HOW TO BE HAPPY

Ven. K. Rathanasara
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His insatiable quest for knowledge saw him entering the portals of the University of Kelaniya, and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts (Special) degree in Mass Communication in 1998. He attained his Master degree in Buddhism (MA) in 2010 from the same university.

The noble aspiration of his endeavour to share his knowledge of the Dhamma internationally was fulfilled when he was selected as a resident monk at the Sri Lankaramaya Buddhist Temple in Singapore in 2001 on the invitation of the Singapore Sinhala Buddhist Association which administers the temple.

He is also the founder and the Spiritual Adviser of the Dhammakāmi Buddhist Society as well as the Dhammānusāri and Dhammagavesi Groups.

As an articulate speaker with effective communication skills, he stands in good stead when conducting regular Dhamma talks, classes and retreats which witness an increasing interest among the attendees.

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Some people view Buddhism as an other-worldly religion which does not have any concern towards the earthly affairs of the ordinary man. From the perspective of its ultimate goal of Nibbāna, Buddhism transcends the world. However, it certainly does not ignore the political, economic and social issues of the common man.

Some people also look at Buddhism as a pessimistic religion. It is a misconception arising from the lack of proper understanding. Some have come to this conclusion through their superficial understanding of the first of the Four Noble Truths, the truth of Suffering. However the Buddha does not advocate that we have to accept our life’s suffering passively. Instead he explains why we suffer and how we can put an end to the suffering by undertaking an ethical, mental and intellectual training process.

On the contrary, Buddhism is in fact an optimistic teaching as it leads its followers out of life’s miseries and towards ultimate bliss and happiness.

This book is not an endeavour to elaborate on the Four Noble Truths. Neither does it cover the fundamental teachings of the Buddha. Rather, this is an attempt to present Buddhism as a Message of Happiness.
In writing this book, I have included quotations from the Pali canon in the footnote. This is for the benefit of those who are interested to know more. However, I have left out some of the lengthy passages of the Pali quotations so as not to overload the reader with too much information.

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May you all be well and happy!

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How to be Happy?

What is happiness?

Happiness arouses pleasurable, delightful, pleasant feelings in the mind. Happiness can be like a lump of foam created in a waterfall for a moment; it is bubbly white and then disappears forever. Happiness can also be like a beautiful flower blossoming in summer. It blooms then withers away. Likewise for the sensation of happiness, it arises and then ceases.

Everyone wants to be happy. ‘All living beings are chasing after happiness’¹ says the Buddha. However, happiness can mean differently to different people. What is happiness for one can be unhappiness to another.

An ordinary man seeks happiness through sense gratification. Sensual happiness is fleeting. Once it arises in the eye; in another time, it comes through the ears; moving through its sense faculties, the mind continuously seeks such pleasurable happiness.

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¹ Sukha kāmāni bhūtāni (Dhammapada 131)
We feel happy when we get what we want; but after some time, we become bored with it; then we look for something else to stay happy. When we satisfy one desire, another arises in its place. Searching repeatedly for momentary happiness, we are therefore constantly chasing after this or that and during which time passes and life moves on.

**Negative approach towards happiness**

We are perpetually not satisfied with what we already have. Instead we are always yearning for what we do not have. This is the common nature of the human mind. This is a negative approach towards happiness.

Why is it termed as a negative approach? It is because we are depending on something we do not have at the present moment to generate anticipated future happiness.

People tend to postpone their happiness to their future achievements. They often have eager wishes and speculate that they will only be happy when they get them.

This however does not mean that we should not plan for the future or work hard to achieve our distant goals. What we should, in fact, do is not to carelessly overlook our present happiness by speculating and worrying unnecessarily about the future.
One who lives in poverty might think ‘I will be happy if I have lots of money’. While this may be an apparent reality, it does not mean that rich people are always happy. They too have their fair share of worries and have things which they are lacking. Money is a means to happiness but by itself, money is not happiness.

‘I will be happy when I get married’, marriageable singles might think and hence become unhappy when they are not. However, there are some married couples who are considering divorce, seeing it as a relief to their entangled relationships. To them, resuming the single status once again is a blessing as they will have more freedom and reduced burdens.

Being unemployed might bring unhappiness. However, there are also many people who are in employment but grumble incessantly about office politics and work life stresses. Some are so distressed that they want to resign for other alternatives.

Some naturally well-endowed pretty ladies are worried about losing their beauty in old age and hence struggle to maintain it. There are also those who think that they are not beautiful enough and so spend lots of money and time on beautifying themselves. Both groups are unhappy people.
Some people love to indulge in reminiscence. They live in the past, worry about the future and totally forget about their present happiness.

After going through an interview, one might regret for not performing well during the session. ‘If I had better prepared myself, my success chances might have been better’ one might sulk miserably.

‘If I had worked harder, I could have achieved distinction for my maths papers’ a student might regret after sitting for an examination.

Suppose someone is trying to sell his property for a higher price. Suddenly the property market goes down. ‘I should have accepted the earlier offer’, he might lament regretfully and bitterly.

As the saying goes, ‘Don’t cry over spilt milk’. It is over. There is no point feeling upset and worried over something which had already happened. Worry and anxiety are negative feelings and they destroy the present moment of happiness.

What we should do instead is to learn from our past experiences by keeping in mind the lessons learnt, developing a positive attitude towards life and then striving forward with understanding.
We often have the misconception that the grass on the other side of the fence is always greener. The measure of Happiness is therefore relative. While there are relatively happy people around, there is no single person on earth who can always be perfectly happy, unless he is Enlightened.

It is a simple truth in life that no matter what we have achieved or capable of achieving, we will still have some degree of unhappiness as long as greed, hatred and ignorance are rooted in our mind.

When a deity asked the Buddha, ‘why do monks who eat one meal a day and live in the forest look so radiant, peaceful and happy?’ The Buddha answered that ‘They do not sorrow over the past. Nor do they hanker for the future. They maintain themselves with what is present. Hence their complexion is so serene. Through hankering for the future, through sorrowing over the past, fools dry up and wither away like green reed cut down.’

The secret to happiness lies in the present moment. It is one’s choice as to how one reacts under the present conditions; either in a positive or negative way. Having understood the present situation with wisdom, equipped with past

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2 Arañña Sutta, Devatāsaṃyutta, Saṃyutta Nikāya
experiences and future plans, one can work diligently with confidence to change life for the better. One who adopts such an attitude is assured of happiness.

**Positive approach towards happiness**

‘Happiness (Contentment) is the greatest wealth’\(^3\) says the Buddha. Do not postpone your happiness to tomorrow. Do not destroy your happiness thinking of the past. Be happy now. Be happy with what you are having.

Someone might think that if we were to be happy with what we are having, then there is no progress in life. While this may seem like a convincing argument, the reality remains unchanged. What is the point of achieving more if we do not know how to appreciate and be happy with what we already have now? Such a person will not be happy even if he were to possess the whole world.

Contentment is a positive attribute. It includes being happy with what we are having and being happy to pursue for further progress. The propelling motive behind the pursuit

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\(^3\) Santuṭṭhi paramaṃ dhanaṃ (Dhammapada 204)
should be generosity and wisdom and not greed and ignorance.

The Buddhist approach to happiness is a positive one. Why is it termed as positive? It is because our happiness comes from what we have in the present moment.

One boy was complaining that he had no shoes to wear until one day he came across a man who did not even have his legs. Appreciate all that you have at any moment.

Cultivate a positive attitude in your daily living is the beginning of a happy life. Happy people are not those who are persistently chasing to achieve everything in life. Happy people are the ones who are contented. Hence, train your mind to appreciate what you already have and on what you are working hard to achieve.

We are fortunate by birth as human beings. ‘It is a great blessing to have done merits in the past’ to achieve this fortunate state. The Buddha says: ‘It is rare and difficult to be born as a human being’. Understand the value of this precious human life.

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4 Pubbe ca katapuññatā (Māngala Sutta, Sutta Nipāta)
5 Kiccho manussa paṭilābho (Dhammapada 182)
When you wake up in the morning, be happy that you are alive because there are people who die in their sleep. Be happy that your five sense faculties are working properly. Do not take them for granted for there are many people who are blind, deaf, cripple, dumb, wheelchair-bound or bedridden.

Count your blessings that you have a shelter over your head. There are millions of people in the world who do not even have decent housing. Appreciate that you have food, clothes and all basic facilities when there are so many people who are deprived of them. It is so fortunate to have your loved ones around you when there are numerous orphans and destitute folks in this world.

Very frequently, we tend to take the favourable conditions in life for granted. We should not wait till we lose them to understand and appreciate how fortunate we are.

**Buddhism and Happiness**

Buddhism is a graduated path to achieve happiness in different stages. It teaches us how to be happy in this life and lives to come. It also points out the way to achieve ultimate happiness by uprooting the causes of unhappiness.
The Buddha while encouraging his ordained disciples to confine themselves to strict disciplinary training and spiritual practice to achieve ultimate happiness (Nibbana) in this life itself also recommends a moderate yet systematized agenda for his lay followers. It entails a gradual process of varying degree for them to cultivate for the ultimate attainment.

Buddhism promotes both material and spiritual happiness. The Buddha has given momentous teachings to lay people on economic prosperity, social integrity, people-friendly governments, harmonious coexistence, ethical and spiritual cultivation that lead to peace and happiness in this life.

The Buddha also teaches one how to be happy after death. The heavenly happiness is an interim goal for the majority of the lay Buddhist followers. Upholding righteous principles and doing meritorious actions pave the way to be born in the heavenly realms. Achieving a fortunate rebirth in the circle of existence is an opportunity to cultivate further on the path towards ultimate happiness.

Nibbana, the Supreme Happiness, is the ultimate goal of all Buddhists. It is to be achieved by eradicating the root causes (Greed, Hatred and Ignorance) of unhappiness perfectly, permanently and irreversibly.
Happiness is to be found within oneself. The journey starts with the training of one’s thoughts, words and actions. Understanding, practice and realization are essential on the path of the Buddha towards perfect bliss and happiness. This path is none other than the Noble Eightfold Path which leads to perfection of ethical conduct, mental training and profound wisdom.

Two thousand five hundred years back in the human history, Prince Siddhattha, left behind a kingdom of great wealth, power and prosperity to set out on a journey in search of perfect happiness. After six long years of ethical, spiritual and intellectual experiment, he returned to the Kingdom with his unique discovery of ‘How to be Happy?’
Happiness is within you

Where can we find Happiness? We often seek it outside us just like wearing our spectacles on our head and searching for it everywhere. Looking for happiness in the external world alone is impractical and unreliable. Happiness is, in fact, within oneself; it is not to be found outside us. However, for Happiness to be generated within, it requires the necessary conditions.

Buddhism is essentially a path of happiness. Joy (Piti) is one of the seven factors of enlightenment. It has to be cultivated by every Buddhist. Joy and Happiness (Sukha) are blissful experiences of meditators who develop their minds.

Buddhism is a self-reliance teaching. Every human being has the potential to cultivate happiness or unhappiness. And to a great extent, it depends very much on our own personal choice. We are the creators of our heavenly bliss or hellish torment. Choose to be happy as Happiness is inherently within us.

In any given situation, there are two ways to react. One is the positive, constructive and wholesome way and the other is the negative, destructive and unwholesome way. The wise
people will of course choose to react in the positive way which they know is the path for long term happiness.

**Happy Thoughts**

Our thoughts are much more powerful than we assume. Every human action is rooted in thoughts. ‘The World is led by thoughts’¹ says the Buddha. Pleasant, peaceful, sublime thoughts produce nothing but bliss and happiness. The Buddha singles out the mind as the base for happiness. He says ‘A mind controlled conduces to happiness’. ²

Happiness generate pleasant feelings experienced through the mind. Contrary to the common conditioned preconception that divine happiness can only be enjoyed in heavenly realm rebirth, the Buddha emphasizes that divine happiness too can be experienced in the human world if we were to cultivate pleasant, wholesome, happy thoughts in our own minds.

It is believed that the super divine beings (Brahmā) are always happy. One day, a man approached and pleaded with the Buddha to teach him the way to be born in the Super Divine Realm. The Buddha advised him to cultivate four

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¹ Cittena nīyati loko (Citta Sutta, Devatāsāmyutta, Saṃyutta Nikāya)
² Cittāṁ dantaṁ sukhāvahaṁ (Dhammapada 35)
positive, wholesome thoughts; Boundless Love, Compassion, Appreciative joy and Equanimity. He labelled them as the ‘Four Divine Abodes’ (Brahmavihāra). Whoever cultivates these worthy thoughts will experience divine bliss in the here and now. ³

These positive, constructive and wholesome thoughts are the most beautiful, wonderful, sublime thoughts that human beings are capable of producing. They are the foundation of all the virtues which bring forth peace and happiness.

**Boundless Love**

The feeling of being loved by others is a joyful one. Loving others will also generate happiness. In both cases, the mind is associated with beautiful thoughts of love. When the mind is full of love, we feel happy, satisfied and peaceful.

Negative thoughts of ill-will, anger and hatred produce miseries. These dark thoughts prevent us from being happy. The key to happiness is to produce pleasant thoughts of goodwill, love and friendship. The Buddha is the happiest human being ever lived. He says ‘Indeed, we live happily among those who hateful being free from hatred’. ⁴

³ Subha Sutta, No 99 Majjhima Nikāya
⁴ Susukham vata jīvāma-Verinesu averino (Dhammapada 197)
Love is the most pleasant, vibrant, positive thought that a human being can produce. The Buddha used the word ‘Mettā’ to mean Boundless Love which is free from lust, attachment, self-centred desire or any other defilement. It is the purest, sublime, wholesome thought. The Buddha thus encouraged his followers to cultivate Boundless Love for the happiness of all the living beings.

Every living being desires to be happy. This understanding is the foundation for Boundless Love. ‘Just like a mother who protects her only child even at the risk of her own life, one should cultivate Boundless Love towards all the living beings’ says the Buddha.

Mettā is a seed of happiness. Every human being inherits this innate nature of pure love which is the base of peace and happiness. Cultivating Mettā brings forth so many benefits in life.

‘One who practises Mettā will sleep peacefully, will not have nightmares and will wake up fresh in the morning. He will be loved by both human beings and non-human beings. Divine beings will protect him. He will not face untimely death. His face becomes pleasant and his mind peaceful. He will pass

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5 Metta Sutta, Sutta Nipata
away mindfully. After the death he will be born in super divine world’. The result of all these benefits is all embracing well-being and happiness.

Having waves of pleasant, vibrant, powerful thoughts of Boundless Love makes one peaceful and joyful. When the mind is full of Mettā, a kind of serene joy remains in the mind perpetually. A calm and peaceful mind will in turn generate wholesome deeds. A glowing face with beautiful smile and calm eyes are the reflections of inner happiness.

Our attitudes, feelings, perceptions towards people are conditioned with concepts of caste, class, race, colour, country, culture and religion etc. Our mind is therefore preconditioned to react towards the world with such perceptions.

Such conditioning can cause us to be narrow-minded. We thus become prisoners of our own mind as it creates stress, suspicion and fear towards others. We become easily agitated, miserable and unhappy.

Developing Boundless Love beyond these barriers creates a new link to our communication with others. We will be inclined to think of our similarities rather than differences.

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6 Mettānisaṃsa Sutta, Aṅguttara Nikāya
This new attitude releases us from our mental prison. It enables us to think freely without prejudices. As we become broader-minded, thoughts of caring and sharing, feelings of friendship and loving-kindness, attitude of acceptance and respect, start to grow in our mind. Consequently, we develop into peace loving and joyful human beings.

To be happy, change must first begin within oneself. Pleasant thoughts with tremendous power actually lie dormant within our mind. We just need to trigger them to produce their vibrant delightful ripple effects.

For instance, you are going for your evening walk. You will probably meet many people along the way. Put aside your prejudices and preconceptions towards these strangers. Smile to them pleasantly and genuinely and then release an instant vibrant thought wave of love towards them, wishing in your mind, ‘May you be well and happy!’

When you radiate these vibrant, pleasant thoughts with a smiling face and friendly look, the recipients will feel them and they too will reciprocate similar pleasant thoughts. These vibrant thoughts will in turn bounce back to you bringing enormous joy and peace.
In your office, while you are working, occasionally do concentrate on each colleague separately, and deliver loving thoughts of Mettā - ‘May you be well and happy!’ towards them.

At home, in any single moment, concentrate on one of the family members and release the powerful thoughts of love. If the person is in front of you, smile with your deliverance of Mettā.

Before you start driving, make a noble wish thinking ‘May I drive safely! May all the living beings be safe and happy!’

Wherever you are, whatever you are doing, as long as you are awake, take few seconds to generate loving thoughts to bring forth inner peace and joy.

Boundless Love can be cultivated in a specifically dedicated period of time by following a step by step method known as the ‘Mettā Meditation’. Practising the Mettā Meditation for thirty minutes daily will bring about remarkable positive changes to your life. Although there is no particular favourable time for the practice, dedicating a pocket of time in the morning, before starting the daily chores is much preferred. It will bring forth a wonderful start to a pleasant, peaceful and joyful day. This is how it is practised...
To begin your practice, it is important that you first sit in a comfortable position. You may sit on the floor or on a chair, choose whichever you feel works best for you.

Once you are seated comfortably, relax and be at ease. Gently close your eyes. Do not pay attention to any sound or any other sense stimulus such as smell or touch. Allow yourself to let go of the past. And do not think about the future. Just be aware of the here and the now.

Pay attention to your breath. Feel the rhythm of your breathing. When you breathe in, feel the air entering your body. When you breathe out, feel your warm breath leaving. With kindness and compassion, bring your attention to your body and accept it just the way it is.

Visualise yourself in your own mind. Visualise the way you are now, at this moment. Make peace with this vision of yourself with kindness and gentleness. With so much love and compassion, wish yourself to be well and happy.

Gently radiate Mettā towards yourself over and over again. Repeat in your mind, slowly and steadily, while feeling the positive, wholesome power of these following words...

May my body be strong and healthy!
May my mind be calm and peaceful!
May I be safe and live with ease!
May I be well and happy!

After spending sometime wishing for the well-being and happiness to yourself, shift your attention towards your mother and father. Spend a few minutes reflecting on how your parents have brought you up. They did so with so much love and care and how much they had dedicated to your well-being and happiness.

Taking your mother and father to your mind individually, radiate lots of loving thoughts towards them; wishing them peace, happiness and overall well-being, just like what you have earlier done towards yourself.

My beloved mother,
My beloved father,
May you be strong and healthy!
May you be calm and peaceful!
May you be safe and live with ease!
May you be well and happy!

Likewise, radiate loving-kindness towards your siblings, close relatives, teachers, friends and colleagues. By reflecting on how these people contribute to your overall happiness, you can generate massive Boundless Love towards them.
My brothers and sisters,
My relatives and friends,
My teachers and well-wishers,

May they be strong and healthy!
May they be calm and peaceful!
May they be safe and live with ease!
May they be well and happy!

If all the human beings in this world are friendly towards one another; if they can respect and accept each other unconditionally; then, this world will be a very peaceful place. Let us wish for a peaceful world for all humankind.

My fellow brothers and sisters in Singapore,
Those who live in neighbouring countries,
All the people who live in Asia,
And all the human beings in this world,

May they all be strong and healthy!
May they all be calm and peaceful!
May they all be safe and live with ease!
May they all be well and happy!

In final step, radiate Boundless Love towards all the sentient beings in this world existence. In this vast universe, the planet Earth is not the only place where life exists. In the
many different planes of existence, we will find various types of living beings. And we are all interconnected. Let us radiate Boundless Love towards all living beings who share this world with us.

Those living beings that live on the ground,
Those who live in the water,
And those who live in the outer space,

Those who are having gross level physical bodies,
And those who are having subtle level astral bodies,
Living beings who are visible or invisible,
Those who live near or far, big or small,
All the kinds of living beings that live in this world existence,

May they all be strong and healthy!
May they all be calm and peaceful!
May they all be safe and live with ease!
May they all be well and happy!

In this meditation practice, starting from oneself, vibrant thought waves of immeasurable love are gradually radiated outward to include the whole universe.
**Great Compassion**

Harmful, cruel and violent thoughts defile the mind. These destructive, unwholesome thoughts produce negative energy which obstructs the mind to be happy. Compassion counteracts and weakens these defilements. It energizes the mind with positive wholesome power which is the base for happiness.

Having deep understanding of the suffering of sentient existence is the developmental base for great Compassion. Much as all the living beings desire to be happy, they often undergo constant pain and suffering. This understanding thus produces the compassionate thought of ‘May all the living beings be free from suffering!’

The Buddhist term for Compassion is ‘Karunā’. When we come into contact with those who are undergoing sorrowful pain and suffering, we naturally feel sad and sorry for them but this is not compassion. The positive and wholesome thoughts of Compassion encompass much more than mere pity. Being compassionate, we recognize their suffering and it propels us to move forward to take proactive wise actions to relieve their distress.
While Mettā is the wish for all the living beings, without exception, to be well and happy, Karunā is the wish for living beings to be free from pain and suffering. Compassion embraces all the suffering of living beings. The followers of the Buddha should cultivate great Compassion wishing ‘May the suffering not suffer; the fearful not fear; the grieving not grief; may all the beings be well and happy!’

A doctor, who is full of compassion, will be overjoyed when he sees his patient recovered fully from a fatal disease.

A compassionate spiritual teacher will be happy hearted when he succeeds in counselling a misguided violent person to follow the noble path of peace.

Parents will feel appeased when their efforts to rehabilitate their wayward drug addicted child achieve favourable results.

In the above cases, Compassion is the motivating factor. It not only relieves suffering but also forbids you from doing any unwholesome actions which may bring about more pain and harm. Consequently, it generates much happiness for yourself and others.

7 Dukkhappattā ca niddukkhā – Bhayappattā ca nibbhayā; Sokappattā ca nissokā – Hontu sabbepi pāṇīno (Great book of protection)
Additionally, Compassion also produces vibrant thought waves that will cause others to react compassionately towards us. Here, self-centred desire disappears and selflessness becomes prominent. This therefore allows favourable conditions of peace, joy and happiness to arise.

Noble thoughts of Compassion are to be cultivated in our daily life. Like the Sun and the Moon that shed their lights indiscriminately, we too must radiate boundless Compassion towards all living beings without exception.

When you go to a hospital, radiate boundless Compassion towards all the patients there, wishing them ‘May these patients be free from physical pain and mental suffering! May they recover from their ailments! May they all be well and happy!’

When seeing someone who is absorbed in rage and jabbering harsh words, in your mind, send him wishes of ‘May this person be free from anger and evil thoughts! May he be peaceful! May he be well and happy!’

While you are at an MRT station, workplace, shopping centre or any location, deliver intermittent compassionate thoughts either focusing on an individual or a crowd at large, wishing them ‘May you be free from worries and sufferings! May you be well and happy!’
When you cultivate this momentary habit of radiating compassion, the mind becomes calm, serene and peaceful naturally. It generates a kind of spiritual happiness which is far beyond the happiness derived from sense pleasure.

Like Mettā, Compassion can also be developed over an extended period of time in the form of meditation. Before starting to radiate compassion towards all the living beings, it is important to spend some time reflecting on how living beings are undergoing various forms of suffering. Driven by incessant cravings and attachments due to ignorance, sentient beings are caught up in the cycle of repeated existence of birth and death which is full of suffering.

Think of suffering in its various folds which the human beings have to go through in old age, sickness, death, natural disasters, human created conflicts, war, terrorism, and poverty among many others. Sorrow, lamentation, mental pain and agony, stress and tension are only a fraction of the psychological suffering.

Animals are of no exception. Domesticated animals are driven by force to labour; they are imprisoned, abused and tortured physically, sampled in laboratories’ experiments and slaughtered for food. Wild animals too live in constant terror and fear, relentlessly running away from predators and hunters.
The method adopted in Compassion Meditation is similar to that of the Mettā meditation practice. Having comfortably settled in your physical and mental composure, with a compassionate mind, wish yourself to be free from all the miseries, repeat the following words, connecting them to their deeper meaning...

May I be free from physical pain and suffering!
May I be free from hatred, cruelty and all defilements!
May I be well and happy!

Gradually extend your compassionate thoughts towards your parents, siblings, teachers, relatives, friends, human beings and all the sentient beings, taking them as a collective group and wishing them in your mind thinking...

May they be free from physical pain and suffering!
May they be free from hatred, cruelty and all defilements!
May they be well and happy!

Compassion combines with wisdom bring great blessings to the society. It will be easy to feel compassionate towards your loved ones. However, it will really be a challenge to generate compassionate thoughts towards those who have done you harm or wrong. Deep understanding in the Suffering concept and the Buddhist Karmic Theory will help
us overcome the grudges and revolting thoughts we have towards them. Bearing in mind that we are solely responsible for our thoughts, words and actions, it helps to understand that the unwholesome actions of those people who did us wrong will suffer greatly when the suitable conditions arise. The understanding of people who committed evil doings due to their ignorance will weaken our grudges thereby allowing compassion to develop in our mind.

**Appreciative Joy**

‘Muditā’ is a beautiful thought. It is translated as ‘Appreciative Joy’ or ‘Sympathetic Joy’. It means rejoicing over the success of the others, sharing their happiness when others are feeling joyful. This is a wonderful and noble way of generating happiness.

Jealousy and covetousness arise in the mind naturally when we see wealth, power, beauty, materialistic possessions, achievements and the exquisite qualities of others. Sometimes we are aware of it and at other times we are not. In whichever case, feeling miserable, envious and resentful is the ultimate outcome of it.

Jealousy and envy produce negative energies. They evoke the underlying tendencies of unhappiness. As a result,
unpleasant bitter feelings, perceptions and mental formations come into dominance in the mind. We then experience woefulness. Mudita (Appreciative Joy) counteracts these negative defilements by preventing and weakening them from arising in the mind. At the same time Mudita also produces wholesome positive power which results in happiness.

Generating happiness through the happiness of the others is a very effective and economical way to be happy. Rejoicing over the happiness of others is like lighting a candle using a well lit one. The light increases its glow, dispelling the darkness and illuminating the world. Likewise, when we ride on the thoughts of happy minded people, happy incidents or occasions, our mind will become happy too. The most wonderful advantage of this simple practice is that we can enjoy the bliss of their successes and achievements without even having to get their permission for it.

Having seen a happy loving couple who treasures each other’s association, generate happy pleasant thoughts in your mind wishing ‘May this couple live with ease and joy! May they take care of each other with love! May they be well and happy!’

Having overheard a great achievement or a career promotion of someone, bring forth happiness in your mind in thinking
'May he achieve greater success in time to come! May he overcome the challenges in life! May he be well and happy!'

Having seen a rich person driving a luxurious car, generate Appreciative Joy in your mind, thinking ‘May he get more success in his business! May he enjoy his wealth! May he be well and happy!'

When you see smiling faces, hear merry laughter or joyful utterances, you are getting the opportunities to be happy. Simply be delightful to be soaked in such joyous environment with happy people and pleasant incidents around you.

It may be easy to feel happy over the success of a loved one but how to feel the same over the success of enemies or strangers?

For a person who has developed Boundless Love and Compassion, it is much easier to generate Appreciative Joy over the happiness of others. Love and Compassion together conquer the gross level of impurities. They mitigate ill-will, anger, hatred, cruelty and selfishness. The mind becomes soft, gentle, pure and amiable for Appreciative Joy to take root. Joy arises in such a mind is like flowers bloom forth in the right season with all the favourable conditions.
One who practises Muditā is always joyful and ever smiling. Such a person is lovely and is easily satisfied. He does not need many things in life to be happy as he finds blissfulness everywhere. He derives happiness from the simplest things he encounters in life.

Having seen beautiful flowers blossom in a neighbour’s garden, he becomes happy. Hearing the laughter of playing children brings him joy. He smiles with Appreciative Joy having seen a teenage boy helped an elderly man get onto the bus.

Muditā can also be practised as a form of meditation over an extended period of time. Here, having done preliminary preparations for meditation, you should reflect on happy, joyful, pleasant, wholesome incidents that have had happened in your life. Your mind will naturally become happy when you think of them.

You also need to contemplate the pleasurable, favourable conditions that you are enjoying at the moment. Understanding and realizing how fortunate you are will inevitably generate much Appreciative Joy.

Recollect the pleasant, joyful moments and life events of your mother, father, siblings, close relatives, teachers, friends and colleagues. Wish them in your mind thinking...
May they experience joy and bliss!
May there be many happy occasions in their lives!
May they be well and happy!

Think also of all the human beings collectively. Imagine that they all are living in peace, caring for each other with love, being contented and satisfied, enjoying in amusement. Develop a sense of Appreciative Joy thinking ...

May all the human beings live in peace and harmony!
May there be joy and happiness in their lives!
May they all be well and happy!

Similarly, radiate such joyful wishes for animals and all the other sentient beings in this world existence, wishing all of them bliss, happiness and joy.

**Perfect Equanimity**

Upekkhā or Equanimity is a sublime, pleasant state of mind capable of producing peace and happiness. Equanimity marks the attitude of a well cultured man towards all the living beings. It is the well balanced state of mind that steers clear of prejudices, preconceptions, predispositions and all types of extremism.
Boundless Love weakens hatred and ill will. Great Compassion mitigates cruelty and selfish desires. Appreciative Joy counteracts jealousy and covetousness. Perfect Equanimity avoids preconditioning based on fanaticism and keeps the mind in balance. What remains therein are pure, sublime, joyful thoughts and feelings.

Through mental training, Love, Compassion and Appreciative Joy coupled with Equanimity will produce the most sublime, perfect, spiritual happiness which every human being is capable of enjoying.

Like the Moonlight that embraces all living beings indiscriminately, Boundless Love must be radiated towards all with Equanimity. Like the water which quenches the thirst of all the creatures, the great Compassion is to be practised with Equanimity to relieve suffering. Like the gentle, cooling breeze that touches everyone gently without exception, Appreciative Joy should also be extended towards all with Equanimity.

When our five sense faculties meet pleasurable, favourable sight, sound, smell, taste and touch sensations, our mind grabs them. This is the attraction of the mind known as Greed (Lobha). A greedy mind loses its clarity and balance.
When our five sense faculties come into contact with unpleasant, disagreeable sense stimuli, our mind repels them. This repulsion is known as Hāṭha (Dosa). The mind afflicted by hatred also loses its clarity and balance.

When our five sense faculties receive neutral sense data, our mind will react in a neutral way. This is the ‘passive uncaring indifference’ of the mind which is known as Ignorance (Moha). When the mind is overpowered by ignorance, it loses its clarity and balance too.

Some tend to think that Equanimity as an attitude of dry neutrality or aloofness. On the contrary, Equanimity is in fact, the mental equilibrium accompanied with calmness, composure and clear awareness. The Buddha defines a mind filled with Equanimity as ‘abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility, and without ill-will’. 8

In our training process to be happy human beings, having a balanced mind is essential. Life is not static. Our life’s ups and downs experience is likened to the caps and troughs of the sea waves. If we do not have a balanced mind to face the vicissitudes of life, we will not be able to maintain the happiness in our mind.

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8 Upekkhāsahagatena cetassā vipulena mahaggatena appamānena averena abbyāpajjhena pharitvā viharati (Subha Sutta, No 99, Majjhima Nikāya)
Gain and Loss, Fame and Shame, Praise and Blame, Pleasure and Pain are the eight worldly conditions that everyone faces in life. When we meet with the favourable outcomes in life, we become delightful and blindly attach to them without realising their impermanence. We then create the underlining tendency for unhappiness to arise in our mind.

When we encounter the unfavourable outcomes in life, we become dejected and ignorantly attach to them not realizing that they too are temporary. We then intensify the unhappiness that has already arisen in our mind.

When facing the trials and tribulations in life, if our mind were to constantly experience sadness and happiness like a pendulum in a wall clock so overly attached to the external conditions, our mind will never be at peace. Equanimity leaves both extremes aside and abides with composure and awareness. This is the base for spiritual happiness.

In facing vicissitudes in life, the wise happy human beings, who cultivate perfect Equanimity, will maintain inner peace and happiness with detached attitude and understanding. The Buddha says ‘He whose mind does not flutter by contact with worldly contingencies, sorrowless, stainless and secure;
this is the highest blessing’. 9 The mind of such a person is unshakable ‘just as a firm post, sunk in the earth, cannot be shaken by the four winds’. 10

Falling sick is a part of our life. It creates physical pain and suffering. When the body falls sick, do not let your mind fall ill too; understand that sickness is impermanent, subject to change and disappearance and so prevent your mind from being overly attached to unpleasant thoughts.

Certain sicknesses come into being as a result of negative Karmic energy. 11 Understanding the Law of Impermanence and the Buddhist Karmic Theory helps one faces such situation with Equanimity and detachment.

Achieving business success and prosperity will surely bring forth riches and happiness. While enjoying such fortune do not let your mind be obsessed with excessive greed and egoism. Wealth is not permanent and attachment produces unhappiness. Having seen it through wisdom, enjoy such abundance with a balanced mind.

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9 Puṭṭhassa lokadhammehi – Cittaṃ yassa na kampati, Asokam virajam khema – Etam maṅgalamuttamam (Maṅgala Sutta; Sutta Nipāta)
10 Yathindakhilo paṭhaviṃ sito siyā – Ctubbhi vātebhī asampakampiyo (Ratana Sutta, Sutta Nipāta)
11 Kammavipākā ābādhā (Girimānanda Sutta, Aṅguttara Nikāya)
Breaking up from a romantic love affair undoubtedly causes one to be sorrowful. While an enchanting relationship brings happiness, it is also bound up with suffering. Sooner or later we will have to be separated from each other, either when we are living or in death. Having seen this through wisdom, the wise ones maintain calm and mental composure even in difficult moments of grief-stricken separation.

Equanimity is to be cultivated in our day to day life. Rational thinking combines with Love and Compassion reduce predisposition and favouritism in our mind. It helps to develop Equanimity.

An effective meditation to develop Equanimity is to reflect and contemplate on the three Marks of Existence – Impermanence, Suffering, Soullessness.

**Impermanence**

Having done preliminary preparations for meditation, mindfully contemplate the changing nature of our body and mind. Whether we notice or not, moment by moment, time is passing. Whether we like it or not, little by little, things are changing within us and around us.

Our physical body is constantly changing. Getting old, falling sick and death are only some of the key milestones that mark
these changes. Our mind is also fleeting and it changes faster than the body.

Our eyes are impermanent. What we see through our eyes is also impermanent. When our eyes come into contact with visual objects, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness arise. They too are impermanent, subject to change and will eventually disappear.

When we are not aware of this mind body process, we take things to be permanent. We attach to them ignorantly unknowing that such attachment produces unhappiness.

Conversely, when we see the things in the light of impermanence, we react to them with detachment. Detachment leads to the development of Equanimity, peace and happiness.

In this meditation practice, the rest of the sense faculties, their sense stimuli, and mental process arise therefrom, are also to be seen similarly, in the light of impermanence.

**Suffering**

Suffering is produced by attachment. When pleasurable, favourable, pleasant situations arise in our life, we cling to them with greed. We want them to remain by our sides forever but they will change and soon disappear. When
they change, unhappiness arises in the mind because of our attachment to them and our lack of wisdom to see their impermanent nature.

When miserable, disagreeable, unpleasant situations arise in life, we cling to them with hatred. We do not see that they are impermanent because of our ignorance. When we attach to them, we prolong our suffering.

When we see suffering and its causes in the light of impermanence, we develop detachment. Detachment leads to Equanimity, peace and happiness.

**Soullessness**

The concept of ‘I, me and mine’ gives birth to self-centred blind attachment, which is the deepest root of human unhappiness. We take our personalities to be permanent. Believing in a permanent soul of ‘I, me and mine’ arises because of ignorance; not seeing things as they really are.

This mind body process is in fact nothing more than just functionally unified psychophysical energies which are in constant flux. They are classified into five groups of energies, namely the material energy, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness. They all are impermanent and undergo momentary changes.
When we are not aware of this mind body process, we cling to them blindly, with the notion of ‘I, me and mine’. But when we see these five groups of energies in the light of momentary changes, we will tend to develop a detached and selfless attitude. This leads to Equanimity, peace and happiness.

In essence, seeing the impermanence of sense pleasures reduces Greed and strengthens Detachment. Understanding that the suffering which living beings experience, urges us to give up Hatred and generate Compassion. Realizing the Soullessness diminishes Ignorance and thereby produces Wisdom.

As to what extent someone can reduce the greed, hatred and ignorance depends largely to the level that he can overcome them. As his gradual conscientious effort to weaken his defilements brings fruition, he will correspondingly become a happier, noble, more compassionate and enlightened human being.

Development of Boundless Love, Great Compassion, Appreciative Joy and Perfect Equanimity produce happiness efficiently. They have two functions. On the one hand, they prevent unhappiness from arising by mitigating unwholesome defilements in the mind. On the other, they provide the favourable ground for wholesome qualities such as gratitude,
tolerance, forgiveness, goodwill, generosity, respect, honesty, truthfulness, understanding and all the other virtues to arise. The favourable outcome of this positive wholesome development of the mind is sublime, peaceful, serene happiness.

Our thoughts are the roots of all our spoken words and conduct. In persistently cultivating these four divine virtues in our mind they will provide the fertile ground for happy thoughts, happy words and happy actions to flourish. As it is said:

‘Watch your thoughts, for they become words.  
Watch your words, for they become actions.  
Watch your actions, for they become habits.  
Watch your habits, for they become character.  
Watch your character, for it becomes your destiny’.  

Happy Words

Everyone loves to hear pleasant, truthful and beautiful words as they bring so much joy and happiness. These words are full of love and compassion, uttered with delight, expressed

from a peaceful balanced mind. The Buddha says ‘just as a beautiful flower, colourful and fragrant, so is the well spoken words which is fruitful in action’.\textsuperscript{13}

Language is the most powerful tool which human beings have ever created to communicate with each other. Words have got equal power to wound or heal, build or destroy, for peace or violence.

The Buddha emphasizes the importance of using words in a positive, constructive and wholesome way. Such words unite the divided, console the distressed, settle the dispute and create lasting peace to bring enormous joy and happiness.

Right speech is one of the training factors in the Noble Eightfold Path that Buddhists cultivate to become supremely blissful human beings. It has two distinctive features. In one aspect, we are expected to avoid words which create unhappiness. They are the negative, destructive, unwholesome words expressed through lying, harsh speech, malicious speech and frivolous talk.

In the other aspect, we should earnestly train ourselves to speak positive, constructive, wholesome words. These two

\textsuperscript{13} Yathā’pi rucirām pupphaṁ - Vāṇavantaṁ sagandakaṁ, Evaṁ subhāsitā vācā - Saphalā hoti sakubbato (Dhammapada 52)
aspects of Right speech, once functionally unified, produce peace, happiness and joy in our daily living.

**Truthful Words**

Speak truthful words. They create trust, destroy suspicion and produce happiness. No one likes to be cheated or be deceived. Under such circumstances, we naturally become upset and angry. So do the others.

People who speak the truth are generally well respected. They uphold righteous principles. They are honest to themselves as well as to the others. This nature of honesty and truthfulness enhances self-respect and dignity. This admirable attribute thus creates positive wholesome condition in the mind for peace and happiness to arise.

Those who speak the truth possess love and compassion. They do not wish to create any unhappiness or unpleasant feelings in others. Hence they refrain from lying and are dedicated to authenticity.

When a truthful person reflects and understands that he has not deceived anyone through his speech, spiritual joy and happiness arises in his mind. Such happiness is far more superior to that derived from sense pleasure.
Being truthful is a Bodhisatta $^{14}$ practice. Once we uphold this noble principle of speaking truthful words, we tend to be virtuous and open in our actions. This is essential for the development of spiritual happiness.

Those who speak truthful words, develop a tendency within themselves to realize Nibbāna, the blissful state of the ultimate truth.

Pleasant Words

Speak pleasant words. These words are pleasing to the ear, softly and politely spoken with love and compassion will gladden the hearts of many. Even your pet dog or cat will be pleased to hear such words.

Knowingly or unknowingly, we may have hurt the feelings of others by our harsh, rude, mean and sarcastic speech. During such times, we ruin relationships, lose business opportunities or create uncalled for issues or problems because of such impolite loud speech.

$^{14}$ A being destined to attain supreme enlightenment. A Bodhisatta passes through many existence and different stages of spiritual perfection before his last birth in which he achieves supreme enlightenment.
Self-dignity is dear to everyone. Belittling and disparaging words create much bitterness. Hence, always speak politely with due respect to others.

The Buddha says ‘Pleasant speech is a great blessing’. It brings joy, happiness and success. The one who speaks pleasantly is well loved by everyone. Pleasant words attract the ears of others and you will be heard.

Speak with love. Words are beautiful when spoken with love, goodwill and friendship. They build new relationships, repair and renew damaged bonds, strengthen the weakened friendship and affirm the established ones. They bring enormous peace and happiness to everyone.

Speak compassionately. Words spoken in such a manner have a soothing effect; they relieve suffering in the human heart. Speak words which give courage and hope to those who are dejected in life. Lend your ears to those who are distressed. Console the grief-striken and lift the spirits of those who are depressed. Such words of Compassion bring much happiness to yourself and others.

15 Subhāsitā ca yā vācā – Etaṁ maṅgala muttamaṁ (Maṅgala Sutta, Sutta Nipāta)
Speak joyful words. They bring forth happiness through the uttering of appreciative words. Acknowledge and admire the virtues, skills and successes of others but be mindful to avoid flattery. Praise graciously and sincerely to those who are worthy of commend. Words uttered with Appreciative Joy and benevolent thoughts bring forth peace and happiness to the speaker as well as the audience.

Speak unbiasedly. Words that contribute to fanaticism and prejudices create miseries. Words spoken with a balanced mind are truthful and righteous. They create favourable conditions for peace and justice. The result is therefore overall well-being and happiness.

**Peaceful Words**

Peaceful words are soothing to the ears. They calm the mind, unite the people and tame the defilements to prevent violence. These are the words uttered by the cultured, praised by the wise, intended to create harmony. Joy and happiness thus arise from such speech.

Peaceful people are always happy as peace and happiness go hand in hand. Make peace with yourself first and then you will be at peace with the rest of the world.
Happiness is where peace is; be it at home, workplace, society, country or the world at large. Peaceful words are the outcome of peaceful thoughts of Love and Compassion.

To the Buddha, happiness comes from peace. He says ‘Happy is the unity of the Saṅgha Community. Happy is the spiritual life of the united’.  

‘The Buddha, being himself perfectly peaceful, teaches the Dhamma to others for the purpose of achieving perfect peace’. Throughout his life, the Buddha only spoke peaceful words. He united those who were separated, settled the disputes, intervened wars and established peace and happiness.

Speak harmonious words with mutual respect, shower care towards one another and selectively see the virtues and goodness in everyone. Such words therefore reap harmonious happiness.

After the passing away of the Buddha, his body was cremated. Eight kingdoms of ancient India claimed the right to have the

16 Sukhā saṅghassa sāmaggī - Samaggānaṁ tapo sukho (Dhammapada 194)
17 Santo so bhagavā samatāya dhammaṁ deseti (Cūḷasaccaka Sutta, No 35, Majjhima Nikāya)
remains of the Buddha’s body. Over this dispute they were about to go for war. At that crucial moment, Brahmin \(^{18}\) Dona addressed the crowd with these remarkable words.

‘Listen Lords, let me say one sentence. Our Buddha was a peace loving person.’ \(^{19}\)

These few words settled the dispute. The Buddha relics were then divided into eight portions and stupas were built in the respective kingdoms. Speak in such a way to unite the divided, to prevent segregation and to reinforce harmony. Such words are a great blessing to the world.

**Meaningful Words**

Time is precious as life is short. Hence valuable time must be used meaningfully for cultivation to be a noble human being. Speaking meaningful words is vital to meaningful living.

Although we are gifted with the most powerful verbal tool of communication, we sometimes fail to use the words in an effective and meaningful way. The Buddha emphasizes

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18 A man of the Brāhmaṇa caste
19 Sunantu bhonto mama ekavākyāṁ – Amhāka Buddhho ahū khantivādo (Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, No 16, Dīgha Nikāya)
speaking meaningful words to the maximum level when he says ‘Monks, when you get together, speak meaningful words (Dhamma), or observe noble silence’.  

Talking is one of the major activities we do in everyday life. It is essential in our social communication in every aspect of the human life. When we take time to reflect, we will notice that we often waste our precious time engaging in idle chattering which gives rise to negative defilements in our mind. This however does not mean that we should totally avoid casual exchanges with our friends or acquaintances. We just have to be mindful to engage in useful, meaningful and friendly dialogue with them.

Commenting on the value of meaningful speech, the Buddha says ‘One useful word, the hearing of which brings about serenity, is superior to a thousand words which do not conduce to well-being’. 

Words which are wise, full of wholesome meaning, spoken with mindfulness, intended for benevolent outcome, are meaningful words. The Buddha’s teachings are full of such

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20 Sannipatitānāṁ vo bhikkhave dvyaṁ karanīyaṁ, dhammi vā kathā, ariyo vā tunhībhāvoti (Rāja Sutta, Udāna, Khuddaka Nikāya)

21 Sahassampi ce vācā – Anaṭṭha pada saṁhitā, Ekaṁ atthapadaṁ seyyo – Yaṁ sutvā upasammati (Dhammapada 100)
words known as Dhamma. ‘It is a great blessing in life to speak such words whenever the right time arises.’

Speak wisely and mindfully at suitable time to promote right understanding and knowledge. Speak clearly to prevent misunderstanding, misinterpretation, confusion and conflicts. Express your thoughts in a simple yet effective way.

Speak words which are full of wholesome meaning to encourage and motivate positive, wholesome actions and behaviour. Such beneficial results thus bring joy and happiness to everyone. People who are dedicated to such speech are blissful.

The Buddha says ‘The person who imbibes the Dhamma lives in happiness. The wise man, with a mind made serene, constantly takes delight in the Dhamma, declared by the Enlightened Ones.’

Words which are truthful, peaceful, pleasant and meaningful are worthy to be remembered, worthy to be recorded, worthy to be repeated, for the simple reason that such words bring peace, happiness and overall well-being to many.

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22 Kālena dhammasakacchā – Etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ (Maṅgala Sutta, Sutta Nipāta)

23 Dhammapiṭi sukhaṃ seti – Vippasannena cetasā, A riyappavedite dhamme – Sadā ramati paṇḍīto (Dhammapada 79)
Happy Actions

The state of happiness or unhappiness depends greatly on one’s own actions. The Buddha says ‘with a pleasant mind, if one were to say or do something, the happiness will follow him like one’s own shadow.’

Pleasant actions, motivated by Love, Compassion, Appreciative Joy and Equanimity, intended to bring forth benevolent outcomes of overall well-being are wholesome actions. These are the actions that bring forth peace and happiness.

Wise people choose to do right actions to bring happiness to themselves and others. The Buddha said to Venerable Rāhula ‘Just like one reflects one’s own image in the mirror, one should reflect carefully one’s own thoughts, words and actions before they are carried out, so as to bring happiness for everyone’.

Right Action and Right Livelihood are the two factors of the Noble Eightfold Path which followers of the Buddha practise in training themselves to become noble, wise and happy human beings.

24 Manasā ce pasannena – Bhāsati vā karoti vā,
Tato nāṃ sukhamanveti – Chāyāva anapayini (Dhammapada 2)
25 Ambalaṭṭhikārāhulovāda Sutta; No 61; Majjhima Nikāya
The Buddha says ‘It is good to do such actions, wherein one does not regret having done them, and which bring happiness and joy as their results’.26

Make it a habit in your daily living to do pleasant, peaceful, beneficial actions whenever possible. Be happy and reflective before you do such actions. Be happy and mindful while doing and be happy and rejoiceful after having done so.

Start with simple, wholesome actions. Do not belittle the power of such actions thinking that they are small and insignificant. Like drops of water, when collected together can form a huge lake. Little by little, wise people practise doing good to build joyful, pleasant and wholesome characters. In doing wholesome actions with a happy heart, one accumulates merits blissfully.

**Kind Actions**

When we express our pleasant thoughts of love, friendship, good-will and compassion through our body, they become kind actions. Such simple kind actions, when spontaneously done, are lovingly welcomed by everyone. These random acts

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26 Taṉca kammaṁ katuṁ sādhu – Yaṁ katvā nānutappati, Yassa patito sumano – Vipākāṁ paṭisevati (Dhammapada 68)
of kindness done with pure thoughts bring forth serenity and peaceful joy may become the most joyful incident of your day.

Suppose you are waiting for a taxi in a queue, having noticed the person behind you is feeling unwell, you offer to let him get into the taxi first. With good-will and kind thoughts in mind, such small connection taps into the power of simple gladness.

Seeing a hurried mother with her baby rushing through a drizzle, you give your umbrella to her. Out of kindness from your heart, you know she needs it more than you do.

Such simple random acts of kindness bring tremendous joy. Hence, always look out for opportunities to do such beautiful deeds and when doing so, bear joyful and pleasant thoughts.

**Generous Actions**

We are by nature self-centred creatures. Such inclination of attachment makes us narrow-minded. However, we too have the ability to be selfless where detachment, peace and happiness can be developed.

The happiness arising from generosity and selflessness is far more superior to that resulting from possessions and
attachments. Make a personal choice to be selfless and generous. The actions arising from such selflessness and generosity will result in greater happiness.

Suppose you had bought some snacks after your lunch and you gave them to your colleagues with a smiling face and generous thoughts. Such practices may seem commonly trivial but we should be mindful not to do so out of obligation or with ulterior motives. Do not expect anything in return other than having the joyful intent of giving.

While travelling in a train, having seen an elderly person walk in and you selflessly offer your seat. If you have acted with sincere thoughts of caring and sharing, you will definitely feel happy.

Do not ever feel regretful in doing wholesome deeds. They are the most beautiful, pleasant actions that human beings are capable of. Our abilities to do so differentiate us from other species. These actions form the base of our spiritual happiness.

**Noble Service**

To some people, the purpose of life is doing ‘Noble Service’. There are great human beings who dedicate their entire lives
for the well-being, peace and happiness of all the living beings. They serve their fellow beings far beyond all boundaries.

Great Bodhisattvas dedicate their lives for noble service out of great compassion towards all the sentient beings. Serving others with noble thoughts and pure intentions bring forth great happiness in one’s life. A journey of hundred miles starts with a single step. As such, start serving others in simple undertakings; extend help to whoever in need, wherever and whenever possible.

In a shopping mall, having seen someone drop some items on the floor accidentally, out of good-will, you help to pick them up. Although it is just a simple gesture, it shows your care and kindness towards others.

Having found a hand phone in a washroom, you take the trouble to find the owner and hand it over. Having pleasant and joyful feelings in mind, we acted not in obligation or out of duty but as a noble service to help the distressed owner.

The above examples of spontaneous beautiful actions will not only enrich your day but also strengthen your virtues. Living your life with such wholesome attitude greatly contribute to your happiness. When you develop an instinctive caring disposition of helping others joyfully, you will find numerous
opportunities to extend your assistance wherever you are. This valuable source of happiness will not only transform you into a better human being but also as a glorious light to the world.
Buddhism is a Message of Happiness

Buddhism is the outcome of a human struggle in search of supreme happiness. The priceless message of happiness is revealed in “The Four Noble Truths”. It explains why human beings experience unhappiness even when they enjoy immense power, bountiful wealth, great glory, delightful pleasure and all the materialistic luxuries. It also points out the supreme types of happiness that human beings are capable of achieving by developing their ethical, spiritual and intellectual faculties.

Buddhism is a message of happiness. When bidding farewell to his first sixty enlightened monks who were to head out in different directions to spread His message of happiness, the Buddha said ‘Go forth, O Bhikkhus, for the good of the many, for the happiness of many, out of compassion for the world, for the good, benefit and happiness of gods and men. Let not two go by one way. Preach, O Bhikkhus, the Dhamma, excellent in the beginning, excellent in the middle, excellent in the end, both in the spirit and in the letter. Proclaim the holy life altogether perfect and pure’. ¹

¹ Mahāvagga Pāli
The Buddha talks about gross level material happiness derived from sense pleasures as well as subtle level spiritual happiness through mental cultivation. In the Bahuvedanīya Sutta\(^2\) the Buddha mentioned the ten types of Happiness that the human beings can enjoy; starting from sense pleasure, gradually ascending to various levels of sublime happiness and culminating in ultimate bliss of Nibbāna.

Buddhism is a systematized agenda designed to bring happiness to every aspect of the human life. It teaches us how to achieve happiness in three different stages:-

(1) Happiness in this life.
(2) Happiness in the future lives
(3) Ultimate Happiness

**Happiness in this Life**

To enjoy happiness within this earthly life is the immediate goal of Buddhist practice. As such, in order to lead a happy and peaceful life, we need to create favorable conditions in all aspects of our daily living. Economic prosperity, political stability, social integrity, religious and social harmony and

\(^2\) No 59, Majjhima Nikāya
interdependent co-existence are some of the aspects that Buddhism focuses in creating happiness.

**Wealth and Happiness**

Poverty is never glorified by the Buddha. He says, ‘Monks, poverty is a misery for those people who are seeking happiness through sense gratification.’ The Buddha therefore encourages his lay disciples, by all the means, work hard to achieve personal wealth. Accumulating economic wealth is a materialistic mean to happiness. Everyone yearns to live comfortable and lavish life to enjoy sense pleasures and satisfaction. To realize this, acquiring monetary wealth is therefore indispensable.

However, the Buddha discourages excessive attachment to such financial wealth. He particularly emphasizes earning in a righteous manner and spending in meaningful ways.

From the Buddhist point of view, the purpose of achieving material wealth is to spend for the well-being and happiness of oneself and others. When wealth is not spent for these two purposes, it is considered as wastage.

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3 Dāliddiyam bhikkhave dukkham lokasmiṃ kāmabhogino (Ina Sutta, Āṅguttara Nikāya)
One day, Dīghajānu came to the Buddha and said, ‘Venerable Sir, we are laypeople who enjoy sensual pleasures, dwelling at home in a bed crowded with children, enjoying fine sandalwood, wearing garlands, scents and unguents, accepting gold and silver. Let the Blessed One teach the Dhamma to us in a way that will lead to our welfare and happiness both in the present life and in the future life as well.’

In his reply to Dīghajānu, the Buddha taught how to achieve both material and spiritual wealth and to be happy in this life and lives to come.

In this Sutta, the Buddha emphasizes four essential qualities that lead to economic prosperity. They are Persistent Effort, Watchfulness, Good Friendship and Balanced life.

**Persistent effort**

Material wealth is to be achieved through working hard diligently. Persistent effort is essential for those who seek financial success and happiness in life. By no means does Buddhism encourage idleness, negativity and inactivity. The Buddha says, ‘A man who is fond of sleep, engage in idle

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4 Vyagghapajja Sutta, Aṅguttara Nikāya
gossip, unenergetic, lazy, full of negative and destructive thoughts, is bound to downfall’.⁵

Like the bees that collect pollen diligently and the white ants which build huge ant hills laboriously, energetic people must work tirelessly to achieve economic prosperity in the righteous ways.

Those who are endowed with ‘persistent effort, mindfulness, pure in conduct, discriminative in action, and self-restrained, their fame and success are increased’.⁶

Slothful people will easily and conveniently attribute that prosperity as a matter of striking good luck. Such lame excuses for their slack work attitude will bring no accomplishment. Abandoning such ideas of fate or luck, one should give a worthy try and work his hardest. Having tried, if one should still fail, then there is nothing to regret about as he has had tried his very best.⁷

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⁵ Niddásli sabhásili – Anuṭṭhātā ca yo naro, Alaso kodhapaññāno – Tam parābhavato mukham (Parābhava Sutta, Sutta Nipāta)
⁶ Uṭṭhānavato satimato – Sucikkamma nisammakārino, Saññatassa ca dhammajīvino – Appamattassa yaso bhivaḍḍhati (Dhammapada 24)
⁷ Udyoginām purushaṁhamupayti lakṣhmī – Dayvena deyamitikā kāpurushā vadanti, Dayvam nihaṁ kuru pavrushātmanāvadapakṣī – Yatne krute yadi na siddhyati korta doṣah (Hitopadesa)
Watchfulness

Riding on the waves of prosperity, good fortune and richness can come forth abundantly. However, the wealth can also be easily dwindled away as quickly especially when one is not watchful. We must therefore be extra mindful of our saving and spending habits.

Destruction comes faster than creation. Ample fortune is easy to splurge but laborious to earn and accumulate. Those who are seeking prosperity must be careful not to fall into such pitfalls that lead to misery. The Buddha says, “One who addicts to womanizing, drinks and drugs and involve in gambling will waste whatever wealth he earns. It is a cause of downfall.”

Your worldly wealth can also be destroyed by flood, fire or any other natural disasters. It can be taken away by thieves or unloved ones as well. Hence, taking precautionary and necessary measures to protect your wealth is crucial.

8 Itthidutto surādhutto – Akkhadutto ca yo naro, Laddham iaddham vināseti – Tam parabhavato mukham. (Parabhava Sutta, Sutta Nipāta)
Good friendship

‘Having good friends is a great blessing’. Buddhist economic prosperity is to be achieved within spiritual framework, if one were to be genuinely happy.

Our company of friends influences us either in a good or bad way. If we were to keep some rotten tomatoes among the fresh ones, they too may become bad very quickly. Hence, it is important that we identify the noble ones who will influence us in positive, constructive and wholesome ways.

Noble friends are full of compassion and wisdom. They lift us up when we are feeling down. They admonish us when we make mistakes. They stand and stay by us regardless of our economic situation. Having such friends bring great successes and joy to our lives.

Balanced life

A balanced life is not an option but a must on the journey to happiness. Wealth management is important for financial prosperity. To achieve gradual success, the Buddha teaches a very simple but practical way to manage one’s wealth.

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9 Paññitānañ ca sevanā (Mānga라는 Sutta, Sutta Nipāta)
He says ‘One’s monthly income is to be divided into four portions. One portion is to spend for day to day expenditure while two portions are to be invested to get more wealth. The last portion is to be deposited for emergency use’.

Although this is not a fantastic fiscal theory when we compare with the modern wealth management strategies, it does serve the intended purpose. In a nutshell, if we want to be economically stable and happy now and in time to come, we need to live within our budget and accumulate our wealth in successive stages.

A balanced life also means achieving equilibrium in material and spiritual growth. Just like a bird which needs two wings to fly, we need to achieve both material and spiritual wealth in order to be prosperous and happy human beings.

In his instructions to Dīghājānu, the Buddha mentioned faith, virtue, charity and wisdom as the essential qualities that bring happiness in this life as well as in the future.

Sensual happiness and earthly wealth are interconnected. Those who become rich following the Buddhist path to

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10 Ekena bhoge bhesioneyya - Dzihi kammam payojaye, Catuttañca nidhepeyya - Apadasu bhavissati (Sigalaka Sutta, No 31, Dīgha Nikāya)
financial prosperity are fortunate to enjoy four types of happiness. ¹¹

Happiness of having wealth acquisition is what a rich Buddhist can enjoy. When he reflects on how he has achieved his economic success through tireless efforts and diligence, he feels a great sense of accomplishment. All his weariness of hardship disappears. He feels a strong sense of joy, satisfaction, security and proud ownership of his worldly riches.

Happiness of enjoyment is what a generous Buddhist can enjoy. When he can spend at will to live a comfortable luxurious life, provide lavishly for his cherished wife, children, parents, loved ones and donate generously for the benefits of society, he feels tremendous joy and happiness derived from his immense wealth.

Happiness of a debt-free life is what an industrious Buddhist can enjoy. If one were to obediently follow the financial advice given by the Buddha and eventually become economically successful, there is no way for him to run into debt. When he reflects that he is debt-free, not owing anyone in big or small loans, he truly enjoys the financial freedom and feels a deep sense of ease and security.

¹¹ Anāna Sutta, Anguttara Nikāya
Happiness of living a blameless life is what a noble Buddhist can enjoy. When he reflects that he has earned his wealth through righteous means in accordance to the statutory laws, without harming any living being or destroying the environment, he enjoys the tranquil bliss and happiness of a righteous life.

Wealth is a means to happiness but by itself, it is not. As such, in our process of acquiring wealth, we must be mindful not to sacrifice our happiness.

**People-friendly governments**

People-friendly governments that work for the progress in every aspect of human life are essential for happiness. The Buddhist legend of human social evolution mentioned that the first ruler, King ‘Mahā Sammata’, was appointed by the people to administer the society for their well-being and happiness.

According to the Buddhist political thought, it is the prime duty of the governing body to work for the development of social, ethical, educational, economic and overall well-being and happiness of its citizens.

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12 The People’s choice
13 Aggañña Sutta, No 27, Dīgha Nikāya
Happiness and peace are inseparable. We need a peaceful society to live a happy life. The Buddha says in Cakkavattisihanada Sutta\textsuperscript{14} that crime and immorality could arise from poverty. The government should therefore provide lawful protection to all citizens including animals. The Sutta further suggested economic development and upholding of the Five Righteous Principles\textsuperscript{15} to stop and prevent crimes so as to create a safe and peaceful society for its people to live happily and harmoniously.

Worldly happiness is inevitably connected to economic prosperity. It is therefore one of the main responsibilities of a government to develop the country economically so as to provide the citizens with employment opportunities to achieve economic prosperity and success.

In the Kūṭadanta Sutta, the Buddha related an incident that happened in dim distant past. Due to the negligence of the ruler, the economy of his country went downhill. In the poverty-stricken society, crimes broke out throughout the country. The citizens became woeful and miserable. To resolve the issues resultanty, the Bodhisattva advised King Mahāvijita as follows...

\begin{itemize}
\item[14] No 26, Dīgha Nikāya
\item[15] The Five Precepts – Refraining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, lying and taking intoxicating drinks and drugs
\end{itemize}
'To those in the kingdom who are engaged in cultivating crops and raising cattle, let your Majesty distribute grain and fodder; to those in trade, give capital; to those in government service assign proper living wages. Then those people, being intent on their own occupations, will not harm the kingdom. Your Majesty’s revenues will be great, the land will be tranquil and not beset by thieves and the people, with joy in their hearts, will play with their children, and will dwell in open houses.'  

In the Jātaka stories, there are ten suggested royal duties for the government to carry out for the happiness of the people. The rulers and the governments are advised to be liberal, upholding ethical principles, sacrificing for the wellbeing of the citizens, being honest and gentle, restraint, being free from hatred and violence, endowed with patience and friendliness. If any government were to practise these virtues, the ultimate outcome would bring peace and happiness to the people.

The Buddha taught the seven conditions of welfare to the rulers of the Vajji Republic. They were conducive for unity,

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16 Kūṭadanta Sutta, No 05, Dīgha Nikāya
17 Previous birth stories of the Buddha
18 Charity, morality, altruism, honesty, gentleness, self-control, non-anger, non-violence, forbearance and uprightness
19 Conduct regular meetings, work and disperse as a team, follow the law of the country, obey the elders, respect the women-folk, follow the religious customs, respect the clergy and held them in veneration
sovereignty, peace and happiness of any government and its people. The Buddha said as long as the Vajji rulers practised those principles, their nation would be a prosperous and happy one.  

**A Righteous Society**

Living in a crime-free society is the dream of peace-loving people. The Government imposes law and order to prevent crimes. Religions provide the ethical principles to tame the animal-like nature of the human mind. Buddhism recommends the Five Ethical Principles (The Five Precepts) in order to create crime-free and peaceful societies. The Buddha says ‘by protecting oneself, one protects others and by protecting others, one protects oneself’.  

No one can be happy without the feeling of security and safety. It is through upholding of the righteous principles that the society can be safe. The people can then live harmoniously and the peace will serve as the solid foundation for happiness and prosperity to thrive.

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20 Mahāparinibbāna Sutta, No 16, Dīgha Nikāya  
21 Aṭṭānaṁ, bhikkhave, rakkhanto param rakkhati. Param rakkhanto aṭṭānaṁ rakkhati (Sedaka Sutta, Satipaṭṭhānasāṁyutta, Saṁyutta Nikāya)
First of the Five Ethical Principles is to ‘refrain from killing.’ Every human action has its reactions to the society and environment. We should not cause others to suffer if we want to be happy. ‘All tremble at punishment. All are frightened of death. Comparing others with oneself, one should neither kill, nor cause to be killed’ says the Buddha.  

Hence, one who abstains from violence not only provides safety for the uncountable number of living beings, he also provides the safeguarded ground for them to live happily.

‘Having given up killing, laid aside rods and weapons, being gentle and kind, he lives with a heart full of compassion towards all the living beings.’ Such a man is truly a blessing to society.

The second ethical principle is ‘refraining from taking what is not given.’ It includes stealing, robbery, fraudulence and all the other types of deceits. The Buddha condemns theft in saying ‘In the village or in the jungle, whatever belongs to

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22 Sabbe tasanti daṇḍassa – Sabbe bhāyanti maccuno, Aṭṭānaṁ upamāṁ katvā – Na haneyya na ghataye (Dhammapada129)
23 Paṇātipātāṁ paḥāya paṇātipātā paṭivirato hoti. Niḥitatando niḥitasattho lajñi dayāpanno sabbapānabhūtahitānukampī viharati (Sāleyyaka Sutta, No 41, Majjima Nikāya)
others, through theft (one) takes what is not given - know him as an outcaste.’

In a society where people live with honest hearts, earning decent and lawful livelihood and knowing that one’s property is well secured, they feel ease and comfort. Living in such a decent society is truly a blessing.

Loving relationship based on mutual understanding and trust is a joyful one. Such married couples will bring up noble children who will in turn contribute to the society in many wholesome ways. Protecting this beautiful relationship of a loving couple and providing them a healthy, social and ethical environment to grow as a family is the main purpose of the third precept of ‘refraining from sexual misconduct’. Observance of this precept will prevent adultery, seduction, molestation and all types of sexual abuses.

Buddhism recognizes sexual desire as one of the strongest among sensual cravings. A marriage is a union of a couple to share their lives together and to satisfy each other’s sensual desires within the accepted social norms and law of the country. The moment one party destroys the trust by breaking this Precept, the foundation of the marriage shatters.

24 Gāme vā yadi vāraññe - Yam paresam mamāyitaṁ,
Theyyā adinnam ādiyati - Tām jaññā vasalo iti (Vasala Sutta, Sutta Nipāta)
thereby creating heaps of unhappiness and grievances. In the
discourse of the Downfall, the Buddha mentions:

‘Dissatisfied with his wife, he is seen among courtesans; He
is seen among others’ wives - That is a cause of downfall of
a man.’

To live in a society where personal relationship is treasured
and respected, happiness will surely prevail. Living in such
a society is truly a blessing.

Communication is fruitful when truthful words are exchanged
in good-will. In society where people have mutual trust in
each other’s words and to treat everyone with dignity and
respect, is the targeted goal of the fourth Precept of ‘refraining
from lying’.

No one likes to be cheated or deceived. The purpose of
beneficial communication is destroyed when people tell lies.
Truthful words not only establish trust and respect, they
are also of significant importance to the establishment and
maintenance of peace and happiness.

25 Sehi dārehi santuṭṭho – Vesiyāsu padissati,
Dissati paradāresu – Tamī pariḥavato mukhaṁ (Parābhava Sutta, Sutta Nipāta)
Even though the Buddha did not include in the Five Precepts, he often spoke of the social benefits of refraining from slandering, harsh speech and gossips. Slandering divides people by destroying harmony. Harsh speech causes violence in generating hatred. In both cases, the peace in the society is adversely affected and bitter dissatisfaction comes into existence. Idle gossips bring some degree of unwholesome pleasure and it is absolutely fruitless and a total wastage of precious time.

Buddhism encourages wholesome speech which brings forth happiness to everyone. In a society, where unwholesome speech is abstained and people communicate in truthful, pleasant, friendly and meaningful words, there will definitely be much happiness. Living among such people is truly a blessing.

The consumption of intoxicating drinks and drugs brings temporary pleasure but they also bring disastrous consequences in the long run. The addiction in drugs will enslave you, destroying both your body and mind ultimately. Under the influence of such intoxicants, one loses his common sense which lead to crime breeding.

When people observe the fifth Precept to ‘refrain from taking intoxicating drinks and drugs’, they put an end to many
social, economic and family problems. The Buddha highlights six harmful results of taking such drinks and drugs; ‘one who is addicted to them lose his wealth, become quarrelsome, liable to sickness, get bad reputation, lose common sense and weaken one’s intellect.’ The collection of these harmful results is nothing but unhappiness.

Conversely, in a society where people live in avoidance of the pitfalls of intoxicating drinks and drugs consumption, such a mindful and diligent community is beneficially progressive. Living among such decent people is truly a blessing.

The Five Precepts are neither commandments nor laws imposed by the Buddha. They are, in fact, His guidelines for the wise people to follow in their seeking process of wholesome well-being and happiness in this lifetime.

**Social stability and happiness**

In a world where everything is interdependent and interrelated, our happiness naturally forms a part of this complex interwoven fabric. Unless one is spiritually advanced in his

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26 Cha kho me gahapatiputta ādīnavā surāmerayamajjamādaṭṭhānuyogo: sandhiṭṭhika dhanajāni, kalahappavaddhāni, rogāṇaṃ āyatanām, akiṭṭisājananā, kopinānīdanāni, paññāya dubbali karanītveva chaṭṭham padam bhavati (Sigālaka Sutta, N o 31, Dīgha Nikāya)
cultivation, the external environment will, to a great extent, have a direct impact on him.

Man is by nature a social living being. He loves to be in camaraderie. The Buddhist social philosophy thus focuses in creating a socially amicable environment for people to live happily.

The Buddha divides the human society into six major sections. He then teaches social ethics in the form of duties to each of these sections. Duties of one group become the rights of another group. In doing so, he creates a duty-conscious peaceful society and avoids the pitfall of fighting for rights.²⁷

Commenting on the Buddha’s social classification and ethics, Mrs. Rhys David²⁸ said ‘Happy would have been the village or the clan on the banks of the Ganges, when the people were full of kindly spirit of fellow feelings, the noble spirit of justice, which breathes through these naive and simple sayings.’²⁹

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²⁷ Sigālaka Sutta, No 31, Dīgha Nikāya
²⁸ President of the Pāli Text Society from 1923 to 1942
²⁹ Dialogues of the Buddha, Part i i
Happy Couples

To be in love with someone is joyous. Being loved by someone also brings much happiness. Man and woman are naturally attracted to each other. The Buddha says ‘No other form do I know, O monks, that so persists in obsessing the mind of a man as the form of a woman...’ The other way around is also true.

Satisfying this desire of togetherness as a married couple not only brings intimate physical sensual pleasure, they also share experiences in emotional, intellectual, social satisfaction and delight.

One day, a happy couple, Nakulapitā and Nakulamātā came before the Buddha to share their married life’s joy in saying:

‘Venerable Sir, ever since the young housewife Nakulamātā was brought home to me when I too was still young, I am not aware of having wronged her even in my thoughts, still less in my deeds. Our wish is to be in one another’s sight so long as this life lasts and in the future life as well’.

30 Nāham bhikkhave aṇṇām ekarūpampi samanupassāmi, yaṃ evaṃ purisassa cittām pariyādāya tiṭṭhati, yathayidam bhikkhave iṭṭhirūpam (Paṭhama Sutta, Aṅguttara Nikāya)
The Buddha then replied ‘If householders, both wife and husband wish to be in one another’s sight so long as this life lasts and in the future life as well, they should have the same Faith, the same Virtue, the same Generosity, the same Wisdom....’

In here, the meaning of faith is of twofold. One refers to the faith in the Triple Gem. When a couple shares similar faith in the Triple Gem, they will follow the noble path which brings forth happiness in this life and in lives to come.

The other refers to their faith in each other as a couple. When they share this faith, they are bonded in mutual trust and honesty which forms the very foundation of their union. Once this is destroyed, the marriage collapses.

A couple who seeks happiness must have equal virtues. They must be forgiving towards each other’s mistakes, letting go of grudges, sharing and caring for one another unconditionally. These are some of the essential virtues a couple needs to uphold in order to stay blissfully married.

When a couple upholds the Five Ethical Principles, they will refrain from evil. Such restraints will prevent them from being born in lower realms. Together, they cultivate the virtues of

31 Paṭhama Nakula Sutta, Āṅguttara Nikāya
compassion, good-will, honesty, tolerance and respect which will in turn bring them all the blessedness in life.

Being generous towards each other is very important in a blissful marriage. Such gesture does not just limit to showering each other with material gifts but more importantly generous in spending time with each other. Correspondingly, their common interest in being generous towards the poor and needy also generates merits which result in happiness. Such wholesome practice of giving will thus bring forth their fortunate rebirth in the cycle of existence.

Wisdom dispels ignorance. The lack of understanding and misunderstanding are two of the main root causes of many marital problems. When a couple devotes time and efforts to cultivate wisdom together, they not only find solutions to their problems but also gradually develop insight which releases them from Saṃsāric suffering. This brings forth supreme bliss and happiness.

In a marriage, the husband and wife should be complementary to each other. They are of equal status. Below are some of Buddha’s suggestions on social ethics to be practised by couples who want their marriage to be a blissful one.³²

³² Sigalaka Sutta, No 31, Dīgha Nikāya
The husband must take care of his wife by according her due respect, without belittling her, being faithful to her, giving her the authority in relevant matters and by providing her with adornments and other necessary things.

When she feels loved and cared thus, she should take good care of her husband by organizing her work properly, being kind to the servants, being faithful to her husband, protecting what he earns and being skillful and diligent in all she has to do.

If a couple were to care for each other thus, surely, they will lead a happy life. Even though these social ethics were given to couples who lived in the time of the Buddha where the husband assumed the role of breadwinner and the wife took care of household matters, we can still apply them with a little modification in today’s modern world where both husband and wife work.

**Joyful Families**

When a married couple has children, the couple-hood becomes a family. Family is the cradle of our life. It is the smallest unit of the big society. A family with strong ethical values will bring up children who will in turn contribute to the progress and happiness of the society.
A noble decent family brings joy to life. In explaining what is conducive for the happiness of a man, the Buddha says ‘To support one’s father and mother, to cherish one’s wife and children is a great blessing’.  

Happy are those families where parents and children live in loving care and concern towards each other. ‘Children are the greatest treasures for parents’ says the Buddha.

Parents dedicate their entire lives and sacrifice for the well-being and happiness of their children. They are our very first teachers who teach us moral values, language, culture among many others. With sacrificial love and care, they painstakingly bring us up and guide us to find our places in the world.

It is therefore the duty of children to reciprocate their respect, gratitude and love towards their parents. When both the parents and children fulfill their respective duties towards each other with mutual understanding and love, both groups enjoy the family bliss.

To provide the necessary conducive conditions for a joyous family, the Buddha suggests certain values in the forms of duties to be fulfilled by the parents and the children.

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33 Mātapiṭū upaṭhānam – Puṭṭadārassa saṅghahō’ (Mangala Sutta, Sutta Nipāta)
34 putṭa vaṭṭhu manussānaṃ (Vaṭṭhu Sutta, Devatāsaṃyutta, Saṃyutta Nikāya)
35 Sigalaka Sutta, No 31, Dīgha Nikāya
As suggested by the Buddha, from the very beginning of the child’s life, the parents should teach him to refrain from committing any evil deeds and persistently encourage him to do good. Giving him a good education, helping him to set up his own family and handing over the family inheritance in due time are some of the major responsibilities of the parents.

Having been supported and brought up by their parents, it is of common understanding that the grateful children should care for and to support their aged parents especially in time of need. Carrying out the duties on behalf of their parents when they are old, following the family tradition with understanding, protecting the heritage they received from parents and finally undertaking meritorious deeds in the names of their deceased parents are some of the duties expected from the children’s side.

When the parents and children are committed to their respective responsibilities, both groups will be joyous.

**Work satisfaction**

Everyone needs to earn a living. Most of our waking time is spent working either in self-employment or for others. Since this is so, job satisfaction forms a critical chunk of our overall happiness.
The ideal way to be satisfied at work is to be in an occupation which we take delight in. However, not many of us are able to have such a preference. Being the case, we either have to adjust our attitude towards the job or to search for the one where our interest lies.

The Buddha always encourages his lay disciples to engage in righteous, lawful and harmless occupations. He says ‘To be engaged in peaceful occupation is a great blessing in life’.

Dealing with drugs, weapons, poisons, butchery, slavery is condemned by the Buddha as these occupations bring much suffering and destruction. In our search for happiness, we must not cause any harm or create suffering to others.

Office politics, work stress, mental tension and many other work related issues often arise out of the lack of communication, misunderstanding and mismanagement. When the employer and employees come together with mutual understanding to strive towards a common goal, being motivated and diligent, they are most likely to succeed. Work satisfaction and happiness will be the ultimate outcome of such partnership.

36 Anākula ca kammānā – Etaṁ maṅgala muṭṭamaṁ (Maṅgala Sutta, Sutta Nīpāta)
According to the Buddha, employers must treat their workforce in five ways; to assign the job scope according to the skill sets and strength of the individual, to provide proper wages and food (allowances), to look after the employees when they are sick in granting rest day, to share the company’s rewards and to let them off work at the proper time.

In today’s highly commercialized societies, the Buddha’s words are still valid and could be implemented with minimal or no modification. On the responsibilities of employees, consideration of different treatments to different types of workers including domestic servants is required.

The Buddha suggests that employees should reciprocate the employers in the following five ways; to do their work properly, being honest and taking only what is given, being bearers of good reputation of the employer and the company and in getting up early morning and going to bed after the employer. The last two responsibilities are specifically applicable to domestic servants only.  

If both the employers and employees uphold these righteous principles and discharge their respective responsibilities dutifully towards each other, both parties will be mutually satisfied and happy.

37  Sigālaka Sutta, No 31, Dīgha Nikāya
Happiness of Friendship

Without the company of friends, life is dry and lonely. Noble friends are rare and precious like gems. Like beautiful fragrant flowers, they are full of inner beauty and virtues. Loving-kindness, Compassion, Appreciative Joy and Equanimity are the foundation for genuine and noble friendship. Such friends bring much happiness. Expounding on the benefits of having noble friends, the Buddha says:

‘Being free from anger he comes home, he lives happily in whatever assembly, he is the best of the relatives who maintain genuine friendship’.\(^{38}\) It is a great blessing to have them in your life.

The types of friends we have are therefore very influential to our lives. While noble ones bring joy and happiness, immoral companions bring momentary happiness through pleasure of sense gratification which in the long run, wreak havoc on our lives. ‘Do not keep company with evil friends’\(^{39}\) says the Buddha.

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38 Akkuddho saqharam eti – Sabhāya paṭinandito, ṇātinaṁ uttamo hoti – Yo mīṭānaṁ na dūbhati (Mīṭānīsāṁsa Sutta, Khuddaka Nikāya)
39 Na bhaje pāpake mitte (Dhammapada 78)
Some people get acquainted with us solely for their own benefits. Such friends give little but expect much in return. They take every advantage of us and pretend to be our best of friends. There are also those who are flatterers. They mainly render mere lip service; when the need for assistance arises, they give quick excuses and express their inadequacies to help. Some friends will praise us in our face but criticize behind our back. Unsavory friends will egg us into gambling, drinking, womanizing and eventually get us involved in various crimes.\textsuperscript{40}

Associating with these types of friends will spiral us downwards materially and spiritually. The outcome will be utter bitterness and miseries. The Buddha highlights ‘it is better to live alone in case we cannot find a decent friend rather than associating with immoral friends’.\textsuperscript{41}

A friend who helps you in need, does not leave you when you are in trouble, advises and admonishes you when you make mistakes and treats you with gentle kindness is a genuine noble friend. Such friends are rare to find. It is a great blessing to have them in your life.

\textsuperscript{40} Sigālaka Sutta, No 31, Dīgha Nikāya
\textsuperscript{41} Caraṇ ce nādhīgaccheyya - Seyyaṁ sadisamaṭṭano, Ekacariyaṁ dālhaṁ kayirā - N atthi bāle sahāyatā (Dhammapada 61)
The Buddha always encouraged his disciples to live happily as noble friends. When the Buddha visited Venerable Anuruddha to ask if he were living happily with spiritual friends, he was told: ‘Venerable Sir, we are living in concord, with mutual appreciation, without disputing, blending like milk and water, viewing each other with kindly eyes’.\(^\text{42}\)

The Buddha set up the monastic order as a form of spiritual fellowship for those who wish to achieve Supreme Happiness (Nibbāna) in this life itself. Once Venerable Ānanda said to the Buddha: ‘This is half of the holy life, Lord: admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie.’ The Buddha however replied ‘Don’t say that, Ānanda, don’t say that. Admirable friendship, admirable companionship, admirable camaraderie is actually the whole of the holy life. When a monk has admirable people as friends, companions and comrades, he can expect to develop and pursue the Noble Eightfold Path’.\(^\text{43}\)

Like everything else, friendship is also conditioned and interdependent. To enjoy the happiness of this companionship, we need to live in caring fellowship for each other.

\(^{42}\) Maya bhante samaggā sammodamānā avivadamānā khīrodakībhūtā aṅnāmaṅnānam piyacakkhuhi sampasantā viharāma (Cūlagosīnga Sutta, No 31, Majjhima Nikāya)
\(^{43}\) Upādīha Sutta, Maggasaṃyutta, Saṃyutta Nikāya
A genuine noble friend is thus one who takes good care of his companions through generosity, speech of kind words, looking after their welfares, treating them like he does to himself and keeping his promises.

When one treats his friends in this way, he is to reciprocate by looking after him and his property when he is inattentive, being a refuge when he is afraid, not deserting him when he is in trouble and showing concern towards his children.\(^4\)

Such noble friendship is further strengthened in putting the Buddha’s teaching into practice and is indeed a valuable source of happiness in the here and now.

**Fruitful Education**

Buddhism is a path of transformation. Bringing forth compassion and wisdom is the aim of the Buddhist teaching. On the path of transformation from childhood to adulthood, education plays a vital role. The Buddhist education emphasizes on the intellectual, moral and social development of every individual.

\(^4\) Sigalaka Sutta, No 31, Dīgha Nikāya
Modern educational system prepares the students to become productive and efficient citizens in the economic and social order. This is very important for the economic development and social stability of a country. While Buddhism acknowledges this aspect of education, it also puts a strong emphasis on the moral development of people if we were to aspire to live happily in the society.

Explaining on what brings great success and happiness in life, the Buddha says a man with ‘vast learning, vocational skills, well trained and disciplined and having pleasant speech is a great blessing’.45

Academic education and vocational training can bring great success in the material world. They bring forth development and advancement of our intellectual abilities for successes in many areas.

However, no matter how highly educated or intelligent human beings are, if they fail to uphold ethical values, the societies will produce an abundance of miseries. The term ‘well trained and disciplined’ implies bringing forth some of the human virtues like kindness, friendliness, honesty, gratitude through a process of strict discipline in upholding

45 Bāhusaccañ ca sippañ ca – Vinayo ca susikkhito, Subhāsitā ca yā vācā – Etam maṅgala muttamaṁ (Maṅga Sutta, Sutta Nipāta)
the Five Ethical Principles to tame the violent, wicked and immoral tendencies.

‘Pleasant speech’ applies to one’s social interactions with fellow human beings. His professional knowledge, relevant skills as well as kind, gentle, polite nature are expressed through his behavior in a society. A fruitful education will bring forth intellectual, moral and social advancements which are conducive for happiness in this life.

To bring out the desired results of an educational system, the teachers and students must work hand in hand. The relationship between the teacher and student during the time of the Buddha was very much different from that of today’s commercialized educational system. Nevertheless, the respective basic responsibilities outlined by the Buddha for both groups are still very much applicable.

The teachers are to discharge their responsibilities towards students in giving clear and proper instructions, making sure that the students grasp their teaching contents, giving practical training in skills, guiding them in their social circle of friends and classmates and providing security.

The students who have been well taken care of by their teachers should reciprocate in according their utmost respect
by rising to greet them, waiting on them, being attentive, by serving and learning well in all that they are taught.\textsuperscript{46}

The teachers and students who are in such caring and respectful relationships are happy and satisfied. Together they bring joy to the society through fruitful education.

**Happiness of spiritual fellowship**

The Buddha says ‘the person who practises the Dhamma lives in happiness.’\textsuperscript{47} Spiritual happiness is far more superior to that of sensual pleasure. It is to be achieved by cultivating the spiritual faculties.\textsuperscript{48} The four types of disciples\textsuperscript{49} of the Buddha form the spiritual fellowship; with mutual understanding and respect towards one another, they practise the Dhamma for the purpose of achieving bliss and happiness in this life time.

When greed, hatred and ignorance defile the mind, they inevitably affect our speech and actions. These defiled thoughts, words and actions produce much unhappiness. The Dhamma helps us to understand this nature. It also recommends a systematic way to tackle these defilements and

\begin{footnotes}
\item[46] Sigālaka Sutta, No 31, Dīgha Nikāya
\item[47] Dhammaçari sukhaṃ seti (Dhammapada168)
\item[48] Faith, Vigor, Mindfulness, Concentration, Wisdom
\item[49] Monks, Nuns, Male and Female lay disciples
\end{footnotes}
to surface the wholesome aspect of the mind so that it can become the basis for happiness.

The ultimate goal of practising the Dhamma is to attain Supreme Happiness (Nibbāna). To achieve this objective, we need to follow the process of Understanding, Practice and Realization. It is a long journey towards spiritual awakening. We therefore need to have spiritual brotherhood to tread the Noble Eightfold Path with unwavering faith, energy, understanding and dedication.

The spiritual fellowship set up by the Buddha includes both the ordained and lay disciples. Simple basic material needs of the ordained disciples are taken care of by the lay Buddhist community. In return the Buddhist monks and nuns serve the society by providing spiritual guidance as Dhamma teachers.

The Buddha suggests six ways for the monks and nuns to take care of the lay disciples; they are to caution on the restraints from evil, encourage to do good, being benevolently compassionate, teach what they do not know, clarify and enhance on the already known and showing the path to the heaven.

When monks and nuns guide the lay community in this way, ordained disciples are to be taken care of with extended
kind and loving thoughts, words and deeds towards them, welcoming them and providing them with their simple material needs.\(^{50}\)

When both groups discharge their duties with benevolent hearts, they move forward as a fellowship on this spiritual path and eventually attain the blissful Nibbāna when the right time comes.

**Peaceful coexistence**

If you wish to live happily, please allow others to live peacefully as well. Racism, fanaticism and all the other extremism speak only one language. That is the language of intolerance. Such attitude divides people. And divided communities live in suspicion, fear and violence.

In the interest of peace and happiness, tolerance is one of the remarkable virtues that the Buddha encourages his disciples to uphold. The greatest Buddhist emperor, Asoka wrote ‘One should not honor only one’s own religion and condemn the religions of others, but one should honor others’ religions for this or that reason. In so doing, one helps one’s own religion to grow and render service to the religions of others too...’\(^{51}\)

\(^{50}\) Sigālaka Sutta, No 31, Dīgha Nikāya

\(^{51}\) 12th Rock Edit
Owing to the lack of understanding, suspicion brings forth lots of conflicts to a society. The Buddha addresses the issue by emphasizing the importance of having Right Understanding among the various ethnic, social, cultural and religious groups. Mutual understanding leads to tolerance, peace and happiness.

Once the Buddha was travelling with a large group of monks, closely behind them were two ascetics who were also on the same road. One ascetic criticized the Buddha while the other spoke in defense. When this incident was brought to His attention, the Buddha said:

‘Monks, if anyone should speak in disparagement of me, of the Dhamma or of the Sangha, you should not be angry, resentful or upset on that account. If you were to be angry or displeased at such disparagement, that would only be a hindrance to you. For if others disparage me ... and you are angry or displeased, can you recognize whether what they say is right or not? ...’

Here the Buddha encouraged his disciples to analyze the matters unbiasedly and to have proper understanding.

The religious tolerance which the Buddha exercised is worthily unique in the human history. The Buddha stressed

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52 Brahmajāla Sutta, No 01, Dīgha Nikāya
cooperation over competition. He accepted the values of other religions and respected the righteous principles that they represent.

**Equality of mankind**

Justice and peace together lay the foundation for happiness in a society. When human beings discriminate against each other based on caste, class, race, clan or any other social measurements, we inevitably create the conditions for unhappiness and miseries to take root. In certain societies, discrimination goes to the extent of depriving the basic human rights of some social and ethnic groups.

In Buddhism, all human beings are equal. They are entitled to equal rights in a society. To create the favorable social conditions for human beings to live happily, the Buddha preached against social injustice and discrimination. Having condemned the caste system and slavery, the Buddha encouraged meritocracy with ethical evaluation. He says ‘No one is high or low by birth but by actions’.

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53 Na jaccā vasalo hoti – Na jaccā hoti brāhmaṇo, Kammanā vasalo hoti – Kammanā hoti brāhmaṇo (Vasala Sutta, Sutta Nipāta) By birth is one not an outcaste, by birth is one not a brahmana, by action is one an outcaste, by action is one a brahmana
The Buddha, without any social discrimination, opened the doors to whoever wants to follow his teaching. His followers are treated with respect and are given equal rights in the Buddhist community.

In recognizing the different responsibilities of man and woman, the Buddha pointed out that they must have equal rights in the society. When King Kosala expressed his disappointment over the news of his queen’s delivery of a baby girl, the Buddha says:

‘A woman, O lord of the people, may turn out better than a man. She may be wise and virtuous, a devoted wife, revering her mother-in-law. The son to whom she gives birth may become a hero, O lord of the land. The son of such a blessed woman may even rule the realm’.

Happiness in future lives

From the Buddhist’s point of view, this is not the first time we live. This will also not be the last life we experience. We have had lived so many lives in the past and we will be born again and again in time to come.

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54 Dhītu Sutta, Kosalaśaṃyutta, Saṃyutta Nikāya
Birth and death are inseparable. Neither birth nor death is the absolute beginning or end of our stream of consciousness. Sooner or later, we all will have to die. However, death is not the end. It is the beginning of another life.

The Buddha says ‘All beings will die, for life ends in death. They will fare according to their deed, reaping the fruits of their merit and evil. The doers of evil go to hell, the doers of merit to a happy realm.’

Therefore one should earnestly do good as a collection of merits for his future life. Merits are the support for living beings in the other world’.

This present life is only one of the series of many lives. The cycle of birth and death will continue to infinitum as long as we have craving. The Earth is not the only place where life exists. There are many other planes of existence in this vast universe. Life can also exist either in gross or subtle level. Buddhism talks about the thirty one realms of existence where living beings can take rebirth.

55 Sabbe saṅkā marissanti – Maraṇantaṁ hi jīvitaṁ,
Yathākammaṁ gamissanti – Puññapāpāpahalūpagaṁ,
Nirayaṁ pāpākammanta – Puññakammā ca suggatiṁ.
Tasmā kareyya kalyāṇam – Nivayaṁ samparāyikam,
Puññāni paralokasmiṁ – Patiṭṭhā honti pāṇinanti
(Ayyakā Sutta, KosalaSaṁyutta, Saṁyutta Nikāya)
Buddhism is a specifically designed agenda to achieve happiness in this long journey of repeated existence while elevating the practitioners for spiritual and intellectual awakening.

We are equally capable of producing two types of energies. One is unwholesome while the other is wholesome. Unwholesome karmic energy is destructive. They are produced through actions when the mind is full of negative thoughts such as hatred, anger, cruelty, excessive greed and ignorance. Such harmful thoughts and actions will also bring forth unhappiness in lives to come. The Buddha says ‘If one were to speak or act with a polluted mind, sorrow follows one as a consequence, even as the cart wheel follows the foot of the ox that draws the cart’.56

Having understood the destructive karmic results of unwholesome actions, the Buddha therefore advises the happiness seeking human beings to ‘refrain from evil’.57

On the other hand, the wholesome karmic energy brings forth peace, happiness and well-being in the present life as well as in lives to come. Wholesome karmic energy is produced

56 Manasā ce paduṭṭhena – Bhāsati vā karoti vā,
Tato nām dukkhamanveti – Cakkam’va vahato padaṁ (Dhammapada 01)
57 Sabbapāpassa akaraṇāṁ (Dhammapada 183)
through actions when the mind is full of good qualities such as compassion, goodwill, generosity and wisdom. Hence, the Buddha’s advice for those who seek happiness is to ‘cultivate good’. 58

When one refrains from the evil and cultivates good, he creates the necessary favourable conditions for happiness. He will be born either in the human or divine realms where he will experience bliss and happiness. Even so, this type of happiness is momentary and mundane. The Buddha encourages his followers to pursue the supreme and highest happiness through the eradication of defilements. The Buddha’s advice for those who seek highest happiness is to ‘purify one’s mind’. 59

Happiness of our future lives, to a greater extent, is conditioned and is dependent on our present way of behaviour. If we choose to behave in a wholesome way through our thoughts, words and actions, we will live happily in this life and also lay the foundation for the happiness in our future lives.

58 Kusalassaupasampadā (Dhammapada 183)
59 Sacittapariyodapanātin (Dhammapada 183)
**Merit is happiness**

‘Merit’ is rejoicing and delighting over wholesome actions.\(^{60}\) A pleasant mind which is full of wholesome thoughts is the firm base for merits making. The actions we undertake with pleasant mind are meritorious deeds and such worthy actions generate great happiness. Addressing his disciples the Buddha says:

‘Monks, do not fear meritorious deeds. This is an expression denoting happiness, what is desirable, wished for, dear and agreeable, that is, meritorious deeds. For I know full well, monks, that for a long time I experienced desirable, wished for, dear and agreeable results from often performing meritorious deeds.’\(^{61}\)

Wise people who understand the benefits of merits will take every opportunity to generate merits as in increasing its accumulation will correspondingly increase one’s happiness. The Buddha points out that ‘A person who does meritorious deeds, repeatedly performs such acts finding pleasure therein; since accumulation of merits conduces to happiness.’\(^{62}\)

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60 Cittam punatti puññam (Pali Commentary)
61 Itivuttaka 22
62 Puññam ce puriso kayirā - Kayirāṭetaṃ punappunaṃ,
    Tamhi chandaṃ kayiratha - Sukho puññassa uccayo (Dhammapada118)
Why do we need merits?

Merit is the very base for happiness in this life. ‘To have done merits in the past is a great blessing’ says the Buddha.  

When the meritorious power is in its operative state, everything goes smoothly in our life. We will meet virtuous people who guide us in our endeavors. We will get favorable opportunities to achieve material and spiritual success and our overall well-being and happiness heighten. People who do merits live happily and comfortably.

The Buddha says: ‘The person who has done merits rejoices in both worlds, that is, here and here after. Here he rejoices thinking, ‘merits have been done by me’. And having gone to a blissful birth here after, as a result of his merits he rejoices exceedingly’.  

Merits open the doors of the heavens. Although some religions maintain that the heavens belong only to their particular groups of followers, Buddhism advocates that the heavens are open to all the good people who have done substantial merits regardless of their religious labels.

63 Pubbe ca katapuññatā (Maṅgala Sutta, Sutta Nipāta)
64 Idha nandati pecca nandati – Katapuñño ubhayatttha nandati,
Puññāṁ me katan ti nandati – Bhiyyo nandati suggatiṁ gato (Dhammapada 18)
Merits also create the favourable conditions for enlightenment attainment as it reduces and mitigates the defilements in the human mind. On his death bed, in addressing Venerable Ānanda, the Buddha says: ‘you have achieved lot of merits, Ānanda. Work diligently and soon you will be free from defilements’.65

Rare and difficult it is to achieve this precious human life. Those who are wise should take maximum benefits of this human life in doing meritorious actions. The Buddha encourages cultivating merits in saying ‘just as many garlands are made from a heap of flowers, so should one born to this world, do much merit.’66

Merits can be done through our thoughts, words and deeds. All our actions are rooted in the mind. When the mind is filled with wholesome thoughts, when we repeatedly generate wholesome thoughts, we are actually making merits mentally. And when these good thoughts are translated in speech and actions, we produce merits by means of words and deeds.

65 Katapuṇṇosi tvaṁ Ānanada padhānamanuyuñja, khippaṁ bhehisi anāsavo (Mahā Parinibbāna Sutta, No 16, Dīgha Nikāya)
66 Yathā’pi puppharasimhā – Kayirā mālaguṇe bahū, Evaṁ jātena maccena – Kattabbaṁ kusalaṁ bahum (Dhammapada 53)
The state of the mind plays a major role in merits making. Having a pleasant mind prior to, while doing and after having done merits, is highly commended by the Buddha. Wise people are always happy before they do something wholesome. They are often mindful and maintain the purity of the mind while they are doing the meritorious action. And when they have accomplished the good deed, they feel jubilant.

The intention, motivation and consequences of these meritorious actions are to be taken into consideration when we are making merits. All the actions which are motivated by compassion, generosity and wisdom are wholesome ones. When they are done with the intention of bringing peace, happiness and well-being, they are well directed. The inevitable consequences of these actions are therefore joyous for everyone.

Meritorious actions can be done in many ways. Any action motivated by wholesome thoughts, intended to bring well-being and beneficially fruitful is meritorious. The Buddha often talked about three types of merits. They are Dāna, Śīla and Bhāvanā. ⁶⁷

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⁶⁷ Puññakiriyavatthu Sutta, Āṅguttara Nikāya
The Pāli word ‘Dāna’ simply means Giving. Nevertheless when it comes to Buddhist practice, it encompasses much more than simple giving. It is a very specific way of giving. In Buddhist practices, one gives out of compassion, goodwill and friendship and one must bear pure and pleasant thoughts before, during and after the giving.

One should give with respect; handing out with both hands, a smiling face and without bearing any taint in belittling the recipient. He also has to give with pure thoughts and generous heart, without any attachment to the things he is giving and not bearing any ulterior motives.

Giving away gifts which we have earned through righteous and lawful means is very important. We must also be mindful to give items that are worthy to be given. Presenting the right gifts at right time to the right person makes one’s offering amply fruitful.

When we practise giving with such wholesome understanding and thoughts, it produces lots of merits which will bring forth much happiness in this present life as well as lives in the future.

The term ‘Sīla’ means Virtues. In upholding righteous principles is already a meritorious action. When one refrains
from evil, wicked actions by observing the Five Precepts and dedicates oneself to developing virtues such as compassion, goodwill, honesty and friendship, his behaviour becomes wholesome and such exemplary conduct generates great merits which are conducive for happy rebirths.

The Pali word ‘Bhāvanā’ means Mental Cultivation. There are different types of meditation subjects which can help develop different aspects of our mind. Meditation can be divided into two groups; one which develops Insight and the other develops Concentration. Both groups lay the foundations to produce merits.

Meditation practice not only diminishes unwholesome thoughts, it also cultivates the wholesome state of the mind which by itself is a meritorious deed. It brings happiness in this life and conditions the mind in a wholesome manner which will result in happy rebirths.

The generous act of giving counters greed while virtue is diametrically opposed to hatred. Meditation develops wisdom which goes against ignorance. In this way, these three types of meritorious actions weaken the unwholesome roots of the human mind and thus provide the favorable conditions for happy rebirths in future lives.
Post canonical texts include seven more specific meritorious actions to add up to the ‘Ten Meritorious Deeds’. They are ‘honoring others, offering service, sharing merits, rejoicing in other’s merits, listening the Dhamma, teaching the Dhamma and straightening one’s view according to the Dhamma.’

Taking a closer look, we can see that all these meritorious actions are to weaken the negative, destructive, unethical thoughts and cultivate mind in such a wholesome way to produce happiness in the present and future lives.

Among all the meritorious deeds that are capable of producing happy rebirths in the future, the Buddha especially singles out ‘Metta Meditation’ to be the supreme. He says:

‘Just as the radiance of all the stars does not equal a sixteenth part of the moon’s radiance, but the moon’s radiance surpasses them and shines forth, bright and brilliant, even so, whatever grounds there are for making merit productive of a future birth, all these do not equal a sixteenth part of the liberation of mind by loving-kindness. The liberation of mind by loving-kindness surpasses them and shines forth, bright and brilliant.’

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68 Itivuttaka 27
Ultimate Happiness (Nibbāna)

Human beings are capable of experiencing different degrees of happiness. The Buddha specifically mentions three types of happiness:

1. Happiness arises from sense pleasures
2. Happiness arises from spiritual practice (Meditation)
3. Supreme happiness through eradication of defilements (Nibbāna)

Elaborating on the third happiness, the Buddha says ‘When a Bhikkhu whose taints are destroyed reviews his mind liberated from lust, liberated from hatred, liberated from delusion, there arises happiness. This is called happiness more spiritual than spiritual.’

Nibbāna is the ultimate goal of all Buddhist practices. It is not something to be speculated but ‘to be experienced by the wise’ by developing one’s ethical, spiritual and intellectual

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69 Nirāmisa Sutta, Vedanāsaṁyutta, Saṁyutta Nikāya
70 Ya kho bhikkhave khīnasavassa bhikkhuno rāgā cittaṁ vimuttaṁ paccavekkhato dosā cittaṁ vimuttaṁ paccavekkhato moha cittaṁ vimuttaṁ paccavekkhato uppajjati piti. Ayam vuccati bhikkhave nirāmisā nirāmisatarā piti (Nirāmisa Sutta, Vedanāsaṁyutta, Saṁyutta Nikāya)
71 Paccattam veditabbo viññūhi (Vatṭhūpama Sutta, No 07, Majjhima Nikāya)
faculties. Just as in no amount of words can describe the taste of honey unless you have actually tasted it yourself, so is the bliss of Nibbana.

Summarising the philosophy and the goal of his teachings, the Buddha says ‘Bhikkhus, both formerly and now what I teach is suffering and the cessation of suffering’.\textsuperscript{72} Nibbana is the cessation of suffering and ‘it is the highest bliss’.\textsuperscript{73}

Greed, hatred and ignorance are the root causes of all the miseries and sufferings. Eradication of all these defilements results in perfect bliss and happiness. Having uprooted these defilements perfectly, permanently and irreversibly, the Buddha uttered these paeans of joys.

‘Blissful is detachment for one who is content,
For one who has learnt Dhamma and who sees;
Blissful is non-affliction in the world,
Restraint towards living creatures.

Blissful is passionlessness in the world,
The overcoming of sensual desires;

\textsuperscript{72} Pubbe cāham bhikkhave etarahi va dukkhaṅceva paññāpemi dukkhassa ca nirodhaṃ (Ālagaddūpama Sutta, No 22, Majjhima Nikāya)

\textsuperscript{73} Nībbānāṁ paramāṁ sukhaṁ (Dhammapada 204)
But abolishing the conceit ‘I am’
That is truly the supreme bliss’. 74

Nibbāna brings such immeasurable happiness that no amount of words can express. Those who realized Nibbāna are ever so peaceful and live experiencing only bliss and happiness.

King Pasenadi of Kosala, having compared Buddhist monks with various other ascetics, expressed his pleasant thoughts over Buddhist monks, saying ‘Here, I can see Bhikkhus smiling and cheerful, sincerely joyful, plainly delighting, their faculties fresh, living at ease, unruffled, subsisting on what others give, abiding with mind as aloof as a wild deer’s’. 75

Venerable Bhaddiya, who was a former prince, having experienced Nibbānic bliss, often uttered ‘Ah, bliss! Ah, bliss!’ Witnessing so, the other monks read his exclamations to be his reminiscing of his princely past of sensual pleasures and reported the matter to the Buddha. When the Buddha questioned Venerable Bhaddiya, he said:

‘Formerly, Reverend Sir, when I was a householder and enjoyed the bliss of royalty, within and without my inner apartments, guards were appointed; within and without the

74 Mucalinda, Chapter 2, The Udāna
75 Dhammacetiya Sutta, No 89, Majjhima Nikāya
city, guards were appointed; and within and without the
district, guards were appointed. But, Reverend Sir, although
I was thus guarded and protected, I lived fearful, agitated,
distrustful, and afraid. But now, Reverend Sir, ongoing alone
into the forest, to the foot of a tree or to an empty place,
I am fearless, unagitated, confident and unafraid. I live
unconcerned, unruffled, my needs satisfied, with a mind
become like a deer’s. Seeing this Reverend Sir, prompts me,
on going to the forest…… To utter constantly, ‘Ah, what
bliss! Ah, what bliss!’

‘Truly my body is light,
Touched by much joy and happiness.
My body floats as it were,
Like cotton blown by the wind’. (Khitaka)

‘Just as a noble thoroughbred,
With swishing tail and mane,

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76 Bhaddiya, Chapter 2, The Udāna
77 Theragāthā 104
Goes with little difficulty, 
So for me the days and nights, 
Go with little difficulty, 
When spiritual happiness has been obtained. (Belatthasisa) 78

‘Suffusing the body with much joy and happiness, 
Enduring even what is harsh, 
I shall dwell in the grove’. (Vakkali) 79

Among all the happiness found existing, mundane or supramundane, the Buddha especially singled out ‘Nibbāna’ as the Supreme Happiness. He says:

‘Whatever bliss in the world is found in sensual pleasures, 
And whatever there is of heavenly bliss, 
These are not worth a sixteenth part, 
Of the bliss that comes with craving’s end’. 80

78 Theragāthā 16 
79 Theragāthā 351 
80 The Kings, Chapter 2, The Udāna
The Unique Discovery of the Buddha

Everybody strives for happiness. We relentlessly seek for pleasurable, favourable sight, sound, smell, taste and tactile sensations. This is because, to the majority of the human beings, pleasure derives from these sense gratifications is the only known happiness. In reality, there are two practical ways to achieve happiness:-

(1) Satisfying as one desires.
(2) Destroying the desire itself.

On the surface, it looks like ‘Satisfying one’s desire’ is the most direct way to Happiness. However, due to some serious defects it inherits, the Buddha discards this unreliable and unsatisfactory course.

Desire is insatiable

We have incessant desires which cannot be fully satisfied. It is like a bonfire. As long as we pour in the fuel, it will keep on burning. Feeding the fire with more fuel will enlarge the
flames as the blaze demands for more. This aptly illustrates the point that using sense pleasure to satisfy desires will only intensify our cravings for even more pleasure.

Take a close look at our sense faculties; our eyes are always seeking for picturesque sights. Our ears crave for captivating sounds. Our noses are drawn to aromatic smells. Our tongue yearns for savoury cuisines and our body indulges in consolatory sensational touches.

When we satisfy one desire, another arises in its place. We feel happy when we get what we wanted. However, after sometime, when the novelty wears off, we become bored with it. To stay happy, we seek for something new to interest us again. We are therefore always busy in satisfying our never ending desire.

Buddha says ‘Life in any world is incomplete, insatiate, the slave of craving’.¹ ‘No satisfaction is achieved in one’s desire even with a shower of gold coins.’² From birth till death, we run after pleasure to satisfy our desires yet we die with unfulfilled ones.

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1 ūno loko atitto tanhādāso (Raṭṭhapāla Sutta, No 82, Majjhima Nikāya)  
2 Na kahāpaṇavassena – Tīṭṭi kāmesu vijjati (Dhammapada 186)
Pleasure is impermanent

Sense faculties, sense objects and sense pleasures are impermanent. They are subject to change and will eventually disappear. Relying on such impermanent pleasure to generate and sustain happiness is like building sand castles on the beach.

Over time, our sense faculties deteriorate in functions and become weak. Although we still want them to continue receiving more sense stimuli, they fail to meet our demands. Contrary to our wish to have them strong, healthy, sharp and bright, these sense faculties cannot withstand the aging and unhealthy changes to become weak, sick and dull. We will eventually lose the effective use of them.

Such changes are applicable not only to our sense faculties but also to the sense objects. The latter are also in direct contact with the Law of Impermanence. Despite our wants for permanent pleasurable and favourable sight, sound, smell, taste and touch sensations, they too will inevitably disappear and depart from us.

Sense pleasures which we grab with so much desire are fleeting and momentary. Pleasure that arises will just pass away. Moment by moment, we maintain this momentum of
pleasure. Once this momentum of pleasure ceases, it is gone forever. We then need fresh delights to re-create pleasure again.

**Gratification is imperfect**

Our continuous efforts to satisfy our desire produce short term happiness but long term dissatisfaction. All the living beings struggle hard to compete with each other to achieve their desired sense pleasures. Worry, stress, tension, mental agony, despair, lamentation, pain and miseries are the “prizes” we receive in pursuit of these sense pleasures.

Being blinded by sensual pleasures’ desire, human beings kill each other, steal, engage in sexual misconduct, get into drug addictions, commit various types of heinous crimes and consequently bring so much misery to the world. Millions of living beings including that of the human lives are imprisoned, tortured and destroyed every day. Natural resources, flora and fauna are being damaged ruthlessly. Now the nuclear weapons are awaiting their turn to take centre stage. The human race has indeed become a curse to Mother Earth.

This havoc is the result of our relentless quest to satisfy our incessant desires. But, are we truly satisfied? In reality, the happiness we enjoy by satisfying these desire is worthless
when we look at our massive destruction inflicted on the world and the bitter miseries we have to suffer.

Sense pleasures have been compared to ‘a meatless bone smeared with blood’ by the Blessed One. ‘Like a hungry dog that cannot satisfy its hunger by gnawing such a clean hacked bone, the human beings similarly can never get full satisfaction through sense pleasures. They would eventually reap weariness and disappointment. Sense gratification produces little happiness but much suffering.’³

To the Buddha, to seek happiness through sense gratification is a very primitive, unskilful and unreliable method. Addressing the Five monks in his first discourse, referring to sensual pleasure he says ‘Indulgence of sense pleasure is low, coarse, ordinary, unworthy and unprofitable⁴ way to achieve happiness.

Being the Crown Prince in the Sākya Kingdom, endowed with great power, beauty, wealth, youth, health and popularity, Prince Siddhattha indulged in sensual pleasure to the maximum level. In sharing his royal luxurious pleasurable experiences, the Buddha says to Māgandiya:

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³ Potaliya Sutta, No 54, Majjhima Nikāya
⁴ Kāmasukhallikānuyogo hīno, gammo, pothujjaniko, anariyo, anāthasaṁhito (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, Saccasaṁyutta, Saṁyutta Nikāya)
'Māgandiya, formerly when I lived the household life, I enjoyed myself, provided and endowed with the five cords of sensual pleasure …… that are wished for, desired, agreeable, and likeable, connected with sensual desire and provocative of lust.

I had three palaces; one for the rainy season, one for the winter and one for the summer. I lived in the rains’ palace for the four months of the rainy seasons, enjoying myself with musicians, none male and I did not go down to the lower palace.'

Although immersed in absolute comfort and luxuries of a princely life, Prince Siddhattha felt dissatisfied. He astutely understood the impermanent, fleeting, insatiable nature of sense gratification. He also took notice of other human beings who were struggling to achieve happiness through such pleasure but constantly met with utter disappointments.

Through his personal experience, Prince Siddhattha realized that due to the defects it inherited, such pleasure could not bring long lasting happiness. He therefore discarded this and went out of the palace to become an ascetic with the determination to search for a reliable and wholesome course.

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5 Māgandiya Sutta, No 75, Majjhīma Nikāya
Destroying the Desire

Having discarded the material and sense pleasure as a means to achieve happiness, Ascetic Siddhātha took on the method of destroying the desire itself.

Long before Ascetic Siddhātha, there were already spiritual seekers in ancient India who understood that destroying desire would bring forth bliss and happiness. However, nobody actually knew how to do it. What they had managed to achieve was to suppress and weaken their desire by developing concentration and depriving one’s own sense faculties of their desired pleasures.

Following this ancient spiritual path, Ascetic Siddhātha achieved his concentration to the highest level. He accomplished deep, lofty, blissful, Jhānic⁶ states of the mind by suppressing his desire.

When in the Jhānic bliss, Ascetic Siddhātha enjoyed peace, happiness, joy and equanimity. However, he realized that such blissfulness he experienced was unreliable. When his mind returned to the normal state, desire with related defilements arose thereby destroying all the peace and happiness that he had previously experienced.

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⁶ Jhāna is a meditative state of mind of profound stillness and concentration
Realizing the defects of this method, Ascetic Siddhattha abandoned it and went in search for another approach. In his time, there was a popular belief among ascetics that no one could actually achieve perfect happiness without practising ‘self-mortification’.

This method involved two ways of training to deal with desire. One way was to stop the sense faculties from receiving any desired sense stimuli. In this way, they tried to control and tame the sense faculties not to generate any desire. The other way was self-torture through pain infliction to their body. In doing so, they tried to destroy their desire completely.

In his earnest attempts, Ascetic Siddhattha carried out these austere practices to the extreme extent that no other ascetics had ever tried. Over time, his intense self-mortification caused his body to degenerate into a living skeleton. He was already on the threshold of death and yet still could not totally destroy his desire. After his enlightenment, explaining his experiences of austerities, the Buddha says:

‘Because of eating so little my ribs jutted out as gaunt as the crazy rafters of an old roofless barn...... the gleam of my eyes sank far down in their sockets, looking like the gleam of water that has sunk far down in a deep well..... my scalp shrivelled and withered as a green bitter gourd shrivels and withers in the wind and sun...... my belly skin adhered to my
backbone; thus if I touched my belly skin I encountered my backbone and if I touched my backbone I encountered my belly skin.’

Having realized the utter futility of self-mortification, he discarded it totally. Filled with disappointment but still striving on with diligence, the Bodhisatta decided to seek another practice.

Unique Discovery

Having tried and tested on himself, Ascetic Siddhattha concluded that the previous spiritual practices could only lead to the achievement of temporary happiness. He also realized that nobody could actually aid or show him the way to ultimate happiness and that he must find the way himself.

His incomparable struggle to find long lasting perfect happiness eventually led him to discover the ‘Noble Eightfold Path’ and by following which he achieved Perfect Enlightenment. He successfully eradicated all desires and its related defilements perfectly, permanently and irreversibly and the attainment brought him perfect everlasting happiness, joy, bliss and peace (Nibbāna).

7 Mahāsaccaka Sutta, No 36, Majjhima Nikāya
At the dawn of His Supreme Enlightenment, being perfectly blissful and ever peaceful, the Buddha utters these joyful words:-

‘Through many lives, I wandered in cycle of existence, searching but not finding the builder of the house (Desire). It is sorrowful to be born again and again.

O house builder, I have spotted you. You will not build this house (Five aggregates of clinging) again. All your rafters (Defilements) are broken. Your ridge pole (Ignorance) destroyed. My mind reached Nibbāna. And thus I have destroyed the Desire’.\(^8\)

**First Discourse**

Having found the way to be perfectly happy, the Buddha spent the rest of his life teaching the humanity how to be perfectly happy and blissful.

His message of happiness was first delivered to the Five Ascetics.\(^9\) Addressing them in his first discourse, the Buddha

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\(^8\) Dhammapada 153/154

\(^9\) Kondañña, Bhaddiya, Vappa, Mahānāma and Assaji – they had attended to the Bodhisatta during his practice of self-mortification
says that seeking happiness through ‘sense indulgence’ and ‘self-mortification’ are not the perfect ways to be happy. These two methods have defects and limitations. They also bring little happiness and amplified suffering. Emphasizing on his newly discovered Path to happiness, he continues:

‘Avoiding both these extremes, monks, the Tathāgata (The Perfect One) has realized the Middle Path; it gives vision, gives knowledge and leads to calm, to insight, to enlightenment and to Nibbāna.’

**The Four Noble Truths**

The Buddha summarises his priceless message of happiness in the ‘Four Noble Truths’. He invites truth-seeking wise human beings to understand, analyze and scrutinize this teaching. He also challenges courageous human beings to dedicate, practise and verify this teaching. To the noble human beings, He encourages them to penetrate, realize and directly experience this teaching.

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10 Ete te bhikkhave ubho ante anupagamma Majjhima Paṭipadā Tathāgatena abhisambuddhā cakkhukaranī, ānākaranī, upasamāya, abhiññāya, Sambodhaya, Nibbānāya saṁvattati (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, Saccasamīyutta, Saṁyutta Nikāya)
Understanding, putting into practice and full realization of the Four Noble Truths will bring forth perfect happiness, perfect bliss, perfect peace, Enlightenment and Nibbāna.

The First Noble Truth specifically and precisely points out the problematic situations which the human beings are so caught up in searching desperately for happiness but not finding perfect satisfaction. Driven by their unlimited self-centered blind desire, human beings are tirelessly busy in satisfying their insatiable desire.

However, fleeting pleasure only brings momentary happiness as it often ends in disappointments. We want to stay young but we grow old. We want to stay healthy but we fall ill. We wish to live on as long as we want to but we have to die. We want pleasurable, favourable conditions to be with us forever but circumstances change and bring forth misfortune and miseries. The struggle between arising desire and satisfaction goes on endlessly thereby diminishing happiness but intensifying suffering.

Desire drives us through life. This yearning makes us the slaves of pleasure. Sorrow, pain, lamentation, grief are only parts of the miseries we ‘earn’ for such pleasure seeking.
Finally, when this life ends in death, the demise does not bring an end to the desire. The unfulfilled desire is so intense that it brings forth a renewed existence to be pursued in the next life.

Without the wisdom to see the real nature of this cycle of birth and death, and not knowing how to get out of it (Avijjā), continually driven by self-centred blind desire (Taṇhā), the problematic and unsatisfactory situation that human beings are caught up in this circle of existence is labelled by the Buddha as ‘Dukkha.’

Singling out the root cause of this entangled problematic unhappy situation in the Second Noble Truth, the Buddha says:

‘It is this craving which produces re-becoming (rebirth) accompanied by passionate greed and finding fresh delight now here and now there, namely craving for sense pleasure, craving for existence and craving for non-existence (self-annihilation).’

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12 Dukkhasamudaya ariyasacca - The Noble Truth of the Origins of Suffering
13 Yāyāṁ taṇhā ponobhavikā nandirāgasahagatā taṭaṭatārabhinandiniḥ seyyathīdām kāmataṇhā, bhavataṇhā, vibhavataṇhā (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, Saccasamyutta, Saṁyutta Nikāya)
The Third Noble Truth\textsuperscript{14} tells us precisely what needs to be done in order to be perfectly happy. It is simply to destroy the desire itself. The outcome of it is perfect peace, calm and bliss. This is Nibbāna, the Supreme Happiness. Explaining what Nibbāna is, the Buddha says:

‘It is the complete cessation of that very craving, giving it up, relinquishing it, liberating oneself from it and detaching oneself from it’.\textsuperscript{15}

The Fourth Noble Truth\textsuperscript{16} teaches us how to destroy the desire as well as other mental defilements. Functionally unified Eight Factors are used to eradicate all the mental defilements perfectly and permanently. Expounding on the path to destroy the desire, the Buddha says in his first discourse

‘It is the Noble Eightfold Path, and nothing else, namely: Right Understanding, Right Thought, Right Speech, Right Action, Right Livelihood, Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration’.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{14} Dukkhanirodha ariyasacca – The Noble Truth of Cessation of Suffering
\textsuperscript{15} Yo tassā'eva taṇhāya asesavirāganiruddho, cāgo, paṭinissaggo, mutti, anālayo (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, Saccasamyotha, Saṃyutta Nikāya)
\textsuperscript{16} Dukkhanirodhagaminipajipada ariyasacca – The Noble Truth of the way leading to the Cessation of Suffering
\textsuperscript{17} Ayam'eva ariyo atthangiko maggo seyyatiṣaṭṭhaṃ: Sammā Diṭṭhi, Sammā Saṅkappo, Sammā Vācā, Sammā Kammanto, Sammā Ājīvo, Sammā Vāyāmo, Sammā Sati, Sammā Samādhi (Dhammacakkappavattana Sutta, Saccasaṃyotha, Saṃyutta Nikāya)
The discovery of the ‘Noble Eightfold Path’ is the unique contribution of the Buddha to the suffering humanity. Putting these eight factors into practice develop and purify the human mind in three successive stages.

In the first stage, by upholding righteous principles and moral precepts, it curbs desire and its related unwholesome, unethical, negative tendencies in the human mind. In its place, wholesome, ethical, positive, virtuous qualities emerge. This is the development of Virtue.

In the second stage, having virtue as the foundation, one develops deep mental absorption by weakening desire and all defilements. The mind becomes well unified, concentrated, powerful, mindful and peaceful. This is the advance development of the mind.

In the third stage, the well cultivated, concentrated mind is ready for wisdom development. The specific technique used to deepen wisdom is the ‘Insight Meditation’.

Through practice of this unique meditation method, one develops intuitive wisdom which sees the Five Aggregates of Clinging in the light of Impermanence, Unsatisfactoriness

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18 Form, Feelings, Perceptions, Mental formation and Consciousness
and Selflessness. With the arising of this Supreme Wisdom, ignorance disappears together with its counterparts; desire and related defilements. This is the end of Dukkha and the dawn of bliss, joy, happiness, peace and Enlightenment.

**Supreme Teaching**

There is a general misconception that the ‘Four Noble Truths’ is the basic teachings of the Buddha or the ABC in Buddhism. There is in fact no level of differentiation in the Dhamma as the teaching of the Buddha is all within the framework of the ‘Four Noble Truths’.

Indeed the Four Noble Truths is the unique discovery of the Buddha and it is the supreme teaching of the Buddha. And realization of the Four Noble Truths is Enlightenment and the ultimate goal of a practising Buddhist. The Buddha declares in his first discourse:

‘As long as my knowledge of seeing things as they really are, was not quite clear in these three aspects, in these twelve ways, concerning the Four Noble Truths, I did not claim to have realized the matchless, supreme Enlightenment....
But when my knowledge of seeing things as they really are was quite clear in these three aspects, in these twelve ways, concerning the Four Noble Truths, then I claimed to have realized the matchless, supreme Enlightenment….’

Buddhism is the ‘Four Noble Truths’

After the Supreme Enlightenment, the Buddha spent his next forty five years teaching people from all walks of life. He taught widely, openly and freely. All the innumerable teachings he gave are confined in a single framework of the Four Noble Truths. Venerable Sariputta said:

‘Friends, just as the footprints of all legged animals are encompassed by the footprint of the elephant, and the elephant’s footprint is reckoned the foremost among them in terms of size; in the same way, all skilful qualities are gathered under the Four Noble Truths…….’

Buddhism is the message of Supreme Happiness summarized into the Four Noble Truths. The First and Second Truths explain the human struggle for happiness and the frequent disappointments we meet due to our unskilful and primitive

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19 Dhammacakkappavatana Sutta, Saccasamyutta, Samyutta Nikaya
20 Mahathipadopama Sutta, No 28, Majhima Nikaya
approach. The Third and Fourth Truths point out a sublime type of happiness which can be achieved through a skilful, wholesome way.

Those who follow the Buddha’s Path to happiness will therefore enjoy supreme bliss and become ever so peaceful.

The Buddha says ‘Indeed, we live happily, without desire for sense pleasure. Amidst those who desire for sense pleasure, we live free from desire’.

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21 Susukham vata jīvāma - Ussukesu anussukā, Ussukesu manusseu - Viharāma anussukā (Dhammapada 199)
The Path to Happiness

The human mind is full of great potential. It is capable of experiencing the highest happiness and the path to such blessedness actually lies in the mind itself. To awaken ourselves to this Supreme Happiness, we need to cultivate the Noble Eightfold Path.

This is the Path of purification from defilements. It awakens us from the deep sleep of ignorance to the light of wisdom. Leaving miseries and suffering behind, this Path leads us to perfect bliss and happiness.

We suffer in life because of the presence of defilements. They are rooted in the human mind in three successive stages. In the first stage, they are in the deep sleep state at the bottom of the mind (Anusaya). This is similar to a quiet dormant volcano. The human being, at this stage, may look calm, serene, peaceful and gentle from the outside but deep within him, defilements such as anger, hatred, ill-will, jealousy, cruelty, lust, greed, fear, ignorance lie inactive.

When stimulated by the five sense faculties, these defilements are activated and become emotionally reactive. This is the second stage. The human being, at this stage, is like a yet to
erupt active volcano (Pariyuttana). He is full of destructive and unwholesome defilements. His body language, facial and eye expressions reveal his underlying suppressed active negative emotions.

If these defilements get further aroused, the human being will lose control of his emotions. The defilements explode from its suppressed pent-up state and demonstrate its detrimental power through raging words and violent behavioral actions. This is the third stage (vitikkama) depicting a fiery erupting volcano. The result will be disastrous as it brings destructions. At this stage, the human being may go on to do evil, wicked, immoral, unwholesome actions.

The Noble Eightfold Path is divided into three sections; Morality, Concentration and Wisdom. Each section deals with the defilements in a specific way; suppressing, mitigating and uprooting them effectively. As long as we have not uprooted these defilements perfectly, permanently and irreversibly, it is impossible for us to achieve perfect peace, happiness and bliss.

Treading the path starts with Right Understanding. It is like our eyes which provide the vision that lead us in our direction. Right Understanding sheds the light for us to cultivate in the other seven factors of the Noble Eightfold Path.
The Buddha defines Right Understanding as comprehension of the ‘Four Noble Truths’. Dissatisfaction and suffering arise in life because of defections. If there were no more defections, the mind will become perfectly pure, calm, peaceful and ever joyful. This understanding gives us the knowledge of what exactly should be done if we want to be happy.

There are three roots where all the defections spring forth. They are Greed, Hatred and Ignorance. By undertaking the Noble Eightfold Path training process set up by the Buddha, defections can be uprooted and destroyed once and for all. The result of which is the attainment of Supreme Happiness.

Right Understanding gives rise to Right Thoughts. When one understands that Greed is a cause of suffering, he gives it up in developing thoughts of detachment. When one sees Hatred which brings forth violence and miseries, he generates thoughts of loving kindness and non-violence. Understanding of the Four Noble Truths thus brings forth wisdom which counters Ignorance.

Thus, at the very beginning of the Noble Eightfold Path, Right Understanding and Right Thoughts set the motion in tandem for Detachment, Loving Kindness and Wisdom against the root causes of suffering in Greed, Hatred and Ignorance.
Thoughts are the origins of all our actions. When the mind is full of positive, constructive and wholesome thoughts, they will be expressed through Right Speech, Right Action and Right Livelihood which are the culminations of morality in the Noble Eightfold Path.

The function of the ‘Morality’ is to curb the manifestations of defilements in our speech and actions. The Precepts are therefore to be keenly observed for this purpose. Abandoning the habits of speaking untrue, harsh, divisive and meaningless words, one dedicates to speaking truthful, pleasant, unifying and meaningful words which are beneficial to one and all.

The impropriety acts of killing, stealing, sexual misconducts and various heinous crimes are mainly committed when the defilements go out of control. Strict observation of the moral precepts will thus prevent the defilements from manifesting into such evil actions. Having refrained from such unwholesome doings, one lives a pure and honest life with a compassionate heart. Such a person will make his living in a peaceful and righteous occupation. Through his noble conduct, he will bring happiness not only to himself but to the others as well.

By observing the Precepts, we may be able to stop defilements from manifesting through our words and deeds but as long
as they are emotionally active, we still cannot be at peace. Whenever triggered, we are likely to break into violence when we lose our firm control.

Peace and harmony in the mind is achieved not by appeasing the defilements but by calming and taming them. The specific function of Right Concentration in Noble Eightfold Path is targeted for this purpose. The functions of Right Effort, Right Mindfulness and Right Concentration are aimed at inactivating the defilements.

Right Effort is of prime importance. Its function is of twofold; one is to prevent the defilements from arising in the mind. The other is to put in diligent efforts to cultivate the wholesomeness of the mind.

When unwholesome thoughts arise, one sees them as poisonous snakes or deadly viruses, he should discard them immediately and take rigorous precautions to disallow such thoughts from taking roots to flourish in the mind.

Conversely, when he notices wholesome thoughts arising in the mind, he puts in persistent efforts to cultivate and strengthen them thereby providing the necessary thriving conditions for their progressive development. He also takes conscious effort to ‘awake’ those wholesome thoughts which
are not yet arisen in the mind. In this way, the Right Effort weakens the defilements and brings forth a good wholesome state of the mind.

Right Mindfulness is like a gate keeper. Its function is to be aware of the body and mind. Taking the body, feelings, thoughts and mental factors as subject fields, one develops mindfulness (Satipaṭṭhāna). Whatever physical movements and actions one undertakes, he is fully aware of them and attends to all the bodily needs with alertness. He is acutely aware of his feelings, thoughts and mental factors in the rhythm of their arising and passing away.

When Right Effort and Right Mindfulness combined, they provide an excellent favorable ground for Right Concentration to arise. Right Concentration is achieved through regular development of mindfulness on a meditative object backed by Right Effort. Mindfulness, which is maintained moment by moment, is developed into an uninterrupted flow of concentration.

When concentration is achieved, all the defilements¹ are brought under perfect control of the mind. The first stage of the concentrated mind is a combination of initial and sustained

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¹ Five hindrances: sensual desire, ill-will, sloth and torpor, restlessness and worry and doubt
application, joy, happiness and one-pointedness. The Suttas mentioned that there are eight levels of concentration in ascending order. Each level is more refined and sublime than the preceding one.

Although we are able to put the defilements under control with the acquired power of mental concentration, they are still remaining dormant in the depth of our mind. Whenever our mind becomes weak, these defilements will seize the opportunities to rise up and disrupt our peace and happiness.

All the defilements are held up and deep-rooted in Ignorance. To uproot them, we need to apply Wisdom, the opposing force of Ignorance. Right Understanding and Right Thoughts belong to the wisdom category of the Noble Eightfold Path. Their functions are to uproot defilements from their base of ignorance.

Wisdom arises in two successive stages. In the first stage, when one understands the Four Noble Truths, it gives rise to knowledge which is primary and essential to eradicate defilements. This is the wisdom yields from the theoretical understanding of the Dhamma (Saccānulomika sammā diṭṭhi).

In the secondary stage, when one who has cultivated on the Noble Eightfold Path and eradicated all defilements, therein
his mind arises the supreme wisdom through the realization of the Dhamma. This is the Ultimate Wisdom (Saccapaṭivedita samma diṭṭhi).

The concentrated mind is like a polished mirror. It reflects the images as they really are without any distortions. When we look at the body, feelings, perceptions, mental formations and consciousness with the well unified, concentrated mental eye, we will see them all in a constant flux, constantly in the process of arising and passing away. Clinging to the five aggregates produces suffering and when one notices that, his mind automatically moves towards detachment.

We are attached to things because we take our personalities to be permanent but what actually lie within are the five aggregates of clinging which are constantly changing. When one sees this reality through his own wisdom, Ignorance vanishes with its host of defilements. One then penetrates the Four Noble Truths and realizes the cessation of suffering. With that, he experiences Nibbāna, the ultimate bliss and happiness.
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How to be happy

Everybody strives for happiness. We relentlessly seek for pleasurable, favourable sight, sound, smell, taste and tactile sensations. This is because, to the majority of the human beings, pleasure derives from these sense gratifications is the only known happiness. In reality, there are two practical ways to achieve happiness. One is ‘satisfying as one desires’. The other is ‘destroying the desire itself.’

On the surface, it looks like ‘Satisfying one’s desire’ is the most direct way to happiness. However, due to some serious defects it inherits, the Buddha discards this unreliable and unsatisfactory course.

Buddhism is the outcome of a human struggle in search of supreme happiness. Two thousand five hundred years ago, Prince Siddhattha, left behind a kingdom of great wealth, power and prosperity to set out on a journey in search of perfect happiness. After six long years of ethical, spiritual and intellectual experiment, he returned to the Kingdom with his unique discovery of ‘How to be Happy?’