

## **Education as an effective tool to enhance happiness**

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### **Introduction**

In the world we live in, we witness a lot of violence, turmoil, turbulence and general unhappiness around us. We also observe general decline of ethical values in the society. We also remain in the midst of a growing global crisis of climate change. Will we be overwhelmed by the growing challenges confronting us or will we overcome them through wise leadership and collaborative action to enter a new era of general happiness and sustainable development.

In this crisis, however, there exists a corresponding opportunity - an opportunity to adapt to the rapidly changing circumstances by changing ourselves, both by inner and social transformation.

The world is indebted to *His Majesty* the King of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, for his innovative concept of 'Gross National Happiness (GNH)', which aims to define the quality of life in holistic terms rather than in stereotyped economic term, 'Gross Domestic Product (GDP)', which is just an economic indicator, not the wholesome 'happiness' indicator.

In any case, there is no simple economic panacea to guarantee a sustained sense of happiness in the people. Is the humanity, as a whole, the real beneficiary of 'economic sufficiency'? Can we really eliminate global poverty? The World Bank estimates that 2.5 billion not-so-happy people still live below poverty line, that is, on \$2 a day, or less. While some societies can '*nurture*' economic growth by adopting sound policies, some other societies are pre-disposed by their inherent culture (a.k.a. '*nature*') to meager growth, as opined by Lawrence Harrison of Tufts University. That probably explains as to why 'South America' is poorer than 'North America', 'Africa' is poorer than 'Europe', etc.

Gregory Clark, an economist, interestingly opines in his book, "A Farewell to Alms: A Brief Economic History of the World", that much of the world's persisting poverty is semi-permanent as many societies cannot take advantage of modern technology and management owing to their values systems resisting the economically sensible policies of open markets, secure property rights, et al. He says, "there is no simple economic medicine that will guarantee growth, and even complicated economic surgery offers no clear prospect of relief for societies afflicted with poverty" because some societies encourage growth and some do not. Clark estimates that the gap

between the richest nations and the poorest is actually greater today (50 to 1) than in 1800 (4 to 1).

The President of the Center for Bhutan Studies, Lyonpo Yigmi Thinley, has observed, "There are many who would agree that ours is a story of how the supposed means to happiness have been mistaken for the end itself. And having lost sight of happiness, we have committed ourselves to a life of endless labour and the goal of mindless growth."

It sounds like '*nurture*' vs. '*nature*'. The '*nature*' (culture) aspect could be moulded only through 'education' and 'attitudinal transformation', that is, inner and social transformation.

It is believed that the growth of GDP in Japan did not result in growth of happiness. We need to find out the indicators and factors facilitating happiness.

Happiness, indeed, is the ultimate aim of life.

### **1. What is 'happiness'?**

There is no path to Happiness. Happiness is the Path. Simply put, happiness is the state of mind. It belongs to the person who finds wisdom and gains understanding. What one thinks within himself, so one becomes.

### **2. What is the measure of happiness?**

Again, to put it simply, happiness is measured by the spirit with which one responds to various situations in life. Of course, there are plenty instances of technology deployment to scientifically monitor change of behaviour to determine stress levels, etc. The Deputy Prime Minister of Royal Government of Bhutan, Paiboon Wattanasiritham has said that we ought to "ask citizens what makes them happy? Rather than tell users what to do, the government could use web sites and digital devices to find out what communities want and to monitor their progress in achieving it. Identify who knows what by 'wisdom mapping', in which community members could identify each other's skill levels, much as users of Amazon.com and eBay use technologies for peer review. In a similar way, applications of technology could be designed to evaluate and honour the skills of neighbours in hundreds of communities. A village, district or tambon could develop a bank of identified skills that could be called upon in times of need." He also spoke about "spiritual technologies," in which

technology applications could combine with instruction to teach mind training or mindfulness in citizens, helping them cope with the stresses of modern life. Noting web sites such as [spiritualcomputing.com](http://spiritualcomputing.com), he suggested to evolve the best thinking about how technology could release citizens from stress.

3. **Education as an effective tool to enhance happiness.** Education has enduring influence of elevating nature. It is an effectively enabling tool to enhance the ‘feel good’ factor and a sense of happiness amongst people. Education could be instrumental in bringing about both the inner transformation and the social transformation, which are vital to generate and radiate happiness all around. We need to evolve appropriate educational tools and technologies to achieve our avowed aim of bringing about sustained happiness in life, which can be achieved through various techniques and technologies, including psychological wellbeing; sustainable development; health; education; rural development, environmental and ecological protection; time management; cultural diversity and resilience; good governance; community vitality; living standards; etc. This Paper is however confined to discussion under ‘education’ domain.

(a) **Paradigm shift in our consciousness.** Educational processes can bring about paradigm shift in our consciousness in keeping with the times. We are on crucial crossroads in the current times on this planet. Inspired by science and technology, all aspects of our life on this planet are undergoing transformation and assuming global dimensions. While the world has virtually become a ‘global village’, breaking boundaries, moving fast toward globalization, we are not yet ready for social transformation and transition to global consciousness, which unites the people rather than divide them because of caste, color, creed or culture. With the wave of globalization, the humanity at large is involved in crucial transition to the global society and world citizenship. We not only need a linear progression in thinking but also a paradigm shift in our consciousness.

To enhance happiness, people need to eschew the medieval mindset of ‘*jihad*’ – holy or religious wars, violence, intolerance, and move toward interfaith amity, understanding and harmony. Religion, in its true sense, promotes the values of *satyam, sivam, sundaram* – the Truth, the Good, the Beautiful. It unites people in universal goodwill. Education helps us know the essentials of all religions and cultures. There is a need for more educational studies in the areas of interfaith dialogue and pursuit of ways and means to promote culture of peace and global harmony.

True happiness does not come from mere possession of things we have. Happiness emanates from appreciating and celebrating whatever we do have. This is where education inspires optimism, contentment, positive thinking and intrinsic sense of joy and happiness

Education indeed is an important tool to evolve right attitudes and new consciousness in tune with the times. We need a paradigm shift in our educational pattern and pedagogy. Education need to take a quantum jump into rediscovery of various religious and cultural traditions leading to new insights into our spiritual dimensions. Spirituality essentially affirms Universal Oneness, that is, all beings are one.

It is the duty of a multi-religious democratic state to promote a tolerant understanding of all religions through effective educational system and enabling environment. The parents and civil society too need to educate the child, who is proverbial Father of Man, about the art of living together harmoniously, in a pluralistic, multicultural environment.

An inclusive, integrated and holistic model of education can bring about social and inner transformation, which is vital for a happy, healthy and harmonious society.

- (b) **Values-oriented education.** Values need to be integrated to the content areas of various subjects, as appropriate. Values need to be integrated to the school programme, too. Positive attitude even in face of adversity needs to be inculcated. Values-oriented education should facilitate all-round, happy and harmonious development of the personality of the learner.
- (c) **Education modifies behavior and shapes personality.** Right attitudes can help one achieve success and happiness. Rev. Lewis Dunnington has said, “What life means to us is determined not so much by what life brings to us as by the attitude we bring to life; not so much by what happens to us as by our reaction to what happens.” Attitude is the way we respond to life, each day, all the while. Attitude is the sum total of our beliefs, assumptions, expectations and values. It determines our response to various stimuli in life. It is the way we look at the life and the world. It determines whether the glass is “half full” or “half empty”. The real uneducated are those literates who cannot learn, unlearn and re-learn in life, rather

than those illiterates who cannot read or write. Education prepares learners to inculcate the 'life-affirming' habits of taking care of health; the sense of humour and simply being the best you can be. Happy people have the habit of finding humour in life. Laughter also increases our immunity to infections.

- (d) **Spirituality.** Religions need to rise above the baggage of ritual and theology to lead the humanity inward into spiritual light and to outward path of peace, prosperity, health, harmony and happiness. Mr. Khandu Wangchuk, Prime Minister, Royal Government of Bhutan, has given a clarion call for "a kinder, gentler world". Spiritual and emotional health is as important as physical and psychological wellbeing.
- (e) **Dynamic educational system.** Educational system should respond to the needs of time to enable learners inculcate vocational and life skills; and accomplish happiness in life. Learners must learn to listen as opportunity, at times, knocks very softly. They ought not miss their bus to health and happiness in life. They should learn to be innovative, responsible, honest and creative.

## **Conclusion**

**Education enables evolve happy vision.** Education facilitates evolution, and the fruition, of vision and aspirations as invoked by the great Nobel Laureate Rabindernath Tagore:

*Where the mind is without fear  
And the head is held high;  
Where knowledge is free,  
Where the world has not been broken into fragments by narrow domestic walls;  
Where words come from the depth of truth  
Where tireless striving stretches its arms toward perfection  
Into the heaven of freedom, my Father,  
Let my country awake.*