

**Rich in happiness:** As most of the world struggles to save the economy, Bhutan is instead working to maintain its high levels of happiness.



# happy shiny people

**D**isillusioned by plunging stock markets and failing banks, or caught out by the unforgiving boom-bust capitalist cycle?

Then for repentant free-marketeers the world over, the small Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan can suggest an alternative: focus not on the bottom line, but the size of your smile.

Gross National Happiness, or GNH, is Buddhist Bhutan's unique approach to national development, and a pursuit that many in the remote country say has been vindicated by the ongoing global economic meltdown.

"It's the materialism, who can make the bigger buck, overnight fast money that caused the problems," said Phurb Dorji, a doctor who works in a Thimphu hospital and is a big fan of the official national philosophy.

"The whole world is going towards materialism, and the more they get the more they want. But they're still not happy. They don't need to copy us, but they should take a look at other ways."

Bhutan has been pursuing GNH for the past few decades: it was conceived by the country's last king, and the new monarch – 28-year-old Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck – says it will remain a policy centrepiece.

"What is important to me and my family is education, health care, spiritual well-being. Anything materialistic should be sustainable. There should be respect for others, respect for the environment," said Dorji, explaining the main tenets of the concept.

Bhutan's concept of Gross National Happiness sounds nuts, but what's capitalism and materialism done for you lately, asks STEFAN SMITH

Officials here say pursuing GNH does not mean ignoring GDP – in fact on that score, the country is doing rather well, clocking an average of about 8 per cent growth a year for the past few years.

Rather, they say, it is the type of growth that is important – hence policies of providing free education and health care, a clean mountain environment and making sure the country's religious and cultural traditions are preserved.

"We as human beings need more than material goods," said the country's prime minister, Jigmi Thinley.

"We see ourselves as a member of a globalised society," he said, but added that the aim in Bhutan was "to continue to develop economically and spiritually."

And as a result, he said, the country of steep valleys and snow-capped peaks is: "Becoming happier and happier. We are happy people."

According to a pilot survey conducted earlier this year by Bhutan's Gross National Happiness Commission – previously the national planning commission – 68 per cent of Bhutanese could be classed as being happy.

The challenge is maintaining that content isolation, with the country of about 600,000 people having survived the arrival of roads and currency in the

1960s and its first democratic elections this year. Many Bhutanese say they have full faith in the GNH philosophy, even if satellite television channels have exposed the country to the shop-'til-you-drop message.

"As long as you have enough money for clothes, food and a place to sleep, that's honestly all you need," insisted Sonam Phunbho, a 54-year-old Thimphu shopkeeper.

"There's no point in being greedy because when you die you can't take a big television or a big car with you."

Tashi Tobgay, a 16-year-old student, fails to see the point of capitalism.

"What is the use of the development of a country without the happiness of the people?" he asked.

So as the outside world is busy trying to figure out how to save a collapsing economy, Bhutan's new king has been setting out quite different priorities.

"My duty is not only to ensure your happiness today but to create fertile ground from which you may gain the fruits of spiritual pursuit and attain good karma," he said.

"Even as more dramatic changes transform the world and our nation, as long as we continue to pursue the simple and timeless goal of being good human beings ... We can ensure that our future generations will live in happiness."

## THE HERE AND NOW

The key to breaking the worry cycle is focusing in the moment, writes DEBORAH STORER

FEEL stressed? Anxious? Depressed?

If so, the solution is to shift your focus.

Your mind determines how you feel.

For example, if you think of the past in a negative light, you may feel down and depressed. If you think of the future and worry about all the things you need to do and whether you are going to get it done in time, you may feel stressed and anxious.

Therefore the key is to either think of the future or the past in a positive light and you will feel great. However what I am talking about here is more than positive thinking, what I want to offer you is something a little different, something you can use anywhere and anytime, that will create instant peace and happiness. What is it?

The answer: It's to FOCUS on the present moment.

When you are present, there is no room to think about the past or the future, there is only an awareness of now. When you observe the moment you are experiencing, the benefits are remarkable. You can make clearer decisions, think more effectively, find solutions to problems and more importantly, feel a sense of fulfilment to every day.

1. Use your senses. Have you ever heard the statement: Stop and smell the roses? Have you ever done this? This statement is powerful because what it means is that when you activate your senses, ie. what you feel, smell, taste, see and hear, it automatically brings you to the present moment. For example, bring awareness to your breath – how are you breathing right now? You'll find that activity alone brings you peace – there is no room for racing thoughts or even negative thoughts because all you are doing is being present to your breath.

2. Observe your thoughts. If your mind wants to go crazy with racing thoughts, you can observe your mind thinking. Therefore, instead of criticising your thoughts, observe your thoughts. This will detach you from your thoughts and have you feeling more in control instead of your mind controlling you.

3. Focus on one step at a time. This reminds me of one lady I coached some time ago who felt out of control when her children came home from school. She would experience stress and anxiety because she was thinking about everything that had to be done. After this awareness, she consciously brought her attention to the one task she was doing and focused only on that. If she noticed her mind wandering off to the future again, she would again bring her attention to the NOW.

As she did this, she enjoyed each task with more fulfilment, felt calm and more importantly, she found she was communicating to her family in a more loving way.

The power lies within training your mind. There is no magic potion, no quick fix, but rather a desire to take charge of your mind so you can gain back that burning desire for life. You now have one tool to do that – be present.

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