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THIMPHU, BHUTAN

It is humbling and deeply gratifying to be asked to write the foreword to Handbook of Happiness. The invitation from the editors must be inspired by my country's philosophy of Gross National Happiness, and not any expertize on my part. Nonetheless, I thank you for the opportunity to share my personal thoughts on some aspects of the subject.

It was my father who said, "Gross National Happiness (GNH) is more important than Gross National Product (GNP)" in 1974. Since then, GNH has come to mean so many things. To me it signifies simply - Development with Values – where we strive for the benefits of economic growth and modernization while ensuring that in our drive for economic progress we do not forget to nurture that which make us united, harmonious and secure as Bhutanese. Whether it is our strong community structure or our culture and heritage, our traditional respect for the environment or the desire for a peaceful coexistence with other nations, the duty of the Bhutanese State is to ensure that these invaluable elements contributing to the happiness and wellbeing of our people are protected and strengthened. Our government must be human.

Thus, for Bhutan, Gross National Happiness is the bridge between the fundamental values of Kindness, Equality and Humanity and the necessary pursuit of economic growth.

So for me, as for all Bhutanese, building a modern literature on Happiness is important. Not because, we might be able to better experience happiness as we know it, but because the Happiness in Gross National Happiness, means much more. It is easy to measure wealth or even the power and influence of nations. Too often, these figures are accepted so easily that the truth of the millions affected by inequality, poverty, neglect, apathy and despair, remain hidden and unaddressed. In identifying Happiness as a development goal, it is not being implied that Happiness can or should become another variable to be measured. We are simply trying to bring a more profound, humane and deeper meaning and purpose to the measuring of economic growth.

For individuals, pursuing true happiness implies striving towards a certain purity, a nobility of goal – some sort of perfection. It cannot arise from wrongful, harmful or contrived circumstances. It is not something to be achieved in solitude or for the moment. Thus, in a nation seeking growth while creating the conditions for promoting 'happiness', it is more likely that we will see such qualities as rule of law, good governance, technology, robust economies and good education combine with values of equality, equity, justice, compassion and commitment to





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the welfare of fellow citizens and future generations – and with respect for other peoples and nations and all sentient beings.

Modernization and political change have nurtured the individual's freedom, but it has also led to a less desirable and unconscious freeing of the individual from his obligations to society and the greater good. As a result, certain inherent values have gone missing. The wonderful thing about placing Happiness in development conversation is that Happiness feeds on community and fraternity. Happiness reminds us that ultimately this is a world of people, of families, of communities all alike – of human beings seeking the same thing. When we grasp this universal simplicity – this sense of a shared planet and a shared fate for those who walk on it in a common quest for happiness, wellbeing and contentment - the answer to national and global problems will come closer at hand.

Inserting Happiness into Bhutan's pursuit of growth gives us a National Conscience guiding us towards making wise decisions for a better future. It reminds us that as we strive for success as individuals or as a nation, we also have a responsibility to the greater good, to future generations, to the world and to other living beings.

I feel blessed to be born in a country that, though small and faced with great challenges, has found in its own humanity the inspiration to think differently about growth or progress. We do not seek to preach Gross National Happiness, but to share our thoughts, and more importantly, to gain the wisdom of others' experiences. So I thank you all on behalf of the People of Bhutan, for your dedication and for the hard work that has been invested in this book, from which we will seek to learn.

*Jigme Khesar*  
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