

The Role of Meditation in achieving Gross National Happiness

Khenpo Phuntsok Tashi. Director, National Museum, Paro

Introduction

Bhutan is just a small nation, but it is a nation where peace and happiness are deeply enshrined by centuries of living in harmony, following a path of non-violence, respect for the unique culture, and preservation of its pristine environment. Today Bhutan is gaining a reputation as the land of happiness on earth, due to the enlightened concept of Gross National Happiness, introduced by the visionary Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the king of Bhutan. It is the most precious gift ever given to the people in our history.

There are many components and factors through which Gross National Happiness can be realized. But this paper attempts to explore the role of meditation in achieving Gross National Happiness. In general terms, happiness is defined as a positive mental state, the opposite of suffering.

If Gross National Happiness is to be achieved by every citizen, then basic meditation practice needs to be introduced in educational institutions like schools and colleges, community temples and farm houses as a part of their daily program. In this way, every citizen can have equal access to meditation to find happiness and peace of mind. It is not necessary to practice for very long hours. Short and accurate practices can dispel the delusion from mind so that everybody can awaken and develop further according to their inspiration and interest.

There are many types of meditation for temporary and long-range purposes. More specifically, there are many levels of Buddhist teachings suited to a practitioner's interest and need.

Desire for Happiness

All sentient beings, particularly human beings want to be happy. Yet they do not know how to put into practice what brings about happiness, a positive attitude. Nobody wants to suffer, but most do not know how to abandon the root cause of suffering. The deepest wishes for happiness and a person's actions thus contradict each other. Therefore, one's own happiness gets destroyed like an enemy due to absence of meditation.

According to Buddhist philosophy, everything is dependent on the right causes and conditions to have result and outcome. When the cause and conditions are rightly met, things get activated and function as desired. With regards to happiness, inner calm and a peaceful mind are the causes; outer objective phenomena are the conditions or circumstances.

There are many skillful means for developing wisdom and a positive mind, but meditation is seen as one of the most important ways for attaining happiness. Delusions and obscurations characterize the inner landscape of an unenlightened being. These delusions inhibit happiness; instead they obscure and defile our calm and perfect true nature.

What is Meditation?

Meditation is a practice using awareness and mindfulness to sustain the continuity of mental calmness and the right view of penetrative insight. In this state, the body abstains from negative action, gossip and harsh speech are suspended, and the mind remains present, not mentally wandering off into past and future. The body remains motionless and majestic like a mountain, workable and supple, speech remains quiet and wordless like the stopping of a grinding mill, mind remains awake and stainless like sunlight.

There are two main types of meditation practice that bring about calmness and clarity: calm abiding meditation and penetrative insight meditation. These two practices are indispensable and common to all teachings of the Buddha, from the Theravada to the Mahayana tradition.

Calm abiding meditation is the first and most important step to train the corrupted mind and overcome negative thoughts. If the mind reaches a state of steadiness and tranquility, it becomes like limpid water in a quiet place. Then the next step is penetrative insight meditation, enabling us to eliminate obstructions to our innate omniscience. The Dawadronme Sutra says:

‘The mind becomes immovable by the power of calm abiding meditation,
And the mind becomes steady like a mountain, by the power of penetrative insight meditation.’

These two meditations form the basis and essence of all paths leading to the ultimate fruition of concentration. We could say that calm abiding meditation is like the leg of concentration, or Samadhi, with which we walk up swiftly to the fully enlightened state. Penetrative insight meditation is like good sight, with which we clearly see the true nature of all phenomena.

Three Opponents of Happiness

The three root causes that destroy happiness are desire, anger and ignorance. As long as the root causes are within us, we have less chance of achieving happiness. For example, our mind is bombarded by serious desire, which leads to frustration and further problems if the desire is not fulfilled. In the first place, desire can never be fulfilled as we expect, and even if our desire is fulfilled, bad outcomes may result creating further suffering.

Anger brings destruction to self and others. Anger is one of the main causes of suffering and even worse than weapons. Weapons are not harmful unless anger drives men to use

them. Inanimate objects like weapons do not kill others by themselves if anger is not behind.

Buddhists look at ignorance as the basis of all evil for it lacks the light of wisdom. It is just the opposite of enlightenment and the awakened state. A man tainted with ignorance is like a blind man walking with no direction.

Direct Antidote

Meditation is the antidote to the root cause of all suffering arising from desire, anger, ignorance, pride, jealousy, and miserliness. According to Abhidharmakosh, these six delusions are called the six subtle root causes of cyclic existence or Samsara. These root causes need to be fully abandoned or transformed by practicing meditation and by analyzing the origin, existence and cessation of its mental state. Meditation is a key factor for attaining happiness and the ultimate goal of realizing full enlightenment. Meditation helps one to abandon the root causes of suffering, creating happiness on many levels: individual, community, national, even worldly. If we create a happy nation, there is no other pure land and paradise than this very world, the one that we already belong to. Psychologically, when everyone feels happy, they will see the good and pure in others. This is why Buddhists call it pure vision.

Meditation deactivates delusions, rendering them inoperative. When the mind remains in a state of meditation, happiness rises naturally above the cloud of delusion. The mind becomes more awake, like a man turning on the light to see clearly and beyond a doubt the nature of things without depending on words and objective phenomena. When deluded mind is pacified by the power of meditation, there will be no longer any destruction taking place.

Meditation is inexpensive and easily accessible, both for one's own happiness and others' benefit. It can be practiced at any time, any place and by whomever is interested. Meditation could bring a whole society and its rulers to a peaceful and happy state of mind.

If everyone is trained in calm and peaceful abiding, many resources could be reduced. For example, police forces would not be required to control our fellow beings because criminal behavior would disappear. There would also be financial implications as we would no longer need to remedy destroyed health and rebuild damaged infrastructure due to negative mindsets. People would be subdued by meditation. No corruption would take place because meditation makes a man honest and trust worthy. Once men become trustworthy and reliable, there would be no crime and violence. Eventually the court and legal systems would also have no pressure by the culprit and criminal because citizens would do the right thing without harming others. Manmade problems would certainly be solved by humans following the right path and action which is meditation.

Who Needs Meditation?

In general, whoever is interested in achieving happiness should practice meditation. More specifically, leaders, decision makers, businessmen and ordinary people are desperately in need of meditation practice, because they regularly deal with so many people and problems. These people's minds are thickly obscured by being pre-occupied with so many worldly activities: plans, aims and objectives for themselves and others. In particular so-called modern educated people should know more about meditation and spend more time calming the mind, since they have more pride than the illiterate. Their egos do not allow them to realize happiness. If their plans are not working out, they have tensions and worries. These tensions will find their way into workplaces and homes, where misery and discord will prevail, due to psychological imbalance.

Once under the influence of stress, people often make wrong decisions. Sometimes they attempt suicide and end this beautiful life, because they do not know how to cope with problems, or cannot find solutions in time to make critical changes. Therefore, to overcome suffering due to stress and worries, meditation is the best way to find peace and happiness. The state of meditation is free from stress and tension; it is pure and calm, not like the calm resulting from a drug.

Many people think that meditation belongs to monks and priests; they think it is monks' daily practice and responsibility. In reality, monks and priests are sober and calmer, so they do not need as much practice as ordinary people and those who are more modern and educated. The more untamed and bewildered the mind, the more time needed for meditation. Of course monks do practice; but they do not own meditation. It is a path for everybody to follow to enter the mansion of happiness. Monks and priests are not usually found implicated in crimes or guilty of transgressions in society, because of mind training through meditation.

Therefore, to make a happy society and a happy people, lay people have more responsibility for practicing meditation daily, because they live among the confused masses.