Welcome to the first edition of the quarterly newsletter from the GNH Centre! We are happy to share our work and news with you and hope that the newsletter is interesting for all to read. We also invite interested people to share short articles on their views and experiences on GNH. The newsletter is a small effort to share with you the world of Gross National Happiness.

Wishing you a very happy read!

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“The GNH Centre

Dr. Saamdu Chetri, Ph. D
Executive Director
GNH Centre Bhutan
Thimphu

The GNH Centre is a Civil Society Organisation registered under the CSO Authority. Its main goal is to provide a space of solace for tired travellers who wish to rejuvenate, refresh and find the purpose of life. Further, the Centre will provide space for inner transformation of an individual through learning and experiencing GNH in living practice. Every participant will be empowered with knowledge and skills to bring effective transformation in family, community and society at large, through compassion and giving back to our little planet, the earth, at a time when it is needed the most.

It is built on the hope that not only Bhutanese, but all nations, will come to understand and realize the wisdom of GNH, its practicality and urgency, so that humanity might choose to turn away from the mindless, singular striving for economic prosperity that is destroying family, community and the planet. It is conceived with the confidence that all human beings have the innate wisdom to define true wealth and prosperity, the pursuit of which will give rise to well-being and sustained happiness.

In other words, the Centre tries to bring the values and principles of GNH to the living practice of every individual in the country. However, as we live in a globalised world, what happens elsewhere in any little part of the world effects us as well. Therefore the Centre offers open programmes to the world, where people may come and be empowered to change themselves as the ambassadors of change everywhere.

The Centre will manifest in living practice, Bhutan’s

“Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross Domestic Product.”

His Majesty Jigme Singye Wangchuck, The Fourth Druk Gyalpo.
unique holistic development philosophy of GNH, which integrates equitable and sustainable socio-economic development with environmental conservation, cultural promotion, and good governance.

Together we can change the world from one day to another. Let us all strive for it together, for what we show now, so shall our generations reap... If we cannot change, we should stop procreation on earth so that there is no generation to take on an unhappy world.

Looking back at 2015, sensing what wants to emerge

Dr. Tho Ha Vinh, Ph.D
Program Director
GNH Centre Bhutan
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2015 has been a year of profound changes, as it becomes more and more apparent that the current system is coming to an end and that a new reality wants to emerge. Gross National Happiness can be a major source of inspiration to start envisioning the emerging social, cultural and economic structures.

On the world stage

The theme that, in my view, connects many apparently disconnected events is the notion of interdependence, or as Thich Nhat Han calls it: Interbeing. And, at the same time our inability to live up to it, manifested by the lack of international leadership and vision in a time of global challenges.

COP 21: the alienation between Self and Nature

Although an agreement was reached, it is far from addressing the root causes of the ecological crisis: the disconnection between mankind and Nature; and an economic system that is inherently destructive, obsessed by endless growth in a finite world. Moreover, world leaders have by and large not been able to overcome narrow nationalistic perspectives as they try to address issues that are by nature planetary. The kingdom of Bhutan is a shining exception, the Himalayan country has made the world’s most far-reaching climate promise to the Paris climate summit, according to new analysis from a respected climate change think tank.

The refugee crisis in the Middle East and in the EU: the alienation between Self and others

Western colonialism drew false borders in the Middle East and in Africa and created artificial countries that had neither, cultural, historical, nor ethnic legitimacy; to the present days, many conflicts are a direct result of it. Moreover, the major world players use all sorts of local factions as proxies to advance their specific goals - often related to their greed for natural resources such as oil - without taking into consideration the actual needs and aspirations of the local population.

It is also remarkable how the reaction to the crisis split the western population and leadership between those who rose to the occasion, such as many people in Austria, Germany and other countries or Chancellor Angela Merkel, and those who reacted by wanting to close the boarders, bolstering nationalistic egoism, such as many far right political parties all over Europe. Likewise it is impossible to reflect on the refugee crisis without taking into consideration the extreme inequality in distribution of wealth and resources. The current economic system has deepened inequality not only between developed and developing countries, but even also within rich societies.

The so-called terrorist attacks: the alienation between Self and self

This major crisis is related to the previous one. The scale and violence of the Paris incidents triggered a worldwide outcry that is of course legitimate, but which also tends to cover up both the root causes and the overall context. Likewise, the reaction of the French leadership, declaring “war on terror” and sending fighter jets to bomb Syria did little to address the actual problems. After all, the people who actually conducted the attacks were French
citizens, born and raised in France. In the 20th century, the need for cheap, low qualified laborers attracted many people from the former colonies to industrialized countries and there was little undertaken to actually integrate these workers and their families; and when modernization of production created massive unemployment among this sector of society, material poverty was worsened by cultural destitution, and left the next generations in a void, belonging neither to their ancestral homes and culture, nor to their new country. The only ideal they met was the consumerist model where the value of an individual is measured by their material belonging, from branded clothes, to expensive gadgets, and fast cars. But none of this was available to them by legitimate means, and radical ideology only met a void that begged to be filled and offered a pseudo identity to people who suffered from not having any.

An old system is dying, and a new reality is wanting to emerge

These are but some of the many symptoms that seem to indicate that an old system is coming to an end and that a new reality is wanting to emerge, although we only begin to sense what the new paradigm will be.

Some elements seem clear to me, even though the way it will manifest on a larger scale is still to be invented:

- Redefining development models from a fixation on material and economic growth to a focus on Happiness and Wellbeing for all, including non-human life forms and the planet. Gross National Happiness is a good model for such a new paradigm.
- Redefining the role and position of the economic system from the absolute ruler of society, based on competition and profit, to a servant of human needs (rather than greed) based on cooperation: Caring Economics.
- Rethinking our shared humanity, not as economic agents striving to maximize our profit at any cost (homo economicus), but as fellow pilgrims on Planet Earth, our common home and our Sacred Mother.

Three keys to Happiness and Wellbeing

Education from kindergarten to university needs to refocus its goals and, in addition to the usual academic and intellectual achievement, include a central emphasis on Mindfulness and Compassion, as well as Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). as fundamental competencies that each one needs to train and develop to become a full human being. Three key objectives could define education at all levels:

- Connecting to Self: training the mind through Mindfulness and other similar practices to support the awareness of our deepest aspirations and highest potential.
- Connecting to Others: conscious cultivation of Compassion and Altruism as fundamental human qualities.
- Connecting to Nature and to Mother Earth: rediscovering the sacredness of Earth, Water, Air and Fire, of Mountains and Rivers, of Forest and Oceans, of the Animal Kingdom and the Plant world.

We can be confident that inner transformation is possible if we just set our intentions right, and that inner transformation can lead to collective and social innovation and change. We have created the systems we live in, they are the product of the human mind; therefore the mind can also change and transform the systems to make this Wonderful Planet a better place where all beings can live together in peace and harmony.

These are some of the ideals that give meaning to my work at the Gross National Happiness Centre, Bhutan.
Let us start with a story about two wolves. One is darkness and despair, and the other is light and hope. They always fight, but the question is, which one wins?

There’s a lot of wrong and bad things that are happening in the world. We have survived this far because our ancestors built strong foundations for us, and for the world. Now the whole burden of responsibility lies in our hands. What we do today will define the tomorrow for the next generation.

The question that we read at the beginning still needs an answer. Which wolf wins? It’s a question we should ask ourselves every day. There’s always a fight going on inside our hearts and minds. If you

The GNH Youth Leadership Program with 23 participants (14 International and 9 National) started from 18 January 2016 – 30 January 2016. The program was designed for young people to spend time together in nature, discuss GNH values and took place in Thimphu, Gelephu, Wangdumphodrang and Paro.

The aim of the two week program was to deepen the practical understanding of how we can bring more compassion and wisdom to our personal lives and the communities we live in through the values of GNH. The program combined a deep retreat with travelling through the country. It was both an inner spiritual and outer physical journey, which helped the participants understand how effective and authentic social change goes hand in hand with self transformation.

The program kicked off with guided meditation and an introduction to GNH by Dr.Saamdu Chetri, Executive Director. The participants interacted and held discussions on how values of GNH be implemented in their daily lives. The day included visits to communities and monasteries and towards evening, they reflected and shared their feelings on the sights they experienced during the course of the day.

Some highlights of the program were visits to the Bhutan Nuns Foundation, Youth Development Fund and VAST. GNH Centre believes in partnering with other CSOs to create and promote the work of CSOs in Bhutan. They also volunteered for the reconstruction of the Wangduephordang Dzong. During this program, Clean Bhutan was invited to share their work and purpose. In addition, two youth participants of the previous youth program also visited the GNH Centre to share how the GNH Youth Leadership Programme changed their outlook.

The participants also camped near at Tshachu (hot spring) in Gelephu. Their paths were strewn with the values of GNH for inner transformation, with daily events like meditation, reflection circle, presentations, connection to nature, mindfulness practices, group work, dialogue and solo time. The program concluded with a meditative hike to Taktshang, Paro.
want to believe that the world is ending, so be it, it will end. Or do you believe that there is still hope for our world?

“Youth”, our young people, are full of passion and love, and are fresh to this world. They are the future. They are the main strength for a better world. The world and the future depend on what we are going to do today. Youth are the hope and light for every one of us, and for the future generations.

At this time there are lot of temptations and distractions. It is easy to fail to understand the real meaning of life. People get distracted because of their curiosity at the abundance of information good and bad, and do some things that will harm the world and themselves.

We, being the guardians of the next generation, must think gravely before doing something. Time is not going to wait for us. We should make a change and take the responsibilities seriously. Rather than just enjoying and surviving, we should learn how to live the life till the fullest. Rather than being ignorant, we should unite in love and peace and move forward to the better future.

We are the future and we have to be selfless and wise to see, and to differentiate between what is good and what is not. It’s up to us which wolf are we going to feed.

GNH – a view from the UK

What has Bhutan, a tiny kingdom thousands of miles away in the foothills of the Himalayas, got to do with life here in the UK?

It is the birthplace of Gross National Happiness, which has become integral to a global conversation questioning the assumptions behind the systems in which we all live. Although borne out of Bhutan’s ancient past, GNH grounds itself in the realities of the modern world. It is a robust challenge to out-dated paradigms and dogmas that are failing humanity and the planet.

One of these dogmas is Gross Domestic Product. Used to measure the economic performance of countries, GDP has partly been responsible for the unrestrained consumption of finite natural resources that has caused long-term consequences for the earth’s ecosystems and wildlife, and contributed to global warming and climate change. Defining human development in terms of material abundance, it has promoted the illusion that consumption alone creates wellbeing, and ignored vital aspects of human existence – social equality, physical and mental wellbeing, spiritual and cultural engagement, and environmental conservation.

That is not to say that GNH is incompatible with GDP. Developed from intuitive wisdom and conceptualised into 9 domains – including Good Governance, Sustainable Socio-economic Development, Preservation and the Promotion of Culture and Environmental Conservation – GNH is a balanced ‘middle path’ and takes a long-term view. Holistic and human-centred, GNH understands that within the context of the personal, social and envi-
What GNH means to me

Gross National Happiness to me is the deepest and most practical approach to measuring the growth and social progress of a country. Yet while it makes perfect sense to me now, it took me a long while to understand it. I still remember the days in my 10th grade, when I would argue with friends about how it seemed a little unreasonable, just a theory and not a practice, only because I didn’t know better and my opposing friends couldn’t give me a reasonable doubt. What I argued mainly was how it was impossible to be happy without money, for all I cared about was to win my friends’ lunch money. It was shallow of me to think like that, and that was just the tip of the iceberg. Most of us use the term Gross National Happiness loosely, without understanding its essence, partly because GNH was a concept with its framework being built over time, with broader indicative parameters.

I don’t know if I have a flair for debates but I remember having another argument with an American friend of mine called Dustin when I was in college. Here is another thing that I have learned. Happiness is subjective and what makes us happy doesn’t always make others happy. By us I mean we Bhutanese. Happiness is very cultural and environmental to its core. GNH is not an approach that completely denounces GDP, and it would be almost impossible for GNH to be as universal an indicator as GDP is right now. Gross National Happiness is an approach that needs time to age, pretty much like the most expensive wine. For now what we can do is start on ourselves as individuals and do things that make us happy, be it physically, emotionally, mentally, financially, or ecologically. What is amazing about the GNH index is that it is made up of 33 environmental wellbeing of people and the planet, economic growth has its appropriate place.

What makes GNH revolutionary, however, is that it speaks on both a practical and an intuitive level, acknowledging the complexity of humanity as being more than economic units. Yet, while it is tempting to romanticise and idealise, we must remain rational and realistic. Although no system so far has been perfect, GNH itself knows it should be part of a complex jigsaw. As HRH Princess Kezang Choden Wangchuck says, “We do not claim that it is the best option. It has its limitations. We see it as a dynamic design that must be constantly enriched and improved with the help of people from all walks of life who bring with them immense experience and knowledge with a shared inspiration to create a better world.”

Mankind has yet to find the perfect paradigm, but in a world of financial disarray, depleting natural resources and political crises that constantly threaten war, GNH will go a long way towards an evolution of current systems, and make a serious contribution toward the improvement of the wellbeing of mankind and the world in which we live.

What GNH means to me

Lhaki Woezer
Fashion blogger for Satin Diaries (www.satin-diaries.com) and kushuthara Diaries (www.kushutharadiaries.blogspot.com)
Intern at the Royal Textile Academy of Bhutan.
different indicators, and objective indicators are given more weight than subjective indicators, so what makes you happy is bound to fall under anyone of the 33 indicators that collectively make up the GNH index.

Don’t fret about the technicalities or anything, just work towards your own happiness, then to your families and friends, and then as units of families and friends, and to the nations as a whole. And then maybe eventually over time we can overcome challenges, cross that transcultural border, and finally spread GNH to the world. On that day maybe I could pick a debate with Dustin, and I might actually stand a chance of winning.

We all have one life to live, so we might as well live it in happiness. It just makes perfect sense to me.

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**GNH- An Inside Job**

Pema Yangtsho
Co-ordinator
Jangsem Monday
Thimphu

GNH for me starts at home, from the food we eat, the good thoughts we think, to the ethics and values we uphold and action we take. It is and can be in the most simple terms, as His Majesty describes it, “development with values”, contributing to our mental and physical wellbeing and setting a foundation for our own happiness. Even a simple task like teaching a child how to meditate can be broken down to wanting them to achieve psychological wellbeing. This idea of our fourth king has inspired many and has now been adopted as the millennium goal.

I believe it is very important for a country to have values as we develop. Development without looking after the basic necessities of a person will result in disaster, as we have seen all over the world. The very latest concept of GNH has been broken down into smaller parts and extended to maternity or paternity leave. Through this we can see that the government is concerned about the upbringing of children, rather than implementing more work hours, because love and care means more than just making money.

You see, GNH is about what you can do for the country, not what the country can do for you. It all starts with oneself, and being a spiritually Buddhist country we may find happiness and peace within ourselves while being compassionate and helping others. And it comes back to you, like Karma: what goes around comes around.

That in itself helps raise the GNH flag. And it is in our hands to strengthen GNH. If we all put in the effort, we will realize we are responsible for all the thoughts and actions that make and break us. If your reckless actions lead to someone’s demise and destruction, it comes back to you. Even with suicide cases and the mentally ill, they are the cause of our own actions and our reactions. If we really want to implement GNH, we need to correct and change our thoughts and actions to better improve ourselves and everybody. I believe positive ethical actions will enhance GNH and enable us to stand stronger. I believe we are meant to individually start being responsible first. GNH is how you behave. GNH is an inside job.
Due to my background as an educationist and experience working in education development in many countries, I have been interested in Bhutan’s education development for some years now. After learning about Bhutan while working with the Royal Education Council over five years ago, I became inspired to initiate the process of writing doctoral theses on the theme of “Strategies of Bhutan in implementing the Gross National Happiness policies - How is GNH philosophy applied in the context of education for sustainable development?” The theses are part of the doctoral studies in the University of Oulu, Finland.

The contents of the first article was based on the interviews of the teachers, principals, education administrators and NGOs in Bhutan in July 2012. According to the conclusions of the article of “Bhutanese Teachers’ Perceptions about Gross National Happiness in Education for Sustainable Development” (BJRD, Ahonen, Thinley, Korkeamäki, 2013), the education system in Bhutan has developed and increased the capacity of teachers to integrate GNH policies into the teachers’ classroom practice. Implementing the new GNH education policies and strategies in the classrooms has helped the teachers to innovate and adopt new methods of teaching. Teachers also saw the importance of extending their teaching into community life. They felt increasingly comfortable practicing mindfulness, engaging in more critical thinking habits, and appreciating the role of media literacy in the teaching of different subjects.

In March 2014 the Ministry of Education approved the request to gather material for the research in three schools in Paro. The questions for 198 students and 49 teachers were about the topics of a good, happy and sustainable way of life. Students of the secondary schools also drew pictures of the themes of GNH and sustainable development. Based on the material, I am now writing an article about “How the drawings of Bhutanese secondary school pupils reflect their perceptions about GNH’s Four Pillars.

“Our country is called GNH country because in happiness, we celebrate together and when we grieve, we grieve together as if we were all members of one family. If there are works to be done, we share equal responsibility in carrying out the work and when we face problem, together we solve the problem.”
- His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck.
GNH-in our culture!

We have very rich culture and ways of life, but these are at high risk with western influence. The challenge is to preserve our culture by practicing and making them part of our lives. Our culture is important to the future of our children and to our nation, because culture ensures a history, a past, present and certainly a future.

The future of the nation lies in the hands of our children. They are our future! And they must carry our identity. They deserve to be cared for, directed aright, nurtured, and cultured, and prepared ready for the future of the nation. We must make an effort to sustain our culture.

Our efforts to preserve and promote culture should never stop. It has to be a continuous process with progress. The culture in which we grow up molds our views of ourselves and the world around us and maintains a connection with our ancestors and traditions. The feeling of belonging to a group of people with whom we identify is a human need that gets expressed by learning and cherishing one’s ethnic religious and cultural heritage. This identification is very important in shaping our identity.

Our cultural values should be implemented in daily life that constitute a GNH living.

“Man is not only a social animal but also a cultured being. Man’s social life has been made possible because of culture.” Anonymous.

“Today, GNH has come to mean so many things to so many people but to me it signifies simply - Development with values. Thus, for my nation today GNH is the bridge between the fundamental values of kindness, equality and humanity and the necessary pursuit of economic growth.”

- His Majesty Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck.
Journey through GNH I (16 Feb – 22 Feb, 2016)

A week long program, ‘Journey through GNH’ took 14 participants from Vietnam, United Kingdom, Australia, France, Sweden and Turkey on a journey to reflect and use mindfulness techniques for inner transformation; implementing the values of GNH. They visited Punakha and also Wangduephordang, where they volunteered for the Dzong reconstruction.

The participants came up with following prototypes:
1. Happiness Business Plan
2. Freedom and happiness for children
3. Model of a happy brand
4. GNH peer & network: GNH in action - concept

Upcoming Events:

- International Happiness Day Celebration (20 March, 2016)
- The Right Livelihood Programme, UK and Bhutan – Finding Deeper Purpose (2-13 May, 2016)
- Global Wellbeing and GNH Lab (4-8 April, 2016)
- Journey through GNH (18 April-29 April, 2016) once every two month.