

Role of Meditation in Achieving Gross National Happiness

Khenpo Phuntsok Tashi

Introduction

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

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

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

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

Desire for happiness

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

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

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

What is meditation?

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

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

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

The mind becomes immovable by the power of calm abiding meditation

And the mind becomes steady like a mountain, by the power of penetrative insight meditation

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

Three opponents of happiness

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

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

objects like weapons do not kill others by themselves if anger is not the fuel behind their use.

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

Direct antidote

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

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

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

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

Who needs meditation?

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

Once under the influence of stress, people often make wrong decisions. Sometimes they attempt suicide and end this beautiful life since they do not know how to cope with problems, or cannot find solutions in time to make critical changes. Therefore, to overcome suffering due to stress and worries, meditation is the best way to find peace and happiness. The state of meditation is

free from stress and tension; it is pure and calm, not like the calm resulting from drugs.

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

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

Nine stages of calm abiding meditation

When you are ready to begin your meditation practice in a suitable place, first calm down both physically and mentally. Take a natural breath in and out for a couple of seconds on your comfortable cushion. At this time you must be pleased and smile with great rapture for getting such a golden opportunity. If there are holy objects in your room, you may pay homage and confess before them with great reverence. If not, you can imagine or remember that a band of Buddhas and enlightened beings including your spiritual teacher, are flying in the space before you as witnesses and are rejoicing in your meritorious action. Then your motivation, which is a primary consciousness directed towards a goal, has to be transformed into bodhimind, the mind of enlightenment. You should say silently; for the benefit of all sentient beings, from now onwards, I shall meditate on calm abiding meditation. May all sentient beings be free from all suffering and attain the state of complete enlightenment. This is a Mahayana tradition to think that others are more important than

oneself. Then start meditating through the nine stages of setting the mind:

- mental setting
- continual setting
- patch-like setting
- close setting
- controlled setting
- pacification
- complete pacification
- single pointed setting
- equal setting.

First you meditate on the present mental setting. Narrow down and focus on the object of meditation or on the present mind over and over again. Do not let the mind wander off and become dull. When you are focusing on the object or your mind, if you find your mind is still and calm you should not disturb it by putting in more effort to set the mind. Let it leave alone as quiet as possible. As soon as you notice that your mind wanders off, call for alertness and mindfulness. Whenever you have any mental distraction you have to apply the power of knowledge and painstaking attention to bring it back to the state of mental setting.

When you practice mental setting, you say to yourself in a soft tone 'Mental setting, I know that I am mental setting right now.' Or you say 'Calm the mind, I know that I am calming the mind.' You say it again and again for sometime. When your mind becomes stable and calm you stop saying it and stay quiet and calm as long as you wish.

At this first stage, the meditator must aim at mental setting like the archer, aiming only at the target. Once the mind becomes a little stable, then the second technique for the continual setting of the mind must be practised.

If one is not following the continual setting after the first stage, the mind may become stagnant and no development of meditation will be gained. So the second stage of continual setting of the mind must be practised through the power of contemplation and repeated attention. Meditation on continual setting the mind is to be like an even flow of a river. At this stage sometimes the mind gets exhausted and is inclined to discontinue the practice. At this time, the third stage of patch-like setting is required to keep the development of meditation going forward.

After the second stage, mental distraction will be less than in the first two stages, but it will come occasionally, so the antidote should be applied from time to time to reduce the distraction as far as possible through the power of mindfulness and repeated attention. The third stage of patch-like setting of the mind is like a skilled tailor, who makes a patch for torn clothes whenever it is needed.

After the third stage, the mind, almost unnoticeably, gets many subtle distractions. During this time it is very necessary to practise the fourth stage of close setting of the mind. If you look at the mind closely it never stays still. It moves and wanders off through subtle mental agitation. At this time we also need to apply extra power of mindfulness and repeated attention. Here the technique of close setting the mind is like a cowherd who keeps his cows close to the grazing land.

The fifth stage of controlled setting of the mind is needed at the time when too much conceptual cognition is coming to disturb the close setting of the mind. At this time the power of mental alertness and repeated attention should be applied to control the conceptual cognition. Here controlled setting of the mind is like an untrained horse getting trained under the control of a master.

During the sixth stage of pacification, wandering thoughts must be caught and brought back to the state of single pointed mind through the power of mental alertness and repeated attention. At this time the mind becomes more pacified and sober.

In the seventh stage of complete pacification the covetous mind, desire, and mental unhappiness must be completely pacified to keep the mind in the state of complete pacification through the power of mental alertness and repeated attention. Until this stage, repeated attention is an antidote to distracted minds.

In the eighth stage, the mind becomes stable in the state of single pointed mind by the force of previous constant practices of meditation. At this time, the single pointed mind should be kept in the state of equanimity without applying an antidote and by putting more effort into bringing back the mind to the state of meditation. Here the equanimity of the mind must be taken care of by uninterrupted attention and the power of enthusiastic perseverance. If the mind is not interrupted, then calmness and tranquility appear naturally, as the sea remains quiet without waves when there is no wind blowing on the surface of the sea. But it is possible to get mental distraction from dullness and agitation, if the enthusiastic perseverance does not remain with uninterrupted attention.

The last stage of setting the mind is equal setting. During this stage the mind is very sober and becomes equal in concentration. The mind has become more powerful than the previous mind, which remains in the state of equipoise whenever needed. So that in this stage, the mind is often compared to an immovable mountain. This is the last stage and the calm abiding meditator can attain complete calmness and stability in six months if he practices in the perfect and precise way according to instructions. At this stage the mind gains special powers like clairvoyance and the ability to read another's with no mental distraction. Every action can become perfect and meaningful to life. This is the real blessing of happiness! This is the real blessing of happiness!

References

Dalai Lama & Cutler, Howard C. (2005). *The Art of Happiness: Art work*. Hodder & Stoughton Ltd.

Practice and Measurement of Gross National Happiness

- Dudjom Rinpoche. (2005). *Wisdom Nectar*. Trans. and Intro. Ron Garry. Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion Publications.
- Sogyal Rinpoche (1998). *The Tibetan book of Living and Dying: A spiritual classic from one of the foremost interpreters of Tibetan Buddhism to the west*. Random House Australia (pty) Limited.
- Patrul Rinpoche (1999). *The words of My Perfect Teacher*. Trans. By Padmakara Translation Group. New Delhi: Vistaar Publications.
- Dowman, Keith (2003). *The Flight of the Garuda: The Dzogchen tradition of Tibetan Buddhism*. Wisdom Publication.