

THE EXPERIENCE AND MEANING OF MIND HAPPINESS AGING IN THE BUDDHIST CONTEXT

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Abstract

The purpose of this qualitative research was to study the meaning and experiences of mind happiness aging in Buddhist contexts. Data were collected by conducting in-depth interview with 15 elders who had mind happiness and were recruited through a purposive sampling together with a snowball selection. Data were analyzed through a content analysis and validated by member checking and peer debriefing.

Study results revealed that mind happiness aging in Buddhist contexts referred to a purely clear and peaceful feeling free from any pressures that was generated from inside and was resulted from leading a virtuous life in favor of the benefits for oneself and others; and from attaining wisdom to recognize the world in line with reality. This meaning covered the 4 main components: 1) Having faith in virtue; 2) Employing virtue as the basis for leading one's life; 3) Living with others in a sharing and caring manner; and 4) Attaining wisdom to have insight into all beings in accordance with actuality. This study has come up with a number of evidence-based findings that are comprehensively in line with the happiness defined in the contexts of Buddhist principles, which is categorized into several levels ranging from the happiness in the level that a person is dependent on consumable objects (but only up to a necessary level for fulfilling the needs of humans) and the happiness that has been developed further to the ultimate one, which is attained from having insight wisdom to know and understand all beings in accordance with actuality, and from getting liberated from all defilements.

Keywords: Aging, Mind happiness, Buddhist contexts.

Introduction

Current advancement of medical and public health technologies has reduced the mortality rate among the population and people's life expectancies tend to be longer. Thus, the structure of Thai population has shifted and had a high proportion of aging population. The number of Thai elders increased to 8.4 million in 2013 (sharing 13.2% of total population); and is predicted to increase to 25% by 2030 (Wipan Phajouebmao (editor), 2013). Therefore, Thailand has become an aging society completely. Stepping into the aging society becomes an issue that family, society and the country must take into account very seriously. For example, they need to provide the budgets for health services for the elders, generate incomes and arrange the environment for the elders to live normally and happily, be capable of doing self-care, reduce reliance on others and serve as the mental pillar for family and society; given that the elders have accumulated knowledge and experiences which can be used for improving their life quality and for developing the society and the country effectively. However, as reported, a majority of the elders in early stage (aged 60-69 years) suffer at least one underlying disease (69.3%) and the incidence of their ailments has increased in line with age increment. Furthermore, retirement from regular jobs and the changes in social roles may affect their mental security and keep them more isolated from society. Also, due to the current structure of society in which the number of nuclear families is increasing; the elders have to live alone with their spouses or by themselves, and cannot depend much on their descendants. Ultimately, life quality and happiness of the elders would be deteriorated by all these factors (Sutthichai Jitapunkul, 2011; Aumphikanit Samanwongthai, 2016).

Happiness is what humans seek for. All activities are aimed for achieving happiness. Human happiness is derived through different approaches. For example, some people might be happy from making merit and helping other people; some might be happy from having a lot of properties and good economic status; some other might be happy from having good health, a happy family, and from living in a safe environment. According to Buddhist principle, wealth and material advancement do not generate true happiness. They only provide physical pleasure for humans which can extend further to mind happiness. However, this depends on

each individual's perspectives. If a person thinks physical pleasure is so important that s/he would have to seek for; then objects, properties and money would be the things that s/he must look for and possess. In contrast, if a person is seeking for mental happiness, such as the release from all passions, liberation from suffering, and having a chance to help other people; then material assets would be less important. According to Buddhist principle, though mental happiness belongs specifically to each individual; however, such mental happiness can lead further to common happiness for the entire community, given that happiness can be developed and shared. The elderly, who suffer physical degeneration, have lived for a long time and have a variety of experiences, would emphasize more attention on mental happiness. They would adapt themselves to cope with all degenerative changes, look at the world optimistically and focus mainly on cognitive or wisdom development, which would help enhance their mental happiness. Unfortunately, among the current studies on happiness, controversies still existed about the proper definition of happiness, its components, and the appropriate way for humans to develop and sustain their happiness (Saowalak Kittipraphat, et al., 2010; Chutima Phongvarin, 2011).

Therefore, the researcher wanted to explore the meaning and experiences of mind happiness aging within Buddhist contexts, which mainly involved the dimension of wisdom and mental developments; and to use the findings to inform the development of indicators for mind happiness in these contexts, and initiate a development program for the elders so that they could feel less suffered but happier (from a development in mind, not from external factors), gain true happiness and become less dependent on external attractions. This way, life quality development among the elders could be sustained.

Objectives

To study the meaning, characteristics and experiences of mind happiness aging in Buddhist contexts.

Methodology

1. Samples: The elders who contributed for peaceful happiness of society and had been accepted as a role model for living with mind happiness, such as religious leaders, technocrats, local wisdom philosophers,

and other general people. Participants were selected through a purposive sampling together with a snowball selection. The study was conducted progressively until the data became saturated.

2. Study Period: September 2015 - October 2016

3. Study tools, data collection and analysis:

3.1 The researcher with good knowledge on the research topic; and good ability in raising questions and listening.

3.2 Informed consent form; semi-structured interview form for in-depth interview; interview record form and field note; and audio recorder.

3.3 Research process was approved by Ethical Review Committee for Human Research.

4. Each in-depth interview took about one hour for each informant. The ending of data collection depended on the saturation of data. Permission for audio-recording was sought from informants before starting an interview. All data were kept confidential and destroyed upon completion of the study.

5. Data were interpreted and analyzed simultaneously at the time of data collection in order to check the correctness before proceeding further with a following interview. Data were analyzed by “content analysis”.

Results

Data synthesis showed that mind happiness aging within Buddhist contexts referred to a purely clear and peaceful feeling free from any pressures, which are the pleasure and calmness generated from inside, resulted from leading a virtuous life in favor of the benefits for oneself and others; and from attaining wisdom to recognize the world in line with reality. This meaning covered the 4 main components and 14 smaller elements as detailed in the diagram below.

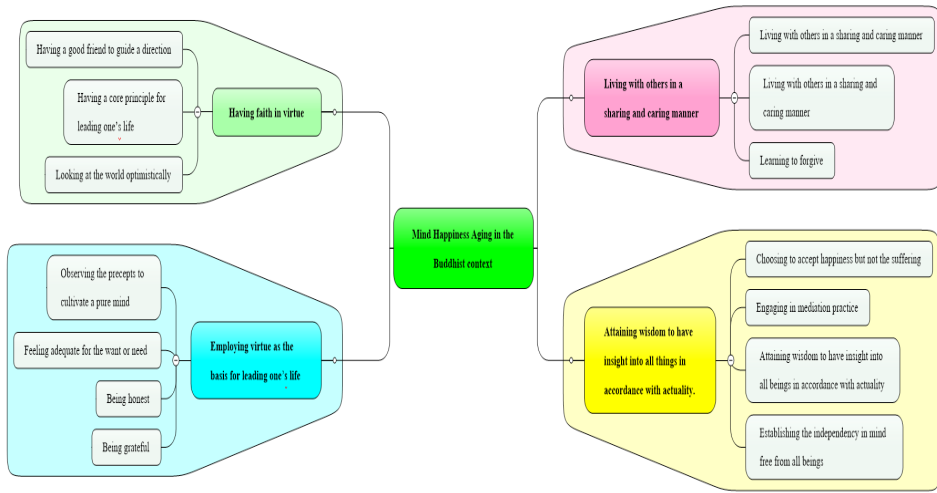


Illustration 1: Conceptual frame of mind happiness aging within Buddhist contexts.

Result

The 1st main component: Having faith in virtue. This component means having a good role model that inspires a strong belief up to the level that it turns into a faith for leading one’s life, which leads further to a good thought and virtuous behaviors. This component comprises 3 smaller aspects as follows.

1.1 Having a good friend to guide a direction: That is, having some specific persons to give advice on a good way for leading one’s life, which could be developed further as the happiness sustainable up to present. This is reflected in the following texts.

“My parents instilled me with the teaching of Lord Buddha and let me go to the temples and meet Buddhist monks regularly. So the Buddhist master had shaped up my thought all along. My maternal grandpa took me by the hand to accompany him to the temple. He was 80 years old but still kept going to the temple. So I absorbed his behavior since I was very young. I remember that I wore a white shirt and walked behind my grandpa,

just kept following him all the way. At the temple, we stayed in a pavilion and discussed the Buddha's doctrine. I loved visiting a person who liked to discuss Dharma. I always discussed with the Buddhist monks, as well as the elders. I gained knowledge from these monks and elders." (P10: 184-185, 298-299)

1.2 Having a core principle for leading one's life: This means having the principles of some teachings for sticking to, as a reminder for leading one's life virtuously, as reflected below.

"I observe the 5 precepts as the vehicle for me to achieve nirvana. This is the very first step. Observing the precepts is much more effective than giving a donation. Donation is so simple. You can ask someone to donate on your behalf; but cannot ask anyone to observe the precepts for you. The precepts keep you from taking advantage over other people. I use the following principles. 1) Do not think too much. If you are obsessive with thoughts, you will be distracted and never experience calmness. 2) Do not set unachievable goals but the possible ones. 3) Look at the world optimistically." (P10: 76, 105-107)

"I observe Sankahawattu 4 (Be generous, speak kindly, help one another, and be consistent). Generosity means giving, which can be done in many ways. Physical generosity, you can give something in kinds such as money; Verbal generosity, you only speak about good things. Then, behave yourself beneficially to society and keep doing good deeds consistently. I also observe Brahmavihara (the Four Immeasurables) meaning that we have to live with other people with loving-kindness, compassion, appreciative joy, and equanimity. When people come seeking help from us, we need to extend compassion towards them. They come to see us because they are sick. When you can think and do successfully this way, you would develop a joy in mind; because, there is another set of principles, to do good, avoid evil, and purify one's mind." (P1: 95-96, 133-138)

1.3 Looking at the world optimistically: This aspect means having a good perspective towards one's self, other people, and all surrounding situations, looking at things in a positive way, overlooking the bad aspects, or viewing that all the negative things would provide an opportunity for

developing one's self; as reflected in the following texts.

“My father does not live with me but I can lead my life happily. No reason to feel unhappy. I have a lot of relatives and been able to do anything that I wanted to. When I wanted to study, I was able to do so. I trained myself to memorize only good things and my life became better. I never memorize any bad situations. Someone used to ask me whether there was a negative story about my wife. I told him there was none. I could not remember any bad things at all but only the good things of each day.”(P2: 12-13, 26-27)

The 2nd main component: Employing virtue as the basis for leading one's life. This component means that a person would gradually develop a virtuous habit in mind and lead his life based on the principles of virtue and would never treat other persons unfairly. As a result, this person can live with other people happily and contribute further to the peacefulness in society as a whole. This component comprises 4 smaller aspects:

2.1 Observing the precepts to cultivate a pure mind: This is to stabilize physical, verbal and mental activities in a normal condition and refrain from treating one's self and other creatures unfairly; as reflected in the texts below.

“Observe the five precepts, never kill any lives, and never know how to steal things. Never violate any precepts at all. Even the water from mouth washing must be split onto the ground so that ants and insects could have something to eat. Be very careful about speech. It is easy to control one's self not to tell a lie but difficult to prevent from speaking boastfully or sarcastically. It is hard if you don't have a strong intention. We never engage ourselves in the intoxicants and gambling. On the observance day, we would observe the eight precepts.” (P7: 66-69)

1.2 Feeling adequate for the want or need and satisfied with current possessions or roles: In this aspect, a person would do everything just about right, reasonably and thoughtfully, would not compare himself with others; and would not get occupied by defilements up to a level that he has to struggle to get more things endlessly. This is reflected in the following texts.

“I feel fine for what I currently have. Feeling adequate already makes me feel happy. I don’t need to add up anything, just feel satisfied with whoever I am; and that makes me happy. I always keep thinking that I have my happiness in my own way, I am happy with the feeling of adequacy. Without having much money, I can live my life just fine; never feel distracted by any temptations.” (P14: 96,204-205)

“I feel adequate with my wants and needs. My car is old and people keep telling me to buy a new one. Well, this one is okay for me for driving to any places. I never bought a new cloth either since my retirement. When some clothes became too tight, I took them to a tailor for enlarging; and I have used these clothes until today. They are good enough for me; and I just continue using them as such. Having satisfaction with what I have makes me feel happy automatically. If I feel inadequate with this, I would need to look for them endlessly.” (P5: 97-101)

2.3 Being honest: In this aspect, a person would be sincere and would do anything as he has promised to. He would perform his physical, verbal and mental behaviors honestly without any hidden agenda to fulfill some other personal purposes; as reflected in the following texts.

“I am a frank person. I always keep my words since my childhood and never tell a lie. My mind has been like this all along. As I don’t know how to tell a lie, so I never feel suffered from this but feel happy instead. No need to worry that someone would try to check what I have said. I feel comfortable from not telling a lie, not blaming anyone, and not making a sarcastic comment.” (P9: 11-13)

2.4 Being grateful: This aspect means the expression of gratitude towards benefactors by paying respect to them, obeying them, and gladly giving helps to them in return; as reflected in the texts below.

“My mother was hospitalized but I did not have money for treatment; and had to find money in many possible ways. I felt so suffered and tried. It took 2-3 years for curing her illness. And once she was cured by my efforts. I really had my enjoyment from expressing my gratitude towards her. I felt very happy and my

mother loved me so much.” (P5: 25-29)

The 3rd main component: Living with others in a sharing and caring manner. It means seeing the worthiness of living together with others, understanding and accepting other people in accordance with their actual being, and being prompt to share virtuous things with others; and it comprises 3 aspects as follows:

3.1 Having a voluntary mind: It means having a heart of contributor involving the contribution of money, assets, and physical or cognitive assistance to others, feeling overwhelmed with pleasure and appreciation from doing so without expecting something in return; as reflected in the texts below.

“I helped patients who were going to die, led them to worship and pay homage to Buddha image and Buddhist monks, and give out some donations before leaving this world; so they would have some merits to go along to next life. I also helped in the activities of Senior Citizen Club every month. I led other elders in chanting, saying prayers, radiating loving-kindness to all beings, meditating, and in doing a physical exercise. I also helped in the activities of the temple at my full capacity and with willingness. I intended to help community and do some good deeds for my village, my nation and my religion.” (P8: 33-36, 95)

“I would help them at my full capacity for anything they asked me to; because, in helping them, I did not lose anything but gained happiness in return. I’m really happy to help others. When I saw them feeling happy and smiling, I could wear a smile on my face as well. In such a moment, I felt so overwhelmed with pleasure that I forgot to feel hungry.” (P10: 480-485)

3.2 Extending love, kindness and good wishes towards other people: This refers to the feeling of gladness and pleasure from seeing other people receiving good things in life, from having a desire to help other people to get liberated from suffering and feeling happy for them when they can successfully get liberated as such; and from extending best wishes to them without expecting anything in return; as reflected in the texts below.

“Once I had gained knowledge and attained more wisdom; I didn’t want to keep this to myself only but share it to those

who did not know much. I wanted them to be able to have an insight into the real happiness. To do this, I started from loving myself first. Once I had learned to love and pity myself; then I also learned to love other people the same as I loved myself. After that, I could help others who faced a same experience as mine to gain happiness; help them to do good deed and gain happiness; and their sufferings would disappear in the same way as mine.” (P3: 10-11, 16-18)

“Whenever I saw someone with suffering, I just wanted to help them. My eagerness was developed spontaneously, no need for me to pretend. As I saw them in an inferior status, I would want to help them. It didn’t matter if I could help them much or just a little. I felt overwhelmed with pleasure to see them free from suffering or to see their suffering become less intense” (P13: 19-21)

3.3 Learning to forgive: It means not getting angry with other people and not taking the undesirable actions of others so seriously. It is an approach for purifying one’s mind. And after forgiving someone, the mind would be empty; as reflected in the texts below.

“I can forgive all the people. When someone talks negatively about me, I do not fight back. I just forgive him and think that it is his karma. If I fight back, he and I would develop karma towards each other endlessly. If my mind forgives him, and I do not to fight back; the anger will be gone. Then, all the good things will happen to me. As disturbance has disappeared from the mind, then, only the happiness remains.” (P8: 57, 61-63)

The 4th main component: Attaining wisdom to have insight into all things in accordance with actuality. This refers to the realization that the occurrence of all beings are resulted from the action of various causes and facilitating factors; realization about the causes of happiness, the suffering, and the uncertainty of all beings; refraining from the development of psychological attachment or a hope that the conducts of all beings will be in line with what one has in mind; and leading one’s life with a proper understanding and acceptance about all beings that they happen in accordance with natural facts, and that everything will ultimately be changed and deteriorated due to the natural cause. This component comprises 4 aspects as follows.

4.1 Choosing to accept happiness but not the suffering: It means looking at one's own life as a good and happy life; removing the sufferings and worries out of one's thought; and not letting them get accumulated and cause uncomfortable feeling in mind, as reflected in the texts below.

“My father passed away since my childhood and my mother had to work in Bangkok. So my paternal grandma was the one who raised me up. However, I never had any sufferings at all. I lived happily with someone who took care of me well. What I just needed to do was to get rid of any suffering issues from myself. When the suffering disappeared, the happiness would emerge spontaneously. As everybody tries to seek for happiness, when they cannot achieve what they want, then it is the suffering for them. But if you can move the suffering out of your mind every day, you will no longer have suffering; and you can feel happy like this forever.” (P2: 11-12, 125-129)

“For anything that made me happy, I would consume it more. In contrast, for anything that led to my mental suffering, I would try to avoid and abstain from. Then I had more time to explore the intrinsic factors and found that some of them could generate the happiness for me and some could cause sufferings. So I chose only the ones that would make me happy and denied any thoughts that would lead to a suffering. By maintaining my behavior as such, I could feel happy continuously further.” (P4: 19-23)

4.2 Engaging in meditation practice: This aspect means establishing a strong concentration focusing on a specific thing constantly to avoid the influence of emotional distraction, keep the “wisdom of insight” strengthened and secured at all time, and keep reminding one's self about the thing one is doing; as reflected in the texts below.

“After waking up every morning, I would sit down observing my inhalation and exhalation and attain calmness. I continued meditating for half an hour a day, then I got a highest mark for every subject and ultimately passed the entrance examination to study in a university without any difficulties. I increased the duration to one hour a day. Then, I could learn everything within a short time but understand it very clearly. As my mind was calm, I always achieved success in everything I did. So I had both the happiness

inside my mind and the happiness from outside.” (P11: 120-127, 290-291)

4.3 Attaining wisdom to have insight into all beings in accordance with actuality: In this aspect, a person would lead his life mindfully basing on the use of wisdom; and understand the fact of life that everything is generated from the association of some causes and facilitating factors, and will ultimately be degenerated and disappear. These are reflected in the following texts.

“Human life is not consisted of anything much; only the body and mind. Everything occurs and vanishes alternately. Through the mind training to gain wisdom, we will know everything about the principles of Buddhist teachings, such as the Four Noble Truths, which include the suffering, the cause of suffering, the cessation of suffering, and the path leading to the cessation of suffering. We must learn to take the correct path based on the threefold training. That is, morality must be explicitly observed, concentration must be outstanding, and the cognitive part of the wisdom must be utilized. Lord Buddha says that the status of all being is conventional. Names and genders of people are conventional truth; but the four elements of the body namely the earth, water, wind and fire, are the absolute truth. All men and women, smart or beautiful or not, will finally face their deaths.” (P7: 261-265, 288-290)

“Everything occurs and proceeds naturally in accordance with the absolute truth but we prefer to separate it as our selves. Each individual is only a part of the nature. And when we are occupied by defilements, we would feel obsessed with ourselves. After mind development, I knew that everything is non-existent and started to see the appropriate path. There’s nothing in life. Once I learned that way, I really felt relieved. If I do not possess any self, then I would not have any suffering. The suffering exists because self does exist. And self is derived from attachment. We must refrain from developing an attachment by training our mind to attain concentration and wisdom and see the noble truths. Then we can abandon both the happiness and the suffering. Our mind would be empty, not containing anything.” (P12: 78-84,

141-146)

4.4 Establishing the independency in mind free from all beings: This aspect means knowing how to abandon everything, either the ones that cause suffering or those that bring happiness, which would free the mind from any disturbance. The mind will be stabilized and no longer be affected; as reflected in the texts below.

“ I just need only the things necessary for my life and would accept any things that could provide the convenience in life, but I won't feel obsessed with them. Most people tend to get a wrong point and feel attached with these external objects. They are just one of the helpful factors for living our lives. If we can liberate ourselves from feeling attached to them, we can experience the real happiness.” (P12: 25-27, 65-66)

“We must take our mind out from the attachments. Once we can take our mind out liberating it from emotions; we will attain a certain level of real happiness. Naturally, our bodies will have gone through the cycle of birth, getting older, getting ill, and passing away. If we see that ourselves are non-existent; then we would get released from emotion and craving. The more our mind is released from there, the more stabilized our mind would be. The happiness obtained is very sophisticated. Physical suffering or illnesses cannot make you feel suffered any longer, given that the mind has been liberated.” (P12: 101-107)

“I don't have suffering and don't have happiness either. I have established stillness in my mind. No dynamics there but calmness. We can attain ultimate happiness if we can free ourselves from defilements. When we don't expect or want to possess anything; we will never face any disappointment further. And this is the ultimate happiness of human beings.” (P11: 67-69)

Conclusion and Discussion

This research aimed to study the meaning, characteristics, components and experiences of mind happiness aging within Buddhist contexts through the in-depth interview with 15 participants. Content analysis revealed that mind happiness aging within Buddhist contexts referred to a

purely clear and peaceful feeling free from any pressures that was generated from inside and was resulted from leading a virtuous life in favor of the benefits for oneself and others; and from attaining wisdom to recognize the world in line with reality. This meaning covered the 4 main components: having faith in virtue; employing virtue as the basis for leading one's life; living with others in a sharing and caring manner; and attaining wisdom to have insight into all beings in accordance with actuality. This finding is consistent with the happiness defined based on Buddhist principles. That is, happiness is classified into several levels ranging from the happiness at fundamental level (requiring a search for objects to fulfill one's desire) to a more sophisticated happiness arising from peacefulness in mind, and the ultimate happiness (arising from having wisdom to get insight into all beings in accordance with actuality) that helps human beings to hold their mind above the good and the bad, above the happiness and the suffering, and get liberated from all defilements. The latter is the ultimate and true happiness, as well as the ultimate goal of Buddhism. The ultimate happiness comprises 3 main characteristics as follows. 1) This happiness exists at all time and no need to search for; 2) This happiness is independent, does not need to depend or rely on anything; and 3) This happiness consists of pure happiness alone, no remaining parts of suffering at all. (Phra-mahajarun Kampiro ,Up-saeng, 2004; Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 2005, 2008, 2009; Phra Brahmaganabhorn (P.A. Payutto), (2016A, 2016B); as detailed below.

1. Having faith in virtue. This consists of 3 smaller elements: having a good friend to guide the direction; having a core principle for leading one's life; and looking at the world optimistically. This is consistent with the texts prescribed in Tipitaka (Kuddaka Nikaya. Dhammapada. 25/33/48-50) stating that "well-established faith brings happiness," and consistent with Buddhist proverb stating that "Wise men shall associate with persons who have faith, observe precepts, have wisdom and thorough knowledge; because, association with virtuous persons shall always bring progress." (Listen to Dharma, 2016). Luang Por Pramote Pamojjo (2011) explains that "look at the world optimistically to establish satisfaction with and accept what we currently have or received, extend loving kindness to all human beings and animals. There is one thing better than looking at the world optimistically. That is, to look at the world in accordance with actuality, sense all phenomena through eyes, ears, nose, tongue, physical and mental touches, in accordance with the way that they actually are,

without taking into account the thoughts of one's own to cause a distortion. This way, we can see that everything occurs due to a cause; and when the cause dies down, that thing would disappear. So, we do not have to sit comforting ourselves or try to look at the world optimistically at each time when something happens". Having faith in virtue has an association with the principle of morality or precepts, which is referred to as having virtuous practice both physically and verbally (Phra Brahmaganabhorn (P.A.Payutto), (2016A, 2016B(because conducting one's behavior virtuously and leading one's life without treating other people unfairly shall bring happiness. This is evident in sentence provided in the Tipitaka as, "Observing morality brings happiness until old age",)Kuddaka Nikaya. Dhammapada. 25/33/48-50). The precepts for general people are categorized into 3 types: The five precepts, the eight precepts and the ten precepts. The observation of the precepts can be divided into 3 levels: 1) Hina-sila means simply obeying the precepts to prevent one's self from getting under the influence of greed; 2) Gocara-sila means making sure that the mind occupies itself only with good intentions, not with the bad ones; and 3) Anagocara-sila means keeping the mind in the present, not letting it wander among distracting thoughts. Intension is considered as the morality and all prohibitions constitute the precepts. To break the precepts, "the body and mind" or "the speech and mind" must work together. In other word, it results from the working together between the mind and the intention. (Phra Suddhidhammaransi Gambhiramedhacariya (Ajaan Lee Dhammadharo), 2012).

2. Employing virtue as the basis for leading one's life. This consists of 4 smaller components: observing the precepts to cultivate a pure mind; feeling adequate for the want or need and satisfied with current possessions or roles; being honest; and being grateful. This is consistent with Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (2005, 2007A, 2008, 2009A) which states that the happiness arising from not taking advantage over someone in term of eating, sexual conduct, and the honor, is the basic happiness or the happiness of laypersons that could be managed and controlled to be confined in a scope that is not competitive and unfair to other people, by observing the "precept or morality". This is also consistent with Buddhist principle regarding Chanda, which includes satisfaction, pleasure, gladness, and craving for a given thing. Chanda is a Cetasika (mental factor) in the neutral group that can go along or take side well with either the good or the bad sides of the mind (i.e. the good or bad intentions). Mental factor with wholesome intention

is the desire to do good deeds (Kattukamyata Chanda), such as the Chanda listed as the first component of Iddhipada 4 (Path of accomplishment, basis of success). The unwholesome mental factors are such as the desire to consume, to possess, and to take for one's self (Tanha Chanda, the mental factor for desire). It is also consistent with Buddhist principles of "Contentment" (satisfaction with whatever is one's own), which is the gladness or satisfaction with the matters required for living that the person has acquired with proper endurance, not in a greedily manner, and without being jealous with someone (Phra Brahmaganabhorn (P.A. Payutto), (2016A, 2016B); and consistent with Phra Paisal Visalo (2010) which states that if you just appreciate everything that you currently have, it will not be hard to cultivate happiness. Just feel satisfied with what we have, feel glad for what we have attained, and feel proud of what we are.

3. Living with others in a sharing and caring manner. This consists of 3 smaller components: having a voluntary mind; extending love, kindness and good wishes wards to other people; and learning to forgive. This is consistent with texts provided in Tipitaka, such as the ones saying, "A giver is always loved by all", (Anguttara Nikaya. Book of the Fives. 22/35/38-39), "Loving kindness well practiced, brings happiness at all time, no matter when you are asleep or awake and you will be loved by human fellows," (Kuddaka Nikaya Patisambhidamagga. 31/574/350), and "A person without anger in mind will have neither happiness nor suffering", (Vinaya Pitaka Bhikkhu Vibhanga.7/347/133). The finding is also consistent with Phra Brahmaganabhorn (P.A. Payutto), (2009) which states that the happiness arising from staying together with other people in a sharing and caring manner is the "social happiness", which is defined as the happiness that comes from good friendship and from living together with loving kindness and compassion among each other in families and community who care for, love and think of each other, and so on. The basic Buddhist principles basically underpinning this kind of happiness are "Brahmavihara 4" (the Four Sublime States of Mind), which is the principle for leading the mind, and "Sangaha-vatthu 4" (the four ways of showing favor), which is the principle of conducts for the happiness in society.

4. Attaining wisdom to have insight into all beings in accordance with actuality. This aspect comprises 4 smaller components: choosing to accept happiness but not the suffering; engaging in meditation practice; attaining wisdom to have insight into all beings in accordance with actual-

ity; and establishing the independency in mind free from all beings. This is consistent with the texts provided in Tipitaka saying, “Attainment of wisdom brings happiness”, (Kuddaka Nikaya. Dhammapada. 25/33/48-50) Phra Brahmaganabhorn (P.A. Payutto) states that the state of the wisdom is attained in three different aspects. 1) Attain wisdom to know and understand that all beings occur, remain, and then change all the time according to the rule of cause and effect; 2) Know and understand that the manifestations of all beings are under a situation of being pressed. They cannot exist persistently in such situation and need to change. Wisdom will help individuals to adapt themselves, improve and manage the system of relationship between causes and effects in a way that they could get out from the pressing situation, and in a way that could yield good results, rather than letting everything continue spontaneously without a use of wisdom. 3) Know and understand that all beings do not have a real existence. They all are impermanent. We should not establish an attachment in a way that our bodies belong to ourselves; given that all beings are constituted from various causes and facilitating factors at each given moment, and relationship between such causes and factors will define the characteristics of what will be happening further, and this will keep changing endlessly. One being may show an intact figure for us to see; but such figure cannot sustain itself forever. If individuals know and understand this truth, they will look at everything without putting their mind to attach with it. They will be released from attachment, have a liberated mind and feel serene, relieved and comfortable (Phra Brahmaganabhorn P.A. Payutto, 2009). This is also consistent with the concept of Matthieu Ricard (2008; 43, 50) which explains that happiness is a deep sense of serenity and fulfillment derived from a high level of well-being in mind. It is not merely a temporally pleasurable sensation but a condition that could be sustained constantly. We can attain this happiness only after we can liberate ourselves from mental blindness and unwholesome emotions. It is the wisdom that reveals to us the running course of the world based on reality without a blind or any distortions. This is also consistent with the concept of Dalai Lama (Dalai Lama & Culler, 2001) explaining that there are several levels of happiness in the contexts of Buddhist principles. The true and sustainable happiness is attained only after a person is liberated and no longer has suffering. A facilitating factor that could lead to a higher level of fulfillment for the happiness in life is the “enlightenment”. Phra Paisal Visalo (2008) describes that, to attain happiness, the wisdom is required. The wisdom refers to the

employment of virtuous knowledge and thoughts that could help individuals to lead their lives happily, and says that “Each and every behavior is initiated from a thought, an opinion and a belief. We would do everything based on what we think or believe. If our thought, opinion and belief are directed by wisdom, appropriate reasons and proper knowledge; it will result in virtuous behaviors that would lead further to happiness. Thus, wisdom serves as a compass directing our lives to a correct way beneficial to us and other persons, and as the fundamental of physical, mental and social happiness.” This is evident by the statement of Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (2005, 2008, 2009) saying that it is the happiness of a person who has reached the ultimate feeling through wisdom; because he can abandon his existence, learn that anything he has does not belong to him, get enlightened that everything occurs due to a cause and a facilitating factor, his existence is really virtual and constituted from ignorance, and he has been taking it seriously as his existence, and has developed the feeling that this existence is mine and that existence is yours. Getting rid of the false idea about the existence of one’s self is the best way to cut the rooting cause of suffering. After a person has got enlightened as such, the components in the course of his life will change from heavy burdens and darkness to happiness and calmness. This is the ultimate happiness. However, the persons who can understand and want to have this kind of happiness are those who have gone through the happiness of a lower or basic level.

This study has come up with a number of evidence-based findings that are comprehensively in line with the happiness defined in the contexts of Buddhist principles, which is categorized into several levels ranging from the happiness in the level that a person is dependent on consumable objects (but only up to a necessary level for fulfilling the needs of humans) and the happiness that has been developed further to the ultimate one, which is attained from having insight wisdom to know and understand all beings in accordance with actuality, and from getting liberated from all defilements. These findings reflect that the Buddhist principles have been implanted deeply in the lifestyle of Thai elders within the cultural contexts of Thailand, in which most people are Buddhist followers. Buddhist teachings are the principles that can bring mind happiness to all humans, as per the texts provided in Tipitaka saying that, “Those who are equipped with morality, delighted with virtue, have been calmed through wisdom, and have attained the cessation of suffering, shall live happily.” (Anguttara Nikaya. Book of the Ones. 20/568/315-317).

Recommendation for Application

1. The findings of this study will serve as the criteria for measuring the level of mid happiness of each individual within Buddhist contexts at a given moment and identifying the area of development that each one would require further.

2. The findings of this study can be used as the basis for implementing a mental development program for people of all ages and from all walks of life; so that they can attain happiness more easily, learn to be a giver and contributor, develop less happiness of the basic level (arising from an attachment with materials) but more with a higher and more sophisticated level by attaining insight wisdom to liberate one's self from all attachments.

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