

Gross National Happiness: a Tribute

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Nailed to the rock of truth, grafted into the tree of knowledge, C I James left us a great little tale of wisdom.

A big dog saw a little dog chasing its tail and asked, 'why are you chasing your tail so?' Said the puppy, 'I have mastered philosophy, I have solved the problems of the universe which no dog has before me solved; I have learned that the best thing for a dog is happiness and that happiness is in my tail. Therefore, I am chasing it; and when I catch it, I shall have happiness.

Said the old dog, 'My son, I, too, have paid attention to the problems of the universe, and I have formed some opinions. I, too, have found that happiness is a fine thing for a dog, and that happiness is in my tail. But I have noticed that when I chase after it, it keeps running away from me, but when I go about my business, it comes after me'.

Without appearing to gurusify the barking quadruped, had the world heeded to the counsel of the senior dog, the lot of the Homo sapiens might have been far happier than the predicament of a 'feverish little cold of ailments and grievances, complaining that the world will not devote itself to making you happy'. They would else have been a tremendous 'force of nature' as imagined by Bernard Shaw.

The world indeed went about its business, but like the junior dog, in a Faustian transaction bartering its soul for the gratification of its material and immediate desires. Human beings court happiness in myriad ways, and the faster they follow it, the swifter it flies from them. Almost everything promises happiness to us at a distance, but when we come

nearer, either we fall short of it, or it falls short of our expectations.

For a world that is long used to measuring success in terms of per capita income and level of consumption, will an invitation to be human again make sense? His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo Jigme Singye's vision of Gross National Happiness is, undoubtedly, a unique paradigm of a chastening possibility in which the main motivating force behind human effort is not economic gain, but the cultivation of a humane society, the ultimate goal being the happiness of all people.

Let us face the fact that we the Bhutanese are no more than human - buoyed by the same reasons for hope and pained by the same causes of despair. And, it will be unrealistic to make greater demands on ourselves than we can fulfil.

But we can all do a little - we can begin gradually to work towards a vision and the way of life we believe would be the right way, rather than following blindly along a path of development that we fear is incapable of responding to the profound needs of human beings. The creation of a society in which gross national happiness is equal to or greater than gross national product presupposes a change in our daily lives. As I am, so is my nation.

Bringing about general happiness is not a question of adapting to a life, which we constantly have to sacrifice our pleasures for the sake of others. This would hardly be possible for most of us. Arriving at a situation of gross national happiness is not a substitution of a life of sacrifice and renunciation by the Bhutanese.

His Majesty the King has dreamt for us a Bhutan where our success will not necessarily be measured by economics or statistics, but by the level of happiness and contentment that the Bhutanese are able to enjoy - from Sibsoo to Sakten, from Lunana to Lalai.

"The success or failure of our five-year plans will be measured by the level of happiness and contentment of the Bhutanese people" said His Majesty in an audience he granted us once. This concern is a reflection of His Majesty's belief that the goal of life cannot be to own and consume as much as possible, because our dependence on material things is destructive of real joy and an intense experience of the celebration of living. Happiness is not available in a condition of inner passivity or emptiness, nor is it found in an escape from the process of life.

Granted that the basic conditions of happiness - security against fear, security against want, security against indignities - must be fulfilled; however, the real foundations of happiness are built in our attitudes and actions. So said Helen Keller:

"Your success and happiness lie in you. External conditions are the accidents of life. The great enduring realities are love and service".

Social conditions should foster love of life - ours as well as theirs. However, paradoxically enough, as Victor E. Frankl says, Happiness must happen...you have to let it happen by not caring about it. Happiness cannot be pursued; it must ensue'.

For a Bhutan of gross national happiness to be born, the Bhutanese have got to be fully born, fully awake and fully human. We must free ourselves from the ideas of infantile grandiosity and accept with conviction our real, though limited, strength. A programme of gross national happiness demands courage and strength of character, no less than Gandhi's call to non-violence did.

The whole of the Bhutanese society, our entire way of thinking, must gradually be changed, through a change in the individual. The way the situation is today, an attitude that is built on ideals that every one can espouse is easily spread. If at least the enlightened or educated Bhutanese

could begin by being a little more responsible - with an understanding that everything we do is bound to have an impact on other Bhutanese - we will already have accomplished a lot.

Gross National Happiness cannot be brought about cheaply. We must enlist every Bhutanese - man woman and child. They must be able to tell apart the genuine from the artificial; they should learn that consideration for others is more important than carving a career for themselves, that the worth of people is measured not by what they have, but by what they are.

All that we are called upon to renounce are our false values and false notions of success - which actually obstruct our appreciation of life's real pleasures. We need to understand that the pleasure of enjoyment is chasteningly enhanced if it is accompanied by a spirit of sharing. We fulfil ourselves more fully in relationships. 'It is the way our sympathy flows and recoils that really determines our lives', as in the language of D.H Lawrence in 'Lady Chatterley's Lover'.

Teaching ourselves how to live more simply, more harmoniously, and a little more genuinely is a real step towards working for gross national happiness. A Bhutan of gross national happiness has to be created in the heart of every Bhutanese before it can be lived in.

The Bhutan of gross national happiness may not be born in our times; we ourselves may not reach the Promised Land, but we will have helped create it. Little by little, and perhaps, faster than we think, once a new attitude has emerged, we will have created a new Bhutan by our own conscious efforts.

Once the idea of gross national happiness grips the national psyche and enkindles hope in the heart of every Bhutanese, then none can check the tide. It will be a national passion. The appeal of this programme is less loud, more profound, and less distinct but more stirring and enduring.

Judged by the standards of even a few decades ago, we live in one of the most exciting times to merge our individual 'I' with the national 'We' and strengthen the hand of His Majesty in our bid to embark on a future which we will be proud to recommend to our youngsters - a future which all of us singly and collectively will have created.

A Bhutan of gross national happiness will be a moral giant 'where everyone cares enough and everyone shares enough so that everyone has enough'. Such a nation 'will pattern a new social and economic order for this and all future generations'. One could echo the spirit of Frank Buchman.

Let us take one step, only one step, and be more imaginative, a little more genuine. Let us be more human again. Perhaps we will one day be able to invite the world to a marriage of gross national happiness and the results of physical enterprise. This is the only Bhutan we have. Come, let us crown her with the fruits of His Majesty's dreams.

References

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