



HAPPINESS COMES FROM THE MIND

Master Jiqun

Translated by MPI Translation Center

Lectured at the Taihu World Cultural Forum, 2014

Contents

I	How to Face Adversity	
	1. Denial, the Magnifier of Pain.....	53
	2. Acceptance, the Wisdom of Transformation.....	56
	3. Making Adversities the Catalyst for Cultivation.....	61
II	Happiness Needs Blessings	
	1. Five Blessings Have Descended Upon the House....	63
	2. Happiness Begins with Cultivating Blessings.....	69
III	Elevating Views and Eradicating Afflictions through Wisdom	
	1. Circumstance, Mindset, and View.....	74
	2. Seeing Reality as It Is.....	77
IV	Excessive Desire Brings Suffering, Contentment Brings Joy	
	1. Desires and Happiness.....	82
	2. The Peril of Pursuing Desires.....	84
V	Happiness Comes from the Mind	
	1. Different Levels of the Mind.....	89
	2. From Benefiting Oneself to Benefiting Others.....	92
	Conclusion.....	95

Seeing such a significant turnout for this lecture on happiness is truly inspiring. Clearly, the topic of happiness captivates many. Several years ago, China Central Television (CCTV) conducted a comprehensive survey, interviewing thousands from a variety of regions, age groups, and professions on their feelings about happiness. This led to “Are you happy?” emerging as a focal question. The array of responses, often unexpected, showcased people’s perplexity about happiness. For instance, Nobel Prize laureate Mo Yan’s ambiguous reply, “I don’t know,” raised questions: was it an evasion or a light-hearted remark? He elaborated, “With the

significant pressures and worries I'm currently experiencing, how can I be happy? However, to say I'm not happy would seem insincere, especially for someone who has just been awarded the Nobel Prize. Can such an individual openly declare their unhappiness?"

His response highlighted a sentiment widely shared by many when discussing happiness. Our living conditions have significantly improved, ostensibly leaving no room for unhappiness. Yet, the question arises: Why aren't we happy? Where does the problem lie? In challenging times, we pinned our hopes on material betterment, convinced that wealth would lead to happiness. For many, merely having enough to eat and clothes to wear was a significant source of joy. However, as wealth becomes more common and our possessions greatly surpass our basic needs, happiness begins to elude us, playing a game of hide-and-seek.

Where does happiness lie? Money offers us temporary satisfaction, yet this pleasure is fleeting, often marred by

comparisons and competition. When we observe others with more wealth and seemingly better lives, our satisfaction swiftly transforms into dissatisfaction, potentially breeding jealousy and resentment. The happiness we looked forward to seems close but continues to evade us, like clouds in the distant sky. Thus, attaining happiness is not as straightforward as we once believed, nor is it a guaranteed result of wealth accumulation and enhanced living conditions.

Why aren't we happy despite having so much? This prompts several questions: What exactly is happiness? Is it an illusory state dependent on specific circumstances, or an essence of life itself? Also, what stands in the way of our happiness? Put differently, what is the ultimate thief of happiness? Finally, if happiness is just a momentary illusion, is chasing after it not like trying to catch the moon's reflection on the water – a pursuit doomed from the start?

As long as these questions remain, our pursuit of

happiness is shrouded in uncertainty, resembling more a fantasy than a goal. Where do we find clarity and answers? The key lies in how deeply we understand happiness, which is contingent upon our understanding of life and its meaning. Life operates on two levels: the material and the spiritual. What, then, is the essence of life? From a pessimistic philosophical viewpoint, life is rife with absurdity and suffering. With such an understanding, the pursuit of happiness might seem futile. Yet, how does Buddhism interpret the essence of life and our pursuit of happiness?

Today, our lecture is called Happiness Comes from the Mind. I will share my thoughts from a few angles.

I

HOW TO FACE ADVERSITY

1. Denial, the Magnifier of Pain

Life invariably brings misfortunes. Many Buddhists approach me with their personal adversities, which include health issues from minor illnesses to life-threatening conditions, grief over the sudden loss of friends and family, and issues concerning family life, such as children's education and marital dynamics. Furthermore, a significant amount of stress arises from interpersonal relationships, career progression, and the aftermath of natural or human-made disasters. It can be said that everyone faces these challenges, albeit in varying forms and intensities.

Those who have enjoyed a predictable life often find themselves unprepared for such hardships, succumbing to despair and, consequently, even dragging their families into grievous suffering.

Objectively speaking, it is probably not the case that a single person or incident has the power to ruin our lives. What, then, drives us into such depths of misery and hopelessness? It often boils down to our denial of the situation, rather than the misfortune itself. We find ourselves asking, “Why did this happen to me?” and finding no satisfactory answer. This leads us to point fingers at fate or others, bemoan social injustice, or lament the lack of divine justice. It’s this refusal to accept that escalates a limited sorrow into overwhelming misery. Clearly, the extent of our denial directly correlates with the intensity of our suffering.

Why do we struggle to accept changes? At the heart of this resistance is the belief of permanence, rooted in the idea that everything should remain as it is. This belief is

centered on our own self-needs. We expect *our* bodies to never falter, *our* family members to always be present, *our* friends to always be unwaveringly loyal, and *our* careers to progress without obstacles. We may even harbor the thought: “Since I am such a good person, while others may face natural and human-made disasters, I should be spared.”

Holding onto a belief of permanence, we become attached and develop a reliance on it, resisting any change for fear of losing stability and disrupting the current balance. Consequently, when life falls short of our expectations, this resistance cultivates stress, anxiety, fear, and even destructive emotions such as anger and hatred.

We all aspire to lead lives marked by good health, a fulfilling marriage, a blissful family, and a successful career. We cling to the belief that stability in these areas means happiness. Yet, the truth is that our world is anything but stable; it is impermanent and ever-changing. When we are ill-equipped to handle adversities, life becomes a

minefield, ready to detonate at any moment.

2. Acceptance, the Wisdom of Transformation

How come people react so differently to the same situations? The answer lies in acceptance. Having the capacity to accept allows one to confront adversities with composure and address them in constructive ways, without succumbing to suffering or afflictions. How is this skill cultivated? It starts with confronting the reality of impermanence head-on, recognizing it as a fundamental truth of life, unavoidable like the changing seasons and the flowering and wilting of blooms.

The illusion of permanence is just that – an illusion and an expectation – disconnected from the world's reality. *All conditioned things are impermanent*, the first of the three Dharma seals, lies at the heart of Buddha's teachings. It underscores a universal law that governs everything, from our bodies and minds to the external world. Change is incessant, occurring every moment without

pause. An apple, for instance, doesn't suddenly become rotten but starts decaying while it still appears whole. Similarly, life is a series of constant changes. From our birth, there is never a moment when we are not undergoing change or moving towards our ultimate conclusion.

Change is inherent and natural, whereas stability is merely a temporary state perceived in comparison. This concept also aligns with the principles of change outlined in the *Book of Changes*, an ancient Chinese text. By truly grasping the nature of impermanence, we can accept any alteration in our lives with serenity, acknowledging that change is the natural order of things. With this insight, adversities we face lose their power to inflict damage.

In the *Samyuktagama*, the Buddha teaches acceptance using the metaphor of “two poisoned arrows.” Being wounded by the first arrow symbolizes experiencing the physical pain of adversities, while the second arrow signifies the ensuing mental suffering. Once struck by the first arrow, it's essential to mitigate further damage to

avoid the impact of the second arrow, as it is often the second arrow that leads to deeper and more lasting pain.

Consider the momentary discomfort when you're attacked or insulted by someone. Allowing this event to linger in your thoughts or letting bitterness grow can lead to prolonged negativity, lasting days, months, or years, which is truly alarming. In contrast, by accepting the incident, its emotional toll ceases to escalate. Nevertheless, acceptance should not be confused with endorsing or condoning the act. Instead, we can approach the individual later, offering guidance tailored to their condition, with the intent to aid, not to argue over who is correct.

In addition to understanding impermanence, familiarity with the Buddhist notion of causality can facilitate the acceptance of hardships. Enlightened sages, even in the face of severe physical discomfort or the prospect of death, do not succumb to bitterness or allow their physical suffering to induce mental suffering. This equanimity is rooted in their understanding that suffering is the

effect of numerous interconnected causes and conditions. A calm acceptance of these outcomes is essential to avoid generating further causes for suffering.

In the teachings of the Dharma, there are no accidents; every occurrence is a result of causes and effects. Take, for instance, poor health, which may stem from factors like an unhealthy diet, irregular living habits, insufficient exercise, neglect of one's body, or karma from causing harm to others. These elements collectively influence our well-being. Similarly, when it comes to interpersonal relationships, it's easy to place the blame outward. Yet, many relationship challenges stem from our own assumptions and the ways we deal with the world. For example, the inability to view issues from others' perspective is a sure path to conflict.

Buddhism guides us to investigate the underlying causes behind events and focus on self-improvement first. Instead of pointing fingers at situations or other people, we learn to transform outcomes by altering their causes.

Furthermore, Buddhism places significant emphasis on repentance, which involves self-reflection, committing to self-improvement, and thereby positively impacting those around us.

Many have transformed their family and work relationships through practicing Buddhism. Couples have begun to cherish and care for each other, parents have shown more love towards their children, and children have learned respect for their elders. Meanwhile, colleagues have found harmony in working together. Such transformations are numerous and owe themselves to the introspective nature of Buddhist practice. Buddhism encourages people to look inward and acknowledge their own flaws rather than attributing every problem to others. By doing so, they foster more positive interactions. As people become committed to self-improvements, they also positively influence those around them and even their surroundings, creating a ripple effect of positive energy.

When we can accept all situations as they are, what could

possibly hurt us or lessen our happiness?

3. Making Adversities the Catalyst for Cultivation

Adversity isn't always detrimental. An ancient Chinese proverb states, "When the old man lost his horse, how could one know it wouldn't be a blessing?" The *Book of Lao Tzu* echoes a similar sentiment: "Good fortune follows upon disaster, while disaster lurks within good fortune." Prosperity, if mishandled, can lead to misfortune or downfall; conversely, adversity, if properly used, can serve as a new starting point and a powerful motivator.

Life shows us examples of individuals who stumble when times are good and those who rise through challenges. Take, for instance, former high-ranking officials who, despite their once glamorous positions, ended up incarcerated due to their misconduct. This situation vividly illustrates how "disaster lurks within good fortune." Favorable conditions may dull our senses and inflate our egos, whereas adversity helps us to gain a clearer

understanding of ourselves and the world, encouraging profound reflection on life.

Therefore, properly facing adversities and accepting adverse conditions not only helps us avoid unnecessary suffering but also enriches our life experiences and fosters personal growth. Moreover, this mindset allows us to transform adversities into factors that enhance our cultivation of Buddhism. Conversely, refusing to embrace adversities does nothing to protect us from them. Instead, it leads to increased pain and prolongs our suffering.

II

HAPPINESS NEEDS BLESSINGS

1. Five Blessings Have Descended Upon the House

Just as a river depends on a source and a tree on its roots, happiness too needs blessings to flourish. In ancient China, there was a cherished saying, “Five blessings have descended upon your house.” These blessings – longevity, ample wealth and status, health and peace, virtue, and a good death – represent all the essential elements of happiness.

The first blessing is longevity. In ancient times, early death from minor illnesses was common due to scarce

medical resources. Thus, living to an old age and enjoying one's twilight years in peace was seen as a significant blessing.

Ample wealth and status form the second blessing. Wealth allows for a life devoid of financial worries, enabling spiritual fulfillment. Status, on the other hand, means achieving a prominent social position, maintaining strong moral principles, and earning the respect of others.

The third blessing involves good health and inner peace, both of which are crucial. While the search for happiness frequently directs us towards external markers of success like wealth and status, it's health and peace that are commonly missing in today's society. I often say, "The greatest assets in life are a healthy body and mind, and the best investment one can make is in self-cultivation." Without these, we are akin to a leaky ship; no matter the grandeur of its decorations, they hold little value. For someone bedridden and suffering from chronic illnesses, life may seem

more daunting than death. In such cases, how can wealth and titles bring us happiness?

A compromised mental state poses even greater challenges. Many people today navigate a pervasive sense of unrest and chaos. This sentiment is effectively captured in the lyrics of a Chinese pop song: “I’ve been feeling quite upset lately, quite upset indeed.” Such words mirror the extensive unease felt by many. Derived from Buddhism, the term *fan-nao* – with *fan* signifying disturbance and *nao* denoting unrest – encapsulates the factors that cloud and disrupt inner peace. Given that happiness is an emotional state, it is highly susceptible to being overshadowed by afflictions and negativity. Neither wealth nor prestige can spawn joy when tinged with such disturbances. True happiness, effortless and unforced like the cloudless sky, is attainable only when the mind is liberated from afflictions. Thus, dispelling these afflictions is crucial for attaining a state of complete tranquility and, consequently, genuine happiness.

The fact that ancient Chinese included virtue among the five blessings speaks volumes. In today's society, where moral education is often neglected, many overlook the importance of virtue, sometimes even perceiving ethical conduct as a drawback. This raises the question: what is the importance of virtue for individuals and society at large? Virtue pertains to moral integrity. Externally, virtue manifests as our ethical principles and the integrity of our interactions with others. Internally, it cultivates a positive and healthy mindset. Therefore, to practice morality is to cultivate a robust mind and personality, enriching ourselves with positivity. Additionally, an ethical person is more likely to receive other people's respect and approval, which sustains their blessings. Thus, morality is a fundamental component of a happy life, impacting both our personal well-being and our relationships with others.

The fifth blessing is good death. One of Buddha's ten epithets is *Well Gone* (Sugata), meaning he could foresee his time of passing and transcend life and death. Good death

is a similar aspiration that life can end without physical suffering and mental burdens, allowing one to leave the world peacefully and comfortably, instead of dying in a tragic accident or being bedridden from chronic diseases. Many people dread death and avoid mentioning it. We know that everyone will eventually die, but in our mind, we unconsciously exclude ourselves from this reality. However, our avoidance will not stop death, nor can our fear change anything. They only make us unprepared when death comes. The wealthier individuals become, the less likely they are to experience a good death. Wealthy people particularly resist the idea of dying, often facing an end surrounded by medical apparatus that strips away all their dignity. Therefore, understanding and transcending death is an essential Buddhist practice. Throughout Buddhist history, numerous practitioners have not only anticipated their death but also passed away gracefully at their own command, whether seated or standing, enabling a perfect closure to their earthly existence. Although achieving such an unfettered end may be challenging for most, dying without suffering

is undeniably a significant blessing for both oneself and others, a reason why a good death is counted among the five blessings by the ancient Chinese.

Spiritual life and hospice care for the elderly are two important topics in China today. We fought tooth and nail in society when we were young, believing that life is all about career, money, and pleasure. However, after retirement, how do we live when our bodies gradually deteriorate and can no longer experience pleasure from material indulgence? Many people spend their later years doing nothing. With no religious belief or spiritual life, they are pretty much sitting around waiting for death to come; due to their ignorance of death, they dread this imminent ending. This lifestyle is particularly prominent in Chinese society. Thus, to lead a fulfilling and peaceful life in our twilight years, we need to have spiritual pursuits and understand death correctly, accepting the law of birth, aging, sickness, and death. Buddhist hospice care provides spiritual guidance, making individuals aware that this life is but a fragment in the vast river of

existence. When the body has served its time, departing from it with the right thoughts is essential to finding an upward path during the transition of life.

In short, happiness comprises many factors. Our lives cannot be considered happy if we have longevity without health and peace, hold wealth and status without good virtue, or do not have a good death. Therefore, we need to focus on these aspects in our quest for happiness. While pursuing external wealth, it is equally important to focus on preserving our physical and mental well-being and embodying noble virtues.

2. Happiness Begins with Cultivating Blessings

So, how do we acquire these blessings? Simply being a capable person does not automatically lead to blessings. Since blessings also follow the principle of cause and effect, we must actively cultivate them. Buddhism teaches that to gain these blessings, we must first develop the fields of blessings, including the fields of compassion,

gratitude, and respect.

We nurture our field of compassion by showing kindness to those who suffer in the world, individuals longing for happiness yet unable to escape their suffering. With a compassionate mind, by assisting them in finding joy and alleviating their pain, we nurture our field of compassion and cultivate our loving nature. However, it is crucial that our actions are driven by genuine compassion. What truly defines charity? It should extend beyond simple donations or services to embody acts of compassion and love. True charity happens when we give or assist with a heart full of compassion and love. Without these core values, regardless of the amount of money or the magnitude of good deeds, they are simply acts of goodwill, not true charity. When our actions are rooted in compassion, anything we do will continuously foster blessings.

Our field of gratitude flourishes when we reciprocate kindness to those who have supported us – our parents,

elders, siblings, relatives, friends, all living creatures, and even the natural world of mountains, rivers, and the Earth itself. Our existence is deeply intertwined with both nature and the contributions of others, which allow us to live freely and joyfully. Acknowledging this interconnectedness with a sense of gratitude, and expressing it through actions like community service and environmental conservation, enhances our well-being. Gratitude transforms our perspective, making every aspect of life a source of happiness. Thus, cultivating gratitude not only generates blessings but also fosters a healthy, positive, and joyous outlook on life. The act of giving back brings instant gratification, whereas ingratitude, negativity, and a sense of entitlement only lead to personal misery.

Cultivating our field of respect involves showing esteem for individuals embodying virtue, including our teachers, spiritual guides, and revered members of society. In the presence of Buddha statues or within temple walls, our reverence is more than symbolic; these sacred spaces hold a transformative power over our mental and physical

state. This attitude of devotion and respect cleanses our minds, rendering them calm and soft. The absence of such respect may leave us unrestrained, fostering inner disquiet and chaos. Thus, showing reverence to the virtuous allows us to resonate and connect with Buddhas, bodhisattvas, and virtuous teachers, enabling us to absorb their positive energies and blessings.

We develop our fields of blessings by cultivating three pivotal mindsets: compassion, gratitude, and respect. These mental states act as powerhouses, continuously generating blessings, improving our mental well-being, and setting our lives free. Our experiences reflect the quality of our mindset; thus, the type of mindset we choose to nurture is crucial. As mentioned previously, the essence of true charity lies in loving-kindness and compassion. Without these qualities, charitable acts can lead to unintended consequences. Therefore, it's vital to develop our loving-kindness to foster a more compassionate world rather than simply calling for the affluent to make donations. With a heart full of compassion, we will

naturally find ways to donate our resources when possible and seek to make societal contributions even in the absence of financial abundance, instead of doing things that cause harm to ourselves or others.

I've talked about success in many of my lectures. Modern society often gauges success through metrics like Forbes rankings and the Hurun Wealth Report, which focus purely on financial assets, ignoring personal character. Yet, without qualities like compassion, gratitude, and respect, wealth alone does not bring happiness. Thus, more crucial than the pursuit of material success is the development of character, which stands as the key to the pursuit of happiness. To sum up, happiness isn't solely reliant on wealth; it encompasses various factors. Virtue serves as its foundation, physical and mental well-being forms its core, and external circumstances act as support. Only when established on such a holistic basis is our happiness complete.

III

ELEVATING VIEWS AND ERADICATING AFFLICTIONS THROUGH WISDOM

1. Circumstance, Mindset, and View

Our happiness is closely linked to our view on life. In the West, Positive Psychology encourages people to adopt a positive outlook on challenges. Similarly, Buddhism places great importance on views, as they shape the world we see. Buddhism suggests that the world before us is simply an image formed in our cognition, skewed by our personal feelings.

Take, for instance, a dog's view of the world – does it match ours? Clearly not. A dog perceives the world differently from us; naturally, what it sees, hears, and senses is different from us. While perception influences one's view of the world, emotion also plays a major role in shaping our views. When we admire someone, we tend to approve of their actions; conversely, if we hold disdain for someone, we find fault in everything they do. How we view the world, therefore, is critical for each of us.

Our perspectives greatly influence our attitudes. There's a tale of an elderly woman who wept daily, regardless of the weather. When questioned about her tears, she explained, "I have two sons-in-law. One crafts umbrellas, the other roof tiles. I worry for the umbrella maker on sunny days, fearing he has no business, and for the tile maker on rainy days, worried he can't work." A Chan master advised her to shift her mindset: to think of the umbrella maker on rainy days and the tile maker on sunny days. Once the woman adjusted her outlook, she found joy every day. This story highlights the stark

contrast between positive and negative thinking.

Buddhism is neither Negative Psychology nor Positive Psychology. It offers us a way of thinking that is truthful and positive. To be truthful is to align with the actual reality of the world. The Dharma teaches that many of our afflictions stem from our views. Therefore, it is essential to elevate our views and mindsets through wisdom. When guided by wisdom, afflictions cease to exist.

Many ancient Chinese literati cultivated their minds by chanting sutras, which is one way to change views. For instance, the *Diamond Sutra* teaches, “All conditioned phenomena are like dreams, illusions, bubbles, shadows, dew, and lightning, and should be viewed as such.” The grandeur experienced by emperors in times of great wealth is but a momentary illusion, subject to the ebb and flow of causes and conditions. Adopting this perspective helps us not to place undue importance on current events. It teaches us to remain grounded during success, aware of its fleeting nature, and resilient during

challenges, understanding they too will pass. This mindset allows us to act proactively without feeling weighed down.

2. Seeing Reality as It Is

Buddhism sums up the unenlightened life state as “ignorance.” What is ignorance? Simply put, it’s like turning off the lights in a windowless room; the room will be pitch-black. Against darkness is “light,” which represents wisdom. Buddhism believes that everyone has a light of wisdom within them. But when this light is not lit, life is in a state of ignorance, making us unable to see ourselves and the world clearly.

Where do we live? We live in our thoughts and our state of mind. We do not know much about ourselves, yet we are obsessed with ourselves. This leads us to falsely regard things that are not “me” as “me.” This is our greatest misconception about life. We have only seen the shifting clouds, never the vast sky at the back. Hence, we never

realized that life's true form is not the clouds themselves but the expanse behind them. Viewing thoughts as "me" allows them to entangle and dominate our lives like storm clouds, obscuring clarity. We need to know that thoughts are fundamentally rootless and have no intrinsic nature. If we remain mindful of our thoughts and keep a distance from them, they lose their power over us.

The maxim "Know thyself" occupies a central role in Western philosophy. Yet, despite our daily self-attention, self-care, and self-obsession, the question arises: do we truly know ourselves? Let's strip away all thoughts, concepts, and definitions and ponder: what was the state of our life before a single thought emerged? Have we ever engaged in such deep introspection? Chan practice encourages us to explore questions like "Who is actually reciting the Buddha's name?" "What was my original face before the rise of thought?" and "What was my original face before my birth?" Indeed, if we truly understand ourselves, we will be able to recognize our Buddha-nature.

When we explore life with wisdom and continuously question, “Who am I?” and “What defines my existence?” we come to realize that all we have considered as “me” only has a temporary relationship with us. Our body, emotions, identity, or wealth – which of these can we keep forever? But due to our ignorance and attachment, we automatically view our body, emotions, identity, wealth, and all sorts of other things that are not “me” as “me,” which creates attachment and dependence. The issue is that these things we regard as “me” are impermanent and constantly changing. If we think that the body is “me,” we will fear death and the loss of the physical self. If we believe that identity is “me,” we will dread losing it and be badly shaken without it. Similar to wearing a mask for so long, we mistake it for our actual face; once the mask is removed, we feel disoriented.

What are the sources of life’s afflictions and suffering? More often than not, they are linked to relationships, family, wealth, status, identity, and our bodies. When we come to the realization that our association with these

aspects is merely temporary, changes in them will no longer cause us anxiety, fear, and pointless suffering.

How can we perceive the truth with clarity? The Buddhist teachings on “no-self” and “emptiness” offer paths to correct our misconceptions. “No-self” in Buddhism doesn’t negate the presence of the physical body, just as “emptiness” doesn’t deny the existence of phenomena. These concepts aim to dismantle our erroneous beliefs about self and the universe. Through constant reflection on “no-self” and “emptiness,” we gradually discard external attachments, making way for wisdom’s light. Only then can we dispel confusion and see the truth.

Once we clear our minds of confusion and afflictions, the happiness we encounter will reflect life’s true essence. This form of happiness is independent of external factors, as our inherent light of wisdom will continue to shine and bring joy, regardless of the situation. Happiness dependent on external circumstances is inherently fleeting and unstable; as our environment changes, so will

our sense of happiness. True happiness, in contrast, embodies the essence of life itself. Indeed, in uncovering this very form of existence, we unearth the treasure of true happiness.

IV

EXCESSIVE DESIRE BRINGS SUFFERING, CONTENTMENT BRINGS JOY

1. Desires and Happiness

What is happiness? Often, the happiness people seek is merely a feeling, a sense of fulfillment that arrives when desires are satisfied. Think back to when you've felt unhappy: they were likely marked by unmet material or emotional needs. Yet, a mere lack of material goods, assuming survival isn't at stake, often doesn't cause significant suffering. The actual source of suffering stems from the inability to satisfy our desires. This frustration

of not getting what we want often inflicts much greater pain than material scarcity.

Desires differ from person to person, which means the ease with which these desires can be satisfied varies too. For some, their desires are as modest as a little teacup, quickly quenched with a bit of water. During our childhood, limited desires meant that contentment and joy were easily achieved, leading many to nostalgically recall youth as their happiest time. However, when desires swell to oceanic proportions, no quantity of fulfillment suffices. Comparison also affects our desires. If we are constantly comparing ourselves and feeling less wealthy or famous than others, how can we ever find happiness?

That said, the happiness derived from fulfilling desires is fleeting and illusory. Take, for instance, the belief that indulging in delicious food can lead to happiness. This is true only when you're hungry and yearning for it. If you're not hungry or already satisfied, even the tastiest food becomes a chore to finish. Being forced to eat when

you don't want to transforms eating into a form of suffering. Similarly, some may think that sleeping in brings joy. However, if you're made to stay in bed against your wishes, what was once pleasurable becomes a form of torment. For someone bedridden, the simple act of getting up and moving freely becomes the most coveted form of happiness.

Clearly, desires only lead to a sense of satisfaction when we alleviate our cravings. This satisfaction, however, is merely an illusory form of happiness, contingent upon particular conditions and does not capture that true happiness. Hence, happiness that stems from fulfilling desires is inherently unreliable.

2. The Peril of Pursuing Desires

Nowadays, society fuels consumption by constantly feeding into people's desires. With each new product iteration, and through aggressive marketing strategies, sellers tap into the public's purchasing impulses from

every conceivable angle. As a result, we find ourselves living in a cycle of constant buying, comparing, and striving to outdo others. It's not enough to simply have resources; the ambition often extends to surpass others by having more wealth and living more extravagantly. These comparisons foster a competitive atmosphere, sometimes leading to unethical behavior in an attempt to stay ahead. Falling into this cycle of endless buying, comparing, and competing can strip us of our independence, making us prisoners to these dynamics.

Today, our homes are filled with convenient appliances intended to ease our daily tasks. However, rather than enjoying increased leisure, we find ourselves more exhausted than ever. Why is this the case? In simpler times, with fewer material possessions, life was straightforward, and we weren't caught up in the competitive frenzy of today. The modern era, marked by globalization, presents before us countless stimuli that trigger our desires and lead to constant comparisons. Once we acquire one item, our attention quickly shifts to the next; having met

our basic needs, we aspire for luxury and status symbols. Our relentless comparisons propel us into unnecessary toil – not for survival, genuine well-being, or answering the profound questions of life, but for the sake of vanity, denying us the opportunity to ever take a break.

Additionally, modern electronic devices and the vast array of information channels consume a significant portion of our time. The allure of smartphones and the internet has become a source of addiction for many. As information becomes more fragmented, so too do our time, our attention spans, and our increasingly frazzled lives. In this era, few can enjoy quiet moments alone; most feel lost without their cell phones to fill every spare moment. The biggest problem with this habit is that it robs our ability to rest. Often, even when our bodies scream for rest, our minds remain agitated and unable to find peace. The ancient Chinese description of *a heart like a capering monkey and a mind like a galloping horse* aptly captures this state of constant distraction. How could such a lifestyle not exhaust us? How can it possibly

lead to happiness?

I often say that, in the future, the ability to rest will become a crucial indicator of a person's capacity for happiness. Naturally, the ability to rest is essential for maintaining both physical and mental health, which are fundamental to achieving happiness. But why is the ability to rest so critical to our existence? It reflects a person's control over their own mind. Those unable to rest lack mastery over their thoughts and are vulnerable to the influence of their surroundings and the flow of karma, causing them to squander their precious human life. There is truly no greater waste than this.

Desires lead to busyness and fatigue. As our desires increase, so does our dependence on external factors. The greater our dependence, the more likely we are to witness fluctuations. People today generally feel anxious, fearful, and insecure because our lives lack self-sufficiency, constantly leaving us worried about external changes and their potential to throw our balance off. Although the

world is in a constant state of change, we are only impacted by the elements that we need, care about, and are connected to. Therefore, having one fewer desire equates to one less source of attachment and disturbance.

Desires escalate our cost of living. Historically, with fewer resources, individuals managed to sustain themselves and their families. Now, despite significantly higher incomes, supporting a family has turned into a considerable burden. Why is this the case? The expansion of our desires has driven up the cost of living, and consequently, the price of happiness has surged. The wisdom of ancient Chinese teachings tells us happiness stems from contentment. A person with minimal desires finds satisfaction and happiness with ease. In contrast, someone with endless desires struggles to achieve happiness and satisfaction.

Therefore, our approach to desires is crucial for achieving happiness. Without actively addressing them, our desires will end up controlling us.

V

HAPPINESS COMES FROM THE MIND

1. Different Levels of the Mind

The mind is the source of both our suffering and our joy. To lead a happy life, it's crucial to cultivate a healthy mind. We've all felt the toll of being overwhelmed by negative emotions like greed, hatred, fear, anxiety, jealousy, and selfishness – not only do these feelings cause our minds to suffer, but our bodies also respond adversely. If we let these mental struggles linger without addressing them, they'll keep spawning problems, preventing any chance of peace.

However, the same mind that produces suffering can also give rise to profound happiness. When free from afflictions, happiness flows effortlessly. But what is the source of this happiness? It usually has little to do with material conditions. Consider the *full-body smile* of Buddhas and bodhisattvas, who radiate joy from within and throughout their entire bodies. Such happiness isn't born from external acquisitions but from an enlightened mind. The Dharma reveals that within each person lies the potential for enlightenment, and this inherent enlightened nature is capable of generating a continuous flow of happiness.

On Weibo, I've discussed the Buddhist perspective on suffering and happiness. It's commonly understood among practitioners that Buddhism characterizes life as inherently suffering. However, this statement doesn't paint the full picture; it applies specifically to the lives of ordinary beings mired in confusion and afflictions. In contrast, for the enlightened, life is also defined by freedom and joy. This is because behind our confusion and afflictions lies the potential for enlightenment. By unlocking this

potential, our lives will become infinitely free, peaceful, and joyful.

Our lives are influenced by two internal forces. Healthy and positive minds are our allies. They enhance our lives, foster happiness, and contribute to a stable and harmonious society. In contrast, unhealthy and negative minds are our adversaries. They consistently breed suffering and discord. Buddha Dharma teaches that the most formidable enemy in life is the self, specifically referring to our inner afflictions. These inner enemies are the root causes of all forms of suffering, from personal anguish to strained relationships, and even crimes such as killing, stealing, lying, and sexual misconduct. At the core, humanity grapples with two natures: the Buddha-nature and the demonic-nature. Cultivating our Buddha-nature leads us towards attaining perfect wisdom and compassion. Conversely, succumbing to our demonic-nature traps us in cycles of prolonged suffering across the lower realms.

Many of you are accomplished individuals. We frequently devote considerable effort to grasping societal dynamics and showing concern for society, yet we often overlook the most critical aspect: learning to understand and manage ourselves, which truly should be our foremost priority. The teachings of Buddha Dharma can guide us to identify the positive and negative forces within our minds.

2. From Benefiting Oneself to Benefiting Others

The aim of Buddhist practice is to embody the qualities of Buddhas and bodhisattvas. This goal is founded on three key virtues exemplified by Buddhas and bodhisattvas. The first is the virtue of cessation, signifying the complete eradication of all afflictions. The second, the virtue of wisdom, represents the attainment of perfect and boundless wisdom. The third, the virtue of compassion, refers to the realization of great loving-kindness and compassion.

Buddhism identifies three “viruses” plaguing the lives of ordinary people: greed, hatred, and ignorance. These are the root causes of all suffering and negative emotions. As a remedy, Buddhism advocates for the diligent practice of the precepts, concentration, and wisdom to eliminate these afflictions. Moreover, we must unlock the whole-some potential of life and attain wisdom and compassion. Because of our compassion, our goal extends beyond personal liberation from suffering. Recognizing that every sentient being grapples with confusion and afflictions, and is plagued by greed, hatred, and ignorance, we cultivate a desire to assist them. This form of compassion is expansive and unbiased, mirroring the great loving-kindness and compassion of Avalokitesvara Bodhisattva, where there is not a single living being we are not willing to help. Thus, Dharma practice aims not just at building a joyful life for oneself but also at aiding all beings in achieving happiness.

What we frequently perceive as happiness is typically merely an illusion. True happiness is, in fact, the

fundamental essence of life. To realize it, we must eradicate all mindsets that undermine happiness and reveal life's innate, wholesome potential. It is through the awakening of our Buddha-nature that life can genuinely transform into a state of joy, perpetually extending happiness to all sentient beings. Achieving this state is also the ultimate aim of Mahayana Buddhist practice.

CONCLUSION

We've delved into how happiness comes from the mind from five key aspects. First, in order to pursue happiness, we must have the ability to accept all situations, both positive and negative. Only then can we remain undisturbed by external factors and preserve a state of tranquility. Second, we must identify the factors that lead to happiness and actively nurture the fields of blessings to ensure our blessings will continuously grow. Third, we must elevate our views, adopting a positive and proactive stance towards both ourselves and the world. Fourth, it's crucial to avoid the pitfalls of chasing after desires, which are formidable foes to happiness. Most importantly, understanding the various facets of the mind – knowing what to foster and what to let go – paves the way from personal

well-being to the welfare of others, from seeking individual joy to spreading happiness among all sentient beings. This represents the highest and most profound form of happiness.