

# THE RIGHT TO BE HAPPY

By The Late Ven Sumangalo

Inscriptions on the relics remaining to us from ancient Egypt indicate that there is nothing at all new in the view widely held in our time that it is possible to cure, or at least palliate, all human ills and injustices – particularly those of a social, political and economical order, by means of achieving “the ideal state”. By Plato’s time the feasibility of attaining such a Utopian state had probably gone through a most considerable examination and had brought forth numerous varieties of what the protagonists, at least, of those systems considered ideal statism. The more common resort was to give a divine sanction to all state acts by the simple expedient of deifying the ruler. In other instances, a select few were proclaimed to be mouthpieces of Heaven and, therefore, not susceptible to error. That these allegedly divine instruments of government did not always function in a way to bring the greatest happiness to the greatest possible number of the subjects of a given ruler or system, was usually attributed to the whimsies of an unpredictable deity called *Fate*, or was laid at the door of the inscrutable decrees of Heaven. At no time in recorded history has this tendency on man’s part to seek a perfect government, a Utopia - by whatever name such an ideal may be called, ceased to agitate the minds of large and often quite vocal and energetic groups in Earth’s population. In our own time we see not only such questing continued and intensified, but we return to at least some of the features that formed governmental patterns in the political infancy of mankind. Deification of the ruler – or of a political party – or of a “Supreme Commissariat” has now become a revived *modus operandi* for the achievement of the ideal social order – always conceived of as originating in a perfect, or well-nigh perfect, political order. No unduly active imagination is needed to see the shadow of the pyramids looming over such systems and to catch at least a faint echo of the utterances of the Delphic Oracle.

It will be a sorry day, indeed, for humankind if ever we lose all active interest in seeking better social and economic systems and forgo all attempts at evolving better modes of government. If ever such a state of affairs comes about, or if a system of statism triumphs which stifles all suggestions that perfection is not yet reached, we shall again be in the ages of darkness and all progress, with the possible exception of mechanical innovations – to fit in with robotized man’s role in life, will speedily come to a halt. I do not number myself among the prophets of doom who see no ray of hope on our horizons. While there is admittedly an incalculable amount of stupidity in the world, still there seems ample reason to believe that the seemingly endless array of fools and dreamers is greatly outnumbered by the folk of good sound sense and devotion to

practicality. That a certain danger of the world's being taken over by statism is real enough, is hardly open to serious argument. The danger is a possibility. It will become a probability only when mankind gives up man's last possession: hope. For so long a time as man hopes for a better life here and now, and at least a modicum of happiness, and gives vitality to that hope by a practical and soundly-sensed approach to the problem attaining the desired end, we need not obsess ourselves with morbid fears that human society is on the skids to perdition. Despite the dire computations of pessimists, there seems good reason to believe that for every two fools in the guise of *genus homo* there are at least three men of balanced intelligence. However, in this particular pot of ointment there is at least one fly, and a large one. It is the fact that the fools are often, in fact usually, much more aggressively active than their mental betters. One of the several hopes embodied in this article concerning man's quest for happiness on his pilgrimage through life, is that at least some of my hearers and readers may be encouraged to go about the quest in a more understanding and, therefore, more practical manner.

It is characteristic of statism that while it professes to love humankind, yet it despises the individual members of humankind. The aggregate is everything and the component parts are as nothing. It has taken us many centuries to reach the view of the enlightened part of the world that society is composed of individuals, and can be promoted in welfare and soundly established therein only when the component parts are considered. It is axiomatic that the obvious is often a bit hard to see. In the course of this present century we have seen several varieties of statism in operation. The outward trapping differs a bit from system to system but the dictum that the state is everything and the individual is nothing is the common denominator of all versions of totalitarianism – by whatever name called. The obvious weakness of all these *isms* is that man is not a mass-produced cog in any machine, without ethnic, social, political or in the matter of taste-preferences. When the final victory is won in the battle to mechanize man, it will be won by man's unconquerable urge to be himself – *an individual*.

That every system of statism so far devised has failed in its attempt to make of every man an assembly-line duplicate of every other man, is due to an obvious fact which statism probably sees – but declares to be a chimera: That wholes are composed of parts – and parts have a way of being different from each other. Allowance is made for human differences and the principal appeal is made to that most universal characteristic: the hope of being able to accomplish one's journey on the road of attempting the impossible task of making individuals happy by creating some type of Ideal aggregate, it is our aim to help make the world happier by adding to the happiness of those individuals who compose society, and without which there could not be so much as the word *society*. Happy individuals working together in harmonious unison can create a

happier world for all. Only psychopaths do not desire happiness and it is only the unthinking who, in seeking happiness for himself, does not also seek the welfare of his fellow-members of the human race.

We live in an era when the planned and systematic approach to any desired end is greatly esteemed. Books on “How To Do It” are published almost daily and enjoy a ready sale throughout the world. Whether one seeks a better and more systematic way to grow rice, or a more efficient manner of mixing paints, or the better way to create pre-fabricated houses, there is a rather general agreement that plan, system, orderly program all enter into the picture, of necessity, and that the two prime features of the picture are, firstly, a good understanding of one’s particular problem and, secondly, a concerted effort to do something about that problem once the understanding is achieved. Does it not seem altogether rational to maintain that, if we can determine *why* so many lives are lacking in happiness and will make determined effort to eliminate the negative factors leading to unhappiness and to establish firmly all those positive factors leading to happiness, we can bring about a greater and ever greater degree of happiness in our individual lives and, in so doing, serve in large measure to make the entire world a happier place? It is fatuous hope to try to make the world happy unless first of all we begin with individuals.

“If thou wouldst right the world, first right thyself;

If thou wouldst change the world, first change thyself”

In the Kalama Sutta, one of the many canonical writings of Buddhism, we are given a *Magna Carta* of human freedom and human dignity that surpasses by far any other declaration of human rights formulated in any age. In His wish and effort to aid man in striking the shackles from his own mind, the Buddha gave us this counsel:

“Do not hold credulously to beliefs simply because you have heard them from many. Accept not traditions simply because they have been handed down for many generations. It is unwise to accept as truth the statements contained in religious books supposedly of Divine origin. Accept not a teaching or opinion solely because it comes from a teacher or an elder supposedly wise. Nor is a given proposition to be accepted merely because the probabilities seem to be in its favour”.

“But, after your own careful observation and analysis, when you find that a teaching agrees with your reasoning and is conducive to your own well-being and that of others, accept that teaching and conform your life to it”.

As a further confirmation and validation of that *Magna Carta*, the Lord Buddha uttered as His last words: “Work out *your own* salvation with diligence.” Even if we consider no other portions of the Buddha’s teaching beyond these two

counsels, surely they alone are more than enough to convince even the most sceptical that Buddhism cannot flourish, or even exist, in any system which regiment man and attempts to standardize every thought and act of the individual. Despite all flowery offers of "*The Workers' Paradise*", despite all claims (as yet unsubstantiated, of course) that earth can be transformed into a heaven or Utopia by means of conforming to a given set of political dogmas, the thoughtful Buddhist is only too well aware that serene happiness for the individual and the social welfare of all, can never be attained by legislative enactments or the decrees of all-powerful commissariats. It is a proverb in many languages and climes that "the waves of fancy are broken on the rocks of fact." From the point of view of both modern science and the twenty-five centuries old teachings of Buddhism, we know that the only way to control effects is to control causes. To seek to produce the effect of a happy society based on unhappy individuals is so far removed from reason that it would be impermissible to mention such puerility were it not for the fact that we see this puerility in action every day and in every land, seeking to win the attention of the masses of the people.

In place of a dream-world originating in a political machine for creating human happiness, this article offers to the thoughtful an analysis of life and all its manifold problems and the solution to those problems – a solution which depends for its validity not merely on skill in dialectic but on the rock-hard fact that is demonstrably true.

