

*Namo tassa Bhagavato Arahato Sammâ Sambuddhassa!***A BUDDHIST APPROACH TO TRUE HAPPINESS
THROUGH RENUNCIATION ¹**© Dhamma Group • Created: 1/07/09 • Modified: 2/07/09 • Email: dhammagroup@yahoo.com • Web: www.DhammaGroup.tk

What the world thinks makes the human mind happy and what the *Dhamma* thinks makes the mind happy are at odds with each other. The world (society) thinks that material accumulation, working and being busy leads to happiness of mind whereas the *Dhamma* defines the letting go and renunciation of material things and giving priority to rest, meditation and *Dhamma* practice as the true path to happiness. Only the latter is correct and it is because many do not realize this that they struggle and suffer through all their lives never really finding the true happiness that they seek, even till the moment of death. This how what the world believes truly brings happiness is at odds with and is at the opposite end of the spectrum to what the *Dhamma* believes truly brings happiness.²

It is important to firstly understand what truly gives happiness and do more of that while understanding what does not and to do less of that. Money cannot and does not give one happiness. The idea of the world that more money will give more happiness is a wrong idea. A certain amount of money is required to pay bills, buy necessities such clothes, food, transport, a house, etc and for emergencies. But after there is enough money for those things, accumulation of extra wealth does not give rise to extra happiness as it is wrongly believed in the world.

This belief exists because money allows for the accumulation and consumption of desirable material assets such as boats, sports cars, travel, large mansions, expensive clothing, shoes and accessories, access to various entertainments, etc. But what one will find is that all these things are empty and will not give rise to any lasting happiness. After one struggles, works hard and has collected enough money to purchase a material possession and then acquires it, one will find that one gets sick of that material thing before too long. Then one will have to struggle, strive and work hard again collecting enough money to get the next best model of that possession thinking that is what will really give happiness. Most humans of all nations, races and religions will go through this cycle of searching for material happiness, struggling and collecting money, acquiring the material possession, getting sick of it because it is empty and then searching again for the next best material possession thinking that *this* will give happiness all their lives till death (and also into the next life and so on and on in *samsara*), never finding true happiness. So it becomes clear that the concept of collecting more giving rise to more happiness is just a dangerous illusion that will only give rise to suffering and strife, but to not really to any lasting happiness.

Many have forgotten how to listen to the mind and understand what it really wants in relation to happiness, so incorrectly think that an endless pursuit of material accumulation and pleasing of the **six senses** (eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind) with various sense pleasures along with fame, recognition, wealth, status, etc will lead the mind to happiness. This is not the case at all. For a lay person a certain amount of accumulation is necessary to lead a comfortable life, but any more accumulation beyond this would be in vain and *will not lead to any more* happiness. The *Dhamma* teaches that what really makes the mind happy is not accumulation, but rather letting go and renunciation (*nekkhamma*), the exact opposite of what the world blindly believes brings happiness. Of the two opposing paths, the worldly path of accumulation and the *Dhamma* path of renunciation, the latter is the one that truly gives rise to lasting happiness within the mind.

It may not be possible for a lay person to give up everything all at once. So what they can do is to find a balance between accumulation and renunciation. One should not get fooled by the illusion that more material possessions will lead to more happiness, to the point that one gets a large mortgages and other such large debts that require an excessive amount of working to pay off. One should live within one's financial means and adopt a simple material life, acquiring material possessions in moderation. What this means is buying a house that one can afford, is within one's means and can be easily paid off. The same applies to other material possessions such as cars, clothing, food, etc. There is also no lasting happiness to be gained from these or the constant enjoyment related to parties, trips, always meeting friends and relatives, etc. These are empty things (no lasting happiness) and should be done in moderation without excess. If one leads such a

simple life, then one will find that one will not have to work as much (one would then only need to work 3 or 4 days a week) and will have more free time to rest and actually enjoy life. More importantly one will gain the time to do what really makes the mind happy; renunciation, rest and meditation.

What renunciation means for a lay person is that for *at least* one day in a week³ (preferably more) they renounce all their duties and commitments and spend that whole day practicing the *Dhamma*. What this equates to is going to the local temple if possible and if not at home or at another location, taking higher *precepts* such as eight or ten *precepts* and then spending the whole day practicing and studying the *Dhamma*. Do not take the higher *precepts* and then waste the day talking/socializing with others (this can be done at parties). Let the whole day be a day of complete verbal silence (unless one absolutely needs to speak, but not otherwise) and physical seclusion from others and even one's loved ones. It is much better to understand the 'inner *Dhamma*' of the mind and body through constant mindfulness and meditation (e.g. through *anapanasati* - awareness of breath) than the 'outer *Dhamma*' contained in the books/discourses;⁴ so give preference to the former where possible. Doing this one will realize that renunciation and not accumulation is the true path to happiness. Then one will start giving more importance and preference to renunciation over accumulation and become much happier as a result.

May you realize the true path to happiness and gain the happiness of *stream-entry* in this very life!

WHY YOU ARE SO TIRED

Do you know why you get so tired?
It's because you work too hard,
you are too active,
it's as simple as that.

Give enough rest to your mind and body,
don't work too hard,
or try to work,
when you are already tired.

But if you have to work,
take it easy,
don't push yourself too hard,
give the mind and body enough rest,
or you'll find you become,
very miserable indeed!⁵

Notes

1. The latest version of this document can be found in **HTML** format here <http://tinyurl.com/n377eo> (or <http://sites.google.com/site/dhammagroupweb/pubs/renun>) and in **PDF** format here <http://tinyurl.com/mvmuu7> (or <http://sites.google.com/site/dhammagroupweb/pubs/renun/print.pdf>).
2. The Lord Buddha has described the *Dhamma* as having a nature of going against the grain, stream or the norm of the world (*patisotagami*). This point highlights this quality of the *Dhamma* very well. Refer to the *Appendix A: Against the Flow* below for more on this.
3. In the olden days of Sri Lanka, people used to widely retreat and take higher *precepts* for the *hathara-poya* (four *moon phases*), essentially once a week or once every weekend. This is a practice that can and should be re-adopted today, even at an individual level, for greater happiness.
4. Many thanks to [Acarya S. N. Goenka](#) for this valuable insight. This may be easier for advanced practitioners who already have some understanding of the *Dhamma* teachings than absolute beginners. However the 'inner *Dhamma*' of the mind and body is the same for all alike and can be equally observed and understood.

5. Sometimes people can get addicted/hooked on the 'high' they get from work. Like most addictions, this ends up causing suffering - the only difference being that *over work* without enough rest causes suffering (this applies mainly to lay people). Retreating is the best form of mental and physical rest.

Appendix A: Against the Flow

Source: <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/iti/iti.4.100-112.than.html#iti-109>

§ 109. {Iti 4.10; Iti 114}

[Alternate translation: [Ireland](#)]

This was said by the Blessed One, said by the Arahant, so I have heard: "Suppose a man was being carried along by the flow of a river, lovely & alluring. And then another man with good eyesight, standing on the bank, on seeing him would say: 'My good man, even though you are being carried along by the flow of a river, lovely & alluring, further down from here is a pool with waves & whirlpools, with monsters & demons. On reaching that pool you will suffer death or death-like pain.' **Then the first man, on hearing the words of the second man, would make an effort with his hands & feet to go against the flow.**

"I have given you this simile to illustrate a meaning. The meaning is this: the flow of the river stands for craving. Lovely & alluring stands for the six internal sense-media. The pool further down stands for the five lower fetters.¹ The waves stand for anger & distress. The whirlpools stand for the five strings of sensuality. The monsters & demons stand for the opposite sex. **Against the flow stands for renunciation.** Making an effort with hands & feet stands for the arousing of persistence. The man with good eyesight standing on the bank stands for the Tathagata, worthy & rightly self-awakened."

Even if it's with pain,
 you should abandon
 sensual desires
 if you aspire
 to future safety from bondage.
 Alert,
 with a mind well-released,
 touch release now here,
 now there.
 An attainer-of-wisdom,
 having fulfilled the holy life,
 is said to have gone
 to the end of the world, gone
 beyond.

Note

1. The five lower fetters are self-identity view, uncertainty, attachment to practices & precepts, sensual passion, & resistance.

Related *Suttas* (Discourses) & Resources

1. *Itivuttaka 109* see <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/iti/iti.4.100-112.than.html#iti-109>
2. *Itivuttaka 109, The River Current* see <http://www.accesstoinsight.org/tipitaka/kn/iti/iti.4.106-112x.irel.html#iti-109>

Related Buddhism (*Dhamma*) Articles

1. *Daily Dana* - On giving and generosity, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=dailydana>
2. *Five Precepts* - Developing virtue through the five precepts, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=pansil>

3. *Work Stress* - An analysis of stress in the work-place, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=workstress>
4. *Sensual Pleasure & Pain* - An analysis of sensual pleasure and pain, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=plespain>
5. *A Buddhist Approach to Disillusionment* - A Buddhist approach to seeing past the trickery and into reality, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=disill>
6. *A Buddhist Approach to Disenchantment* - A Buddhist approach to becoming disenchanted with all that gives rise to stress, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=disench>
7. *Metta Meditation* - Easy to follow instructions for doing the meditation on loving-kindness, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=mettamed>
8. *An Introduction to Buddhist Meditation* - Basic instructions for doing the meditations of loving kindness (*metta*), awareness of breath (*ana-pana-sati*) and foulness of the body (*asubha*), see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=intromed>
9. *A Buddhist Approach to the Awareness of In-and-Out Breath Meditation - Anapanasati* - A Buddhist approach to the awareness of breath meditation (*anapanasati*), see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=anapanasati>
10. *A Buddhist Approach to the Contemplation on Body Parts - Asubha* - A Buddhist approach to bodily revulsion (*asubha*) through the detailed contemplation of the body parts, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=asubhaparts>
11. *Four Noble Truths* - The essence of Buddhism, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=fourtruths>
12. *Noble Eightfold Path* - The path for ending stress and suffering, see <http://www.vihara.org.au/go?to=noblepath>

Online Resources

1. *AccessToInsight.org* here <http://www.accesstoinight.org>
2. *What-Buddha-Said.net* here <http://what-buddha-said.net>
3. *What-Buddha-Taught.net* here <http://what-buddha-taught.net>
4. *Buddhanet.net* here <http://www.buddhanet.net>
5. *Vihara.org.au* here <http://www.vihara.org.au>
6. *DhammaGroup.tk* here <http://www.dhammagroup.tk>