



The Evaluation Criteria of Happiness in The Sutta Pitaka: An Analytical Study

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Introduction

Buddhism came into this world for the sole purpose of realizing the nature of existence and suffering. At the same time, the Buddha also taught how to get rid of them to bring happiness when suffering is absent. Everyone wants to be happy, but not everyone knows how to be happy.¹ That is why the Buddha appeared in this world, for no other purpose than to show humanity the path to lasting happiness. The Anguttara Nikaya affirms that: Tathagata was arises in the world 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.² He appeared in the world for many to avoid the unlawful and dwelling in the Dharma.³

I. The Buddha's perspective on happiness

Two months after attaining enlightenment under the bodhi tree, having attained full insight, the Buddha contemplated predestined with his previous teachers, but all passed away. Ultimately the Buddha thought of the five energetic ascetics who attended to him during his struggle for enlightenment. With his supernatural vision, he perceived that they were residing in the Deer Park at *Isipatana* near

¹ MN. 46 The Greater Discourse on Ways of Undertaking Things

² AN.170–187 Ekapuggalavagga: The Chapter on One Person

³ AN. Ekadhamma Suttas: A Single Thing

Benares. After arriving at the Deer Park and preaching to the five *Kondanna* brothers with the first lesson: The *Dhammacakkapavattana Sutta* (the turning of the *Dhamma* Wheel or Setting into Motion the Wheel of the *Dhamma*). In this sermon, the Buddha expounded that the Middle Path (*Majjhimapitipada*) leads to peace, happiness, and attain enlightenment which He discovered. He exhorted the five ascetics to avoid two extremes, i.e. indulgence in sensual pleasures (*Kama-sukha*) and devotion to self-mortification (*Atta-kilamatha*).

Indulgence in sense pleasures is the indulgence in desirable sense objects such as sight, sound, smell, etc., which are low, common, unworthy, and unprofitable. During the Buddha time, some people held the belief that earthly bliss could be enjoyed in this very life, waiting for happiness in the future is foolish. According to the *Buddha*, it is a wrong view since sensual enjoyments just lead to arising craving and clinging which is the cause of *samsara*.

The Buddha himself experienced this extreme for thirteen years as a prince, He knew that this enjoyment is not the practice of the noble one; it will not lead to welfare and happiness. Therefore, the *Buddha* advised His disciples to avoid it. Herein, it should not be misunderstood the Buddha expected His disciples to give up material pleasures and retire to the forest without enjoying this life. The *Buddha* was not so narrowing minded like that. He advised His disciples to avoid the extreme because the enjoyment of sensual pleasure is very short, it never satisfies one's desires and it is the result of unpleasantness, one cannot seek delight in such feeling pleasures.

Devotion to self-mortification is opposite to the first extreme. It is a form of self-torture practice under the belief that luxurious living causes attachment and that only extreme austerity could lead to internal peace. During the Buddha's time, there was Niganthanataputta who practiced this method with a large number of followers. To him, emancipation can be achieved by austerities, so he was denied food, clothing, bed, etc.

Before enlightenment, the Buddha also practiced various forms of austerities for six years but He realized that they are painful, unworthy, and useless. They only multiply suffering instead of diminishing it. Therefore, the Buddha taught His disciples to avoid the extreme. However, the four requisites that support a worthy life do not need to deny. One can use them but one should not attach so much to them.

From a practical perspective, the Buddha mentioned two kinds of happiness:

Sense pleasures (*Kama Sukha*): involves contact with the objects people, things. Happiness comes from experience and sensory sensations in life, such as acquiring money, beauty, fame, comfort, etc. Sense pleasures arises from the contact of the five faculties (eyes, ears, nose, tongue, body,) with

the five objects (visible objects, sound, odor, taste, touch). Any pleasant sensation, pleasure or happiness that arises from these five sensualities is called sensory happiness. Sentient beings often consider these to be blissful, loving, rejoicing, enjoying themselves as if they were the highest happiness in the world that human beings can achieve. These feelings are easy to make us attachment and sink in it. Therefore, the Buddha taught us to avoid this extreme of sensual pleasures.

Mental happiness (*Cetasika Sukha*) including two parts:

- Joy of the law: the joy of having faith in the Buddha, the joy of reading Suttas, listening to the Dhamma, making offerings to the Sangha...

- The nourishing powers and the joy of the mystic trance of meditation. Detached from all sense-desires and unwholesome mental state; experience deep joy by practicing concentration and peace of mind on the meditative object; experience deeper, more subtle pleasure when the practitioner does not cling to the two upper levels of happiness; Happiness is achieved by letting go all the past, present, future ideas, emotional reactions, attitudes, and thoughts in subjective and selfish directions. Turn your mind to the Three Insights⁴ to attain it.

The bliss one experience in meditation must attain one of the four *Jhana*. According to the *Sangiti Sutta*⁵ in the *Digha Nikaya*, in the sets of four things, there are Four *Jhanas*, whereby the believer's mind is purged from all earthly emotions, and detached as it were from his body which remains plunged in a profound trance:

- *First Jhana*: detached from all sense-desires, detached from unwholesome mental states, enters and remains in the first jhana, which is with thinking and pondering, born of detachment, filled with delight and joy.
- *Second Jhana*: subsiding of thinking and pondering by gaining inner tranquility and oneness of mind, enters and remains in the second jhana, which is without thinking and pondering, born of concentration, filled with delight and joy.
- *Third Jhana*: the fading away of delight, remaining imperturbable, mindful, and clearly aware, experiences that joy of the Noble ones say: "*Happy is who dwells with equanimity and mindfulness.*" Enters and remains in the third jhana. The feeling of joy, which is an active sensation, also disappears, while the disposition of happiness still remains in addition to mindful equanimity.

⁴ The Path of Purification by Bhaddantaariya Buddhaghosa. The three Insights are Insight into the mortal conditions of self and others in previous lives; Supernatural insight into future mortal conditions (deaths and rebirths); Nirvana insight – Insight into present mortal sufferings to overcome all passions or temptations.

⁵ The Discourse for Reciting Together, translated by Thānissaro Bhikkhu.

- *Fourth Jhana*: having given up pleasure and pain, and with the disappearance of former gladness and sadness, enters and remains in the fourth jhana which is beyond pleasure and pain, and purified by equanimity and mindfulness. All sensations, even of happiness and unhappiness, of joy and sorrow, disappear, only pure equanimity and awareness remaining.

In addition to these two levels of happiness, the Buddha also mentioned the happiness of *Nibbana*.

Nibbana is a *Pali* term (*Nirvana* in *Sanskrit*) that literally means “blowing out” or “extinguishing.” It is a state of liberation and enlightenment that transcends suffering and the cycle of rebirth. *Nibbana* is described as the cessation of craving, ignorance, and the extinguishment of the fires of greed, hatred, and delusion. It is a state of mind beyond ordinary human experiences, characterized by boundless peace, clarity, and unconditioned happiness. This happiness is not dependent on external factors but arises from within as a result of the complete cessation of craving and ignorance.

Attainment through the Noble Eightfold Path:

The Noble Eightfold Path, which includes elements such as right understanding, right intention, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration, serves as the framework for attaining *Nibbana*. By following this path, practitioners cultivate wisdom, ethical conduct, and mental discipline, ultimately leading to the realization of *Nibbana*.

II. The criteria of happiness through 38 blessings in Mahamangala sutta

The “*Mahāmaṅgala Sutta*”⁶ is a Buddhist scripture that lists 38 blessings or factors that lead to happiness and well-being. These blessings are considered to be important criteria for evaluating one’s level of happiness and spiritual progress. These blessings cover a wide range of virtues and attributes that can be cultivated by individuals and societies alike. Some of the blessings mentioned in the sutta include:

1. Avoiding association with foolish and unwholesome people.
2. Associating with wise and virtuous individuals.
3. Respecting those who are worthy of respect.
4. Humility and contentment.

⁶ This Sutta appears in the Sutta-Nipata (v.258ff) and in the Khuddakapatha.

5. Practicing gratitude and showing gratitude to others.
6. Being patient and easily spoken to.
7. Seeking opportunities to learn and practice the Dharma (Buddha's teachings).
8. Engaging in discussions on the Dharma.
9. Abandoning harmful actions and cultivating virtuous deeds.
10. Cultivating loving-kindness and compassion towards all beings.

The Mahāmaṅgala Sutta emphasizes that true blessings or happiness arise from inner virtues and actions that lead to well-being and spiritual growth, rather than external material wealth or fame. It provides guidance for leading a meaningful and fulfilled life by cultivating positive qualities and abandoning negative traits.

III. The four criteria with 18 factors

Group 1. Property gains from a legitimate business

The Anana Sutta⁷ mentions a householder who makes an effort to invest in a legitimate business, harvest a lot of property, and then use that income to support his wife and children, take care of his mother, share alms with others, do meritorious deeds, etc. As a result, four kinds of bliss are obtained:

1. *Atthi sukha*: (The bliss of having) That is, the feeling of comfort and happiness when thinking of one's possession is due to genuine effort and accumulation, thanks to legitimate labor, due to diligent harvesting. "My money is increasing; the revenue of my business is increasing; my asset price is increasing; my stock price is going up." This sukha is the joy of possession.

2. *Bhoga sukha*: (The bliss of wealth) The feeling of joy and happiness when using the lawfully produced wealth earned for daily living expenses and doing blessed deeds. Due to one's wealth, one enjoys various amenities: one sees beautiful sights; listens to melodious music; smells the sweet scent; a person tastes delicious food; And people like pleasant physical contact. All these comforts bring happiness.

⁷ AN. IV. 62 The Discourse of Debtless

3. *Ānanya sukha*: (The bliss of debtlessness) A sense of peace of mind when observing and knowing that you owe no debt anything, material, emotional or legal, more or less, great or small to anyone at all.

4. *Anavajjasukha*: (The bliss of blamelessness) The feeling of comfort and security associated with a true, good, faultless life. For a householder, there is greater happiness than the previous three. It is to avoid actions that go against the Path. A householder examines oneself and ensures that he abstains from unwholesome behavior: he abstains from killing; stealing; sexual misconduct; lying and deceiving others; From harsh words, backbiting words, slander hurt others. He abstained from the use of intoxicants. He ensures that his livelihood does not involve dealing with weapons, poisons, animals for slaughter, meat, and intoxicants such as alcohol. His mind relished this. He is still free from fear of government laws or criticism from society in his current life, as well as fear of descending into the world or in the next life. He also escaped the agony of remorse. Remaining cheerful, calm, and fearless, a person with such a pure mind experiences a kind of happiness that certainly surpasses other worldly pleasures.

The *Dhammapada* mentions the benefits of this life and the benefits of the next life of the householder who lives a true, good, faithful, virtuous, almsgiving, and wise life: “Here he rejoices, hereafter he rejoices; one who performed meritorious deeds rejoices in both existences. He rejoices and greatly rejoices when he sees the purity of his own deeds”⁸, and “ Here he is happy, hereafter he is happy; one who performs meritorious deeds is happy in both existences. Happily, he exclaims: “I have done meritorious deeds”. He is happier still when he is reborn in a higher world.”⁹

Group 2. Habitat and life area

In the *Vibhanga* 339, the *Buddha* referred to the four supporting conditions (*sampatti*). With these conditions, *Kusala Kamma* has the opportunity to produce good results. They are:

1. *Gati sampatti*: (Rebirth in a favorable birth) All higher planes of existence such as the human world, the worlds of *Deva*, and the worlds of *Brahma* are called *Gati sampatti*. This condition is influenced by one’s past actions (karma) and the quality of one's ethical conduct. Positive actions and virtuous behavior increase the likelihood of being reborn in a good realm. Being reborn in such abodes gives the opportunity to their *Kusala kamma* to produce desirable results.¹⁰

⁸ Dhammapada verse 16

⁹ Dhammapada verse 18

¹⁰ Ashin Janakabhivamsa, *Abhidhamma in Daily life*, (Mahagandayone Monastery, Translated by U Ko Lay (pro) Faculty of Patipatti International Theravada Buddhist Monastery, Myanmar, 1999), p. 210.

2. *Upadhi sampatti*: (Possession of attractive physical features) For beings reborn in *Gati Sampatti* (especially the human world), it is important that they also have *Upadhi sampatti*, pleasant traits, or good personalities. A human being with ugly physical characteristics may not achieve success or popularity while people with pleasant appearance, despite being born into a low class or poverty, may receive help from others and achieve success in life.¹¹

3. *Kala sampatti*: (Rebirth at a favorable time) Being born during a period or in a location where the conditions are conducive to leading a wholesome and fulfilling life. A time of prosperity with no civil war, no foreign invaders, no economic blockade, no global isolation, a stable political system, and social, cultural, and economic conditions, as well as the presence of spiritual teachings and opportunities for personal growth and development. The dynasty of noble, wise rulers is called *Kala sampati*. Under the leadership of wise regents who care about the social welfare of the people, and promote their prosperity, health, and education, the resulting kusala kamma is an opportunity to take effect.

4. *Payoga sampatti*: (Presence of effort) means the combined effect of mindfulness, vigilance, and knowledge. Here knowledge means harmless knowledge as well as *Vitakka* (good reasoning). Vigilance, effort, alertness, lucidity, wisdom, intelligence, and mindfulness are all *Payoga sampatti*. Having the necessary means, resources, knowledge, and diligence to accomplish one's goals and lead a successful life. This condition emphasizes the importance of having the practical skills, intellectual abilities, and work ethic required to make progress and achieve desired outcomes. It encompasses qualities such as knowledge, competence, perseverance, and the ability to utilize appropriate tools or resources effectively.

Group 3. Relation to oneself

In the *Anguttara*,¹² the Buddha points out five types of blessings that we must practice in order to achieve happiness.

1. Faith (*Saddhā*), having faith in the Three Jewels, believing in karmic cause and effect.
2. Precepts (*Sīla*), living ethically, without mistakes. Precepts are the basis for concentration (*Samadhi*) and wisdom (*panna*) to arise. Precepts are the fundamental ladder of all the ultimate good, which is to prevent evil and to do good.
3. Widely learned (*Bāhusaccaṃ*), knowledge promoted, listened to a wide range of studies.
4. Effort (*Viriyārambha*), diligent effort. The four right efforts: Endeavor to start performing good deeds; Endeavor to perform more good deeds; Endeavor to prevent evil from forming; Endeavor to eliminate already-formed evil.

¹¹ Pa Auk Tawya Sayadaw, *The workings of Kamma*, (Myanmar, 2009), p.219.

¹² A. III. 132

5. Wisdom (*Paññā*), is a thorough understanding of everything.

Group 4 The five *Varas*

The Buddha taught the five *Varas* (Five Good Wishes) to both laymen (creating goodness) and monks (practicing power). These five *Varas*,¹³ expresses the five needs of human happiness that people wishing each other to attain peace and happiness in life. However, to truly receive these blessings, one needs to practice corresponding virtuous actions, cultivate ethics, and wisdom.

1. Longevity (*Āyu*): This is a wish for longevity and good health. To have a long and healthy life, one should preserve and cherish life, follow ethical principles like non-harming, have a balanced diet, and consider the consequences of actions.

2. Beauty (*Vaṇṇa*): This is a wish for beauty and prosperity. However, beauty here not only refers to outward appearance but also includes character and compassionate hearts. To have true beauty, one needs to practice compassion, show kindness, and live a simple life.

3. Happiness (*Sukha*): This is a wish for happiness and contentment. To attain happiness, one should work to reduce suffering and discomfort, avoid harmful actions towards oneself and others, and nurture a pure and serene mind.

4. Wealth (*Bhoga*): This is a wish for wealth and abundance. It is essential to recognize that wealth is a means to support life and help others. If one becomes overly greedy and possessive, wealth can become a burden to the soul.

5. Power (*Bala*): This is a wish for power and influence. However, power and influence are only attained if one possesses wisdom and ethics. Using power responsibly and compassionately is crucial in life.

These blessings are not merely empty wishes but also goals to achieve happiness in the lives of Buddhist practitioners. By cultivating virtues and practicing ethics, they aspire to attain these blessings not only for themselves but also for the benefit of all beings in society.

¹³ D.III.77; S.V.147

Conclusion

The Buddha's teachings on happiness, as found in the Sutta Pitaka, offer profound insights into the valuation criteria for genuine well-being. By recognizing the impermanence of external sources of happiness, following the Middle Path, cultivating the Noble Eightfold Path, practicing ethical conduct, nurturing mental development, embracing renunciation and contentment, and cultivating compassion and loving-kindness, individuals can embark on a transformative journey toward lasting happiness. These timeless teachings continue to guide and inspire seekers of happiness and inner peace to this day.

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