



## Happiness Beyond Material Possessions: A Buddhist Perspective

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DOI : <https://doi.org/10.55248/gengpi.6.0325.1173>

### ABSTRACT:

In a world dominated by consumerism and material aspirations, happiness is often measured by wealth, possessions, and external achievements. However, Buddhism offers a profound alternative one that transcends material accumulation and finds fulfillment in inner peace, wisdom, and compassion. This paper delves into the Buddhist perspective on happiness, emphasizing the transient nature of material wealth and the suffering (Dukkha) that arises from attachment (tanha). Drawing upon fundamental Buddhist teachings, including the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, it explores how liberation from cravings paves the way for genuine well-being. At the heart of Buddhist philosophy lies detachment, not as a renunciation of material possessions but as a shift in perception recognizing their Impermanence and inability to provide lasting satisfaction. Individuals cultivate self-awareness and contentment independent of external circumstances through mindfulness (sati) and meditation (samadhi).

Furthermore, the practice of compassion (karuna) and loving-kindness (metta) fosters deeper connections and a sense of purpose, reinforcing that true happiness is rooted in selflessness and harmony. This study argues that modern societies can significantly benefit from Buddhist wisdom by redefining happiness as a state of inner serenity rather than material success. Individuals can attain a more profound and sustainable sense of fulfillment by embracing simplicity, ethical living, and spiritual awareness. Ultimately, true happiness is not found in possessions but in the cultivation of wisdom, mindfulness, and compassion, which are elements that lead to lasting inner peace and a meaningful life.

### INTRODUCTION:

There are many unexpected changes in life that we cannot predict, such as happiness, sadness, and so on. How often do we need to confront the world's miseries, such as disappointment, boredom, loss, and sorrow in this life? How can you live a quiet, Happy, and Unchanging Life? It is something that we must all desire, wish, and seek. Although there are many different perspectives on happiness, all fall into two categories, according to Buddhism: Happiness from experience and sense of pleasures in life, such as having money, beauty, fame, comfort, and so on, and mental happiness, as the mind is happy and peaceful. The enlightenment of the Buddha in the world and the content of Buddhist teachings aim to bring peace and happiness to gods and humans. The Four Noble Truths are the content of this teaching, which includes Dukkha (suffering), the cause of Dukkha, the Cessation of Dukkha, and the path leading to the Cessation of Dukkha. In the Nikāyas, the Buddha often guided his disciples to spread all of this knowledge such as That would be for the welfare and happiness of the people, out of compassion for the world, and for the benefit, welfare, and happiness of gods and humans <sup>1</sup>. So, what is happiness in the view of Buddhism, and how does one attain it?

Furthermore, Buddhism holds that everything in existence is Impermanent, so happiness in any sense- physical or mental- is subject to the law of Impermanence. So, according to Buddhism, what is the real meaning of happiness? Happiness in Buddhism is Serene Life right in the present, now in this life, according to the Buddha's spirit. Happiness is naturally a natural characteristic inherent in every one of us, which is clear and very valid because we cannot see and live in that province owing to ignorance, greed, hatred, illusion, and self-grasping. When the mind settles down, return to a peaceful lifestyle, stay away from extreme states, walk on the middle path, and be happy, according to the Buddhist Spirit.

### *Aim of the Article*

This article explores the Buddhist understanding of happiness and its distinction from material wealth. In contemporary society, happiness is often equated with financial success, luxury, and external achievements. However, Buddhist philosophy challenges this notion by emphasizing that true and lasting happiness comes from within, independent of material possessions. This article examines how Buddhist teachings, particularly the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, provide a framework for overcoming attachment and achieving inner peace.

<sup>1</sup> sangitisutta-Bhikhu sajato, DN33, London, p480

Additionally, the article aims to highlight the role of **mindfulness (sati), meditation (samadhi), and ethical living (sila)** in fostering genuine well-being. It will explore how practices such as **detachment (vairagya), compassion (karuna), and loving-kindness (metta)** contribute to a more profound sense of fulfillment and emotional resilience. Furthermore, the study intends to bridge ancient Buddhist wisdom with modern challenges, demonstrating how individuals can integrate these teachings into their daily lives to find contentment amidst material abundance or scarcity. By presenting a Buddhist perspective on happiness, this article aspires to inspire readers to shift their focus from external possessions to inner peace, encouraging a more sustainable, mindful, and meaningful approach to life.

### *The concept of happiness*

Happiness is the ultimate objective of human life; everyone wishes to be happy. People seek luxury, money, fame, position, health, lovely friends, successful people, and sublimation regardless of where or what century they live. The desire to live blissfully is not beyond the soul's longing to escape the trials of life. So, what exactly is happiness? Happiness is as simple as a rose in a young woman's hand but as far away as the noble truth.

Happiness is referred to as "Happiness" by the British and Americans and "Bonheur" by the French. It refers to a sensation of happiness or pleasant feelings in the psyche that directs people's development in an upward direction. Happiness is also associated with peace, happiness, persistent sensations of body and mind, human morality, and triumph over anxiety and sadness. Conversely, happiness is a nebulous "fuzzy concept" that is difficult to quantify. Drinking water is happy, but not being thirsty but being forced to drink water is painful and unpleasant.

People usually mix up joy and happiness. We frequently believe that if we eat, dress, and are always happy, we will be happy. We also think we will be pleased if we satisfy our needs and desires. On the other hand, self-centeredness will lead to loneliness and sadness. When we are alone with our thoughts and feelings, we seek distractions in music, computer games, food, sex, and careers. However, this does not link you to others nor provide you with a genuine sense of contentment. As a result, when asked to define happiness, people only offer opposing ideas.

Leo Tolstoy exclaimed: "Rejoice! Rejoice! The business of life, its purpose, is joy. Rejoice at the sky, the sun, the stars, the grass, the trees, animals, people."<sup>2</sup> Happiness is always the feeling of a good and noble life in the thoughts of every human being, reflected in social life through words, acts, contemplation, and inner peace, as well as all of life's concerns and demands. Happiness is the soul of a culture, human civilization, life's tranquility, humanity's bridge, and the link between individual and collective lives. As a result, where there is happiness, there is happiness, and where there is peace, there isn't suffering or misery. The goal of life is to be happy. You were not born to be unhappy but to be joyful.

"Yet, because the human heart can be such an unreliable thing, it is important that you make the Gohonzon the foundation of your faith. If you do so, I am sure you can lead your lives confidently and easily. Please lead your lives that way and help others do the same."<sup>3</sup>

For these reasons, happiness has been defined by some as a satisfaction of the will. If you obtain it, you are said to be happy. If you have been dreaming, you are told the definition of happiness; you may do countless things to fulfill your wishes so that you will be happy. You may spend all your time, money, energy, skill, and all the opportunities to do your best to make your life happy or to bring happiness to your family, friends, relatives, and probably to your country.

Historically, there have been many views on happiness, each with its value corresponding to each era, society, or small scale of the individual. Therefore, the writer mentions some typical points while still identifying happiness to have a more correct perception of reality.

### *The concept of Happiness in Buddhism*

The Buddhist concept of happiness is always an ethical way of life, bliss, concentration, wisdom, and escape. Ethical living is always promoted, puts people in the ultimate position, and determines that people can eliminate all suffering and unending death if they have enough will, concentration, wisdom, and career efforts. Strength and a clean and healthy lifestyle will ensure a peaceful and happy life. The Buddha taught: "Bhikkhus, I have only spoken of suffering and the way out of suffering in the past and present."<sup>4</sup> The Buddha talked about. They are suffering and suffering to the Cessation of suffering. This is talking about happiness and how to live a happy life.

In the present, here, and in this life. The good or bad actions of people cause happiness or unhappiness. Buddhism does not offer saving grace, but Buddhism teaches people how to live to enjoy happiness, free from birth and suffering: the Tathagata is only a guide, practicing up to us, by ourselves, not decisions or's fault; for example, the doctors examine and give medicine to the patient. To drink or not to drink is up to the patient.

An examination of Buddhist sensory analysis is essential to comprehend the precise nature of bliss. Emotion is a cognitive element inherent in all forms of awareness, a ubiquitous experiential accompaniment. It possesses the quality of sensation, serves the purpose of experience, and manifests the fulfillment of cognitive elements. It is commonly asserted that it arises from touch (phases), the conjunction of a sensory object, a faculty, and the corresponding sort of awareness. When these three elements are amalgamated, consciousness engages with the object. It perceives the emotional essence of the item, and from this perception, a sentiment emerges that correlates with the object's emotional character.

<sup>2</sup> Leo Tolstoy, *Tolstoy's Diaries*, edited and translated by R. F. Christian, vol. 1 (London: The Athlone Press, 1985), p. 264. (September 15, 1889).

<sup>3</sup> Translated from Japanese. Josei Toda, *Toda Josei zenshu*, vol. 4 (Tokyo: Seikyo Shimbunsha, 1989), pp. 541-43. (A speech delivered at a young men's division leaders meeting in June 1957)

<sup>4</sup> Alagaddūpamasutta, tr. by Bhikkhu Bodhi, wisdom publication, Bonton, p224

Since contact is of six types and comprises six senses, feeling also has six kinds corresponding to the six types of contact from which it arises. There is a feeling born of eye contact, touched by the ear, the nose, etc. The feeling is divided into three or five categories according to its emotional nuance. Regarding the three parts, there is a pleasant, painful, and non-painful feeling, e.g., stability. Pleasant feelings can be divided into pleasant bodily sensations called "pleasure" (sukha) and pleasant mental feelings called "joy." Pain can also be divided into physical pain, called "pain," and emotional pain, called "discomfort". In this classification system, neutral feeling is called "discharge" (upekkha). Consequently, upon categorizing into five segments, we identify the following five emotions: pleasure, joy, pain, sorrow, and equanimity. Abhidhamma posits that pleasure and pain occur solely in conjunction with body consciousness, joy, and pleasure arise exclusively with consciousness, and stability is present when associated with body consciousness and the other four forms of sense consciousness.

The Buddha listed contrasting types of spiritual happiness: The happiness of the lay life and the happiness of the monastic life, the happiness of sensual pleasures and the happiness of renunciation, the happiness of non-attachment and defilement and happiness free from attachment and defilement, worldly happiness and mental happiness, happiness devoid of concentration, happiness of the Noble One, spiritual happiness, happiness lacking delight, equanimous happiness, happiness not aimed at rapture, and happiness focused on immaterial objects. The happiness associated with the wholesome roots produced by the renunciation of sensual pleasures is spiritual happiness or monastic happiness. Jhana's happiness is a mental state derived from the withdrawal from sensual pleasures and obstacles. It also pertains to the act of concentration.

Sariputta, reiterating the Buddha's elucidation of sensory desire, addresses his fellow monks: There exist, valued sirs, these five aspects of sensual longing. Which five entities? Forms exist that are visually perceived, wanted, compelling, pleasurable, and attractive, connected with passion and yearning. The ear, odors by the nose, and flavors by the tongue perceive sounds. Contacts, perceived through touch, yearned for enticing, delightful, and beautiful experiences intertwined with passion and desire. These, esteemed sirs, constitute the five facets of sensory desire; the resulting enjoyment and well-being are sensual happiness.

According to the Dalai Lama, "Cessation of the continuum of affliction has four characteristics. True peace, ultimate satisfaction, and definite emergence from the process of unenlightened existence."<sup>5</sup>

There are various methods to cultivate happiness. "Friends provide joy in times of need; contentment with what exists is gratifying; merit is rewarding at life's conclusion; and the Cessation of all suffering is delightful. It is joyous to be a mother, and it is cheerful to be a father; it is also fulfilling to lead a reclusive life, and it is contenting to attain the level of Brahman. Happy is an age-long virtue, and happiness is a well-established confidence; happiness is the gaining of wisdom, and happiness is not to do evil. "Joyful is the emergence of the Enlightened Ones; joyful is the instruction of the Noble Truth; joyful is the cohesion of the community, and cheerful is the austere existence of the united"<sup>6</sup>.

Besides the happiness that humanity is feeling, there is always a feeling of suffering and unhappiness: "Sex, happiness is less suffering, more brain, and therefore more danger.". Therefore, Buddhism introduces people to a peaceful, happy life that transcends the sexual world by practicing a moral life and developing spiritually and intellectually. The control of sensory desires and the clarity of the soul, leading a clean life to lead people to happiness and peace, must overcome the sorrowful feelings of life, and immobility. Range of pleasure, pain, or feeling of neither pleasure nor pain: "There are these three feelings. What is three? Pleasure life, suffering life, non-suffering non-pleasure life. Sage, these three feelings are impermanent. When knowing what is impermanent is suffering, that wonderful feeling does not exist.". Therefore, with Buddhism, happiness is not only a matter of implementing a moral life and a good life but also a matter of liberating suffering for oneself, others, and the nation-society.

There are two types of happiness—one is experiential and the other nonexperiential. The latter is regarded as the highest, as it remains constant, whereas the former possesses a lower degree of happiness due to its variability. The latter is achieved by eliminating all mental impurities, while the former is attained without eradication. Unless defilements, including hindrances, are eradicated, whatever enjoyment is achieved remains transient.

The ultimate happiness is, undoubtedly, Nibbana. As documented in the Anguttara Nikaya, Venerable Sariputta states in one of his dialogues: "This Nibbana is bliss." One of the hearing monks inquired: "Friend Sariputta, what is the happiness not experienced in this Nibbana?" In response to this question, Sariputta stated: "That very absence of sensation constitutes happiness here."

Nibbana happiness is not considered to be a feeling to experience, for it is an emotion that evokes longing. For example, if the sensation is enjoyable, a desire emerges in the mind to get what is experienced. All enjoyment originating from any emotion may transform into unhappiness. If enjoyment transforms into unhappiness, our experience is suffering [Dukkha]. Genuine happiness is achieved via the eradication of Dukkha. Its cause must be entirely and permanently eliminated to eradicate suffering, ensuring it does not reemerge. Permanent happiness is attainable with the complete eradication of the source of misery.

The eradication of Dukkha achieves joy. To eradicate suffering, its root cause must be entirely and permanently eliminated. With that concept of Buddhism, we can see that happiness is not only limited to mundane matters but also broader than pleasant feelings through overcoming attachments and hindrances. When individuals realize the essence of freedom from all constraints, they attain genuine bliss, referred to as the tranquility of joy. When individuals realize the essence of freedom from all constraints, they attain genuine bliss, referred to as the tranquility of pleasure. They were leading to peace and liberation in Nirvana.

<sup>5</sup> Dalai Lama T (1997) The four noble truth fundamentals of the Buddhist teaching. His holiness of XIV Dalai Lama (GT Jimpa Trans, Thorson, London, Australia, p 288)

<sup>6</sup> Dhammapada, verse 194, 331-333

Therefore, greater happiness must be peaceful due to separation from sex, which is the separation of worldly dharmas called peace, joy, and liberation. Happiness must be through the practice of body, speech, and mind. Liberated mind and liberated wisdom, or in other words, the joy and peace of precepts, concentration, insight, liberation, and liberated knowledge.

### *Compassion and Selflessness as Pillars of Happiness*

In Buddhist philosophy, **compassion (karuna)** and **loving-kindness (metta)** are fundamental virtues that directly contribute to cultivating happiness. These qualities foster personal fulfillment and play a crucial role in building harmonious relationships with others. Compassion, defined as the ability to empathize with and alleviate the suffering of others, is central to the Buddhist understanding of happiness. By developing compassion, individuals transcend the self-centered pursuit of material gain and instead focus on the well-being of others, which in turn creates a sense of connection and shared humanity.

**Loving-kindness (metta)** is the practice of cultivating unconditional love and goodwill toward all beings, regardless of their actions or circumstances. When practiced regularly, metta encourages an open heart, free from the judgments and expectations that often cloud relationships. This unconditional love fosters a sense of peace and contentment, as individuals learn to release attachments to ego and self-interest, aligning themselves with a more expansive, compassionate worldview. Compassion and loving-kindness contribute to a sense of personal happiness and promote social harmony, as they encourage individuals to act with empathy, patience, and kindness toward others.

Selflessness, a key aspect of Buddhist teachings, further deepens one's sense of fulfillment. The more individuals let go of self-centered desires and act with genuine concern for others, the more they experience true satisfaction. Selflessness does not entail neglecting one's needs but rather emphasizes the interconnectedness of all beings. In recognizing that one's happiness is intertwined with the happiness of others, individuals develop a sense of collective well-being, where helping others leads to personal joy. The act of giving, whether it be time, resources, or emotional support, enriches the giver's life by fostering a profound sense of purpose and connection to the world around them. Ultimately, compassion and selflessness create a path to deeper fulfillment, rooted in shared happiness and collective well-being.

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### **Discussion of the article**

The pursuit of happiness has long been intertwined with material success, particularly in modern consumerist societies where wealth, luxury, and external achievements are seen as well-being indicators. However, the Buddhist perspective challenges this notion, asserting that genuine happiness cannot be derived from material possessions, which are inherently impermanent. Instead, true contentment arises from inner peace, wisdom, and compassion. This discussion examines the implications of Buddhist teachings on happiness and how they can be applied in contemporary life.

Buddhism teaches that attachment to material wealth leads to suffering (Dukkha) because desires (tanha) are insatiable; as one desire is fulfilled, another arises. The **Four Noble Truths** provide a framework for understanding how suffering stems from craving and how its Cessation can be achieved through the **Eightfold Path**, which emphasizes ethical living, mental discipline, and wisdom. By practicing **mindfulness (sati)** and **meditation (samadhi)**, individuals can cultivate self-awareness, reducing the dependency on external sources of happiness.

Furthermore, **compassion (karuna)** and **loving-kindness (metta)** are crucial in achieving true happiness. Individuals experience a deeper sense of fulfillment that extends beyond personal gain by focusing on selflessness and interconnectedness. The Buddhist emphasis on **detachment (vairagya)** does not advocate for rejecting material possessions but rather encourages a balanced approach that acknowledges their temporary nature while prioritizing spiritual and emotional well-being. In contemporary society, where stress, anxiety, and dissatisfaction are prevalent despite material abundance, Buddhist principles offer valuable insights. Individuals can cultivate a more sustainable and profound sense of happiness by shifting the focus from external acquisitions to inner development. Embracing simplicity, ethical values, and mindful living allows for a meaningful existence where true fulfillment is found not in what one owns, but in how one lives and connects with the world.

### *Practical Applications in Modern Life*

Integrating Buddhist principles into daily life offers a transformative approach to cultivating happiness that transcends material wealth. One of the most profound ways to apply these principles is through the practice of **mindfulness**. Mindfulness, a core aspect of Buddhism, encourages individuals to live in the present moment with full awareness, reducing attachment to past regrets or future anxieties. By practicing mindfulness throughout daily activities—whether it's eating, walking, or working—individuals can shift their focus from external possessions to internal peace. This helps reduce the craving for material wealth, as one learns to find fulfillment in simple, everyday experiences.

Another practical application is embracing a **minimalist lifestyle**, which aligns with Buddhist teachings of detachment and simplicity. In today's consumer-driven world, there is often an overemphasis on acquiring more, whether it's material goods, social status, or professional success. A minimalist lifestyle encourages individuals to evaluate their needs versus wants, leading to a reduction in excess and a greater appreciation for what is essential. This helps minimize stress and clutter and creates space for more meaningful experiences and relationships. The Buddhist concept of **simplicity** teaches that happiness does not come from accumulating things but from living a life that prioritizes inner peace and spiritual growth over external gains.

Furthermore, **gratitude** plays a central role in fostering contentment. Instead of focusing on what is lacking or desired, Buddhist teachings encourage individuals to cultivate gratitude for the present moment and what they already have. This shift in perspective promotes a sense of abundance rather than scarcity, allowing people to experience joy in simplicity. Individuals can foster a deep sense of contentment and well-being by focusing on the present, appreciating life's small moments, and reducing material dependency. These practical applications of Buddhist principles help individuals achieve sustainable happiness, rooted not in possessions, but in mindful living and gratitude.

### *Challenges and Misconceptions*

One of the most common misconceptions about Buddhism is that it outright rejects material possessions and encourages an ascetic lifestyle. While Buddhist teachings emphasize the Impermanence and fleeting nature of material goods, they do not advocate for the complete renunciation of all possessions. Instead, Buddhism encourages a balanced perspective where material wealth is not clung to as a source of lasting happiness. The core message is not about rejecting possessions but about understanding their transient nature and avoiding attachment to them. Buddhism teaches that when possessions become the center of one's focus, they lead to craving (*tanha*) and, ultimately, suffering (*Dukkha*). Thus, the goal is not to dismiss material goods but to cultivate detachment and mindfulness, allowing individuals to appreciate possessions without being consumed by them.

The challenge lies in finding a **balance between material needs and spiritual growth**. In modern society, pursuing wealth and success often precedes personal growth or spiritual fulfillment. People may feel that their happiness depends on acquiring more material goods. Still, Buddhist teachings suggest that while material resources may be necessary for survival and comfort, true fulfillment lies beyond their accumulation. The challenge, therefore, is to meet basic material needs while simultaneously nurturing one's inner peace and spiritual well-being. Buddhism teaches that prioritizing ethical living, mindfulness, and compassion can achieve a balanced life that integrates both material and spiritual well-being. Applying Buddhist teachings in a **consumer-driven society** presents its own set of challenges. Modern culture often emphasizes individual success, materialism, and constant consumption, which contradicts Buddhist principles of simplicity, contentment, and detachment. The constant bombardment of advertising and societal pressures to acquire more can make adopting a more mindful, minimalist lifestyle difficult. Despite these challenges, integrating Buddhist practices, such as mindfulness and gratitude, into everyday life can provide individuals with the tools to resist the pull of consumerism and find contentment in simplicity.

### **CONCLUSION:**

We live in a problematic society; everyone wants to be better, more functional, kinder, happier, and more peaceful. That wish is humane, realistic, appropriate, and suitable for human psychology. However, how can we achieve happiness and peace? Some people fully desire true happiness and liberation, but their minds are incorrect, their cultivation is improper, and they make themselves miserable; others suffer, and social disruptions occur. Its purpose is to make society unhappy. Therefore, from the Buddhist point of view, true happiness must be happy in the right way, based on the spirit of compassion, selflessness, the path of morality, concentration, and wisdom. Happiness transcends painful desires and selfish thoughts—peace - liberation - Nirvana. From the perspective of happiness presented by Buddhism, we can understand the efficient values of happiness. The truth of happiness does not wait in the next life, nor does it need to look elsewhere for happiness. I can indeed be in the here and now of life, opening up new dimensions for people and society today.

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