

Shoyo Sensei's Dharma Message:

“When people spend money on others, they actually feel happier than after spending it on themselves.”

(Dr. Jennifer Lerner, a psychologist at Harvard University)

The Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics says that Americans spent 63% of their income in 1980, but now in 2008, they spend 70%. The consumer debt in the U.S. tops two-and-a-half trillion dollars. This is more than three times as much as it was 15 years ago. These numbers clearly explain that we are getting even more accustomed to see our life through the gross amount of materials and possessions. GDP is a universal method to rank the nation's success, value and happiness. And now there is this global recession and financial crisis. Today's bad economy in the world gives us the opportunity to take a fresh look at what is important. Many people now aspire to other type of success of life rather than financial success.

There is a small Buddhist nation in South Asia called Bhutan. It is located at the eastern end of the Himalaya Mountains and is bordered to the south, east and west by India and to the north by the Tibet Autonomous Region of the People's Republic of China. Bhutan has a balanced modernization with its ancient culture and traditions, recommending people to wear the Bhutani cloths in their daily life. The government takes great measures to preserve the nation's traditional culture, identity and the environment. Rampant destruction of the environment has been avoided. What is more interesting is that Bhutan has the guiding philosophy of Gross National Happiness (GNH), but not the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The 2006 *Business Week* rated Bhutan the happiest country in Asia and the eighth happiest country in the world citing a global survey conducted by the University of Leicester in 2006 referenced to as the “World Map of Happiness.”

We may remember Robert Kennedy's following comment on GDP 40 years ago:

For too long we seem to have surrendered personal excellence and community value in the mere accumulation of material things. Our gross national product now is over 800 billion dollars a year, but that gross national product, if we judge the United States of America by that, that gross national product counts air pollution, and cigarette advertising, and ambulances to clear our highways of carnage. It counts special locks for our doors and the jails for people who break them. It counts the destruction of the redwoods and the loss of our natural wonder in chaotic squall. It counts Napalm, and it counts nuclear warheads, and armored cars for the police to fight the riots in our city. It counts Whitman's rifles and Speck's Knives and the television programs which glorify violence in order to sell toys to our children.

Yet, the gross national product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education, or the joy of their play; it does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate for the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country it measures everything in short except that which makes life worth while. And it can tell us everything about America except why we are proud that we are Americans.

Robert Kennedy insightfully points out one of the most fundamental questions of happiness, value and success of our life.

Buddhism is a teaching regarding suffering, unhappiness and happiness. The goal of the teaching is how suffering and unhappiness can be transformed into happiness and positive energy in our day-to-day experience. Then, it is natural for a Buddhist country like Bhutan to adopt Gross National Happiness as the measurement of life.

There is an interesting reserach by Dr. Jennifer Lerner, a psychologist at Harvard University: After her survey, she concluded that “When people spend money on others, they actually feel happier than after spending it on themselves.”

I am glad to know such a new data. But, it is not surprising. The Buddha, 2500 years ago, discovered that action of giving (*Dana*) promotes joy, positive energy and happiness to the person her/himself who does it. Actually, all the

Buddhist practices bring the same results. It is because the Buddha was aware of the relationship between an action and its reaction, and thus, utilizing this knowledge, he designed and programmed those Buddhist practices. It is not only *Dana*, but also *Nembutsu*, *Metta* (loving-kindness), Compassion, Insight, Calmness, Tolerance, Effort and many more are destined to promote happiness, positive energy and joy. And that is the way it is, This is what we call Dharma-Power (*Tariki*).

In a society where self-centeredness is regarded as the key factor for happiness, recent scientific findings by neuroscientists and psychologists may have more persuasive power compared to some “religious” teachings. But, it does never underestimate the Buddha’s value. The Law of Causal Conditionality that he discovered is the law for both the material (body) and the mind. Therefore, I am anxiously waiting further discoveries in neuroscience, psychology and natural science.

Namu Amida Butsu
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