



## The Natural State of Happiness

Happiness may be natural but it can feel very elusive unless you know how to cultivate it properly, says **Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche**. He presents five noble qualities that enable us to experience this ever-present happiness.

PAINTINGS BY MICHAEL NEWHALL

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**W**e all know, intellectually at least, that the Buddha's dharma is not merely a topic of study, nor is it simply something to be practiced on our meditation cushions. But as we hurry through our daily lives, it is easy to forget that the quality of formal practice is intimately tied to the quality of our minds, moment to moment. Practitioners of all levels can benefit from instructions on how to enrich their own lives and the lives of others by cultivating five noble qualities that are within reach of us all: *contentment, rejoicing, forgiveness, good heart, and mindfulness.*

The basic nature of our mind is essentially good. The Buddha taught that all beings are buddhas covered by momentary obscurations; when those obscurations are removed, they are real buddhas. The true identity of every sentient being, not just human beings, is a state of unconditioned suchness. This is the basic nature as it is, pure and perfect. We have an inherent capacity to care for others and to understand; it's not a product of education or upbringing. To practice the dharma means simply to develop and nurture these intrinsic qualities. That is our task, our responsibility.

According to the Buddhist approach to spirituality, the ability to care includes both loving-kindness and compassion. We aim to cultivate loving-kindness and compassion until they are boundless, totally free from partiality. The ability to understand, when developed to its utmost, is called "the wisdom that realizes egolessness," an insight that sees the fact that the self, or the personal identity, has no real existence.

There are many conventional methods for infinitely expanding our kindness and compassion and realizing the true view. *Contentment*, for instance,

is a valuable asset not only for so-called spiritual people but for everyone. Discontentment ruins every chance for happiness and well-being, but true happiness is immediately present in a moment of feeling content and satisfied. From today on, no matter what, try to appreciate whatever you have: the comfort of your home, the pleasure of your possessions, and the goodness in the people close to you. Happiness is already present and accessible to each and every one of us.

Often when imagining what it takes to make us feel happy, we see some other place or object that we haven't managed to possess: *I'm just about to. I'm on my way there. I can achieve it, I simply haven't yet.* As long as fulfillment is at a distance, we will remain unfulfilled. When we do not get what we want, we are not happy. Ironically, once we do get what we seek, it's not that satisfying and we still are not happy. The grass is always greener on the other side.

We all know that those who have nothing suffer. It is understandable; they are hungry and they have lots of other problems. They may be too hot or too cold. But who is truly happy?

We need to seriously investigate whether people who have fame, power, and wealth are happy and whether those who have nothing are always unhappy. When we look into this, we see that happiness is not based on objects but on one's mental state. For that reason, those who are truly happy are the ones who appreciate what they have. Whenever we are content, in that moment, we are fulfilled. The teachings of the Buddha are common sense.

On one hand, it's very simple: we are all searching for happiness. How do we become happy with-

out a big effort? Whenever we appreciate what we have, we are happy. That effort is an intelligent technique. We might have a very simple life, but still we can think, *This flower is lovely* or *This water is good*. If we are too picky, thinking this is wrong and that's wrong, then nothing is ever perfect. We need to learn how to be content so that whatever we have is precious, real, and beautiful. Otherwise, we might be chasing one mirage after another.

The second noble quality is *rejoicing*. Our basic goodness is obscured by negative emotions. The Buddha said that there are 84,000 types of negative emotions, but among these, there are two in particular that often cause problems because they are quite difficult to notice: pride and envy. Envy is one of our biggest, most unnecessary types of mental suffering. If someone else's life is better than ours, we become jealous, angry, and disappointed. It can sometimes make us very uneasy: our food loses its flavor, we have trouble sleeping, and our blood pressure can go up. Rejoicing is the second intelligent remedy to all this useless self-torture. We can mentally share in other people's happiness. Is there any easier way to attain happiness?

The third noble quality is *forgiveness*, which is very important. Pride can be quite powerful. Even in moments when we are loving and caring, if we're not getting along with someone and our heart is saying, "The best thing to do is just forgive," behind that voice there is another one saying, "No, don't. You are right. You did nothing wrong." Pride constantly prevents us from forgiving others, an act that is so healthy and beautiful.

Forgiving and apologizing have the power to completely heal rifts, but we need to understand how and when to apply them. If we try too early, the situation might still be volatile. We need to find the proper moment, and once we've done that, we should be careful about the words we choose, the tone of our voice, and even the physical gestures and facial expressions we make. Each of these has a lot of power, and if one of them is off, we won't be that effective. If, on the other hand, we can express an apology in a heartfelt way, we will always be able to achieve peace, respect, and mutual understanding.

Most important of all is to have a *good heart*, which is the fourth noble quality. Like everything else, in order to have a good heart we need to investigate until we are clear about what true

well-being actually is, both in the temporary and long-term sense. The source of happiness and well-being is not only loving-kindness and compassion but also an insight into the true view of reality, because someone who fully recognizes reality becomes a tathagata, or fully awakened one. Conversely, the source of suffering is hate, craving, and close-mindedness. These three are the roots from which all our troubles grow.

By "true view" I mean knowing the nature of things exactly as it is: the basic, essential nature of what is. This insight has to do with how we experience things. Everything that appears to us seems real and solid but in fact is only a mere impression of something that occurs as a result of causes and conditions. In and of themselves, things do not possess even a shred of solid existence. This is why the Buddha taught that all phenomena are emptiness while occurring in dependent connection. Hence, it is good to study the twelve links of dependent origination, both external and internal. This will enable us to see that mind is of primary importance; everything depends on it. Whatever is experienced, felt, or perceived is dependent on mind—on an experiencer experiencing it, observing it, knowing it.

Why would the Buddha say that all sentient beings are confused or bewildered? Was it because sentient beings really are confused? It could be that the Buddha was mistaken and that all sentient beings are not confused. We need to investigate this point, because one of the two parties is definitely mistaken. The Buddha also said, "Don't take my words at face value." If they are wrong then we should speak up. We are allowed to examine the Buddha's words for ourselves and to question whether or not he was wrong.

Let's take an example. The Buddha said that all formed things are impermanent and unreal. However, we have the instinctive feeling that things are actually real and permanent. He really challenged us. He said that we haven't bothered to look closely; we haven't questioned our own beliefs. When we do, we discover that things are not really as they seem. Things are re-formed again and again, moment by moment, by causes and circumstances. When we start to carefully investigate and dissect objects, we also see that they are made out of smaller and smaller parts: molecules, atoms, more and more minute particles. If people bothered to explore in this way, they would find that even the atom does not really exist.

Our perseverance should be joyous and spontaneous. Such perseverance springs from our awareness of the unconditioned natural state.

## DISCIPLES! AREN'T YOU FILLED WITH JOY?

*A spontaneous song of experience by Chokyi Nyima Rinpoche.*

In the essence of realization of the buddhas, the lords of the three times,  
The natural state of the dharma of the definitive meaning,  
There are no divisions as to buddhas and sentient beings.  
Sugatagarbha is present in everyone.  
Reflecting on this innate state, I feel great joy!

All beings are fooled by the thought of ego-clinging.  
Reflecting on this delusion, I feel deep despair!  
The lord guru has pointed out the natural face of awareness.  
Reflecting on this liberation, I am filled with amazement!

This is not far away; it is right before you.  
It is not too difficult; it is too simple.  
What a great loss not to recognize  
The fact that your present ordinary mind  
Is the self-existing buddha!

Don't cover your naked empty awareness  
With layers of indecisive meandering!  
Don't veil your natural face  
Within the grip of a meditator and his object.  
Now is time for direct experience!

The sign of experience is your nature turning gentle.  
Faith and devotion spring forth spontaneously.  
Love and compassion naturally well up.  
The ocean of understanding and experience overflows.

Vital it is to practice the view, meditation, and action  
Condensed into a single key point!

Seizing the stronghold of your innate mind  
You have captured the illustrious kingdom of dharmakaya.  
With no need to hope for a future result,  
Disciples! Aren't you filled with joy?

This inexpressible nature, self-existing wakefulness,  
Is claimed to be understood by almost everyone,  
But rare is it that someone is free from mental fabrication!

You may have the drive of wishing to meditate,  
But unless you give rise to experience from your heart,  
Halfway understanding will fail to liberate you.  
What certainty is there, without realizing the true nature!

Resolve the view definitively!  
Refine the practice repeatedly!



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FROM *THE UNION OF MAHAMUDRA AND DZOGCHEN*, BY CHOKYI NYIMA RINPOCHE.  
PUBLISHED BY RANGJUNG YESHE PUBLICATIONS.

As pain and worry diminish, our confused way of experiencing subsides, and we begin to understand how other beings feel. This is when real compassion overtakes us and a sincere, unchangeable devotion begins to grow. It is the dawn of irreversible or unshakeable confidence.

In the *Root Verses of the Middle Way*, the great master Nagarjuna wrote that since the formed cannot be found to exist, the unformed couldn't possibly exist either. He also said that samsara is merely our thinking. When we are free of thought, that is real freedom.

The discovery of the unconditioned natural state involves a process of learning, reflection, and meditation training. The most important of these three is meditation. We hear about all different styles of spiritual practice—such as meditating, visualizing, and reciting mantras—but we must understand that there is only one purpose to all these endeavors: improving ourselves. This means allowing our basic goodness to manifest.

To achieve this we need to apply the teachings in daily life. The first step toward developing kindness is *mindfulness*, making our minds as calm and clear as possible, which is the fifth noble quality. This is something we can practice every day, wherever we are, whatever we are doing. We need to be aware each and every moment. What are we saying? What are we thinking? How are we moving about? Be aware moment by moment, before moving the body, before speaking, and also while moving and speaking; then afterward remain aware, asking, what did I say or do?

There are many types of meditation training, but they all fall into one of two categories: the first is deliberate meditation with effort, and the second is practicing being completely effortless, free of conceptual focus. The most profound and truest meditation is the training in complete effortlessness, but it is not our habit to be that way. We are pretty much in the groove of being deliberate, in using effort, whether mental, verbal, or physical. Unconditioned suchness, which is our natural state, transcends every type of mental construct and is effortless. Learning, reflection, and meditation are very important because we need to recognize our true basic state. Through listening and learning we become familiar with the teachings, and through reflection we become convinced of their truth and develop certainty. Learning and reflecting are definitely deliberate and require a lot of effort, but they are essential.

In order to be brought face to face with unconditioned suchness, our basic nature exactly as it is, there are two factors that are very helpful, but they are not easy to acquire. One is boundless love and compassion; whenever love is almost overwhelming, when kindness and compassion are unwavering, there is a moment available for

you to realize the unconditioned natural state. The other is sincere devotion to and unshakeable pure perception of the unconditioned natural state. From this spontaneously arises a respect for and pure perception of those who have realized the unconditioned natural state and have the capacity to reveal it to others. This also includes a pure appreciation of anyone who really practices and trains in the Buddhist teachings.

In a nutshell, the real Buddhist practice is to try our best to bring forth in all beings the true sources of happiness and well-being—boundless love and compassion and the unmistakable realization of the natural state, the unconditioned innate nature—while at the same time removing the causes of suffering, which are craving, hate, and close-mindedness. That is what it really means to have a good heart.

Love and compassion can be expanded until they become boundless, genuine, and impartial, making no distinctions between friend, enemy, and stranger. We must continue in our efforts until we have removed even the slightest obstacle to our love and compassion. Only when our love and compassion have become boundless will they be truly effortless.

Meanwhile, our perseverance should be joyous and spontaneous. Such perseverance springs from our awareness of the unconditioned natural state, therefore it is not merely an admiration, yearning, or longing. As your comprehension of the profound nature becomes stronger and grows deeper, you develop a confident trust. Spontaneous, effortless compassion begins to blossom as you continue to train after having truly recognized the natural state as it actually is. Sincere compassion radiates from the deepest part of your heart. You can't help it; it just naturally springs forth.

Before becoming aware of this natural state, we are bewildered, creating painful states all the time, but by continually training in this, we recognize that beneath everything is an unconditioned natural state. We start to notice that every selfish emotion begins to soften and subside of its own accord. As pain and worry diminish, our confused way of experiencing subsides more and more. Then we begin to really understand how other beings feel. You may ask yourself: What can I do to help them? If I don't help them, who will? This is when real compassion overtakes you and a sincere, unchangeable devotion begins to grow within you. We call this the dawn of irreversible or unshakeable confidence.



(Above)  
*Blue Gold Buddhafield*

MICHAEL NEWHALL

True confidence begins with a trust in the instruction that reveals this nature. Once you have experienced firsthand that it works, of course you feel confident. This also is directed to the source of the instructions, the one from whom you received them. You are grateful to him or her, as well as to the entire lineage of transmission through which the instruction came to be passed on to you. That is true devotion. These two, effortless compassion and unchangeable devotion, join forces so that your training quickly grows deeper and deeper. Your practice is strengthened to the point that it is unshakeable, like when a strong gust of wind causes a huge fire with plenty of firewood to blaze even higher.

The great master Atisha wondered what it meant to be really learned and concluded that real wisdom is to understand egolessness. True ethics are to have tamed or softened your own heart; whenever that is the case and somebody actually cares, is watchful and conscientious, that is real ethics. What is the foremost virtue? Atisha said it is to have a profound sense of caring for the benefit and well-being of others. What is the foremost sign of success or accomplishment? Not clairvoyance or miraculous powers, but to have fewer selfish emotions. These may sound like just a few simple sentences, but they are very profound and of great benefit when you take them to heart. **BD**