new content" or "new form" with "old content." The use of storytelling to promote Gross National Happiness can serve as a bridge among all viewpoints, spanning

the traditional and the modern, the new and the old. Story (and song) conveys the message and quickens the heart. Stories make up the fabric of changed lives. Whether it's stories from an old man sitting around a campfire in a village, conveyed through rigsar or popular music, seen and heard on television, learned in school, or read in the newspaper, the point is to touch lives with the morals and values of Bhutan, leading to a happier and more satisfied people!

Here's a story by Sundar Singh from the book *Wisdom of the Sadhu*. Singh was a sadhu of the late 1800s – early 1900s, who left the wealth of his home at age sixteen to live as a sadhu. His life and stories became legendary across Asia, Europe and even the United States. This story, one he adapted from the Bible, is on the wisdom of King Solomon.

Once two women appeared before the wise king Solomon. One said, "Your Majesty! This woman and I live in the same house. I gave birth to a son, and three days later she also gave birth to a baby boy. But in that same night, her baby died. So she sneaked up to my bed while I was still asleep, took my child from my side and left the body of the dead son in his place. In the morning, I could she that it was her baby and not mine."

At that, the second woman interrupted, saying it was not so. Then the two women began arguing in the presence of the king. The king called for silence and, to the astonishment of all present, he called for a guard to come with a sword, cut the living child in two, and give each woman half of the child's body. The second woman said, "So be it then!" But the first woman fell on her knees before the king and cried: "No, your Majesty! Have mercy and spare the child's life. Rather give him to the other woman." In those words, King Solomon recognized the true mother's heart and ordered that the child be given to her.

We need the wisdom of Solomon to carefully maneuver our way through the conflict, contrasts, and confusion before us, ensuring that that the implementation of Gross National Happiness at the grassroots level truly taking place.

The Role of the Story in Bhutan

"In the memory of the people dwell the folktales ready to be 'untied' at an appropriate time." (Tandin Dorji)

In Bhutan the literary genre of *khaju* or "oral transmission" serves as an important tool of communication between one generation and another. Tandin Dorji, lecturer of history at Sherubtse College in Kanglung, said, "The role that it plays in the transmission of moral values, philosophy, beliefs, humour, etiquette, and many other traits specific to the Bhutanese society holds an increasingly eminent place...What is special about Bhutanese folktales is that it is still a living tradition in many pockets of

rural Bhutan. In the villages which are far flung from motor roads, the narration of folktales in the pastures and in the evenings is today very much alive. " He questions, however, "How long will it continue to survive? Will the development process engulf this beautiful tradition? What can be done to keep this heritage alive?"

Kunzang Choden, author of the classic book *Folktales of Bhutan*, indicates that stories in the Mountain Kingdom are not narrated, but "released" or "set free" (tangshi). "This could then imply that the Bhutanese and the folktales are inextricably interwoven," Dorji said. "It wouldn't be wrong to comment that they are found one inside the other. The folktales contain the traits and aspects of the Bhutanese. In the memory of the people dwell the folktales ready to be 'untied' at an appropriate time. " Excluding the narration of epics and the biographies of saints, Dorji observes that there are no professional storytellers and no particular way or place of narrating stories in Bhutan. "However, there seems to be two ways of telling stories," he said. The first way is solemn and is done in the house of a sick person, focusing primarily on the victory of good over evil. "The other type is a freestyle narration," said Dorji, "as the narrator can be from any age group. " This is the most common and popular type of narrative storytelling, according to Dorji.

By beginning a story with dangbo, dingbo ("long, long ago"), the Bhutanese audience detaches itself from the world and enters into the fascinating land of folktales where they identify themselves with the heroes and the good. "People rejoice when the hero very cleverly steals the cubs of a tigress and laughs when he is able to make fools of the villains," Dorji said. "They are worried when the monsters kidnap the beautiful maiden, and they are sad when the marriage of the charming Prince and the Princess fails. " Thus by beginning the story with dangbo, dingbo, the audience is navigated into a marvelous world that takes place during an unspecified time and is temporarily disconnected from the mundane, everyday world around it. The other ritualistic formula for opening a Bhutanese folktale is henma, henma ("once upon a time"). "Little by little and bit by bit the narrator releases the folktale," Dorji said, "punctuating his narration with dele, which equates to 'and then. '"

Dangbo, Dingbo

"Dangbo, dingbo", the old man slowly uttered. "Henma, henma. " "Long, long ago and once upon a time. " The circle of crowding villagers around him grew quiet and still. Stars twinkled above in the crisp cold air of the surrounding mountains. Sparks from the burning fire drifted upwards, creating a magic of their own, competing with the impending magic of the story about to come. For a few moments the storyteller drew incomprehensible designs in the dirt with his walking stick, then pulled his kabney tighter around him to ward off the chill of the night. Eventually he

looked up, his eyes piercing, reflecting the burning fire and projecting the wisdom of generations before him. "When few stones and pebbles could be seen," he said. "When the saplings and grasses began to sprout out in greenness. When a few drops of water began to drip...in the upper direction; in the lower direction; in that, that direction; in this, this direction. " On and on he went, with a tale captivating and enchanting, punctuating various parts of the story with "dele" ("and then"), leading his audience from one event to another. Not a word was said by those around him; not an eye strayed from the figure huddled by the fire - until he was finished. Then there was a collective sigh, with smiles on their faces and murmurs of approval. One said, "We can be like those of this story! Are we not as good as they are?" The others responded in agreement, "Yes! Yes! We are as good as they! We can be like them!" Then there were pleas for another story from the wandering storyteller who stopped by their village to entertain them for the night. They would stay up late, absorbing the stories of the old man like dry parched ground absorbs the drops of freshly fallen rain. And long after he's gone they would recall his words, the details of his stories, telling them to others, who in turn would pass them on to even others. "All is right with the world," they would say upon hearing the tales. "We are content; we are happy."

"Stories are not simply narrated for the pleasure of exhibiting the knowledge of the storyteller," Dorji said. "Putting it the other way, the stories are not deprived and barren of functions. On the contrary, the folktales and its narration hold a very important place and play an indispensable role in the life of the Bhutanese society in general...On closer observation, we realize that the folktales are pregnant with variety of roles that influences the very core of activity of the Bhutanese. "

For the ancient mystic Drukpa Kunley, fondly called the Divine Madman by the Bhutanese, life was not measured by eight hours of sleep per night or three good meals a day on the table. There was more to life than this, he would say. Though we may laugh at some of his stories and be shy about some of his antics, Drukpa Kunley fully understood the power of story and song and the emotions they evoked. He knew that people - ordinary, everyday people who worked hard, believed in God, and supported the royal family - needed to laugh, cry, be shocked, and even be outraged sometimes, to give them a broader, better understanding of life and themselves, leaving them content with what they had around them and within them, rather than seeking after things that would never be. Today the Divine Madman has become more than an historical figure. In Bhutan he is a cultural hero around whom a web of stories and legends have been spun. An example follows how the very life of Drukpa Kunley (also named Kunga Legpa) was a story:

By the age of twenty-five, Kunga Legpa had gained mastery of both mundane and spiritual arts. He was accomplished in the arts of prescience,

shape-shifting, and magical display. Returning home to visit his mother in Ralung, she failed to recognize his achievement and judged him merely by his outward behaviour. "You must decide exactly who you are," she complained. "If you decide to devote yourself to the religious life, you must work constantly for the good of others. If you are going to be a lay householder, you should take a wife who can help your old mother in the house."

Now the Naljorpa was instinctively guided at all times by his vow to dedicate his sight, his ears, his mind, and his sensibility, to others on the path, and knowing that the time was ripe to demonstrate his crazy yet compassionate wisdom, he replied immediately, "If you want a daughter-in-law, I'll go and find one." He went straight to the market place where he found a hundred-year-old hag with white hair and blue eyes, who was bent at the waist and had not so much a single tooth in her head. "Old lady," he said, "today you must be my bride. Come with me!"

The old woman was unable to rise, but Kunley put her on his back, and carried her home to his mother. "O Ama! Ama!" he called to her. "You wanted me to take a wife, so I have just brought one home." "If that's the best that you can do, forget it," moaned his mother. "Take her back where she came from or you'll find yourself looking after her. I could do her work better than she." "All right," Kunley said with studied resignation, "if you can do her work for her, I'll take her back." And he returned her to the market place.

According to Dugu Choegyal Gyamtso in the book *The Divine Madman*, "His style, his humour, his earthiness, his compassion, his manner of relating to people, won him a place in the hearts of all the Himalayan peoples...He may not have been the greatest of scholars or metaphysicians, although he left some beautiful literature behind him, but he is a saint closest to the hearts of the common people...For the common people it was Drupka Kunley who brought fire down from heaven, and who touched them closest to the bone." The life, stories, and songs of Drupka Kunley touched, stirred and even changed the lives of the common people in a time when they so desperately needed it. He is a successful example of what the storyteller and his tales can do.

Dorji said that folktales represent the collective memory of society. "Despite the nuances in the art of narration and the use of varying vocabulary, the central theme and principle facts remain unaltered no matter who narrates the stories," he said. "If the folktales talk of the society, it is in the minds of the people that the stories lie ready to be released at an appropriate moment...Many beliefs, sentiments, as well as values concerning a society is evoked in the day to day life of the Bhutanese directly or indirectly through the vehicle of folktales." Dorji emphasized that the telling and hearing of folktales in Bhutan is a grassroots event, taking place at the level of the people, no matter where they are or who they

are. "The old and the young alike listen and narrate the same story repeatedly in their own way and always with the same enthusiasm and zeal. The simplicity of the theme and plot of folktales offer itself as a literary genre that is comprehensible to all...Thus, the mythical characters which marches across the memories of the narrator allows the audience to explore the land of dreams and return to the mundane world equipped with the philosophy of life, beliefs, code of traditional etiquette, values and many other traits proper to the Bhutanese society," Dorji said.

"Take for instance, in the story titled 'The Lame Monkey,' the poor boy is taught the manners of eating, self-presentation and walking by the monkey," Dorji continued. "Through this story, the Bhutanese are reminded of their indispensable beautiful etiquettes popularly known as dza cha dro sum which can be freely translated as 'the three manners of eating, self-presentation and walking.'" Dorji said that there were stories on the values of honor and the "causes and effects" of actions as well. "These two principles are very important and act as a cementing force of a society and its absence would result in the encountering of unprecedented calamities and sufferings, as it means contradicting what accords with morality," he said. "Many other values which are the basis of peaceful and harmonious coexistence between man and environment and among human being themselves are exhibited through the folktales. In addition, obviously, values, which teach how one can become a real member of his or her society, are also revealed through the folktales." In conclusion, Dorji said, "We have to all agree that the immense reservoir of stories are all created by man for the benefit of the upcoming generations, not only as the entertainment but also as a vehicle of transmission of religious, social, and moral values, philosophies and many unique traits of society. Then, it is not only important to document and create a treasury of folktales but also to keep them alive."

Conclusion

"It is not only important to document and create a treasury of folktales but also to keep them alive." (Tandin Dorji)

Telling stories is one of the most basic forms of communication. Across the ages, stories entertained people around a campfire at night, sitting with our mother or a favorite uncle, and in front of a fireplace, but really stories didn't just entertain. Stories connect the deep things of life, the deep things of God, and the values and morals of society, to our everyday lives. On one side they make us content with life and the everyday world around us, and on the other side they invite us into a larger world than we presently inhabit -- pulling us in as participants and not mere spectators. More often than not, though, one or another of these stories becomes imbedded unnoticed in our consciousness and then, unexpectedly, begins to release new insights and

new perspectives. They often shake our very foundations so that we find ourselves reaching out for wisdom and better understanding. In many ways, telling stories is an act of oral hospitality. Good storytellers invite us into a world that is different and wider than the one we ordinarily live in. Stories draw us into a reality where we find ourselves in touch with not only the world as it is, but also with the world as it should or could be. Through stories we discover that there is something more to life, something that we didn't quite see or understand before.

As statistics on orality and literacy imply, we live in a world desperately in need of stories and storytellers. Unfortunately, we also live in a world impoverished of stories and storytellers. "Words in our culture are a form of currency used mostly to provide information. Contemporary schooling is primarily an exercise in piling up information. By the time we have completed our assigned years in the classroom, we have far more information than we will ever be able to put to use. Motivational speech runs a close second to the informational kind – words used to persuade us to buy something, achieve something, vote for someone, become someone. As important, even essential, as informational and motivational words may be, they are conspicuously impersonal. There is no discovery, no relationship, no personal attentiveness in them. For that we need story and storytellers."

Stories can be brief, ranging from a simple metaphor embedded in a sentence to a broadly sketched portrayal of a person, quest, dilemma, or situation. Normally they employ ordinary things, people, and events as subject matter: farmers and merchants, travelers and partygoers, money and seeds, parents and children, salt and light. What is interesting though is that these stories can be thrown into our ordinary lives, and we wonder, "What are these doing here?" When they are allowed to complete their work, however, we find that our lives are changed. "Jesus was once asked by one of his friends why he told stories. He responded that he told stories 'to create readiness, to nudge people toward receptive insight...' Without leaving the world we work and sleep and play in daily, we find ourselves in a far larger world. We embrace connections and meanings and significance on our lives far beyond what our employers and teachers, our parents and children, our friends and neighbors, and all the so-called experts and celebrities have told us for so long."

In an effort to add to the cross-fertilization of ideas on and assist in the implementation of His Majesty's policy of Gross National Happiness, may I make the following suggestions:

Develop a national plan on promoting Gross National Happiness within the Kingdom by way of the rich oral traditions and heritage of Bhutan (in essence storytelling and its related art forms).

Recognize, encourage, promote, train, equip and utilize indigenous national storytellers and musicians.

Make storytelling part of the national education and entertainment systems.

Sponsor, host and promote national and regional storytelling festivals.

Research, collect, compile and disseminate appropriate stories, proverbs and songs.

Seek and encourage a royal patron or patroness to advocate the seriousness of promoting Gross National Happiness through storytelling and provide "legitimacy" to the program and its storytellers.

A Concluding Story: "The Lovers"

Here's a story, called "The Lovers," by Sundar Singh. It illustrates well how a story can promote Gross National Happiness.

It is told that there was once a young man who belonged to a respectable family, and who, after finishing his studies and other duties, used to go out for a walk in the [forest] each evening. His parents loved him dearly because of his good character, amiable disposition, orderly habits, and obedience. He was the pride of the family. One day he went further than usual into the [forest]. In fear that darkness might overtake him, he frantically tried to find his way. Just as he reached the road, a wild beast attacked and wounded him. With his last strength, he drove off the beast, cried out for help and then collapsed from shock and exhaustion.

Some distance away a beautiful girl was gathering firewood. When this horrible cry reached her ears, she was at first frightened, but she took courage and went to see who had cried out so desperately. She found the handsome young man lying half-conscious with no one nearby to help him. He was badly wounded and bleeding heavily. She pitied him and led him by the hand to the nearby river. She washed his wounds, and tearing her own dress, she bandaged them. Then she struggled to help him reach his own village.

Finally, they reached the house of the young man. His parents and relatives were shocked to see him in such a frightful state. They were also distressed to see him in the company of the girl who was obviously poor, and, in their eyes, quite beneath his social position. When the young man and the girl told their story, the lad's parents thanked the girl for her help and invited her to stay with them for the night, but they were actually eager to see her on her way. Early in the morning, the young man sent for her to express his deep gratitude. As soon as he saw her bright and beautiful face glowing in the morning light he was overwhelmed by her innocence, tenderness, and beauty. He fell in love with her in that instant and made up his mind to marry her at all costs. But the girl belonged to a very poor and low caste, and he knew this would be a great obstacle to overcome.

After hearing the young man's words of gratitude, the girl headed home. On her way through the [forest], she picked up the bundle of firewood she had left behind the day before and reached her village about

midday. About the same time, her parents and relatives returned exhausted and desperate from their fruitless search through the night. Needless to say, they were greatly astonished to find the girl at home. The girl told the whole story in all simplicity and honesty, but nobody believed her. Her elder brother doubted her character and chastity and thought she had run away and disgraced the name of the whole family. Her father beat the innocent girl black and blue and forbade her to step out of the house.

In time, the young man heard about how she had been treated, so he decided to visit her. He went to her village and told her parents the whole story, but they did not believe him either, for there was no witness to verify it. The girl, who was listening eagerly to the young man, remained silent. The sweetness of his words and the brightness of his face mesmerized her. When he had left, she told her parents, "If you doubt my chastity, then let me marry this young man." But her parents were very angry and refused. On his return home, the young man told his parents that he loved the girl who had rescued him and wanted to marry her. They became red with rage, punished him severely, and said: "Can't you find any better girl than this one of low and poor caste? Why do you want to disgrace our respectable family?" Eventually, the young man slipped away unobserved, and went to the village of his beloved. By chance, she was alone in the house that day. So they talked together freely and frankly. They were able to meet a number of times in this way and their love grew even deeper. But their parents were angry and bitterly spoke against their children's wishes. It thus became increasingly difficult for them to see each other. So they arranged to meet late at night when the others were asleep. Sometimes the young man waited outside the girl's village and sometimes the girl waited near her lover's room.

One night there was an accident. The girl fell down a steep bank behind the boy's house and injured her leg. The young man heard the noise and came out at once. He discovered that her leg was broken, took her to the hospital, and made all the necessary arrangements for her care. He went daily to see her. After some days she felt much better. When her parents finally found out where she was, they took her away from the hospital and hid her with some relatives in a distant village. The next day the young man went to the hospital as usual, but was confused when he did not find her there. The doctor in charge of the ward told him that she had recovered and that her parents had taken her home. The young man ran at once to her village, but she was not there. He feared that she had deceived him and had run away with some other man. Nevertheless, he missed her terribly and worried constantly. He could not find any clue where she might be. The girl also worried and wept bitterly day and night. Days passed but she heard nothing from her lover, so she thought that perhaps he had forgotten her and had fallen in love with some other girl. In addition, her parents were arranging for her to marry another man.

One day, when her family was asleep, the girl slipped out and ran to her lover's house. Calling at his window, she discovered that he was not there. She wept bitterly, saying: "Alas! My parents and relatives are now enemies. The man to whom I gave my heart has also left me. I cannot live another day in this world that is now hell to me." Thinking thus, she turned her steps toward the very river where she had once washed her lover's wounds. There, she jumped into the water, intending to end her life. Nearby, her lover sat behind a large rock, absorbed in his thoughts and entirely unaware of the presence of his beloved. Hearing the sound of someone falling into the water, he leapt in and rescued the girl. It was like a dream. He held the unconscious form of his beloved on his lap. After a few minutes, she revived and looked up into the dear face of her lover. All the bitterness of her life vanished in the twinkling of an eye. They embraced and kissed each other. At first, they were so overcome by joy that neither could speak. For half an hour they embraced each other with the deepest affection. [They then realized that it was God's desire for them to be together as husband and wife and committed themselves to him and each other.] So they went to the man of prayer and explained the whole situation to him. He gladly married them and sent them on their way with his blessing. They returned to the city, rented a small house and worked hard to earn their living. Even the richest people, with their palaces and worldly comforts, would envy the life of peace, love and happiness that those young lovers enjoyed in their poverty. Along with their love for each other, they were also filled with the bliss of divine love. They gave themselves heart and soul in the service of God and he blessed them in every way.

Bibliography

- Bhutan National Development – Report 2000: Gross National Happiness and Human Development – Searching for Common Ground. Thimphu: The Planning Commission Secretariat – Royal Government of Bhutan.
- Aris, M. and Hutt, M (Eds) (1994). Bhutan: Aspects of Culture and Development. Kiscadale: Gartmore Publishers.
- Armstrong, Hayward (Ed) (2003). Tell the Story. Rockville: International Center for Excellence in Leadership.
- Birch, Carol L. (2000). The Whole Story Handbook: Using Imagery to Complete the Story Experience. Little Rock: August House Publishers
- Birch, Carol L. and Heckler, Melissa A. (Eds) (1996). Who Says? Essays on Pivotal Issues in Contemporary Storytelling. Little Rock: August House Publishers.
- Campbell, Joseph (1949). The Hero with a Thousand Faces. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

- Choden, Kunzang (1997). *Bhutanese Tales of the Yeti*. Bangkok: White Lotus Publishers.
- Choden, Kunzang (1993). *Folktales of Bhutan*. Bangkok: White Lotus Publishers.
- Comer, Kim (Ed) (2000). *Wisdom of the Sadhu: Teachings of Sundar Singh*. Andhra Pradesh: OM Books.
- Dalai Lama (1998). *The Art of Happiness: A Handbook for Living*. Bangkok: White Lotus Publishers.
- Dorj, Tandin (2002). "Folktale Narration: A Retreating Tradition," *The Journal of Bhutan Studies*, Vol. 6, Summer 2002, pp. 5-23. Thimphu: The Center for Bhutan Studies.
- Dowman, Keith and Paljor, Sonam (Trans) (2000). *The Divine Madman: The Sublime Life and Songs of Drukpa Kunley*. Varanasi and Kathmandu: Pilgrims Publishing.
- Kinga, Sonam; Galay, Karma; Raptan, Phuntsho; and Pain, Adam (Eds) (1999). *Gross National Happiness: A Set of Discussion Papers*. Thimphu: The Center for Bhutan Studies.
- Kinga, Sonam (2001). "The Attributes and Values of Folk and Popular Songs," *The Journal of Bhutan Studies*, Vol. 3 No. 1, Summer 2001, pp. 132-170. Thimphu: The Center for Bhutan Studies.
- Lipman, Doug (1999). *Improving Your Storytelling: Beyond Basics for All Who Tell Stories in Work or Play*. Little Rock: August House Publishers.
- MacDonald, Margaret Read (1993). *The Storytellers Start-Up Book: Finding, Learning, Performing and Using Folktales*. Little Rock: August House Publishers.
- Maguire, Jack (1998). *The Power of Personal Storytelling: Spinning Tales to Connect with Others*. New York: Putnam Publishers.
- McLuhan, Marshall (1962). *The Gutenberg Galaxy*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Ong, Walter J. (1982). *Orality & Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. London: Routledge Publishing.
- Petersen, Eugene (1999). *Stories of Jesus*. Colorado Springs: NavPress.
- Phuntsho, Karma (2000). "On the Two Ways of Learning in Bhutan," *The Journal of Bhutan Studies*, Vol. 2 No. 2, Winter 2000, pp. 96-126. Thimphu: The Center for Bhutan Studies.
- Raptan, Phuntsho (2001). "Mass Media: Its Consumption and Impact on Residents of Thimphu and Rural Areas," *The Journal of Bhutan Studies*, Vol. 3 No. 1, Summer 2001, pp. 172-198. Thimphu: The Center for Bhutan Studies.
- Thomas, Rita (1999). *Folk Tales of Bhutan*. Columbia: South Asia Books.
- Wangyal, Tashi (2001). "Ensuring Social Sustainability: Can Bhutan's Education System Ensure Intergenerational Transmission of

Values," *The Journal of Bhutan Studies*, Vol. 3 No. 1, Summer 2001, pp. 106-131. Thimphu: The Center for Bhutan Studies.

Yolen, Jane (Ed) (1999). *Gray Heroes: Elder Tales from Around the World*. New York: Penguin Books.