

Taking Happiness Seriously

Eleven Dialogues on Gross National Happiness

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The Centre for Bhutan Studies

Taking Happiness Seriously: Eleven Dialogues on Gross
National Happiness

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Introduction

Gross National Happiness represents not just a new way of measuring our progress but a new ethic for human development. First formulated by His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck the Fourth King of Bhutan, the ideal has been used for many years to guide domestic policy but has only more recently come to the broader world's attention. GNH enters into the global mindset at an opportune time as governments, cities and states begin the serious business of conceiving a new vision of what our post-GDP progress should ultimately aim to achieve.

As what the Bhutanese call 'GNH thinking' becomes known it meets several other influences that are similarly fertilising the global consciousness. Perhaps the most profound of these is the slow appreciation of the fact that our current levels of consumption are rapidly undermining the biosphere's regenerative capacities. The rate at which we are consuming the dwindling bounty of resources around us is staggering and wholly unsustainable. As reports mount and scientific evidence becomes ever more consensual one overwhelming conclusion is being drawn – that uncontrolled economic growth or 'business as usual' will be catastrophic for our future well-being. Tied to this dawning acknowledgement is a deeper conclusion that challenges the very foundations of an economic order. Since its inception, the priority of market economy has been justified by the claim that it is a self-correcting mechanism guided by a beneficent and God-like Invisible Hand. The dawning of the anthropocene - the current age of human and market driven mass extinction - tells us in the clearest of terms that this fanciful assumption is completely unfounded.

A second disturbing influence comes from our increasing appreciation of the stubborn problems of impoverishment in the modern world. For decades we have labored under the belief that poverty will be solved by growing markets. Yet

despite decades of global growth, today 1.4 billion people still live in extreme poverty and at least 800,000 are undernourished. In this arrangement markets embed extremes of excess and privation as much as they remove them. A gulf separates the powerful from the vulnerable but slowly we are becoming aware of some of the impacts excessive privilege has on others. We see the most spectacular sufferings and we get glimpses of the multitudes who sweat to produce our cornucopia in locked-down factories. We sense the future choices we will face between the bio-fuel needs of drivers and the food needs of the hungry. Decreasing food security, declining water resources, shifting climates, growing populations – these are the conditions that will throw millions more into future poverty and they will all be greatly exacerbated by more business as usual.

A further unsettling awareness comes in the form of the mounting empirical evidence that beyond a basic point, increasing economic growth loses the ability to lift happiness levels. A large body of robust research now clearly shows that happiness and economic growth are by no means synonymous and that once the essentials of life have been secured, further fulfillment comes from indulging not the material but the immaterial pleasures of life. Thus, friends, family, health and a sense of positive purpose become central to satisfying living. It is very likely that the uncoupling of economy and happiness comes from the increasing demands that a growth fetish places on society as both producers and consumers are pushed to pick up the pace. Growing economy demands that we work longer and harder and that we consume faster and more. The time and attention necessary to conform to these dictates completely deny us the opportunity of fulfillment in the immaterial dimensions of living. Thus, we work harder to consume more to less and less effect. The core model of the marketplace assumes that economic growth equals an increasing felicity but we now have plenty of evidence to know that this uncritical assumption is also false.

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Taken together these and numerous other factors are making us realise that to cling to our core economic delusions – that market growth is self-correcting, inevitably inclusive and equal to happiness – bodes ill for our future. This shift is stimulating an interest in Gross National Happiness because it offers an adaptive alternative, one in which economy is balanced by other equally essential ends - sustainability, justice and genuine happiness in particular. A GNH approach offers us a way to see beyond our current myopia. Yet before we leap to embrace any alternative it is useful to ponder further the deeper roots of our current malaise. This is particularly so in the context of Bhutan where culturally all problems can only truly be resolved by undoing them at their point of origin.

The damage that unrestrained economy does to systems of ecology, justice and human development stems ultimately from the ordering requirements of its hegemonic ideology. In free market culture economic indicators come to represent the ends to which all other ends must be subjugated. Nature comes to be looked upon as a source of 'exploitable' materials and energy. Or at the other end of the dynamic, as a dumping ground for the constant waste and pollution we spew. The inherent value of the biosphere is necessarily disregarded and our interdependence with it denied. From a purely economic perspective, the ideal consumer is deeply disconnected from the rest of the living world and unable to appreciate it or bear responsibility for it.

In a similar way our relationship with human society and the responsibilities inherent in this are also denied to serve economic ends. The massive consumption enjoyed by the biggest economies is built on the backs of masses of invisible producers but these direct inter-dependencies are denied in a disappearing act that rules out any sympathetic connection between our worlds. Although it is true that there is a rising awareness of some of these linkages, the essence of economic expansion lies in denying us the ability to make any caring

connection that might cause us to interrupt our consumption out of a concern for others. It is a cultivated moral blindness that occludes the raw power plays that dictate who gains, who loses and indeed who gets to define justice in a growing global economy.

Equally, the imperative of economic ordering also sacrifices genuine happiness to its ends so that we come to cut ourselves off not only from nature and from others but also from our own deeper selves. To maximize GDP people must be encouraged to live in a constant state of desire for more. Growth depends on relentlessly 'stimulating' demand and much of the commercial media works with exactly this goal in mind. We are endlessly enveloped in advertising whose sole intention is to increase consumption along with a gnawing desire for more. The search for happiness is thus diverted into the marketplace and away from the immaterial realms where it can more certainly be found

All of these disorders combine to force a collapse of the practical ethics that lie at the heart of any decent and sustainable society. The greedy, careless and self-absorbed type most functional for achieving market growth is in fact the opposite of that required for genuine development. The mounting environmental problems, the gross injustices and the failing felicity of the modern economic system are caused at base by our self-absorbed disregard for other ends of value. To paraphrase the well-known words of Robert Kennedy, in economic culture we have come to recognise the price of everything and the value of nothing. To transcend our current destructiveness we must work seriously to revitalize the values that extend respect to the natural world and compassion to our fellow inhabitants. Without doing this how can we possibly hope to build a happier and more secure world?

This is the direct question that Bhutan sets before a now failing economic culture. In GNH thinking the natural, the

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social and the personal realms are deeply inter-woven and all need to be brought into harmony if happiness is to be found. Its foundational challenge lies in its utter denial that value and fulfillment can be found in an isolated state of constant desire. In a Buddhist way of seeing, craving, a disregard of others and disrespect for nature lead inevitably toward conflict and sorrow. Accordingly, the means to avoiding these conditions is to cultivate their ethical antidotes - care, compassion and self-restraint.

There is at the heart of Gross National Happiness an essential perception that sees deep ethics and deep happiness are co-existent states. In this, Bhutan retains a holism that is emphasized by all the world's major religious cultures and one dominant everywhere that market ideology has not yet prevailed. In the immature ethics of the modern marketplace considerate values and self-restraint confer weakness. Yet this separation of feeling good and doing good comes at a heavy price and the 'fun' we find tends often to be superficial and short-lived. In GNH thinking we live as beings with a profound potential for maturity. If conditions are right we can grow into a full humanness - and become wise, compassionate, appreciative and self-restrained. Or if conditions are not right we can find ourselves stuck in immature patterns of delusion, conflict and insatiable craving. It is the latter conditions that economic values drive us towards.

As a goal for social development GNH could be as easily dubbed Gross National Maturity or Gross National Responsibility as it is as much about these as it is about happiness per se. It holds considerable promise not least by holding economic growth to higher account. Thus, as long as markets work to facilitate a harmonious, just and sustainable world they add to a constructive progress. But where they tend us towards destruction, division or alienation they must be re-directed by a larger and more adaptive set of values. As the Fourth King of Bhutan pointed out when he first

mentioned GNH, happiness is more important than money and money can only ever be a means to an end and never the end in itself.

For GNH to succeed, the aggressive momentum of economic power has to be tamed and slowed in order that a genuine balance of other values can be achieved. In its classical formulation Gross National Happiness rests upon four inter-dependent pillars, the so-called Four Pillars of GNH. The first makes explicit that to achieve widespread happiness society must live in harmony with a thriving ecosystem that is valued in its own right. Secondly it must also cohere around a vibrant and grounding culture that conveys on-going wisdom and an ethical sensibility to the nation. Material economy is also an essential pillar of any happy society as it provides for basic necessities and eases burdens. The final pillar is good governance, a transparent and dedicated civil service that acts to harmonise all of these ends in the most practical way. The pillar of good governance is where the creative and active transformation of ideals into policy occurs and here that Bhutan really works at the forefront of a new mode of governance. As I write the country has good reason to be happy as the first democratic government of Bhutan, elected with over 90% of the vote in 2007 is headed by Lyonchhen Jigmi Y Thinley, a man long dedicated to making GNH a practical reality.

I was first convinced that seeking happiness should really be taken seriously while listening to one of the Prime Minister's speeches. Over the years it has been he who has been the most visible advocate of GNH particularly on the international stage and among the many spin-offs of his remarkable energy and persuasion is this book which had its direct origins in a conversation we had in Istanbul in 2007. We met after he had left the stage of an OECD conference of economists, policy-makers and academics. As I had listened to his speech it

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seemed to me that a prevailing sense settled over the audience, that GNH was an appealing but unrealistically ‘soft’ measure of progress. In the end it seemed to float like an exotic curiosity above and beyond the pale of this particular convention. Lyonchhen and I spoke about this gap of understanding and I mentioned a vague intention to write a book that would help bridge the divide and build a more common understanding. His enthusiastic response immediately committed me to organizing a project that would deliver something of value.

From the outset I had no desire to attempt a sole-authored tome. Gross National Happiness is an integrative way of looking at our responsibilities in the world and it is one that has thus far avoided co-option by outside ‘experts’. It is an unfolding dynamic seen differently from different perspectives and certainly in my explorations of GNH I have learned most from informal talks with a variety of thoughtful people. I began then to gravitate towards a project that would bring together a range of such conversations in one volume. If I could bring Bhutanese and non-Bhutanese perspectives to bear on common themes then maybe some clarifying common ground could be found. If done well it might help weave together a more a diverse conversation about GNH, and help others understand its origins, its intent and its practical prospects.

In working towards this end I had the great good fortune to be involved in a series of meetings at which Bhutanese and non-Bhutanese came together to deliberate GNH in practice. It is an approach that the government has used to great effect and in meetings around measuring GNH, managing media, educating for happiness and other themes a rich sharing of perspective has taken place. As I grew to appreciate this synergy I began to record dialogues with some of those who are well placed to shed light on various facets of GNH.

For a Bhutanese perspective I wanted to include a number of people beginning with the Prime Minister. As a person involved since the beginning, no volume would be complete without his input. I also wanted to talk with Dasho Kinley Dorji who was for many years the Editor-in-Chief of Kuensel which was until recently the only national newspaper in Bhutan. I recorded a dialogue with Dasho Karma Ura, President of the Centre for Bhutan Studies, where he works and writes on GNH and its measurement. I talked also with Dasho Neten Zangmo the marvelously energetic Anti-Corruption Minister of Bhutan who has been a strong advocate of greater ethics and good governance for many years. Siok Sian Pek is a media practitioner, educator and researcher and a keen-eyed observer of development in the country so I wanted her perspective. I wanted to include also the thoughts of Namgay Zam, an astute and articulate broadcaster and long time youth advocate. And finally, I wanted to explore a Buddhist perspective on GNH and so recorded a dialogue with Khenpo Phuntsok Tashi a respected Buddhist teacher and Director of the National Museum of Bhutan.

For voices from outside of Bhutan I talked with a range of people who have been closely involved in contributing to the development of GNH and to its measurement. Dr Ron Coleman of GPI Atlantic has been intimately involved in Bhutan for a number of years and is the leading practitioner in alternative post-GDP measures of social wellbeing. Nic Marks heads the London based New Economic Foundations Centre for Wellbeing and has a similarly strong connection to the country. He too is at the forefront of alternative measures and is chief author of the Happy Planet Index a widely reported measure of the responsible happiness of nations. I wanted to get the perspective of Prof. Ruut Veenhoven as one of the most well known academic researchers on happiness. He is the founder of the World Happiness Database and a global authority on the empirical approach to studying happiness. Helena Norberg-Hodge was another whose voice I wanted to include given her long experience of development,

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culture and environmental change in the Himalayan region. As founder and Director of the International Society for Ecology and Culture she has devoted her life to the finding ways to balance economy with cultural values and ecological health.

Brought together in these pages I hope that they add something of value and that they open new avenues of thinking about what our future could be like if we were to act with more mature priorities. I would like to give my heartfelt thanks to those who so kindly gave their time and permission to talk and be included here. Their patient ability to tolerate convoluted questions and articulate straight answers made my task a humbling pleasure. I learned a great deal and was much inspired by the positive energy they apply to making the world a better place. This book is dedicated to their spirit and to the happier ideals they recommend we seek.

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Lyonchhen Jigmi Y Thinley

RM: I wonder if we might begin by looking at the roots of GNH and where the philosophy came from.

JYT: I was with His Majesty the King on the day of his coronation in 1974. He had ascended to the throne just two years earlier following a two year period of mourning for the previous king who passed away in 1972. Now I think that it was barely months thereafter that I heard him mention the term Gross National Happiness for the first time so, we are going back more than thirty years. The idea was picked up by the Financial Times of London under the headline 'Gross National Happiness is More Important than Gross National Product'. This is what has always been at the back of our minds, that human happiness is more important than economic growth. So since that time, in all our development activities, whatever strategies we came up with, any kind of policy, any kind of development, there has always been the question of whether they would really promote the happiness of the people.. However, at the start, we did not have the benefit of critical analytical frameworks to assess whether the things we did actually increased happiness as we hoped and if they did, to what extent. We did not have the benefit of that and realising this we began to develop happiness metrics which would allow us to accurately evaluate our activities in terms of the happiness they generated.

Personally, I resisted the development of quantitative indicators and this whole approach until the philosophy of GNH crossed the borders of Bhutan for the first time in 1998 when Bhutan finally overcame its inhibition to speak about GNH abroad. It was at the Asia-Pacific Millennium meeting

sponsored by the UNDP in Seoul, South Korea. The UNDP had invited His Majesty, the King to speak on happiness, but his Majesty does not do lectures. As I was Prime Minister at the time, I was designated to go and speak on the subject and it was so very well received. I remember going to this ministerial meeting and being worried that GNH would not be taken seriously so I was really taken by surprise. The UNDP put the speech up on their website and it was accessed worldwide. It was thereafter that the world really started talking about it. In part, I think the timing was very good, being close to the beginning of a new millennium and with people thinking a bit more expansively and reflectively. We were in a more contemplative mood in the sense of reflecting on what humanity had really achieved over the last century and equally, on what we had lost. The feeling for many at the time was that we may have lost more than we have gained and certainly that we have suffered a significant spiritual impoverishment in the midst of all the amazing material wealth we have accumulated. We were also facing the serious realisation of what we are now leaving the next generation in terms of a deteriorating climate and structural injustices.

So, as GNH moved out of Bhutan, we found that having talked about following this path, we could not be resistant to the pressures for its quantification. And so the question of whether we should develop indicators and of what kind, became more and more relevant. In many of my initial statements, I spoke very strongly against it because developing indicators raises a whole lot of questions and the possibility of succumbing to a materialist view of what constitutes value. There are many difficult questions about what is really valuable and what you can actually measure. There is also the danger that only those which can be made measurable will be pursued while everything else will be rendered inconsequential. This is one way that material economy and its ideals can come to dominate our thinking. There has been a fear then that as we move towards measurement, we might end up measuring only those aspects of happiness that make themselves quantitatively available.

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There are, however, many other elements of happiness of which we are not so fully conscious. You can easily lose an awareness of the whole when you try to break it up into too many measurable components.

RM: What sort of elements are you thinking of?

JYT: Well, I won't really venture too far into those as that is to contradict the very point I am making. There is a feeling that we might develop a set of indicators measuring those things that we know lead to greater happiness but still leave out those that might be even more vital. That I think is the biggest danger as we can quickly reach a point of thinking people are not happy because there is too little on this or that measure and then our policies try to make people happy by giving them a little more of this and that.

RM: I agree entirely. It is interesting to hear you talk of the multi-dimensional aspects of happiness because when I think of the understanding of happiness, I have come to in the context of Bhutan. I am aware that it is much more involved and subtle than the more fleeting feel-good understanding of happiness in the West. Do you think that there is a danger that Gross National Happiness might be seen only superficially by those both outside and inside Bhutan who want to see happiness as representing just personal good feeling?

JYT: Yes there is a danger of that and this is why I think it is very important to have discourse, a demystifying discourse at the global level that can lead to a holistic and complete understanding of happiness and its spiritual, ethical and emotional aspects. And the good thing about the present globalised world is that it should be quite possible to challenge the spread of this narrow interpretation of happiness.

RM: When I look at the way happiness has been interpreted in the West, I notice a historical transformation away from moral principles and qualitative improvement.

JYT: This has long been the case in the West. The standard tends to be if something makes you happy, just do it. It has little to do with questions of whether your doing something will make other people around you happy or not. This is related to me often being asked why we adopted Gross National Happiness and not Gross National Contentment in a Buddhist sense. I have always said that contentment is too passive a state of being. You can be content with everything going badly around you and can come to accept it. You would then have no inclination to try and change conditions around you for the better. But happiness is proactive. It requires your active understanding that it cannot exist without being shared. Happiness is not a state of being that one can achieve privately or personally without others sharing it. When you are contributing to others happiness, you know that you are improving your own chances of happiness and to that extent you become socially responsible and valuable as a member of the community and society. Happiness in this context becomes much more constructive, creative and proactive. So, happiness is a compassionate state of being. It imposes upon you the responsibility to contribute to others wellbeing. I hope then that it will never, never be narrowed down to that level of interpretation.

RM: It's a tempting thing to do though in the culture of the West which is very much dominated by a competitive and individualistic worldview. As Minister of Culture in Bhutan, how do you view the role of Bhutanese culture in terms of its ability to protect that multifaceted view of GNH as it moves into the future? Is the Buddhist grounding of Bhutanese culture strong enough to withstand the dissolving tendencies of modern media and growing consumer appetites?

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JYT: Well, first of all, I have to say that there are of course good Buddhists and not so good Buddhists in Bhutan. As the Minister for Culture, I do worry increasingly over the influence of media although I would also like to think that we have the capacity to resist it. I worry that we all seem to be playing a lesser role - at the level of the state, the clergy and at the level of being elder siblings - in consciously transferring values into the hearts of our young people. Just to give you an example, I often go to primary schools and often ask children what they want to do when they grow up. They will answer 'I want to be a doctor, an engineer, a government worker' and so forth. But when you ask them why they want to become these things, they have trouble understanding and answering the question. I have to tell them that if we had been asked that same question when we were their age, I and my whole generation would have said we wanted, above all, to be able to repay our debts. This does not mean simply material debt, but much more - to repay our debts of gratitude to parents and family and to the land and so on. Every single one of us would have said that. That is the kind of value erosion that I see with my own eyes - the self has become more and more important. If you are able to become mature and think about serving your friends and repaying your parents, you become part of a family that genuinely cares about you and your happiness and they will help you find it. The same principle works also at the level of community and of society. If you are not engaged with those around you, you cannot become compassionate and you cannot be happy. So, I tell these children before I go that there is one thing I want them to do and that is to show their parents respect when they get back home. It does not matter if they are in the most menial of jobs, use honorific language and show them respect. When I am travelling, I always ask people to tell the old bedtime stories to their children because these continue to teach good Buddhist values. The new sets of values that we are learning through television are not Bhutanese, they are not Buddhist values, so it is worrying.

RM: When I listen to you speak of repaying debts and honouring parents it seems to represent a basic appreciation of the opportunities you have in life. I find it interesting because in English, the word appreciate has the same root origin as happiness, both coming from the Greek 'hap' meaning luck or good fortune. So, at its root happiness involves cultivating an appreciation of the world around us and a sense of being blessed. One of the worries that I have when I look at culture change around the world as traditional societies come in contact with consumerism, is the implantation of feelings of dissatisfaction and the cultivation of a feeling whereby we do not appreciate what we have or feel blessed. Rather, we become frustrated by unhappy longings and a sense of not having what it takes to be happy.

JYT: That's very true, how aptly you put it.

RM: And, of course, it is such a difficult dynamic to challenge. When we talk about the importance of parents and elders passing on values to the next generation and keeping cultural aspirations alive I am reminded that in much of today's so-called 'developed world', the major stories are the ones cultivated and portrayed through television and those stories have embedded messages. I was listening to a Thai story teller yesterday and she was talking about Thai children and the stories they know. These are now mainly imported ones - the Disney classics of Snow White and Sleeping Beauty and other Western stories that seem to have taken the place of the older, more grounding cultural tales that are so important in maintaining culture.

JYT: You know I was visiting Kuwait many years ago as the Foreign Minister and the Deputy Foreign Minister took care of me. He told me that even Kuwaiti children do not grow up to be Kuwaiti in the main but are becoming more like Sri Lankans and Filipinos and are taking on their stories and values. Many Kuwaitis do not have time for their families and so they are raised by the Filipino maids or the Sri Lankan

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nurses and their stories and recollections are all about those places. So, everywhere there seems to be this worry about what things might be like in the future as a result of changing cultural values.

RM: This would be particularly powerful in situations where children are made to feel that they are not a full and valued part of the family. But if there is one thing that really impressed me and stays with me from my visits to the more rural areas in Bhutan, it is the obvious valuing and respect for children. There is a sense of inclusion in both the family and the community that from a Western point of view is quite remarkable. But then at the same time, I see in the background, as I see in many cultures where I do my work, this slow erosion of the cultural fabric. When we lose it, we can appreciate it in others and see the fulfilment and happiness that comes from it. Yet it is almost as if we have to see the grass as being always greener on the other side. If we are in a moral community, closely involved in the life of a close-knit family, we long for independence. If we are independent we long for connection and inclusion in family and community. I think perhaps that we reach an important point where people have to decide to what extent they want to be part of continuing tradition or 'move on' to adopt new ways of thinking, valuing and inter-relating. Older people tend to be rather set in their ways and so shifting values usually come from young people abandoning traditional practices and aspirations. What their parents and elders represent becomes the past - something boring and old hat. If that is true, how can a government help guide people through these difficult personal challenges and towards developing a more inclusive and healthy identity rather than veering towards an unhealthy materially fixated one?

JYT: That too is something that I am concerned about. There are certain trends that beg for our intervention... These kinds of problems exist more in the urban setting and there seems to be a real need for education and orientation for the

parents. The urban parent does not know how to parent so well and is not so supported by the community. We need to retrain ourselves but I do not know how we go about this– we need help in this. It is quite possible though that we might be able to find the wisdom within our own society to come up with the best solution. When it comes to the schools, it should not be up to only one or two counsellors in the school but every teacher having that role, to impart decent values. There is a hidden curriculum in teaching, so a maths teacher is not just teaching maths but is passing on other embedded values. Positive values can be passed on in ways that are quite engaging for young people, ways that are exciting and interesting enough to be involving. And then there is the state, but state involvement should always be the last resort, I think, in any situation.

RM: That sounds very wise. One of the things I was struck by last time I was in Thimphu was spending a lot of time around young people and hearing them refer to GNH as Gross National Harassment, as if it were an unfair imposition on their freedom by the government.

JYT: Do you know where this came from? It was first raised by one of our former Prime Ministers. He wrote an article in the Bhutan Observer using that phrase. What represents order or what represents the system is what youth always wants to rebel against. So, there are certainly challenges of that kind.

RM: Related to this is what I see as a fairly tragic division of society in so-called developed countries into age cohorts where the elderly spend time primarily with the elderly, the middle-aged socialise mainly with the middle aged and youth spend time only with themselves. One of the pervasive aspects of imported culture is its fixation with youthfulness and its rejection of parental authority and older people in general. Every part of this social fracturing has been associated with significant unhappiness so I think support for

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family structures is enormously important. How much is this impacted by changes in Bhutan, by the movement of people from the country to the towns for instance?

JYT: This is involved in the GNH policy. In many of my statements, I stress the importance of extended family networks and I will continue to work on this and do whatever I can to build on it. Urban drift is not a major problem in this sense although it is there. But you know everywhere I go, there are so many happy things that I see. If you go to any celebration or event, or to any community affair, what you will see is multi-generational integrity. You see great-grandmothers and grandfathers and parents and children all together. I get to see this all of the time and it makes me very happy to see that it is very much alive. It is alive to the extent that we do not have to spend time rebuilding this integrity of community and family. What we have to do is allow people and communities to work on it and make it sustainable. I would like, in fact, to start a Centre for Happiness in Bhutan. In that Centre, we will have children from high schools, grade 8, grade 10, grade 12. It should be about finding a frugal way of life that is secure and affordable.

Without that, we do have some urban drift and it is manifested in Thimphu where the population is growing every year by between 10 and 15 percent so it is there, but not as a major problem in the sense that there is no major slum development. In the meanwhile, our policy has always been to stem this tide in various ways and mainly by taking opportunities to the rural areas. One of the things that we want to do is to design interventions that really offer the same opportunities available to the average citizen in the towns to those in the rural provinces. The reason for this, and I do not know if you find it laughable, is that I am completely convinced that happiness can be more easily obtained in a rural setting. In fact, the loss of happiness has much to do with the separation from ones roots. Aside from the physical aspects of actually separating oneself from familiar

surroundings, family, friends and so on, there is also an intuitive insecurity in urban life. Even if one feels they are materially better off in an urban setting, there is often a deep sense of insecurity. One can fail to realise it but in the subconscious, it is there. It is there nagging all of the time. If your salary stops or you lose your job, you lose your security. Fail to pay the rent on your luxurious apartment and you are out on the street. In the rural areas you have your land and you have your home. You have the security of your community bonds. Human relationships are much stronger and much more meaningful in the rural context. Our interdependence is so pronounced there. When I speak to rural meetings, I sometimes tell them that in New York there are people living in the same building who do not know each other, and they do not believe it. And if I tell them there are people living on the same floor of that building who don't know each other, they laugh. But as I tell them, this is happening in Thimphu now. The entire nature of our economy, our commerce, our industries need to be structured in a unique way in order to allow and enable rural life to continue. Does that sound naive to you?

RM: Not at all, I can easily relate to what you say. When individuals move into a more commercialised reality and the family fragments as the father goes out to work leaving the mother at home while the children go to school it illustrates to me at least, a very thin line that exists between individual empowerment and vulnerability. I am struck by your noting that much of the cultural life of Bhutan is thriving and does not need to be remade. Do you think that as GNH spreads beyond the boundaries of Bhutan, others too will be encouraged to think of rebuilding more healthy relationships with family, community and nature and that these might be able to cohere around notions of collective happiness?

JYT: This is the aim of talking about Gross National Happiness. I really feel that it is a very important mission that I am involved in and that Bhutan is involved in for the

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betterment of human society on a global level. Human happiness is important to all societies - rich and poor.

RM: As you look at the global situation and at the situation that Bhutan now finds itself in, particularly given her geographical position between India and China - both rapidly expanding and rapidly growing countries - I wonder what you think the prospects of GNH are in terms of its ability to foster a change towards a more just and sustainable global order? Do you think of it in these terms, or do you see it as an approach that is worth pursuing regardless of what its chances are?

JYT: I am hopeful and have never really despaired since the first time I went abroad carrying this message. In fact, each gathering has given me more confidence in the feeling that we are going to succeed - even as you say, with the re-ordering of the world. This is not because there is inherently more wisdom in this philosophy than others, but because it is the truth, a truth that is so very obvious. More and more people are coming to grips with the fact that our current way of life does not fit. It is not sustainable, it is not right and it does not give happiness. It is the hollowness of materialistic living that is dawning on many of us. We can see it here in Thailand where there are whole sections of society rebelling against globalisation. They are redeeming the Thai way of life and some of the initiatives being taken at the local level by local communities are remarkable. There are lots of people including city dwellers, bankers, lawyers and business people who have moved away from material concerns to pursue what is really sustainable - a way of life that is based upon sufficiency, community and interdependence in living. These are positive trends and signs that GNH will continue to advance and not fall by the wayside.

Dr. Ron Coleman

RM: You have been involved for many years in efforts to develop methods of assessing our progress that go well beyond the standard econometric measures. It is a fairly radical programme you are involved in, trying to shake us out of an approach that has centred for a long time on increasing Gross National Product/Gross Domestic Product as the primary aim of government and business. I wonder if we might begin by my asking you what exactly is wrong with these standard measures that seem so appropriate to so many.

RC: Well the real problem is not with GDP which is used to measure the size of the economy, as long as GDP is used just for that. It measures the quantity of economic activity – how much production and consumption of goods and services is taking place and for that, it is fine. The problem has been that since the Second World War, GDP has been used in a way that it was never intended for and which its architect never intended it for. Simon Kuznets, the Nobel Prize winning economist said explicitly that it should never be used to measure the welfare of a nation. If you want to know how well a nation is doing, you always have to ask what is growing and not just how much things are growing. But since the Second World War, it has been used as a standard measure of how well we are doing as societies. There is an assumption that if the economy is growing then we must be better off and it is interesting that they use the language of health which is the real indication of how much it is being used as a measure of wellbeing. We talk of a ‘healthy’ economy, a ‘robust’ and ‘strong’ economy if it is growing. If it is not growing so well, we talk of it being ‘weak’ and ‘sick’ and if things get really bad it

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suffers a 'depression'. We are using the language of wellbeing simply to describe if the economy is growing or not growing. There is then a confusion that is now deeply entrenched in the system. GDP is the measure of wellbeing for the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. Governments use to compare how nations are doing, and so they are classified as less developed, least developed, or advanced and it is measured in exactly the same way from Addis Ababa to London. It has become very powerful, but also very dangerous because it sends highly misleading signals to policy makers and distorts policy in dangerous ways.

First of all, it is disastrous for the environment because it actually counts the depletion of our natural wealth as if it were economic gain. So, the faster we cut down forests, the quicker the economy grows. The more fish we catch and the faster we catch them, the quicker GDP will grow. This may not have seemed like a bad thing when the GDP was constructed, nobody believed that natural resources were limited. There was no idea that you could fish a stock to extinction. But now we know that it is catastrophic to account for what we extract in the way of natural resources but not keep track of what we leave behind. We forget to take into account the health of our remaining forests and our marine systems. We know for example that we are rapidly losing our big fish stocks - they are dying out all around the world. The same applies to soils, we focus on increasing yields by any means - chemicals, fertilisers, pesticides, insecticides - whatever will make it grow faster. But now we have large numbers of Indian farmers committing suicide because of the failed promises of the green revolution. Yields did go up for twenty years, but now the soil is so depleted and so degraded that its base productivity is gone. When the Atlantic ground fish stocks collapsed, the fishing industry in Atlantic Canada was experiencing record landings up to the moment the stocks collapsed. It was a boom industry. Then overnight, the fish disappeared and 40,000 jobs were lost. There is a false dichotomy made between the environment and jobs but it is clear that if we do not pay attention to the

health of our basic ecosystems, the economy will eventually suffer. So, relying on GDP to measure progress is not only disastrous for our natural wealth but also for our social wealth and our human wealth. We do not recognise that these other forms of capital also suffer depreciation. So, misusing GDP to measure progress is simply bad accounting. It is like a factory owner selling machinery to get money in his pocket in the short term. Next year, they will not be able to produce anything and the money will be gone. That is the way we are treating natural and social wealth. Its degradation is taken as profit. In the context of a factory owner, they would not be allowed to keep their business accounts in that way, it would be completely unacceptable to treat the depletion of capital as profit or gain. But we do it with our national accounting systems. So, that is one major flaw.

But there is another major flaw, and that is you cannot use a measure of quantity to assess quality of life. How large the economy is tells you absolutely nothing about wellbeing. In fact, scientists tell us that the only organisms that thrive on limitless growth are all highly destructive. The cancer cell thrives on unlimited growth, as do weeds and algal blooms which destroy lakes. A system that is based on a limitless growth paradigm is in fact disruptive. Nature when it is thriving does so in equilibrium, not too much water, not too little, not too much sunlight and heat and not too little. It thrives not on endless growth, but on finding balance and equilibrium between the elements. We have lost that balance and are trying to use a quantitative measure of limitless growth to try and measure quality of life and it is just not possible. It is an absurd effort that leaves us with absurd conclusions. One of the fastest growing sectors in the US economy over the past 10 years has been imprisonment that is growing at an average rate of 6.2% per year. The prison building industry is a 7 billion dollar industry and it costs \$35 billion more to run those prisons. There are whole towns in the US that wholly depend on the prison industry and the United States has 25% of all prisoners in the world and the highest rate of incarceration anywhere including Iraq, Iran,

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South Africa and Russia. It is a major growth economy. It helps us realise how foolish it is to measure something that is inherently a sign of deterioration in the social quality of life as if it were gain and progress.

Another example that Marilyn Waring uses is that of the Exxon Valdez. It contributed far more to the GDP of Alaska by spilling its oil than it what it would have if it had safely delivered its oil to the port. All of the money spent on the clean-up, all of the journalists flying back and forth, the legal costs, the repair costs, the replacement of the ship - it is all growth. And what pulled the US out of recession in 2001? Spending on war! So, whenever money is being spent, the economy grows. You might even say climate change can be great for the economy. A lot of money was spent after Hurricane Katrina. It is very hard to take action on climate change when more spending on fossil fuels, more pollution and even more disasters all make the economy grow. I know that we in Canada would much rather spend hundreds of millions of dollars talking about Kyoto than actually doing anything about it. Canada has ratified Kyoto but every year our greenhouse gas emissions continue to go up. What would it take to get the Prime Minister of Canada to go on television to say “next time you buy a car, buy an efficient one with low emissions? Don’t buy an SUV.” It costs nothing for the leader of a country to transmit that message. But we will never do it because Canada is dependent on the automobile industry. In southern Ontario, there are General Motors and Ford. It is not even an issue of left and right politics. The United Auto Workers are not going to stand for any measure that threatens their industry and jobs. So, there is no attention being paid to conservation or to fundamentally restructuring industry.

Twenty years ago, Denmark looked to the future and saw that it was not in oil and gave substantial subsidies to businesses to create a wind industry. Within three years, it was so strong that the government no longer needed to support it and today

wind power is a growth industry and is in huge demand. Denmark has state of the art technology, its wind turbines are exported around the world. So, growth industries can be environmentally benign. It comes back to what Simon Kuznets meant when he said that we need to look closely at what is growing. Is it benign or destructive to wellbeing? A straightforward quantitative approach can not make those distinctions and so we get these absurd situations where wars, pollution, fossil fuel consumption and more sickness are institutionalised because they help make the economy grow. So, a second major flaw is that a single quantitative measure of GDP is blind not only to deterioration of our natural ecosystems but also to social ones. Trying to use a quantitative measure to assess qualities will lead to those kinds of absurdities and to think that policy is being made on that kind of misinformation is truly frightening.

RM: What kinds of additional qualitative social indicators should we be paying attention to then, if we want to get a bigger picture of our collective wellbeing?

RC: Well, some things really do contribute to our wellbeing. Personally, it is questionable to me that every additional lawyer, stockbroker or advertising executive contributes to our wellbeing. The more of those people we have, the better off we are? You would be hard pushed to draw some sort of a direct line between many of these professions and social wellbeing. They certainly contribute to GDP and economic growth and we have lots of information on how much but there is virtually no information on volunteers. Why not? It is an important sector and people volunteer to contribute to the wellbeing of their communities. That is why people help the elderly, the sick, the youth in need, coach teams, teach literacy, etc. The whole arts and culture industry is supported by volunteers. Theatre, art, music, sport they too depend on volunteers. Fire-fighters, search and rescue teams, environmental groups – they all make a huge contribution to social wellbeing. We calculate that if volunteer work were

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given a monetary value, it would constitute about 10% of our economy – more than all government services combined. It is a huge contribution that is completely invisible and completely unvalued because no money is exchanged. It is a contribution both to social wellbeing and to the economy. If those people were not doing the work they are doing, only one of two things could happen. Either the quality of life would plummet for the sick, elderly and disabled, or you would have to replace their contributions with paid services that would cost a lot more money. So, here you have a huge contribution to the economy and to wellbeing that is completely unvalued.

What is the consequence of that? In Canada volunteer work declined by 12.3% in the last decade. But does any politician in the country know that statistic? It has never been debated in the legislature. If the automobile industry were to fall by 12.3% or GDP fell by 12.3%, that would be a depression and cabinet would be meeting around the clock to organise massive tax-payer bail-outs for the industry. A decline in social volunteering is invisible and because it is not counted, it is value-less. Women's work too is generally devalued and is often unpaid around the world. It is work, very hard work, but it counts for nothing. Marilyn Waring is the pioneer in measuring women's work and it is ironic that if you have a stranger looking after your child, it helps GDP but if you look after your own, it literally counts for nothing. Hire a housekeeper to keep your home and the GDP goes up but if you marry her, GDP goes down. We count something as growth when nothing in reality is growing. Work can be just as productive when it is done in the unpaid sector in terms of producing the same outputs. A lot of what we have counted as growth in the last fifty years is nothing more than a shift of work from the unpaid to the paid economy. It is not growth at all. Its not growth as viewed from a happiness point of view or from a more spiritual point of view.

One of the things that should be mentioned here is that what is important for people to make that kind of personal

transformation is time for reflection. That has to be the basis of any individual transformation. But free time which is a fundamental pre-condition for that also counts for nothing. On the contrary, the more hours you work for pay, the more the economy grows. Recently, we have seen an increase in total work hours. The average dual household today is working more than 20 hours a week extra compared to a hundred years ago. With paid and unpaid work rising, we have a squeeze on free time and that has implications that are not being considered on any policy level. As a result, stress rates continue to go up and up while Valium sales and other anti-depressants feed into GDP growth, so it really is absurd.

Another thing GDP leaves out is how wealth is distributed. The economy can grow even as the gap between rich and poor grows as it has been doing. The gains of the very rich can raise the GDP per capita figures even if 50% of the population is getting poorer. So equity is a non-issue in these figures. The depletion of natural wealth, failing to value unpaid work and free time, the strength of our communities, our wisdom and knowledge as societies, equity - the list of what we fail to account for is endless.

RM: It is an interesting way of putting it. The curious thing I find about the myopia of standard measures is that the inclusion of things that harm us seems related to a unhealthy public and individual consciousness that is driven not only by the structural violence of greed and gain, but also by a deep disconnection from nature and from the healthy social networks that facilitate wellbeing and happiness. Do you think that an overly-narrow measure of economic growth compounds this problem?

RC: It fosters it. We could say that what we measure reflects the values of our society and so the more materialist a society is, the more likely it is to use GDP because it reflects that materialism. It measures how much stuff we buy and

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produce. So yes, it is a reflection of the materialism of our world. But interestingly enough, we have done our own survey work at the community level where we gave people 10 values and asked them to rate them as guiding life principles. They were ranked from 1 to 10, from not important to extremely important. The values were things like family, responsibility, generosity, spirituality and we included material wealth, career and pleasure. So what are the fundamental principles that guide people's lives? Of the ten that we gave, the one at the bottom of the list, the one having the smallest number of people ranking it 8, 9 or 10 in importance, was materialism. Less than 1 in 5 said that this had high importance for them. More than 90% said family was highly important and 8 out of 10 ranked responsibility and generosity as highly important. It was the non-material values that topped the scale of what matters to people and not the material ones. You could say then that the GDP does not genuinely reflect peoples' sense of values. In their hearts people know what creates value and what does not. So you can say current measures are out of sync with what people really value. We assume that our society is consumerist and materialist but really, that too is a myth. If you probe and ask people what really matters to them, very quickly you find out that materialism is not highly valued. But GDP puts policy makers in a terrible position and the purpose of developing more inclusive measures is to provide them with good information. What is the state of our natural resources? What is the state of the environment? Are our communities becoming safer and stronger or not? Is the gap between rich and poor growing or not? All of this information has to be included so that comprehensive information can be used to make more appropriate decisions.

RM: As you talk, I have a picture in mind of someone driving a car and not taking their eyes off the speedometer to see if there is a cliff or a bend ahead. It is clearly myopic when we are made conscious of the connections between our individual and collective actions and outcomes of importance—sustainability, social justice and so forth. What is the

relationship between these sorts of dimensions and Gross National Happiness?

RC: There are two things. The accelerator example is a good one. I do not know if you have ever looked inside the cockpit of an airplane but there are a whole host of panels and dials and instruments. Just imagine if you had to fly that plane paying attention only to how fast you are going. It would be a disaster and it is an example that David Suzuki uses too. We need to use the full range of natural, social and community health indicators. Now these things do not make happiness in and of themselves, but you could say that they are conditions that improve the opportunity for happiness. If you are living in poverty and struggling to make ends meet, or trying to feed your family and not knowing whether you will be able to, or if you have just been evicted from your plot of land, or if you are freezing in winter time, your existence is dominated by worry and happiness has less of a chance. It is not that having food, shelter, health and money create happiness but having them offers the opportunity for happiness. In those ten values I mentioned earlier, financial security was rated much higher than material wealth so we do need to know that our fundamental economic needs can be secured. Having security creates the opportunity for happiness although having all of these things, one might still be miserable. One could have a lot of free time and use it to play video games and watch television. Our research shows that high levels of watching television are associated with high levels of depression. Free time can be misused and squandered but it also provides the opportunity to reflect or contemplate, to exercise or hang out with friends. So again, free time does not cause happiness but it provides a helpful condition. The same is true with all of the things we measure – the health of the environment, the safety of our communities, livelihood security, the gap between rich and poor, population health, educational attainment etc. None of these in and of themselves can create happiness but they produce opportunities for happiness. Ultimately, it is up to every individual to use those conditions for benefit. That can not be legislated for by any government

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because one cannot legislate happiness. But you can provide the conditions.

You can look at it from a spiritual point of view. Why do we have a shrine-room to practice meditation? Why do monks go to the temple? It is not because the temple is happiness but that there you can create certain conditions that are conducive to your practice. There everything is arranged so that it aids your practice. In the broader setting, we are trying to do the same thing at the societal level. Metaphorically, it is the same as the temple and the monks. We want to create social conditions which give people the greatest opportunity for being happy - for realising their potential. The conditions are very important. We know from research that there is a strong correlation between every dimension we have been talking about and expressed satisfaction with life. They correlate well. Social support is particularly interesting. The more social supports people have, the more likely they are to be happy. When people are isolated and have no one to turn to in times of crisis, or have no-one to help them with important decisions, people are much less likely to say they are happy with their lives. So, if we can foster these conditions we have a real opportunity to structure societies which have the maximum chance of being happy. Ultimately though, it is down to the individual to make the most of those conditions.

RM: Wonderfully put. I am particularly struck by how consonant that is with Buddhist notions and particularly with what Bhutan is trying to do by creating the social, political and environmental conditions for people to flourish in-if they so choose. It seems to me that culture is particularly important here in encouraging people to aspire towards those ways of thinking, acting and being that are constructive to maintaining ecological, social and personal balance. I am wondering how you view Gross National Happiness as a potential organising agenda, particularly at this time in our collective history when the environmental system you spoke

of is under such enormous strain and along with social polarisation, it suggests that we need to change very rapidly. How do you see GNH playing a role in moving towards a more sustainable and just global system?

RC: When the fourth King of Bhutan said back in 1974 that Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product, it was very powerful because people immediately understood the deeper meaning. As John Ralston Saul said at the second meeting on GNH, it immediately involves a paradigm shift because it uses the language of GNP but suddenly turns it on its head. The way the King said it changes the language and shifts the paradigm towards the non-material bases of wellbeing. It immediately challenges the value of materialism. It asks what the goal of our society really is. Is it about having more stuff, or is it about deeper considerations such as are we happy? And why has it suddenly become so powerful all around the world as a potential organising principle? It is because the term itself is a critique of our entire materialist obsession. It is like seeing yourself in a mirror. The very words are transformative. It takes one set of meanings and turns them on their head and points beyond the limitations of this consumerist, materialist worldview that is destroying the world.

But if you try and break it down too much you can run into problems. What is the difference between Gross National Happiness and Gross Individual Happiness? You could argue that national interests are just concepts. Nations are just artefacts. East Timor for example, exists because in 1501 the Netherlands and Portugal decided to carve this island down the middle. It is a legacy of colonialism. What is Canada? Many people in Quebec would prefer to think that they are not a part of Canada. So what is Canada? It is a creation of colonial Europe. Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, they are all artefacts. Burma has 135 different ethnic groups and 7 major minorities but the British authorities created one state. The map of Africa is wholly artificial. So, I would not want to use

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the concept of GNH to somehow make more out of the nation. Happiness ultimately is dependent on individuals, even if the conditions are all helpful, to take the next step. But really there is no distinction between individual, national and universal happiness. If interdependence is a reality, then compassion is not a feel-good thing – it is simply the reality that you cannot be happy unless other people are happy. If you are connected to them, and if you gain enough wisdom to recognise that we are completely interdependent with the rest of the world, then it is a universal happiness that we are talking about. In other words, I think that as a paradigm shift GNH is enormously powerful. It is inherently a critique of our materialist world and our consumer obsession. It is brilliant actually. But we have to be careful not to become too academic about it and try and break it down intellectually because the happiness of the individual, the national and the universal are ultimately part of the same picture.

Khenpo Phuntsok Tashi

RM: I wonder if we could begin by looking at GNH in the context of Buddhism in Bhutan because happiness is a very slippery concept and it has different connotations and meanings for different people. As I look at a Western understanding of happiness, I sense that it has moved towards being a rather superficial and highly personalised emotion. But I do not get the impression that this is what happiness means in a Buddhist framework. So, I wonder if I might ask you what your understanding of happiness would be from a Buddhist perspective.

KP: From the Buddhist perspective, happiness has many causes and conditions and these have to be in place if happiness is to spring forth. Happiness comes from the mind and not from external conditions. Objective conditions change through time but the mind is the original cause and its influence is dominant in the creation of happiness. That is why in order to have happiness, one has to analyse and study the causes in one's own mind and look inward to see how happiness originates from the mind and not from outside of the mind. Every Buddhist would agree that happiness comes from spiritual enhancement as the cause. It does not come from money or material things but from the nature of the mind and its reactions. So, the mind is the source of everything and it can be refined through meditation and other mindful practices. To understand happiness, then, we need to recognise the internal dynamics and this may take many lifetimes which is why we believe in reincarnation.

We can say that there are two kinds of happiness, one that is called conventional happiness, or temporary happiness and

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another which is continual happiness. When we talk about conventional happiness, there are also two kinds, individual happiness and collective happiness both of which are relative and temporary which is why they fall under the heading of conventional happiness. When we study the mind we find that there are many obstacles to finding happiness which is why we categorise negative mental states and positive mental states. Happiness is a positive mental state which can be nourished by removing the influence of negative thoughts. This can lead to an ultimate happiness or enlightenment which is the real happiness we seek. GNH is not about this ultimate happiness but it is a positive state that should be developed through developing right will, right thoughts and right actions. If we use wrong will, wrong thoughts and wrong speech, then our actions will be contrary to happiness. This is why we have to act consistently and in a right way instead of only desiring or wishing for our own happiness while ignoring the happiness of others.

RM: In this transformation from a more conventional happiness towards a deeper form and ultimately into a state of enlightenment, would I be right in saying that the key movement involves undoing the restricting forces of egotism and the greed, hatred and ignorance that cause unhappiness?

KP: Yes, exactly.

RM: Given that, when you look at the changes that are happening in Bhutan at the moment, do you see these as posing a serious challenge to the process of releasing oneself from negative and egotistical mental states?

KP: Yes, because society is seeking more happiness by changing external conditions. But the perceiver can change how they see these external conditions and how they respond to them. In Bhutan, these conditions are really changing very fast but at the same time, in our spiritual methods,

happiness still comes from the mind. In Buddhism, we call this the happy path to the happy land. Even if I have negative emotions, problems and so on, I can practice dharma and have full confidence that I can find happiness even if I am very poor individually. So, these are the types of things that we have to develop in Bhutan, in the hearts of each and every citizen. But now with globalisation effecting Bhutanese people, and particularly youngsters, it may become more difficult for us to put efforts into acknowledging this happiness and bringing it out because people are being swallowed completely by sophisticated advertising and temptations without knowing that these are only temporary illusions - only temporary and disappointing elements that will not produce genuine solutions. This type of wisdom and insight has to be developed in each individual. For centuries the Buddhist community has played a central role in developing this wisdom – monks, gomchen, lamas and so on were very helpful in this. But now their influence is becoming weaker and a farmer or an economist cannot give these teachings.

When we talk about the collective happiness of a country, it is important to see how this relates to conditions also. If there is an absence of disease, then there can be happiness. Where there is an absence of poverty there can be happiness and where there is an absence of war there can also be happiness. This is why we Buddhists pray that this society be free from illness, poverty and war. Some people would say that praying is just wishing and that we have to put the wish into action. But we must begin by asking the cause of disease. We can build more hospitals but this will not remove illness if the cause involves an imbalance of emotions and negative mental states. Removing the real cause of disease can only come from a deep awareness of the mind. If we are ignorant of this, disease will always be there and poverty and war will always be there. So, it is really very important to educate and sensitise and develop mindfulness if happiness is to be found.

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The cause of poverty according to Buddhism is greed. As long as there is greed in the mind, poverty will always be there. Even if I live in a diamond house I will still feel poor. We really need to develop a content mind free of greed, hatred and ignorance. If there is no contentment in a house, the children will not be happy, the parents will not be happy and the atmosphere will be tense and uncomfortable. These things come not from outer objective conditions but from the nature of the mind. This is why we have to understand what Buddhism has established for so many centuries. Before, this understanding was mainly in the monasteries but now this spirit has to come out into society more. Through GNH, through schools and colleges we need to work to refine the mind so that we have a choice in how to meet the future. If we do not have a clear perspective on the root causes of poverty, the causes of war and the causes of disease, we will think wrongly and find only a false kind of temporary happiness. I may be wrong but this is how I see things from a spiritual perspective.

RM: I cannot see how that could possibly be wrong. In the body of what you have been saying though, there are a number of subtle and very profound difficulties involved in guiding a society away from the problematic inner processes that keep us from developing a deeper happiness. I wonder about GNH being presented as it is—it almost makes it a desirable thing to greedily seek and there is always the danger that we might become overly grasping in our attempts to secure it. Yet in traditional Buddhist frameworks, the emphasis is always more on undoing problems and barriers rather than on seeking compensating solutions as such. To undo ignorance and to undo greed and hatred requires a good deal of attention and an ability to reflect very deeply on our own consciousness. But globalisation brings much more frenetic and intense processes into play, whereby our attention is constantly being pulled outwards into a sensationalised external world of fast entertainment and disposable superficiality. I wonder how this drawing outward is likely to impact Bhutan's development.

KP: When His Majesty pronounced GNH, it was very visionary and very far-sighted because what he said at the time was that we have been enjoying a living harmony even though we were poor and that we had to be careful not to lose what we have. The King knew that globalisation would really effect Bhutan and that we would have to accept some of the changes. We are part of these changes and like the passengers on a bus, when the driver moves we all move together and it is hard to speed up or slow down as an individual. But we cannot lose our unique culture; we have to keep it so that we can develop positively. So, we have to accept globalisation but at the same time meet it with what we already have. Bhutan has a very good chance to do this well because of the cultural understandings we already have.

It is different in the West. You used a good metaphor before when you said that it was like a society that has been swept out into the ocean of materialism and that it will be very hard to swim back against the tide. Bhutan is still anchored and the question for us is how we can retain our balance and not be swept away. In understanding this, we have to think also of karma. If the collective karma of the Bhutanese people has not been created already, we will suffer anyhow. But karma is not fixed, it is not as if we can do nothing but we need to stop creating bad karma and bad conditions for the future. But this will not be enough, we really have to educate and enlighten our citizens so that they can make the right choices. To deliver this service is very important from a Buddhist point of view.

The Bhutanese people are mainly farmers and have been living this way for centuries and if they are not educated, if they are not enlightened, if they are not sensitised by the government, by monks and by teachers, the young people will come to think that sophisticated advertising and so on is real-life. This is a danger and they should be aware that this is an illusion and not be ignorant of the real need for mind purification and getting rid of ignorance, greed and anger. So,

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people need to think on these things and ask what the impacts of negative emotions are. It is very important now that we act on this, ask questions, have western teachers come and talk about how society can lose happiness. If this understanding comes not only from monks but from a wide variety of sources, the Bhutanese can become very educated people. Then we could really share with the rest of the world. But if we do not put this into practice then after a few decades, we will not be able to go back. It will be too late.

RM: Well, it is certainly much harder to recreate than to maintain an already existing balance. One of the fascinating dynamics I find when looking at Bhutan and the outside, more consumerist world is that for people to follow a spiritual path and release themselves from the mental constraints that condemn them to a superficial and fragile happiness, there is the need for some kind of respected authority that can guide or pull one away from the tendency to remain in your own narrow mindedness. And one of the things that I think is dangerous about consumer society and is one of its greatest liabilities has been the idea that the individual is sovereign and that the individual's judgement of what is good for them is wholly their own decision and is always a valid one. So, if I crave a larger television thinking this will make me happy, there is little in consumer culture that can authoritatively convince me that this will not bring me real happiness because I do not realise the trap of material longing. So, I think it is a very important and fragile point in Bhutan's development in terms of retaining such a grounding authority.

KP: I always wish that this type of ethical education can create an active understanding for all Bhutanese people because I know that in Bhutan now, people are not accessing this. So to improve things we really have to give people education, not only the intellectual people because GNH does not belong to anybody, it belongs to everybody. Even if we do not call it the Buddha's teachings but only normal teaching,

we can see that nobody wants to be harmed by others. It is not because the Buddha says we should not cause harm to others but because it is a human thing. To cause harm to others is to harm oneself. If you want to have a bigger television or a bigger car to make you happy, then okay. But if others get these things instead of you, you must rejoice and be happy for them and say 'my friend has a good car, that is good' and not think that I must have one also, a better one at that. That is harmful thinking, harmful speech, and it leads to harmful action. If you do not go in this direction, you have more power and you can develop abilities and capabilities so that on top of not harming others, you can become active and positive. Those who do not develop these capabilities become de-activated. An active person can come out and help others if they have developed the capability and this is the real cause of happiness. This is the boddhicitta of mind enlightenment. It involves dedicating oneself to others' happiness and forgetting oneself and through this, one automatically becomes happier. So, not harming others first and then helping others really makes us happy. And then there is contentment. These three things, finding contentment, not harming others and helping through a sense of universal responsibility produce happiness and everyone should be aware of this. It is true that the ego is bad, anger is bad, desire is a problem, but these things can be difficult to understand. Speaking of being helpful to each other and to the community is easy to understand and so these things can be easily taught by gomchen and so on.

In fact, the gomchen play an important and crucial role in the community. Monks usually stay in the monasteries and people have little contact with them but at the community level, the gomchen are there and play a very important part in community life and in achieving GNH. If there is conflict or if someone is dying, the gomchen can come and conduct prayers or offer advice and it makes people much happier. For these kinds of things, gomchen are very important. They are highly accomplished spiritually and they teach methods of non-violence in the community. People can easily listen to the

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gomchen because they are right there and they have a lot of experience and knowledge of the community. Decision-makers and other authorities may come once a year but gomchen are always there and are very important to the happiness of the nation. But now with modernisation coming in, the people are becoming less interested and even the gomchen's influence is on the decline as our interest in becoming refined and enlightened become dominated by outer things.

RM: The movement towards not harming and being of benefit to others introduces an interesting relationship between happiness and ethics in the sense that perhaps happiness is not a thing to be sought directly but rather it is a by-product, or co-product of leading a responsible and considerate life. It seems then that GNH is a call to act responsibly and to think and act inclusively and compassionately.

KP: Exactly. That's why the Buddha said you don't have to worry about the result; the result will be like the rising sun. You cannot make the sun rise but still your practice should be perfect. If you practice right effort and right action, the result will be like the rising sun. In Bhutan, our goal is national happiness but it is not a goal that we can achieve easily in 20 years. We have to construct good strategies to achieve the goal and this means that every day, every individual must refrain from harming others and only then, can we live in true happiness. As long as there are conflicts in the community, there will be no full happiness. So, it is important to achieve harmony and this can only come from the mind. Anger, hatred and conflict are not constructive mental states. If someone gets angry because another encroaches on their land, they may say that this action makes them angry but this is only seeing the external elements and the anger really comes from the mind. So, he has to understand the nature of this anger and if he wants, he can avoid anger and maybe even come to help other people.

RM: Given the causal factors in the mind, this would suggest that the most important consideration is intention rather than outcomes alone. I wonder if there is a danger in the way GNH has been framed and how it is now being measured that we might come to focus too much on outcomes and forget the importance of purifying our intentions. It makes me really appreciate your point about the gomchen and their importance at the local level in keeping alive the movement towards purifying intentions and further, their potential for keeping the pulse of the country and how far it might be drifting away from the clarifying of consciousness. Is there much receptivity on the part of those in government and those designing GNH policies to these types of organic processes and how they might play a role in achieving GNH?

KP: Those who are designing GNH, the architects of GNH, have to understand that some things may not apply across the country in the same ways. What works in one area of Bhutan may not work the same way elsewhere – Paro in the west is different in many ways from Lhuentse in the east. Concerns may not be the same for different generations and so we have to design for that and think from many different angles not just from one simple and narrow viewpoint. The question is can all Bhutanese become enlightened, can all people be healthy or rich? This is not possible because of our karma and so we have to think of the long term and of how our actions will effect a new generation in, say 50 years' time. Everybody has some hatred and anger and only if we really go into the nature of the mind can we become free from their negative effects. Some people do not want to go into that and that is up to them. But we have to try because it can be done. All human beings have a potentiality; everyone has Buddha nature even if most do not recognise it. Many people are confused about their potential and so we must try and bring a better understanding to them. It can be done, so why not?

RM: Yes, and this confusion probably explains in part why there is such an interest in GNH from the outside world and I

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think that perhaps Bhutan has been caught a little by surprise given the intensity of that interest. An increasing number of people are beginning to realise the essential shallowness that comes from seeking happiness only in external and material forms while ignoring the need for the internal work that actively releases a deeper happiness. So, I see the spread of GNH outwards as a very positive fertilising force for a global consciousness, particularly now as we face the karma, if you like, of our poor ethics in the form of ecological degradation and systemic conflict.

KP: Yes and this all come from anger. It does not come from a particular location or event or from money, it comes from the mind. We are not saying to the world that everybody should become enlightened monks but only that we really do need to try and understand the mind better and work to refine it.

RM: Are you optimistic about Bhutan's potential to maintain its clarity and stimulate positive change?

KP: I can not really make a judgement on all Bhutanese. If I was the Buddha, then maybe I could say how things will be in 20 years but I am not that. As a Buddhist monk, I think that we have to remain active and continue to work on these things. We now have many of the things that you have- television, internet, mobile phones and more; so we are building up more attachments and consequently, degenerating in a way. So, I do not know how it will be in the future. It may be better or it may be worse. The important thing is that we must keep trying to make it better.

Prof. Ruut Veenhoven

RM: As we are both aware, there has been a booming interest in happiness in the West that has become particularly pronounced over the past few years. The academic literature is focusing more and more on happiness, particularly in the field of positive psychology and this interest is mirrored in more popular forms too as our bookshops are filled with titles relating to happiness, these ranging from philosophical and historical texts to self-help manuals. Happiness seems also to be entering increasingly into the policy debate as governments, states and cities expand their traditional measures of success to include assessments of happiness and wellbeing. I wonder if we could start by addressing why this might be. Do you have any reflections on why happiness has suddenly become a topic of such interest?

RV: Yes, basically I think it is a by-product of a multiple-choice society. When there is nothing to choose in life, there is no need to wonder if you are happy or not. Once you are able to choose, you wonder which way of life will make you most happy. So, at the individual level not only are we more able to choose but we can see that some choices make people quite happy. If some people score 8 on happiness scale while you score 6, then something appears to be wrong and so, people then start looking for information. Yet the strange thing is that as yet, there is little professional guidance for finding happiness. This is why there are so many self-help books and so many happiness quacks around. There is a big market for happiness advice which probably will be served by professionalised positive psychology but as yet the advice is pretty poor. So, that is at the individual level.

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At the organisational level, there is also an increasing demand for happiness. Of course, organisations make money in the first place but they are places where people spend large parts of their lives and typically happy workers work better than unhappy workers - especially in the creative jobs which have become more prevalent nowadays. So, this raises an interest in organisations on how to raise happiness levels. There is also a rising interest in organisations like schools and care homes, especially care homes where a significant outcome is happiness and where the voice of consumers is getting stronger. They do not just want what the professionals say is good but want increasing happiness also. This is already happening in the medical field where there is a growing interest in the so-called health-related quality of life. A doctor can say that you will live longer if you take all of these pills, they might make you live for one more year, but will you be happy? There is a considerable market opening in such institutions. And, lastly, at the national level more politicians are asking what they should be doing. For many politicians, politics is about reducing misery and we have been quite successful at that. In the Netherlands for example, most serious misery and injustice has disappeared. So, the question is what next? One answer to the question is to look after Mother Earth which is the ecologist's answer. Another is to produce the greatest happiness for the greatest number.

I do not think that the interest in happiness is a fad but rather a structural effect. The question of why it has cropped up so recently relates to the fact that the demand has been growing gradually and after many years of doubt and development, the research has matured and now people can see that it works and they want applications.

RM: There are a number of layers in what you have just said, ranging from the individual to the nation-state. I wonder in looking at the individual level to begin with whether you think that part of the search for happiness which you mentioned in

relation to choice, indicates that in modern consumer society many people are confused as to what happiness might mean?

RV: They are not confused about what happiness might mean, it is commonly understood as enjoying life, but they are confused as to what makes them happy. I agree that in looking for a gratifying life one way is through the consumer system, but there is also the question of what philosophy of life suits you best. What philosophy and what meanings involved in that make you feel most comfortable. I do think that humans need a view on life and that we cannot live in society unless we have a picture of how things are put together. Yet I hardly see that one philosophy is better than another. One philosophy may fit a particular person better than the others but as far as I can see, people need answers but it does not particularly matter what type of answers. People can live well with answers that are incomplete.

In my theory, happiness is the result of need gratification. We are biological organisms that have in evolution developed in-wired needs and when these needs are gratified, we feel good. If we feel good most of the time, we say that we are happy. Now the question is whether we have an in-wired need for meaning. I do not know if people who do not have a philosophy of life would be less happy. In this context, I do not believe that we have an in-wired need for meaning or philosophy. I think that all humans are interested in it but that it is not a need. Why not? I think that needs are things that have a survival value. Philosophy and the answer to the question 'why are we here' is a by-product of the fact that we can think, but it is not a need and we can live without a final answer.

RM: That is very interesting and particularly in relation to needs. One of the things that I am interested in and particularly so in the context of Bhutanese endeavours, are attempts to find happiness that go beyond simple economic frameworks and the supposed needs that these encourage.

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Such frameworks raise the question of whether these are real needs or falsely created ones?

RV: I consider them wants. Needs are things that are biological while wants are imputed by society. If our wants fit our needs then we have a good society but if society creates wants that do not really correspond to needs, we have a poor one.

RM: Indeed and I wonder if this is part of the confusion that surrounds the search for happiness for individuals as we try and optimise good feelings at the personal level. Many of us live in highly commercialised cultures where media in particular constantly attempts to create new felt needs for the individual and I wonder whether in allowing our systems to become so dominated by an economic framework, we have not confused ourselves and come to spend a great deal of time pursuing false lifestyles that do not have a significant hedonic pay-off.

RV: That is a very important question. To a certain extent we may be deluded as business does link goods to needs and particularly to status needs. But as a species, we do have status needs, ones that we have in common with all group animals and while we do not have an innate need to be the top ape, we do have a need not to be the bottom ape. Business tries to exploit these needs-I think they are over-doing that and so we are buying expensive goods for some false gain. In that sense I agree but I am happy that there are strong counter-forces in alternative cultures that protect us against too much powerful advertising.

RM: It is true that a lot of advertising seems to relate to status needs. If you have the latest model car you are somehow superior to the person who has last year's model and so on. I think those dynamics are fairly apparent but I am wondering as we move towards an increasing focus on happiness whether there is not a tendency in that to re-

create a similar problem - in the sense that if I find myself to be 6 on a ten-point happiness scale and find out that the average is 7.5, does not that set up a similar process of competitive status-seeking. Would not everybody want to be happier than the average as a basic mark of personal success?

RV: Yes to some extent that is true but happiness is a mark of success. Happiness is a biological signal of good thriving. There is indeed a danger that in a society where everybody is happy, the ones who are not get even more depressed. This may be one of the factors in the so-called depression 'epidemic'. If you are not happy then you are better living in a society where everyone is depressed than in a society where you are the only sufferer and your own suffering stands out. That is the situation just now as a happier culture increases the obviousness of some peoples' suffering.

RM: Do you think that happiness is the most important indicator of a successful life?

RV: For yourself, yes. In my scheme of the four qualities of life you have the chances for a good life, the outcomes of life, the quality of the environment and the quality in yourself. The chance for a good life embodied in the environment is the liveability of the environment. This is what politicians are concerned about, sociologists, ecologists and so on. The chances for a good life embodied in yourself represent your life-ability and that is the business of professionals who try to improve the individual – doctors, educators, psychologists etc. If we look at the outcomes for life then you could say that a good life is a life that is good for the environment. I think that this is the utility of your life and is of interest to moral specialists who focus on your good deeds which is not the same thing as your enjoyment of life. And finally there are the outcomes for yourself which is satisfaction with life as a whole.

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So, if you ask if happiness is the final criterion of a good life, I would say it is the most important outcome for the person as an individual – how happily people live is the best indicator of how well the organism thrives. But that is not the same as your utility. So, we can thrive very well but fail in other dimensions. We can have a happy life but one that is not very useful - you can enjoy yourself but ruin the earth.

RM: Do you think that there is enough balance in people's concerns over doing well in these different realms at the moment? It seems to me that in Westernised culture, there is a great deal of emphasis on individual outcomes like the happiness of the individual but significantly less on the collective outcomes, particularly in terms of the individual's utility in creating happiness for others and a broader social good.

RV: Well, yes this is part of the individualisation of society. In modern societies, we feel less a part of any particular group and we focus more on our selves and the happiness of our own lives. But at the same time, because we are all dependent on the whole, individualisation has to go together with universalism. Now we are more interested in the world and humanity as a whole. That is typically the pattern you see in modern societies.

RM: Do you mean to say that the modern form of individualism and the happiness that an individual can experience is associated in some way with a broader, more universalised moral concern?

RV: At least in the sense that modern individuals both want to be happy and are concerned with the world as a whole, but this concern is not linked to our primary needs.

RM: Do you think that there ultimately needs to be a stronger connection between these two domains – that an individual

should seek their happiness in ways that are socially constructive and not damaging to the larger collective?

RV: That would be nice, but it is not pre-programmed by Mother Nature. If we want to do that we need to construct it culturally.

RM: Yes I agree. It is interesting that you mention that because one of the things that underlies the Bhutanese conception of happiness is the fact that it is informed by Buddhism as a cultural system. Central to this is a vision of happiness that sees it as moving from a highly personalised form outwards to a form in which happiness is gained through contributing to the happiness of others. In the Buddhist framework, happiness is seen as progressing from dukkha which is a highly personalised and unstable form towards a deeper, more stable and collaborative form - sukkha where personal thriving becomes a by-product of one's active attempts to improve the happiness of others.

RV: I would say in my terms that this is all about your perceived meaning. It is about your experienced utility and not your real utility. It is only how useful you think you are. But I come back to my first point that I do not think your usefulness to others is a primary source of happiness. It is something that many people would like and you can say that happy people are more open to the world - that is a fact. Unhappy people tend to be self-centred, defensive and more closed to the world. Happy people feel psychologically safer and so they get more involved. They get more informed about universal problems and they participate more in movements to improve the world but I would not call that a source of happiness. I would say they are doing good things certainly but in my strict definition, happiness is about the subjective enjoyment of one's own life.

RM: That is a point that becomes particularly germane at the moment with the somewhat parlous state of the world's

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environment for one thing and I know that there is a good deal of public concern which may lead some people towards grabbing at happiness as a valuable outcome in the belief that it would be better for us collectively than simply focussing on economic expansion. A great deal of the underpinning of such hope lies in the feeling that happiness does necessarily involve us in considering others' happiness on a more equal basis to our own. If we think about that in the context of the correlates of happiness, I wonder if I could ask you to briefly outline what else is known in the empirical literature about the other psychological states that are significantly correlated with happiness and which might validate that hopefulness.

RV: Yes. There is a lot of research now if you want to know what the correlates of happiness are. Longitudinal and experimental studies typically show that if people are happy, they tend to be more active, they tend to be more open, they tend to be more creative. They are also more daring and take more risks and are more in the world. As a result they develop more resources within themselves and develop more friendships and social networks. So, in this sense, happiness works out well. At the national levels, we can see several similar outcomes. We know that happy countries are more democratic – you could conclude this one way and say that democracy makes people happy or the other way which is also true, that happy people vote more and engage more with the political process. They are also more tolerant which tends to make happy societies more free. That means for example, a greater acceptance of religious minorities and gay people.

You can also reason in a similar way about the relations between national wealth and happiness. Typically, we say that wealth generates happiness but you can also say that happy, active people engage more effectively in work and even continue when they have sufficient incomes. One of my theories is that life is becoming more like sports in modern societies where people find forms of work that produce

challenge and meaning. This helps create wealth, so money is a consequence of the fact that people are happy, active and working.

RM: The relationship between economics and happiness has been addressed in some depth of late and I would be right in saying, would I not, that even though there is a relationship both at the individual and the collective level, it is far from being a perfect relationship. I am wondering how you feel about what a number of people have been talking about recently which is that economic wealth and material satisfactions are useful in terms of creating happiness up to a certain level but that after individuals and countries have got most of their basic material needs taken care of, other non-material needs become more important as a source of increasing happiness. The quality of intimate social relationships is particularly spoken of in this context.

RV: Well the levelling off is most clear at the individual level and we see in rich countries evidence that if you are pretty rich then it makes very little difference to become very, very rich. At the national level it is not so clear. We know that there is a strong relationship between income per head and happiness in nations but we do not know why. Is it because of the material goods and services that we can buy, or is it a counter-fact, maybe the fact that in the current economy we have more division of labour and the creation of more niches where more people find a happy fit? Or is it in the side-effect of the growing interdependence that modernisation tends to emphasise? It is also possible that it is not so much the cars and the washing machines that make us happy but the fact that as a function of economic organisation, we can afford better housing, better schooling and better health care. It is impossible to disentangle these things and test them empirically.

RM: Given the enormous complexity of these variables – the effects of democracy or good health care and so on, it may be

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very difficult to tease them apart in a causal sense, but I get the impression that it is going to become increasingly important to address some of those issues and particularly our dependence on economic expansion as a route to happiness. The major reason for that is the pressure that is building across a range of basic resources in a limited biological system. We have for example mid-range predictions that we may have 9.5 billion people by the year 2050 – a huge increase in pressure on the resources we have. We currently have spikes in food prices, in fuel prices, in the cost of credit and a number of critical resources are coming under greater pressure. I wonder then what Western empirical studies of happiness have to contribute to our managing that situation as we move into the future, particularly in terms of moving us towards more sustainable outcomes where we might seek our happiness in less destructive ways.

RV: Well, I think that the application in the Happy Planet Index is a very sensible one because it shows which societies succeed in creating happiness without squandering the earth. So, it shows us the extent to which this is possible. For the next versions of the Happy Planet Index we will have available new data that comes from the Gallup World Poll so we can have a good look at which societies are the most happiness efficient.

RM: That in a sense brings the personal and the social together, doesn't it, in terms of the need to balance those concerns because as a measure of efficiency, the Happy Planet Index basically shows which nations are highly inefficient in terms of producing happiness gains. Many modern societies seem to use masses of resources for little, if any, gains in the collective level of happiness. I wonder how that can be negotiated without raising issues of ethics around happiness itself. When I look at the tables of happy nations, I see at the top many of the most resource intensive nations and I wonder from the perspective of the next generation, how much of that happiness can be seen as being legitimate. Is

this happiness actually being created in responsible ways, ways that look to the bigger picture and the longer term and exercise some self-restraint in response? I do not mean by this that perhaps people should be searching for less happiness but perhaps for a more responsible way of achieving that happiness.

RV: I think that ethically utilitarianism can solve this because what is moral is what creates the greatest happiness for the greatest number - the next generation included. Now, of course, there are real constraints on how far we can estimate the preferences of the next generations but we can rest assured that if we use all the oil it will be bad for our children. If we consider the needs of the next couple of generations, happily there is a good, ethical underpinning for controls over energy and resource use.

RM: Do you think that along with that some form of education or facilitation is necessary if significant numbers of people are to begin finding happiness in less destructive ways?

RV: Yes, and adverts are a good example. The material lifestyle is dominant in advertising and there should be counter-forces to show that there are other ways to find happiness that are available as well.

RM: Do you think it would also be wise from a happiness perspective to redistribute some of our wealth towards those who are the least happy and particularly the very poorest because after all, one thousand Euros has only so much potential to increase the happiness of someone already rich in a rich country, but huge potential to increase happiness for people in poor communities. Do you think that there is an underpinning in the utilitarian perspective that would suggest this would be a worthwhile thing to do – both from an ethical perspective and from a happiness perspective?

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RV: Certainly. If you follow utilitarian morality the answer is yes. But there are also perspectives that would say if you give money, you only create dependence, or if you give money, populations will multiply too much. And there are also several reality constraints. Still I do think that when people are really in need, we should help them. Generally that is accepted but it is not so generally practiced. Development support is, of course, linked to national policies. So, our morality is not quite as good as we would like it to be.

RM: It is interesting when we look at this in terms of utility because this is the ethical model that also underpins modern economics....

RV: But wait, modern economics involves a utilitarian theory of action but not utilitarian morality. I think that the utilitarian theory of motivation – that we only act in our self-interest—is wrong. Utilitarian theory as an ethical theory means that we should give priority to what brings happiness for the greatest number of people.

RM: Yet the way that happiness is measured in an empirical sense is highly self-referencing, isn't it? In the typical happiness survey the respondent is asked a question along the lines of "All things considered, how happy are you with your life at the moment?" This seems to bring a focus on the self and the self's outcomes alone and I wonder whether this has a knock-on effect in removing the focus from the broader good that utilitarianism would in theory encourage us to adopt. Do you think that by constructing an approach to happiness that encourages us to self-refer and only to self-refer, that we run a danger of diminishing the ethical focus we should have on others and their happiness?

RV: I do not think so. I think that if you broadened the concept to include groups you would run the risk that people would be used by these groups. What is typical of collectivist societies is that it is the group that becomes most important

and individual happiness comes second to that. In these circumstances, people may not develop a very strong sense of individuality or personalised input. So, I think that if we are to make this world a better place, we should depart from underdevelopment. Individualists are not interested only in their clan but in universal values. An individualist conception of happiness is how much I love my life and on that basis, individualists are able to imagine that there are other people who can be recognised as real persons, and that they can be more or less happy. I think that we should have a clear understanding otherwise we cannot really communicate. So, we should keep a difference between the questions of how happy we are, how well our society is doing and how much we are involved in our society. These are different things that we need to keep conceptually apart.

RM: I take it that a good part of what you are just saying has to do with freedom, insofar as the individual's happiness as you speak of it, is a happiness that freely chooses to identify with others in a universal sense as opposed to a collectivist system in which you have a false commitment to others that is effectively forced upon people instead of being more freely adopted.

RV: Yes, that is right.

RM: I am wondering as we talk about collectives and how we come to identify them and see them as equal to ourselves how much the fundamental nature of the nation state becomes a problem as we look at the global situation at the moment. As you know we rank nations in terms of relative amounts of happiness and no doubt some can come to view this as a competitive thing – our nation has slipped from number 3 to 5, how can we rise above others, etc. Involved in that is a constant tendency to always look ahead at the pack and not attend to those who are less happy. I wonder then how much notions of Gross National Happiness, the collective happiness of single nation, are constructive in aiding us coming together

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as a responsible global society who inclusively think of the happiness of the least advanced and not only the most advanced. Does the emphasis on national happiness tend to constrain or facilitate the search for a more extensive human happiness?

RV: It can work in one of two ways. One way is to see that there is always a leader, which at the moment is Denmark - followed very closely by Switzerland as measured in happy life years. They are happier than we are in Holland so they must be doing something better. Maybe, what has been successful in Denmark might be successful in the Netherlands. So, I think comparisons can work in this way. But I also think that if you look at the bottom, at a country like Zimbabwe, you find significantly fewer happy life years and we can begin to understand the differences by looking at what is missing, maybe schooling, health and identify what might help. People are used to pictures of starving children, but even in the poorest countries there is increasing attention to quality of life. In Tanzania, you can read about it in the newspapers for example, along with questions of what makes a good society. In a place like Zimbabwe, which is a failed state, there is nothing we can do about happiness levels. If the problem were hunger or an epidemic or a natural disaster we could do something about it but in this case we cannot.

RM: In the teaching I do, whenever we look at issues that are problematic in the world, when we look at hunger for example and realise that there are several dozen nations with around a third of children malnourished, people often show a good deal of resistance in terms of acknowledging it. But given you are in a classroom situation and there is academic control over certain outcomes that are of value to them, you can get people to address those issues. But I know that in broader society for a significant sector, the reaction to such issues is often one of avoidance. In part, this is because it makes us unhappy to recognise the misery that others exist in. So, I wonder how much of our contemporary happiness is a

function of systematically avoiding some of the grand inequalities and problems we are currently facing.

RV: I am not sure that it affects our happiness very much. It is like we are talking about with the meaning of life where some of these thinking things do not really impact us very much. My response would be that I don't think people buy happiness by denial, they may avoid some discomfort but I don't think that acknowledgement will really deprive them of happiness.

RM: When I look at the types of inefficiencies involved in producing happiness, I feel that perhaps we should be a little less happy with the way the world is at the moment in order to feel the need to change it.

RV: But you can be happy with your own life while also acknowledging that life is not perfect. I think we can look at, say the young radicals of the 1960s - many people saw them as being depressed, having Freudian problems and so forth but investigations of their mental health showed they were basically happy but open to the problems of the world. So, these things can apparently go together. On a bigger scale you see it in contemporary society where many people are happy but feel that things in general are not going so well.

RM: Yes indeed. Do you think there is enough being done to flesh out these dimensions of happiness – say to differentiate between the individual's satisfaction with their own life and their levels of happiness about where the world is going or how the environment is doing?

RV: We can look at these as separate pieces of information. How well your life is going is how well you feel. That is not the case with satisfaction with income because income satisfaction is typically based on social comparison. How do we feel about the happiness of society at large? -well the further others are from our lives the more we depends on

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mediated information. Typically we are informed about the state of the world by the media, by politicians through the media or by social science. Here bad news tends to be good news and good news is no news. So, we have a great deal of information on what is wrong in society. This may be good in the sense that we become very problem focused and so, there is constant reform and change. But it may also mean that though we are improving as society, people continue to think of themselves as bad.

People know how happy they are as they can infer this from their own feelings, but they don't know how happy you are or how happy anybody else is. So it starts to be based on hearsay.

RM: In terms of politicians and their responsibilities, one of the critical aspects of GNH as you know is good governance. What do you think the most important things that politicians could do in terms of specific policies if they genuinely wanted to increase the happiness of nations?

RV: I think it is a very difficult task. The change to modernisation has been problematic in most societies including our own. So you could say that is almost impossible to develop without problems. I hope that in Bhutan, they do it gradually. Essentially I see the mantra of Gross National Happiness as a good way to avoid debt. Bhutan can change but it does not have to be too much. In the end, I believe that people live better in modern societies than in agrarian societies like Bhutan-especially where health outcomes are concerned. During our evolution we spent 95% of our time as hunter-gatherers. Hunter-gatherer societies produce about thirty happy life years but in agrarian societies people live longer and are healthier. And in industrial societies there are not only more life years, but also more happy life years. So, Bhutan is still the type of society that is not at its happiest but moving towards a more modern society. In one or two generations, it will have all the fruits of modern society.

RM: And no doubt many of its frustrations. In concluding this, I wonder if I could ask you whether you see the present focus on happiness, as opposed to simple economic growth, as a significant step forward in our evolution or progress.

RV: Yes, at least for our species. I do not know what your feelings are about other organisms, but when I take into account the next generation of humans, an increasing attention to happiness is a positive thing.

Dasho Karma Ura

RM: There has been a great deal of interest in Gross National Happiness as a philosophy that fundamentally challenges the economic fixations and material-mindedness of current development approaches. I wonder if we could begin by exploring what the notion of happiness actually means in a Buddhist culture. In part, this is because I have the sense that happiness in a Western understanding is reduced to a simple emotion – one of feeling good. But in a Buddhist sense and a Bhutanese sense, particularly relating to GNH, the notion seems deeper and more involved.

DKU: I think that happiness has both a non-self-transcendent quality and a self-transcendent quality and the latter has much to do with the good feeling that flows from fulfilling your social and sociological needs. Material goods are tremendously important to fulfil physical and physiological needs. We live in a world where in every society, there is a portion that is struggling with these material aspects of life, so we cannot deny them that. But economic growth which largely deals with material production also includes intangible, non-material things. Production of services, knowledge and human resources are examples of those important non-material things. What we know now tentatively is that in any given society, economic growth does not necessarily increase self-reported happiness over time. Using certain methodologies, we know that happiness does not simply increase with income. There is no pre-ordained condition that says you cannot increase happiness in this way, but if we look back historically we can see that it has not done so and we should ask ourselves why not? Could we use those goods in a better way? Could we design a qualitatively

different kind of growth? There is nothing inherently that says that material goods cannot give you more happiness, but we can certainly make the economy work much better. At the physical level, we have climate change, so we clearly cannot continue to produce the same things we produce now in the same way or at the same rate. We cannot do it given the physical limitations of the earth, including its atmosphere to absorb harmful gases. There are problems backfiring against our attempts to satisfy our needs in this same way. But we can produce at a lesser level. We can reduce the size of global economy but to do that, we have to improve the distribution of those goods in a drastic way. So, a very radical idea of sharing is needed.

When we look at the satisfaction of social needs - that part does increase your self-reported happiness and it might not necessarily be linked to any material exchanges or transactions. Just as this conversation is not based on any material exchange, so the social nature of man means that you can make a person much happier and more secure by just being socially available to them at certain moments of need or crisis. If we can learn to share, I think we will be driven much less in an economic direction. Therefore, restoring the importance of social relationship to a much higher position may substitute for a lesser amount of material consumption and the desire for higher incomes.

RM: Well, certainly when you look at the Western psychological literature you find that if there is one overwhelming factor associated with self-reported happiness, it is being embedded in a community and a set of intimate social relationships. A number of people have referred to this as a 'moral net'. As you observe, the opening up of Bhutan to globalisation and its economic processes, do you sense a diminishing of the strength of the types of social networks you were talking about and the commitment the average person seems to have towards maintaining healthy family, community and social relationships?

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DKU: It is difficult to know because no precise measurement of this phenomenon has been undertaken at any two points in time, but there are trends that might be indicative like migration and urbanisation. There is likely to be a reduction in people's free time as we move towards more work and away from socialisation and leisure. But we can only make inferences. We know from demographic surveys that in some areas of Bhutan, especially in the vulnerable rural areas, there are fewer men than women and fewer young people compared with older people. The families living there look older and more feminised. This type of change may unleash a different type of living pattern in these areas. And on the other side, in the urban areas, many of the young men working there may have less opportunity for a social and cultural life in the urban settings. Urban life does not have the same rituals and obvious shared interests as the rural areas do with their long traditions. So, certainly there may be significant negative impacts on happiness in this movement of people from villages to towns. And we have not created, comparatively speaking, better urban area so far. Urban areas have all the tendencies of urban areas elsewhere, but masquerading as better places. That pretension reflected in media creates a second round of popular misperception.

Work done outside Bhutan would suggest that the sense of belonging and trust in relationships are important to happiness and at face value, you might be led to think that these things are lower in urban areas because life there is more atomistic. Urban people may not seem to have so many common interests but of course urban people have many issues in common by virtue of living together in urban areas. But social organisation is such that they do not come together to act in concert. The market mediates between them rather than direct cultural and social relationships. Migration and the corresponding deprivation of populations in the villages and the lack of social and cultural opportunities for youth may indicate a loss of collective spirit and energy. In the new urban areas, people are coming together only

physically and not in other ways and this would suggest a lowering in certain aspects of happiness.

RM: I have been interested being here and listening to those who are keen to employ standardised measures of happiness and to do so as fast as possible. I wonder about the extent to which the introduction of arithmetical, quantitative measurements can actually represent a diminishing of an existing cultural perception of what appropriate progress and development entails. It seems to me for example, that Buddhist understandings of the world are very precise in identifying the roots causes of suffering, the essential modes of happy living and so forth, and I wonder if there is a conflict between these essential, intuitive, experiential understandings of what happiness means and a Westernised objective, standardised system of measurement. Is there a danger that in employing these too centrally you might move away from traditional Buddhist interpretations as an authoritative source of perspective?

DKU: No. I think we have to align our indicators and our traditional understandings of existence. We have to align them so that the worry that you raise does not happen. Any indicators must be built in the context of a Buddhist way of life and be sympathetic to Bhutanese aspirations. But finding out whether aggregating individual preferences to know what is Bhutanese aspirations is itself a methodological problem. First, one must be able to imagine the society you would like to have. This is the pre-requisite for the development of any indicators. If you do not do this, you will end up reinforcing the present predicament in another guise. GNH then is about imagining the future and the course of appropriate development and then taking the path to that imagined future. So, GNH is not really an arithmetical exercise, derived from indicators, it is about developing a vision that is in concert with all the deeply thinking members of society. If the future we want is somewhere different from where the present path is going to take us, then we need to have many

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instruments to navigate wisely. But all of these indicators are only short-distance navigation tools. The tools have to be agreed to for common use by the society. This means you have to persuade people to agree that the tools are appropriate and then, they can help deliver us to our destination. That is the function of indicators I think.

But as you know most indicators that are currently available either deal with basic human development – income, health, longevity, education, basic literacy etc – or they deal with economic development – like measures of GDP. These latter ones come from a time when material production was considered essential to our conception of the future. To produce was important and to measure annual production baselines was correspondingly important. But these are incomplete measures. We have the HPI (the Happy Planet Index) which takes into account the levels of self reported happiness and combines it with income. It is heavily weighted by ecological footprint, so it is a partial measure of sustainable development. But there is a need for a deeper assessment of development that directly gives much greater space to happiness defined in a broader way. All other indicators tend to be inadequate from the point of view of happiness. Eventually I think that maybe all nations will converge on three sets of central indicators. First, one set of indicators for economy and its various aspects—consumption, distribution, and conversion rate from natural resource etc.; the second set of indicators for happiness and well being, and third one, indicating our ethics which can bring all these elements together. We have to weigh both consumption and happiness in the light of ethics.

As a criterion for society, the amount of happiness is a good first step indicator because if the prevalence of happiness is high it generally means that something is going right. But we know that happiness is only one of the important ends humanity seeks - one that has been largely ignored - but it is certainly not the only one. There are other ends, chief among

them being a sense of justice or ethics. So, we have to achieve happiness in a fair way and with balanced consumption and to find the best way forward, we will have to scope both of these things within an ethical framework. Of course, it would be very good to have an indicator that would measure all of these things. It would be good to have indicators which do not treat the progress of society separately on a consumption dimension, a happiness dimension and an ethical dimension. When you see a society that is happy but it is tending towards unethical actions or an individual finding happiness but in a very unethical manner, there ought to be some sort of an adjustment downward in the hedonic value of that happiness. I think we will finally come to that understanding but in the meantime, positive change must include happiness as one of our key criteria. Unfortunately, there are not many governments looking at these issues with much urgency today. There are teachers and psychologists doing so, but happiness should be at the centre of public policy decisions and policy-makers should be much more keenly engaged with it. But the allocation of funding for building up such criteria as against the annual production of national account statistics is very lop-sided. This in itself demonstrates that our understanding of these issues is not nearly deep enough.

RM: In a curious way, although we do not in developed countries as yet assess happiness, let alone ethics in useful ways, the whole philosophical structure of the market is premised upon its being directed towards these outcomes. Utilitarianism provides the basis for believing that a growing economy is always just because it promotes more free expression and choice - which for rational pleasure-seeking individuals, is the basis for happiness. But in-built in that is a tendency to see happiness as pleasure and indeed it is defined as that in utility theory. It is most heartening to hear your qualifications that it has to be taken in the context of its inter-relationship with other dimensions and it seems to suggest that the real challenge GNH poses for the rest of the world is fundamentally an ethical one – one that challenges our immaturity and failure to develop the moral maturity that

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could genuinely spread happiness. As GNH moves beyond the boundaries of Bhutan and beyond the cultural boundaries of Buddhism, do you think that the underlying ethical challenge is sufficiently understood in those countries that still adhere to a narrow pleasure-based definition of what happiness involves?

DKU: I think pleasure felt as a response to some external stimuli - hedonic pleasure in other words - can come from both right and wrong sources. Even the Utilitarians distinguished these, and this reflects the fact that there is not only a hedonic form of happiness but also a reflective and transcendent happiness. This kind of happiness has to be cultivated much more and be concerned with things beyond the stimulus and response mechanisms of pleasure and the level of sensory input. Some reflection is already re-entering in the realm of culture and institutions because some things that are regarded as sources of pleasure in one society seem not to generate pleasure in other ones. One of the aspects involved here is the need to cultivate reflection so that we can properly evaluate the source of sensory inputs and then formulate proper responses in the realm of pleasure to displeasure. You can cultivate this, but at the moment happiness is quite mechanically based in simple stimulus-response relationships and there is little reflection. That for instance is the advertising method of producing pleasure. It is purely mechanical. But at the other extreme you also have the fact that you can achieve happiness and its physiological correlates without such external inputs and that is obtained through a technique of contemplation or meditation. There is nothing religious about this technique. Lastly, there is also an association made in Buddhism between happiness and a self-transcendent compassion. All ethical acts of compassion, although they may cause immediate suffering on the part of the compassionate person, on reflection are felt as tremendous sources of joy, energy, equanimity and so forth. Again then, we need to train in these reflective ways to experience full happiness.

But these are remote issues at the moment. They will become relevant once public policies begin to pay serious attention to happiness. At the moment it all still seems strange and remote. Once public policy and public discourse see happiness in the light of negative and positive ethical values, many things governments do become open to change. In the course of time, these changes may affect many ways by which we make decisions. The laws we pass will be affected, the social sciences will have to change, cost-benefit analysis will change, rates of return calculation will change, management principles will change, human resource development will change too. As the importance of happiness grows, it may have a very profound impact just as national accounting gradually had a pervasive effect on the methods and procedures for developing and costing economic factors.

As regards applying Buddhist ethics to the 21st century Bhutan, not only abroad, it is considered laughable in many quarters. The social and cultural context, they argue, are different from the period between 2500 to 800 years ago when Buddhism was at its height. The Western thinkers, who have influenced us all, believe in the idea of linear progress, with minor interruptions. On the whole, there is a belief in perpetual change driving innovations and innovations driving change - indeed the process constantly produces new needs instead of limiting their needs. There may be linear scientific progress but there is hardly such a thing in terms of ethics. History does not show any irreversible upward shift in practice of ethics over time between one generation and the next. It does not show practice of virtue improving secularly. The Western thinkers also believed that the progress was related to the pursuing reason and objective knowledge.

Buddhism on the other hand does not seem to view that the march of time brings progress in an inexorable way. It can go either up or down depending on causality and responsibility we generate. How it defines progress is as an inward journey towards realization of the true nature of mind. Objective

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knowledge and belief in scientific proof are not the main routes towards knowledge of the true nature of mind. The mind itself has to observe its working. Introspection is the main tool. In brief, the purpose is to relieve ourselves of all the encrusting obfuscations, and clarify ourselves intellectually through analysis and through meditation and other practice so much that the ethical nature present in us can be found. Now, there is slow and rapid techniques depending on the different paths. The progress Buddhism conceived was discovery of the ethical nature of the mind, or consciousness. The concept of progress was ethical progress. It was not utopian, it was possible, through various techniques of introspection and awareness.

RM: I was thinking while you were talking of an interview I heard on the radio where someone was talking to a representative from the Vatican. They were talking about Mother Theresa's fast-track towards sainthood and the representative was asked why she was being advanced so quickly. His answer was interesting because he said that it was, of course, in part because of her works with the poor and her great compassion. But he added the main thing was that she found joy in her sacrifices. So it fits with what you have just been saying. Some remarkable people can combine happiness with compassion and generosity spontaneously, but for the majority of people I think it requires a supportive culture that can help guide us by pointing to a destination and sets of practices that allow us to avoid becoming stuck in unreflective dead-ends. Do you see Bhutanese culture as being a central, if not the central aspect of facilitating GNH and moving it towards its potential?

DKU: I don't see people as being engrossed in selfishness in a conscious way but the structural environment is such that we get enfolded within our own existence as the avenues of wider engagement and the opportunities for participation with others get closed. That happens socially and structurally and not necessarily by individual choice. People tend to

emphasise autonomy, but one is always part of a structural environment and that influences how far you can go with the idea of autonomy. We can underline independent thought but even by the time we are born we are already part of a certain community, a particular history, religion and economy. Culture may be important for a place like Bhutan as a late comer to globalisation, but there are more similarities than dissimilarities among the peoples of the world. We Bhutanese have embraced democracy; we have embraced markets and technology so we live now in a heterogeneous culture, a living crucible where many influences are coming together. This is not like the isolated culture it was in the past. There are few places like that in the world now. So, we cannot convey GNH on the platform of its cultural correlates with happiness alone. In fact, GNH has to be neutral to culture. I think that culture, like religion, should be playing a supporting role in the understanding and communication of GNH and that the universals that are important to all people in the world should be underlined and made more prominent. So, GNH may have grown in the context of Bhutanese culture but now it has to transcend it. If GNH is nectar, then it must now be drunk from many cups and not just a Bhutanese cup.

RM: Bhutan is moving towards democracy as the fourth King largely abdicates much of the power the position formerly involved. Do you see this as posing significant new challenges for the way GNH is explained and translated into policy? Is the move to democracy more of a threat or more of a facilitator in achieving national happiness?

DKU: Personally, I do not see any threat because the extent to which GNH is undertaken depends on the people of Bhutan as well as our public officials. These will be the same people under democracy as they are now under the current dispensation. However, our direction can be influenced by the representatives of public voice because this voice will be made much more pronounced under democracy. There is the possibility that at a certain stage people may demand a lot

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more goods in the hope that these are going to contribute to their happiness. This is a classic mistake – the fantasy of goods delivering your happiness. Democracy can sometimes bring this tendency much more upfront and a new middle class is generally aligned with more materialistic values. We tend to call them democratic values but they are really materialistic values. So, democracy may unleash these latent desires and all we can do is confront this in an enlightened way. His Majesty the King has given people more power in the hope that the citizens of Bhutan will use it wisely and remain enlightened. This is His hope and it is our dream too. So, if GNH is debated constantly, if it is used as a lens through which we can look at the world, we will be empowered. Its influence will spread in schools, in public life, and through prolonged public discussion and constant reiteration our understanding will develop. Every time we discuss it, we progress. If we dream of the right things, I believe the culture of happiness can be maintained. But this requires so much self-restraint as once we have achieved an adequate level of material comfort, we have to decide collectively how much more we need and what is the right amount to live. This is always historically and culturally contingent. I hope that Bhutanese people will have the courage and wisdom to decide this ethically because then we will be at our happiest and there will be less need to apply unreasonable rules. At the global level, there are a lot of rules that must now be necessarily made and they must be enforced because as we know, although we live in the same world and drink the same water and breathe the same air, we deny the collectivity of life. It is important that we move to embrace a willing ethical change and a global compassion. For now, there is this false conception that one nation can be secure while the rest go down and that is a very dangerous conception.

Dr Nic Marks

RM: You have been working with the New Economics Foundation, a group well known for their work on issues of social justice and sustainability and increasingly on developing new measures of collective wellbeing. Part of this work has seen the development of the Happy Planet Index which has received a lot of attention of late. I wonder if we could begin by exploring exactly what the Happy Planet Index is and what its purpose might be.

NM: The Happy Planet Index is an indicator that tries to differentiate between what the ultimate outcomes of societies are and their fundamental inputs. When we think about lots of indicators, they represent a means to an end but what is the end that we are trying to get to? If we go all the way back, say to Aristotle, the concept of happiness has been thought of as an end – people don't want to be happy for another purpose, so that they can be wealthy or educated or attract a mate. Happiness is something that we want for its own sake. Aristotle talks in terms of telos - that ultimate aim or purpose - and well being or happiness fits that idea. So it is good to look at how well societies do at producing long and happy lives. But there is another issue here and that is how much of the planets resources they use to produce that happiness. The idea of a Happy Planet Index was to link together this increasing global interest in the concepts of wellbeing and happiness, with the understanding that we do only have one planet and there over 6 billion of us here and we have to share these increasingly scarce resources around. What the HPI does then is it looks across nations at the average levels of life satisfaction in a country (and this is the most globally available indicator of happiness), length of life because people

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want to live the full span of human life if possible and divides these by people's ecological footprint. So, the idea is really to create an efficiency measure, one that shows how efficient we are at converting the planet's resources into wellbeing and happiness. It is like a measure of miles per kilometre, or how much bang you get for your buck. Ultimately, that is what the Happy Planet Index is trying to do.

RM: Overall what have been your major conclusions after constructing the Index? What did they reveal?

NM: I think a major finding was what quite a lot of us in so-called developed countries already feel, and that is that we are becoming less efficient in producing happiness. That is, we are using more and more resources for very marginal gains in wellbeing. We are over-developing, in contrast to for instance the Thai concept of the sufficiency economy which is where we use neither too little nor too much. If we look at all the things we have in the West that we don't need, it is a terrible thing. And I think lots of parents feel this when they look at all the toys their children have that they do not need. When I was young we played with only a few toys and played with them a lot. But now kids have masses but they don't have the time to play with them. And if you scale that up a hundred-fold it includes mobile phones, I-Pods, televisions etc. How many televisions do we need? If your current television works then why do you need a bigger, flat-screen one? Why drive newer, larger four wheel drives in the city when you only really need a little smart car. So, we have huge over-consumption and it is a problem in two ways. In one way, it is always easy to show that there is just too much pressure on the planet and that this pressure on our basic resources is simply not sustainable. Strictly in terms of throughput, most products in the economy are simply waste-in-waiting, just waiting to be thrown away. We may get some of what economists call 'utility' in using them along the way, but sometimes we do not. In the UK, something like 20% of food is thrown away before it is eaten. It gets grown, shipped

around the place, it gets frozen, packaged, put in the shops' fridges, in our own fridges. We go and park in the supermarket car-park, drive all this food home and leave it there till it passes the sell-by-date. Then we throw it in the bin. If not even a tasty meal comes out at the end of all of that, it is so unbelievably wasteful. About 30% of our footprint is about food systems, so it is a massive area that we are over-consuming in. But the point really is not only that it is not good for the environment - obviously, but I also feel that it is also not good for our true feelings of wellbeing and happiness.

The recent research on happiness from the Western positive psychology movement is now trying to redress the imbalance of the past where there was much attention on disease and distress and not very much on understanding human flourishing. Now there is interesting and good research looking at positive outcomes like happiness, meaning and so on. And one of the most important things to come out of this is that it is not the material things that make you happy, it is your relationships that are primary in bringing happiness and well being. You can buy something new and it might give you some pleasure when you get it but often that soon wears off. You buy the new car thinking its fantastic, but you quickly realise you are still stuck in the same old traffic jam, going to the same old job so it is not really bringing you that much extra benefit. What we are finding is that having materialist values means chasing what psychologists call 'extrinsic rewards' - that is, things that bring you status, so you are chasing after something from the outside that other people will respect you more for having. The ways in which we chase approval and status in the west in particular, revolve around our material goods and our relative position - keeping up with the Joneses, or even out-trumping the Joneses. Or another way we do it is to compete on the basis of our physical looks. Today we have a younger generation growing up with very poor body images because they do not feel they live up to the impossible standards of models and pop stars. Their self-esteem is hit by the fact that they cannot look like them. Or

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they try and starve themselves so they can sort of look like them. Chasing such an external identity is hollow and is never going to be intrinsically rewarding.

Deeper happiness involves living in such a way that you get deep satisfaction, from living in ways that meet your own passions and interests and meet your own values. You set the agenda yourself, if you like. So, instead of playing society's game, you set the agenda yourself. Consumption then is definitely bad for the environment and probably bad for wellbeing. And this means that this over-consumption that we really have in the West should be seen as a regression instead of a progression of human society.

RM: It is a very interesting way of putting it in terms of regression because it seems that in a sense, this movement towards gaining a sense of self-worth through the reactions of others is in many ways characteristic of a psychological immaturity. It is almost as if in our tendency not to look to the long-term, and in our self-absorbed individualism, we have failed to move beyond our limitations as Western cultures. But I think that wanting to impress on the basis of superficial things like fashion and cars is only the tip of the iceberg in that it is only one visible part of a more deeply problematic social structure. Do you think that alternative indicators like the HPI and the new evidence they bring to the table, can help challenge our collective immaturity and push back some of the forces that tend to keep us immature in our political, social and economic structures?

NM: Yes, well that is quite an interesting and profound question. I think that indicators do have a role to play in the maturation process that you are talking about there. Any maturing process requires reflection and one of the things that I have done in my life is to train and work as a psychotherapist and the models and ideas from doing that have certainly influenced my strategies around what indicators can do. If you look at the research on what makes

a good therapist, a good therapist is one who listens to his client and reflects back to the client what they are feeling and then asks appropriately challenging questions. So, I think indicators can play a similar role in that they listen to a population if the questionnaires and surveys are constructed in a good way. They allow us to basically hear the views of people. Then by communicating the results of these they are basically reflecting back so that people and societies can suddenly see themselves afresh, anew, in a different way. Then we can move a step further to look at how we address the challenges we face and I think that is a maturing process.

I have become very struck in my work over the past four or five years of creating well being questionnaires that people really enjoy filling them out. They genuinely enjoy being asked questions that they are not usually asked. Usually, if you are given a questionnaire, it is a marketing one or a health screening questionnaire or something like that. Not many people ask you questions about whether you feel your life is worthwhile and useful, or whether you are optimistic, or how resilient you feel and these are important concepts. People really value being asked to reflect like that. And with information technology these days, you can design questionnaires that give people real time feedback if they fill it out on the web. People can not only enjoy it but they can stop and think about their life. We are not a very reflective culture and it is a big difference when you come to Buddhist countries like Thailand or Bhutan where people are allowed to be more reflective and in a way that you do not often see in the West. So, we design these indicators to give people instant feedback and I think people enjoy filling them out because it provides a mirror that can allow them to look at their lives in a different way and see a bit more clearly that maybe their life-work balance isn't really in balance, or that they are in too much of a rush, or that they might have a bit more choice around those things than they realise. So, I think we can begin in a very direct way to touch people's lives and have them look at why they are living the lives they are and whether this is really making them happy.

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So, it is about asking these really quite simple questions of do I have a choice to do things differently. Obviously, we often find that our choices are really quite constrained and we cannot be too romantic and think that people are free to choose exactly how they want to live. But at the margins, people can definitely choose to invest their discretionary time in different ways. I can work harder and earn more money to buy that flat screen TV or pay back the debt on the one that I have already got, or I can have a little bit less money and more time to spend with my family, my children and my friends. I could possibly take up a hobby, something I've been meaning to do for years. I could go and join in that community project I have never got time for. So, I think that is one way that indicators can actually influence people.

Then there is the question of how indicators interact with the policy cycle and how much we think we can develop indicators that can inform policy debate. I work in a UK context and we are certainly seeing a lot of experimentation with that. We work with several local government authorities and we work for three different government departments – the Department of the Environment where we work on sustainability and wellbeing, the Audit Commission who evaluate government departments and we are part of a long term project with the Office of Science and Technology on what the scenarios are around wellbeing and how it will play out over the next 30-40 years in the UK. So there is a lot of interest there. And what they really seem to be looking for at the moment are contextual indicators, ones that can explain some of the differences between different groups of people and what they think around wellbeing, I think there is a nervousness though about wellbeing indicators becoming what are currently termed KPIs, key performance indicators and around any idea that government somehow must make the population happier. Some are nervous about these and I think quite rightly so for a couple of reasons. First, is it directly the role of government to make people happier? And, secondly, I think subjective indicators are useless for performance targets until we see how they operate at the real

sharp end of policy. Can we actually produce some of these indicators? How are they going to perform? What are the best ways of doing it? I personally think we will be able to do these things but I totally understand that we have to prove it. We have to do action research around developing questionnaires, getting local authorities to use them and talk with the policy makers in those local authorities about whether that is a useful process for them. Has it informed their policy decisions, and changed the way they spend their money? I think often we talk so much about spending more in certain areas when it might in fact be more an issue of how policy is being delivered that is important. So, how can we best deliver education? The use of wellbeing indicators leads this to be much more child-focused in the schools. It is more about developing curiosity that bunging them full of knowledge. So it can be quite a subtle change and not necessarily one costing more money. We can design housing differently to facilitate people meeting other people in a casual way. They can get to know their neighbours more easily which is difficult in say tower block living, where you come straight upstairs and shut your door behind you. Living like this means you are not going to meet your neighbours. But if we design spaces in the round, so that people have to move around them and have social spaces where people gather naturally, it works better. The kids want to play there and the older people to sit out there. And particularly when the motor car is taken out. Where children used to play out in the street they are now inside, often watching television or playing computer games while outside, drivers in their private tanks think they own the road and have an attitude of 'get out of my way child'. It would be much better for kids' wellbeing if they could get out there and muck around a bit more.

RM: I am interested in a couple of things you said there. If you look at much of the focus of work on wellbeing it seems to be primarily about creating the environment within which wellbeing can thrive. Many people are sceptical about government's right to try to make people happy but to put it in the context of creating an environment within which people

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can create their own happiness makes it fit clearly with the Bhutanese perspective. Do you think there is a tendency at the policy level to demand simple and quick answers to creating wellbeing that might undermine some of its deeper potential? I mean, for example, in terms of looking for overly simple outcomes, such as a single happiness measure, and in the process losing a more complex view of what is important and valuable? Do you find this sort of process in action as you engage with policy makers or do you find an openness to the fact that it is a multi-dimensional issue and that happiness and wellbeing involves the coming together of a variety of situational factors within which individual happiness can thrive?

NM: At a local government level, policy-makers are used to having to deal with a variety of social indicators. In the UK, local government is assessed against a list of about 200 KPIs and quite a lot of these are about social inclusion, participation and so forth. But they are very poor on more personal wellbeing, whether they are building peoples' resilience and those sorts of things. In the UK certainly there are a lot of process indicators relating to the percentages of people involved in this or that, or the ethnic breakdowns of these but they are acutely aware that they need to move to more specific outcome indicators that are of more significance to people. I feel fairly encouraged in a local government context. I think that is very different in a national government context where, again, they have a multiplicity of targets but they have quite a top down view that they have to somehow solve the problem. Local governments are used to dealing with the grey areas and the difficulties involved in only being able to do so much, but sometimes central government want clearer and simpler answers. In the political realm, they are far more interested in having one number. But I am quite comfortable with producing indices which are composite and bring things together. The Happy Planet Index is a single number. If you are playing the game of producing one number, you have to be acutely aware that it cannot catch everything in it. You have to be transparent and explain why

you brought certain things together and you have to deal with the issue of trade-offs. This is in fact the nice thing about indicators – you have to start having those debates about how much of this compared with how much of that do we really want? These are the real policy questions of how much we invest in health, education, leisure and so on. If composite indicators are to be worth anything, the structure must contain those tensions and look at how much wellbeing we get from our resources. We already do that in the sense that GDP is a composite indicator and it has the assumption that any transaction is good and that the measure of value is what people are willing to pay. But there is no concept at all as to what the other outcomes are.

RM: Although there does seem to be a real movement internationally towards the inclusion of broader aspects of our wellbeing, for a long time we have laboured under this purified ideological notion that the bigger the market is, the more satisfaction it represents and therefore that GDP has to be an indicator our happiness. There are many towns, provinces, states and nations beginning to seriously look at broadening the scope of their evaluation of progress as you well know. I am wondering if you think that this momentum has to do with the unfolding environmental situation and our increasing appreciation of this. There are many voices now being raised about the lack of fit between ever-growing consumption and the health of the planet and the radical changes we need to make in the short term if we are to avoid severe disruption. As these pressures enter our consciousness, does it suggest to you an easier transition towards more inclusive thinking, or do you think that it might drive us in the opposite direction to becoming more individualistic, more competitive and even more oblivious to the big picture?

NM: I think how one view the future unfolding is, in part, a personal choice depending on what one chooses to place emphasis on. There are different strategies and I will just say

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what I think my strategy is. My true answer is that I don't really know how the future will unfold. I think we can see some trends but I don't believe we live in a totally linear system. But now we have almost weekly reports of looming environmental challenges and some of them are quite apocalyptic in their presentation. So, now most people are very aware that we have to face some serious issues. In Britain we experienced very serious flooding in late June 2007 when we had a month's rainfall in four hours. This is like monsoon rain - torrential. Small streams rose five feet in an afternoon. It worried people a lot and we can see that coming through in surveys. A good recent survey asked people across Europe what they think about the future and whether they are worried about it and twice as many people are worried about the future than are not. That is a massive number of people across Europe who are seriously concerned. Now that could be seen as a bad thing or a good thing. Quite often when we have threats as you say, we retreat into our shells and into immaturity. But if we want people to go towards a more positive future, then we need to offer them approach goals and not only avoidance goals. We have to offer them a vision of the future that would be better. And I think this is the big role that Gross National Happiness can play. We have not only seen images of increasing environmental costs but see these alongside scenes of social disintegration. So, if we can offer a future that has higher levels of social well being - community happiness as its called in Thailand, and show how the social milieu can be so much more functional, I think it could be an appealing future for people. Local relationships are good for community wellbeing and local food production and energy systems are good for the environment, so we need to create a new vision based on localism - which does not mean small-mindedness.

Most of us feel rushed off our feet and if we could only have the time to enjoy the fruits of our prosperity rather than rushing around indebted and chasing security, I think it would be an attractive future. So, I think there is an opportunity in that a fear of the future can really shake the

system up. Now whether there will be a smooth transition, I don't know. The Berlin wall came down fairly quickly following a change of mind. Obviously there were serious transition problems after that but I think that the weakness of the materialistic, consumer society is its hollowness. If people begin to see the hollowness for what it is and begin demanding a more deeply satisfying life, I think we could see a shift happening quite quickly. Unfortunately we will almost certainly have more environmental catastrophes and where they are experienced will matter. If more hit the wealthy world there might be a quicker shift, but if it is in the poorer parts, the need for change will no doubt be shut out. With peak oil, we reach a situation where prices rise more and more as the situation becomes less and less secure. Who is going to control the most essential fuels? We have Russia holding the major gas fields, control of oil being largely in the Middle East and so there is likely to be considerable geo-political insecurity over our supplies of fuels. If Russia turned off the gas taps to Europe, a lot of people would face a very unhappy winter. So, local renewable energy can be much safer and more secure. Personally though, I am not in the game of frightening people. I think we should be in the game of inspiring people to change

RM: Reflecting upon a few of your previous comments I am thinking that part of the movement towards happiness and a more grounded wellbeing might require a temporary plunge into quite deep unhappiness with the way we are living our unsustainable lives at the moment. It is a psychological constant in all major theories of growth - that to move forward you first have to become dissatisfied with where you are at present. I wonder if there is a danger in emphasising happiness too much, particularly in the context of the privileged world where there may be a tendency to avoid the unhappiness of acknowledging where the big picture is going.

NM: I do understand your question. I think the Buddhist perspective would see that our view of happiness is quite

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shallow with our unawareness of the sufferings of life. There are challenging concepts over what is right thinking and so forth and I think it is a useful stretch to our work. But, obviously, there is the notion of no pain, no gain in Western culture and I think there is a trade-off that goes on between pleasure and meaning in life. You can show this statistically when you do detailed work on the dimensions of wellbeing. Broadly speaking there are two major dimensions. One is around emotions and pleasure, while the other is about engagement and meaning. The latter is about maturation and personal development. We can all recognise people who are perhaps more pleasure seeking and not so centred on their personal development. And we can also see people who are centred upon finding meaning and personal development but who really don't enjoy life. The people who can find a balance and have a good time but still engage with being considerate and reflective, these are the most mature. So, a full model of wellbeing looks at a much deeper and more textured approach to assessment. We do have to recognise the hollowness of our lifestyle if we want to change and so I am not afraid of pointing that out. I think most people are pretty aware of that actually and if you ask a few meaningful questions, it doesn't take long to get to it.

There are very few people who are so attached to our Western way as to see it as the only way. So, maybe, the 27% in Europe who don't worry about the future are too hard to reach, so let's worry about the 47% who are perhaps ready to change first. And that is a much higher figure than people usually talk about. We talk of 'early adopters' but I think we have quite a body ready to change. There is another 20 something percent who say they don't know whether they should be worried or not. So there is quite a considerable audience there and so perhaps we do not worry about the ones that are harder to change straight away. If they are holding vested interests then that is likely to be a problem and we will come up against structures of power and all sorts of resistance but, we will see.

Dr Helena Norberg-Hodge

RM: Helena you are well known for your work in many areas including the nature of culture change and the effects of economic globalisation on people's wellbeing and their communities' dynamics. As you look at Gross National Happiness as Bhutan's orienting philosophy, its primary organising principle if you like, do you think that happiness is an appropriate goal for a society to direct itself towards?

HNH: I think that it is definitely appropriate as long as it is done with a very honest and clear analysis that recognises that human wellbeing is inextricably linked to the wellbeing of the biosphere. So, I like to think that happiness can link human wellbeing with real sustainability and human equality.

RM: So, in that interpretation, happiness has to come in combination with a variety of other human outcomes such as sustainability and social justice?

HNH: I think you can say outcomes but they are also pre-requisites. Without health you are not likely to be happy and from my point of view, pure physical health is very affected by the toxic effluents that threaten the biosphere. So, sustainability and justice are also pre-requisites for happiness.

RM: In your writings you have connected problems of degraded ecology and injustice to the spread of monoculture. What do you mean by monoculture?

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HNH: What I mean by this is that we have a fairly widespread recognition that in agriculture, large scale monoculture, meaning the planting of only one crop – sometimes over many thousands of hectares – is inherently unsustainable. It is against the laws of nature. Ecosystems that have survived for hundreds of thousands of years have great diversity and involve a complex interdependence between large numbers of species. We are threatening this diversity and our own survival by imposing an unnatural agricultural monoculture and there is a growing recognition that this is a problem.

But there is another big problem in that we are actually imposing a human monoculture at the same time, one in which the same global media impose an identity on young children that literally standardises and stereotypes identity. It creates an artificial situation where children start basing their sense of self on a completely unnatural attempt to measure themselves up to role models they can never compete with and never really emulate without a sense of frustration and dissatisfaction. This is a major problem and I think that I and my organisation have done work to counter this, that is important but I have been disappointed by how difficult it has been to convey, particularly in the West. My book *Ancient Futures* deals with this and many, many non-Western people resonate with it and say this is our experience too. But the Western world and particularly the Anglo world, seems quite impervious to understanding what it might mean to lose your own culture and language for example. There is a real dearth of understanding.

Structurally, monoculture not only imposes an alien identity, but an instant ideal that is impossible to emulate. What I think is really important is that we understand how closely linked this is to fuelling self-rejection and even self-hatred, and how these are the best states for promoting consumerism. The message driven by the ideal is that if you want to find the respect and happiness that every person longs for, that fundamental sense of love and connection,

then you must have this, this and this. So, you have to consume to get the approval you want. But instead of doing this, consumerism leads to envy and separation. Children as young as 2 and 3 are being set down a path that fuels itself and becomes self-sustaining - self-sustaining in the sense that the same system that creates self-hatred then thrives on these feelings of lack to push useless gadgets and constantly changing fashions on people. Some would argue, of course, that we are greedy by nature, but I have said for the last twenty years that this makes us approach a very dangerous position where we lose the ability to really know what is our true nature and what is structured by culture. When one global culture imposes a system that internalises greed and lack and we see this as being our nature, we really are in a very difficult situation.

RM: And, of course, lying at the heart of our consumer culture is this whole notion of individualised rational choice – that the person is somehow separable from the world around them. It seems to me somewhat paradoxical though in the sense that in these times of globalisation, our interdependencies becomes greater and greater involving wider and wider networks of people in producing and transporting our goods for us, yet we still resist appreciating just how interdependent we are.

HNH: I don't see this as paradoxical, I see precisely the opposite, that we are losing our direct interdependence on one another and being made dependent on vast, remote bureaucracies, funds and systems that we do not see and don't have any access to. So, we are actually becoming more and more isolated from each other. Its part of a whole system that begins with education segregating children from their culture and it imposes artificial separations and false psychological processes on everyone. Young students coming out of universities now have huge debts, a situation that is very different from what it was 20 years ago. People are entering into employment markets that are more intensely

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competitive and into jobs that are often so specialised they are wholly lacking in meaning. We become integrated into giant financial systems where we don't have the satisfaction of seeing the whole process or the end-product and probably if we did, we would not approve of it. So, we have become caught in this vast system, one that is highly specialised and highly competitive. People have to work longer and longer hours while food prices, house prices and debt are skyrocketing. In terms of happiness, the combination is just a dead-end. So although of course, in the real world there is an interdependence where we are all personally dependent upon each other, the feeling that is created in monoculture is that we are not really dependent upon each other but upon these vast impersonal structures.

But even to say this shows only part of it because underlying it all at a very fundamental level is speculative finance. The central banks like the Federal Reserve, regulate the economy and manage it in such a way that the sure-fire winnings of billions and billions of dollars can be made to the detriment of all these little people who lose their jobs and pension funds, their homes or this and that. What we have is a system in which the majority will always suffer and continue in poverty. So really, we had better start regulating and managing things in a much better way.

RM: It is interesting though, isn't it, because in those situations where money and power are concentrated, there is a necessary disempowerment of the average person in terms of their ability to see how the larger system works to corner benefits. And it seems to me that the classical political arguments between the right and left wing have often been arguments between simplicity and complexity. I mean this in the sense that market liberalism can present itself in a mystifying language of simplified tables and uni-dimensional measures of growth. But to see the larger interconnections and interdependencies require a more complex viewpoint, one that is difficult to get across in the competitive arena of

sound-bite media. I think a more conscious and interconnected understanding is always going to find it difficult to overcome the more narrow-minded and short-sighted individualism that drives contemporary consumer capitalism. Do you see the media having a role to play in creating a positive shift towards a more considerate, happy and wise view of the world?

HNH: Well, first of all, I have filmed a fair amount and I think that should be possible. We have been trying for twenty-something years to raise awareness of the madness of global trade and to show that at the level of say the EU, a package of policies, subsidies, taxes and regulations puts pressure on every business to become larger and more global. In the media, the talk of importing and exporting industrial commodities is not of a complexity that could not be explained in a very simple and direct way. So, why is that not being done? I think that there is a widespread intuitive recognition, by journalists, that such material is not going to be published so they don't even go there. They don't need to say to themselves that what I am doing or not doing is helping to destroy the world or that it is highly immoral, or that it is not such a big issue. When you really look at what we are talking about it involves the whole neo-liberal military-industrial complex with its emphasis on greater and greater production, consumption and so on. In our commercial media other priorities just do not stand a chance. However, I do agree that in a sound-bite culture it is much more difficult to communicate complex ideas but I don't think this is the major problem. The major problem is the funding. I am fascinated by how it all works to keep alternative ideas out.

RM: Particularly at the moment when we look at the need to grapple with our declining environmental situation and the growth in population. The planet just does not have the capacity to support the types of trends we are engaging right now. But still with serious warning signals being fired across our bows, we seem almost paralysed, unable to move beyond

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that ultimately simple mantra the far right used to use, that there is no alternative. I think that this is where in a very important way, the Bhutanese emphasis on Gross National Happiness is helpful, in pointing to the lie in the claim that only one material interpretation of human progress is possible.

HNH: It is very valuable, particularly at this time. We were talking earlier about Richard Layard's idea that maybe reducing misery is more important than increasing happiness but I really worry that this might get in the way of a real discussion. This is because there is an assumption that economic growth always benefits the South - and not only the South. It is a big part of the major media. Yesterday, I was reading in the paper about Christmas time in France and they were interviewing adults about what they wanted for Christmas. Most of them were saying that they would really like fewer working hours, more time with their family, a slightly higher pension, slightly lower taxes. Then they interviewed the children in front of this giant shop with Santa out front. Children were all wanting material things, more toys, clothes, another Barbie when they already have three and so on. The way the story was put together was to show that if the economy keeps growing, and consumption keeps growing, people will be able to buy more and have higher pensions and lower taxes and more time off. These will all be produced together. That is a lie, but these things are placed together to suggest to us not only that we had better consume more to get a better life but that if we do not, everything will collapse. So, I think there are some real breaks here, and they are not even just breaks in logic, but real breaks in seeing what this economy is about.

RM: And a break in relating to our deeper identity I think as well. Not only does a narrow modern economics alienate us from the natural world and from our communities but also from our own natures in the sense of narrowing our approaches to finding happiness to a single axis of material

purchases. It has to be constraining in that sense. And one thing I find particularly intriguing is the rapidity and ease with which that global monoculture manages to dissolve and undo the bonds of traditional communities and their values - almost upon contact. You have written very beautifully and powerfully about this in the context of Ladakh. As you look at Bhutan, a country still separated from the outside world to a degree and with the future still in its own hands, what do you think are the most important steps the country can take to avoid the moral and cultural dissembling that monoculture usually brings?

HNH: Well, I think that some of the things that are happening at these meetings are vital because the most strategic first step at every level is for people to link up with like-minded individuals and groups. It is critical and I hope that the Bhutanese allow more NGO transfer between Bhutanese groups and outside ones. And I also very much welcome the connections being made with Thailand and Laos and other countries in S.E. Asia. I worked in Bhutan in the 1980s when it was quite isolated but I don't think it is possible to isolate any group today. It is certainly not possible to impose an isolation, but I have seen an interesting pattern in my work in Ladakh and I am sure you would find the same in Bhutan. That is, it is the people in the villages who feel most disenfranchised and feel most inferior to the West - more than those who have experienced a bit of the modern lifestyle or had some contact with Westerners. So I have found that in a way the best antidote to what is ultimately an imposed sense of inferiority relative to a supposedly 'superior' Western consumer culture is some personal connection to, and/or experience of the Westernised lifestyle. In India for instance, you find many people who moved many hundreds of miles to cities like Mumbai, ending up hankering after the community and land they left behind. I think we all need to be more intelligent about how to make these linkages.

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My hope is that we can develop what I call a breakaway strategy where countries can link up to collaborate not in the way of the usual trade blocs, not to compete with the EU or the US, but to scale up in order to allow small local business to survive. I think it is a very important strategy and one that Bhutan could learn from at every level. I believe that at the grassroots level, all businesses flourish best by going in the direction of far more community and ecological sustainability. In England for instance, close to where I live in the Totnes area, local farmers began selling food through box schemes. It was all local organic food with minimum packaging. But their success has led to huge growth and so now they cover half of the UK. That means having to put in things like imported peppers from Spain and so on. I don't blame the farmers, I don't blame anyone, but what I would argue is that there is no understanding on the part of the consumer that they have to collaborate to keep local farms and to encourage the proliferation of being small. This is in relative terms of course. Years ago there was an idea that smaller is always better but that's not always true, it is a balance.

But right now, you see businesses like Celestial Seasonings being bought up by Cargill and Seeds for Change being bought up by Mars, you know Mars Bars?, and there are so many other examples. So, I think that at the grassroots level as well as at the government level, we need to understand how it is in all of our interests to keep business local and distance relatively small, but I recognise that there is no absolute in all of this.

RM: There are interesting shifts taking place in this direction, in transition towns like Totnes for example, where local sustainability applies to both the immediate food system but also to the health of the community itself. And in the background of what we have been talking about are phenomenal rates of depression. You mentioned that in the UK last year, there were 31 million prescriptions for anti-depressants. It is a trend that is observable across the so

called developed world, as people slip into really feeling inferior, of feeling that they are deeply unhappy with their lives.

HNH: Yes, I understand. Recently we were in California, in Point Rey which is a beautiful place but there were two suicides within a week and in both cases pure economic insecurity was part of it. In consumer culture the choice is often between doing intense, specialised work for 10 hours a day or having nothing.

RM: Part of that is of course that great ball and chain that is attached to people in the modern commercial culture in the form of debt. From the IMF and the World Bank's lending to create indebtedness to the mortgages of the high street banks and credit card companies, these sectors have been growing rapidly over recent years. But debt limits our ability to move freely and it significantly dis-empowers people in terms of their practical ability to live differently. We might want to make a shift to support things at a local level, spend more time with the kids, or take a year off to learn a new trade but we cannot because we have to work to pay off student debts, credit-card debts, mortgage debts, and so on. It is like being caught on a treadmill. I think it builds up a real insecurity and fear. The trouble with this is that fear often tends people towards immaturity and more dependence. As we face growing difficulties in the realms of peak oil, changing climate, exponential population growth and so on, I wonder if these created states of dependence and inferiority won't reduce our chances of intelligently seeing what needs to be changed in the larger, more complex system. Our ability to adapt maturely is likely to be sorely tested particularly in food production

HNH: I would definitely say that all of these things are linked but I really think we need to realise that food is the most important issue - there is nothing else we produce that everybody needs everyday. We really need to understand this

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but I am amazed by the number of intelligent people who will say never mind about food, what about fibre? But if for the rest of your life, you were never to get another article of clothing, you would probably be fine. But without food it would only be a matter of a few weeks before we found ourselves dying, literally dying without food. The difference is huge. How food is produced and how it is delivered is very important. If these systems become unhealthy, we will not be ok.

RM: I wonder if the failure to appreciate the centrality of food is part of our broader disconnection from the basic processes that drive the world. This is going to become an issue very soon, and I mean in very practical terms. With the melting of the major glaciers here in the Himalayas for example, which is well underway, the food security of millions of people is threatened. All of the major rivers in the region from the Ganges to the Indus to the Yangtze get their irrigating summer flow from snowmelt in the dry season. If the snows continue to recede, and they will, it is going to have massive geo-political implications that will return us to the fundamentals very quickly.

HNH: Yes, but now we require an incredible amount of intelligence and care to ensure that we survive our future. And it is particularly important to act before fear engulfs us and before we blindly crash in the direction of mad solutions like ethanol, nuclear power and so on. It is essential that we understand the real problems - like the destructive idea of growth. Otherwise, fear mongering can be used to push us further in the wrong direction.

RM: Well, we love to clutch at dangled straws like bio-fuels even though these would be disastrous in terms of exacerbating the problems they are meant to be solving. It is almost as if in our vulnerability, if anybody offers us any solution then we grasp at it with great enthusiasm and I wonder if this is partly underlying the current enthusiasm for

happiness as an alternative social goal. I don't mean that in the Buddhist sense of happiness where happiness is never separable from certain moral qualities like compassion and other inextricable aspects of a generally well rounded development. Working in this area, I see people adopt happiness with great relish and almost a sense of relief – 'that's it, we'll seek happiness instead of wealth' and that will solve all of our problems. But in commercial culture, happiness has lost its necessary connection to morality and maturity and as a mere feeling seems prone to endless manipulation. This is particularly so in modern consumer culture where we are mediated by corporate influences that shape our identities and shape our ideas of how we might find ourselves satisfied. So, one of the things that does worry me in the current context of climate change and social polarisation, is that if we define happiness as a feeling alone – that I feel good, not that I am good – that potentially what we do is embed the problem of individualism and disconnection further. Seeking my own outcomes is reinforced by any doctrine that emphasises the importance of the right to personal happiness. So, if I am happy driving my 4x4 alone to work everyday and taking it on the smallest of errands, then nobody has the right to reduce that by imposing restrictions on me. My happiness becomes the sacrosanct principle that nobody can violate even in the name of sustainability or justice.

HNH: Well, my happiness at the expense of others is not useful and this is the challenge. But I don't think it should be too hard to outline paths to happiness that are not going to impinge negatively on others. Those paths that argue that one can be happy at the expense of others are definitely not acceptable.

RM: Yet in the spread of monoculture as you explain it, one of the critical disjunctions that occur is between my individual happiness and that of everybody else. In the current economic doctrine of course, if I seek my own individual

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happiness, oblivious to, or even opposed to others, I am actually serving everybody else's happiness anyway as impersonal markets spread their magical benefits under conditions of maximised individualism and competitiveness. The dangerous thing about that, I think, is that there is a certain gravitational force in human nature that can pull us down towards conditions of selfishness, separation, ignorance and a lack of compassion for others that can be countered effectively only by a healthy culture. I mean that in the sense of the moral content of culture which directs us towards connection, contribution, compassion and so forth. Certainly with the work I have done in the Pacific, I see culture work in a way that exerts a constant pressure on people to improve themselves and aspire to overcome their egotism and does so with certain authority. As that is dissolved, I wonder if we are not much more prone to the effects of media-based corporate messages that encourage us to indulge our immaturities. My most recent work in Bhutan has been around advertising and trying to persuade the Bhutanese to strictly limit it. This is basically from a Buddhist perspective given that in Buddhism, inflated desire is seen as being the great problem maker. If I become overly desirous of things and my appetites swell, then I start abusing and short-changing others, I fail to appreciate the world around me and so on. But this seems very difficult to get across, the idea that advertising because it creates feeling of lack and greed, is a fundamental social and psychological problem. Do you see these things in similar terms?

HNH: I do, but I was just thinking again that this involves everything. Whether we talk about higher education, whether we talk about advertising, whether we talk about food, they all sustain the system. I mean supermarkets in the UK now fly strawberries grown in Britain to South Africa just to be washed and then they are flown back to the UK to be sold. But you imagine, someone said to me recently that they were growing strawberries to sell locally and wanted people to know so they could come and buy them. If he wants to put up a sign, that should be fine. But we need to start making a

distinction here. Advertising in some circumstances, to allow small scale wealth accumulation, and even some money lending can be fine as long as it is on a scale where society shapes, restricts and rules the economy. I think we are not quite aware of how much we have been imperilled and damaged by global wealth accumulation. We can think of global corporations as empires essentially – conquering, enslaving, manipulating and robbing. I don't think we have a good analysis of what happened in the history of this system and how much it has transformed and changed the world for the worse. We haven't even begun to understand this.

I don't know if that answers your question but I certainly would say that modern day advertising is definitely very destructive. But I have also become aware that there are other things too. In Ladakh, even Hindi films had a very destructive effect. They in themselves were imitations of Western white culture with their materialism and their absolute fixation with romantic love. This too is very much a part of it. It is closely linked to the breakdown of community and a sense of wellbeing. It is also very much linked to a patriarchal, white world that encultures and polarises, breaks up families and dis-empowers the feminine in both men and women. I must say that Ladakh really was an incredible lesson in understanding the system. I could and should have written ten volumes on what happened and on all of these issues, but I do still feel that an overview was an important contribution to make. But it is not always counted as that and some say 'oh yes Ladakh, Ladakh that was an exception', but it is not. It is exactly what is happening everywhere in the global economy.

RM: One of the things that I have found in the work that we both do around cultural resistance to globalisation is that one of the weakest points in many cultures' ability to resist the dissolving effects of global monoculture are young men. In the teenage years, there seems to be a remarkable susceptibility to what you have described as a basically juvenile and

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masculine global media that is driven by male violence and views of appropriate sexual behaviour, competition, sport and so forth. I wonder if there are lessons for other cultures in this as they try and strive for happiness. I am wondering whether there ought to be very specific and targeted programmes to facilitate media awareness and demystification particularly among the young who are most aggressively targeted and the most susceptible given the uncertain nature of self-identity during this period.

HNH: Definitely. I think that this could be very valuable and would be one area to focus on in a very strategic way. You were saying earlier how quickly and easily such cultures can be changed and I don't think it is any wonder at all. If you look closely at what is happening in the real world, at how the system operates to break up relationships and re-form lives, it involves a multi-faceted and multi-pronged approach that squeezes people. The media is one of these facets. As I mentioned earlier, people are put in this position where they are not able to measure up to these false role models. So already, even in very young children there is this sense of inferiority and a lack of fundamental self-worth. Simultaneously, there is a breaking up of community relationships partly through schooling and its monoculture where the young are taught to experience themselves in a world of competition. At the same time the elderly are disempowered and left behind as disposable people.

RM: In light of all of this and given your extensive experience and thoughtfulness on these issues, I am wondering what your advice would be to the government and people of Bhutan. If they genuinely wish to maximise their collective happiness in culturally valued ways, how should they begin?

HNH: I believe that one step would be to actively pursue happiness education and I don't mean academic education. For the Bhutanese or any community, the most fundamental step is always a process of education. My message would be

that we are not aware of the extent to which we are being manipulated by a type of propaganda that is so endemic, so much a part of the system that even the people who force and promote it are not aware of what they are really doing. The assumptions being promoted, that growth is fine, are not questioned but taken as just being true. On one level, this links to the belief that we need more powerful cultural and spiritual values. In part, this is to counter those who would claim that we are greedy by nature and many believe that more Buddhism and more meditation are ways to counter that. I argue that we also need to look at how we understand structural violence and the way we create and promote individual greed and community breakdown. Conditions now are very different from the conditions the Buddha was talking about because these sorts of issues didn't exist in his time. It is critical that we understand more deeply the global system that is taking us in such a wrong direction.

At the most fundamental level, the problem is the economic system and how this system has shaped knowledge for generations and in a particular direction. We need to understand this in order to find our way forward to a more honest means of education. Finance, media, advertising and science are all part of what is preventing us from seeing some very obvious truths. Together they are preventing us from listening to our hearts and to our own experience of what makes us happy. We also need to have a deeper dialogue between North and South and be sure to include activists, workers, artists and ecologists in diverse contacts that can give everyone a bigger picture. Another theme that is closely related to this is what we said earlier – that as we pursue this enquiry, we should do so more honestly, more holistically and more globally than we have been doing. If we do so, we will quickly appreciate that the ecological wellbeing of the globe is fundamentally linked to every other kind of wellbeing. Another way of putting what I am saying is that we all need more big-picture education and by this I don't mean schooling.

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We have a few years, I don't know how many, to try and help make a shift and begin to move in another direction. I would love Bhutan to play a leading role in this because it really has a unique potential globally. I find it fascinating because Bhutan is described as being a Least Developed Country and so I think it would be a beautiful symmetry for an LDC country to lead change. Maybe GNH can be seen in too limiting a way but I would like to see it as bridging a path in the direction of ensuring a genuine ecological wellbeing and a lasting society. It is about really understanding that there is a path that could make us all richer and more secure. So yes, I find what is happening in Bhutan incredibly exciting and inviting.

Siok Sian Pek

RM: I am interested in talking with you about the movement of foreign media into Bhutan and the effects of this on the populace in broad terms. You were a driving force behind the first national media impact assessment. I wonder if we could talk about the introduction of visual media into Bhutan and what the popular perception of that was. Was the introduction of television seen as being a good thing or a bad thing?

SSP: TV was introduced in 1999, the year of the silver jubilee for the coronation of the Fourth King of Bhutan. Until then, Bhutan had very little foreign media. People would come here and wonder what sort of country it was, was there no freedom? That was the view of many foreign journalists, and a lot of our friends are journalists and it was often their first observation. You do not have Time magazine? You do not have CNN? In the 90s, quite a few Bhutanese did in fact have televisions and satellite dishes even though this was against the law. In pre-TV days, I remember that whenever the soccer world cup was happening, people would converge to watch and the way it was watched was very social. A youth group would organise to tape a game in India which would then come by bus up to the capital and it would be screened publicly. They were important occasions and everyone would turn up. Everyone would come into town and there was a strong sense of community with us all coming together to watch the games. It was nice, you know?

It was a nice situation and people were thinking this is good but if I had a television in my own house, I would not have to come out like this. So, pretty quickly, people began wanting

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their own televisions. The government began to think that it was important enough as an issue to do something different. We knew that people do want television and how long can you stop it? Technology is getting simpler, smaller and cheaper. At that time, dishes were 10 or 12 feet across, but now more powerful dishes are only one foot across. The internet, how can government hope to control that? So, it was decided to introduce television in a very short amount of time. The Bhutan Broadcasting Service was given the job of introducing Bhutan's TV and had less than nine months before it took to air. I was there at the time, working on the programming where we had to convert radio journalists into television ones and we started from scratch. The feeling was that we could not push technology aside and say we'll do without it. Besides TV can be useful, there are many good things about it. So, it was done.

The challenge then was keeping content flowing. In a country with limited resources - we are small and not rich - it's far cheaper and easier to buy cheap global programming than to produce an hour of your own. We saw that from the beginning and it did raise questions but Bhutan was at a crossroads of change and the real question was how much we could remain isolated. The government position was that at some point, we have to join the twentieth-first century and become part of the global village. Lets prepare and have our own TV instead of letting people just take in whatever is provided from outside. And most people had a good view of what television could bring. When the King addressed the population on the occasion of his silver jubilee, he said TV is here but I think we Bhutanese are now educated enough and I trust that you will use your own judgement because TV will bring both good and bad and it is up to you to decide how it is used. It was a very optimistic look at technology and most people were very happy with that. The day television was introduced was very exciting. We were working non-stop. But when it came on, every family prepared their living room around the television set. Everyone came around and sat together and watched and there was a real sense of national

pride. It is what you read about in studies all over. There was a sense that television brought on this identity, it reinforced a sense of being Bhutanese. So people felt a strong sense of pride at seeing themselves on television. Our identity was reinforced and that worked really well. That was a success, but now of course eight years down the road, we face this tremendous pressure and challenge to provide programming that is relevant and indeed uplifting and not trivial.

RM: Part of the reason for introducing the Bhutan Broadcasting Service was exactly that, wasn't it, to maintain the cultural values of Bhutanese society. How long did BBS run before global media was allowed entry?

SSP: Six months. BBS began in June and by October the pressure was on. Many people were saying look we already have television, so why not allow the private sector in. It will create jobs, open up opportunities for Bhutanese and quickly, overnight actually, we went from only one channel, broadcasting one hour a day to forty-five channels. The world came into our living rooms. And again this is good and bad. The World Wrestling Federation came in and young kids were just not used to it. You have to remember that in Bhutan, people in the rural areas are not that exposed to global culture, so there was a clean slate, a very pure slate. Things like wrestling were very confusing. On first seeing it, kids were disturbed. One young child in Bumthang, for example, wrote to the newspaper asking why are these adults hurting each other and throwing each other on the ground? Why are they so violent? What is happening? They did not understand until they realised that it was not real even though it looked so real. It was interesting doing that work on the impact of the media. I met people from all over the country. Young children would talk about parliament, and the growing number of cars and population growth. Nine year old boys would talk about America and George Bush and Iraq. So, media really opened up the world. There was a greater consciousness that followed the initial reinforcement of

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national identity as television made people realise that we are part of a larger world. It was helpful because it allowed us to understand our neighbours in the region better, both India and China. It was only through TV that we got a glimpse of what China is like. This is our neighbour to the north. But it has also brought up a lot of new ideas, new goods and new services. It brought in a middle class identity. Television is dominated by stories about middle class values, hundreds of ads and promotions. So, it does fuel peoples' needs, or wants actually.

At that time, there were lots of articles in the press overseas, the Guardian for example ran an article about television coming to the last Shangri-la. Because of television, there were now robberies, stabbings and new crimes of different kinds. But I think that was being too simplistic, too quick to link this to that. I spoke to a lot of older people in my research and remember asking one monk what he made of this. Is TV creating all this disaffection, is it bringing about the negative instances we hear about like crime and so forth? He said he didn't know - with TV you may learn new things, but that to act in these ways means the intention must somehow have already been there for people to take these actions. So, it is quite interesting. For us in Bhutan, although we can laugh about it now, before we introduced television, the rest of the world was saying to us your country is not free, you don't have free media. What kind of a country does not have television? But the moment we introduced it the whole world seemed to be saying to us 'why did you do it? It is such a big mistake'.

RM: How popular is the Bhutan Broadcasting Service now? What are the most popular channels and shows?

SSP: BBS does do well despite all of the challenges. It broadcasts now for ten hours a day (five hours of programming repeated). The most popular programme on television is the national news, but BBS faces a real uphill

task as all of the other channels that come in are very well funded and have levels of production that are hard to match. Some of the most popular programmes overall are soap-operas, Indian soaps but also in the last couple of years, South Korean soaps have been growing in popularity. What is interesting though is that Bhutan TV has commissioned its own series and that is now taking over which is heartening because it tells us that at the end of the day, we want to see ourselves and watch in a language and voice we understand.

RM: And of course there is a thriving Bhutanese film industry that is very popular.

SSP: Yes. The film industry boomed partly as a result of TV and was one of the very positive spin-offs of learning a new visual language. Most of our film-makers are self-taught, not people who went to film-school. They watched TV and thought 'I can do that'. Why should we watch all these media from a culture that isn't ours? So they became part of this digital world. It does not cost too much to get hold of a camera and initially, some of them were basically copying scripts from other films. But they are now extremely popular. Films are screened at cultural festivals and in cinemas all over the country. Most of these local cinemas screen largely, and in Thimphu only Bhutanese films. They are so popular. So, this has been a very positive spin-off.

But film is a commercial venture and you have to pay to watch. BBS is a public service and because public service is not well funded, there are challenges. We have been suggesting to BBS that there is a need for more children's programming. We do not want our children to be weaned on just global commercial fare and in order to understand themselves growing up in a society of change, local programming for young people is one of the most important things. I think this is one of the potentials that could be developed in a fairly efficient way.

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RM: That would be children's programming that is consciously designed to continue some of the fundamental values of Bhutanese culture?

SSP: Yes. It can be music, story-telling, the options are there. But it is important that we see ourselves, and that our children see their peers on television in our own backyard. That is important. Otherwise we will always imagine ourselves in terms of the other right? Shows like Barney and Sesame Street – these are all right and show some good things but we really need to balance these images of what is outside with what is here.

RM: There are a number of people who would argue that commercial television's role is to make everyone in every culture feel a sense of inferiority and lack. Even in the most capitalised societies, we are encouraged to see our lives as incomplete through the messages and ideals portrayed on television. The lifestyles are generally materially indulgent, exciting and involve a high degree of personal liberty and so on. Have you observed anything in Bhutan that would reinforce these views or do you think they are overstated?

SSP: I think the biggest problems are the commercials. Personally, I really dislike advertising aimed at children and I think that this is one area we should be worried about. In my work at home, I have been working closely with local government saying that they really have to think of guidelines around this. For example, Cartoon Network has so much advertising for food that is not even nutritious. The non-stop sales pitch is something we should definitely be very concerned about. But how do we stop it? Right now I believe that education is the only answer. So, I am interested in media literacy and getting children to recognise what is an ad and how to read media messages and view them critically. Then it is up to them. Of course, in Bhutan, it is not enough to reach the young, we also have to teach our parents, peers and ourselves because Bhutanese people are very open and

very trusting. And because we are so confident in ourselves, we need to begin realising how to read between the lines and how to select and choose. Then of course it is up to them. If people want to be seduced by the media, what can we do? Are we going to go and convert them all? It is too hard. The reason why we want a more socially conscious way of living is because we see this world rife with material living and if we couldn't see that, we wouldn't be so conscious. So, it is hard to say that we will get rid of it. But we need to find the right way to meet these challenges as we are very vulnerable to all of these impacts including the negative ones. It is important then to see what media is and to put in policies and guidelines that raise the awareness of the population so that we can wean ourselves off the bad stuff. We need to go for quality and get rid of the trash.

I have interviewed a lot of young people about changing ideas of fashion. When you ask them where they get their ideas of what to wear from, they say television. We now have aspiring models in our schools who come together for an annual fashion show and again, they learn to walk and pose from television. So, television can be looked at in many ways like a research tool. You can get many ideas from television and the internet. I am hopeful that people can learn to pick what is good from the many unhealthy things.

RM: Do you find that there is a lot of traction in terms of government support for such initiatives.

SSP: Generally yes, there is. The only thing is that because we are small, there are always many other more pressing priorities. Bhutan has free education and healthcare, and we have a priority of putting in farm roads and we have focussed on these. So, there are many pressing problems. Healthcare is obviously more important than television and if you had to choose between training a doctor or putting money into programming or media literacy, most people would say lets save lives first. If we can reduce advertisements and promote

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programmes that have a social message, TV can also save lives. We have to ask ourselves in every programme that we write and every article we write, what we are intending to do? I think the government is conscious of these issues. With GNH in the constitution as our development philosophy, it is now important that media actively adopt a GNH policy and consider how it fits in this point of view. It should coordinate programming, policy, management and training.

RM: How would that effect media in Bhutan if it was indeed the case?

SSP: Initially people might think that it would make media boring but it need not do. We just need to be questioning ourselves critically. What are we doing with this programme? Is it just to sell and if so, how does that help fulfil our search for GNH? The policy of Gross National Happiness is to create conditions in which people can find happiness. That does not mean comedy shows and Disney, it is a deeper happiness that comes from the realisation of your self. The media has a big role to play in this and it need not be a didactic, boring process. We can make it exciting and question ourselves. Does this article create more satisfaction? Is it educating people? What is it trying to do? Public service is about socially-responsible broadcasting. It can be film, music, drama, anything. But these can be done in a powerful way so that people can watch quality programming. Quantity is a danger now with new media coming in. We have two more radio channels - one went 24 hours in June. We have two new newspapers but we must be so wary about adopting global trends where we begin pushing movie stars over and above great leaders or use sexist imagery. We can fall into these traps so easily. In Thimphu, if you look at the magazines, they are all film fare and glitz, people in various stages of undress. No problem with that but lets balance it. If we want to speak about a society that seeks genuine wellbeing we need to strike a balance of inspiring, meaningful

media so that we have a choice. We don't want to be swamped by just what is commercially available.

RM: Its difficult though isn't it given that so much of the appeal of media is to our baser emotions. Undress, titillating gossip about stars and so on, people love it and particularly youth love it. I personally wonder about the long term effects of that in terms of shifting priorities. But I wonder not only about the content of media but how much just the mere process of being engaged with it is problematic. I mean this in terms of being removed from your own immediate circumstances. When I see people watch television, they sit in isolation. On the surface it may be a collective enterprise but actually it is a very isolating experience.

SSP: You know that in Bhutan before television, the most important room was the altar room. Now with TV, everything has shifted. The arrangement of furniture and carpets is all around the TV and sometimes the TV has moved into the altar room as we discovered in our research. One woman said to me that she goes home at night and the family all sit facing the TV and do not talk. Many people say this, that they go home and their families are watching television so they do not communicate.

RM: Do you think that these new media are having an impact on people's perceptions of happiness and what brings them happiness?

SSP: I think so and this is why our answer is not to say take it away because it is too late for that. Content and education are the things. If you look at Thimphu today, if you have a spiritual programme there will be a large following. People are aspiring to be better people, better human beings, and they are attracted to spirituality. In Thimphu, you see people doing their prayers, doing their mani while watching. And we know that whenever there are programmes featuring spiritual leaders giving dharma teachings, there are always big

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audiences. It is interesting because even in the print media, you find that the political candidates when asked what is the latest book you have read, 8 out of ten say dharma books-spiritual books. So, if we can ensure that our programming stimulates the mind and inspires us, it might work to off-set this large commercial pull. Along with this, we need education, media literacy and parental guidance. We now have a situation in Bhutan where stories are no longer told by parents or grandparents, so important values are not being passed on by communities but by the media as children are set in front of the TV.

In the media impact study, people told me that their children were becoming much smarter and said that if they did not have television, their children would know nothing about the world. This comes from being in a small country that is land-locked and you must understand that. So, for us it is important to know what is happening outside. People think television is all good so this is what we are battling with. We are no longer an oral society, telling and sharing stories with a sense of local values being passed on by word of mouth and discussion. So, the role of the family is diminishing. Government can lead in setting policy, leading how we move to develop media, but this needs to be done with a light touch given that people are now used to having greater freedom - freedom of ideas, freedom of information - and you cannot take that back once it has been given. But if we have enlightened leaders who really believe in GNH then they can drive it in the right way. Ultimately, it is up to the media personnel involved - we all need greater training, more professionalism and most of all, to be inspired by the whole idea of GNH. Media needs to be not just as a job, to cover what someone has said but needs to be engaged. And, I think, this is not only in Bhutan.

Globally, one thing we ought to do is to try and engage the CEOs of major media companies. Instead of saying they are all bad, we should throw down a challenge to these very

powerful organisations and advertisers and say after years of advertising goods and services, do you think that you can now convert to selling wellbeing? Sincerely. Do you think that you could help the environment? I think it can be done, but they have to be pulled in and not regarded as the ones that are causing all of the world's ills. That way we are not just creating more enemies. It is as you were saying of your teaching, change works best when you can get alongside people, understand them and make friendly connection. Maybe we have to start doing that in the media and in Bhutan, I really feel that the CEOs of media companies, the reporters and editors really need to know what GNH is and why the world is interested in it. What does this mean for us in Bhutan and what is the role of the media in creating the social conditions for it?

RM: That is fascinating because it seems to suggest to me that GNH becomes a sort of way of integrating an enormous number of forces that are apparently disparate at the moment towards improving our intentions in all spheres. It brings to mind that in New Zealand, Scotland or India as a classical example, cultural stories are told through television, film and other media and that this has been a significant way of strengthening traditional identities as opposed to weakening them. Part of the underlying perspective has been that if television is so powerful at influencing perceptions of truth and value, then it is useless to fight against it and much more constructive to work with it. In Maori and Hindu culture, you find the great legends and the epics being dramatised and proving to be very, very popular.

SSP: That is true and I think we can do a lot more of it. Localisation of the media has occurred. The Latin American soaps for example are their answer to globalisation. Why watch American serials when you can make your own? South Korea and others have responded in the same way. But as soon as they get popular and become big, they are sold elsewhere and become just another part of culturally

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imperialistic programming, even though they start off with good intentions. Japanese shows have spread across the region but these also have a lot of good Asian values in them, respect for elders and so forth. So, changes have been happening in small ways. These responses to globalisation need to be studied, supported and replicated but not necessarily in the same form. It seems to be a positive answer because in this day and age, how do we say no to the media. Television is now on the internet and on mobile phones. But you are right; the whole thing is about dumbing the media down with sensationalism and distraction. There is so much trivial stuff that is totally irrelevant. It is so distracting and does not give us time to be ourselves. This world is saturated by media and we do not need more but we need clearer thinking about the media. We need a more right-minded media but right now, the media that tends to thrive is basically entertainment which is unfortunate.

RM: Indeed. One of the experiments I get my students to do is to watch television but with their eyes focused about six inches off to the side of the screen so that they can see the number of visual changes, scene shifts, focus pulls and other changes that are involved. Psychologically, if something is changing, it grabs our attention. If something suddenly flashes over there across the street, we will look at it automatically and television has an incredible ability to capture attention partly because of this constant change. But it does seem to me that one of the great potentials of GNH as a development philosophy is its potential for coordination across a variety of activities. So if attention can be captured in constructive ways, programming can be directed towards helping to create the conditions within which happiness can thrive.

SSP: It could really catch on. Programmes on meditation and yoga would catch on. So, we have to think of really creative alternatives, not just the usual twenty-four hour music and film that make up the global fare. In Bhutan, the thing is that

we have the luxury of being able to imagine this change. We can do it the way that we like. There is a huge responsibility in that in the sense that in most other countries you can have 50, 80 channels and lots of choice for niche markets but Bhutan is too small for that. We are not the many millions, but the few. And if we are the few what is our responsibility? Are we going to dumb down from the beginning, trivialise and sensationalise everything? That would be a real pity. There are pressing issues to deal with right now. With the changes that we are going through - in moving to democracy, opening to globalisation, joining the WTO and so on, there are many issues to think about. We cannot afford to just be like the media everywhere else, pandering to the lowest common denominator. We really have to give people more important things to think about. That is what I think.

Dasho Kinley Dorji

RM: You are a very keen observer of the Bhutanese scene and someone whose opinion is widely regarded. I wonder if I could ask you about the major challenges Bhutan faces as a rapidly developing society. What are the most important challenges in your mind?

KD: Bhutan's major challenge, its major goal in one word, is survival. Bhutan is a small country of about half a million people stuck between India and China with over a billion each and this gives us a very strong sense of vulnerability. So, there is a perception that as a small country, we might disappear. This is at the back of the Bhutanese mind and this is why extreme caution has been followed in all areas of development. Of course, Bhutan's development has come in different stages. Infrastructure like roads, electricity and education have been improved, we have entered the information age and now have an expanding media which is a very important part of globalisation. These changes are happening so quickly that it is a challenge to respond fast enough.

RM: When you say that change raises issues of survival for Bhutan, do you mean by that survival of Bhutanese culture and its values or do you mean survival of the nation state as an independent entity?

KD: The survival of Bhutan as a country. In the past, the threat was military—take the case of Tibet to the north and Sikkim to the east—in this neighbourhood, small countries really are vulnerable. One of the realities that Bhutan has always accepted is that we will never be a major economic or

military force so we decided that our strength must lie in our identity, our cultural identity. We must be different from the other billions of people in the region or we will be swallowed up. Culture then is very important and with globalisation, the media in particular is a threat to this unique identity so that is one element. Then there is the demographic threat. With large movements of people around the Himalayan region, there is a chance that the Bhutanese identity could disappear. That is why there is such an emphasis on culture in GNH thinking, on dress, on architecture, on language, on values and other aspects of our identity. This is of course very closely linked to our spiritual heritage.

RM: In that sense then the development philosophy of GNH serves an important purpose in providing a rallying point around which people can gather to maintain a unique identity and choose a different direction from the one globalisation seems to be taking other societies in?

KD: Yes. GNH is not a sudden concept and it is not as if in the 1970s, the King suddenly had a brand new idea. It is really the expression of a Bhutanese system, of the values and social and economic arrangements we have had for centuries, it is just been given a new name—GNH. In a way, this is so that it can be more palatable to the next generation. Many young people reject the more austere sounding terms that say you must wear these clothes, learn this language, build your house this way and so on. GNH is more palatable because it goes deeper and is a nicer expression of the values that keep Bhutanese society together and strengthen our identity.

RM: To what extent then is GNH a direct continuation of Buddhist sensibilities in a new form?

KD: I think we have to be a little careful when we talk about Buddhist values and characteristics. I see that within GNH that Buddhism is more of a spiritual practice than a religion

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and uses the values that come out of Buddhism. For example, in GNH to find happiness you have to look inside yourself not outside. There is no external source of real happiness and therefore under GNH it is the government's responsibility to create the conditions within which the individual citizen can find happiness. It is then an expression of spirituality.

RM: Do you think that the articulation of GNH and its emphasis on the spiritual and non-material sources of satisfaction has been sufficiently robust – both in terms of its intellectual development and its translation into practice - to act as a practical force of resistance to the materialistic and consumerist shifts that globalisation normally demands?

KD: As a philosophy, yes. But to be honest, we have not achieved GNH yet, we are only just beginning. I think this is square one, almost. We are beginning to refine the academic discussions on the philosophy but the translation of the philosophy into policy has not even begun. If we believe we have achieved GNH and that this is a GNH society, we are wrong. It is just the beginning. I think the start is an inspiration but we need to build upon this. We can see now for example that there are some specific GNH surveys being done and we have some results coming out but these are in the very early stages. Even from a Buddhist point of view, we have accepted the essence of it but we have not really constructed it. If asked about GNH, many decision-makers in Bhutan would say it is something we have to attract wealthy foreign tourists, so there is a lot of scepticism even in Bhutan itself. That is why one of my concerns is that maybe we are trying too hard to export it, to sell it outside before we have developed it inside Bhutan itself. We are yet to really build up a GNH economy, a GNH society, a GNH culture.

RM: I wonder about the extent to which the scepticism that sees GNH as a selling point for the nation matches a certain misplaced romanticism on the part of those outside who wish to see Bhutan and GNH in overly simplistic terms. To what

extent do you think that this might feed into a dynamic in which Bhutan comes to play catch-up and implement policies in light of an easy to articulate abstraction that was perhaps ahead of its time and much more complex and difficult to achieve than many realise?

KD: In many ways, it has all been a little accidental. Now I think GNH has really been picked up around the world not so much because of what Bhutan has to offer, but because societies outside are feeling a gap and a need for something more. Basically the world has found out that GNP is inadequate. Someone, it might have been you, referred to it as a broken promise. Because of that, I think people are looking at GNH and thinking that maybe this is the answer. Bhutan's Shangri-la image has definitely helped as people see a potential answer coming from the exotic Himalayas. This international excitement has put pressure on Bhutan to put its money where its mouth is.

But this can be very good because Bhutan needs GNH in a very real sense. We are a small country trying to survive and as such, we need the underlying strength that comes from a clear value system. I think that GNH is that value system and it has helped because, inadvertently, perhaps the message of GNH has gone out into the world as a reminder that material development alone will not bring happiness, only a Disney-type happiness, but not the real contentment that we really need to appreciate and value.

RM: It is a difficult time though, isn't it with the pace of change happening in Bhutan at the moment. Compared with when I first came here in 2003 for instance, the changes around Thimphu have been quite astonishing. With the slow development of GNH in terms of carefully consolidating its philosophy, gradually developing measures and ultimately putting these into policy, do you think that the process is proceeding fast enough to meet the pace of change that society is presently experiencing?

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KD: No, we are not able to keep up. The changes that globalisation is bringing are such a force that we cannot keep up. We have not developed the concept enough, we have not been able to intellectualise it, we don't have the institutions or enough educated professionals to deal with changes in areas like the media for example. We do not fully understand the impact that this is having on a new generation. So, we are definitely not moving fast enough. We are lucky though that we started so late and that there has not been time as yet to destroy some of the pillars of GNH – like the environment and the culture of Bhutan. In this sense, we have a real advantage. And we also have the advantage of seeing the destruction that has taken place in other countries, in our own neighbourhood. These are sharp reminders but it is nonetheless a very difficult race.

RM: Would that imply that alongside a more rapid development of GNH as policy, there also needs to be a companion set of measures in place that are essentially protectionist measures designed to slow down the pace of change within the country in order that it has time to adapt?

KD: Yes. We call this the middle path or the balance. In this sense, it means slowing down which is why the cautious approach to development is important. Rather than random mass tourism that is looked at only as a source of revenue, it is controlled. A very good example is mountaineering. Bhutan has 20 virgin peaks over 20,000 ft. Mountaineers are drooling to climb these and would pay anything. But GNH says no, these are sacred mountains important to the people here, so no. It is no to the power of the dollar because people's sentiments can be more important than money. We need to use this approach at all levels. We now have a discussion about the WTO and many politicians would like us to join. But GNH thinking can allow us to ask about the real advantages. What will we lose? Can we retain control over our own decisions? This is where GNH can be seen as a goal, as

an inspiration and as a constant guide to what is important as we make these critical decisions.

RM: Well certainly for many observers WTO membership represents a real loss of sovereignty and the ability to determine one's own path to a unique future. Given what you have said about the impact of foreign media on the core values that underlie GNH, how can a force like this be addressed and contained so that it does not create the individualism and competitiveness that it has spawned elsewhere in the world?

KD: I think that what the world has found out is that there is no stopping the media. When we did not have television, everyone told us that we were depriving our people of information and that everyone has the right to information. But they did not realise that many places in Bhutan did not even have electricity. We did not have schools or hospitals either but still they pressured us into introducing television. Now that we have it, everyone is saying why do you have television, don't you know it will have a bad effect on your children? But a small country like this has very little say. We are moved by bigger forces and there is no turning back now that television is here. From what I understand as a media person, the only answer is to have your own media and your own content to counter what is really an aerial invasion. This is what we are battling but we do not have sufficient resources. We are desperately trying to start some media literacy programmes to teach people about the impacts of media but it is a huge uphill battle. This is where again we need to draw on GNH as it basically emphasises public service. The media must serve the public interest and cater to what the people should have as opposed to what they think they want. What should our people know and what should they know about the media? These are the important questions and the right approach, but again this is easy to say but practicing it is another big challenge.

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Before television came in, if you asked any Bhutanese child 'who is your idol or who is your hero,' he or she would say 'my King'. Within weeks of television's arrival, this changed. First it was people like David Beckham because the world cup was going on, then all of the Bollywood stars and the World Wrestling Federation. When my son was three, he suddenly decided that his hero was Rock, the wrestler and now it is people like 50 Cent, the rap artist. From the King to 50 Cent in a very short time – so, this is what is happening.

RM: What do you think the impacts of this are on society as a whole as people shift their values and their ideals of what is heroic and desirable?

KD: If we do not watch it, we are going to lose the Bhutanese identity and we are going to become just another struggling developing country that is no different from any other 'third world' society. In other words, we will have lost GNH. So, what can we look to to counter this? GNH is vital in this regard and we have to construct it in understandable terminology and from there into policy, so, that Bhutanese society is able to deal with change.

RM: Do you think that putting things in terms of happiness provides a strong enough focus to prevent dissolution in a number of other realms such as an appreciation of justice and sustainability for example? It does seem to me that it would be very easy for a young person who gets into a rap artist like 50 Cent to say 'this is what makes me happy and so if I am making decisions on what makes me happy, I choose to value this.' So, I wonder if happiness is a strong enough focus to prevent a deeper compromising of the country's culture.

KD: I think that is an important point and it is actually part of the misunderstanding and scepticism about GNH. GNH is not about happiness. Happiness is an individual pursuit. Philosophers have been trying to define happiness for

centuries and no one really has successfully. GNH is about responsibility, not only happiness. It is about the responsibility of the state to make sure that the conditions that make it possible for the individual to find happiness are in place. We cannot confuse the two. GNH then is a very serious business as the Prime Minister says and as a serious issue, we need to translate it into good policies and GNH regulations. It is then not so much about transforming the individual but about transforming society. We need a GNH society and a GNH economy where you do not sell your natural resources but find a balance where you can sacrifice income for what must be preserved—like ecology and natural resources.

RM: That would imply wouldn't it, that there will need to be a good degree of regulation involved in policy making and I wonder how this fits with an emerging democratic focus and the ideal that is always embedded in modern commercial culture, that the individual should be maximally free. Do you see potential tensions in the future between the need to enforce some degree of responsibility and individuals' desire to flee from that responsibility?

KD: I have just started thinking about this and I don't have an answer. When I look at the process of democratisation taking place in Bhutan and started by the King, I see a very clear picture. Many developing countries in Asia, Africa and South America believe that democracy is a goal and so once they have had elections, they think that they have democracy. GNH tells us that this is just the beginning. Democracy is not a goal and an election is not democracy. In fact, democracy is just a strategy to ensure good governance, good governance meaning to serve the people. This is one of the pillars of GNH so what GNH has given us as we undergo the process of democratisation is the ability to see that it is just one aspect of a broader goal. It is a political change that will help us achieve GNH.

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In this perspective, GNH and democracy resonate well because both require the empowerment of the individual. So that element is very clear to me but as we try and introduce democracy and with it the rights of the individual, there is a tension. We are at a very early stage but if I were to explain it at a superficial level, I would say that now more than ever, the responsibility again comes on the decision-makers. Our leaders need wisdom, they need true wisdom and GNH should give them the strength and the justification to make tough decisions. Take for example an area in which I think government today is failing – the number of cars. In Bhutan we don't have a Dzongkha word for 'traffic jam' but everyone wants to buy a car. They are coming in through India very cheap and soon our roads are going to be clogged up and we will have pollution, accidents and so on. It is time to make decisions now and say sorry but we have more cars than roads so there must be heavy taxes to control their numbers. The government attempted this, people protested and the government withdrew. Now GNH means that officials must have the courage to make these decisions – for the good of the whole and for the good of the community and this must be more important than the vote. Our politicians and our leaders must have the guts to make tough decisions and that is where I think more than democracy, we have to fall back on GNH to see the priority of the environment and pollution-free air. This is the perspective that we must adopt.

RM: That is interesting because one of the areas I work in is concerned with indigenous responses to the forces of globalisation and I often find that when cultures reach that point of conflict between traditional, deeply-held values and the more superficial processes of change they confront, there is often a crisis of confidence vis-à-vis the right to impose traditional values. Traditional systems tend to work on the basis of authority and there are established positions of power that have the right to guide peoples' behaviour by virtue of the fact that they represent wisdom and sound judgement. It makes me wonder whether Bhutan is suffering a slight crisis of confidence at the moment in terms of

knowing exactly how to translate these traditional values into concrete policies that are relevant to a shifting scene.

KD: It is not a crisis yet, but it could be and in fact it will be. We have a democratically elected government and some politicians have made their promises to their constituents who are demanding to know where their schools and roads are – where is what you promised? I guess all politicians want to be re-elected and if in a particular community, they feel that logging and woodcraft industries could bring in money, they will want to start cutting down forest. Will the politicians have the courage to say no, the environment is more important? That is why there is such a powerful need for our small academia to develop indicators that will be able to explain and give politicians the strength and the justification to make these decisions. At the same time, we need to be able to educate the people, to say, look, how good it is to live in a forested village. If you move to the city it will not be so good. In fact, the initial findings from the CBS surveys have already proved that. If you go by the GNH indicators, then, people in rural areas are better off. They have greater community vitality, they have a healthier culture and environment, and everything is less diluted. Thimphu is the opposite. It is as if we are trying to be a little Bangkok. So, GNH would say that the rural place is much better off. But if you ask the people there you will find that every farmer will want to come and live in town and have the bright lights. So, we are already losing GNH from that point of view and this is going to go on.

RM: It makes you wonder if people have to experience the problems associated with dislocation personally before it actually sinks in as a problematic reality. After all, there is more than enough evidence to show that it happens elsewhere.

KD: This has been my fear for a long time now - that human beings go through this cycle where we have to lose it before

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we appreciate it. Then it is too late. You cut down all of your forests and only then do you realise what you have lost.

RM: So, do you feel confident about the ability of GNH to become strong enough to help avoid this common pattern?

KD: At this stage, I would say that I really feel the urgency and the concern more than confidence. Yes we are a Shangri-la. Yes we are unique Bhutanese. Yes we are a relatively enlightened Buddhist population in the exotic Himalayas but actually, we are human and we are prone to the same temptations that everyone else is. That is why I have such a strong concern.

RM: It may be a very powerful notion though in the sense that if outsiders begin to see GNH and what it stands for as a positive aspect of Bhutanese identity, it might become something that is adopted more rigorously in response to that outside validation.

KD: That is a very real dynamic. I believe that we have had enlightened leadership and that we have the advantage of seeing the mistakes made elsewhere but it is the feedback that is critical. Why is Bhutan 72% forest? It is feedback. The control of tourism has also helped in this regard. I am a backpacker at heart but I realise that by keeping mass tourism out we tend to get a certain age of tourist, a certain section of the world society who appreciate the environment and the culture and who say 'this is beautiful, it is wonderful, do not lose these good things like we have lost ours'. So that has been a very good feedback. In many places, if you talk about indigenous culture, it is in a museum somewhere but in Bhutan it is a living culture. When someone like yourself comes and tells us this is fantastic, it helps us appreciate what we have. I believe that this kind of appreciation is intuitive in a way but you need that encouragement and feedback to really appreciate what you have. I was at the Smithsonian festival in July and to be walking down a

Washington street in a gho brings a lot of attention. People are interested and want to know where you are from. So, I think that good feedback for being ourselves has really helped Bhutan preserve its culture. Bhutan understands that it is special in part because the world has told us we are special.

RM: And on the other side of that dynamic, of course, is not only what comes into the country in terms of encouragement and feedback but what goes out of Bhutan in terms of a developmental philosophy that could be very influential elsewhere. I was talking to someone recently who said to me that it might be debatable as to whether Bhutan would be able to maintain its steady course but that the wonderful thing about it was that GNH would spread outwards regardless to fertilise the rest of the world's thinking and it really seems to be doing this. The parallel that was suggested was with Mahayana Buddhism's spread out of Tibet after it was invaded. As it was erased as the dominant functioning culture of Tibet, it fertilised the rest of the world's consciousness to a quite remarkable degree. Do you see the spread of GNH being a similarly on-going and important influence on global consciousness?

KD: Yes in the sense that it is already a reminder to the world that material development is not enough. That is inadequate from a happiness perspective. Bhutan is not in a position to teach the world values. I think the best solution would be to make the GNH approach work here. All of the attention that is coming from outside makes us realise that it must work here. If GNH can be made to work in Bhutanese society, the rest of the world will automatically learn from it. It is not that we are going out there to preach – that would be completely the wrong approach. We cannot do that but it is very, very important to make it work here.

Dasho Neten Zangmo

RM: I wonder if I could start by asking you how you think GNH is advancing in Bhutan at the moment.

DNZ: I am quite positive in the sense that GNH has been there since the 1970s. But through the 1980s, there were little talk of Gross National Happiness. Even in our five year plans and in our policy documents, there was no reflection of the philosophy at all. But in the late 80s, people gradually started talking about it more, in small groups and in public institutions and then in the 90s, it became known in international circles. Then, of course, everybody started talking about GNH and it has been a very positive trend but now we have to move away from this stage of talking. Whether it be in the schools, or offices or at home, we have done enough talking and now we have to start putting things into action. There are encouraging signs, like the renaming of the Planning Commission as the Gross National Happiness Commission which says a lot about the political will to really integrate the philosophy and principles of GNH into our development plans and policies. As the country that began talking of GNH, many people both here and in the world at large are now looking to Bhutan to lead the way. I think that all of these things are positive signs though we need to do more.

RM: Has the ideal of GNH been widely disseminated within the Bhutanese society? In the rural regions for example, are people generally aware of what GNH is and what it entails?

DNZ: People are generally aware of GNH and they hear about it in speeches and so on, but how they really conceptualise it,

I don't know. It gets mentioned loosely but whether people really ask 'What does it mean for me, for my community, for my family or for the country as a whole' I do not know. From my point of view, I think it may not be there. Even I talk about GNH but if you asked me what I mean by it, my answers may be too shallow and too simplistic.

RM: Do you think that the understanding of what GNH implies is deep enough at the government level in terms of the day-to-day operation of departments? Is it a philosophy that really drives government policy at this point?

DNZ: I don't think so but I would like to give full credit to the Honourable Prime Minister who has been the true advocate of GNH - although its author was, of course, the Fourth King. When he was Bhutan's foreign minister, he used GNH as a tool of foreign policy and this is how the GNH concept has been brought to the international stage. It has given the world the opportunity to re-think development. So, full credit goes to our Prime Minister. Because of him, we consciously talk about GNH in our speeches and in cabinet meetings so that more decisions can be made that really are GNH responsive. But I think that it needs to be more clearly reflected in our policy documents, in our strategic planning and in how we function in a day-to-day manner. There are simple things, like for me as a public servant, how do I best serve my clients? How do I serve my fellow citizens? These questions could be reflected more explicitly in our documents and policies and at the moment, I think there is not enough there though now efforts are being put in. I do not think that we can use the excuse that we do not understand GNH because although we may not understand the deeper philosophy of GNH, as public servants the question is simple - how can I make my clients happy? If I am a utility officer for example, working on electricity or water supply, the question is how best can I best serve the people? How can I be most helpful? At a simple and mundane level, these are the questions that will help us achieve GNH and so it is about being responsible

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as public servants and it is also about being compassionate. As Buddhists, we should not have a problem with that because, as Buddhists, we know that the happiness of the world comes from making other people happy and not from focusing upon yourself. This consciousness needs to be reflected more clearly in how we function in a day-to-day manner, how we do our work and formulate our policies. This, I think, is the real challenge because it can often conflict with personal and political agendas.

RM: That makes it rather complex because it would suggest that when you look at the ideals of service and compassion that GNH involves fundamental issues of ethics in the sense that it represents in some ways a force for increasingly responsible forms of social development. Is that how you would characterise it?

DNZ: Yes, absolutely. Working for the Anti-Corruption Commission, how can I not focus upon ethics? The work that we do here is very much about contributing to Gross National Happiness. It is all about equity; it is all about justice, so ethics is very much a part of GNH. It is about sharing and compassion and being responsible. It is about empathy and about discipline, so yes, it is all about ethics and values.

RM: Does that suggest then that some of the work of the Anti-Corruption Commission is about trying to ensure that a sense of Buddhist ethics does not become corrupted by incoming waves of materialism and modernity?

DNZ: Yes. As you would have seen coming up the stairs, we have on the wall the Eightfold Path of Lord Buddha and it is not just about Buddhism as the themes apply to every society and every community. Right livelihood, right speech and right thought - these are the basis of our humanity. As Buddhists, we all know this but we need to really internalise and practice these values.

RM: Do you think that these values are holding up well in the Bhutanese society as a whole?

DNZ: That is a difficult question. We certainly need to make them stronger if these values are to be maintained because they are permanent values. Whether we reach the development stage of the most economically developed countries in Europe or become poor like some African countries, these values need to remain to keep the society together - to maintain harmony and unity and to survive as a nation state. It is not just about being honest. It is a larger issue of survival because if there is no justice, no ethics and no equity, there will be disharmony in the family and disharmony in the community. So, I think we need to do more. Until now, we have held together as a society but we can see the erosion happening. Individual ministries need to do more in terms of the overall development of the individual and their character. It is very important in building a decent society and creating new leaders. In terms of our leaders, we have been so lucky and when you look at other countries, it is clear that often we do not appreciate what we have here. When I see what is happening in many of these countries, I thank God that I am Bhutanese and that we have had such strong leaders. But things are changing now with parliamentary democracy coming in and with leadership being handed over to the people and people having to be more responsible. As people realise their rights and their duties, we need the examples that people like our Kings have shown us because as a small country, we are vulnerable. We are very vulnerable.

RM: It is a very important point that to encourage the average individual to be responsible and to accept their duties, it really helps to have good role models and I agree that Bhutan has been very fortunate in having very talented and responsible leadership to this point. As Bhutan moves into a democratic period, what safeguards are in place to ensure

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that future leaders maintain a high sense of ethical sensibility and do not become corrupted?

DNZ: His Majesty has always believed that to have a strong government, institutions and systems have to be created that ensure the rule of law. Institutions like the judiciary are so important to ensuring that the constitution is upheld. The people have to feel safe, so the judiciary and the Anti-Corruption Commission are very important and they have to be very strong and effective so that there can be real confidence in the government. In many parts of the world, people have very little confidence in their governments and we cannot allow this to happen in our country. We have always had confidence in the institution of the monarchy and now with democracy, there are other institutions to consider including civil society and the media. These are areas that are not fully mature yet and we need to build more capacity so that they can function positively and ethically. If these institutions are morally diseased, then there will obviously be problems.

RM: Indeed. In many democratic countries, there is a certain level of moral corruption and certainly a degree of cynicism amongst electorates as they begin to wonder whose interests their elected politicians are actually serving. You mentioned earlier the ideal of being of service to others and it seems to me that this is core to the philosophy that values democracy. Yet there is a very thin line between serving others and serving oneself as a politician and clearly a very slippery slope where the perks of office – the size of house, the salary, the car and so forth – can come to corrupt the ideal of genuine public service. Do you think that Bhutan is now seeing the thin end of that wedge and the possible movement away from a full commitment to serving others as the personal rewards of public office become more tempting in their own right?

DNZ: With democracy, we should become even more subservient to the people because this is what democracy

should be about—especially in a GNH state and in a Buddhist country. The principles of democracy can be upheld here and we can make it unique. In the rest of the world, there is a widespread mindset that politicians are corrupt but if we manage things well, we can show to the world that politics can be good and that politicians can be good human beings and that they are not all looking to siphon government funds or give kick-backs to their friends. We have that opportunity here in Bhutan. We have just begun and I hope and pray every day that we do not go the way many other countries have gone and can show that politics can be clean and that the values of democracy can be truly achieved in a GNH state. It is a wonderful opportunity. That is why the Honourable Prime Minister and the King are saying that the most important thing in the next five years is to create a really vibrant democracy. It is a very important responsibility and making it work involves everybody, not just the politicians but every citizen. We have to establish the foundations of this vibrant democracy - strong laws, strong institutions and most importantly, strong leaders to manage these institutions and systems.

RM: You mentioned that the next five years is critical. Do you see a possibility that if things are not consolidated through good, strong policies in this period, Bhutan might lose control of the development process?

DNZ: I fear that and I think that we are very vulnerable. What we do in the next few years is absolutely critical.

RM: Personally, I feel the same way and having experienced many of the dynamics of cultural change in the work I do, I think that the pace of change is often fundamentally disorienting for many societies as they are suddenly faced with major challenges through new media and alien ideals about what to aspire to in life. I am interested in this immediate period because I am beginning to wonder about a possible wavering of confidence in Bhutanese society

concerning the country's ability to be genuinely different. Do you see the clarifying influence of Buddhism as being an essential component in building the sort of responsible economy and democracy that is required to meet the goals of GNH?

DNZ: Well I am not an authority on Buddhism but when you look at the policies surrounding GNH, it is very much based on Buddhist values and you can see it even in simple things like communities not wishing to spoil their forests or mountains because they believe they are sacred. These are quite prominent beliefs but if we do not make conscious efforts to strengthen these beliefs, they can be easily eroded. For example, at one of our meetings someone talked about her experiences in Ethiopia before the interventions of NGOs and other institutions and spoke of how traditional communities that were strong and happy were completely broken by the introduction of foreign value systems. It produced disharmony and distrust and this distrust is the worst thing that can happen to a society, this spreading sense of distrust. So, I think we need to be aware of this potential and make conscious efforts to institutionalise and spread the positive values we have at all levels. If we do not do this, I don't think we will be able to achieve what we want to achieve with GNH. This is a real danger and so it is a critical area that we need to focus on in the next few years. We need to develop the wisdom to clearly see what our priorities are and to develop skilful methods that will allow us to pursue those. If we can do that, we should not have too many problems but it means that we need to spend time on these issues. It would be useful to have more roundtable meetings and in-depth discussions. In cabinet for example, we should invite people who are authorities on Buddhism and on GNH and others whose voices are important, to become more involved. If GNH is only understood in a shallow manner, then there is bound to be trouble.

RM: In that context then, what do you think are the most critical and urgent things that need to be done now to allow GNH to move Bhutanese society in the right direction.

DNZ: I think that we need those people who command respect, like spiritual masters, His Majesty the King and others to talk more about GNH and the need to act on it and not simply philosophise. Core secretaries and officials need to be called upon to reflect deeply on it and bring it into the workplace – it will not just happen by itself. Of course, the GNH Commission has been established and the Centre for Bhutan Studies has developed some indicators, so let's start using these to develop a real consciousness in our plans and policies. Right now, and I don't want to generalise too much, but I feel that this consciousness is not there and that we do not even remember GNH in our day-to-day work. But it has to be there, particularly for the senior bureaucrats like department secretaries and ministers. They move the government machinery and we need to appoint strong leaders in those positions who believe in GNH and so again, it comes back to leadership. Then of course, at the level of the cabinet, there needs to be strong advocacy. On corruption, they have made very useful statements that there will be zero tolerance of corruption. So, for me the most important thing right now is to appoint the right people as secretaries and ministers.

Education is also very important and although it is a long-term thing, we need to start now. I used to be in the Education Ministry, I was a teacher and I taught at the Polytechnic. When I was there, I had the privilege of having an audience with the Fourth King and I remember even now that His Majesty said that we can make mistakes in all sectors but we cannot afford to make mistakes in the education sector. If we make mistakes in that sector, we will lose a whole generation and that is too big a stake. So, we need to work immediately in the Education Ministry to look at the curriculum, at the teacher-training programme, at the sorts of people we have as teachers, because they are the

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builders of future citizens and future society. So, these are the main things for me - education, appointing sound leaders and using the information we already have. We now have a lot of information from surveys, for example the surveys that we have conducted on corruption, so there is enough data, ample data and we do not have to wait for more before we begin to act. All the more so because we are a small nation and especially now, as other countries are asking what are we doing to take GNH forward.

RM: Those all seem like very practical and important interventions, and almost everyone that I have spoken to in the course of these dialogues has mentioned education and the need for a good values education in particular as being critically important. Do you think that there is a possibility that the curriculum as it currently stands has been overly influenced by westernised standards and the encouragement to conform to values of individual achievement, competitiveness and abstract intellectualisation?

DNZ: Absolutely. There has been a new approach to primary education which we imported from England and many people say that has pulled down the quality of our education. But, of course, there are many other factors involved. The policy statements about providing wholesome education for our kids are there. If we are serious, lets do something about it. In terms of operational units and how they are working on this, it is not convincing. The policy statements are different to what is happening in the field – they do not match. Education is so important and, of course, it has been a focus for the government and I am glad that now the fifth King has created a Royal Education Commission which is seeking experiences from other countries where a real conscious effort is being made to address the overall development of the child. This might involve creative arts, dance, yoga, meditation and so on. Some of these programmes are wonderful.

RM: That is very interesting and one of the things that I have found as an educator working overseas is that once a society gets to the point of losing a clear articulation of its basic values, it becomes very difficult to introduce values education and it is often resisted quite vigorously. People feel it implies an illegitimate moralising and a compromising of the individuals' right to interpret the world as they freely choose to. But I do feel that it is very important to have a component of values education in the curriculum. Do you think that there would be widespread acceptance of moving the curriculum towards more of an integrated blend of western intellectual development and Buddhist moral development at the same time?

DNZ: There should be and there is a lot of pressure towards improving the quality of education. Currently it aims more in the direction of a utilitarian notion of achieving employment. This is important as people have to be able to survive economically but if we take care of value development and character development I believe that employment needs and other social needs will be taken care of. I don't know how exactly but this is my gut belief. It is not that we do not have value education. I remember that as a student we had moral education and for me I was taught by nuns, Jesuits who were very clear on issues of right and wrong. I always tell people that I am so grateful to my teachers for being so strong. My parents gave birth to me but I am so grateful for my teachers who really brought students up to be good human beings with a strong sense of morality. So, values education is a core part of some curricula and for us in this office, we are saying that as a long-term measure, corruption has to be addressed by talking about corruption and ethics and by going back to the kids with this as a subject and as a vehicle to convey an understanding of right and wrong. We have not been able to do so much because we are very small and don't have many officers - which I don't want to use as an excuse. It is encouraging to see that the Education Commission is there to look at education policies but again, there is the need to translate these into practical action and I don't think that this

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will be resisted. Every parent would like their child to get the best education in terms of their overall development. That is why so many people are taking their kids outside the country and it means that we are losing a lot of resources. So, many people agree that we should not be looking towards developing dirty industries like mining and manufacturing but clean industries like education. We have just the right environment to make education a business sector. In fact, if we have an excellent education sector, people will want to send their children here from India and other countries. It is so peaceful here; there are no bomb blasts or terrorist activities here. Knowledge based industry is so wonderful - particularly in terms of building human resource capacity and a genuinely thriving nation.

RM: That would suggest that with GNH in place as a remarkable development goal, every sector that contributes to it from government to education to business has to be equally unique and remarkable to reach that goal.

DNZ: Yes, and you will be sensing that I can get quite impatient about this. We have exactly the right environment as you know, just the right conditions. We have been commended for being environmentally pristine but we can also be morally pristine. When you look at the global corruption tables, you find that Bhutan is about forty-fifth or forty-sixth in terms of level of corruption but we have all the right conditions to be the cleanest in the world. We can beat Finland, Denmark and Norway and be the best. From the statements of our politicians and from His Majesty, we know that the political will is there and in a small country like ours, we can achieve things very quickly. It is not like Bangladesh or India where the mere thought of achieving such a goal is so intimidating. Here in Bhutan, government is small scale, the private sector is small and we are talking of a population of only a few hundred thousand.

RM: It is refreshing to hear you talk in that way because for most nation states, as they look to compare themselves with other nations, they think only in terms of beating them economically and so, to aspire to be the least corrupted nation is really inspiring.

DNZ: Yes and although we can always compare ourselves with say Bangladesh or Nepal, I always say no, that we cannot feel good about comparing ourselves with the worst criminals. We need to compare ourselves with the most non-corrupt nations and take pride in equalling them. So let's look to more challenging targets than the worst performers because we can always beat them. We can find happiness in a high degree of non-corruption. Our environment can be protected and the nation's fate will not be in the hands of a few people. We cannot have happiness without justice and harmony. We did a survey and in peoples' perception, the biggest form of corruption was nepotism which is not surprising in a small society and here people often try to seek refuge in the grey area between culture and corruption. If you do not help your nephew or your relatives, you will be ostracised by your family and so on. You will be seen as useless or hopeless. So some have been doing these things thinking that it is acceptable to help relatives get a position at the cost of someone else—but it is often a poor family's child at whose cost you are placing your relative. So, nepotism is a problem. But for me working in the Anti-Corruption Commission, there are not many grey areas. I may be speaking very simplistically but for me, it is very clear – I cannot help my nephew, so let my parents curse me. It is wrong ethically. So, I keep saying that we constantly have to ask ourselves consciously what is right and wrong and that we cannot hide in some false grey area between culture and corruption.

RM: That again emphasises the importance of personal responsibility in achieving GNH. As you look towards the

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future, are you confident about the prospects of GNH delivering a more sustainable, just and responsible society?

DNZ: Yes. As a proud Bhutanese I cannot say that I am not confident, I have to be hopeful. I am a very sceptical person but still, I am optimistic because I feel that we have all the right conditions. We just need a few people that matter to really push us forward and we can show to the world how we can achieve Gross National Happiness in its true sense and that we are not just philosophising but actually practising happiness. At the personal level, I am very happy and at that level, GNH is with me every day. In fact, earlier today I was sitting with two of my colleagues and we were looking at targets for the next year and I was saying to them that for me, targets are not so important but what is more important is our work ethic and our disposition towards our visitors, simple things like that. For me, these are far more important. And it is human nature again, if you can make someone feel valued, it is nice, you know. I don't mean in terms of ego and so on, but if someone has come from a far away village who is absolutely lost, having come to Thimphu for the first time, we must find it in ourselves to help them. For me, these people are very important and these are the ones who need our attention. And it makes me so happy being able to help. To give someone a cup of tea and ask if they are ok-what does that cost you? For me, this is happiness. Even in the workplace you can make a difference. If you have strong convictions about GNH, you can help improve your colleagues. I think that we should see our workplaces as training grounds for increasing consciousness about GNH and about what is right and wrong. In this way, people can then really become role models for change in other organisations and in society as a whole. Then I think, in our own small ways, in our own humble ways, we can do a lot. At my own personal level, I am confident and convinced that I am practicing and contributing to Gross National Happiness.

Namgay Zam

RM: I am very interested in talking with you about the perspective of youth in Bhutan. You have been involved in canvassing youth opinion and have been a representative to a number of meetings and conferences on GNH. Many of the people that I speak to about the impacts of incoming modernisation have deep concerns about its effects on young people and I would like to explore some of these with you if I could. I wonder if I could start by asking what Gross National Happiness means to you as a young Bhutanese woman?

NZ: As a young, working Bhutanese woman, it is good to have GNH as the development philosophy of my country. GNH is needed especially for a small country like Bhutan where we can't have hardcore economic development at the expense of people's lives, especially rural folks' lives. The majority of the population of Bhutan is agrarian and it is valuable to have a national philosophy which puts the happiness of people above economic values so that all individuals have a stake in the development of the country. GNH is very important to me, it's very close to my heart.

RM: Do you see it then as being a philosophy that primarily drives the country towards more equitable development?

NZ: Yes, in some ways. Everybody is talking about GNH these days and I think that young people are looking towards how GNH is going to be implemented because it cannot just be about philosophy. When we put GNH in the category of philosophy, it excludes people who feel they are not intellectual enough to talk about it or implement it in their lives. So, we should allow multiple interpretations of GNH as

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long as the goal is the same, which is happiness for all. Putting it that way, it can be understood by all people. It will lead to more equitable development because wherever there is selflessness, there can be equity. So, I can see that as a potential but before that happens, it is essential that people understand more about how GNH can be brought into their lives.

RM: Is GNH well understood amongst young Bhutanese people? Do they have a good understanding of what the term means and how it can be integrated into their lives?

NZ: They are familiar with the basic definition, the Four Pillars you know? Everybody knows about these and that GNH is about national happiness. However, I think that is all that most young people know about the concept. They do not go much further than the Four Pillars. They know it concerns happiness but this is often interpreted as individual happiness and this might be the downfall of GNH in Bhutan.

RM: It sounds as if it is understood at a general sort of free-floating ideal level but, that, maybe there is not too much understanding of what it means in actual day-to-day practice. A number of people I have spoken to have suggested that GNH is the continuation of an essential Buddhist philosophy but where this is put in terms that are easier to digest and understand and this would imply a very close connection to what you were saying about selflessness. Many people have concerns over changing values and a fear that perhaps the Buddhist foundations of Bhutanese culture are being diluted and becoming weaker in terms of directing people's daily life. Do you get the sense that among younger people, the Buddhist values are becoming less cherished?

NZ: I would like to point out the difference between Bhutanese values and Buddhist values. I think, with the younger people, say from eighteen to twenty-eight years old, and even those who are confessed atheists or agnostics or

those who dabble in a bit of Christianity, all have the Middle Way at their core. They have the path of moderation etched in their psyche. Too much of anything is bad and that comes up in our daily conversation, whatever it is we are doing. So, don't work like a dog the whole day, it is not good for your health and don't indulge yourself too much either as too much of anything is not good for you. This is one of the core parts of GNH, the Middle Path and it means everything in moderation and you can see this search for balance in the lives of young adults. But when it comes to Bhutanese values, these are more socio-cultural, like living with your parents, looking after elders, the importance of living in extended families and so on. These things are changing a lot as youth become more independent and want to live more private lives with whoever they want to settle down with instead, of opening up to include their old parents. Some young people now look at this as an intrusion and a burden. Until now, it has been natural to look after your parents. They looked after you and so, you should repay this gratitude when they get old. So, in this sense, yes, the traditional Bhutanese values are definitely taking the back seat as western culture moves in. Media has had a huge hand in really changing a lot of values in the urban areas – in Thimphu, Phuentsholing, and Paro. In rural Bhutan, it's almost as it was before, although many people there have been exposed to media too. But these values are all about how you put them into practice. People in urban areas have the access and ability to open up to more modern culture and make it their own which is not the case for people in rural Bhutan.

RM: In the change towards a more individual outlook, is it likely that those commitments toward extended family and of being of service to others are going to be compromised by a rising individualism or can they both be brought into balance?

NZ: They can be brought into balance but I see an immediate danger of the individual becoming most important and I think

this is rapidly increasing. I will give you a workplace example. There are some people who think of themselves before they think of their workplace and they wonder 'what can I get out of this? Can I get extra benefits? They don't think about how they can best benefit their organisation or the ministry they are working for or how they can be of service and real help to the people of Bhutan. That is very little now, maybe 5% think that way, the other 95% would wonder what they could get out of a job. Can I get training, can I get promoted, if not, why should I work hard? I see this everywhere and it is very disillusioning for me. I have always tried to put others before me, maybe because I was raised by my grandmother and she indoctrinated me into that system of trying to be selfless. But it is human nature to think in terms of the survival of the fittest and these days, it is in most people's minds to have the best that they think they deserve. But I think that growing up in Bhutan and being Bhutanese helps in seeing that your happiness and your wellbeing depends upon other people and external factors as well. So, if we think in terms like that, then what others get is really not that important after all. So, let them have it, let them be happy. The question for me is how can I make a difference but this really depends on the mindset and that depends on a lot of things including what media you are exposed to, what part of the country you grew up in, what kind of family you have and so on.

RM: Certainly, as I view the impacts of media as it moves into Bhutan, I see changes that are the common ones you see anywhere when globalisation arrives. The rise of self-concern, the increase in competitive attitudes and I am wondering about how in practical terms, GNH can be translated into policies and practices that would allow the worst excesses of these attitudes to be avoided.

NZ: A few of us used to meet regularly at the Centre for Bhutan Studies to talk about how GNH could be used in workplaces and how it can be implemented in general but it is hard to say how practical it could be in this day and age. One

of the first suggestions to come up was the promotion of selflessness. When a person is 5 or 6 years old and still growing then, at that stage, it is easy to change a person and there are ways and means of having them become more selfless. But when one is 18, 19 and working, you have a mind of your own and it is not easy to ask people to become selfless especially if they have a family to support or ambitions. You can't easily ask people to give up their dreams for the wellbeing of the nation or for GNH. So, I think that the goal of happiness for everyone has to be the same but the way we get there, the means, may have to change through time. So we are talking about an adaptive approach to GNH which is why it is important to have multiple interpretations of GNH and how to get there.

So, where I work at KUZU FM, we have to work for the happiness of others but in a way that does not totally negate the self so that you get nothing from it. I think that, in this day and age in Bhutan, GNH is all about striking a balance so that both society and the individual benefit from the work they do.

RM: It is interesting what you say about different means of achieving the goal of happiness because it seems to me that in many traditionally religious societies, much of the influence on young people and of shaping the next generation comes from a fairly authoritarian base. You are expected to behave in particular ways, expected to play a role in supporting the extended family, you should dress like this and not like that and so on. As everyone in society contacts a different interpretation of what is possible in life, freedom becomes a principal value and so it is perhaps inevitable that people begin to see much of tradition as overbearing and imposing. I would think then that much of the challenge for Bhutan is how to get people and especially young people to internalise those values out of free choice and not because it is forced upon them. But that would imply that there has to be some counterbalancing force to the materialism and

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competitiveness that are pushed through the media. Is there much in the formal education system in Bhutan that can act as such a meaningful counterforce?

NZ: In the present education system, I do not really see any. In our own Dzongkha language and in Bhutanese literature, I think that there are some good moral values that come across to students. It is very traditional and the stories have been passed down through the centuries and through the generations. There I see moral values but in the education system itself, not so much. Most of our textbooks come from India or outside the country. So, it is not very relevant to the local scene. There are some efforts now to localise education and put more Buddhist values into what children are learning at school. So, maybe there is more of a sense that students should be allowed more choice. From my perspective, you have the literature from outside Bhutan and the literature from inside and students should be allowed to talk about what values are there and which ones are best. I don't think it is useful to try and come out with in-your-face moral values. Some of the books that I have seen for younger students do not really have very explicit value judgements but are designed to make you think and wonder 'Is that guy really the good guy, and is that one really the bad guy?' It allows more questioning. If there is more of this, then Bhutanese students could have a greater ability to think about values and see the point of GNH. So, I feel there is a need to have GNH in the curriculum, not in the form of teaching about the Four Pillars and the nine domains but in the sense of more discussions of culture, tradition, Bhutanese values, etc. and through this, I can see the younger generation growing into very responsible people.

RM: In the realities of culture and culture change, many of these values are passed down through the family and I wonder about the integrity of the family unit, particularly given some of your earlier observations. Do you sense

increasing tensions between young people and their elders as expectations of life change?

NZ: Yes. Sometimes it seems like a relationship of tensions and again it is most obvious in urban Bhutan especially in Thimphu. Sometimes the parents benefit from this and sometimes the youth benefit from these cultural changes. One very disturbing phenomenon that I see is educated parents not opening up to the idea that their children might want to do something with their lives that will make them happy. I can understand the concerns because obviously parents always want security for their children but a lot of parents are not pro-media and so even if their children, as young adults, want to join the media, they are not allowed to and they end up agreeing to do something else just to make their parents happy. You see the tension. As young people are forced to do something they do not want, they cannot put in the requisite effort to succeed at the highest level. At the end of the day, I am not sure if this even helps the parents and ultimately it sets in motion a vicious cycle of frustration and tension in which there can be no winner. The divorce rate is increasing. Almost every other person I meet in my age group now has divorced parents or parents who have remarried. The sanctimony of marriage was there before but now if you do not like the person, then you can just get divorced and find someone else. This is where individualism really comes into play, where you put yourself and your own happiness first and are less concerned with the consequences - how will the children, or the husband or the wife be effected? In previous times the question was how can I make my family work, what can I do that would make my children or my husband or my wife really happy? You got married for life and if there were problems, you worked on them. Now the individual has assumed central stage, the 'I' has become very important and more and more individual decisions are being made that affect the community at large and which are often detrimental.

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RM: In the middle of all of these changing expectations amongst families and community members, there must be a lot of pressure on young people as they have to decide where their allegiances lie – to themselves, to their parents, to society as a whole? Do you get the sense that many young people are falling through the cracks and suffering as a result of these tensions and shifts in society?

NZ: The youth that stand out unfortunately in this sense are the ones that come from broken homes. They can be hurt a lot and are the ones most likely to turn to drugs and alcohol. They end up doing badly at school which of course only fuels the tension at home. Instead of them being supported or treated with understanding, they are criminalised. It is surprising because we are a Buddhist country and are meant to look at the root cause of any problem and not at the superficial level. However, almost everyone here seems to look at it superficially. The thinking is 'lets send them to some centre' and not that perhaps we should ask them why they are having these problems and how can we really help. I see a lot of youth not getting to where they would want to be in life because of negligent and selfish parents. A lot of people who fall through the cracks do so because of negligent parents, even if it is not in obvious ways like drug addiction or alcohol abuse but depression. There seems to be a lot of depressed young people in Bhutan which is surprising. I mean I can understand why many youth would be depressed in a big society like India where there is so much pressure to perform. But Bhutan is comparatively more laid-back. When young kids are pressurised into doing things that they do not want, it can lead to depression and even though suicide rates are not very high at the moment, it is depressing to think that people are contemplating it at all.

I think that before, when the focus was not so much on the individual, you did not have that sense of 'oh my God, I am such a worthless human being, what can I contribute?' Before, problems were shared with your family while now you

have to bear everything yourself. When problems were shared, the pain was tolerable. There were always people one could turn to. There are solutions but I think that parents need to understand these because many of the problems faced by youth come from the parents' selfishness.

RM: The sense of failure you mentioned must in part be compounded by comparisons with those who seem more successful and who have more. It is one of the problems of media that it is designed to keep us feeling dissatisfied with what we have so that we consume more in what is often a vain search for happiness. Are those ideals of achieving a sense of self-worth through what you consume rising visibly to you amongst Bhutanese youth in the sense that material things - the cell phone you use, or the clothes you wear - are becoming an important measure of success. Is that becoming a bigger part of Bhutanese society?

NZ: It is. How can it not be when we are being bombarded by the media, for up to eight hours a day with no control over it? Young people want good paying jobs that will allow them access to high tech phones, good vehicles, good clothes, and good places to live. So, I see that it has become very important to be a symbol of success and to have the symbols of success. Even rural Bhutan is affected by this - they are not untouched by it. People from the villages come to town to sell goods and they see the vehicles, the good clothes, shoes and so on. Even the most rural people like the Layaps say they are now dissatisfied with the traditional clothes they wear because they think they are very rustic and rough compared to the cotton kiras we wear in the town. It's really sad. Things are changing and I think this is where the implementation of GNH is very important but very difficult

I can count the youth I know for whom these things are not important on my fingers. The strange thing is that they are looked upon as eccentric and a little strange and not really

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part of the gang. For the rest, clothes, mobile phones and vehicles are very important.

Parents are involved in this too, of course. And then you can see sibling rivalry rising. If a sibling is in the civil service, then they are often highly respected because they have a secure job and often have more perks than someone working for a private company. Let me give you a very cultural example. Every Bhutanese household has the *lochoe* or *choko* which is a very traditional festival where every year, we go to our home region and perform a ritual. Now, there is the pressure to see who can contribute most to this event. Parents think that if you earn more you can contribute more. It is subtle right now but you can see it affecting people as they think 'how can I get a job that pays more so that I contribute more to this *loche*?' It's amazing how much money people give and it is funny because it is meant to be for spiritual benefit but then you have the economy involved. So, if it can happen at that level, just imagine how much more it is happening at all other levels.

RM: That is a fascinating example of a sort of balancing act between getting more and giving more. I am interested in what you were saying about the impacts of change on rural people because I have heard it said that many who exist outside of the bright lights feel a strong draw towards being a part of the modern action. In your work, have you found that this is creating problems back in the villages in terms of a lack of commitment to village life and a desire to separate from it as soon as possible?

NZ: Yes we have a lot of youth opting for urban life. It has to do with the education system and I would blame that system entirely. The education system does not promote youth to become agricultural farmers, it educates them to become civil servants. I think this is where the problem lies. It is not a system that encourages young adults to work in different fields. It doesn't make you proud to be a farmer and to find

success at that. The system does make it seem valid – it is a rustic lifestyle, you can only make so much money, you can only do so much, full stop. So if we open up avenues and promote an agrarian lifestyle it would be helpful. I mean who are we fooling? Bhutanese society is over 70% agrarian. A lot of the money we make is based on agriculture and if everyone is encouraged to abandon farming and lead an urban lifestyle, who is going to feed us? It is very important to have educated farmers as you have all over the world. You can make money in agriculture and this is another area where I think we could really implement GNH so that we can support and enable our farmers and our villages to become successful and prosperous. Then it can become an option for young people who are graduating. That way we can have a back-flow of educated people into the rural system that could benefit the whole country. It could be a very practical application. But because that option is not available at the moment, a lot of young people come here after class twelve. We have this problem because a lot of the families in Bhutan cannot afford to send their kids out of the country to finish college. We only have two universities here but the competition is really high and rural youth are disadvantaged. We should think about those who do not get through. These people still want good jobs but there are not enough of these and the ones that are available, often, undermine their self-respect. Then you have alcohol problems and other health issues that become a burden to the health ministry and, in turn, to the government of Bhutan. And of course there are the women and the parents who are left behind in the villages as the men from there come looking for work. It is really quite sad as some cannot find any work that pays well. That ultimately increases criminal activities. This is not so bad as to involve murder and looting, but not paying the landlord or employees are also just as bad. Many of these people can not really go back to the villages because they came here to make money and when they can not, it leads to depression, feelings of worthlessness, and suicidal thoughts.

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RM: What you have just been saying reinforces the importance of what has been proposed in terms of moving as much development out to the villages as possible to try and stem the flow of young people into urban areas. Transport and electricity infrastructure has of course been a part of this but it seems that Bhutan is presently at a very delicate point of development and that perhaps the next five to ten years represent a critical window for GNH to become properly operationalised if the changes are not to become so profound that it will be difficult to avoid the development path that most disadvantaged countries find themselves on. As a young person looking towards the future and thinking of how Bhutan might be, are you optimistic that GNH will reach a point where it can create a real resilience within the population that will allow a good balance of collective happiness with individual satisfaction?

NZ: The more I discover about my country, the less optimistic I become but not to the point that I have become a pessimist. I think that I am more of a realist now. It all depends on how successfully we can operationalise and implement GNH and how successfully we can bring the growing youth population of Bhutan into the system of GNH. If we fail there, I see a very bleak future for Bhutan. We will not get anywhere economically and we will not get anywhere environmentally. We will end up becoming a poverty-stricken and unhappy people. We will become a corrupted society. I think that with the coming in of democracy, you have the promotion of the individual and if we look around the world, we can see that it has not really been so successful. Along with the right to vote for the government, people often feel that they have the right to demand. Because of that, I think, a lot of youth in my age group see that something could go wrong down the line. But we have GNH, and thank goodness for that. It is now all about how GNH is taught to the youth of Bhutan and if it can be made loveable to all instead of just being this intellectual philosophy that you need to respect and revere, it can be celebrated and implemented. Without this, Bhutan is not going to get anywhere.