

Happiness, Karma and Mind By His Holiness the Dalai Lama

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Many billions of years elapsed between the origin of this world and the first appearance of living beings upon its surface. Thereafter it took an immense time for living creatures to become mature in thought and □in the development and perfection of their intellectual faculties; and even from the time men attained maturity up to the present many thousands of years have passed. Through all these vast periods of time the world has undergone constant changes, for it is in a continual state of flux. Even now, many comparatively recent occurrences which appeared for a little while to remain static are seen to have been undergoing changes from moment to moment.

One may wonder what it is that remains immutable when every sort of material and mental phenomenon seems to be invariably subject to the process of change, of mutability. All of them are forever arising, developing and passing away. In the vortex of all these changes it is Truth alone which remains constant and unalterable□in other words, the truth of righteousness (Dharma) and its accompanying beneficial results, and the truth of evil action and its accompanying harmful results. A good cause produces a good result, a bad cause a bad result. Good or bad, beneficial or harmful, every result necessarily has a cause. This principle alone is abiding, immutable and constant. It was so before man entered the world, in the early period of his existence, in the present age, and it will be so in all ages to come.

All of us desire happiness and the avoidance of suffering and of everything else that is unpleasant. Pleasure and pain arise from a cause, as we all know. Whether certain consequences are due to a single cause or to a group of causes is determined by the nature of those consequences. In some cases, even if the cause factors are neither powerful nor numerous, it is still possible for the effect factors to occur. Whatever the quality of the result factors, whether they are good or bad, their magnitude and intensity directly correspond to the quantity and strength of the cause factors. Therefore, for success in avoiding unwished- for pains and in acquiring desired pleasures, which is in itself no small matter, the relinquishment of a great number of collective cause factors is required.

In analyzing the nature and state of happiness, it will be apparent that it has two aspects. One is immediate joy (temporary); the other is future joy (ultimate). Temporary pleasures comprise the comforts and enjoyments which people crave, such as good dwellings, lovely furniture, delicious food, good company, pleasant conversation and so on. In other words, temporary pleasures are what man enjoys in this life. The question as to whether the enjoyment of these pleasures and satisfactions derives purely from external factors needs to be examined in the light of clear logic. If external factors were alone responsible for giving rise to such pleasures a person would be happy when these were present and, conversely, unhappy in their absence.

However, this is not so. For, even in the absence of external conditions leading to pleasure, a man can still be happy and at peace. This demonstrates that external factors are not alone responsible for stimulating man's happiness. Were it true that external factors were solely responsible for, or that they wholly conditioned the arising of, pleasure and happiness, a person possessing an abundance of these factors would have illimitable joy, which is by no means always so. It is true that these

external factors do make partial contribution to the creation of pleasure in a man's lifetime. However, to state that the external factors are all that is needed and therefore the exclusive cause of happiness in a man's span of life is an obtuse and illogical proposition. It is by no means sure that the presence of such external factors will beget joy. On the contrary, factual happenings such as the experiencing of inner beatitude and happiness despite the total absence of such pleasure-causing external factors, and the frequent absence of joy despite their presence, clearly show the cause of happiness to depend upon a different set of conditioning factors.

If one were to be misled by the argument that the above-mentioned conditioning factors constitute the sole cause of happiness to the preclusion of any other conditioning causes, that would imply that (resulting) happiness is inseparably bound to external causal factors, its presence or absence being exclusively determined by them. The fact that this is obviously not so is a sufficient proof that external causal factors are not necessarily or wholly responsible for the effect phenomena of happiness.

Now what is that other internal set of causes? How are they to be explained? As Buddhists, we all believe in the Law of Karma—the natural law of cause and effect. Whatever external causal conditions someone comes across in subsequent lives result from the accumulation of that individual's actions in previous lives. When the karmic force of past deeds reaches maturity a person experiences pleasurable and unpleasurable mental states. They are but a natural sequence of his own previous actions. The most important thing to understand is that, when suitable (karmic) conditions resulting from the totality of past actions are there, one's external factors are bound to be favourable. The coming into contact of conditions due to (karmic) action and external causal factors will produce a pleasurable mental state. If the requisite causal conditions for experiencing interior joy are lacking there will be no opportunity for the occurrence of suitable external conditioning factors or, even if these external conditioning factors are present, it will not be possible for the person to experience the joy that would otherwise be his. This shows that inner causal conditions are essential in that these are what principally determine the realization of happiness (and its opposite). Therefore, in order to achieve the desired results it is imperative for us to accumulate both the cause-creating external factors and the cause-creating internal (karmic) conditioning factors at the same time.

To state the matter in simple terms, for the accrual of good inner (karmic) conditioning factors, what are principally needed are such qualities as having few wants, contentment, humility, simplicity and other noble qualities. Practice of these inner causal conditions will even facilitate changes in the aforementioned external conditioning factors that will convert them into characteristics conducive to the arising of happiness. The absence of suitable inner causal conditions, such as having few wants contentment, patience, forgiveness and so on, will prevent one from enjoying pleasure even if all the right external conditioning factors are present. Besides this, one must have to one's credit the force of merits and virtues accumulated in past lives. Otherwise, the seeds of happiness will not bear fruit.

The matter can be put in another way. The pleasures and frustrations, the happiness and suffering experienced by each individual are the inevitable fruits of beneficial and evil actions he has

perpetrated, thus adding to his store. If at a particular moment in this present life the fruits of a person's good actions ripen he will recognize, if he is a wise man, that they are the fruits of (past) meritorious deeds. This will gratify him and encourage him to achieve more merits. Similarly, when a person happens to experience pain and dissatisfaction, he will be able to bear them calmly if he maintains an unshakable conviction that, whether he wishes it or not, he must suffer and bear the consequences of his own (past) deeds, notwithstanding the fact that normally he will often find the intensity and extent of his frustration hard to bear. Besides, the realization that they are nothing but the fruits of unskilled action in the past will make him wise enough to desist from unskilled deeds henceforth. Likewise, the satisfying thought that, with the ripening of past (evil) karma, a certain part of the evil fruit accrued by former unskilled action has been worked off will be a source of immense relief to him.

A proper appreciation of this wisdom will contribute to grasping the essentials for achieving peace of mind and body. For instance, suppose a person is suddenly afflicted with critical physical suffering due to certain external factors. If, by the force of sheer will power (based on the conviction that he is himself responsible for his present misery and sufferings), he can neutralize the extent of his suffering then his mind will be much comforted and at peace.

Now let me explain this at a rather higher level. This concerns the strivings and efforts that can be made for the systematic destruction of dissatisfaction and its causes.

As stated before, pleasure and pain, happiness and dissatisfaction are the effects of one's own good and bad, skilled and unskilled actions. Skillful and unskillful (karmic) actions are not external phenomena. They belong essentially to the realm of mind. Making strenuous efforts to build up every possible kind of skillful karma and to put every vestige of unskillful karma away from us is the path to creating happiness and avoiding the creation of pain and suffering. For it is inevitable that a happy result follows a skillful cause and that the consequence of building up unskillful causes is suffering.

Therefore, it is of the utmost importance that we strive by every possible means to increase the quality and quantity of skillful actions and to make a corresponding paring down of our unskillful actions.

How is this to be accomplished? Meritorious and unmeritorious causes which result in pleasure and pain do not resemble external objects. For instance, in the human bodily system different parts such as lungs, heart and other organs can be replaced with new ones. But this is not so in the case of karmic actions, which are purely of the mind. The earning of fresh merits and the eradicating of bad causes are purely mental processes. They cannot be achieved with outside help of any kind. The only way to accomplish them is by controlling and disciplining the hitherto untamed mind. For this, we require a fuller comprehension of the element called mind.

Through the gates of the five sense organs a being sees, hears, smells, tastes and comes into contact with a host of external forms, objects and impressions. Let the form, sound, smell, taste, touch and mental events which are the relations of the six senses be shut off. When this is done the recollection of past events on which the mind tends to dwell will be completely discontinued and the flow of memory cut off. Similarly, plans for the future and contemplation of future action must

not be allowed to arise. It is necessary to create a space in place of all such processes of thought if one is to empty the mind of all such processes of thought. Freed from all these processes there will remain a pure, clean, distinct and quiescent mind. Now let us examine what sort of characteristics constitute the mind when it has attained this stage. We surely do possess some thing called mind, but how are we to recognize its existence? The real and essential mind is what is to be found when the entire load of gross obstructions and aberrations (i.e. sense impressions, memories, etc.) has been cleared away. Discerning this aspect of real mind, we shall discover that, unlike external objects, its true nature is devoid of form or color; nor can we find any basis of truth for such false and deceptive notions as that mind originated from this or that, or that it will move from here to there, or that it is located in such-and-such a place. When it comes into contact with no object mind is like a vast, boundless void, or like a serene, illimitable ocean. When it encounters an object it at once has cognizance of it, like a mirror instantly reflecting a person who stands in front of it. The true nature of mind consists not only in taking clear cognizance of the object but also in communicating a concrete experience of that object to the one experiencing it.* Normally, our forms of sense cognition, such as eye-consciousness, ear-consciousness, etc., perform their functions on external phenomena in a manner involving gross distortion. Knowledge resulting from sense cognition, being based on gross external phenomena, is also of a gross nature. When this type of gross stimulation is shut out, and when concrete experiences and clear cognizance arise from within, mind assumes the characteristics of infinite void similar to the infinitude of space. But this void is not to be taken as the true nature of mind. We have become so habituated to consciousness of the form and color of gross objects that, when we make concentrated introspection into the nature of mind, it is, as I have said, found to be a vast, limitless void free from any gross obscurity or other hindrances. Nevertheless, this does not mean that we have discerned the subtle, true nature of the mind. What has been explained above concerns the state of mind in relation to the concrete experience and clear cognizance by the mind which are its function, but it describes only the relative nature of mind.

There are in addition several other aspects and states of mind. In other words, taking mind as the supreme basis, there are many attributes related to it. Just as an onion consists of layer upon layer that can be peeled away, so does every sort of object have a number of layers; and this is no less true of the nature of mind as explained here; it, too, has layer within layer, slate within state. All compounded things are subject to disintegration. Since experience and knowledge are impermanent and subject to disintegration, the mind, of which they are functions (nature), is not something that remains constant and eternal. From moment to moment it undergoes change and disintegration. This transience of mind is one aspect of its nature. However, as we have observed, its true nature has many aspects, including consciousness of concrete experience and cognizance of objects. Now let us make a further examination in order to grasp the meaning of the subtle essence of such a mind. Mind came into existence because of its own cause. To deny that the origination of mind is dependent on a cause, or to say that it is a designation given as a means of recognizing the nature of mind aggregates, is not correct. With our superficial observance, mind, which has concrete experience and clear cognizance as its nature, appears to be a powerful, independent,

subjective, completely ruling entity. However, deeper analysis will reveal that this mind, possessing as it does the function of experience and cognizance, is not a self-created entity but is dependent on other factors for its existence. Hence it depends on something other than itself. This non-independent quality of the mind substance is its true nature which in turn is the ultimate reality of the self.

Of these two aspects, viz. the ultimate true nature of mind and a knowledge of that ultimate true nature, the former is the base, the latter an attribute. Mind (self) is the basis and all its different states are attributes. However, the basis and its attributes have from the first pertained to the same single essence. The non-self-created (depending on a cause other than itself) mind entity (basis) and its essence, *shunyata*, have unceasingly existed as the one, same, inseparable essence from beginningless beginning. The nature of *shunyata* pervades all elements. As we are now and since we cannot grasp or comprehend the indestructible, natural, ultimate reality (*shunyata*) of our own minds, we continue to commit errors and our defects persist.

Taking mind as the subject and mind's ultimate reality as its object, one will arrive at a proper comprehension of the true essence of mind, i.e. its ultimate reality. And when, after prolonged patient meditation, one comes to perceive and grasp at the knowledge of mind's ultimate reality which is devoid of dual characteristics, one will gradually be able to exhaust the delusions and defects of the central and secondary minds such as wrath, love of ostentation, jealousy, envy and so on.

Failure to identify the true nature of mind will be overcome through acquisition of the power to comprehend its ultimate reality. This will in turn eradicate lust and hatred and all other secondary delusions emanating from the basic ones. Consequently, there will be no occasion for accumulating demeritorious karma. By this means the creation of (evil) karma affecting future lives will be eliminated; one will be able to increase the quality and quantity of meritorious causal conditioning and to eradicate the creation of harmful causal conditioning affecting future lives—apart from the bad karma accumulated earlier.

In the practice of gaining a perfect knowledge of the true nature of mind, strenuous and concentrated mental efforts are required for comprehending the object. In our normal condition as it is at present, when our mind comes into contact with something it is immediately drawn to it. This makes comprehension impossible. Therefore, in order to acquire great dynamic mental power, the very maximum exertion is the first imperative. For example, a big river flowing over a wide expanse of shallows will have very little force, but when it passes through a steep gorge all the water is concentrated in a narrow space and therefore flows with great force. For a similar reason all the mental distractions which draw the mind away from the object of contemplation are to be avoided and the mind kept steadily fixed upon it. Unless this is done, the practice for gaining a proper understanding of the true nature of mind will be a total failure.

To make the mind docile, it is essential for us to discipline and control it well. Speech and bodily activities which accompany mental processes, must not be allowed to run on in an indiscreet, unbridled, random way. Just as a trainer disciplines and calms a wild and willful steed by subjecting it to skillful and prolonged training, so must the wild, wandering, random activities of body and

speech be tamed to make them docile, righteous and skillful. Therefore the Teachings of the Lord Buddha comprise three graded categories, that is *sila* (training in higher conduct), *samadhi* (training in higher meditation) and *prajna* (training in higher wisdom), all of them for disciplining the mind. By studying, meditating and practising the three grades of *trisiksa* in this way, one accomplishes progressive realization. A person so trained will be endowed with the wonderful quality of being able to bear patiently the miseries and suffering which are the fruit of his past karma. He will regard his misfortunes as blessings in disguise, for they will enlighten him as to the meaning of nemesis (karma) and convince him of the need to concentrate on performing only meritorious deeds. If his past (evil) karma has not as yet borne fruit, it will still be possible for him to obliterate this unripe karma by utilizing the strength of the four powers, namely: determination to attain the status of Buddhahood; determination to eschew demeritorious deeds, even at the cost of one's life; the performance of meritorious deeds; repentance.

Such is the way to attain immediate happiness, to pave the way for attaining liberation in future and to help avoid the accumulation of further demerits.