

How to Create Your Own Happiness

These days, I spend many hours a day alone in my dharma center. I spend a lot of time meditating on my cushion and much of that time, I have been reflecting on the suffering and discontent of my students, friends, family, and all people all around the world. There is truly so much suffering, and I cry a lot during my meditations when I reflect on this suffering. When I am not actively meditating, I am connecting with students and family and friends around the world, through the internet or on the phone, responding to their needs for spiritual guidance. They all experience various forms of suffering. Because there are so many people who would like to talk to me, and I cannot talk to them all, I thought I would write down some advice that I would like to offer them, and anyone else who is dealing with the problem of suffering.

The first thing that comes to mind, is that it seems many believe that if only they could completely eliminate suffering, then complete happiness would be theirs, as if they were two totally separate and independent things. However, both the happiness and suffering that we experience in our lives are not devoid of cause or condition. They don't just happen. Both are the results of a great many causes and conditions. As Buddhists, we believe that they are the results of our actions in our past lives (*karma*) and that what we will experience in our next life will be dependent upon the present actions of our body, speech and mind. It is true that there are ways to overcome our physical suffering. As we change our outer circumstances and employ different means to do so, we have some ability to alter our level of physical pleasure or discomfort. But, even if one were to manage to arrange everything in their external environment just the way they want it, it would still be temporary at best. And even then, while everything seems good, they still will suffer the anxiety and fear of losing their comfort and trying to keep it together. As I have recently written, in my composition, *Dharma Gong to Wake Us from Ignorance*:

Even if I attain physical, outer happiness

It is the suffering of change.

The feeling of mental, inner happiness

Can be unchanging, eternal happiness.

As difficult as it is to transform our physical suffering, it is even more difficult to transform our mental suffering. A mere change in our external circumstances is not enough to bring any real improvement to our mental anguish, as you can see from the example above. That transformation has to come from within us.

That big house, wealth and fame is neither the cause nor the condition to bring about mental happiness. That can only arise when we transform our own way of thinking. Therefore, an inner well-being comes about only when we bring a change within us. Actually, this is quite an amazing and radical discovery, and it is one of the greatest gifts that the Buddhist teachings or any other religious or philosophical system has given to humanity: that there is a limitless source of well-being and contentment, which is not dependent on pleasurable external stimuli, but arises from within the very nature of consciousness itself. In the language of modern science, it is a hypothesis, which can be tested by anyone with the inclination to do so.

In this day and age of immense competition, from a place of discontent, we constantly look at and compare our own situation to something else or someone else. Thus, greed, jealousy, and competition results in ongoing mental anguish. This is how we deliberately push away our own inner happiness. For some, there is a feeling of grave discontentment that they don't have the means at present to be happy, and that one day, when they become rich, will have the means to experience inner happiness. For others, there is the notion that happiness will come to them when they find a partner, get married and have a family. They end up finding innumerable ways to achieve happiness. To attempt every which way to achieve happiness and to believe that it is only possible in a distant future is, however, a completely wrong approach towards attaining it. If the factors for the causes of happiness are mistaken, then one will never be able to bear the result. The real root problem here is one of misidentifying the cause of happiness. In *Dharma Gong*, I write:

Don't be like a mother, searching in the West,
for a child she has lost in the East!
Having turned the mind inwards,
don't seek happiness outside!

So now, what can we do about it? It is only the first step to stop seeking outside for happiness. The next step is to identify the methods to unveil inner happiness. Here, I would like to offer a suggestion that came to me while reflecting on this piece. This is a practical and simple contemplation that anyone can do, with a little bit of discipline and consistency.

To contemplate happiness in the course of a single day, it is helpful to think of it in the very moment you find yourself in. For instance, to begin your day, you can relish your first meal. If you are having it with your family, you can take a few moments and truly appreciate that time for however long your breakfast is. In essence, you have created happiness for that duration.

Then after breakfast as you begin to meet people, you can direct your attention toward appreciating the positive traits in the individuals with you interact. Even when you find troubling aspects in someone, if you redirect your mind to your own faults before finding one in the other, and genuinely appreciate the person before you, then in that moment, you experience happiness. Psychologists say now that perhaps 95% of what we see in another person is based on our own mental projections imputed onto them. Actually, the great Buddhist saint and philosopher Nagarjuna was saying just about the same thing in the second century!

As your day progresses, pause to appreciate your lunch, whether at home or at a restaurant. Even if lunch is unsavory at a restaurant, at that moment if you are able to think of all the homeless, migrants or refugees, and countless others literally starving to death, it will, in that instant, help transform your mental disposition, and bring gratitude and happiness. Arguing or complaining over it, on the other hand, will only cause you distress. Likewise, after lunch, if you engage mindfully with your body, speech and mind during dinner, or any activity for the rest of the day, then you are able to establish happiness within a 24-hour period - a day with inner happiness.

If you go with the whims of the untamed mind, you will never be able to find contentment, you will never find happiness. There is always cause for self-made

discontentment that must be watched and constantly corrected. Conversely, if you repeat the above meditations from one day to the next, you will become the cause of your own happiness. Practice this repeated shifting of perspective away from noticing flaws or distraction, and towards appreciation, gratitude, and the moment-by-moment beauty of life. Don't take my word for it. Try it and see what happens!

Happiness does not drop from the sky or grow from the earth, nor is it something to wait for in the distant future. It is not something that if once attained, remains forever. On the contrary, if you experience complete contentment at that very instant with whatever you have, that is happiness. What destroys happiness is the insatiable mind fueled by greed. This greed that bleeds into society turns our body, speech and mind towards toward the causes and conditions of physical and mental suffering. So, if one is able to reflect daily on the causes and conditions of happiness, then one will be able to bring happiness and gradually, in days, months and years, will be able to bring this habitual change and transform one's whole life.

I would like to return to my earlier example of what can happen to our mind when we constantly compare our own situation to those who have more. Instead of doing that, you can do a similar short meditation to the one I have just described. This is a practice of shifting one's perspective away from how others are so much better off than you, toward seeing and comparing what you have to those who are less fortunate: those who are sick, starving, those affected by natural disasters, and so on. In so doing, you will notice a gradual sense of contentment with what you already have. At the same time, where jealousy once caused your mind to be unstable, this new orientation will cause love and compassion to naturally arise within you. Again, from *Dharma Gong*,

If I have no peace of mind, what is achieved
by collecting and hoarding wealth?
The supreme wealth is contentment.
The supreme happiness is in helping others

In summary, if one wants to find genuine happiness, one has to curb greed, find contentment and transform one's own body, speech and mind. Another of the way to achieve these goals is through meditation.

Meditate daily to challenge one's sense of self-grasping, attachment and pride. You can meditate for 5 minutes every single day when you wake up. In particular, meditate on impermanence. There are two kinds of impermanence - gross and subtle impermanence. Even if you are unable to meditate on subtle impermanence, begin to meditate on gross impermanence. For about two minutes, just contemplate that all outer phenomena are fleeting. We witness impermanence daily, including death, birth, sickness, the days and nights, the four seasons, the five elements and so on. Then for the remaining three minutes, contemplate the impermanence of your own existence. Not others will die. Reflect on your own age, your physical condition, and an estimation of how long you will live. In this way, reflect for two minutes outwardly then for three minutes inwardly, every day. We will never be able to eliminate greed - the basis of our anguish - without pondering death and impermanence for even for a few minutes. Not knowing if we may even be alive tomorrow, we plan as if we are going to live for a hundred years. This reflection on impermanence will provide an antidote to your own self-grasping, which erodes our happiness, especially in these times. **Meditate on impermanence, an antidote for self-grasping.**

In the afternoon, when you have time, meditate for about 5 minutes on the futility of *samsara* (cyclic existence). Contemplate the true nature of *Samsara* and understand the the meaning of "*samsara* as an ocean of suffering." Understand that despite all the efforts we make to achieve happiness in *samsara*, there is nothing much to it and that even while realizing there is suffering, we knowingly, happily and blindly jump into it.

From *Dharma Gong*:

*It is so sad, poor beings like myself!
We want happiness in our minds
yet apply ourselves to actions that cause suffering
and have to experience the painful results.*

Then reflect on why we do so, whether there is a way out, and if we can find other means to escape from this suffering. So contemplate on the futility of *samsara* and whether there is truly any purpose to it. **Meditate on the futility of this *samsara*, an antidote for attachment.**

Further, in the evening, contemplate *Bodhicitta* - generate compassion. Contemplate in this way: "All sentient beings are exactly like myself - they desire happiness and deplore suffering. These beings, like myself, all run towards suffering and the causes of suffering." Then, generate a deep sense of unbearable compassion as you see these sentient beings run towards suffering and run away from happiness. Aspire deeply that they may truly part from all suffering and tread the path of happiness. Irrespective of your state of mind, make such profound aspirations. By doing so, even if you are undergoing immense suffering, such thoughts and aspirations will dramatically reduce your own suffering. **Meditate on *Bodhicitta*, a direct antidote to self-grasping and pride.**

If you need further explanations on meditating and cultivating *Bodhicitta*, it will be helpful to refer to other resources. Without making this daily blog too lengthy, this is just a brief introduction on how to recognize happiness, find contentment and how to meditate.

I, Khenpo Karten Rinpoche, wrote this brief account in June, 2020, during these challenging times in which many people experience unhappiness, with the hope that it can benefit some of my dear students. This blog was transcribed by my Dharma sister, Dechen Bartso, through a series of audio recorded messages and conversations.