



Mahayana Buddhism and Gross National Happiness in Bhutan

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Abstract: In 1972, the fourth King of Bhutan announced that Gross National Happiness was more important than Gross Domestic Product. In this paper, the basic conceptual features of Mahayana Buddhism are discussed particularly as they relate to the Mahayana Buddhist view of happiness. The primary purpose of Mahayana Buddhism is to spread happiness and compassion to everyone in the world. This includes that by awakening to the Ultimate Truth, one obtains greater clarity and insight about the true nature of the universe, leading to internal peace and happiness. As this paper shows, the goal of modern Gross National Happiness is also based on Mahayana Buddhist principles to increase happiness for everyone. This occurs through governmental policies and programs that promote material needs balanced with becoming enlightened.

Keywords: Bhutan, Gross National Happiness, public policy, Mahayana Buddhism

Introduction

Mahayana Buddhism, which was the state religion of Bhutan in the early 1970s and still has a substantial influence today, has been intricately entwined with culture and politics, including Gross National Happiness (GNH), in Bhutan. In this paper, I will provide an overview of the Mahayana Buddhist view of happiness and how it impacts GNH. A deep understanding of Mahayana Buddhism provides an important basis to understand why and how GNH operates as a primary policy influence in modern Bhutan. When Shakyamuni Buddha (formerly Prince Siddhartha) found Enlightenment around or after 400 B.C.E. after six years of striving and one night of meditating under the Bodhi tree in what is now northeastern India, the new religion of Buddhism emerged.¹ Buddha's awakening brought forth a religious movement that was grounded in the principal belief that profound suffering exists in the world. This suffering can be resolved by following Buddhist dharma or law that facilitates happiness and bliss (Armstrong 2004; Assavavirulhakarn 2010; Batchelor 2010; Keown 2013; Leighton 2012; McGovern 1922; Mitchell 2008; Morgan 2010; Smith & Novak 2003; D. T. Suzuki 1968).

In Buddha's first sermon, he identified suffering as all-pervasive in life (Morgan 2010). He saw the fundamental bases of suffering as the need to survive day-to-day existence, illness, aging, and death. As it was written in the Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta, which is Buddha's first sermon after finding Enlightenment:

¹ There is no general scholarly consensus on the exact date that the Buddha found Enlightenment. A number of scholars, though, regard the date of Enlightenment to be near his death, approaching 400 B.C.E. See also: Gethin, *Foundations of Buddhism*, 1998, 13-14 and Gombrich, 1988, 32 for general comments. To get the details see Heinz Bechert 1982, "The Date of the Buddha Reconsidered" *Indologia Taurinensia* 10, pp. 29-36.



Suffering, as a noble truth, is this: Birth is suffering, aging is suffering, sickness is suffering, death is suffering, sorrow and lamentation, pain, grief and despair are suffering; association with the loathed is suffering, dissociation from the loved is suffering, not to get what one wants is suffering — in short, suffering is the five categories of clinging objects.

Buddhists believe that suffering also occurs through the selfish and mindless craving of sensual pleasure and material wealth and power by individual egos, which may cause evil deeds (Armstrong 2004; Batchelor 2010; Keown 2013; Leighton 2012; Mitchell 2008; Smith & Novak 2003). Buddhists have further identified additional reasons suffering continues, including past conditioning to expect suffering and ignorance of the ultimate reality of existence or the Ultimate Truth. The Ultimate Truth, which has also been referred to as Nirvana (which means “to extinguish desire”), Enlightenment, or the Awakening, is a state of transcendent metaphysical reality, and the attainment of this state of happiness is the ultimate goal of Buddhism (French 2002).

In Buddhism, the Ultimate Truth cannot be described, but may be understood only through direct insights, which may come through meditation approaches. Only the Ultimate Truth is permanent. The Ultimate Truth is the realm beyond death and is the infinite nature of the ultimate reality of the cosmic universe. There is no ultimate reality in the cosmic universe except cosmic emptiness or Shunyata.² By awakening to the Ultimate Truth, Buddhists believe every sentient being can possess peace, bliss, joy, and happiness (Gethin 1998; Leighton 2012). The understanding of the Ultimate Truth is, in a general sense, a move toward significant comprehension of the true nature of the universe (Gethin 1998; Leighton 2012). For all Buddhists, the Ultimate Truth is beyond syllogistic logic and meaning, and within the Ultimate Truth, all space-time limitations disappear as they are ordinarily experienced by humans (Gethin 1998; Leighton 2012). Paradoxically, however, the rigorous use and traditions of logic and argumentation in some Mahayana Buddhism is required to obtain the Ultimate Truth and happiness.

In the universe all matter, energy, and time is interrelated and in constant fluid fluctuation (Gethin 1998; Keown 2013; Leighton 2012). Within Mahayana Buddhism, a metaphor of the ocean is an important illustration of this principle. The ocean is absolute, stable and changeless, but the waves are always changing. In much the same way, reality in the here-and-now appears to be based on a unified and observable universe. However, this seemingly unified nature of the universe can also be compared with modern theories of physics, such as Einstein’s Special Theory of Relativity or quantum physics, where there are underlying and complex interactions between space, matter, and time that reflect a complex and ever-changing universe. When a sentient being experiences the Ultimate Truth of the ever-changing universe even paradoxically through rationalist logic, they have liberated themselves from all causes of suffering, including greed, hatred, and delusion, and they enter into a state of clarity, happiness, and peace. By perceiving Ultimate Truth and eliminating egotism in the form of greed, hatred, and delusion, happiness and Enlightenment ensues (Goodman 2008).

Karma, in Buddhism, which means willful actions or the fruits of actions, is the everlasting law of cause and effect that is an essential ingredient in knowing the Ultimate Truth (Williams 2008). Karma pertains to happiness in the following ways. Ultimate happiness is obtained

² In Mahayana and Tibetan Buddhism, one major position by Mipham and others holds that the nature of emptiness and ultimate reality is not knowable. But elements of reality, such as matter and energy, do exist and can be grasped by humans. In contrast, the Gelupka school in Mahayana Buddhism believed that reality is unknowable and encompasses a negation of all worldly corporeality (Phuntsho 2013).

through Enlightenment. Positive Karma results in higher rebirth, bringing one closer to Nirvana. The Vipaka (result) ripening of Karma (deeds) leads to greater happiness, joy, and bliss when a person is reborn.

In part, Buddhism acquired the Karma idea from Vedic Hinduism, but endowed it with further ethical constructs (Morgan 2010). Adherents of Vedic Hinduism, particularly the Upanishads, as early as the first century B.C.E. believed that good moral actions by humans turned a person into a good being in the next life while bad moral actions turned a person into a bad person in the next life. Under Karmic law, which functions as a natural law in the changing and interdependent universe, good or bad deeds have consequences for rebirth and nature, including the happiness of sentient beings (Mitchell 2008).

Karma's impact in Buddhism is not rigid, as it responds on a continual basis to a sentient being's good or bad deeds (Morgan 2010). A sentient being's present character cannot nullify the consequences of an individual's misdeeds in past lives but creates better Karma to offset bad Karma. In particular, four acts that counter past bad Karma are remorsefulness, the resolve not to commit an action again, actions to restore justice for past bad actions, and acts of holding another in loving-kindness (Morgan 2010). Mindfulness of one's actions can have an important positive effect on future rebirth as a sentient being, including greater happiness.

As explained in 2007 by Dasho Karma Ura, President of the Centre for Bhutan Studies in Thimphu:

Because of the discursive nature of Karma, all are part of an intricate web. Karma is simultaneous and is constantly being revised in all of our interactions with one another. Such a view of interdependence sufficiently motivates us to forget our own narrow existence, changing us such that we begin to engage meaningfully with others and pursue collective happiness. By recognizing the true nature of interdependence, one can see that all Karma is collective, that all enlightenment is collective, and therefore that happiness and the policies required to promote it must be oriented toward collective achievement (Ura 2012).

According to Buddhists, without awakening to the Ultimate Truth and happiness and bliss, humans remain on the ever-moving Wheel of Life (Gethin 2004; Snelling 1998). Additionally, the cravings for sensual pleasure and material wealth and power represented by the Wheel of Life, are not permanent fixtures of human existence and doing good karmic acts will increase happiness and wellbeing (French 2002). The Wheel of Life pushes us from one moment of our life to the next, and from one lifetime to the next, within the realms of human, animals, asura or jealous gods, hungry ghosts, and ultimately Heaven and Hell. Yama, the deity of death, holds the Wheel of Life (Gethin 2004; Snelling 1998).

The outer wheel is divided into a 12-fold chain of dependent origination (pratityasamutpada), which represents the causes and effects of Karma that does not bring greater happiness (Gethin 2004; Snelling 1998). At the top of the Wheel is a blind man who represents ignorance. Moving clockwise, the potter represents action. Next is the monkey, which is symbolic of a consciousness unable or unwilling to comprehend the Ultimate Truth. Three men in a boat represent a vehicle that can carry a sentient being across a body of water of growing consciousness of the Ultimate Truth and through life. Houses with doors and windows are symbolic of the ability to sense reality. Lovers represent the ability to engage in sensual impressions of reality. A man with an arrow stabbing his eye is representative of blindness to feeling itself or the feelings accompanying sensing the reality of the Ultimate Truth. Alcoholic drinking represents the non-productive thirst for sensual pleasure. Similarly, the monkey in the tree is illustrative of a consciousness fixated on ego-oriented desires. A pregnant woman

indicates that the birth of a child and eventual old age will bear Karma's burden of good and bad throughout a lifetime.

Contained in and connected with the outer Wheel of Life is the second wheel, which represents the six realms of existence. These include heavenly, asura, animal, hell, hungry ghosts and human realms (Gethin 2004; Snelling 1998). The six realms are metaphorical representations of conditioned existence or samsara. These realms are classified as dukkha or suffering being temporary and not perfect. Entry into one of the six realms is based on karmic deeds, good or bad. Bad deeds and decreased happiness, upon rebirth, means entry into the asura realm, where there is envy and greed for power. Bad deeds also lead to the animal realm in which a sentient being is hunted or slaughtered; the hell realm where suffering is harsh and very long; and hungry ghosts, due to past transgressions, are doomed to suffer insatiable hunger and thirst that cannot be quenched due to past unrelenting material greed. Good deeds lead to the heavenly realm where there is continual happiness, pleasure, and no suffering. Entry into the human realm is based on both past good and bad deeds, which reflect a sentient being's current human condition including, for instance, their social prestige and status. All of these realms are inhabited by sentient beings upon rebirth based on their past record of Karma. From the Buddhist perspective, being caught on the Wheel of Life means to continue to exist in the everyday realm without realizing or awakening to the Ultimate Truth (Snelling 1998). However, in each of the six realms there is a bodhisattva shown to assist all sentient beings toward obtaining the Ultimate Truth and happiness. In Mahayana Buddhism, who remains in this world works to enlighten all and spread happiness and bliss (Gethin 1998; Keown 2013; Leighton 2012). A bodhisattva is not yet a Buddha and not yet awakened. Bodhisattvas are bodhicitta or the "mind of awakening" with a goal of achieving Buddhahood.

Finally, the third, innermost wheel represents the core reasons for negative karmic designations and decreased happiness. These are known as the Three Venoms: greed, hatred, and delusion. The poison of those trapped in everyday existence rather than knowing the Ultimate Truth energizes each of these Venoms. This is represented by sentient beings caught within the six realms in the second wheel. Ultimately, humans can exit the Wheel of Life including the third wheel and find bliss and happiness by becoming enlightened.

1.1 The Eightfold Path

The Eightfold Path is followed in order to lead an ethical life and thus to end ones' suffering, leading to happiness and the Ultimate Truth. The Eightfold Path is the ongoing condition of obtaining increasing bliss and happiness (Gethin 2004; Snelling 1998). The Path is divided into three parts (Gethin 2004; Snelling 1998). Sila encompasses proper physical actions and refraining from improper deeds of body and speech. Samadhi focuses on meditation practices, which help to gain the mastery over ones' own mind necessary to achieve the Ultimate Truth. Prajña offers insight into the true nature of the Ultimate Truth.

Contained within Sila are Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood (Gethin 2004; Snelling 1998). Right Speech is required because words have an impact on others, and also influence spiritual development. It is important to speak charitable words that are truthful, pleasant and benefit others (Morgan 2010). For the Buddha, this meant avoiding falsehoods, slander, harsh words, or gossip (Morgan 2010). Abstaining from false speech is important to happiness because lies are motivated either by greed, by which the suffering of material attachments is increased; hatred, by which it is intended for other people to suffer; or delusion, as in an exaggeration or joke, and by which rationality is abandoned and replaced by ignorance. Abstaining from slanderous speech is important because such speech is meant only to foster ill

feelings and alienating division. Either the motivation to hurt another's reputation or to win favor for your own ego is perverse and should be quelled. Happiness comes through cooperation, not self-interest and denigration. Abstaining from harsh language is important because it is born of anger, and aims to cause pain of some kind. A person who has controlled his own mind has no need for such expressions of enmity. Gentle words foster understanding, cooperation, and ultimately, happiness. Abstaining from idle chatter is important because if people talk of things, which have no depth or importance, they are more likely to find their minds wander into areas which are perverse or undesirable, which the mind will then feed on in unhealthy fantasy. Words should be chosen carefully in order to not diminish their meaning. Followers of this tenet should also try to avoid useless information in order to keep their minds unclouded in their path to understanding. The overarching goal of speaking Right Words is to create a foundation to establish peaceful relationships with all sentient beings (Mitchell 2008; Morgan 2010; Smith & Novak 2003).

Right Action means moral action that avoids causing harm to any sentient being in whatever one does (Gethin 2004; Snelling 1998). Right Actions are not only what actions a person should not do, but also what actions a person should do. Exhibiting compassion for all embodies this. Incorporated in Right Action is the moral code of the Five Precepts, which call for people to respect and cherish life and respect others (Mitchell 2008; Morgan 2010; Smith & Novak 2003). Buddhism places a heavy emphasis on the need to end destructive acts and to end dissatisfaction in the world through action. Abstaining from the taking of life is important because, aside from the obvious suffering that comes from the act of killing (the harm to the being itself, the emotional weight of the act of killing, and the grief of those who knew the victim), killing, like lying, comes from greed, hatred, or delusion, all of which hinder one's ability to find personal contentment. The opposite of the inclination to kill is deep compassion and sympathy for other sentient beings, and this type of love leads to widespread happiness. Abstaining from taking what is not given (through stealing or deceit) is important because Buddhism values contentment with what one has, and giving up ties to the material world. Theft in any form comes from greed or hatred, both of which diminish happiness. Abstaining from sexual misconduct (having relations with a married or engaged person, a convict, one who is underage, those under a vow of celibacy, or close relations, or any intercourse which occurs by force) is important because according to the guidelines given in Buddhism partnerships, which constitute misconduct directly, this hurts someone in the process. In its most extreme form, the celibacy of nuns and monks represents the purity of thought required to reach Enlightenment, which should not be clouded with distracting sexual thoughts.

Right Livelihood includes engaging in occupations that do not cause harm, pain, or injustice for others (Gethin 2004; Snelling 1998). The Buddha included engaging in the sale of weapons, harming animals, and producing intoxicants as examples of harmful types of livelihood. Also, one should not make more money than one needs, as this could lead to deception and exploitation of others (Mitchell 2008; Morgan 2010; Smith & Novak 2003). The promotion of economic equality under GNH allows for people who may otherwise, due to their poverty, feel the need to resort to dishonest or directly harmful livelihoods to branch out into other facets of the economy, and to make an honest and productive living, while being able to support themselves and their family. The work one does should ultimately spread compassion to all sentient beings.

Within Samadhi are another three parts of the Noble Eightfold Path: Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration. Right Effort includes making use of meditation practices, which overcome negative or unwholesome states of mind. These meditation efforts should occur

on an ongoing basis (Mitchell 2008; Morgan 2010; Smith & Novak 2003). Right Effort also includes ridding oneself of the desire to commit unwholesome acts (Mitchell 2008). Right effort involves the release of energy, which can be used in pursuit of “desire, aggression, violence, and ambition on the one hand, and generosity, self-discipline, kindness, concentration, and understanding on the other” (Access to Insight). This means that, specifically, when energy is focused on the elimination of suffering, it promotes happiness, and this concentration is Right Effort.

Right Mindfulness is having a keen sense of awareness about what is happening in the present (Gethin 2004; Snelling 1998). This includes focusing on feelings, the body, current consciousness, and unwholesome thoughts through meditation practices (Morgan 2010). Meditation is essential for the mind to stay on the Eightfold Path because it focuses on feelings and thoughts from the past and idealizes what might happen in the future (Mitchell 2008; Morgan 2010; Smith & Novak 2003). Mindfulness through meditation is the kind of objective awareness that allows one to see into the true nature of the universe as well as to gain understanding of Buddhist teaching in the present. This stage of focus is closely tied to experiencing Enlightenment, the ultimate happiness. Right Mindfulness is “the only way,” to indicate that a positive range of experiences are nothing without the insight granted through Right Mindfulness, and it is thus the key to sustaining one’s earthly happiness.

Right Concentration requires that the focus of the mind is free of distraction so it will be clear and sharp enough to reach full realization of the Ultimate Truth. This process requires great patience and focus, and requires continual meditation. Key approaches to training the mind in Right Concentration are mastering tranquility and insights into reality (Mitchell 2008). This stage unifies the other mental factors in becoming Enlightened. It blocks out all distractions and focuses the mind on a single point for the greatest level of comprehension, given that the absence of ignorance and the presence of intense self-knowledge lead ultimately to happiness. Right Concentration is necessary to sharpen the ability of the other elements to the point at which they are able to penetrate into the true meaning of things. This understanding is where happiness comes from, either from the knowledge that the material world holds no bearing on personal satisfaction, or from the acceptance and application of the Four Noble Truths. Through Right Concentration, mental and emotional peacefulness ensue, which foster realization of the Ultimate Truth (Mitchell 2008; Morgan 2010; Smith & Novak 2003).

Prajña is the wisdom, which purifies the mind and allows awakening to the Ultimate Truth. Within Prajña are the final two parts of the Eightfold Path, Right Understanding and Right Thought. Right Understanding is obtaining clear insight into the impermanence of the world, understanding how ego leads to greed and even evil, and comprehending every aspect of the Dharma, or Law, of the Buddha (Mitchell 2008; Morgan 2010; Smith & Novak 2003). Right Understanding includes agreement with the Four Noble Truths and the development of a deep awareness of dissatisfaction in the world (Mitchell 2008). Acceptance of the Four Noble Truths leads to the understanding and elimination of suffering, which in turn leads to happiness.

Right Thought includes developing freedom from states of mind that include greed and desire to harm others. Right Thought also focuses on refraining from unwholesome thoughts. Conversely, Right Thought also focuses on concern for the suffering of others (Mitchell 2008; Morgan 2010; Smith & Novak 2003). Renunciation of the material world fosters happiness in oneself by eliminating personal suffering due to desire and ego. Kindness and compassion foster happiness in others. Refusing to harm others limits the amount of suffering allowed to thrive in a society. By faithfully practicing the Eightfold Path, a person moves towards greater happiness, compassion, and joy.

1.2 Buddhism after the lifetime of the Buddha

A number of scholars believe about three months before the Buddha died at the age of 80 and entered paranirvana, or final liberation, the First Buddhist Council convened in Rajgir, then capital of the Kingdom of Magadha, to maintain Buddha's teachings (Harvey 2013). Most of Magadha is located in the modern Indian state of Bihar, which also includes Bodh Gaya where the Buddha found Enlightenment and happiness (Harvey 2013). After the Buddha reached paranirvana or final nirvana, his body was cremated, and his ashes were buried under eight stupas, or chortens, as they are called in Tibet and Bhutan. Stupas or chortens symbolize Buddha and his passage into Nirvana upon his death (Harvey 2013). Two other stupas contained the urn and ashes of the Buddha. Stupas depict a crowned Buddha sitting in a meditation position on a lion throne and are an important icon in Buddhism.

During the First Buddhist Council, the conveners divided Buddha's teachings into Three Baskets, known as the Tripitaka (Mitchell 2008). The Sutra Pitaka or the Basket of Discourses provides advice by the Buddha on meditation techniques and requirements and contains instruction by the Buddha on training the mind. Another set of teachings is the Basket of Discipline, which contains more than 225 rules of conduct for monks and nuns. Finally, like many Buddhist teachings, the Basket of Higher Knowledge contains Buddha's insights into the nature of reality, including obtaining Enlightenment and happiness (Morgan 2010).

During the Second Buddhist Council, which was held about 100 years after the First Buddhist Council, simmering divisions in the monastic community reached a boiling point, which initiated a process that resulted in a schism in Buddhism (Assavavirulhakarn 2010; Morgan 2010; B. Suzuki 1948; D. T. Suzuki 1968). While there is not complete scholarly consensus as to what caused the schism, a number of scholars believe that the dispute between the Sthaviras and the Mahāsāṃghikas centered on the nature of what was the Vinaya. Vinaya, which is the path out of suffering by becoming, enlightened and happy, is the regulatory framework for the sangha or Buddhist religious community.

The Third Buddhist Council is thought to have been convened in Pataliputra by King Ashka in 250 B.C.E. Not all scholars believe the Third Buddhist Council actually happened, as there are no written records of the proceedings (Morgan 2010). However, oral Buddhist traditions affirm that it did occur. The primary purpose of the Third Buddhist Council was to purge "unworthy monks" (Mitchell 2008; Morgan 2010). Subsequently, Theravada Buddhism originated in Sri Lanka in the First Century C.E. and became firmly established by the Third Century C.E. (Lopez 2001; Snelling 1998). Mahayana Buddhism developed in China and India in the First Century C.E. and was firmly established by the Fourth Century C.E. (Lopez 2001; Snelling 1998; B. Suzuki 1948). Theravada Buddhism is primarily practiced in modern day Southeast Asia and Sri Lanka. Mahayana Buddhism is predominantly in Central and East Asia, including Bhutan, Tibet, and China as well as Korea, Japan, and Vietnam (Morgan 2010).

2. The Mahayana worldview

The core beliefs of Mahayana Buddhism deal with the impermanence of reality, non-dualistic reality, egoless reality, Karma, transmigration or rebirth, and the Ultimate Truth. The Mahayana view of impermanence includes fluidity of all spirit and matter (Gethin 1998; Keown 2013; Leighton 2012; Williams 2008). Impermanence is essential, as it represents how matter and energy are formed, endure, and decay in the universe (Gethin 1998; Keown 2013; Leighton 2012; Williams 2008). Like all forms of Buddhism, Mahayana also focuses on the process of uncovering insight into the Ultimate Truth (Kakol 2002).

From the perspective of Mahayana Buddhism, the Ultimate Truth of the universe is based on the non-duality of reality (Gethin 1998; Keown 2013; Leighton 2012; Williams, 2008), meaning that all in the universe is interconnected. Non-duality also means that all binary opposites will or can be eliminated. Any perceived dualities are based on illusions or doubts about the ultimate nature of the universe. Dualities must be eliminated in order to obtain Enlightenment, or knowledge of the Ultimate Truth (C. T. Dorji 2008).

Mahayana Buddhists also believe that all of reality is egoless. There is no rigidity in personalities, as they are subject to complex changes. Nor does Mahayana recognize the Judeo-Christian concept of the soul (Williams 2008). In Mahayana Buddhism all reality is impermanent. From this perspective, humans also have no permanent self or soul as they go from rebirth to rebirth (Harvey 2013). By contrast, in Judeo-Christian beliefs, the soul is the spiritual part of a human that is immortal and is often thought to survive beyond death (Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica 2010).

Additionally, in Mahayana, those that possess an ego are subject to suffering in the form of greed, craving for unnecessary things, undue political power, and even evil, all of which prevent them from obtaining Enlightenment. Thus, one of the goals of Mahayana Buddhism is to counter and eliminate egoism.

Transmigration in Mahayana reflects the Karma that sentient beings have obtained in past lives. Under transmigration, there is a causal link between the deeds of the current life and the quality of the next one. The accumulation of good and bad acts in a lifetime provides the condition for a future birth (Snelling 1998). If a being's life is filled with bad Karma, they may be reborn in a hellish realm. Ultimately, positive Karma is an important end goal of Mahayana Buddhism, and it is embodied in all aspects of the Eightfold Path. When a sentient being comprehends the Ultimate Truth, there is a cessation of suffering and a destruction of the seeds of future rebirth based on good or bad karmic deeds (Lopez 2001).

2.1 Differences between Mahayana and Theravada worldviews

Beyond the core values of Buddhism, there are a few key fundamental differences between Mahayana and Theravada Buddhism. A major expectation of Mahayana Buddhism is an existence based on compassion and improving happiness and social wellbeing in the here-and-now for all sentient beings (Keown 2013). Instead of achieving Enlightenment for oneself, bodhisattvas seek to bring compassion, happiness, and wellbeing to everyone else. Service to others is central to being a bodhisattva. This contrasts with Theravada belief where the primary emphasis is on each individual seeking and obtaining awareness of the Ultimate Truth (Keown 2013).

Mahayana Buddhists also view the Buddha in Trikaya Doctrine as a benevolent supernatural entity, in contrast to the historical Buddha (Keown 2013; Leighton 2012). In Trikaya, Buddha has three bodies: his Nirmanakaya or body in this world; his Dharma body, in which he is eternal beyond all dualities in reality; and Sambhogaya, in which his body manifests itself for bodhisattvas in a celestial domain (Snelling 1998). Theravada does not have the Trikaya concept, viewing the Buddha as a historical figure (Leighton 2012). This belief in a supernatural Buddha eventually led to a new Mahayana worldview, where the Buddha contained three bodies. These are Dharmakaya, or the Buddha being the same as the ultimate truth; Sambohogakaya, where the Buddha who is transcendent exists in a heavenly paradise; and Nirmanakaya, where the Buddha has a mortal body on earth (Keown 2013).

2.2 Mahayana Buddhism and Gross National Happiness

The mission of Bodhisattvas in Mahayana Buddhism is to spread happiness to the world. By awakening to the Ultimate Truth, one obtains clarity and insight about the true nature of the universe, as well as internal peace and happiness (Gethin 1998). This happiness results in joy in human relations. Through obtainment of the Ultimate Truth, greater and positive potentialities of the enlightened beings are unlocked. All laypeople have the inner Buddha nature, and thus can obtain this happiness (Leighton 2012).

2.2.1 Modern Gross National Happiness

In 1972 His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck announced that: “Gross National Happiness (GNH) is more important than Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (L. Dorji 2008).” This pronouncement by the fourth King of Bhutan has become in subsequent years a primary public policy to balance the growing pressures of modern capitalism and modernization with Bhutan’s ancient Mahayana Buddhist traditions and culture (C. T. Dorji 1997; L. Dorji 2008; Mathou 1999, 2001; Ramakant & Misra 1996; Rose 1977; Sinha 2001; Voice of America News 2005; Wangchuk 2004). Under GNH, GDP is considered an inadequate measure of wellbeing and happiness (C. T. Dorji 1997; L. Dorji 2008; T. Dorji 2004; Mathou 1999, 2001; Ramakant & Misra 1996; Rose 1977; Sinha 2001; Voice of America News 2005; Wangchuk 2004). In one sense, a person can be happy while they are performing atrocious acts, as when a dysfunctional narcissistic person inflicts emotional pain on others for self-gratification, with no remorse. In addition, happiness and wellbeing can be defined as a current happy mood. On the other hand, wellbeing or happiness as described in GNH and Mahayana Buddhism includes current satisfaction with ones’ entire life or a satisfaction with a fulfilling life. Each of these definitions of happiness and satisfaction are based on the meeting of human needs, environmental protection, cultural protection, and democratic or good governance including the protection of political and civil rights. Recently, these four pillars have been reclassified into nine domains. The domains include: psychological wellbeing, health, education, time use, cultural diversity and resilience, good governance, community vitality, ecological diversity and resilience, and living standards (Centre for Bhutan Studies, 2011a). Each domain represents an essential part of national wellbeing and happiness. Happiness is defined as governmental action to create the conditions for a “good life” including meeting material needs, being in ecological harmony with the planet, and providing the basis for Bhutanese citizens to become Enlightened. For instance psychological wellbeing is defined, in part as a citizen’s spirituality level and employment of good Karma (Centre for Bhutan Studies, 2011b).

In 2008 Bhutan adopted its first written Constitution, which contains several provisions that link GNH to Mahayana Buddhism (Royal Government of Bhutan 2008). Article 3, Section 1 declared that: “(Mahayana) Buddhism is the spiritual heritage of Bhutan, which promotes the principles and values of peace, non-violence, compassion, and tolerance.” In Article 2, Section 2 related to the constitutional monarchy: Bhutan’s King is required under the Chhoe-sid-nyi or dual system of religion and politics to promote Mahayana Buddhism as the state religion. Article 3, Section 4 empowers “religious institutions and personalities” to promote the spiritual heritage of the nation “...while also ensuring that religion remains separate from politics in Bhutan.” Under Article 3, Section 3, the King also appoints the Je Khenpo (head monk) with training in the Drukpa School of Mahayana Buddhism. The Je Khenpo must be a highly skilled spiritual master in Mahayana Buddhism and be accomplished in ked-dzog or spiritual development. In turn, under Article 3, Section 5, the Je Khenpo appoints, with the recommendation of the

Dratshang Lhentshog (Commissioner of Monastic Affairs), five lopons or masters of Mahayana Buddhism to serve on the central Buddhist Monk Council. Article 4, Section 1 requires that:

The state preserve, protect, and promote the cultural heritage of the country, including monuments, places and objects of artistic or historic interest, Dzongs (ancient Buddhist religious and civil fortresses), Lhakhangs (Buddhist temples), Goendeys (Buddhist monastic communities), Ten-sum (Buddhist images, scriptures, and stupas), Nyes (Buddhist pilgrimage sites), language, literature, music, visual arts and religion to enrich society and the cultural life of citizens.

In tandem with this mandate to preserve and promote Mahayana Buddhism as a state religion and policy, Article 9, Section 2 states, “The State shall strive to promote those conditions that will enable the pursuit of Gross National Happiness.” As provided by the GNH Commission:

GNH is a multi-dimensional development approach that seeks to achieve a harmonious balance between material wellbeing and the spiritual, emotional and cultural needs of our society (Gross National Happiness Commission 2015).

The GNH Commission further explains relative to spiritual happiness and GNH:

We have now clearly distinguished the ‘happiness’... in GNH from the fleeting, pleasurable ‘feel good’ moods so often associated with that term. We know that true abiding happiness cannot exist while others suffer, and comes only from serving others, living in harmony with nature, and realizing our innate wisdom and the true and brilliant nature of our own minds (Gross National Happiness Commission 2015).

This statement reflects the primary goal of seeking Enlightenment under Mahayana Buddhism. In Mahayana, overcoming suffering and becoming Enlightened and happy through the Fourth Noble Truth or Eightfold Path occurs by becoming aware of the nature of reality including good Karma by serving others and being in harmony with nature.

2.2.2 Implementation of Gross National Happiness

The GNH Commission is the key national planning agency in Bhutan that operationalizes and evaluates GNH’s incorporation in all government programs (Gross National Happiness Commission 2015). In furtherance of this policy objective, the GNH Commission uses the Thimphu, Bhutan-based Centre for Bhutan Studies’ GNH Index, which measures four pillars of GNH: economic growth or materialism, cultural preservation, ecological protection, and good governance (Centre for Bhutan Studies 2011a, 2011c). For the purposes of further analysis of GNH in Bhutanese society the four pillars have been expanded into nine domains (Centre for Bhutan Studies 2011a, 2011c; Thinley 2009). The nine domains include: standard of living, good governance, time use and balance, community vitality, cultural vitality and diversity, ecosystem vitality and diversity, health of the population, education, and psychological wellbeing (Centre for Bhutan Studies 2011a, 2011c; Thinley 2009).

The Centre for Bhutan Studies has recently developed 33 measures based on national public opinion surveys to assess progress toward national wellbeing as reflected in the nine domains (Centre for Bhutan Studies 2011a, 2011c; Thinley 2009). The psychological wellbeing domain in particular and especially as it relates to government promotion of Mahayana Buddhism, measures the degree of spiritual happiness of Bhutanese citizens in the areas of: spirituality level, prayer recitation, meditation, and consideration of Karma (Centre for Bhutan Studies 2015). Ultimately, at the center of all development efforts under GNH is a focus on the material and spiritual welfare and wellbeing of each individual in Bhutan (Centre for Bhutan Studies 2011a, 2011c). As the GNH Commission indicates “The GNH paradigm concludes that ‘economic

growth is not an end in itself, but rather a means to achieve more important ends ...happiness” (Gross National Happiness Commission 2015).

GNH in Bhutan as implemented by governmental agencies is based on the Mahayana idea that Enlightenment can be obtained by everyone. Compassionate Mahayana public policies based on GNH can increase the likelihood of citizens becoming Enlightened, blissful, and happy. While there is no universally accepted definition of happiness, the specific religious-based Mahayana view of Enlightenment and happiness implemented through governmental action and public policies contrasts with several prominent modern western and secular views.

Utilitarianism, for instance, holds that the role of government is maximizing total benefits for many while reducing the suffering or negatives for as many as possible (Bentham 2007). The maximization of utility includes enhancing hedonistic pleasure, economic prosperity, and a lack of suffering or pain. This approach to material happiness relies on government, but focuses on promoting secular happiness for as many citizens as possible. Utilitarian happiness in significant part contrasts with the Mahayana religious view of happiness contained in the Second Noble Truth, which calls for overcoming suffering related to unwarranted ego-cravings including seeking an undue amount of material things.

Another modern western view of happiness is contained in the Enlightenment-based idea of liberty, such as the “liberty, equality, fraternity” of France, “unity, justice and liberty” in Germany, “life, liberty, security of the person” in the Canadian Charter of Rights, and “life liberty and the pursuit of happiness” in the US Declaration of Independence. Liberty in each case is considered an inherent and inalienable right for human happiness by which governments are required to protect, in some combination, citizens’ life, their liberty from political abuses by government, and private property. This contrasts, in part, with the GNH and Mahayana view of happiness, in which the Bhutanese state has a duty to promote conditions for citizens to individually and actively obtain Enlightenment and happiness. Here, the emphasis is not solely on government protecting rights, but also on citizens having a duty to practice compassion and seek Enlightenment and happiness.

A third example of a western view of happiness is Rawlsian happiness (Rawls 2005). From Rawl’s perspective, people are made happy when they are successfully executing a rational plan in life, based on favorable conditions, and their expectations are good that the plan will succeed based on justice (Rawls 2005). Rawlsian justice includes every person simultaneously having the right to civil liberties, equality of opportunity, and distributive state policies that meet basic human needs. Again, the focus here is on secular governmental action to meet secular requirements for happiness for citizens. By contrast, the Mahayana view of happiness is focused on the religious goal of all citizens seeking and becoming Enlightened. However, in Mahayana Buddhism, as in Rawlsian justice, there is a goal of compassion for others by working to alleviate human suffering through such approaches as meeting basic human needs, through individual or government actions as in Bhutan, and respecting the sanctity and integrity of all sentient beings, including humans.

Unlike a number of western and secular approaches to happiness, such as these three examples, in which the state provides basic needs or checks governmental abuses, Mahayana-oriented GNH includes governmental action to provide suitable conditions for religious happiness. This is in tandem with individual citizen responsibility to become enlightened.

3. Conclusion

Obtaining happiness is a central focus of Mahayana Buddhism doctrine, and in seeking the Ultimate Truth sentient beings look to reach a holistic balancing of material, emotional, and

spiritual needs (Bhutan Broadcasting Service 2008; Tashi 2004; Thinley 2007). GNH means government facilitating the achievement of the collective happiness of society (Bhutan Broadcasting Service 2008; Tashi 2004). According to Mahayana Buddhist beliefs, happiness and compassion arise from awareness of suffering in the self and in others (achieved by removing the distraction of immediate suffering and through education).

While the 2008 Bhutanese Constitution explicitly calls for Mahayana Buddhism to be the state religion in Bhutan, the Constitution in Article 3, Section 2 requires that the King protect all religions in Bhutan. Article 7, Section 4 provides for freedom of religious practice with no person required to belong to another faith by means of "...coercion and inducement." As written in Article 7, Section 1, all Bhutanese citizens are accorded equal protection of the law and are not discriminated against based on religion. Moreover, Article 8, Section 3 requires that Bhutanese citizens promote tolerance regardless of "...religious, linguistic, regional or sectional diversities." Given that Mahayana Buddhism is the state religion in Bhutan and about 22% of the population is Hindu, these Constitutional provisions in a legal sense provide important requirements on the right to practice a religion other than Mahayana Buddhism (United States Central Intelligence Agency 2015). However, modern legal requirements since 2008 and reality as it occurs in societal practices in promoting freedom of religion may not always be 'in sync'. While GNH is a policy that explicitly promotes Mahayana Buddhism, a key question remains how GNH will bridge religious differences in its promotion of wellbeing. Will non-Buddhists in Bhutan even be marginalized within GNH? The answer is not yet known, but is certain to be tested within the framework of the recent Constitutional provisions that afford human rights in the practice of religion while making Mahayana Buddhism a state religion.

The relief of material needs sponsored and promoted by the government, in tandem with the spiritual and emotional needs of individuals, are a primary goal of Bhutan in a Mahayana Buddhist context of compassion for all in this world. Moreover, Bodhisattvas can facilitate the development of a GNH society by spreading compassion and countering ignorance. Oppositely from GDP, GNH focuses on the individuals who make up society and their wellbeing, rather than external economic phenomena. Buddhist canons indicate that focusing only on ego-driven cravings and the illusion of material wealth will lead to unhappiness, making GNH an appropriate Buddhist response to the worldwide use of economic indexes as indicators of success.

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