

SYMPOSIUM: PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS IN INTERRELIGIOUS PERSPECTIVE HAPPINESS FROM A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

HIS HOLINESS THE 14TH DALAI LAMA

ABSTRACT

Happiness is an essential goal of all people. Because happiness is so fundamentally part of our being, the question of how to attain it is of great importance. Buddhism has a long and well-developed philosophical and practical tradition with the goal of helping humans to attain happiness and end suffering. In this article, His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama draws on the wisdom of the Buddhist tradition to explain how one can achieve happiness by transforming the mind. In particular, His Holiness explains how, in the Buddhist tradition, there is a special instruction called Mind Training, which focuses on cultivating concern for others and turning adversity to advantage that can be of great benefit to people seeking to end suffering and cultivate happiness.

KEYWORDS: Buddhism, happiness, meditation, mind, altruism

HAPPINESS IS A UNIVERSAL NEED

When I ask small children what they hope for when they are grown up, they often tell me about what job they want to do—how they want to become pilots, doctors, nurses, or teachers. Perhaps because it is so self-evident, very few reply simply that they want to be happy. But isn't this true, aren't all our plans based on a fundamental wish for happiness and contentment? However differently we may express it, as living beings what we all have in common is a wish, at the very core of our hearts, to be happy. Because it is of such prime importance, I think it is worth looking at how happiness can be brought about.

The great Tibetan master Drom-ton-pa¹ has said that the entirety of the Buddha's teachings can be condensed into the Three Collections,² and that whoever studies these Three Collections will be able to fulfill his or her wishes. All of us are the same in wanting happiness. In order to enable sentient beings to achieve happiness, the Buddha provided various levels of teachings, which are all meant to transform and discipline the mind. So, the contents of the Three Collections of the Buddhist scriptures are instructions, which enable us to pacify the mind that is afflicted by disturbing emotions, and to gradually attain a state in which the mind is purified of all such obstacles.

The Three Collections contain a wealth of ways and means to achieve temporary and lasting happiness, which is why they are described as marvelous and amazing. The teachings contained

1 Drom-ton-pa (1005–64 CE) was the chief Tibetan disciple of the great Indian master Dipankara Atisha and was significant in shaping the second propagation of Buddhism in Tibet. He initiated the Kadampa tradition and founded Reting Monastery.

2 The three divisions of the Buddhist scriptures, the *Tripitaka* in Sanskrit, comprising Discourses, Discipline, and Higher Knowledge.

in the Three Collections are categorized by individuals' different mental capacities, so they can follow different levels of teachings and different stages of the path according to their capacity and mental disposition. Those who follow this approach of the *Kadampas*,³ which present instructions according to three different mental capacities, will be able to fulfill their specific needs and purposes.

All sentient beings, human beings included, want happiness and do not want suffering; this is a point that needs no further explanation. Every person, depending on his or her ability, tries to get rid of suffering and achieve happiness. There are many categories of sentient beings, such as the animals that we can see, who engage in different activities to achieve happiness. There are also many sentient beings that we cannot see. What distinguishes human beings from other sentient beings is that we can look further ahead. Our intelligence is sharper and allows us to take a broader view. Animals, for example, concern themselves mainly with finding their day-to-day food and drink. Of course, certain categories of animals may be able to plan further, but human beings have a special capacity in that respect. Another unique feature of human beings is that we are able to accumulate experience, learn from it, and make our future plans accordingly. Consequently, human beings have a capacity to achieve greater levels of happiness.

Even though all sentient beings are similar in wanting happiness and not wanting suffering, the life of a human being is regarded as especially precious because of human beings' greater capacity for action. However, the quality of that action may be either positive or negative. On the positive side, human beings can train their minds in an altruistic way and follow a beneficial way of life. They have the most powerful potential and capacity to do good. This capacity of human beings is not possessed by any other sentient beings. Only human beings are able to cultivate a real concern for the welfare of other sentient beings and act on it. Since we have such an opportunity, it is very important not to waste it but to find ways of making our lives meaningful. The purpose of our birth in this world is not the destruction of the planet or the disruption of the peace and happiness of other sentient beings; it is the pursuit of happiness. Therefore, it is important to lead a life in which we try to benefit others as much as possible or, at least, restrain ourselves from doing harm.

It is obvious that our experience of happiness and suffering is generally related to our minds and is not primarily due to our physical experiences. Take the example of two people who are sick: Both may be undergoing similar physical suffering, but in the one case, because the person has a positive mental attitude, she may willingly accept her suffering and so be able to minimize it. Whereas the other person, by adopting a negative mental attitude, simply adds to the suffering she is feeling. From this practical point of view, our mental attitude plays an important role in our experience.

Naturally, human beings also have to deal first with the physical hardship of securing food, clothing, shelter, and so forth. And as the human population has increased, we have had to make sustainable plans, which is why we have made a certain amount of material and technological progress. Nevertheless, there remain undeveloped countries, like Tibet, where the primary need is still for material improvement. Under such conditions, it would be understandable if people tended to forget about the need to develop the mind or cultivate a positive mental attitude, and yet paradoxically, learning to transform and develop the mind is just what Tibetans make their focus.

On the other hand, when people in developed countries have sufficient material facilities, they begin to wonder where they will find lasting happiness. Experience tells them that material well-being by itself is no guarantee of happiness. Whatever material comforts we have, we are still afflicted by greed, jealousy, and competitiveness. As long as these disturbing emotions remain intact, we continue to experience suffering. Besides which, when the focus is solely on material

3 The tradition that preserved Atisha's teachings, especially the instructions for Mind Training.

development, there does not seem to be much need for love and compassion. For example, we do not need love and compassion to develop new machinery. Therefore, if human beings think only about their physical problems and try to counter them in exclusively material ways, they will naturally ignore such inner values as loving-kindness and compassion. Indeed, two centuries of scientific and technological development have inclined people in many parts of the world to consider material prosperity to be of greater worth than inner qualities.

When we are deprived of inner qualities, there is no place for human warmth and affection; consequently, there is a lack of harmony within families and within society at large. Clearly, material development alone is not enough to give us lasting happiness. As people have started to realize this, they have begun to understand that it is a mistake to use our human intelligence only to achieve material prosperity. It is at least as appropriate to use it to strengthen our mental qualities.

The great master Gungthang Tenpai Dronmey⁴ said that this life as a free and fortunate human being is obtained but once. A life in which our mental and sense faculties are intact, and in which we have some interest in pursuing lasting happiness, is unique. Therefore, it is important that we make a concerted effort to use it for the benefit of ourselves and of all other sentient beings.

Although we have all obtained such a valuable human life, we tend to enjoy it without recognizing its real value. Even people running small businesses know that there is a time and place for doing business. They know that if they try to sell their goods out of season they will fail. Likewise, a farmer is aware of trends in the weather and does not hesitate to cultivate his land when the time comes, even if he has to work day and night. And yet, even as free and fortunate human beings with a rare opportunity to enhance our inner qualities and develop inner peace, as well as the time to exploit this opportunity, we too often fail to do so.

THE OBSTRUCTIVE ROLE OF THE DISTURBING EMOTIONS

When we talk about creating a positive transformation within our minds, we have to make an effort personally by using the mind itself. With regard to external construction, we can rely on others for physical support, but with regard to developing the mind, we simply have to use the mind. Our mental defects must be reduced and weakened, and the positive qualities of the mind must be developed and cultivated. First, we must establish which aspects of the mind are positive and which are destructive or negative. With negative states of mind such as anger, jealousy, competitiveness, and attachment, we need to understand why they are negative, how they arise in us, and how they leave us disturbed and unhappy. Understanding their drawbacks will help us to reduce them. It is not enough simply to say that these negative states of mind are negative because the scriptures say so. We must examine our own experience to find out how destructive and negative these emotional states are. Then, we must apply counterforces to minimize and ultimately eradicate them.

Disturbing emotions refer to those negative states of mind which, when they arise in our minds, disturb us and make us unhappy. Prominent among them are attachment, anger, and jealousy. In fact, the Tibetan term for disturbing emotions, *nyon mongs*, means something that wears you down, something that makes you suffer.

For example, when we get angry and express our anger violently and harshly, we are likely to say unpleasant words that are offensive to others. On such occasions, it is as if we are temporarily mad;

4 Gungthang Tenpai Dronmey (1762–1823 CE) was a Tibetan master famous for his pithy advice about developing renunciation and the determination to be free as a ground for cultivating the awakening mind of a bodhisattva.

we lose our sense of discrimination. The expression on our faces is horrible and ugly. Clearly, such behavior is disturbing. Are families who continually quarrel happier? Are those places where there is constant conflict and fighting harmonious and peaceful? Obviously, the answer is no. If we are unexpectedly visited by a hot-tempered person, his or her presence is likely to make us uneasy; whereas if we are visited by a kind, happy person, we immediately feel like welcoming that person. So it is clear that we can easily identify such destructive emotions as anger, jealousy, and competitiveness in others.

Of all the destructive emotions, anger, attachment, and jealousy are those that are most often responsible for our other negative states of mind. Once we recognize and become fully aware of the negativity of these mental states, we will be able, if and when they arise in us, to restrain ourselves. Undertaking such analysis in meditation whenever opportunities arise can help us to guide our minds in a positive direction. This kind of practice is very effective and useful.

When we do not know how to check our disturbing emotions by applying antidotes, the disturbing emotions take their own course. The result can be incredibly destructive. Therefore, it is true to say that a single class of disturbing emotions—for example, anger or hatred—could destroy all the human beings in the world. All the trouble, suffering, and uneasiness that we experience are due to disturbing emotions. It is a unique feature of the Buddha's teaching to explain that disturbing emotions are destructive, that they reside within our minds, and that they can be removed by relying on powerful counterforces.

If we watch the mind and can prevent its being overpowered by disturbing emotions, we can try to lead it towards virtuous qualities. All good qualities come through having a mind that wishes to benefit other sentient beings. Whether we accept a particular religious practice or not, all of us need to make an effort to be warmhearted. If we can manage that, we will all experience peace and happiness. We are social animals, and we live in a society in which the very basis of our existence is cooperation and mutual dependence. Cooperation is founded on an attitude of loving-kindness towards each other. If we have that, there will be peace and happiness within our families, within our neighborhoods, and within society at large.

On the other hand, if we are always plotting against each other and harboring resentment towards each other, we may have an abundance of material facilities at our disposal, but we will have no happiness. Imagine how horrible it would be to live in a place where no one smiled at you. Under totalitarian systems, there are spies to pry into every activity within the community and even within the family. As a result, people lose trust in each other; they are constantly suspicious and full of doubt. If we lose a basic sense of trust and sincere appreciation for each other, how can we expect to find happiness? Instead, we will live in a society wracked by fear and suspicion, like a crow that is afraid even of his own shadow.

THE ADVANTAGES OF CULTIVATING AN ALTRUISTIC MIND

A mind wishing to benefit other people and other sentient beings is, therefore, the very basis of peace and happiness. Today, in many developed countries, there is a degree of material and technological progress that is astounding. But due to a lack of inner peace or a sense of compassion, the people who live in those countries continue to face many problems. It is a big mistake to think that only money can bring satisfaction and contentment. Altruism, or the wish to benefit other sentient beings, definitely plays a part.

Real cooperation and real, lasting peace and happiness can be brought about only through compassion and loving-kindness. There is a practical aspect to this, too. We talk about practicing

patience, but patience can be put to the test only when we are challenged. It comes into play only when we have the power to retaliate but refrain from doing so. If our opponent is more powerful than we are, our restraint is not really an example of patience, because we are not really in a position to do our opponent any harm.

Patience does not mean that we always have to accept defeat and that we have no opportunity to assert ourselves. A bodhisattva⁵ observes the practice of patience sincerely but never gives any quarter to the disturbing emotions, which are his or her most severe enemy. In fact, a bodhisattva continuously challenges injustice and never limply concedes defeat. If something requires a response, we should respond immediately, but not out of anger.

Whenever I travel abroad and talk to different people, I always stress the importance of a good mind, a mind that wishes to benefit others. In the Buddhist scriptures, the main emphasis is on the cultivation of altruism. Of course, it is a unique kind of altruism, because the focus is on how to cultivate the mind that wishes to attain Buddhahood for the sake of all suffering sentient beings.

TRAINING THE MIND THROUGH MEDITATION

A great Tibetan teacher of Mind Training once remarked that one of the mind's most marvelous qualities is that it can be transformed. I have no doubt that those who attempt to transform their minds, overcome their disturbing emotions, and achieve a sense of inner peace will, over a period of time, notice a change in their mental attitudes and in their responses to people and events. Their minds will become more disciplined and positive. They will find that their own sense of happiness grows as they contribute to the greater happiness of others.

The most important Buddhist practice is transforming the mind, and it is for the sake of mental transformation that we engage in contemplation and meditation. Meditation is a means of taming our unruly, wayward minds and familiarizing ourselves with positive aspects of the mind. The mind certainly can be trained. Just like a horse, the mind may at first be wild and difficult to handle, but gradually, we can tame it until it obeys our commands. Likewise, in the initial stages, when we are not used to mental training, our minds are so addicted to negative habits that they are difficult to control and go their own way. However, if we meditate and familiarize ourselves with positive qualities, we can gradually train and transform the mind. Meditation is a means of changing our mental attitude and making the mind more positive.

Transformation of the mind should be done systematically, in much the same way that we construct a building. We cannot hope to construct the second floor without constructing the first floor; therefore, as Aryadeva⁶ explained in his *Four Hundred Verses*,⁷ the process of doing the practice is systematic. In the initial stages we should try to put a stop to the grosser levels of disturbing emotions, such as attachment and anger, and to the behavior they provoke. Then, in the second stage, we should address these disturbing emotions in a more explicit way.

5 Someone who, having cultivated the awakening mind and the altruistic aspiration to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all other beings, has embarked on that course.

6 Aryadeva (3rd century CE) was a disciple of the great Indian master Nagarjuna, the author of several important treatises on Madhyamaka philosophy, and a teacher at Nalanda University.

7 The abbreviated title of Aryadeva's seminal work, the *Four Hundred Verse Treatise on the Actions of the Bodhisattva's Yoga*. For a translation of Aryadeva's work, see Aryadeva, *Four Hundred Stanza's on the Middle Way*, trans. Ruth Sonam (Ithaca, NY: Snow Lion, 2008).

In the case of attachment, we meditate on ugliness, and in the case of strong hatred, we meditate on loving-kindness. The most important thing, of course, is to seek out the root cause of all our disturbing emotions and to try to eradicate that cause. This is the way of the wise, because if we eradicate the root, there is no opportunity for other disturbing emotions and the experiences associated with them to arise. It is like stopping a flood; we can either trace the source and stop that, which is much easier, or we can try to dam all the streams flowing in different directions, which is much more tiring and difficult.

When we meditate, at the outset we should check our motivation. If our motivation is neutral, we should try to transform it into a virtuous state of mind. If our mind is under some negative influence, we should first try to meditate on the flow of our breath. In that way, we try to remove our negative state of mind and transform it into a neutral state. Then, we transform that mind into a positive state. This is similar to the way in which we go about dyeing cloth. White cloth can be dyed any color, but it is difficult to dye cloth that has already been dyed another color. When the mind is agitated and overwhelmed by anger or attachment, even if we force ourselves to do certain virtuous practices, doing so will be very difficult. So, we should first try to calm the mind, setting it in a neutral state with the help of breathing meditation, and quietly observing the flow of the breath.

When we come to a conclusion through analytical meditation and start to gain insight into the object of our meditation, we should try to let our minds remain single-pointedly with it for a while. Through this combination of analytical and single-pointed meditation, we can gradually transform our minds. This is an effective way of making our lives meaningful. If we procrastinate and think that we will start tomorrow, next month, or next year, time will simply run out. The great Gunthang Tenpai Dronmey once said that if you really seek liberation and lasting happiness, never say that you will do it tomorrow or the day after tomorrow: start today. If you put it off until tomorrow, there is every chance that before tomorrow comes you may die.

The Sanskrit term for the Buddha's teachings is *Buddhadharma*. *Buddha* refers to being awakened, while *dharma* loosely corresponds to the English term "religion." It refers to something that keeps us from falling under the sway of destructive emotions and consequent negative ways of living. In this way we are protected, not in the sense of being protected by a creator god or some other external agent, but of being protected through the reshaping of our own thoughts and actions. Through such practice we transform our state of mind from negative to positive.

TAKING A REALISTIC VIEW

The Buddha's teaching is based on a distinction between conventional and ultimate truth, which means it takes a realistic view. Unless we ground our practices and experiences in such a realistic view, we will not be able to bring about any transformation in our minds. If we try to focus on something that actually does not exist, there will be no truth, no reality in it. It will simply be a fabrication.

It is a reality that we all have different mental experiences and different disturbing emotions, but it is also a reality that all these disturbing emotions are interconnected. Our second task, after we have become familiar with how to reduce the power of our disturbing emotions by applying countermeasures, is to find the root cause of our disturbing emotions. When we eradicate that cause, we will achieve the state of lasting peace and happiness known as *nirvana*,⁸ although this state is still not the enlightenment of a Buddha.

⁸ The perfect peace of the state of mind that is free from craving, anger, and other disturbing emotions; the unconditioned state of mind that is free from the conditions that formerly obscured it.

As Buddhists, we do not believe that things are created or motivated by some external factor. Nor do we believe that things arise from permanent causes and conditions. We relate the experience of happiness and suffering, and their causes and conditions, to our own actions. And the quality of our action depends on the state of our mind: whether it is disciplined or undisciplined.

Problems and suffering arise because our minds are undisciplined. Therefore, our own happiness is in fact in our own hands. The responsibility rests on our own shoulders; we cannot expect someone to simply bring us happiness. The way to experience happiness is to identify its causes and conditions and to cultivate them, and to identify the causes and conditions of suffering and to eliminate them. If we know what is to be practiced, and what is to be given up, we will naturally meet with joy.

The root of suffering is ignorance, which here means our misconception that our self is inherently or intrinsically existent, exists under its own power, is established by way of its own nature, and is able to set itself up. In order to remove this misconception, we cultivate its direct opponent, the understanding that all things are empty of intrinsic existence. All the myriad difficulties we encounter arise because of this misconception, this wrong understanding. Thus, when we say that the Buddha discarded all wrong views out of compassion, we mean that he had the compassion to work for the benefit of all sentient beings. And in order to benefit sentient beings, he provided them with various levels of teachings that are free from wrong views and negative thoughts. Therefore, those who follow these teachings, by understanding the right view and putting it into practice, will be able to eliminate suffering.

When disturbing emotions arise within our minds, they disturb us and leave us without peace. So the crucial point is, can we remove them? Disturbing emotions are not of the same nature as the mind. If they were, then whenever the mind is present, the disturbing emotions would be present, too. But this is not the case. For example, a person may generally be very hot-tempered, but does that person remain hot-tempered and angry the entire day? Even bad-tempered people sometimes smile and relax. Therefore, even strong, disturbing emotions are not inseparably one with the mind. Basically, the two are separate.

Disturbing emotions are dependent on ignorance. Just as the sense of touch pervades our whole physical body, ignorance pervades all our disturbing emotions. There is no disturbing emotion that is not related to ignorance, and so we must investigate this ignorance. Ignorance is the very powerful, negative state of mind that induces all disturbing emotions. It is through ignorance that we are projected into the cycle of existence. Even though ignorance, or the misconception of self, is very strong, it is a wrong or mistaken consciousness. There are other positive minds or consciousnesses that can act as a counterforce to this ignorance. If we rely on them, we can eradicate ignorance.

Not only is the mind, like all phenomena, empty of intrinsic existence; its nature is just clarity and awareness. In its basic nature there are no disturbing emotions, so disturbing emotions are temporary obstructions of the mind. Consequently, disturbing emotions can be removed from the basic nature of the mind, which has the potential to become enlightened one day.

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

As I have already mentioned, we all want happiness and do not want suffering; it is also evident that both happiness and suffering come from a cause. The Buddha's fundamental teaching, the Four Noble Truths,⁹ simply deals with this fact. On the one hand, we have suffering, and suffering

⁹ The fundamental formulation of the Buddha's teaching that there is suffering, that suffering has a cause, that there is cessation of suffering, and that there is a path to that cessation.

has a cause, and we refer to this as true suffering and the true origin of suffering. On the other hand, we want happiness, and happiness, too, has a cause, and we refer to this as the true cessation (of suffering) and the true path.

Ultimate happiness here is referred to as true cessation, or liberation, which means not only that we feel happiness, but that we have achieved a state of lasting happiness. This happiness, referred to as true cessation—the true cessation of the disturbing emotions—also has a cause, and that cause is the true path. The instruction known as the Four Noble Truths is related to the basic laws of nature: we have suffering, and in order to eliminate it, we must remove its causes; and we want happiness, which is achieved by cultivating its causes and conditions. This explanation makes clear that the Four Noble Truths can be explained on the basis of interdependence and relativity. As Buddhists, we do not accept the idea of physical intervention by a creator god, nor do we accept that the sentient beings and the environment in which they live are the mere idea of an external creator.

According to the Buddhist explanation, everything we see and experience is a result of action; action, in turn, relates to actions of the mind, and the mind is without beginning. Suffering has an end, because its causes can be eliminated by cultivating positive counterforces. Although suffering has no beginning, it has an end; we can put an end to suffering. This explanation accords with basic laws of nature. It is not a philosophical fabrication; it neither exaggerates nor underestimates what exists. This is the Buddhist approach.

ADDRESSING OUR PROBLEMS BY TRANSFORMING THE MIND

Transforming the mind is not something that can be done through force. This is one of the things that makes it difficult, but it is still extremely important to transform the mind, because we want to be happy rather than miserable. Like other ordinary pursuits, we do not set out to fail. If we start a business, we do so with the intention of making a profit and not of going bankrupt. Similarly, when we talk about transforming the mind, our aim is to find peace and happiness. In order to train and transform the mind, it is important, first of all, to identify its negative and destructive aspects, as well as those of its aspects that are positive. Then, we have to cultivate the mind's positive qualities, such as kindness, patience, and compassion, and try to weaken, reduce, and eliminate our negative states of the mind, such as attachment, anger, and jealousy.

Many of our problems arise out of frustration with our efforts to fulfill our hopes and expectations. One of the remedies for this that I personally find useful is to be realistic, and my source for this remedy is the great Indian Buddhist master, Shantideva.¹⁰ He recommended that if the situation or problem is such that it can be remedied, then there is no need to worry about it. In other words, if there is a solution or a way out of the difficulty, then we need not be overwhelmed by it. The appropriate action is to seek the solution. It is clearly more sensible to spend our energy focusing on the solution than worrying about the problem. Alternatively, if there is no solution and no possibility of resolution, then there is also no point in worrying, because we cannot do anything about the situation anyway. In such a case, the sooner we accept this fact, the easier it will be for us. This formula, of course, requires that we directly confront the problem and take a realistic view. Otherwise, we will be unable to find out whether or not a solution to the problem exists.

¹⁰ Shantideva (8th century CE) was a scholar at Nalanda University and the author of *Bodhisattvacharyavatara* (*Guide to the Bodhisattva's Way of Life*), a text about developing the bodhisattva's aspiration and putting it into practice, which is highly valued in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition.

Taking a realistic view and cultivating a proper motivation is a way of protecting ourselves, of shielding ourselves against feelings of fear and anxiety. If we develop a pure and sincere motivation, if we are motivated by a wish to help others on the basis of kindness, compassion, and respect, we can carry on any kind of work in any field. We can function more effectively and with less fear or worry, being unafraid of what others think or whether we will ultimately be successful in reaching our goal. Even if we fail to achieve our goal, we can feel content in having made the effort. But if our motivation is poor, people may offer praise and we may achieve our goal, but we will still not be happy.

What principally upsets our inner peace is our disturbing emotions. All those thoughts, emotions, and mental events that reflect a negative or uncompassionate state of mind inevitably undermine our experience of inner peace. Negative thoughts and emotions, such as hatred, anger, pride, lust, greed, envy, and so forth, are what obstruct our most basic aspiration—to be happy. When we act under their influence, we become oblivious to the impact our actions have on others. They are thus the cause of our destructive behavior, both toward others and toward ourselves. Murder, scandal, and deceit all have their origin in disturbing emotions.

There are many methods and paths by which we can purify the mind and realize its true nature. Among these, in the Buddhist tradition, is a special instruction called Mind Training, which focuses on cultivating concern for others and turning adversity to advantage. It is this pattern of thought, this way of transforming problems into happiness, which has enabled the Tibetan people to maintain their dignity and spirit in the face of great difficulties. Indeed, I have found this instruction to be of great practical benefit in my own life.