



Global Spa & Wellness Summit

JOINING TOGETHER. SHAPING THE FUTURE.

7th Annual Global Spa & Wellness Summit

New Dehli, India

October 7, 2013

**Keynote speech by Dasho Karma Ura,
President, The Centre for Bhutan Studies**

**The Fascinating History of Bhutan's Gross
National Happiness Index and What it Means
for the Future**

**Ubiquis/Nation-Wide Reporting & Convention Coverage
22 Cortlandt Street, Suite 802 - New York, NY 10007
Phone: 212-346-6666 ♦ 800-221-7242 ♦ Fax: 888-412-3655**

7th Annual Global Spa & Wellness Summit

[START RECORDING]

MODERATOR: As the cherry on the top of our day we have an expert to talk on Bhutan's Gross National Happiness Index, which is GNH instead of the focus that we have on GNP. Dasho Karma Ura is the president of the Centre for Bhutan Studies, a research center that's focused on GNH.

He's earned degrees from Magdalen College in Oxford, my alma mater, and Edinburg University. It was awarded the ancient title of Dasho by His Majesty the Fourth Druk of Gyalpo, another thing I've probably butchered. His essays and articles have appeared in international journals, magazines, and books. And interestingly enough, he is also a painter who has designed temple murals and large scale silk Tonka.

A warm round of applause for Dasho Ura Karma.

DASHO KARMA URA: Thank you very much for having me in this spectacular gathering. I'd like to thank especially Suzy Lee [phonetic] and Putnam [phonetic] who brought me here.

I've brought a few slides for this. Here you see that not only us, primates were interested in spa long before. But the idea of grooming and personal care is not just for the sake of appearance I think. I think it's also to bring consciousness back into your body in an integrated and in a non-narcissistic way because we can be alienated not only from others but ourselves. That is a very good reconciliation we have to do very often.

Our consciousness, as I said, can escape ourselves but I'd also like to now ask you to bring your consciousness back into this meeting room, if it has escaped. The triangular relationship between causes of happiness, skillful happiness, and consequences of happiness or benefits of happiness is a very important one for movement of happiness. They are interlocked. People are very eager to know about or trace the causes of happiness. But when it comes to commitment to cultivating skills so that you can capture the benefits they are very reluctant, whether it is in Bhutan or elsewhere.

I am going to talk about this trinity; cause, consequence, and skills. There are also three benefits that I just mentioned; health and longevity, benefits of happiness, or increasing happiness in order to make people inclined to our

commonality and social life, sociality. But there is also the creative effect of being happy. If you're already happy it is most likely that you will also be creative. Creative and intelligence, as you all know, is a very different thing. Intelligence is being able to respond efficiently and quickly to set questions, but creativity is a very meandering process in order to bring two unconnected ideas together or to invent new questions to which you answer yourself.

But there is also a possibility of another benefit of generating happiness or well-being and that is that there can be ecological benefits. Our sense of emptiness that we feel leaves us very much wanting as a pervasive phenomena for things and that can lead to explosion of consumption, which then leads to transgression of the planetary boundaries, which you see already has been exceeded. If you can create before already happy societies or happy individuals it is our contention that it could also have huge ecological sustainability benefits.

These are for individual things. When we come to applying concepts of happiness, well-being, or gross national happiness, not narrowly defined as a psychological state of anxiety or depression or something like this but in a holistic, dynamic, or flourishing sense then we need three more tools. We need of course indicators of the past, that is baseline indicators. We need indicators of the future, which is to arrive at a value or target. And in between we also need to equip, organizations, big decision makers with other sets of decision making tools to bridge between this past tense future indicators. This is done in gross national happiness in this manner.

For example, when a project or an activity is being proposed then the decision makers have to apply something which is called the gross national happiness screening tools. I'm just a humble researcher doing boring things like surveys and constructing indicators. But here is the true proponent of gross national happiness. Since the 70s the Fourth King of Bhutan on the right side and the Fifth King of Bhutan is on the left side.

From the point of view of well-being and happiness in a multidimensional sense the real purpose of government or real purpose of any leader sitting at the top of any organization is really to minimize unhappiness, minimize adversities to happiness. To do that you have to know where are the people

who are unhappy. Who is unhappy? Most importantly, why are they unhappy? Not only from - - poverties but there are many different types of poverty including psychological and time poverty and so forth. That is the real purpose of leadership and dare I say also the purpose of state, which is committed to dissolving suffering, tension, and dissatisfaction that is pervasive in the world. We are very much blessed people I am sure in this hall, but there are many others whose lives are not illuminated enough.

For leadership the timeless qualities of a leader who is addressing himself or herself to dissolving sorrows and adversity to happiness the most important timeless qualities are compassion, strength, and knowledge. But knowledge, the - - knowledge is knowledge of how to tackle sufferings of various kinds, not other kinds of knowledge, which are subsidiary and means to that problem solution.

Here you see our trajectory of life from birth to death. That trajectory can be split really into three parts; the work life trajectory, the non-work life trajectory, and the sleep trajectory. Here you see the trajectory of work life peaks at midlife because we have to work quite hard. Then as a result of that an additional factors, a crisis of so-called midlife, unfolds. This is proven also by the subjective well-being curve in this case which is very deep for women compared to men.

That curve is derived from very simple unidimensional scale of life satisfaction. Here however we see the categorization of population of Bhutan from the point of view of GNH. There's experience of happiness is never nothing or all. It is always graded by depth and breadth of happiness. Here you see deeply happy eight percent, but about 47 percent are naturally happy. That is the sort of descriptive of the situation like mine which is very edgy but nevertheless comfortable.

I also show a humble painting of mine here in order to emphasize that although we never discuss the role of color in well-being and happiness, in my opinion it is a very important one from the point of view of - -, from the point of view of healing, but also from the point of view of activating very lethargic psychology to which we all think very often.

GNH as a holistic concept purports to be represented by a wheel. Of course this is the wheel of the Eightfold Path. Anything that presupposes itself to be holistic must always address well-being by definition to me. It also must apply globally. It must speak to the multiple needs of human beings from culture, spirituality, economics, health, education, community life, and so on and so forth. It must be relevant for not just a short period for a small country. It must be relevant for a somewhat longer period such as thousands of years or so.

In the current jargon you would say that happiness and well-being really accrues from this kind of capital or resources on which our well-being, wealth, and etcetera depends. The point here is that economic capital is valued well, also prized so much, but it is very much parasitic on other kinds of resources and capital.

The wheel of GNH for example now encompasses all necessary elements of well-being and happiness. The red ones are fairly conventional ones, blue ones are emergently important. But the wheel now takes a very different turn, for example, by including psychological well-being, community, vitality, culture, and above all a time use which applies to all of us every 24 hours.

We can break down the results of the gross national happiness when it applies to organizational society by rural urban resistance, by gender, by occupation, by age group and so on and so forth. We find this sort of decomposition very useful because it shows us what are the trades of going in a society which is in rapid transition. Which is the one which should be slowed down and which is the one which should be speeded up for some quarters of the country.

These are the purpose of GNH, for example, really to bring it down to managerial tools so that resource allocation also is decided by GNH. The indicators of GNH are to set the society in a somewhat holistic and well-being direction. But we are ruled today, I think almost captured our imagination, by indicators which are grossly rooted in economics and material living.

The first thing to change really in order to change society is to change indicators because the indicators, underlying them, concealed by them, are different types of values. The relationship between happiness and the nine domains and the

sub-domains or variables under them are normally proposed to be linear, but as you know in real life they are very multi-linear and directions also multi.

If you look at the causes of happiness, which people are very quick to find out because they want to apply it to themselves, is these sorts of things all over the world. When we aggregate the causes at a very broad level it is not very distinct; income, health, family, relationship are perennial quests amongst the causes. Apart from income and health the rest seems to be really about relationships, but you can also argue that income and health is really a product of relationship. If the network of relationships change that also will change.

Relationships I think is at the core. In a manner of speaking, even happiness's origin doesn't lie either in you or the other person. It lies in the middle of the ongoing relationship. If that takes a negative turn then both sides are affected. If you see the regression results of the significant factors for happiness you find again the same three things.

But we also find through research in Bhutan now that meditation, which you emphasized over the last few days and reduction of negative emotions, being able to have the time and the opportunity and the culture to socialize vigorously and also to be able to trust others, of course which means that you have to be trustworthy yourself first. These are very much important ones. Midlife crisis, nobody has found a way to skip it, but the important lesson is that what are the tensions that plague midlife. We can do something about it once we deconstruct it. Social time in Bhutan, 34 percent of Bhutanese spend 63 minutes and the rest do it on other days.

We can sort of desegregate causes. I will only go into three non-income sources of happiness; psychological well-being, time use, communal vitality because we have no time. The sort of idea over here, which is a non-income source of happiness, is that the negative emotions should be lowered and positive emotions should be boosted. The idea behind spirituality and meditation, this is associated with positive emotions. That is why we also survey and measure them.

In the GNH view human beings are postulated or assume to be fundamentally good, as you know is also a Buddhist assumption. It is repressed by blinding things like end of

your selfishness, so on and so forth. That has to be systematically tackled at the individual and societal level. If you see the simple measures of emotional balance we already noticed that the prevalence of this negative emotion is quite high in Capital City of Kempo, TP [phonetic]. I wonder whether this is true of New Delhi also.

This is the idea, again, that the satisfaction with the domains of your life such as health, job, family, relationships, etcetera can be sort of enlarged by enlarging positive emotions. Negative emotions, if you see, are greater among females.

I finished my time. I will mechanistically flash the thing here. I'd like to say in the last one minute that time is an independent element of well-being, happiness, and GNH. But we never experience time objectively, only machines do. We always have illusions of these two kinds. The effect of time on well-being and happiness depends on where you belong in this dichotomous map of the social and economic constructions of time. If you are in the wrong half of the time you will be unhappy.

Eventually I think the experience of well-being and happiness no doubt is experiential, but it is experiential in two ways, either experiencing it directly now or remembering the experience. Of course there is discrepancy between these two due to various reasons. I saw that you emphasized meditation and the idea of meditation I would like to boil down to two things. It is not only to arrest the wandering of your bewildered mind for various reasons but it is also to experience the shortest possible moment of time, that is momentariness. That momentariness is even shorter than the momentariness of your awareness of that moment. Through meditation you can at least try to make your mind recognize only the shortness of time, the shortest possible moment, and nothing else. That might open an experience of some sort of bliss and emptiness together. Thank you very much.

[END RECORDING]