

Bhutan's Remarkable Recipe for Happiness



By Azriel ReShel | [Uplift Connect](#)

Cultivating Collective Wellbeing

Sandwiched between India, China, and Tibet, the tiny mountain kingdom of Bhutan is home to some truly big ideas. Here, [happiness](#) is designated by law, and in the 1970s an official policy of 'Gross National Happiness' was embraced.

Today, nearly 50 years on, Bhutan's 'happiness guru', [Saamdu Chetri](#), who is tasked with ensuring every single person in Bhutan is happy, says this vision of ensuring national happiness has been taken up by many other countries around the world, and they have centers in Thailand, France, Switzerland, and Germany. They are also gearing up for centers in South Africa, the UK, USA, Spain, and Vietnam. And, in 2011, an incredible 193 countries at the UN decided we need to have

Gross National Happiness, wellbeing and happiness as standalone goals in all development parameters.

So what is this happiness that the Bhutanese are so skilled at creating and what can we learn from it? Saamdu Chetri shares the wisdom of the system they have developed and use in Bhutan.

“Happiness according to the Gross National Happiness (GNH) definition is serving others, living in harmony with nature and realizing human values and wisdom. Happiness is not those fleeting, momentary feel-good moods. The concept of GNH is to develop holistic human beings through the nine domains that we talk about often. That we’re able to balance the material and the spiritual wellbeing of the people.”

How to Measure Happiness

The Himalayan mountain kingdom may be poor in the gross national product, but it is spiritually rich and [strong](#) in human values. Today it is sharing its wisdom with the world and people are taking notice. Gross National Happiness is at once a philosophy, a practice, and an index.

In charge of Bhutan’s Gross National Happiness Centre, Saamdu Chetri says they aim to have 100% of the population [happy](#). At present, the Bhutanese are only 92% happy, with 8% of the population unhappy, but the government is working on changing this.

Unlike most other countries in the world, development in Bhutan is measured not through infrastructure or technology, but by happiness and they’ve been experimenting with this idea for the last 40 years. The tenets of Gross National Happiness include a system and you need to have 77% of the conditions in the 9 domains to be considered deeply happy, says Saamdu Chetri.

“We have four pillars, nine domains, 33 indicators, and 124

variables. To take you through these four pillars and nine domains, the first pillar is called Equitable and Sustainable Social Economic Development, that's a pillar. Under it, we have three domains: health, education, living standard. Then we have environment preservation, which by itself is a domain under the name Ecological Diversity and Resilience. We have Good Governance by itself, it's a pillar and by itself, it's a domain because these two are very important so they're independent."

"Then we have Cultural Preservation and Promotion as the fourth pillar. Under these are four domains: time use, how you use your time, do you sleep well, do you work only eight hours, or more or less. If you work less you get less score, if you work more than eight hours you get less score. You can't exceed that time and similarly do you sleep well, six hours completely or do you need eight hours? Eight hours at least you have rest for yourself. Time use, psychological wellbeing, community vitality, cultural diversity, and resilience. These are the four domains again under this pillar."

The Four Pillars of R.I.C.H

"Love is the foundation, in between our four pillars which I call rich R-I-C-H rich. R stands for Relationship, one pillar; I stands for Integrity, C stands for Compassion and H stands for Humanity. On top is that roof of trust."

Gross National Happiness was coined by the fourth king of Bhutan, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, in the 1970s. When the 16-year-old king of Bhutan took to the throne after his father's death, the first thing he did was ask: How do I bring [happiness](#) and wellbeing to my people?

The king decided that happiness was a more important [success](#) measure for his nation than economics. It was extraordinary then and still is today, to have a country's

development policy based on the somewhat intangible idea of happiness.

Following a Cambridge education and time in the West, looking into European models of development, the Bhutanese king decided the conventional [economic](#) model was based on the destruction of nature and of society, and so rejected it. He went to his people and asked them how he could make them happy and then listened to all of their answers. He later began the process of devolving power to the grassroots and at the height of his popularity, a new political party, Bhutan's Blissfully Happy Party was formed, and in 2008 the country became a constitutional monarchy.

A Recipe for Wellbeing

Bhutan's quest to give all people true and lasting happiness, is a recipe for global wellbeing, not only of people but of the Earth. If we all devolved our lives to a [simpler](#), more meaningful existence based on non-material values, there wouldn't be the wholesale environmental destruction we are witnessing today, along with the global epidemic of depression and anxiety.

Saamdu Chetri believes that happiness is both a choice and a skill that can be developed.

"If we need to be happy, we need to do a few things correctly. One, we need to let things go; two, we need to accept things as they are; three, we need to forgive others and forgive the self, have right intention in our works, in our thoughts, in our deeds, in our actions and we need to say sorry even if we are right and thank you every moment."

Hugging Medication

His other happiness promoting factors include exercising so that you sweat, [love](#), and hugging medication. This happiness

guru speaks of a dose of happiness that stimulates the release of dopamine, oxytocin, serotonin, and endorphins.

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