

# **Gross National Happiness: Concepts, Status and Prospects**

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*Dedicated to the memory of  
The Missing Joint Secretary,  
Dasho Rinzin Dorji of Tang, Ugencholing.*

## **Foreword**

This paper discusses gross national happiness in terms of its constituent parts: happiness itself and kindness, the flip side of happiness. In doing so it also covers issues such as the meaning of reality, and the importance of the roles played by the individual and organizations such as the civil service.

The paper attempts to demonstrate the direct link between these concepts and entities, concluding with a specific set of recommendations for a policy framework conducive to the attainment of GNH.

These are all clearly weighty matters, and it is necessary to clarify that I do not claim to be an expert on any of them. It might be helpful to know instead that I do profess to have been a student of management now for over twenty years, reading widely on the subject and implementing them at work. And more recently I have also become a student of happiness. This may sound a bit odd, but perhaps you will think differently after reading on.

My only intention is to use this forum as an opportunity to pass on some insights, you judge their value, with the hope that perhaps those among you who share the same proclivities might be so moved as to even incorporate it in your personal and professional lives.

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# Gross National Happiness: Concepts, Status and Prospects

## Introduction

Like many others, I have been fascinated by the concept of gross national happiness. Mulling on the concept over the years, I would make mental notes on this or that facet that struck me, always believing in its wisdom. And somehow always confident that in it lay the path on which Bhutan could find its own unique place in the sun.

This was so because I believe that the concept of gross national happiness shares one thing in common with many great ideas that have changed the world: simplicity. It is simple and forthright, and in this simplicity lies its profundity. If happiness is the ultimate goal for every individual, then why not make happiness the clearly stated goal for the nation? A nation after all is nothing but a collection of individuals with shared common interests. In other words, pursue happiness and all that it comprises in the most direct way possible.

I have therefore welcomed the move by the Centre for Bhutan Studies to discuss ways in which GNH can be realized, and have made considerable effort to clearly organize the random thoughts I have had on the subject.

Having put pen to paper, and with the benefit of the greater clarity of thought that often, though not always, is the outcome of such an exercise, I find that my views are not quite what I expected:

Using the metaphor of the human life cycle, I have to state that as brilliant as I believe the concept is, it has barely survived birth. Now, not even in its early youth, GNH is sickly, neglected, and teetering on the brink of an early demise.

It seems that GNH has been much proclaimed and celebrated, with very worthy policy proclamations, papers and books covering the subject. However, much of this appears not to have moved beyond paper, reducing the concept almost to a platitude. The problem seems to be that it has not become a shared attitude, a way of doing things.

In reaching such an assessment, I would emphasize that I am as discouraged as any true champion of GNH would be. This is not a conclusion I like. However, I feel that it is best to face such a conclusion squarely. And to take a constructive view, I believe that this seminar is timely – GNH may be at the edge of the abyss but it isn't dead, at least not yet. Perhaps the discussions during this seminar will serve to rouse a few spirits, and the day may yet be saved.

## Concepts

### *Hallucinations v. Reality*

Why have I reached such a seemingly dire conclusion, and what is the basis for such a diagnosis? Before I can meaningfully put forth my reasoning, it is necessary to understand where I am coming from and the underlying beliefs that color my thought process.

The starting concept is the whole notion of reality. What is “reality”? The truth is that reality is different for everyone. Take a hundred people, put them through the exact, same incident, and they will have a hundred different accounts of that experience. Each account is the reality for that person, and none of them is wrong.

The reason for this is that while we absorb the experiences of the outside world through the same senses – visual (sight), auditory (sound), kinesthetic (touch), olfactory (smell) and gustatory (taste) – these sensory inputs mostly do not go directly to our conscious mind. There is a whole lot of preprocessing that goes on before it is internally represented in the conscious mind. This interpretation of outside events – a perception – occurs at the unconscious level and is totally colored by one’s past experiences, beliefs and slant of mind; and quite often all of these can be totally distorted. Yet all of these constitute a reality for that person, and few people, if any, can convince her otherwise.

What we consider our individual reality is really nothing but an individual perception of reality, which isn’t much different from a hallucination given all the internally generated spin. Thus technically speaking, we are all hallucinating to a greater or lesser degree.

While this so, the key question is why is it that some individuals are far more effective than others? Why do some people appear to stroll from success to success, while others flounder around?

Richard Bandler and John Grinder provide a simple answer: effective people hallucinate in a way that gives them the most options possible. They stretch their minds and are thus able to generate and choose from a greater range of possibilities.<sup>1</sup> On the other hand, the average person takes a view of reality that provides far fewer options. In the extreme case, take a suicidal person: the only option he allows for his hallucination of being overwhelmed is to take his own life. A permanent solution to a temporary problem, yet it is the only option he allows himself in his reality.

The point is that since reality is only a hallucination, and since the way we hallucinate makes a huge difference in the direction and quality of our individual lives, it becomes imperative to consciously (and over time, unconsciously) hallucinate with a positive bent of mind. This is the only way to always give ourselves the widest range of options in any conceivable situation in life.

Thus being positive and cheerful is crucial. And positive and cheerful are only synonyms for the word happy – the focus of this seminar.

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Bandler and John Grinder, Structure of Magic I

## ***Defining Gross National Happiness***

In the term gross national happiness, happiness is clearly the operative word. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, happiness is defined simply as “an instance of deep pleasure in, or contentment with, one's circumstances”. It is thus a state of mind.

The words “gross national” are easy to explain. They have been taken directly out of the economics term, gross national product, which is a monetary measure or sum of the economic activity in a given country for a given period of time.

The fact that the word “product” has been replaced by “happiness” would clearly suggest that GNH is being offered as an alternative to GNP. Thus GNH is about adopting a less materialistic national goal, a goal of happiness that is based on the notion that the quality of one's life matters more than the materialism that one tries to stuff into life.

In this sense it is a unique concept, clearly requiring a unique approach to the whole goal of development.

In other words, the concept of GNH requires that at the individual (or micro) level we should concern ourselves more with seeking deeper pleasure in, or contentment with, our individual circumstances. The greater one's success at that, the greater one's per capita happiness. And when you have the sum total of everyone's per capita happiness, you have collective happiness, or GNH. The greater the number of happy individuals, the greater the corresponding value of GNH.

While happiness cannot be measured, it can be worked at and achieved. The fact that it cannot be measured directly does not imply that we cannot use proxy or indirect indicators to measure our success at achieving it.

Besides, as we discussed earlier, hallucinating our individual realities with a happy attitude is the only way to create and discover all the options available, and only by generating the greatest range and quality of options can we achieve our true potential.

His Holiness the Dalai Lama believes that the main pursuit of human beings should be happiness. On the question of whether the goal of happiness or contentment is unprogressive (from the viewpoint that a contented person may be unmotivated to do or achieve more) His Holiness points out that only when one is in a happy state of mind is one capable of the positive emotions such as love, kindness, generosity and compassion. A happy person is more likely to naturally do more simply for the common good. As opposed to this, an unhappy person will harbor afflictive emotions such as anger, hatred, jealousy and vindictiveness. Such a person is likely to be brooding, lurching negatively from situation to situation, and unlikely to contribute in a meaningfully sustained way to society.<sup>2</sup>

There is also the view that if one does things that do not cause remorse or guilt, engaging instead in acts that are considerate and kind, happiness is a natural outcome. This comes from the belief in cause and effect, that you reap what you sow, and to use another cliché, what goes around comes around.

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<sup>2</sup> His Holiness the Dalai Lama, with Howard Cutler, *The Art of Happiness*

Thus happiness and kindness more than complement each other; they are the twin forces that constitute the most powerful, virtuous circle one can conceive.

Unfortunately, there is the widespread belief today that happiness comes after one has achieved wealth (oodles of it), education, status (fame or power), or accomplishment (recognition). Though the sad truth is staring us in the face we choose not to recognize it: there are so many unhappy rich people, suicidal rock/movie stars, highly accomplished but lonely people, and the list goes on. The truth is that one's happiness has little meaningful correlation with anything one might have or achieve. There are also plenty of unhappy and mean spirited poor, uneducated, status free and unaccomplished people too!

The problem is that we have mostly been raised with the notion that in order to be happy we must have or achieve something. There is thus this unstated pre-condition that we set before we allow ourselves the luxury of a little happiness.

“I’ll be happy when I have that Mercedes...”

“When I get that promotion and pay raise, all will be well...”

“I will be a success when I’m the president of the company...”

“If only I had a million dollars...”

The truth is that after we get what we set our hearts upon, we find that it isn't quite what we thought it would be; that victory is often hollow and, as General George Patton noted, glory is fleeting.

We have to realize that there is no way you are going to enjoy that million dollars, even if you get it, if you are incapable of enjoying and being happy with the hundred that you have now. On the other hand, if you strive to thoroughly enjoy and be happy with what you have, that million dollars is likely to fall on your lap anyway. This has a lot to do with being more effective and productive when in a happy state of mind, as against the anxiety that results when you want something too much.<sup>3</sup>

There is also the tendency to treat happiness like a commodity, like money. We say things like “I’ll enjoy myself later. I’ll make time for my family, later.” Later is usually when you’ve retired or made all the money you thought you needed to be happy. The only problem is, happiness deferred is happiness gone for ever – it cannot be saved like money in the bank. Happiness is more like a muscle; it needs to be exercised or else it’ll atrophy. More accurately, the emotions of happiness create neuro-cortical pathways in the brain; pathways which grow bigger and bigger with continued use, and get overtaken by weeds and undergrowth with disuse. So come retirement time you find that your children have all flown the coop, and nothing, not even all your wealth and power, brings you any joy simply because you have no happiness neuro-cortical pathways in the brain. You just hit a wall.

I would thus suggest that the direct pursuit of happiness is desirable not just for the sake of the happiness that results, but also for its inevitable externalities, that is the economic and other social benefits that will surely accrue as side benefits. Happy persons will have happier families and friends; and they will be more effective and productive.

I have to say this again: GNH is such a beautiful concept because it grabs the bull by the horn. It recognizes that happiness is the ultimate individual goal, and accordingly places happiness as the national goal as well. It is direct, and it deemphasizes

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<sup>3</sup> Richard Bandler, Design Human Engineering (Seminar)

chimerical surrogates such as wealth, education, status, power and personal accomplishment.

### ***Defining kindness***

Having mentioned the word kindness several times, it is necessary to ensure that we share a common understanding of this term. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, kindness is having or displaying a gentle, sympathetic, or benevolent disposition; and the quality of showing consideration for others.

While this is acceptable from a linguistic perspective, there is the need to be a bit more specific, since we are taking a more technical approach to the subject. Of the descriptions included in the definition, to my mind the word “benevolent” stands out. Synonyms for this word that we could use to clarify the meaning of kindness include the words generous and caring.

Having defined the meaning of kindness in our context, it is important to add that acts of kindness need to be ecological, to use an NLP term. Kindness to one person at the cost of another is not ecological as it will have negative consequences for, and reactions from, the affected party. Kindness to a person at the cost of the community or organization isn't ecological for the same reason.

These distinctions are important to make as it would be risky to have anyone, least of all a well positioned civil servant, go off on a hallucinated tangent with regard to the promotion of kindness. For example, being kind to people on government expense – overdoing the *kidu* thing – isn't kindness; it's generosity on the house which is really being cheap. Being kind to yourself or your relatives by dipping into or being generous with government funds isn't an act of kindness, it is also known as corruption. Being kind to your relatives by promoting them without regard to their competence isn't kindness, it is usually called nepotism. Letting someone off the hook despite non-delivery, shoddily completed contracts, etc. isn't kindness either, it is known as dereliction of duty. And going out of your way to promote someone, more because you like him than because you have taken the time to objectively evaluate his competence and integrity, isn't kindness at all, it is known as pandering to sycophancy.<sup>4</sup>

Thus any act that costs the organization or someone other than you, the would be benefactor, is harmful and cannot be treated as kindness. Like everything in life, kindness requires a sense of balance and good judgment. And, as any good parent will tell you, kindness sometimes requires firmness.

As the examples cited should make clear, the organization – whether it be the company, government office or the government itself – must be treated as a living, breathing being. It requires nurture and care, just as humans do. Neglect it or abuse it and eventually all of us will have to pay for it. The misapplications of kindness described above have one thing in common: they all seriously harm the organization. We can thus expect true wisdom to emanate from a civil servant only when he has the

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<sup>4</sup> If you stop to think why you like a particular subordinate, the answer will often be that that person is willing and eager to do your bidding. That is usually a good thing. However, whenever you find that the beaver is too eager, it helps to ask yourself why that may be the case. And it helps further not to flatter yourself by coming up with answers such as “Because he is really loyal to me” or “Because he really believes in my leadership.” A little hard headedness in this regard is all that it would really take to discourage, rather than encourage, sycophancy.

capacity to dispense kindness in a way that balances the needs of the organization with that of the people that it consists of and serves.

## **Status of Gross National Happiness**

Having spent considerable effort elaborating on the ideas, values and assumptions that I arrive with, we are finally ready to consider the question of how far we have gone in realizing GNH. It has been over 30 years since His Majesty laid the foundation for such an alternative course of development, and I'm sure we all agree that there has been plenty of time for action in implementing it. This is therefore quite a good point at which to see roughly where we stand.

Having made the case that the wisdom of the GNH concept lies in its direct approach, its uniqueness and its simplicity, it would be reasonable to suggest that these three points also serve as an excellent basis against which progress in realizing GNH can be gauged.

### ***Directness***

Let's take the notion that the GNH concept is a direct and forthright one in that it seeks to directly seek happiness, as opposed to achieving it indirectly via material and other economic progress. If we genuinely believed in this approach, one could expect institutions and mechanisms in the country which support or promote the direct achievement of happiness. If so, where are they? I cannot think of a single organization, whether public or private, business or recreational that puts happiness as its principal business. For a nation that prides itself, at least vocally, in its pursuit of happiness, it seems to me a little strange that there is not even the semblance of a systematic or organized way to achieving it.

It seems rather, that the goal has been set and we are simply waiting for good fortune to grant it to us over the passage of time.

This is a pity, since there already are well developed principles, methods and techniques – human change technologies – that could readily have been adopted or at the very least, experimented with. Among my favorite authors in this field is Richard Bandler who, along with John Grinder, created Neuro-Linguistic Programming or NLP. Using NLP techniques they have “cured” paranoid schizophrenics, suicidal maniacs, catatonics and people who had been in coma for years. They have also “cured” hundreds of thousands of unhappy people in deep clinical depression, with extreme phobias and neuroses; people whose internal representations were so screwed up that happiness was impossible. The word cured is in quotes because Bandler and Grinder believe that the afflicted persons were never broken to begin with – they had just lost control over their own internal dialogue and representational processes. All they needed to do was regain control.

The amazing thing is that most of these successes took barely a session for each individual, often only minutes, compared with the years (sometimes 20 to 25 years, if ever) that it took with conventional psycho-, drug and shock therapy. Further, this exciting development occurred way back in the mid-70s, roughly around the time the concept of GNH was coined. The fact that, in all that time, we have not looked for and found such human change technologies is inconsistent with our purported commitment to GNH.

There have been many other options as well. Official support of meditation for lay persons is one obvious one, especially for a devout Buddhist country, as are laughter

therapy clubs which we often read about in the news. One such movement, “The Art of Living” which promotes breathing techniques among others, did reach Bhutan. I think the response to this was pretty good, with quite a number of people eager to part with some money and devote some time to learning their methods. However, I don’t think anyone here would claim serious credit for their arrival.

## *Uniqueness*

This paper began with the assertion that the concept of GNH was in its death throes. That is a pretty stark assertion, considering all that Bhutan has achieved in the last three decades or so. There are clear signs of greater affluence and a higher quality of life stemming from better education, health, communications and other facilities; and some might even make the point that there is perhaps even greater happiness now than in the past.

Credit must be given where it’s due, and these achievements are certainly creditable. I acknowledge all of these. However, consider this: How much of this has arisen because of a commitment to GNH and how much from standard development activities and policies that are in effect all around the world? In fact almost all the visible progress has arisen from policies and programs that are no different, and little if any can be attributed to programs flowing directly from the concept of GNH.

The point is that if GNH is being targeted seriously, there has to be something that we are doing that is different and distinct. We cannot seriously expect to realize such an audacious goal of national happiness with average, standard development schemes.

And if we are going to continue following the standard IMF, World Bank, Danida, UNDP, etc. prescription for development, we should call it just that. We shouldn’t continue to grandly espouse GNH as Bhutan’s contribution to the world when in fact we are doing nothing different or special.

I would suggest that our adoption of standard development policies is the real tragedy as GNH has so much more to offer. Sure, we cannot avoid targeting the usual areas such as health, education and employment, but we must realize that the attainment of GNH has to go beyond that. Our policies must involve additional elements; it must have that extra twist – that *je ne sais quoi* - that takes more cognizance of local genius and which makes our development approach unique. These policies must reflect our unique circumstances – both the advantages and the constraints – if it is to succeed in any meaningful way.

If these have been incorporated, or if we are indeed doing something unique and different – on the ground, not on paper – it must be hidden very well as I have totally missed it.

## *Simplicity*

The trouble with adopting the standard approach to development is that it has come with considerable excess baggage. The chief among these is complexity.

We are basically trying to do everything, at the behest of purported experts as well as on the basis of overstretched beliefs in our abilities and capacities. Everything is a priority, depending on whom you speak to. It’s agriculture for the Ministry of

Agriculture, health for the Ministry of Health, industry for the Ministry of Trade and Industry, and so forth. This isn't a problem if the focus of each department or ministry on its work is always tempered with an understanding of higher, national priorities. However, this isn't the case and that suggests that there is a systemic failure to forge a common perception of what matters more. After all, some priorities are always more important than others.

In the absence of a clear prioritization of objectives and values, we are basically trying to do too much. In the context of our well acknowledged shortage of human resources, most pointedly in management, this had led to some confusion, profligacy in the use of scarce managerial ability and financial resources, and prevented the focused application of such resources in priority areas. We have thereby denied ourselves the attainment of the most optimal returns on effort and investment.

What has happened instead is that over the years the bureaucracy has simply grown, both in numbers as well as in density. There has also been a sharp rise in the number of project ideas and plans proposed by each element of the bureaucracy. Sometimes it is approval of a project idea that yields the subsequent demand for additional manpower. And sometimes it is the additional staff strength that generates project ideas, possibly to make a difference, extract more resources or simply to justify the existence of the department. Whatever the cause, the trend is unmistakable.

To complicate matters further, the increasing size of the civil service has led to more people in a position, and with the time, to conceive and push innumerable new rules and regulations, ostensibly to fix problems. The underlying assumption seems to be that creating a new rule or regulation, or better yet, passing lengthy acts in the National Assembly, will somehow remedy the problem; that a piece of paper can prevent the real life misdoings of a person or a particular group of individuals.

The net result is an increasingly complex bureaucracy and web of rules that the common man finds increasingly impossible to penetrate. Given that we are still a predominantly agricultural and rural nation, where the bulk of the population continues to be rooted in our traditional, simple ways, the complexities that we are forcing upon ourselves is incomprehensible. Worse still, in addition to contributing to greater complexity, many of the rules and regulations do not prevent what they seek to proscribe in the first place.

In this sense the tendency is to be simplistic in approaching problems, rather than seeking out simplicity in solving them. There is a world of a difference in the meaning of these two similar sounding words. Simplicity is what results from a good understanding of the way in which the universe works – what motivates people and what discourages them. Simple solutions harness these motivations and work with the grain of the universe, rather than against it. Simplistic solutions are the opposite of this. With simplistic solutions the link between the problem and the proposed solution is usually tenuous because little consideration is given to these natural laws.

For example, there are few people today who doubt that a person's motivation – and quality and quantity of output – is directly related to the prospect of being rewarded for that effort. This is an observation that has been ignored at great cost, as every communist nation has discovered. An agreement with this notion should tantamount to an agreement with the belief that free markets are desirable, and that intervention by government should be kept to the minimum.

Yet, time and time again, our policies do not adequately consider these natural laws that determine the success of our efforts. Much that is in effect is simplistic, going against the grain, and invariably doomed to fail.

The truth is that nearly all of these trends are not unique to Bhutan. Countries all over the world, including all in the South Asian sub-region, have been blighted by them. Progress has been slowed, halted and even reversed by those dictating policy and wielding administrative power. The human tendency seems to favor simplistic solutions, myriads of them, with the net result being an exponential growth in unmanageable complexity.

For example in Bhutan, take the ban on the import of cigarettes. I know this is an emotional subject for some of us, but however deep those emotions we have to recognize as extremely flawed the notion that we can pass laws to ban the sale of cigarettes (which we have done in several Dzongkhags) and expect to see a decline in its consumption. That is not how things work. What we can expect instead is a continued consumption of cigarettes, at higher prices now that it isn't legally available, a growth in the black market, and another front on which regulatory agencies can engage with the public (in an entirely discretionary manner it goes without saying). In accordance with the law of unintended consequences, we will have three problems instead of the original one. And depending on how lucrative the black market becomes, the new problem will become bigger than the original, particularly in terms of its contribution to lawlessness and the gradual emergence of a parallel economy.

If one subscribes to this nature of intervention and extends it logically, we should ban the sale of glue, dendrite, erasing ink, cough medicine, petrol and whatever else kids fancy these days.

This nature of intervention is, how shall I say it nicely, not intelligent, and runs completely counter to human experience and basic economics. Memories of the lawlessness that prevailed during the prohibition of alcohol should come to mind, as well as the limited success the present drugs regime is having in the United States and elsewhere. There is no way this law is going to work; it just adds another straw to the back of the camel carrying that burden of complexity. And yet we have blithely allowed it to happen.

As I have said, simplicity constitutes the brilliance built into the concept of GNH. Simple, far more than small, is beautiful.<sup>5</sup> Simplicity is the only antidote to complexity because it is in simplicity that one can find the clarity of purpose. It is only the brilliance incorporated in simplicity that leads to desirable attitudes, behaviors and strategies that have any chance of permeating into the collective mind of the civil service and the population at large. Simplicity in strategy is the one concept which, if incorporated into our entire development approach, could provide the basis for genuinely believing in the attainability of GNH. It is, however, conspicuous by its absence.

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<sup>5</sup> Richard Koch, *The 80/20 Principle*; Richard Koch argues that large corporations often fail because of the complexity of their strategies and operations. The perpetually successful corporations are the ones which build on inherently simple, and thereby focused, strategies.

## *Nature of the bureaucracy*

Having considered the virtues of simplicity, as well as the notion that simplicity is achieved through a clear prioritization of objectives and intentions, we turn to the key consequence of the complexity to which we appear to have defaulted. While the complexity has been created largely by the bureaucracy, the complexity in turn has contributed to shaping the bureaucracy itself. This impact is important to consider for the following reason.

GNH is the national aggregate of individual happiness and individuals play an important role in contributing to that aggregate. However, individuals play a greater or lesser role depending on the responsibility and position held in society. In Bhutan it is the civil service and related cadres that hold the bulk of these positions of influence, and clearly the happiness of the rest of society is dictated to a great extent by this group.

Thus a clear prerequisite for the attainment of GNH is the evolution of a civil service that embraces the concept, and is imbued with a *Weltanschauung* that is alive with notions of happiness and kindness of the sort defined in this paper.

Yet, it must be said that over the years such an evolution appears to have gone the other way. We seem to have grown less and less kind, more and more self-righteous and increasingly heavy handed in the way we deal with the public at large.

I know there will be those who disagree, but let's consider a couple of issues to better understand this view.

Firstly, consider the issue of land ownership. This is probably the most sensitive subject as land is central to the livelihood of the largely agricultural Bhutanese population. It is an emotive issue, linked as it is to the very notion of survival. It is no surprise that countless lives have been lost over land disputes, given the motivation to defend it at any cost.

Despite this, it has to be said that we have not handled the issue very well. Today there are thousands of families who, having inherited properties owned by their forefathers over many generations, are suddenly being told that in fact they own swathes of excess land. And that inability to pay for it will result in its confiscation.

This turn of events has come about because the laws of land ownership and registration have changed. The state used to recognize traditional boundaries – the concept of *sa-tsam do-tsam* – where known landmarks such as a neighbor's wall, the edge of a public road and the banks of a river constituted a sufficient basis for proving ownership. Land ownership based on the concept of *aring lebdrang* was also recognized. This tradition works very well because the entire village, and most notably the neighbors, kept a meticulous record and memory of such boundaries. It worked very well because it involved everybody's self interest. The neighbor's because he shared a common boundary and would face an immediate consequence if it moved. And the community's because any encroachment on a public road or other feature affected the whole village. It works because it goes with the grain of human nature.

The problem arose with the introduction of modern methods of land survey. The laws were changed so that land must now be measured and recorded in terms of square feet or acres. All very modern, progressive and so forth, it would seem.

The problem starts on several fronts. The first is that the new law completely discards all the checks and balances provided by the shared and respected memories of individuals and the community with respect to property. As if that weren't enough, it completely vests all those powers in the hands of the person conducting the measurement. That itself would be acceptable if there were a fail safe, fool proof way for that person to arrive at an accurate measurement.

Now I know several officials who would swear that indeed, with all the new fangled advances in technology, measurements are accurate. The truth is rather different. I too believe in technology, but I think I know enough about it not to place blind faith in machines, especially when the machines require humans to operate. It's the classic man behind the gun variable.

Accordingly, measurements swing unpredictably from year to year, depending on who is doing the measurement, and often even if done by the same person. If that weren't bad enough, villagers are caught in a bind: If, for example, the measure is higher than the previous year's (let's say 10 acres against a registered 9), excess land is declared and struck off the records. If the next year the measurement of the now reduced land (still 9 acres on the record) turns out in fact to be much less (say 8 acres in actual measurement), you have a fat, hairy chance of getting back the shortfall of one acre inflicted on you.

There is just no way out for the common man. Land measurements swing unpredictably, and it is never the fault of the measurer, always the land owner. Land seems to "drop" out of registration records on a regular basis, completely erasing a person's ownership of land. And land is taken over from the public at large, ostensibly on the strength of need and the concept of eminent domain, but often with a callousness or disregard for the feelings of the people.

The National Assembly has made some allowance for this issue, no thanks of course to the bureaucracy. However, I believe that it doesn't go far enough. Let us have no pretenses about this – the countryside is simmering over this issue.

A second issue, which might appear less significant, involves the issue of filling out documents or applications required by various government offices. I'm not sure of the experiences of everyone, but I do know of many, many instances in which you fill out the application, have it duly signed and stamped, and go through a number of other requirements before you finally manage to submit it to the concerned office. You go back a few days later to see if it's being processed, and you are perhaps told "Not yet, it's being processed." Some days later you are informed – straight faced and without apology – that the documents are lost and that you need to fill it out again. This type of treatment is usually combined with delays of the most casual sort, requiring you to almost be on duty at the concerned office for long periods of time. This would be acceptable if it were that certain matters of policy needed to be worked out before approval is granted. Usually, however, it's just a routine signature that's required. Significant or not, this attitude causes considerable angst and is a telling indicator of our mindset.

These are but two examples that might just indicate that perhaps we, as civil servants, are forgetting why we exist in the first place. Perhaps it is the complexity that has arisen from the wide range of development activities that has led us to forget that we exist to serve the people and to facilitate the development process. Though most of us probably can consciously mouth and repeat that basic premise, how much of it is reflected in our actions is more pertinent. The examples suggest that rather than

being guided by the concept of kindness and the broad vision that comes with it, the afflictive emotions of arrogance, ego, envy and mean spirit have taken or are taking over. These emotions cannot be disguised as they find an outlet in only one way – in a general air of obstructionism and uncooperativeness that pervades the person. Whenever we bump into unexplainable obstructionism of this nature we can be certain that hidden behind whatever veneer it is masked with, there lies the sort of mean spirit that is literally dragging the country down.

I personally do not believe that we consciously and collectively bid ill for our country men and women. That intent can be dismissed by the existence of many well intended individuals within our ranks. However, I do believe that however well intended we might be, we have tolerated and condoned the cavalier elements within our bureaucracy. We have for too long ignored the presence of those among us who subscribe to the politics of envy and negativity, for whom kindness in the manner described here is not even a concept. And for whom the responsibility vested in them, however limited, is only an opportunity to demonstrate authority.

In not reining in these widespread tendencies, the bureaucracy is failing the country and its people. Urgent remedies are required if we are to prevent matters falling further apart. The more so if we are to sustain any hope of attaining that elusive goal of gross national happiness.

As General Colin Powell wrote, we need to separate our ego from the position we hold, because if we continue to equate our ego with our position, what will happen to us when one day, inevitably, we retire from or *are made to* relinquish that position?

## **Prospects for Gross National Happiness**

As we have discussed, the crucial elements for the attainment of GNH are not in place and the prospects do not look good. Even so, and as I have said many times already, a genuine embracement of the values enshrined in the concept of GNH continues to offer the opportunity to save the day.

Consider this tried and true four step formula for succeeding at anything:<sup>6</sup>

- 1) Decide on the goal to be attained.
- 2) Take action.
- 3) Notice the outcomes of your actions. Are they working?
- 4) If your action isn't getting the desired results, have the flexibility to try something else; and keep changing tactics until the goal is achieved.

We have identified our goal but how firm is our decision to achieve it? It would seem not enough, and we need to demand more commitment to the goal of GNH. A decision truly taken must rule out any other possibility.

Secondly, we have taken lots of action, rather too much and in too diffused a manner. Much of it can be linked to achieving GNH in only an indirect or pedestrian way.

Thirdly, we have noticed the outcomes of our actions, and it has been suggested that there isn't very much to speak of, from the viewpoint of attaining GNH.

That leads us to the fourth step: Our actions are not working and we must be flexible enough to try something else. After all, it is insane to do the same thing over and over again, and expect a different result.

### ***Recommendations***

This section offers recommendations for trying things differently. Some are well known, but are important to repeat. Perhaps repetition with a slight twist will help deepen our understanding of their significance. Some contrast starkly with present policies, but need to be adopted if we are to demonstrate a genuine commitment to GNH and have any hope of realizing it.

#### **Protect our precious institutions**

There are two institutions that are most precious. The first is our monarchy. The other is our faith, and the institutions that guard that faith, Buddhism.

#### ***Defend the institution of the monarchy***

While we enjoy our current lifestyle, both the new freedoms as well as the material benefits, we need to constantly remember that the changes that have allowed such a lifestyle constitute nothing short of a revolution. What is unique is that this

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<sup>6</sup> Richard Bandler and John Grinder, *Frogs Into Princes*

revolution has been led by our monarchy. Feudalism and serfdom were done away with by the monarchy. And the devolution of power and decentralization that continues to this day have been initiated and strongly backed by the monarchy. All of these have been done in the span of a generation, so much so that our society has gone through a transformation that continues to this day. Wealth, title and status have been made accessible to all, whether through good fortune, calculation or hard work.

The monarchy has clearly and consistently viewed its subjects through kind and benevolent eyes. Given this, it is in our interest to do everything in our power to serve, protect and uphold this sacred institution. It is as straightforward and simple as that.

### ***Defend the institutions of our faith***

Buddhism is not just our religion; for most of Bhutan Buddhism transcends our culture and our daily lives. In addition to our monarchy, our faith is the uniting factor. The continued strengthening of the belief in our religion is vital to the continued prosperity and progress of the nation. The institutions that strengthen the faith, within and without the official monastic order, must be supported and upheld. Only then will we have the assurance that our guardian deities will continue to stand by us, and defend us, as they have done for centuries.

With all the education and exposure that we have been getting, there are certainly those among us who believe in pursuing only scientific fact over faith, ritual and religious ceremony. Such persons may pause to consider that the more science explains, the more it finds it cannot explain. And physicists are beginning to sound more and more like Buddhist monks. That is something to think about.

### **Embrace guiding philosophies and principles**

As those among us with a strategic bent of mind will expect, an important step is to formally adopt guiding philosophies and principles. The primary benefit of this is that it obviates the need for excessive immersion in detail: guiding philosophies and principles allow you to quickly decide whether something is acceptable or not depending on how it fits within it. And here are some that we need to enshrine right away.

### ***Simple is beautiful***

The general problem with the policies that are not working today is the fact that they are too forward-looking. We undergo advanced studies, travel a bit, interact with citizens and consultants from distant nations, and come up with new ideas and policies. In the bargain it has been all too easy to forget our roots, and many of these policies seem to reflect this tendency.

It is important to remember that feudalism was a way of life in Bhutan until as late as the 1960s and that serfdom itself was only abolished in the late 1950s. We have certainly come a long way.

And yet we must remember that just coming a long way doesn't mean that we are nearing the same level as other countries. We still have a long way to go. Blindly adopting practices in other countries will be of no use to us. What we need to do is remember that we are just in the initial stages of modernization. The educated and well traveled elite may be able to absorb the ideals and ways of the western world, but the rest of Bhutan cannot.

The rest of Bhutan is still rural, simple and god fearing. We have the responsibility to ensure that their ways are not turned on its head, making it difficult for them to cope. Yet we are doing just that, by creating more bureaucratic red tape, more complex regulations and insensitively changing ways that have worked for generations.

In order to recognize this, let us adopt the policy of simplicity and simple ways. Let us eschew this tendency to introduce new laws and requirements just because the rest of the world is doing it. Let us keep things simple for as long as we can. We do not need legions of lawyers, tax planners and advisors, and tax accountants, the sort of people that are needed only because the system is so complicated that the average person either can't make sense of it or can't afford the time to understand it. We don't have the human resources to spare for this essentially nonproductive work. And yet many of the things that we are introducing are laying the basis for requiring such services.

Let us instead, embrace the notion that simple is beautiful, especially for a country that is still steeped in its simple ways. Progress should not be measured in terms of more complexity, but in sustained simplicity. Increased complexity should be viewed as a step backward.

Take the case of justice. Clearly, if we are unable to provide justice, there will be no basis for a cohesive society. And while it is true that our judicial system has its own set of problems, the answer does not lie in blindly introducing a whole set of foreign laws to ostensibly make things "watertight", an often used argument to support more rules and laws. The answer lies more in putting into these positions people of high integrity, whose common sense and sense of fair play are more likely to engender the all important public perception that justice is indeed being done. This is because whatever the regulatory or legal sophistication on paper, at the end of the day it is someone's judgment that is necessary.<sup>7</sup> In the absence of such integrity, removal from office must be immediate, if the faith of the public is to be safeguarded. Recognition of this tenet is equivalent to appreciating the beauty of simplicity.

### ***Market economics and laissez-faire***

Let us officially recognize that free markets work. Let us place as the cornerstone of any policy initiative the concept of *laissez-faire*, the notion that minimal government interference is desirable and beneficial. In doing so, we will be consistent with human experience. We will be recognizing the fact that economic progress is spurred by the power of motivation and self-interest, and that the positive aspects of this need to be fostered rather than quelled.

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<sup>7</sup> I have covered this issue in greater detail in a paper entitled "Rules and Regulations, Corruption and the Role of the Individual" that I presented at the Royal Institute of Management, Thimphu back in 1999. Besides emphasizing the role of the individual in terms of integrity and good judgment, this paper also elaborates on ways in which the Pareto Principle could be applied in Bhutan to tackle undesirable outcomes such as corruption, and recognize good effort or performance.

An official subscription to this view is long overdue. Although most right thinking individuals in the country take it as understood, over the years there has been a steady increase in the number of people who espouse socialism or worse. Though much of this is often thinly disguised as egalitarianism, the sort of egalitarianism proposed is usually half-baked, and in that sense is indistinguishable from half-baked communism itself. It seems to stem more from mean spiritedness and jealousy or envy which, when coupled with the access to decision making authority, have resulted in many of the ill considered policies in effect.

Once we have committed to the principle of *laissez-faire*, we could then go about putting it into practice. The starting point for this would be to ensure that every person wielding the power to determine policy believes in the power of the free market. Doubt in this respect should have direct career repercussions. Only then will there emerge a bureaucracy that truly holds a happy and kind outlook, one that rewards and celebrates effort, performance and achievement.

### ***The Pareto Principle***

Given our limited resources in almost every respect, be it financial, human, or technological, it is essential that we adopt a very strategic approach to anything we do. Such a calculated approach is the only way to ensure the limited resources generate the most optimal results.

The Pareto Principle, also known as the Rule of the Vital Few and as the 80/20 Principle, provides the basis for such an approach. This principle asserts that “a minority of causes, inputs or effort usually leads to a majority of the results, outputs or rewards.”<sup>8</sup>

To illustrate, this principle predicts that if there are ten things that you could do to achieve something, let’s say GNH, usually only one or two (around 20%) of those things would generate the bulk (around 80%) of the desired goal. Conversely, 20% of the outcome would cause 80% of the cost or effort put in.

This is a time tested principle, proving itself in fields as diverse as programming where the majority of bugs come from a very small section of the code, and in business where the majority of profits are usually generated by a very small number of people.<sup>9</sup>

If we adopt this as a guiding principle, we will be able to consciously avoid the urge to take indiscriminate action, as we have done, and avoid the resultant confusion and complexity. At a fraction of the cost (around 20%) we can expect to achieve 80% of any desired outcome.

The net result will be cost effective and, given the narrow front on which the principle requires us to operate, will serve up the valued goals of simplicity and clarity of purpose.

A further benefit will be the focus that it would put on quality, a sadly little considered issue in Bhutan. Doing fewer things better always yields higher quality.

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<sup>8</sup> Richard Koch, The 80/20 Principle.

<sup>9</sup> It is interesting to note, as Richard Koch did, that large numbers of people in most organizations have a negative contribution, even when you don’t count their salaries.

Whatever the field, training very well a hundred people each year will yield far superior results in the long run than training a thousand in an average way. Building or investing in just one thing well will yield better dividends than building or investing in a hundred things in a diffused way. And the list goes on. The Pareto Principle reminds us that it isn't numbers – it is quality that always counts.

### **Take immediate action**

In addition to the official adoption of the principles recommended above, here are a few recommendations for immediate implementation. In keeping with the Pareto Principle, I am keeping the range of recommendations narrow. There is no need to twiddle with too many other things, especially if we cannot muster the resolve to implement or pursue these fully.

### ***Pursue individual happiness***

We have discussed at length concepts such as happiness, kindness and the reality/hallucination continuum, and we have considered the fact that happiness is a state of mind that we create or deny ourselves. Given that many new techniques and technologies exist to help us do that, the obvious recommendation is that every person go forth and stake his or her individual claim to happiness. I have already mentioned that NLP has been around for almost as long as the concept of GNH. One of the creators of NLP, Richard Bandler, has gone on to discover newer methods. One is Design Human Engineering (DHE) and the other, his latest, is Neuro-Hypnotic Repatterning (NHR).<sup>10</sup> Both these technologies reject the question “How happy can you be?” Instead, they ask the counter questions “How much pleasure can you stand?” and “How much success can you stand?” They recognize that people generally feel bad or are unhappy for no reason, and make the argument that it's better, instead, to feel good or be happy for no reason whatsoever. I think that says it all.

To my mind Richard Bandler has followed the path of one of Bhutan's favorite saints, Lam Drukpa Kinley aka The Divine Madman. He is contrarian, unpredictable and swears a lot (testing the limits of language or so he claims) but behind it all is a sensitivity and understanding of the human condition that is both endearing and brilliant.

For those of you who prefer something a little more sanitized, there is Tony Robbins, one of Richard Bandler's most famous students. He has his own packages for learning elements of NLP, with the most popular entitled “Personal Power II”.<sup>11</sup> He has another older one called “Lessons in Mastery” in which he provides an eight step path to happiness, and in which I believe he basically nails the subject.

All of these are worth checking out, as are other things that we can do daily without anybody else's input: smile more, laugh more, take ourselves both less and more seriously; and live, and let live, just a bit more. And remember that the most direct way to be happy is to do good deeds. Genuine kindness sits at the root of happiness.

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<sup>10</sup> Check out [www.richardbandler.com](http://www.richardbandler.com)

<sup>11</sup> Check out [www.anthonyrobbins.com](http://www.anthonyrobbins.com)

If enough of us take a little action along these lines, it will be a matter of time before it rubs off on those we work with, with the possibility of reducing the level of mean spiritedness, envy and jealousy that appear to abound. That itself would be a major milestone. There would be more people who feel good about themselves. And, “People who feel good about themselves produce good results”.<sup>12</sup>

### ***Pursue kindness in the bureaucracy***

The pursuit of happiness along the lines described above should also apply to the civil service. Perhaps an official endorsement and support for training along these lines may be in order, rather than the ones that are in vogue.

However we do it, it must be seen as vital because this is the only way to put a different shine on our bureaucracy. Progress towards happiness will yield kindness, as I have asserted. Better yet, there is the fact that a happy state is one in which better decisions are made. That would make it a double bonus!

Kindness as defined in this paper is the need of the hour. There are many cases in this country in which kindness of the compassionate sort is required. Understanding, generosity, and *kidu* in its purest form are in order for this category. And yes, there are equally many instances in which kindness of the firm sort is required. The sort where a firm knock on the head constitutes kindness, because it provides feedback to the culpable person and provides the stimulus for improvement and eventual reform.

The tendency today seems to be quite the reverse. Firmness seems to be aimed more at the former category, and misplaced *kidu* or compassion at the latter. Whatever the motivations that have led to this, the situation requires remedy.

This can only be done if all individuals in the service, whatever their position, monitor those whom they supervise. The key aspect to monitor is each individual's general but demonstrated behavior and outlook: What are his kindness ratings? What is her position on the concept of market economics and *laissez-faire*? Is he mean spirited or open minded? Is she fair minded? The answer to these and similar questions should be given the greatest weight in deciding the progression of his or her career – it provides the clearest indication of whether that person will be helpful or obstructive to the goal of progress.

Great effort must be taken to find the answers to these questions. Use all means to get continual feedback on the behavior of your officers, especially those you trust and depend on. It is vital to assess the respect your trusted ones command from their subordinates. This is the truest measure of their value, and is worth even more than your own personal reading.

Take some time off every month to wander around the offices that fall under your supervision, however far down the chain it may be. Get into the queues in which everybody else must wait, just to see how things are really working. See first hand how your officers and staff interface with the public, and use the opportunity to discover how it could be improved. See who is really performing, and whose talents only revolve around an ability to talk. If necessary, go incognito, just as Jordan's King Abdullah is believed to – with false moustache, beard and all – simply to get to the truth.

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<sup>12</sup> Kenneth Blanchard and Spencer Johnson; The One Minute Manager

If you don't do this or make other concerted and continual effort to get the same result, you are operating on faith alone and cannot be in touch with the facts on the ground. You really do not know who your officers are or what they stand for, however pleasant and charming they may be in your presence. You therefore cannot possibly know how beneficial or harmful they really are.

This is the job that all bosses need to do. We need to take a leaf out of that classic management guide, *The One Minute Manager*<sup>13</sup>, in which its symbol – “a one minute readout from the face of a modern digital watch— is intended to remind each of us to take a minute out of our day to look into the faces of the people we manage. And to realize that they are our most important resources.”

Having assessed your team, it then becomes vital to provide immediate and continuous feedback, firmly when required, generously when appropriate and approvingly when deserved. That is the only way behavior can be modified and attitudes reshaped. Though sometimes the act of providing feedback will involve some unpleasantness, it will never arouse resentment if done fairly and even handedly. Feedback truly is the breakfast of champions.

Only through a methodical and continual process of feedback and correction, with the clear goal of reversing current trends, will we be able to forge a kinder and gentler bureaucracy. Once we do that, the foundation would have been laid for truly higher productivity and achievement. And another virtuous circle would come into play, because “People who produce good results feel good about themselves.”<sup>14</sup>

### ***Rollback policies that are ill considered or ahead of time***

This section makes specific recommendations in light of the positions put forth in this paper. Some of them do not qualify for attention in strict Pareto Principle terms but should be done in order to demonstrate our seriousness of purpose.

Only three fronts have been selected for immediate action. The first of these offers an opportunity to demonstrate that we firmly reject retrogressive policies that stem from retromingent logic. The second is an opportunity to correct a serious problem; one that is seriously alienating large sections of our society. The third is an opportunity to demonstrate our embracement of the free market and our ability to learn from the mistakes that others continue to make.

The list is purposely short. As you can imagine, there are quite a few more areas that need serious rethinking. However, it will be worth making more recommendations only after we implement these.

#### ***1. Lift the ban on the import of cigarettes***

From what I've said so far, this one is obvious. The ban on import of cigarettes in several parts of the country is highly ill considered, both from our knowledge of market forces, experiences from all over the world with similar types of prohibition, and our own ability to enforce such a ban. Let's face it. The chief benefit of such a ban is the brief attention it draws in the press. Apart from that, and as discussed, it creates more problems than it solves.

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<sup>13</sup> Kenneth Blanchard and Spencer Johnson, *The One Minute Manager*

<sup>14</sup> Kenneth Blanchard and Spencer Johnson, *The One Minute Manager*

Let us do the right thing – remove this and similar bans that are in effect<sup>15</sup>, and resolve to reject any further moves for such bans. Such a step will be consistent with our embracement of market economics and *laissez-faire*.

## **2. Revise the Land Act**

There is a serious problem brewing with regard to land ownership. It may not blow up now, but it eventually will. As we have discussed, the problem has arisen largely because of the attempt to transition from the use of traditional boundary indicators to more modern measures of acreage.

While the traditional method has some disadvantages, its primary advantage is that it has a built in set of checks and balances. The new methods do not, as they rely too heavily on a measure declared by one person or a team of persons, all speaking from a position of authority. Their measurements are unreliable, and vary significantly. And while there is no accountability on the part of the measurer, the implications for the land owner are severe. This is all consistent with the increasingly unforgiving stance that we in government are taking.

Literally thousands of families are affected, standing to lose large areas of land notwithstanding their well recognized ownership across many generations. Something needs to be done urgently. As noted, the National Assembly has partially resolved the problem by allowing the one time regularization of excess land using elements of the concepts of *sa-tsam do-tsam* and *aring lebdrang*.

However, a one time reprieve is not sufficient, given the manner in which measurements vary. The Land Act should be amended, and we should revert to recognizing the traditional boundary demarcations wherever they reliably exist. Actual land measurements should be limited to cases in which clear evidence of encroachment exists<sup>16</sup> or in which excessive subdivision of plots has taken place thereby rendering traditional demarcations impractical. Such a step would be consistent with the pragmatic wisdom that Bhutan has traditionally had – it would uphold such traditions – and would be a reflection of the type of kindness upheld in this paper.

## **3. Rollback tariffs, taxes and duties on imports**

Bhutan imports nearly everything, from food items to clothes, vehicles, construction materials and industrial equipment. The Bhutanese economy is so small that it is highly unlikely that we will ever produce even a small fraction of the items that we consume on a daily basis. Fortunately, there is no need to do so, just as long as we can create enough goods and services to generate the hard currency needed to pay for those that we must continue to import. That is basic economics.

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<sup>15</sup> The ban on the sale of meat during religious holidays, and the ban on pool/billiards in Mongar come to mind.

<sup>16</sup> Yes, there are crooks out there. However, that cannot justify creating laws that assume everybody is a crook. Each case deserves to be considered on its own merit. We really have to stop believing that blanket solutions are the answer – they create more problems than they solve. If justice is denied and everybody is treated like a crook, eventually everybody will start behaving like one. Handling that eventuality tomorrow will be a far more troublesome than taking the trouble to carefully evaluate each case today.

Given our size, we become by default an open economy – economics speak which simply means that exports and imports constitute a large part of our economy. Also, we have a high cost economy as a result of our geographical location and terrain, population and population distribution and incipient entrepreneurship, among a host of other factors. Every thing costs more to do here, than in competing areas in the region.

In such a situation, it makes sense to have policies that lubricate or facilitate the economy, policies that help to reduce the high costs – basically policies that are forward looking.

Rather than that, we currently have policies that seek to tax everything. There is a range of sales taxes, customs duties, import duties, excises, etc. in effect that have simply had the effect of making Bhutan an even higher cost economy. I can't imagine that we do this to encourage domestic industry, in an application of the now dated infant industry argument. I guess it must be purely for the raising of revenues and perhaps because it is done everywhere else. I don't know.

What I do know is that while some revenues may be collected, it is done at great cost. There is the actual monetary cost of collection (salaries, allowances, paperwork). And then there are the non-monetary costs, the burden placed on already struggling small businessmen and entrepreneurs to cope with these requirements, and even the unpleasantness which, for whatever reason, always seems to be anchored to the officialdom/public interface.

I want to avoid making too many sweeping statements here, but I will say this: This type of problem, and the policy environment it thrives in, has held back economic progress in most if not the whole of the South Asian region. It is the reason East Asia, which began in a far worse economic condition 50 years ago, has left our region in the dust. It is the reason that in many countries in South Asia, more than half the economy has been driven underground. Talk about unintended consequences.

Let's learn from that lesson. Let's ease up a bit. Let us remember that sometimes it is more important to assess the cost of what we do than to revel in or celebrate what we believe is an achievement, in this case the notion that raising ever greater revenues is good in and of itself. It may help to temper such notions with the understanding, for example, that there is more to gain by ensuring that limited resources are better spent. That sometimes, no matter how great your revenues are, it will never be enough if it is not used properly.<sup>17</sup> That all over the world, there is a perverse variant of Parkinson's Law in play – governments *are* expanding to finish off the budget available.<sup>18</sup> And when the limits of that budget are reached, governments are finding it easier to raise taxes rather than cut back on expenses.

Let us do something concrete to prove to ourselves that we will not make the same mistake as others in the region and the world. Let us begin by rolling back all import duties (however they may be disguised) on goods from the SAARC region. To be very clear, given the tangle of duties in effect, let us simply undo all that we have done to drive business out of Phuentsholing into Jaigaon. The benefits will be immediate: lower costs for the economy and less bureaucratic tangling will lead to more economic activity.

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<sup>17</sup> The bankruptcy in 2003 of the State of California, one of the richest states in one of the richest countries, offers a good example.

<sup>18</sup> C. Northcote Parkinson, Parkinson's Law; "Work expands so as to fill the time available for its completion." Parkinson alternatively dubbed this observation "The Rising Pyramid".

After doing so, we can go on to reassess the entire tax and revenue regime in the country, this time taking into consideration our historically and geographically unique circumstances, not just narrow revenue considerations.

## **Conclusion**

If you have reached this far, I thank you. The time taken to consider the thoughts and views in this paper is well appreciated.

I am conscious of the fact that many of the views expressed may not necessarily be shared by others, and that some may even take issue with them. Wherever this may be the case, please forgive me and treat these views, however sincere, as nothing more than the hallucinations of an overactive and contrarian mind. I never set out to intentionally rile anyone or any point of view, just to express an alternative opinion. And if it is the case that the majority of us don't agree with these views, that's ok. We can carry on with business as usual, but do us a favor – stop touting GNH. Just bury it, along with all the other meaningless \$100,000 vision statements that have been gathering dust in the archives of our respective ministries.

On the other hand, if you see merit in the views expressed, let us join hands and take action. Let us begin by making a serious attempt to implement the recommendations made in this paper. After we have done that and proven the seriousness of our intent, let's go on to consider other options that are consistent with the principles enshrined here.

Let us fight envy and mean spiritedness, wherever they may exist. Let us do what we can to uphold the values and virtues that the concept of gross national happiness represents. And let us move purposefully towards the attainment of gross national happiness by making the concept, its values and its virtues, the centerpiece of a living, breathing and, above all, a uniquely Bhutanese *Weltanschauung*.