

## **Development with sparks Placing the hamburger in the mandala**

Diederik Prakke  
*Thimphu*

### **Introduction**

Over the past few decades, Bhutan has seen tremendous developments, stemming in part from modern education. At the same time the country has endeavoured to preserve its culture and identity. However, whereas modern education makes the younger generation think in new terms and concepts, the essence of culture is still presented in essentially the same way as in the past. As a result the bulk of policy makers cannot consider Buddhist and Hindu<sup>1</sup> wisdom in their decision making. Buddhism, once the ordering principle of society, now becomes no more than icing on the cake. Buddhist topping on an essentially western pizza, rather than a consciously placed the hamburger of modern development in the Bhutanese mandala.

Even though nobody made a terrible mistake<sup>2</sup>, Bhutan nevertheless finds itself challenged to **establish a sparking dialogue between its modern and traditional heritages, making the best of both available in modern terms.** Inheriting ritualised Buddhism and Hinduism<sup>3</sup> is like owning a house but not knowing where it stands. Past generations never thought about its whereabouts, and probably just naturally enjoyed this palace or awoke in it after death<sup>4</sup>. But the educated have learned to question, and many doubt the location and very existence of anything deeply meaningful in their culture<sup>5</sup>. Others still genuinely sense or think<sup>6</sup> that there is something worthwhile to behold, but harden as they do not know *what* exactly they believe in. To mask this insecurity some display a tendency to cling to outer forms and to be apprehensive of foreign values and unbiased questioning.

However understandable, this approach ultimately defeats its purpose, as it enhances the feeling of the others that cultural preservation is nothing but the oppressive defence of a non-existent house<sup>7</sup>. Today moralistic and naïve presentations, expressing more clinging to the past than future vision, and the scantiness of more modern and subtle interpretations of the teachings of the Buddha and Hinduism, almost compel individuals who are true to their intellect, to discard these traditions.

This article will argue that, given the government objective of happiness or spiritual growth of Bhutan's inhabitants, a fresh look at Buddhism is of the greatest relevance, as Buddhism provides just the perspective and insights that were lost in modern development. Moreover I will present a personal view of the development process in Bhutan, providing the historical and cultural-psychological background<sup>8</sup> in which the need for a modern understanding of Buddhism arises<sup>9</sup>. Acknowledging both the shortcomings of modern development and the Buddhist culture existent in Bhutan, I conclude that an open-minded sparking dialogue between the two can strengthen both, bringing down the rain of wisdom and compassion which is the rightful inheritance of humanity. My personal view is that there is no need to fear 'intrusion' and that Bhutan can best open to the lessons learned abroad about this marriage of traditions, but this view may be a worthwhile subject for debate.

### **Organisation of this text**

Firstly I briefly present my view on the link between overall government objectives and personal growth. Then, based on the teaching of the Four Noble Truths, the text attempts to shed light on the timeless wisdom of Buddhism, yet formulated in current concepts. The aim of this section is to present some vocabulary and concepts to refer to later (the reader familiar with Buddhism can skip this section).

Subsequently the main body of this article presents a view of the development process of Bhutan, and the main emerging challenges, given the objective of gross national happiness.

The text distinguishes between current characteristics of society that may be good to change, and values that deserve to be promoted. However, in either case the challenge is how to go about it, because short-sighted methods are likely to be counterproductive in the long run. The paper concludes with a brainstorm on how the Buddhist wisdom may be made more accessible, engaging in a sparking and enriching dialogue with modern thinking.

## **Part I: Theory**

### **Personal growth and Policy**

Maslow and others have presented the needs of (human) beings as a hierarchy: In the first place we need food, then shelter, and subsequently non-material goods such as peace, meaningful employment, love and spiritual development. Defining the basic needs of human beings helps to overcome the drawback of traditional economic science: That all desires of human beings are seen as equally valid. Moreover, the hierarchy of basic needs also facilitates to distinguish true and long-term from false or momentary satisfiers; to distinguish real food from drugs.

Stable happiness flourishes if the material needs are sufficiently met and the higher needs met in abundance by true satisfiers. Moreover happiness is more stable, if the roots are steadfast. In fact happiness becomes unconditional and indestructible if it is based no longer on any wish or condition<sup>10</sup>, but on understanding the truth. Individuals, who wish to live in such a state<sup>11</sup>, thus need an understanding of the truth, and methods that remove the blockages that prevent love and activity to manifest freely from that basis.

A government that is not only concerned about the material well-being of its citizens, but also wishes to enhance the fulfilment of the emotional and spiritual needs, may therefore endeavour to make such vision and methods available. Since this is precisely what the Buddha's teachings are said to

offer, Bhutan may well turn in the first place to its own heritage and explore how its wisdom can be presented in ways that inspire interested individuals of today<sup>12</sup>.

In focussing on the spiritual dimension of development, I do not suggest that the 'lower' needs can be forgotten or looked down upon. In fact both the hierarchy of needs, and the Buddhist notions of absolute and relative truth urge to pay attention to the immediate concern or bottleneck an individual or society experiences. Thus Bhutan cannot afford *only* to do what this article will do: Reflect on the ultimate and subtle aspects of development. Bhutan will have to look into economic inequity, elite control of power, and the like. I will indulge in higher reflections only in the hope that this will eventually contribute to better approaches on all levels in the relative world.

### **The first Noble Truth: *Dugngal*<sup>13</sup> (Suffering or Anguish)**

According to the Buddha all experience in conditioned existence<sup>14</sup> is *Dugngal* (Skt: *Dukha*), 'dis-satisfactoriness', anguish or suffering. Within our everyday experience we *do* have unconditional gaps, in which real joy and appreciation happen, for example when we are suddenly amazed to look out of our window and see the world covered by snow, or when we are delighted by the song of the first birds in spring. But other than that, even what we think of as pleasurable, has the taste of dissatisfaction, struggle. There is struggle because we want to arrange and keep our pleasures so badly, or invest so much in pretending indifference to ease the pain of losing them.

This pervasiveness of suffering may need some comment, for this is what is rare and subtle in the Buddha's teaching. The Buddha saw that not only the death of a relative or a fight with a friend is painful, but that all our conditioned actions express dissatisfaction with who we are<sup>15</sup>. Most religions<sup>16</sup> (and Buddhism, if not correctly understood) acknowledge suffering, but suggest that if you do your best a little more you will overcome the 'bad', either by escaping to heaven or

by attaining a blissful state in this life. According to the experience of the Buddha such self-improvement projects lead just to further imprisonment, because they still express dissatisfaction with or denial of who we really are. Buddhism teaches that there is no way out, though there is a way in.

Because of this view of the inevitability of suffering or anguish, which is at the same time the seed of love and compassion, Buddhism is sometimes considered a negative religion. This argument actually flips around when well considered. The view of those who maintain that they are already perfectly happy is grim, for they refuse to acknowledge and relate to the depth of their experience. And the view of those who admit that there is suffering but promise that there is a way out is equally grim, because their happiness depends on future hope and promise, and a refusal to take experience as it really is just at this very moment.

There are many ways to increase one's experiential awareness of anguish, such as asking oneself whether one leads the life one dreamt of as a child, contemplating impermanence, or imagining the pain of oneself and others. The purpose of such exercises is not to increase daydreaming as escape from the present moment, but to open ones heart. Exercises of this kind can also help to see how vast the unnecessary part of pain is: Most suffering is not the direct, brilliant experience of the moment, but the agony of hope and fear of how the situation should or may change.

### **The second Noble Truth: Dwelling, the origin**

The Buddha went on to teach the cause of *Dugngal*, stating that anguish arises based on rejecting and resenting reality, which in turn is based on a misconception. Rejecting and resenting is almost the definition of suffering, because we suffer when we are united with what we do not want, when we have a rejecting I-don't-want-mind. And the same holds for dwelling: When we have what we want, we want to keep it, and suffer because we have a mind that wants to maintain a

phenomenon which is certain to fleet, because impermanence is the nature of all phenomena.

The second Noble Truth points at our secondary emotions. Our primary emotions of jealousy, pride, greed, anger, passion and stupidity are not a problem we can fight. The problem arises when we impute a problem and follow secondary strategies to express or suppress the primary manifestations of our confused enlightened mind. We may think of how peaceful life would be if our primary emotions would not arise, but as long as they do, we might as well make friends with them, developing a deep and tender curiosity, rather than the judgmental attitude of our secondary emotions. Because we cannot at once refrain from these habitual tendencies, Buddhism has many suggestions on how to deal with our secondary confusion. We can practice them not as punishment, but to develop a joyful understanding of who we are.

### **The third Noble Truth: Realising non-duality, the cessation**

The third Noble Truth is the subtlest of all, the hardest to fully assimilate. It asserts that our dwelling and rejecting mind arises based on the sub-conscious misconception of taking awareness to constitute a self, implying that overcoming this misconception causes the cessation of the experience of pervasive anguish. The tradition of logic and debate in Himalayan Buddhism establishes this view, by proving that neither sentient beings nor phenomena constitute a permanent self, but that unenlightened beings sub-consciously do impute permanent entities, and that that projection is the cause of all their suffering.

The same tradition of debate also establishes what is known as *Uma* (*Skt: Madhyamaka*), the Middle Way, by negating extreme points of view<sup>17</sup>. This Middle Way avoids the extremes of imputing permanent existence or total non-existence. The strength of these teachings is to leave the gap of unknowing wide open when our thoughts reach the limits

of conceptual mind, rather than positing soothing answers. Many people feel encouraged and validated by the statement of their religion that there is a God who loves and takes care of all of us<sup>18</sup>. Others take pride and find identity from inferring the opposite: That no such being(s) exist. But Buddha did not confirm people in either of such artificial faith<sup>19</sup>: He considered his students mature enough to live in the fathomless groundless wisdom of unknowing<sup>20</sup>.

Combining the second and the third Noble Truth we now understand why the Buddha never intended to give life recipes. Many people who turn to religion are looking for just that: Guidelines that tell them what they should do to be good boys and girls. Compelled by compassion the Buddha and later teachers *did* give instructions on practical livelihood, but never to validate practitioners, and always as a temporary concession to help beings on their way to gain certainty in the highest view. Such skilful means may be compared to the finger pointing at the moon: To find the moon the pointing finger is useful. But once one has discovered the moon, one should discard the pointing finger.

Therefore, in spite of all logic, the *Uma* approach to decision-making is not to validate and search for black-and-white answers. Conventionally, if your son did something naughty you may gather all arguments against him (including moralistic quotes from religious authorities), recalling what mistakes he previously made, and penalise him with a sense of righteousness without pity. Or you could impose compassion and 'good manners' on yourself, denying and suppressing your anger. In either case you trap yourself in unnecessary thoughts. Actually you can take very good decisions based on uncertainty. You could decide to scold your son, and still sympathise with him, or overlook the event and forgive him, meanwhile not being naïve of the situation<sup>21</sup>.

Yet understanding this philosophy will not stop your mind, and so what you will find again and again, is that your mind first starts to chatter a bit and then becomes increasingly heavy-handed piling arguments to one side, negating the

other. Or you may observe yourself establishing ever-subtler viewpoints in between, which still expresses nothing other than your wish to produce ground and security. Just noticing this may give you a break, an opportunity to stop (at least temporarily). The point of meditation is not to find out whether or not your individual thoughts are correct - *any* arguments simply unnecessarily escalate entanglement and suffering. Realising the cessation of anguish is seeing that sticking to a strategy or opinion to avoid pain, is what perpetuates it.

### **The fourth Noble Truth: Paths to the cessation**

Traditionally the eight-fold path is presented as the path to the cessation of *Khorwa* (*Skt: Samsara*), which is the fourth Noble Truth. However, to point at the different Buddhist approaches and the unique characteristics of Himalayan Buddhism, the text below will centre around the *Thegpasum* (*Skt: Three Yana's*), or the three Vehicles<sup>22</sup>.

#### ***Thegchung* (*Skt: Hinayana*)**

The first of these three is the *Hinayana*<sup>23</sup>, or Lesser Vehicle. 'Lesser' not in the sense of inferior, but in the sense of being basic and true, in the sense of no promises and no pretension, in the sense of being the only starting point. The aspiration of the follower of the *Thegchung* is to liberate him- or herself from habitual patterns and obscurations. Teachings of the Hinayana are the teaching of the four Noble Truths, dependent arising, egolessness of the individual, and the four reminders. The latter are a set of well-known, basic contemplations aimed to cause renunciation from futile attachment to conditioned existence. They are: Contemplation on ones precious human possibilities, on the certainty of death and the uncertainty of the moment of its occurrence, on the inevitability of cause and effect, and on the flaws of *Khorwa* (*Skt: Samsara*), the futility of struggling and pushing and spreading ones inner dissatisfaction and irritation.



The main meditation practice of the *Hinayana* is *Shine-Lhagthong* (Calm Abiding-Insight). The discipline of *Shine* (*Skt: Shamatha*) is to just sit, be aware of one's breath, and let one's thoughts go with non-judgemental kindness. The latter turns out to be very hard for most practitioners. Conditioned to strife and struggle the beginner cannot help but criticise him- or herself when realising that thoughts have started unnoticed. Instead of simply letting them go once one awakes to seeing them, the practitioner blames him- or herself (with further thoughts!), or watches his or her mind so tightly for the next few minutes, that he or she becomes more stressed rather than more relaxed... If pursued further the practitioner however starts to be perplexed by how many thoughts occupy our minds unwanted, and develops a humorous wakefulness that naturally extends into insight or awareness.

The seeing that occurs in *Lhagthong* (*Skt: Vipashyana*) is called *Sherab*, Transcendental Knowledge (*Skt: Prajna*) - 'transcendental' in that it is not produced by learning or thinking, but just pops-up by itself. *Sherab* is classified in different ways, among them as higher and lower. Lower *Sherab* realises an aspect of phenomena, whereas higher *Sherab* experientially sees their impermanence and emptiness (*Tongpanyi, Skt: Shunyata*). Suppose you meet a friend and extend your arm to shake hands, while your friend does not. You then bring your hand to your face and rub your nose as though it was aching all along. If you then happen to realise that you did the latter to camouflage the moment of uncertainty, then that is a simple example of lower *Sherab*. To suddenly see impermanence and question experientially and probably with a little shock, whether you really exist and have solid ground under your feet, is an example of higher *Prajna*.

During *Shine* practice these experiences may happen, but the instruction is to treat them like any other mental events: They are acknowledged and then let go of. This is a very settle point: Touch and go - it is not a matter of rejecting what arises. As Guru Rinpoche said 'Whatever arises in the mind, such as thoughts of the five poisons, one should

neither *lead* nor *follow*. Just let it remain in its natural state, and attain the liberation of *Chhökkyiku* [full enlightenment]'. Superficially Buddhism seems a path in which our powerful, so-called 'negative' emotions are subtly denied, and the implicit way in which many Asian cultures deal with emotions is often thought of as intrinsic to Buddhism. But in actual fact the emotional intelligence<sup>24</sup> of even our most confused emotions dawns as wisdom by really letting them be, in the way the Buddha taught.

### ***Thegchen (Skt: Mahayana)***

Having glimpsed but not stabilised a more immediate state of being, the practitioner then becomes irritated, for the smallest distractions can completely disrupt the peace he or she achieved. This is the natural sign of the need for the *Thegpachhenpo*, the Great Vehicle. When realising that others are equally affected by their thoughts and emotions (many of them not even realising it and taking their compulsive behaviour to be freedom) *Nyingje* (*Skt: Karuna*), natural compassion, arises - the spontaneous wish that all find and stabilise the natural state. Compassion feels as broken-heartedness and often as frustration: Being honest to one's heart one realises that one does not only aspire to free oneself, but really wishes that all other sentient beings attain enlightenment as well. At some moments a deep peace starts to occur, but at other times the realisation of the unbridgeable gap between ideal and reality, and the uncertainty how to go about it, cause one to be genuinely tormented.

Whereas the *Thegchung* is still goal-oriented and therefore subtly aggressive (because having a goal expresses dissatisfaction with where one is), for the *Mahayana* practitioner the path becomes the goal. The goal is so unreachable that one slowly starts to realise that there is no salvation to be expected in the future. The only relief that can be achieved in each moment is to accomplish a total willingness to give oneself completely. Note however that *Nyingje* and skilful means always start with *Jamba* (*Skt: Maitri*), Loving-Kindness to oneself. If one cannot realistically

see and accept ones strength and imperfections of the moment, one will act from an underlying aggression that will exhaust and or hurt oneself in the long run. Seeing and accepting ones imperfections is also what keeps one humble, which implies a willingness to start forever from the beginning, because the masters report that what you overcome are not your 'unreasonable' emotions, but your unwillingness to work with them<sup>25</sup>.

Feelings of fear, guilt and unworthiness are not fostered to motivate extending an outward effort, but are, do they occur, the first emotions to embrace with tenderness. And so are feelings of rage and hatred: Rather than feeling depressed or guilty about such feelings, the practitioner is encouraged to acknowledge them as part of his or her being at that point in time. Once accepted, they become a bridge to the larger world, because you realise how others are tormented by the same feelings, while they often have no hint as to how to bring them on their path. Many people struggle their life long to justify their feelings with conceptual fabrications (a passion symbolised by the hen in the wheel of life), to force their feeling into the pigeonhole they have assigned to it (with snake-like aggression), or just to ignore any problems (like the pig). Just feeling properly, before judging, speculating and strategising does not occur to many beings.

### ***Dorjithegpa (Skt: Vajrayana)***

“At every stage of the path there is always some subtle ignorance, some knot that we feel must be untied. But when we look, we cannot even find it. Realising this, the only thing we can do is seek a genuine *Lama (Skt: Guru)* who can untie the bonds of ego. Finding such a guru, we can begin to train on the *Dorjithegpa* path of devotion. The unbreakable commitment between teacher and disciple, called *Damtshig (Skt: Samaya bond)*, is the vehicle for that training. [...] Accepting life fully is the same as accepting our teacher as guru. Only a human being who has trained in the path of simple trust can surrender to the faith that the phenomenal world is accurate and true. Only then can he or she offer the apparition of ego to the uncompromising scrutiny of the guru.

The guru demands that we manifest our own true nature, our Buddha nature, our enlightened mind. Anything short of that is unacceptable.”<sup>26</sup>

The *Vajrayana*, the indestructible Vehicle, or *Gyü* (*Skt: Tantra*), the Continuous Vehicle, that is practised in the Himalayan region, is considered dangerous, because it can easily be misunderstood. The story of Rudra may illustrate this: Two students received the advice from their master ‘Don’t reject anything’. One of them understood this to mean that he observe meticulously whatever arose in his experience, without any attempt to manipulate it. He found the instruction very difficult to follow at first, but over time developed an incredible awareness and devotion for the world and his guru. The other student took the teaching to mean that he could act on all impulses, and he had an easy start doing whatever was considered bad in those days: Drinking, gambling, and sexual indulgence. However, he got more and more miserable and confused over time. After years the two students met again, compared their experiences and decided to ask their teacher which student had understood the instructions properly. As the teacher expressed that the former had been right, the latter, Rudra, got so angry that he killed his master on the spot, thus cutting himself completely from his last source of refuge.

In both *Hinayana* and *Mahayana* the world is considered a bad place, though in the *Mahayana* one is willing to stay in it for the benefit of sentient beings. In *Vajrayana* there is no conceptual view of the world as either good or bad, but the directness and brilliance of experience, to which the *Lama* re-introduces the student, is highly appreciated. Although the magic is not the possession of the guru, the student feels tremendous awe and devotion and openness to him or her, and this is the saving grace preventing the student from becoming wild and confused. Pain is no longer regarded as something to overcome, but a part of celebrating ones life, as when deeply in love.

Devotion and the master-student relationship is often misunderstood (and, unfortunately, also misused). Some western students have rejected the idea, thinking that it entailed throwing away ones dignity and personal responsibility, while others embraced it, seeing it as a way to receive élitist confirmation. It is good to remember that the lama ultimately is no higher than the student, and that his 'only' role is to point at the *Dharma*, which points at the truth. However, a compulsive desire to project equality at all relations and at all times seems to indicate exactly the subtle ignorance that needs to be overcome: The idea that to 'be' we need to hold on to some reference point and not give in to more pervasive delivery.

## **Part II: Application**

### **A view of society**

Modern education has opened the eyes of a new generation to a world of previously un-thought-of possibilities, and modern development has made many of these prospects reality. The hamburger of modern development does not only consist of road construction technologies and tuberculosis vaccines. Ingrained in it are also new dreams of fulfilment and freedom – in other words changed ideologies and values. As far as there are diseases related to modern development, those viruses have long been contacted. Attempts to separate the materialistic wish for outer freedom (and considering it as still a foreign element) from the technologies that increase such freedom, therefore harvest little result. Change in values and ideals are part and parcel of the development process, and need not be regretted or resented.

In practice, however, change in values meets with resistance. Resistance not only from the 'rational' level (ones genuine understanding, which can be lower *Sherab*) because helpful traditions are lost, but also from the emotional (*Karma* created) level because change brings insecurity and value clashes. The conscious 'opposition' or question marks to the

predominant trends of modern development are the subject of debate for this paper: What can individuals and the state do to improve happiness over material progress? Which views and values are essential to Buddhism (e.g. compassion), which are compatible but not essential (e.g. folkdances), and which are contrary to either Buddhism or the national stage of development<sup>27</sup>? How can Bhutan not just resentfully fight negative trends, but really address them most effectively? How can personal, spiritual growth be enhanced, acknowledging that indiscriminate clinging to outer forms may have the inverse effect? How can the ground be understood and transmitted which underlies temporal cultural values and expressions?<sup>28</sup>

As for the unconscious forces of resistance to change: The individual can feel these from three sources. Firstly from his or her direct family, secondly from the society at large, including the state, and thirdly from his or her 'inner parent', the internalised voice that wishes not to question old patterns. In other words the third source is a reflection of the earlier two, thus making the link for the continuation of the compulsive aspect of culture. And the role of the state in turn is a resultant of the first and third, because in their policies the individuals who govern a country express not only their wisdom but their cultural programming as well. According to Buddhism these forms of resistance are the result of habitual patterns, obscurations and attachments and need to be overcome, which often entails bringing them from the unconscious to the conscious level. However, they are not the kind of enemy that needs to be fought – *Karma* just naturally ceases to keep a hold over us if we develop tremendous curiosity and friendly wakefulness<sup>29</sup>.

In my view this sketches the current challenge of Bhutan, because with more exposure and education many modern Bhutanese are tormented between living up to their parents expectations (and internalising them) and giving in to their impulse to explore new ways of relating<sup>30</sup>. Submitting blindly to the expectations of ones parents (superiors, or government) and demanding the same obedience from ones children

(subordinates, or society at large), which has been a non-hypocrite practice for centuries, somehow does not fully fit anymore. Even if kept below the surface, sticking to such anchorage creates friction, and at best merely postpones change, for at some point in time individuals will develop different relationships than in the past. Attending the GNH day was a great relief and hopeful sign in this respect, because to me it clearly illustrated the fast growing openness for unbiased discussion, an attitude that (sometimes unknowingly) expresses the heart of the Buddha.

It is interesting to note that the Bhutanese seem to have some characteristics that distinguish them from many others, thereby *reducing*<sup>31</sup> the danger of going an alienating path of development. Until recently the development of countries like Japan, Malaysia and Korea was viewed as the model of successful change: 'Even' the western world eyed at such countries to see how they excelled in modern technology by organising production just a little more disciplined and efficient. But as much as their outer success beats that of others, the inner distress and emptiness surfaces more terrifying once the ecstasy of outer paradise starts fading<sup>32</sup>. Illustrative of the difference that I sense is the distress a Bhutanese reported upon finding that everything in Singapore was artificial. At some point this friend of mine ran to a flowerpot in a shopping mall, needing to smell earth, only to find that the plant grew on substrata...

### **What to change**

So far we have not been very specific about what institutions and values could be allowed or even encouraged to change over time. As background for discussing this let's look at the early life of the Buddha. The parents of Prince Siddhartha did everything in their power to avoid their son to suffer. They went as far as to imprison him in their palace, keeping him ignorant of the truth of suffering. They even arranged a wife for him, not only for their love of him, but as a means to keep him tied with them. For the greater good, however, he broke with these fetters, and set out on a journey that taught him

to overcome all entanglements of conditioned existence. It was only for his love, and not for imposed guilt or fear, that he returned after enlightenment to teach others.

Looking first at family relationships, we can conclude that ultimately all binding that builds on instilling a feeling of indebtedness, can and should be given up. Parents need and should not consider child raising as an investment, for which the children should repay them<sup>33</sup>. Once children mature, the opinions of parents regarding what the children should do, should be seen as advice. Parents can advise against a love-relationship of their grown-up children, a trip abroad, a job, or the way to raise their grandchildren, but that advice should not be regarded as an order that ought to be obeyed. Therefore, disregarding such advice should not be perceived as betrayal and a reason for emotional blackmail.

From my observation this contrasts to the current situation in Bhutan, where both children and parents feel that adults still have to closely follow the opinions of their parents<sup>34</sup>. A traditional strategy to deal with such friction between parental instructions and ones own will is to say 'yes' but do 'no'. Though a clever and successful strategy for helpless children<sup>35</sup>, it does not break the pattern into adult freedom. The hard-nosed approach experimented in the sixties in the west, regarding ones parents as conservative smuck and giving free reign to ones disturbed emotions, is not a solution either - that is just another fixed pattern of behaviour. The challenge the Buddha calls us for is to go beyond strategy all together, as we will discuss later<sup>36</sup>.

Another area where values are slowly changing is in the openness of feeling. Traditionally people do not cry, and encourage each other to 'be strong' by grieving in silence, or by denying the pain of a dragging conflict. As in most societies children are taught this value early, and babies are not left to cry, in the first place because it is unsettling to their parents. Because emotions do not just disappear, this implicit way of dealing with them leads to expressing feelings in secondary ways. A husband who finds the house untidy



after a hard days work may not say '*I feel unhappy if the place is not neat, shall we clean up together?*' but '*This place is in a mess*'. His wife then gets the message and starts cleaning with an injured sense of guilt, or strikes back with another inferred remark and boycotts her husband's command. However, these costumes are subject to gradual development for the better, probably faster than in most other societies.

In the relationship between people and government I suggest much the same: That the work of government *servants* not be regarded as a gift for which the population should be blindly thankful. The partnership should become more equal in that the government agencies should be accountable, as much for what they do, as for how they do it, as also for what they omit. These statements are fully in line with His Majesty's view, and also with the decentralisation objectives – but are still far from reality<sup>37</sup>. In practice a great conditionality can be observed: If subordinates or the recipients of assistance become too critical, all assistance may be withdrawn<sup>38</sup>. The act of decentralisation itself is still seen as adding a credit to the powerful, because the giver and receiver of power fail to see that that power originated from the recipients in the first place<sup>39</sup>.

Whereas natural respect, if not devotion, is more than worth promoting, the traditional setting poses its own challenges, which still remain today. The challenge for a leader is to get accurately informed, although his or her subordinates will in the first place express optimism even if they despair. In fact the current mix can be even more complicated: When somebody refuses a cup of tea (even by saying '*I don't refuse to be polite*'), does it still express the traditional costume, or does he really not want tea? Similarly, when a superior asks for open debate, does he really wish it, and do his subordinates really trust him?

The recent history has shown successful examples of forced development: Think only of the current high government officials many of whom were sent to school much against the will of their parents. Such examples consolidate the belief in

imposed change, but whoever goes this path should be certain of his case. For the superior who asks commitment for a cause, radiating that his subordinates should answer his enthusiasm, invites a display of rhetoric support, but cuts himself off from the feedback and real beliefs of his subordinates, who may share their disbeliefs behind his back. The direction towards openness is clear and good, but it is important to acknowledge the stages along the path for what they are.

### **How to change**

The question for this section is: How do we allow and encouraged what needs to change to change, in a way that evokes least hurt and resistance, both at the level of the family, and at the society or government level.

I stated earlier that, if you are a young adult it is important to realise your independence without compromise. Even more important is to allow the feelings that you have, when your parents do not support and share that view. Often people talk about what they should and should not feel, and then speculate on the best strategy to rid oneself of 'bad' feelings. For a large part such people refuse to listen to their so-called 'negative' feelings, maybe because they realise all the good their parents did as well. But if you refuse to listen to your heart, your genuine love can also not unfreeze and flourish. Listening to your feelings does not create negativity - it just explores your inner wisdom, thus giving room for you feelings to shift and change<sup>40</sup>.

Allowing your feelings to arise when you are alone with yourself or with friends, however, need not mean expressing them as such to your parents, or superiors. The parents of the educated generation have witnessed so many drastic changes in their lifetime that, if you talk to them harshly, they may be overwhelmed by a feeling that you disrespect them. And they may not have the background to understand that allowing your feelings is for you a step to greater appreciation and mature love<sup>41</sup>.

Once you have owned your innate freedom and listened with kindness and humour to all you inner rage and frustration, you may no longer fear intimidation. When reprimanded you may learn to say 'I understood your concern and will consider it, but I will make my own decision'. In the past you may have kept quiet and obedient (and aggressive to yourself) until you could not help but add fuel to the fire by shouting 'Stop ruling my life'<sup>42</sup>! As mentioned earlier philosophical Buddhism refuses to give directions for post-meditation action, because this could undermine taking personal responsibility. So all possibilities are open. One may try to discuss the issue with ones parents, though in many cases this will not yield positive results. One may express ones frustration, be it only to mark the change for oneself. Or one may keep quite to ones parents and only internally transform...

As for allowing and promoting change at the level of society, one issue that comes to mind is how to promote real tolerance and appreciation of the multi-cultural society, fighting a distinction between full and second-class citizens. We can for example attempt to apply *Uma* reasoning at the southern (or eastern) Bhutanese issue<sup>43</sup>. When really understood and internalised, there need not be any problem at all, but in practice I have often been torn hearing arguments either way, separating people more than uniting them in their common unresolved pain<sup>44</sup>.

If you honestly believe that the government was right in principal, that's fine but it does not compel you to set up reasoning proving that all southern Bhutanese are to blame, and implying that any pain endured by them was well deserved. Or if you are convinced that the government made major mistakes that's OK too, but need not be an impetus to deny that the situation was difficult. Accommodating both sides does not deny that some conceptions are more correct, loving and helpful than others. What Buddhist philosophy has to contribute is the understanding that agitated conceptual mind cannot disentangle the knots. To do that we have to release that mind and its fabrications, and embrace

any problem that occurs as ours, maybe not because we directly caused it (which is irrelevant if our house is on fire), but in that we have to accept that we have to deal with it<sup>45</sup>.

Wouldn't it be wonderful if discussions on this issue, be it private debates or the deliberations in the National Assembly, could move in such a direction? It would not lessen the pain experienced by those directly affected, but by not trying to run from that hurt, Bhutan could set an almost unprecedented example of approaching conflict, an example to be proud of without a need for defence. Displaying open-mindedness, and encouraging the same among the larger population, is in not only temporarily most pleasant, but in the long run the strongest and healthiest protection. It is a direct expression of understanding the second noble truth: That the origin of suffering is our obsessive desire to be separated from suffering.

### **What to nurture**

"In the twentieth century, we talk about democracy, individualism, personal heroism, and all kinds of things like that. While all of those ideals are excellent in one sense, they are the creation of a culture that does not appreciate arduous and long training in a traditional discipline. Throwing away tradition and wisdom that have been developed through many centuries is like tossing the extraordinary exertion and sacrifice that human beings have made out of the window, like dirt socks. This is certainly not the way to maintain the best of human society."<sup>46</sup>

Modern development has introduced values and ideals that, at least seemingly, contradict with the more indigenous values of *Tantric* Buddhism, Hinduism, and other traditional influences. Below I will list some relevant issues in which I plead that the traditional values not be discarded too lightly. Some of the traditional approaches carry lessons for the modern world, which struggles making all relationships flat, and then experiences a lack of awe and purpose in a flat world. I feel tempted to elaborate my personal understandings

(which would make up another paper), but will curb them to a few remarks on devotion and hierarchy and some footnotes. The challenge for current and future policy makers is to investigate which approaches can be married harmoniously<sup>47</sup>, and where a choice needs to be made, fitting both the eternal wisdom of Buddhism and the stage of development.

### **Modern**

Fixation on equality / Democracy  
Participation, down-ward accountability  
Devotion is slavery  
Human rights, universality  
'Free'<sup>50</sup> art is creative  
Exploring emotions advocated

### **Dorjithegpa**

Lama-disciple hierarchy/ Kingdom  
Offering, upward sub-ordination<sup>48</sup>  
Devotion is enlightenment<sup>49</sup>  
Love and wisdom, specificity  
Following tradition is formative<sup>51</sup>  
Touch and go<sup>52</sup>

Traditionally the ruler of *Vajrayana* countries was (not unlike the rulers in middle age Europe and those in many other cultures) regarded to be enlightened. Although in many cases this belief was obviously misplaced, manipulated and misused by the rulers, at the core this expresses a genuine worldview. In this view it was naturally accepted that blessings come from above, and the thought of democracy (making 'high' accountable to 'low') would therefore be a repulsive idea – worse than eating excreta. In Bhutan it is said that one could not look the previous kings in their eyes, they were simply too exalted and powerful. And a king himself would probably not look into the eyes of his subjects: Like Guru Rinpoche he would look over them straight into fathomless space, to maintain an un-deluded, impartial view (compare with the French statue of the Lady of Justice who is depicted blindfolded). The need for an enlightened guru to gain enlightenment and a king to rule a country was as obvious as the fact that one cannot free oneself from drowning in quicksand by pulling one's own hair.

The modern world, on the other hand, has been very brave in systematically questioning its leaders, reflecting on the best mechanisms to control the potential harm that can be done by ill-intended leaders, such as laws, elections and controlling bodies. Sometimes these measures express

suspicion born from that perversion of Christianity that views people as fundamentally evil, and this is where I hope Bhutan can differ, for this view tends to be a self-fulfilling prophecy. Nevertheless, with increasing exposure and education, and an expanded civil service, it has obviously become appropriate to make use of the modern experiences and models to increase participation and accountability, as is currently happening.

As stated earlier the above remarks are hopefully no more than a foretaste of serious and in-depth reflections on timely fundamental concepts and resulting values, marrying or choosing the best of all human wisdom available to Bhutan.

### **How to nurture**

Suppose we have identified some traditions that we wish to nurture, But how do we enhance this, as families, citizens, or as government? A rigid, dualistic approach yields dualistic results, because it separates the obedient from the naughty and dreamy, who cannot catch up with the norm. Dualistic societies make criminals out of the latter group, which may originally include the most artistic, visionary and soft-hearted people. And the former group of 'good boys and girls' are curbed into dull, frigid and narrow-minded individuals. In other words, too stringent promotion of even the most worthwhile values at the wrong time defeats the purpose.

On the other hand one should not always be soft and fear being directive – the question seems to be how to relate to fear itself. An approach based on hope and fear – the hope that those we care for adopt our values and stay within the limits that we wish to impose, and a fear that they won't – recreates that hope and fear from generation to generation. A non-dual approach seems to start where people are. If a tirade can help, go for it! But if we are unwilling to acknowledge where we have got already – that chorten robbery, crime, and alcohol abuse are everyday reality – and explode as a means to shout our own terror and frustration down, that is unlikely to be effective.

Therefore starting where society is, is at the same time starting where we are. To be of help we must acknowledge that we are out of control and shocked, and that the danger that the future generations of Bhutan really ruin their connection to Bhutan's heritage of wisdom and compassion, is very real. Rather than wishful day-dreaming (ignorance), heavy-handed condemnation (aggression), or soothing flattery (passion), those heart-felt feelings could be our starting point for action.

I have not made it the objective of this paper to launch many suggestions for action, but just wish to discuss where to act from: from nowhere. Few of the modern educated, who could quite readily understand the philosophy of non-theism, are aware of it. Yet as a background to action, and to facilitate genuine appreciation of spirituality (and as a side effect for the integrity of Bhutan) such understanding is very helpful. In terms of national identity (an asset Bhutan has assessed as essential to maintaining independence) this understanding frees one of the fiction that identity needs to have a well-defined ground<sup>53</sup>.

On a relative level preserving Bhutan's cultural heritage, through documenting folk stories, translating *Lozeys*, and making Bhutanese cinema, are great and worth promoting. But non-of them need not be clung to as the only ultimate truth, which is a tremendous relief. In discussing the pro's and con's of, national dress<sup>54</sup>, national language<sup>55</sup>, or architectural stipulation<sup>56</sup> we do not need to cling to rigid viewpoints, engaging in rhetoric debates with up seemingly solid, patriotic arguments. An old saying states that one cannot drink tea without a cup, and one cannot recognise the nature of mind without a cultural tradition pointing at it. Therefore I do not argue to do away with culture, but to perceive it as a means. When understanding what is really important, there is no need to try to hold on to all expressions of the past, and one can be much more focussed on the essence.

It is often not so difficult to see what change is desirable, but the hard question is how to achieve it. In the programs I worked for it was easy to state that beneficiary management needed improvement, but complex to ensure the same. Our first approach was to list all technicalities that communities should look into and dump that information package on them. To nobody's surprise, but everybody's frustration, this yielded very little result. And adding some scolding or moralistic talk (*'You should be thankful for the help you got, now take care!'*) did not change that. Change in people cannot be planned and produced as easily as butter can be extracted from milk - to think so expresses a mechanistic view of life, which is not in accord with reality.

Similarly few will argue that for instance the basic aims of value education and student counselling are not noble and worthwhile. However, to work with them beyond rhetoric or uptight discipline, is a life's job. To bring counselling beyond humanistic chatter, a teacher has to develop qualities of a psychologist, integrating in his or her life example the lessons that we discussed under the heading *'How to change'*<sup>57</sup>. And to distinguish which values are appropriate requires a broad understanding of the underlying worldview and principles. Without such a view the choice will be random, and may fixate on values that are not essential.

## **Recommendations**

Whoever wants to mature and grow in stable happiness is helped by authentic teachings that point to profound insight and vast love. If such teaching is available from the religion or philosophy that the person considers his (or her) own inheritance, all the better, because it prevents that the spiritual journey may be distorted into exotic trip. Bhutan is lucky in that such teachings are available within the predominant, living culture, while for the first time in history a large part of the population would also be able to intellectually comprehend them.



Whether it is really feasible that the government interferes for the better in this area I do not know. I do know that the blessings that were for centuries experienced by the illiterate, are not automatically passed on, though they could even gain in strength if interested educated individuals opened their hearts, meanwhile engaging their sharpened intellect. But to a modern Bhutanese there is as yet neither much incentive (for from what he sees he cannot assume there is much worthwhile to Buddhism) nor much possibility (for there is little public teaching and guidance) to inherit the Buddha in the palm of his or her hand.

Comparing the number of Landcruisers parked at MoC with those in front of the Special Commission, or comparing the Institute for Health Sciences with the building of the Rigshung school, it is clear where the priorities have been during the past five-year plans – and probably rightly so. But the future challenge is less in further infrastructure and services, and more in the immaterial aspects of development. Attaching higher priority and extending more efforts into spiritual promotion, however, need not maintain the gap between the religious and the secular, or viewing the traditional institutions as flawless.

We may acknowledge that, in the eyes of the educated generation, the appeal of monasteries is limited, for the curriculum and teaching methods have less evolved than those in 'normal' education. Similarly studying at Rigshung has limited appeal as long as the most likely perspective is to become a low-grade Dzongkha teacher and ones English is insufficient to fully participate in modern society. The efforts to combine traditional and modern wisdom seem well-intended, but have not resulted in a happy marriage. With the married partners not speaking the same language, the dialogue cannot evolve.

What I recommend is to **foster a sparking dialogue between Bhutan's modern and traditional heritages and make the best of both available in modern terms.** How could that be done? Obviously we cannot and should not try to synthesise

a Khenpo degree curriculum and a three-year retreat into the secondary school program. What could be done, as a first step, is developing more expertise on joining the western intellectual wisdom and the understanding of Buddhism, for this combination is what might relate to 'modern minds'.

Although the actual teachings of Buddha may be considered as flawless, it may not be possible to ignite such dialogue directly between traditionally educated monks<sup>58</sup> and educated laymen, if it is to be really sparking and mind-blowing but nevertheless authentic (else it would have taken off already). They lack common ground, vocabulary, and outlook. Such ground has been sought and found in different places worldwide, and it may be worth studying these examples (traditionally Buddhism has always been strong in borrowing and adapting). Once this enriching 'diversion' has been embarked on, Bhutan may also more directly reconnect to its own living resources. This is at least my personal experience: That I needed the fresh air and bold curiosity of the west, to learn to feel confident and at home in the traditional presentations of Buddhism. Whereas at first I could not hear the *Dharma* except when translated into my own terms, I now feel most connection with some masters who hardly speak any English.

The most promising graduates from Sherabtse and Semtokha, but also English speaking pass-outs from for example Kharchung Dratshang, or the Shedra's of Gangtey and Dewathang, or even Bhutanese licentiates from Mysore, could go for training abroad. They could pursue religious studies, psychology or management from a Buddhist perspective at CIHTS in Varanasi, at Sophia University in Tokyo, Naropa Institute in Boulder, or at CIIS in Berkeley, San Francisco. Or Bhutanese could live for some time in Plum village in France, or at Gampo Abbey in Nova Scotia.

Upon coming back there would be much work that could be done. They could contribute to debate and workshops. They could, for example assisted by consultants from these institutes, review the primary and secondary school

curricula<sup>59</sup>, train teachers, and conduct courses for government or private parties. And, if this would over time indeed result in a demand for teaching, they could work in the private sector, organising teachings and retreat for lay-practitioners...

### **Request to the reader**

In the paper I have tried to share my understanding of development in Bhutan, with the objective to contribute to reflections on where development should go and how to move in that direction. To serve this purpose I have taken the freedom to express some views and opinions on what may be considered 'internal' or 'sensitive' issues. Please accept my comments in the light of the intention to foster forward open debate, rather than as judgements and criticism that need to be silenced or negated.

I regret that my presentation is lengthy (a shorter version of this paper may appear in the RIM Silver Jubilee Conference reader), obscured by a jungle of endnotes and in its second half somewhat disorganised. As a famous author once stated: 'I have little time and therefore write you a *long* letter'. I have not had (or taken) the time to extract and summarise the pith from my elaborations, but just present a variety of thoughts.

### **Song of a Madman**

Born below the level of the sea,  
Inexplicable coincidence elevated me  
To the foot of the highest mountains.  
Extracted from the clay, that I failed to smell,  
I found myself on granite,  
In the land of the *Peaceful Dragon*.  
Ploughing the land of cheerful farmers,  
Inheritants of the mind of carefree *All Good Dragon-man*.  
Where modern irrigation brought water to water,  
As the increase in harvest turned into rice wine.

At *White Knowledge Retreat* I looked straight  
Into the compassionate eyes of a living Buddha.  
Still I wondered with assumed superiority  
What this folklore was about.  
Deep shame reddened my cheeks  
And my ears burned in embarrassment,  
When the *Dharma Ocean*, the eleventh *Closest Disciple*,  
Expounded the *Dharma*,  
Using the language of confusion,  
To reflect my mind with shocking precision.

As by *Fearless Shadowless Rays of Activity*,  
I returned once more to this Kingdom,  
And hassled friend and foe for five years,  
Struggling to make water run uphill.  
This *Ocean of Fortune* was finally trapped  
By the flattering words of the *Meritorious Beloved*,  
To expose his exalted confusion by spinning off into  
exhortation.  
Attempting to convert born Buddhist into Buddhism,  
And obsessively preaching the overcoming of obsession:  
How utterly laughable, how pitiful indeed.

Diederick Prakke

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> In the below article I will refer much more to Buddhism than to Hinduism or Pön, simply because I am more familiar with the former. This coincides with two pragmatic justifications to emphasize Buddhism over Hinduism in Bhutan, namely that Vajrayana Buddhism has been the majority religion for centuries and that it offers a more unique contribution to world culture. As a statement for debate also note that it has been argued that inherently Buddhism has more relevant insights to offer for the future of humanity, because its non-theistic approach is closer to the modern world.

<sup>2</sup> In Christianity and many other religions, the loss of paradise and innocence by eating the apple of knowledge is often viewed as a sin, thus instilling a sense of primordial guilt in man. While Buddhism agrees that since the dualistic split man no longer lives in natural union, this is not seen

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as a grave mistake. In fact the highest teachings of the Kagyü tradition do not attempt to overcome but just celebrate dualism.

<sup>3</sup> I do not mention Christianity, currently the third religion of Bhutan, here because at this point in time Christianity is more a part of the modern influences Bhutan has opened to, than its own heritage.

<sup>4</sup> In the traditional setting, the profound philosophical and experiential insights of Buddhism regarding non-self, emptiness and luminosity, were not understood by the larger population, but the devotional attitude of many nonetheless gave them the openness and experience of sacredness that the Buddha pointed at. In other words: Compared to the educated, the older generations still live(d) in the innocence of paradise.

<sup>5</sup> Illustrative in this regard is a quote from a translator in the irrigation research project I worked for in 1990: 'Although my father is highly educated, he is very religious'. This translator was honest and clever enough to acknowledge that education seemed to defy religion, honest enough to admit his embarrassment of his father's faith. What he lacked was an education that pointed at the excellence of religion over intellectual severity, that could make him proud of a religious father.

<sup>6</sup> It is also possible, as we will later discuss, that a wish to preserve expresses not so much a genuine conviction but 'resistance' – a general opposition to change that may equally defend a good or bad cause (though reasoning will tend to justify the cause as good).

<sup>7</sup> Unwillingly such preservation tends to enhance stereotype conception of Buddhists and Hindus as ever smiling, dull people, with half-closed eyes to look holy, who ponder any thought for hours, prior to slow-motion action. Such stereotypes decrease the interest in religion, even though such conventions contrast sharply with the wrath and directness of many protectors depicted in so many temples, or the awake and humorous spontaneity of Saints like Drukpa Kinley.

<sup>8</sup> I have hesitated about presenting this view on paper, because it may be read as a judgement of Bhutanese society. The intention, however, is quite the opposite, namely to provide food for thought.

<sup>9</sup> To be worth elaborating the GNH debate should, in my view, not become a sterile intellectual speculation on the characteristics of Utopia, but combine an analysis of the history and aspirations of the country, leading to a vision on the most relevant over-all issues at that point in time. The present paper in fact explores only that foundation, the psychological history of Bhutan, leaving the implications for GNH open to further discussion. My idea is to first search for the fundamental questions, and not immediately start looking for instrumental answers to superficial issues .

<sup>10</sup> It seems a contradiction in terminus that conditions could be arranged to lead to an unconditional state. The comparison used in Buddhism is that of removing the clouds in the sky: The unconditional sky has been there all along, but concealed by temporary conditions. Once the sky has been

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realised, not even the recurrence of clouds can undo this realised, for the latter can be recognised as manifestations of the sky.

<sup>11</sup> The Chhōke term for this state is *Dewachhenpo* (*Skt: Mahasukha*), 'Great Happiness'. It differs from the conventional notion of happiness in that pain and pleasure alike are enjoyed, not only happiness.

<sup>12</sup> More than in any other area, the pre-condition for individual spiritual development is freedom. Therefore, the only role a government may play is to make an atmosphere and authentic teachings available.

<sup>13</sup> Terms in *italics* are in *Chhōke*, except when prefixed 'Skt.', in which they are in *Sanskrit*.

<sup>14</sup> The term 'conditioned existence' stands for our normal state of mind, *Khorwa* (*Skt: Samsara*).

<sup>15</sup> Lots of such suffering is taken to be happiness, like a mocking child stating that it wants nothing. However, when seen clearly, such denials in passion, aggression or ignorance are futile strategies trying to prevent acknowledging ones stuckness.

<sup>16</sup> Within most religions there are mystical schools with a more profound understanding.

<sup>17</sup> All different schools of Himalayan Buddhism agree that ultimately the intellectual negation of wrong views is of no benefit, because the misunderstanding (taking awareness to constitute a self-entity) of sentient beings does not take place at the level of conscious conceptual thinking. The only purpose for reasoning is that by confronting the conceptual mind with the inherent contradiction of any view, it wears itself out and makes place for non-conceptual awareness.

<sup>18</sup> The most outstanding feature of Buddhism as compared to most other philosophies and religions, is that it sees phenomena and beings as empty of inherent existence (meaning that beings and phenomena are seen to lack any permanent core or characteristic that remains unchanged). Though this view is rare, it seems not unique to Buddhism, but shared with various mystical schools of other religions. Such schools may outwardly posit or negate the existence of God or Gods, but in their actual contemplations refrain from imputing any defining characteristics on their experience. Illustrative in this context is the book title of a treatise by a fourteenth century Christian Mystic: 'The Cloud of Unknowing' – a cloud which the author by no means tries to remove.

<sup>19</sup> In fact the *Uma* teachings *do* negate that phenomena and beings have come into existence out of nothing by a Creator God (non-theism), and assert that sentient beings in relative terms create their own experiences since beginningless times, while in absolute terms the displays sentient beings experience are causeless and unstained. However, when viewed properly such negations and assertions do not create any security.

<sup>20</sup> The same logic can also be applied in viewing miracles. Whereas a genuine believe in miracles can be an authentic and inspiring part of ones

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piety, it becomes tricky when there is an emotional investment in wanting to scientifically prove the power and realisation of those one believes in. Real miracles are those for which it is not relevant to distinguish the objective from the imagined. If you feel peace in the presence of fluttering prayer flags, if you feel blessed when a lama puts a vase on your head, if you break out in tears on seeing your teacher smile with loving kindness, or if you are over-awed feeling the presence of a wrathful deity emerged in flames, who cares whether that is 'real' or not? Real magic is not only a footprint Guru Rinpoche left in a rock, but that seeing such an object may transmit his blessings to your mind.

<sup>21</sup> The purpose of *Madhyamaka*, is to destroy mental constructs, not to deny a genuine conviction. If you saw your son beat your daughter, you don't have to argue he was just stroking her. You believe what you believe, but need not solidify.

<sup>22</sup> Traditionally the three *Thegpa*'s are the paths of *Nyanthö*, and *Rangsangay* and the *Thegchhen* (Skt: *Shravaka*-, *Pratyekabuddha*- and *Mahayana*). In that presentation the *Dorjithegpa*, including in itself four or six *Thegpa*'s, is seen as special means within *Thegchhen*. The below text, however, will follow the nowadays more common categorisation of *Thegchung*, *Thegchhen* and *Dorjithegpa*.

<sup>23</sup> In the below text I will discuss the *Hinayana* as the foundation and preparation for *Mahayana* Buddhism. The Buddhism of countries like Burma, Thailand and Sri Lanka does not belong to the *Mahayana*, but is known as *Theravada*, the Teaching of the Elders of the Order. The teachings and practices of in the *Theravada* tradition are basically the teachings referred to by the *Mahayanists* as *Hinayana*. It may however not do justice to the *Theravada* to equate them with *Hinayana*, because the *Mahayana* understanding of *Hinayana* Buddhism, has developed for centuries without close contacts with the *Theravadins*. And so, although according to the *Mahayana* teachings the followers of *Hinayana* are only after their own salvation and have little concern and compassion for others, the same is not necessarily true for the actual followers of the *Theravada*.

<sup>24</sup> The American psychologist Daniel Goleman, a long term Hindu practitioner, equally acquainted with Buddhism, introduced this term for the lower *Sherab* implicit or explicit in all our emotions.

<sup>25</sup> This seems also to be the reason why the masters of the *Mahayana* practice meditation so much. When I first discovered how much students of Buddhism practice meditation, I thought this was too much withdrawal and escape from working in this world, which needs enlightened people so badly. Seeing my own stubborn tendency to struggle and fight others who are equally in need of a break, I do start to appreciate the tremendous patience and dedication of the masters of the past.

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<sup>26</sup> Taken from Ösel Tendzin's Preface to 'The Rain of Wisdom, The Vajra Songs of the Kagyü Guru's', translated by the Nalanda Translation Committee, Shambhala, 1989.

<sup>27</sup> As an example of the latter: Buddhism seems compatible both with the extended and the nuclear family model. However, as modern society moves from the former to the latter, society should gradually open to the views and values inherent to the latter order.

<sup>28</sup> Here a real gap in the transmission of experience and sacredness seems to occur between the generations. And unless Bhutan finds ways to point out and spread in modern terms what unbiased openness the masters of old have experienced, we cannot assume that Buddhism remains meaningful to the people of this country. But if the country *does* find such ways, the spiritual development of those inspired to emulate the example of the Buddha, may even be vaster and more profound than in the past.

<sup>29</sup> This is symbolised in the wheel of life where the process of dependent origination is depicted in the twelve pictures at the rim of the wheel. The series starts with basic unawareness, *Ma-Rigpa*, and ends with death. Although what we finally want to achieve is the cessation of basic unawareness, we cannot cut it at the source. It doesn't help to talk to our thoughts – that just creates further chatter. We cannot help but let our ignorance arise, project it outward and then desire to relate to it in a habitual way. However, even though that desire arises, we can learn not to act upon it, and that cuts the chain.

<sup>30</sup> When we are about to give in to a new insight that has arisen in us, our resistance is often strongest, and we tend to defend it against reason (though often hidden behind fanatic reasoning). The image of a horse is used: When one is coming closer and closer to a wild horse, it will nervously move its ears prior to giving in. When in the process you make a frightening move, the horse may still break out. (Part of the strong emotional reactions of many educated northern Bhutanese to the southern Bhutanese problem seem to be an example of this phenomenon). It is again as though we feel we loose our house, but in this case this house was never anything but an illusory dream castle.

<sup>31</sup> *Reducing*, and not *eliminating*, because for increasing numbers of Bhutanese their rural roots are of decreasing importance, making them more vulnerable to directionless growth ideology contacted through modern education, in-country or abroad. Moreover, as argued extensively above, the earthiness (one could even say, in a positive sense, 'conservatism') of Bhutanese does not always function as an effective antidote, because they happen at different levels. Modern influences 'attack' at a rational level, whereas 'earthiness' happens at the emotional level. Those who do not know how to 'translate' this felt sense, fall in the trap of rigid conservatism, or ignore and loose their heritage altogether.



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<sup>32</sup> In response Himalayan Buddhism, seemingly offering an escape from this voidness, spreads fast in South East Asia. From the little that some teachers have told me about their students in this region, however, it seems extremely difficult to go deeper than a superficial Walt Disney version of spirituality. Apparently there is no 'ground', which contrasts sharply with the situation in Tibet and Bhutan when Buddhism was first introduced. According to Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche the people in the Himalayan region were so earthy and 'savage' (in a positive sense) that they could not be fooled by esoteric philosophy or promises, but had tremendous stubbornness (again in a positive sense). Once conquered with wrathful manifestations like Dorji Trolö (Guru Rinpoche), herders and nomads made devoted students who rigorously and without second thoughts followed the instructions of their teachers. They upheld no wishful hope and hallucinations, whereas the very motivation why many South East Asians re-connect to Buddhism seems to be related to 'sweet dreams'.

<sup>33</sup> Such an approach just copies that common diversion in Christianity of solidifying original sin to impart a sense of fundamental guilt that binds people to the church.

<sup>34</sup> I know of several youngsters whose parents, for whatever reason, denied them the partner of their choice or other freedoms, to the point where the children have become suicidal, close to abusing alcohol, or seriously depressed. Such clashes seem to occur more in the urban areas and among well-to-do families, whereas the parents of educated children in rural areas tend to look up to the latter and therefore exercise less control over them. However, this note does not reduce the relevance of the problem, because the urban areas and the standards of living rise.

The current generation (or the next, if the challenge is postponed) stands for the most difficult task, because they may have to accept that their parents may not change (or initiate such change), but build up different relationships with their children. Failing to take that step is again not a sin, or something for which we should keep grudges against such forefathers, but it is not helpful either.

<sup>35</sup> The same strategy is applied by villager's responding to government orders. In front of the officials they confirm the importance of the government instructions, and that they will immediately carry them out, which however remains to be seen.

<sup>36</sup> The psychologist Winnicott introduced an interesting concept in this regard: That of the 'good enough mother'. He argues that a mother trying to be perfect, preventing her child to learn about imperfection and dissatisfaction, pays a bad service to her child (meanwhile exhausting herself). The child *should* have the bitter experience that it is not the centre but just a part of the world. The 'good enough' concept further indicates that it is not the role of the elders to *make* the next generation: They should provide a good enough example, showing that one can embrace ones own

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imperfections, and then leave freedom to the next generation to find its own way...

<sup>37</sup> Once again this is a (personal) perception and not a judgement or criticism. Viewed from the angle of recent history, the changes toward accountable governance and meaningful participation are considerable.

<sup>38</sup> When called for meetings the rural population in the first place estimates what they think the organisers of the meeting wants them to say. If the meeting seems to be run by an authoritarian team they take the traditional 'Lasso Dasho Kasho nangsho' attitude, whereas when the organisers seem a 'soft team' they say speak the befitting vocabulary of 'self-determination' and 'community ownership'. When reprimanded for speaking too frank, this confirms their sense that all meetings are rhetorics.

<sup>39</sup> Characteristic of development ethos in Bhutan is the optimistic feeling, based on the relatively successful and highly guided development of Bhutan till date, that the government can make society. Probably my very drive to write this article is still based on that illusory belief.

<sup>40</sup> Western proof-readers have raised the question whether this view diverts from Buddhism and is closer to modern psychology. While the main question is whether this approach is appropriate and helpful for Bhutan (a question that may be answered by Bhutanese), I have some thoughts on whether such introspection is (compatible with) Buddhism:

- Indulging in ones emotions is contrary to Buddhism, and no longer common in modern psychotherapy either. The above descriptions do not advocate such an approach.
- What is (currently) relatively unique in Buddhism is the understanding of emptiness. If discoveries in ones emotional world enhance a person's sense of self as a real entity with definite characteristics, such discoveries are deceptive and contrary to Buddhism, especially if one clings to these insights.
- Exploring the richness of ones emotions per se, is in accord with Buddhism, and in my exposition I have stressed that ignoring and avoiding emotions, as seems common in Asian cultures, is contrary to the Buddhist path of meditation. Already at the *Hinayana* level of mediation emotions are not rejected or subdued, while in the *Vajrayana* all experiences are celebrated fearlessly and unconditionally. Genuine Buddhism points to experiencing emptiness, not to ignoring appearance.
- In one sense the description probably divert from Buddhism: I propose to listen and look to what emotions seemingly say, as opposed to just hear and see, and going beyond answers. The stricter approach to meditation instructs the practitioner not to seek, but disown ones experiences. Active listening and looking is too intentional to achieve the ultimate state, and the beginner may be misled as he will not distinguish when his emotions really

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speak, and when conceptual mind speaks on its behalf, distorting the actual message.

- An example may illustrate the above point. Whereas modern psychotherapy may stop when somebody has acknowledged which emotions he or she feels in relation to whom and why, this experience may be the starting point for the analytical meditation of *Uma*: How does that emotion feel, where does it reside, does it have a shape? Abiding in such questions leads to the discovery of emptiness, observed by higher *Sherab*. A more advanced approach, 'working' more direct with emotions in *Vajrayana* Buddhism relates to the *Nagpochhenpo* (*Skt: Mahakala's*), wrathful protectors. They protect by a sudden jerk that returns confusion to openness. In particular the protectors perform the 'four karma's' (pacifying, enriching, magnetising, and destroying). Rather than listening to what an emotion tells, feelings are treated with ironic courtesy: Dressing them up, and then trampling them instantaneously - fearlessly and actively disowning ones experience. The approach is both immaculate (in the sense of no fight) and impersonal, leaving no trace of acknowledgement. Notwithstanding the active ignoring, however, the effect seems that unintentionally one *knows*. Note that this approach is advanced (I have no instruction in it), and that normally one is instructed again and again just to let eruptions go, practising *Zöpa*, patience.
- As a contemplation the described procedure can be helpful, especially for the larger group of people who have no wish to meditate, because this understanding may more easily be assimilated in wider circle of society than the higher insights of meditation. In other words, the described procedure may bring less enlightenment than formless mediation, but more than continuing the current cyclic state of affairs.
- The described method keeps the middle between meditation (for which definite instructions exist) and active life (for which true Buddhism refuses to give guidelines); when seen in this perspective a diversion may not be a violation of Buddhism.

<sup>41</sup> Seemingly this section contradicts the well-known practice of increasing compassion and contemplating the kindness of all sentient beings, by expanding ones natural love to ones mother to others. However, according to several *Vajrayana* teachers, as well as modern psychologists and practitioners, in contemporary societies the relationship between people and their mothers is not uncomplicated enough to start. Either the complications have to be acknowledge at first, or another person should be thought of (a renowned Tibetan master instructs his students to think of their grandmother at the outset). I assume that, due to modernisation, the same change applies in Bhutan.

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<sup>42</sup> Note that this description is obviously too short to have an impact on anybody's life, and that misunderstanding (aggravating tense situations) is highly possible if you would take this description as a do-it-yourself instruction: It just gives a hint as food for debate.

<sup>43</sup> The objective of this paper is only to illustrate the potential relevance of the Buddhist teachings to various social challenges. A balanced and comprehensive discussion of the social dilemma's Bhutan faces should take factors into account like the regional political situation and how easily the uneducated can be influenced or misled. The above discussion ignores such factors, because the intention and pretension is not to present an overall discussion of the challenges.

<sup>44</sup> Typical of dualistic arguments is emphasis on who is to blame. If your house is on fire, the only question that matters, however, is to how to get out. The fierceness of argumentation only represents the intensity of the fire, and therefore indicates the extent of damage one may expect. After escaping the house the question becomes how to de-escalate the fire and rebuild a stable house. As for the new house: The best fire prevention is not to ban the kitchen (for at some point people will wish to make good food), but to make it large and fire proof.

<sup>45</sup> In this light Lyönpo Jigme Thinley's recent statement that the he regarded the problem of the camps as a 'humanitarian rather than a human rights issue' may be welcomed. Whether or not (or to which degree) human rights violations have taken place, the main issue remains to find humanitarian, lasting solutions.

<sup>46</sup> From the Foreword by Chögyam Trungpa Rinpoche in *Buddha in the Palm of Your Hand* by Ösel Tendzin, Shambhala, Boston, 1987.

<sup>47</sup> The transition will never be completely harmonious, but the more it is allowed to happen, the easier it may go. Various scholars have admitted that Tibetan Buddhism had become decadent and stiff prior to 1959, and that cynically enough, as one *Tülku* put it, '*Mao saved Tibetan Buddhism*'.

<sup>48</sup> Note that even the man or woman at the top does not have any freedom, in the conventional sense. He or she has to obey the command (*Ka*) of his or her master or masters, be it the inner *Lama*, or outer masters, and whether these instructions come through Visions, or in 'normal' meeting. For a Vajrayana lineage to be authentic it is said that such guidance (if not continuous, than at least through flashes) is indispensable. Whether this 'model' is (still) appropriate to base the leadership of a modern state on, is subject for debate (His Majesty seems to indicate that he does not think so).

<sup>49</sup> Vajrayana teachers among themselves express widely differing opinions on how absolute devotion should be taken, and whether masters can be controlled by rules. The present Dalai Lama has participated in formulating a code of conduct for spiritual teachers, whereas Trungpa Rinpoche talked of 'human rights neurosis' when he meant that the American ideals of equality and independence were too compulsive, and absolute. Tradition

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has many stories of how submitting to the absolute authority of the Lama was essential to the progress of the student. This makes some students again self-righteous and rigid in their plead to regard every action of a master as teaching. Personally I believe the healthiest 'position' is to remain in genuine doubt (which is not the same as blissful ignorance), not pretending to have certainty where you obviously don't have it.

<sup>50</sup> Freedom in a Buddhist sense means not resisting doing what you know or think is best – not freedom to just do anything.

<sup>51</sup> Modernity values originality high, whereas in the traditional Buddhist arts, like tangkha painting or wood carving, the artist is not supposed to deliberately make his own versions. The risk in the modern approach seems that the compulsive drive for originality and creativity leads to nothing but extravagant expressions and solidification of the ego, while the risk of the arts in Bhutan can be that the instructions are clung to with short-sighted self-righteousness. In practice full delivery to tradition, as a stage on the path, can yield enormous freedom and inspiration, as evidenced for example by the songs of the sages of Buddhism. Though outwardly following tradition, such songs express completely spontaneous and original experiences of the display of awareness.

<sup>52</sup> Earlier I argued that in as far as Asian cultures avoid and subdue emotions, and apply the strategy of saying 'yes' but doing 'no', they divert from Buddhism. On the other hand, the drawback of modern forms of conscious exploration can be that one clings to feelings, failing to see their empty aspect. The 'safest' way is therefore the path of meditation, where feelings are not sought or grasped, but acknowledged and disowned. However, as only a minority may follow a path of meditation, a guided exploration to overcome the most gross and hurtful emotional blockages may be preferred over doing nothing.

<sup>53</sup> Here the analogy of the clothes of the emperor may fit. As the story goes the emperor wears no dress (has no individual or national self), but pretends (and tries to convince himself) he does. When finally someone is straight-forward enough to declare the emperor is naked, he flees in shame. In the case of ego the scene is even more hilarious: The enlightened ones have since long seen us, but we still mistakenly assume we (ought to) have a mask and argue with the mirror if it denies that our disguise is solid, to say the least. The joke is that not only we *are* indeed naked, but that *that* is the perfect way to be.

<sup>54</sup> Let me share my personal line of thought: The special method of *Vajrayana* is to identify with enlightenment (whereas the lower *Yana's* are concerned only with detaching oneself from confusion). Initially visualisations of enlightenment are practised in secluded, formal meditation, but later the path is to manifest. Dressing is one way to do that. Any dress worn with dignity and understanding (be it a splendid *Gho* or a torn pair of Jeans) becomes an inspiring reminder of enlightenment. However, since

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deluded mind wakes up more when seeing something it imputes to be 'special', it does make sense to consciously wear a dress that reminds one of sacred outlook. Promoting the (variety of) national dress(es) in this way is in the first place a matter of uplifting, with an increased 'national identity' is simply a by-product.

As for the practicalities: *Gho* and *Kira* are beautiful dresses, with a long, deeply rural history and profound symbolism - so they can be an excellent key. Some consider the law to wear one national dress in public as oppressive and a human rights violation. I have no definite opinion for or against it, but find such a rule in itself not a big deal: Even though I mock when I get a wrong parking ticket, I secretly think some of such restrictions help uplift society. The only question that matters is whether the effect of the rule is still as intended, or whether it increases the wish of people to undo themselves of their cultural heritage. Whatever ways are considered to promote manifesting enlightenment, the vital point is to see that there is neither need nor benefit in making the debate rigid and patriotic in the fascist sense.

<sup>55</sup> My personal guts feeling on this subject is that the current efforts extend beyond what best serves the purpose. With little literature in *Dzongka*, it appears to me that teachings spoken *Dzongka* in school would suffice.

<sup>56</sup> In the field of architecture I personally regret that the government has been fairly lenient. In my country the rules on the outer appearance of houses are much stricter and as a result cities like Utrecht and Amsterdam display more congruity than Thimphu. However, I see no need to make a very big deal of this: '*Some of the traditional beauty of Thimphu is lost, so be it.*'

<sup>57</sup> It is also interesting that the Royal Kasho on value education first and foremost mentions the need for '*wholesome education*', which seems to indicate something more than just cold development of the brain. As recognised by the Education Division, value education mainly happens through the example that teachers live, not through intellectual sermons. What may be added to that is that the impact is far more wholesome if the teacher tries to set a '*good enough*', rather than the *perfect* example. According to Buddhism perfection lays in graciously accepting ones imperfections, rather than in achieving a robot-like state (or failing altogether). This in turn influences which values should be pursued: The objective may be more in the area of enhancing cheerfulness, than in attaining perfect outer behaviour (from abandoning *Doma* to not digging ones nose) – rather in living spirituality than in mimicking narrow-minded flawlessness.

<sup>58</sup> I do not deny that Bhutan has a number of *Tülku's* and monks with both thorough traditional training and modern exposure and understanding, and some high-trained civilians who have seriously studied Buddhism. They can contribute valuable views. However, some of them spend considerable time

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outside the country, while others are fully engrossed in their government or private employment. Therefore, in my view this group still forms insufficient basis for the dialogue I hope for. Whatever can be started already is more than welcome, but what should not happen is that the advances to the wider public debate I envision (such as this very paper itself), are taken as substitutes for that broader discussions. Speaking for myself I feel my understanding of both my own background and Buddhism are too narrow and little to rely on to decisively direct this society toward gross national happiness.

<sup>59</sup> I have very limited knowledge on the current materials on Buddhism, but as far as I know the material is more historical than going into the actual teachings.

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