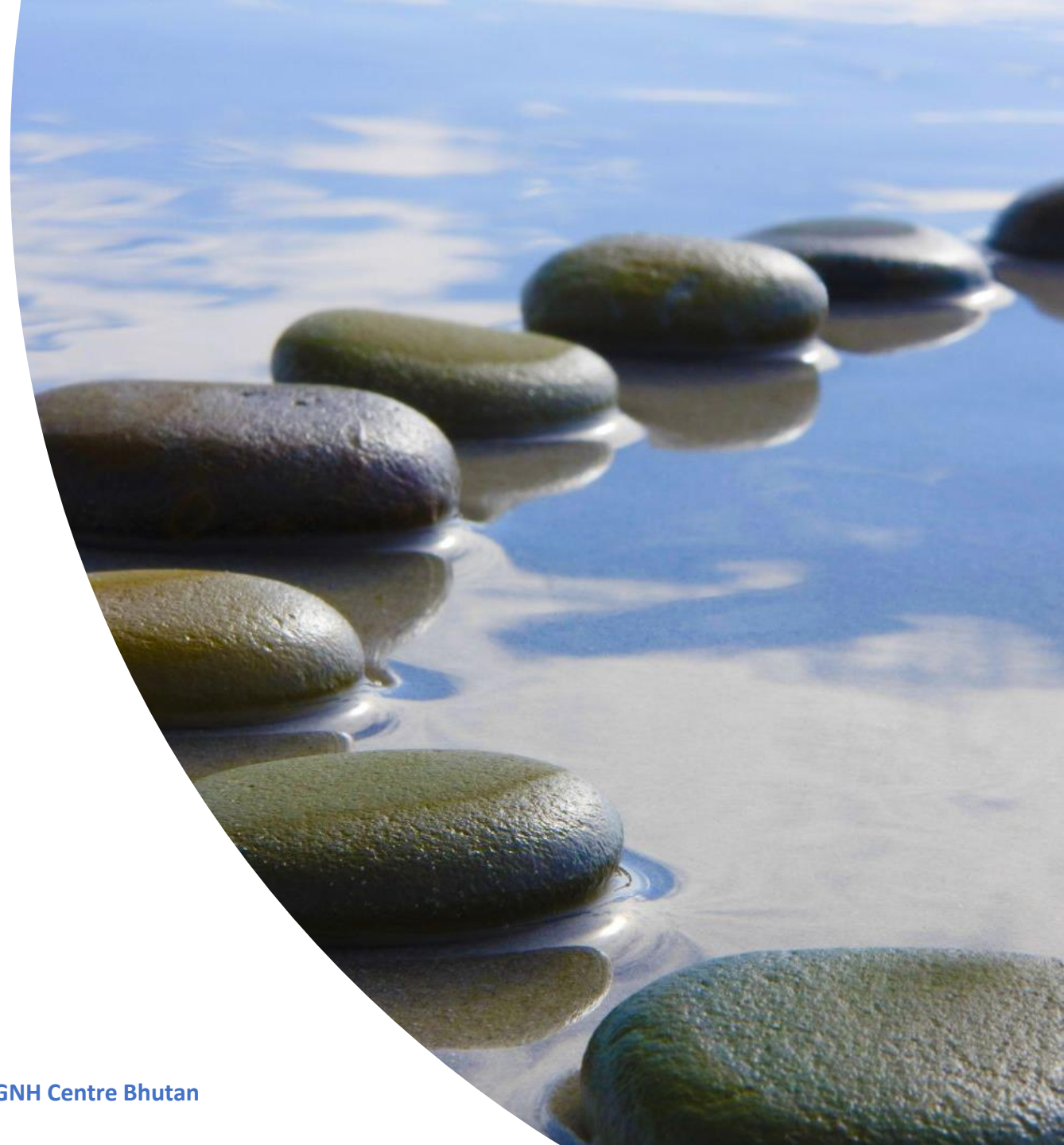


# Beyond GDP, Beyond Numbers: Reflections on Bhutan's Journey Towards GNH

CACOR  
Aug 18. 2021

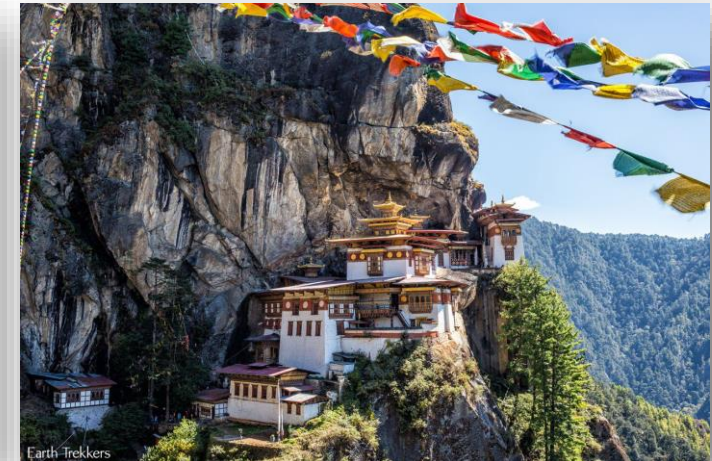


Dr. Julia Kim  
*Program Director*  
*GNH Centre Bhutan*



# What is Happiness? What is Development? How are they related?

*My own journey: Canada, South Africa, London, New York, Bhutan...*





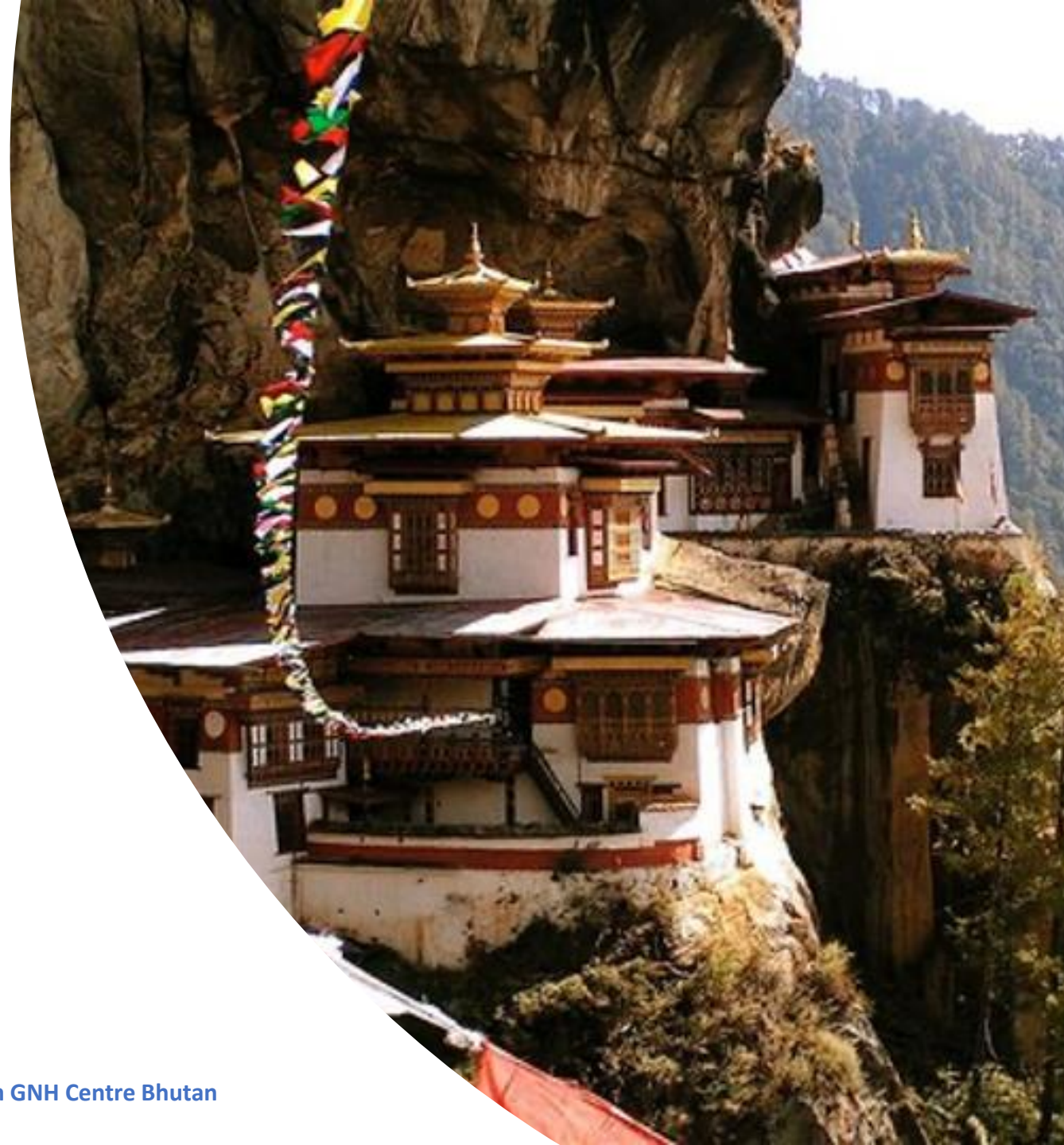
## Resonance:

listening deeply to our *collective social field*...

- We are dealing with **deep system failure**. Marginal adjustments will not do. Our current situation requires a **transformation** in our understanding of the **nature and purpose of life and what it means to be human**...we must create together an Ecological Civilization – [David Korten](#)
- How do we **tap into our deep spirit and wisdom** – and bring this to African leaders and others...How can we bring **LEAP principles and tools into leadership**?  
– [Mamphela Ramphele](#) (resonating with [John Gilmour](#))
- How do we reconcile the way we think, with how *Life* works? How do we create a pluriversal synthesis of **ancient wisdom** and the **best of modern science**?  
– [Carlos Alvarez](#) (resonating with Mamphela)
- **“I am because you are.”** *Ubuntu* acknowledges that all things are related & interdependent. From this **wisdom** follows an insight foundational to *Eco’-nomics* (vs. **Ego’-nomics**) - *Ubuntu Principle*: **“My wellbeing depends on your wellbeing. I do best when we all do well.”** - [David](#) (resonating with Mamphela & Carlos)
- How can we design the **storytelling** of impact, using **cold and warm data**, so that it has a **ripple effect** in a culturally adaptable, pluriversal way, such that we **inspire collaborative action in building wellbeing economies**?  
– [Ndidi Nnoli-Edozien](#) (resonating with David, Mamphela, Carlos & [Nora Bateson](#))

# Intentions

- Share emerging lessons from Bhutan, based on a *systems* thinking perspective
- Wellbeing Economies: The importance of BOTH *inner* transformation & *systems* change
- *Awareness-based* systems change: Cultivating the capacity to deeply *sense* self/system and *co-create* an emerging future
- Beyond Bhutan – what are current seeds of possibility in our own contexts and communities?

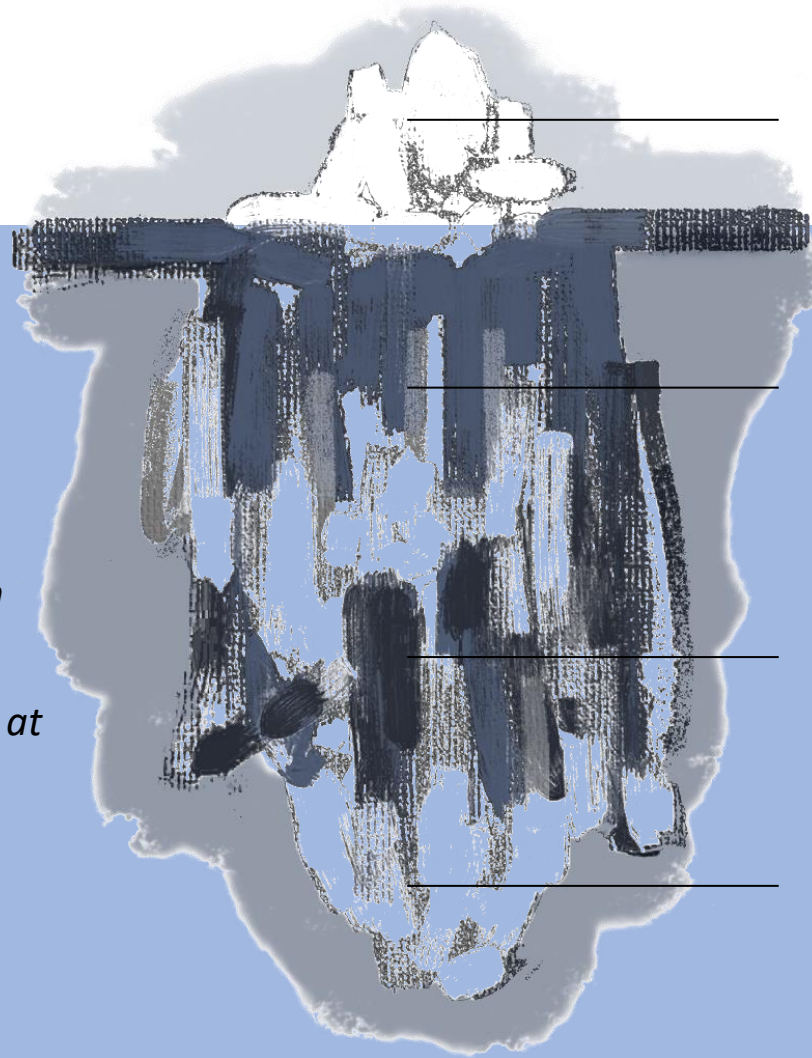


The world that we see:

*What lies below the surface?*

*“Because mindsets & paradigms guide behaviours, changing them can have a profound impact...”*

*People who manage to intervene at level of **paradigm** hit a leverage point that totally **transforms systems**” (D Meadows 1999)*



**What Appears:**  
*Visible Behaviors, Symptoms*

**What Does Not Appear:**  
*Structures, systems*

**Paradigms of Thought**  
*Our narratives, mental models*

**Sources of Inspiration**  
*Vision, values. mindsets*

**Ecological**  
Disconnect  
Self ≠ Nature

**Social**  
Disconnect  
Self ≠ Other

**Spiritual**  
Disconnect  
self ≠ Self

**Structures**

**Paradigms of Thought**

**Sources of Inspiration**



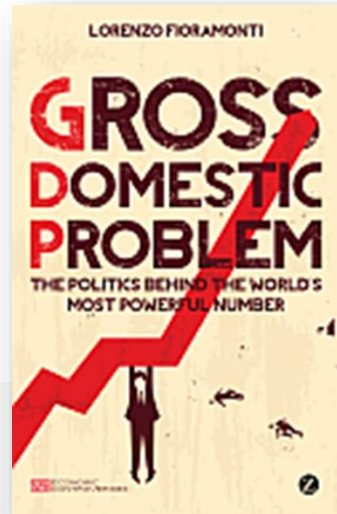
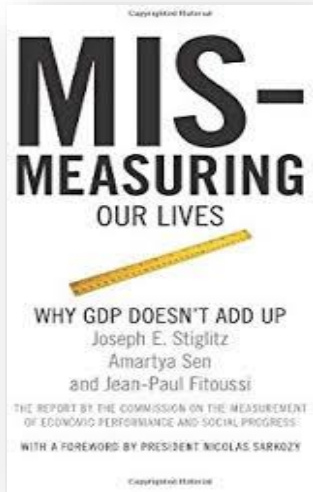
*The story of GNH begins  
with a visionary King*

*“Gross National Happiness is more important  
than Gross National Product”*

– HM Jigme Singye Wangchuck, 4th King Bhutan (1970s)

*“GNP measures everything ...  
except that which makes life worthwhile”*

– Senator Robert Kennedy (1968)



# Our obsession with “Growth”

## *The problems with GDP*

- In 1940s, GNP (and later GDP) adopted by IMF & World Bank – to help predict & describe fluctuations in economic growth
- GDP now taken as a reflection of a country’s “success” or “progress” – in ways not intended by its creator (Simon Kuznitz)
- **What it counts:**  
GDP measures only **marketed** economic activity - Counts all of this as **positive** (even if it leads to more pollution or illness)
- **What it fails to count:**  
Many activities that enhance **wellbeing** but are outside the market (e.g. unpaid child care, time with family & friends)
- **What it hides:** *Uneven* growth & rising **inequalities**





# GNH: What is meant by “happiness” in GNH?

*Not just fleeting moments of “feeling good”*



*“True abiding happiness cannot exist while others suffer, and comes only from **serving others**, living in **harmony with nature** & realizing our **innate wisdom**” - Jigmi Thinley (1st PM Bhutan)*

- Wellbeing is deeply **relational** – healing the **3 disconnects** (self, others, nature)
- **“I am because you are”** - the Ubuntu Principle:  
*“My wellbeing depends on your wellbeing.  
I do best when we all do well.”*
- Immediately **counters** myth of **“homo economicus”**:  
Happiness is NOT a *competition*.  
Wellbeing is NOT a *zero-sum equation*

# GNH: The importance of *outer* transformation



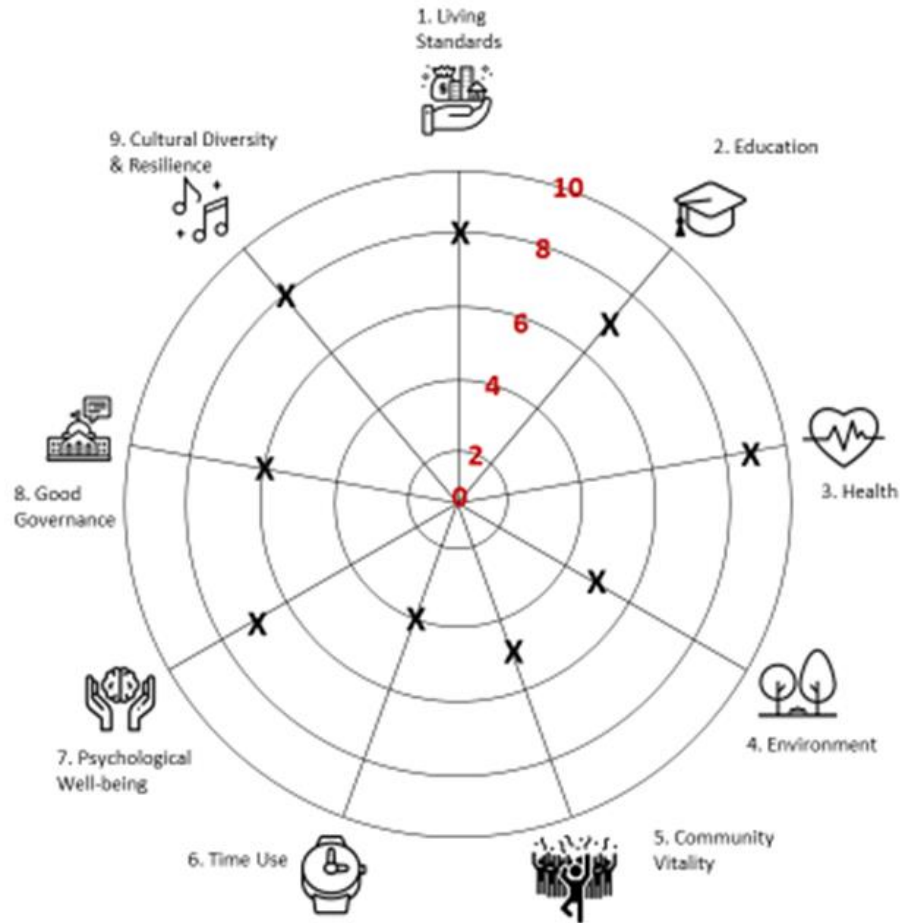
## Creating an enabling *environment for Wellbeing*

- The GNH Survey– 9 domains, 33 indicators
- About balancing material & intangible factors for wellbeing (e.g. *Time Use, Community Vitality, Cultural diversity & Resilience*)
- 9 Domains seen as inter-dependent



# GNH Wheel: *Balancing wellbeing in your life*

*Adapted from the 9 Domains of Bhutan's GNH Index*

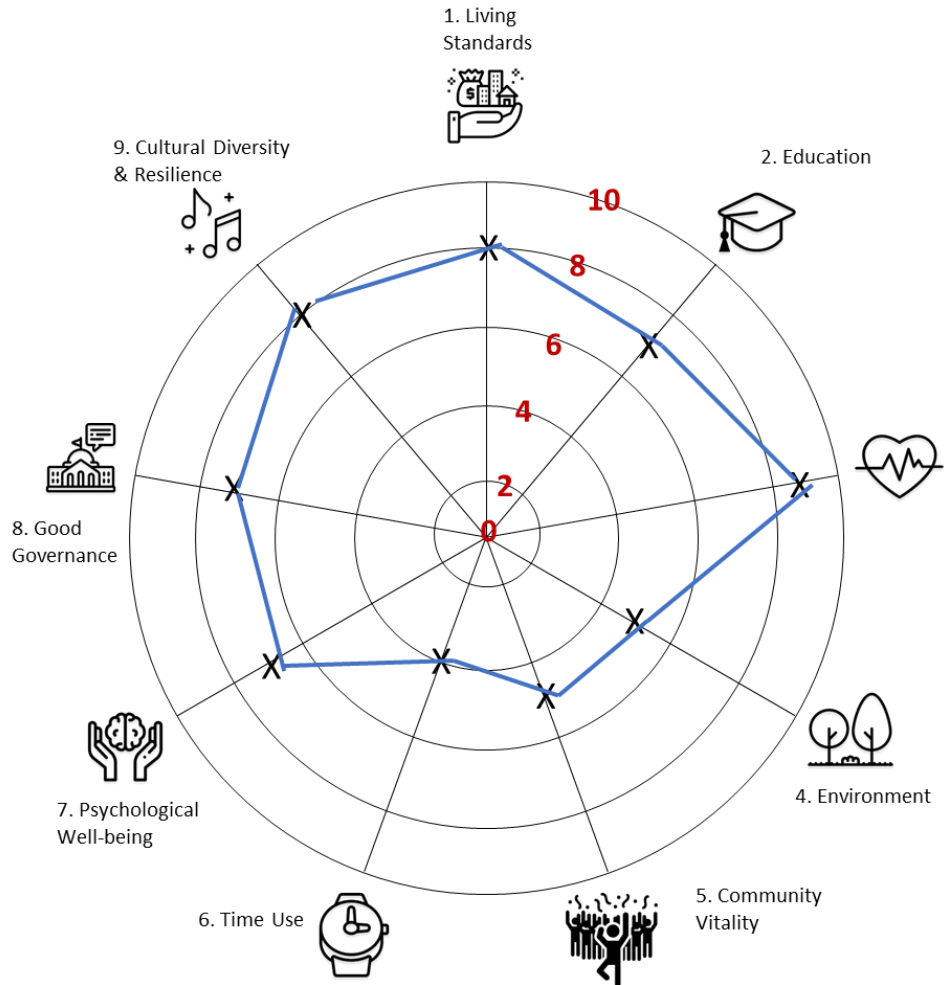


**Scale: 0 = Very poor; 10 - Excellent**

- 1. Health:** *My lifestyle supports good physical and mental health*
- 2. Living standards:** *I feel confident I have enough financial security to meet my needs & those of my family*
- 3. Education:** *I have enough learning opportunities to meet the shifting challenges in my professional career*
- 4. Environment:** *In my workplace there is high awareness & responsibility towards the environment*
- 5. Community vitality:** *When I have faced a personal crisis, I felt I had enough support from my friends & community*

# GNH Wheel: *Balancing wellbeing in your life*

*Adapted from the 9 Domains of Bhutan's GNH Index*



Scale: 0 = Very Poor; 10 = Excellent

**6. Time Use:** *I have enough time to do the things I enjoy with friends & family*

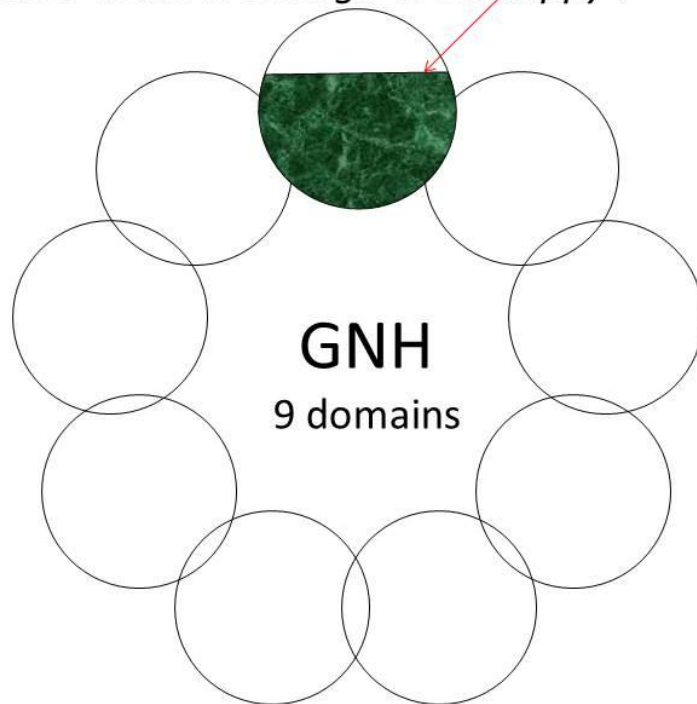
**7. Psychological Wellbeing:** *I feel there is good alignment between my sense of life purpose & my work*

**8. Good Governance:** *In my country, I feel that there is a good level transparency & trust in leadership*

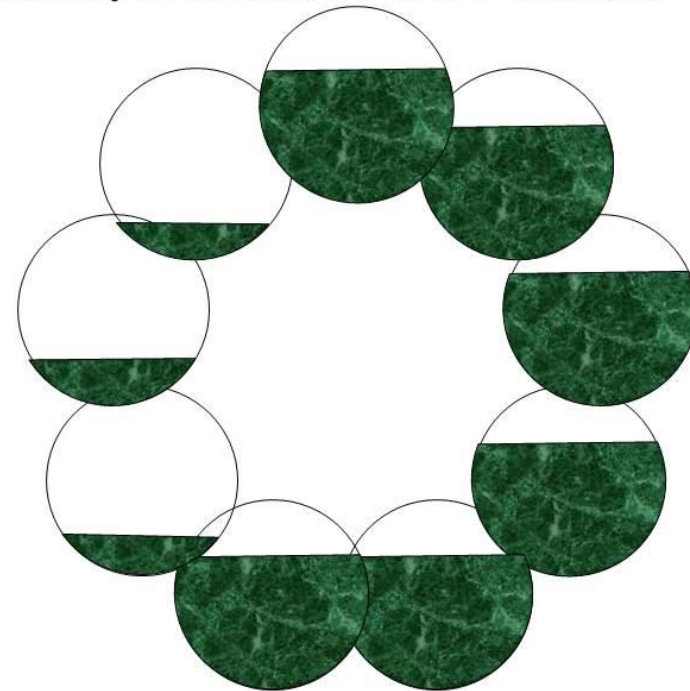
**9. Cultural Diversity & Resilience:** *Where I live, cultural diversity is seen as a positive contribution to society*

# GNH and the notion of “Sufficiency”

For each domain, set a sufficiency threshold:  
*“how much is enough to be happy?”*



Overall: Establish a ‘Happiness threshold’  
**Sufficiency** in at least 6 out of 9 domains



# GNH: The importance of *inner* transformation



## Transforming vision & mindsets, cultivating capacities

- Redefining **purpose** of the economy - From chasing GDP growth to promoting equity, sustainability, wellbeing
- **Meditation & GNH values** - cultivating awareness & insight into the **interconnectedness** of all life; nourishing **altruistic behaviors** rooted in compassion & generosity
- 5<sup>th</sup> King of Bhutan & **“leadership of the self”** - leading lives guided by **values** of kindness, integrity & justice
- Strong sense of **community** & culture of **volunteerism** (*desuups*) especially visible during COVID pandemic
- **Only 2 Covid deaths** - Civil society mobilized to sew masks, farmers donated food; science & spiritual leaders consulted: 93% adults vaccinated in 2 weeks - starting with 30-year old woman...and *ending* with the King (servant leadership) – New York Times Apr 18, 2021



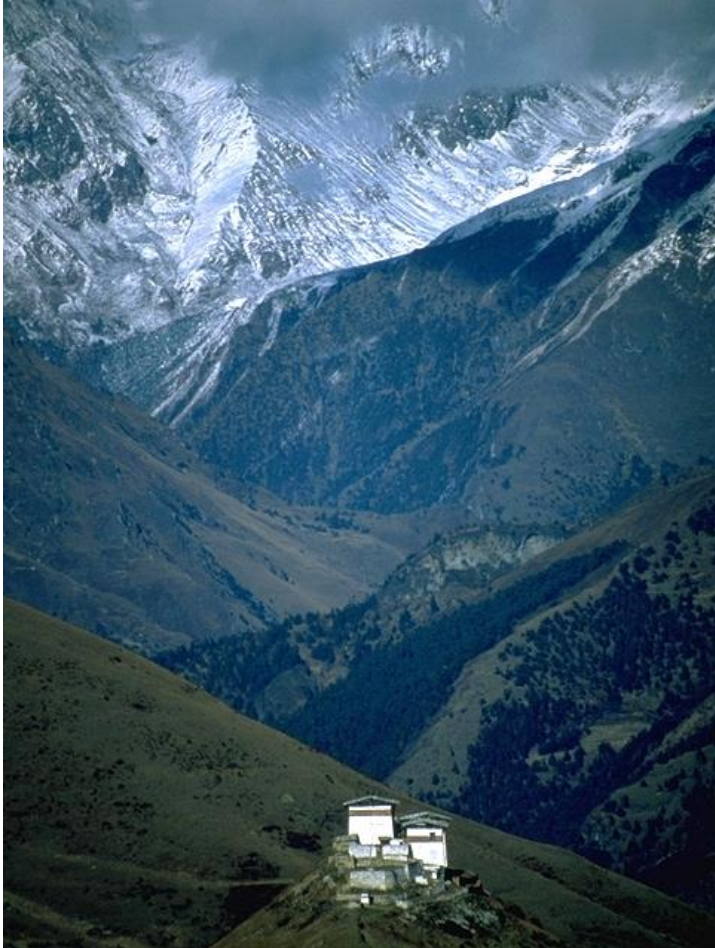


Setting *new targets*

## *GNH: From Vision to Action*

- **VISION:** “Happiness & wellbeing of all life” as the purpose of the economy (Bhutan’s Kings)
- **MEASURES:** GNH Index - 9 domains, 33 indicators, national survey every 3 years. (Centre for Bhutan Studies & GNH Research)
- **POLICY:** GNH screening tool to guide policies; 5-year development plans (GNH Commission)
- **ACTION:** Applying GNH in daily life – leadership development, business, education, civil society (The GNH Centre Bhutan)
- **TAKEN TOGETHER** - Getting **below** the surface (Iceberg)  
Wellbeing *vision & values* > shape *structures & systems*  
(metrics, policy) > shape wellbeing *culture & society*

# Aligning Policy & Action for GNH & Wellbeing



## How Do Policies Prioritize Wellbeing?

- **Marketing takes a back seat:** National ban on billboard advertising
- **Caring for People:** Universal free basic Health & Education
- **Teachers & Healthcare workers:** Highest paid civil servants in the country
- **Commitment > 60% of country** under forest cover *for all time*: First & only **carbon negative** country in the world. **Biodiversity** hot spot
- **Nature is sacred:** Mountaineering only up to 6000m (1994) > banned completely (2003)
- **“High Value - Low Impact Tourism”:** balancing tourism income with social & environmental impacts
- **Cultivating inner leadership:** Meditation & GNH values in Education



# Bhutan: Responding to emerging challenges

*Latest GNH Survey (Centre for Bhutan Studies, 2015):*

- Farmers less happy than other occupations
- Women less happy than men
- Bhutanese youth: Less happy than other age groups

**Emerging responses:**

- Improving rural infrastructure, electricity, roads
- Initiatives to improve women's empowerment & political participation
- Tackling growing youth unemployment, exposure to social media & globalization
- Strengthening roles of CSOs & Business in promoting GNH



# GNH as a *Journey*, rather than a *Destination*

Going beyond *Shangri-la* myths



PM Jigmi Thinley

*“Bhutan is not a country that has **‘attained’** GNH. Like most developing nations, we are struggling with the challenge of fulfilling the basic needs of our people.*

*What separates us, however, from most others is that we have made **happiness** - the foundation of human needs - as the **goal of societal change**”*

**Interdependence:** *“We cannot be a GNH bubble in a GDP world”* - Kinley Dorji

A decorative graphic consisting of several overlapping, semi-transparent rings in shades of blue and green, arranged in a circular pattern around the central text.

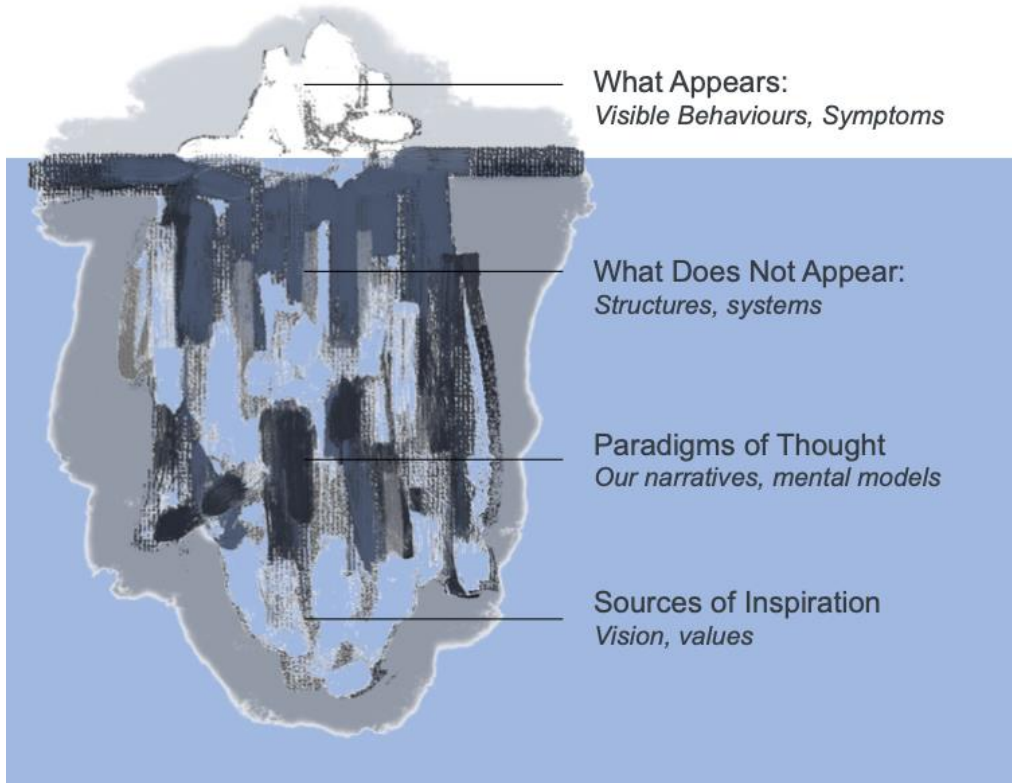
# Reflections

*Breakout rooms*

Julia Kim GNH Centre Bhutan

# Wellbeing Economies:

The importance of both *inner* & *outer* transformation



- ***Why*** do we need a shift in consciousness?
- ***What*** are we up against?
- ***Reclaiming*** our attention:  
*Awareness-based systems change*



# We are not operating in a *neutral* space

*Our cultural map is flawed, yet reinforced by media & other forces – as if our goal were to dehumanize ourselves & separate ourselves from each other & nature*

– David Korten

- **Class status** gained, lost & reproduced through everyday acts of consumer behaviour...**Consumption practices maintain basic structures** of power & inequality which characterize our world.” (Pierre Bourdieu, 1984)
- **We consume for status & affirmation:** In a society where “*consumption has become one of the only ways for the individual to exercise power, we consume as an aspirational response*” (“How Unequal Does it Feel?” – Adam Lerner, 2020)
- As a result, breaking our **consumption habits** proving extremely **difficult**
- **The painful irony** - increased income & consumption **little to no benefit** on overall **well-being** - while simultaneously **devastating our planet**
- How can we go beyond individual “*voluntary simplicity*” to tackling deeper “*politics of consumption*”. What is the **shift in consciousness** AND the **systems change** levers required?

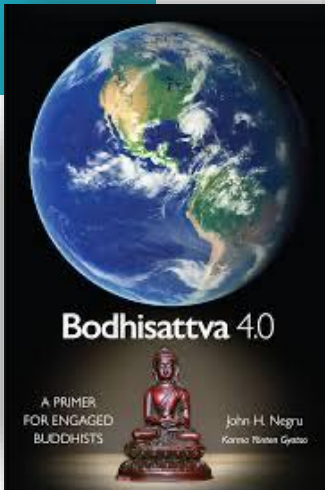
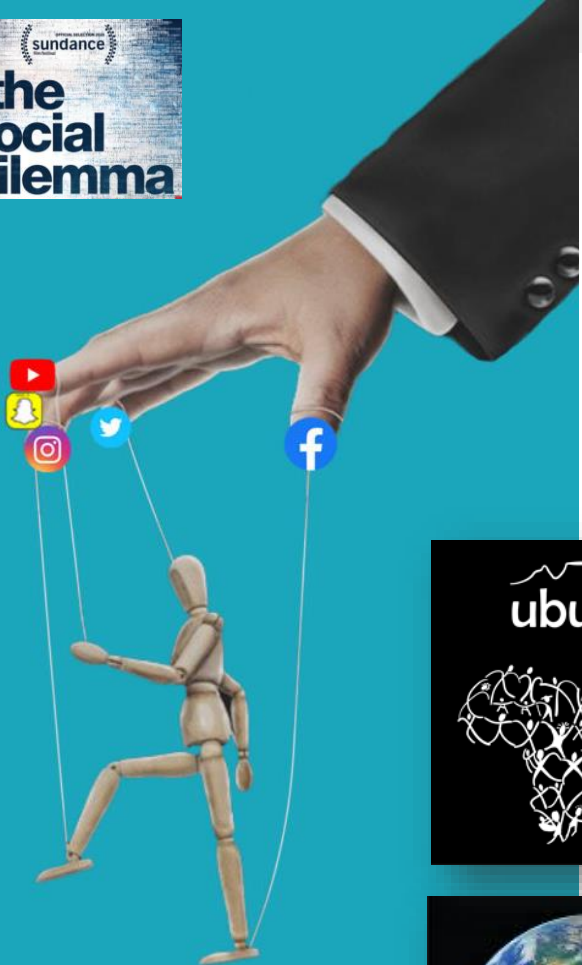
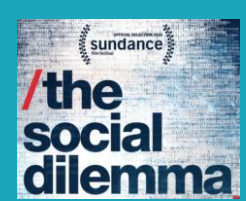


# “A distracted mind is an unhappy mind”

Killingsworth & Gilbert. *Science* (2010)

- Harvard researchers used smartphone app to track 2,250 volunteers: *How happy are you? what are you currently doing? Were you thinking about your current activity or about something else?*
- *Findings:* Average adult spends **47% of waking hours** thinking about something **other** than what they're doing, and this mind-wandering typically makes them feel **unhappy**.
- *Conclusion:* **Mind-wandering** an excellent predictor of **unhappiness** - in fact, it's a better predictor than the actual **activity** we are engaged in.
- *Concern:* US Children aged 8 - 18 now spend > **seven hours/day** gazing at screens (AHA, 2018)





# Wellbeing Economies:

## The importance of *inner* transformation

*Why shifting values, mindsets, consciousness MATTER*

- **Decolonize our minds** from our addiction to consumerism and the distorted *mindsets* & habitual *behaviors* created by neoliberal economics
- **Reclaim our attention & detox** from constant barrage of distraction & manipulation (advertising, social media) - to be *masters* (rather than puppets) of our expanding technology
- **Cultivate our highest human potential** - “*ubuntu*”, “*bodhisattva*” “*7th generation thinking*”, “*ego-to-eco*” consciousness – expanding our sense of “self” & seeing ourselves as part of the *whole*
- **Strengthen capacity to expand our time horizons** *while* taking action **now**, even if results not visible “on my watch”- **Also critical for taking care of ourselves** & not burning out
- **Generate the courage, imagination & will** to step into an unknown, ***emergent future*** rather than making *incremental* changes, or *propping up* failing systems

# Reclaiming our Attention: *Ancient wisdom & modern science*

**Neuroplasticity:** The capacity of the brain to be shaped by experience (*'neurons that fire together, wire together'*)

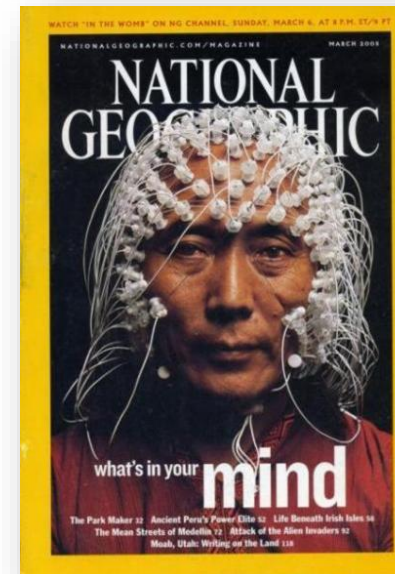
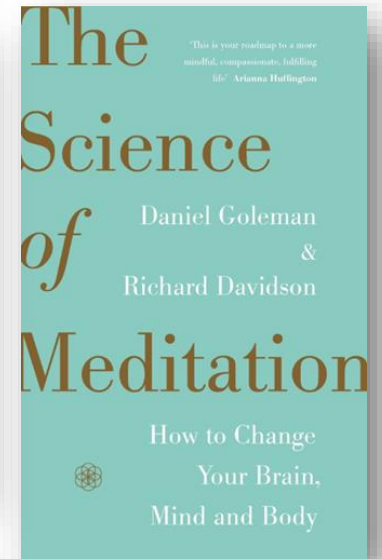
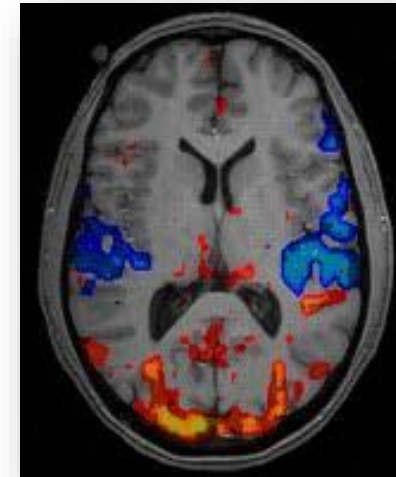
**Meta-awareness** (meditative awareness) - the ability to be *aware* of what we are doing, is *trainable*, and brings range of health & wellbeing benefits

- Improved ability to **cope with stress**, greater **resilience** (sustaining pos emotions, rebounding from neg emotions)
- Enhanced **compassion, altruism & pro-social behaviors**  
- Goleman & Davidson (2017), Helliwell et al, (2018), Diener (2019)

***"Exercising our minds should be approached much in the same way we exercise our bodies"*** - R. Davidson, Centre for Healthy Minds, U Wisconsin-Madison

## 4 pillars of Wellbeing

1. *Awareness* – being present
2. *Connection* – appreciation, kindness, compassion
3. *Insight* - how our minds work (e.g. the narratives we tell ourselves)
4. *Purpose* – values, principles, maintaining motivation amidst challenges





# Awareness-based systems change

*“How do we **tap into our deep spirit and wisdom** – and bring this to leaders & others?”*

– Mamphela Ramphele

- Cultivating **awareness** & building **leadership capacities** to address *root causes* of complex social, environmental & spiritual crises
- Supporting shift in consciousness from ego- to eco-system awareness: NOT “what do I have to **lose**” - but “what do we *all* stand to **gain**” by transition to **wellbeing economies**?



## THE RIGHT LIVELIHOOD AND GNH PROGRAMME

CANADA AND BHUTAN

*Putting Gross National Happiness into Practice in your own Life*

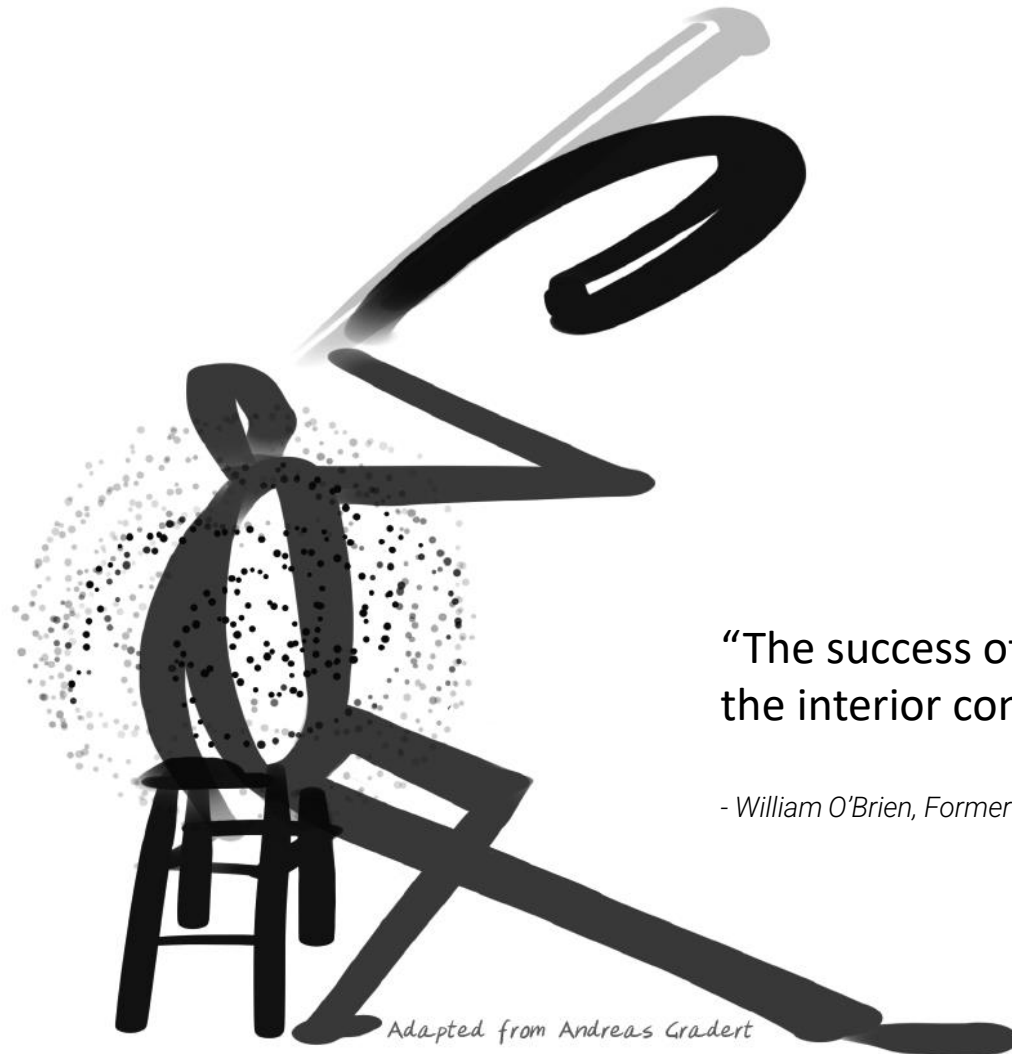
A unique nine month learning journey towards right livelihood

REGISTER NOW!

## Prototyping the new - Action Learning Labs:

- **The Global Wellbeing Lab** – Government, business, civil society leaders  
*(GNH Centre, Presencing Institute, GLAC/GIZ)*
- **The Right Livelihood & GNH Program** – Adapting GNH values, practices & metrics to own community, organization or context  
*GNH Centre Bhutan, Schumacher College (UK), Windhorse Farm (Nova Scotia)*

Julia Kim GNH Centre Bhutan



“The success of an intervention depends on the interior condition of the intervenor.”

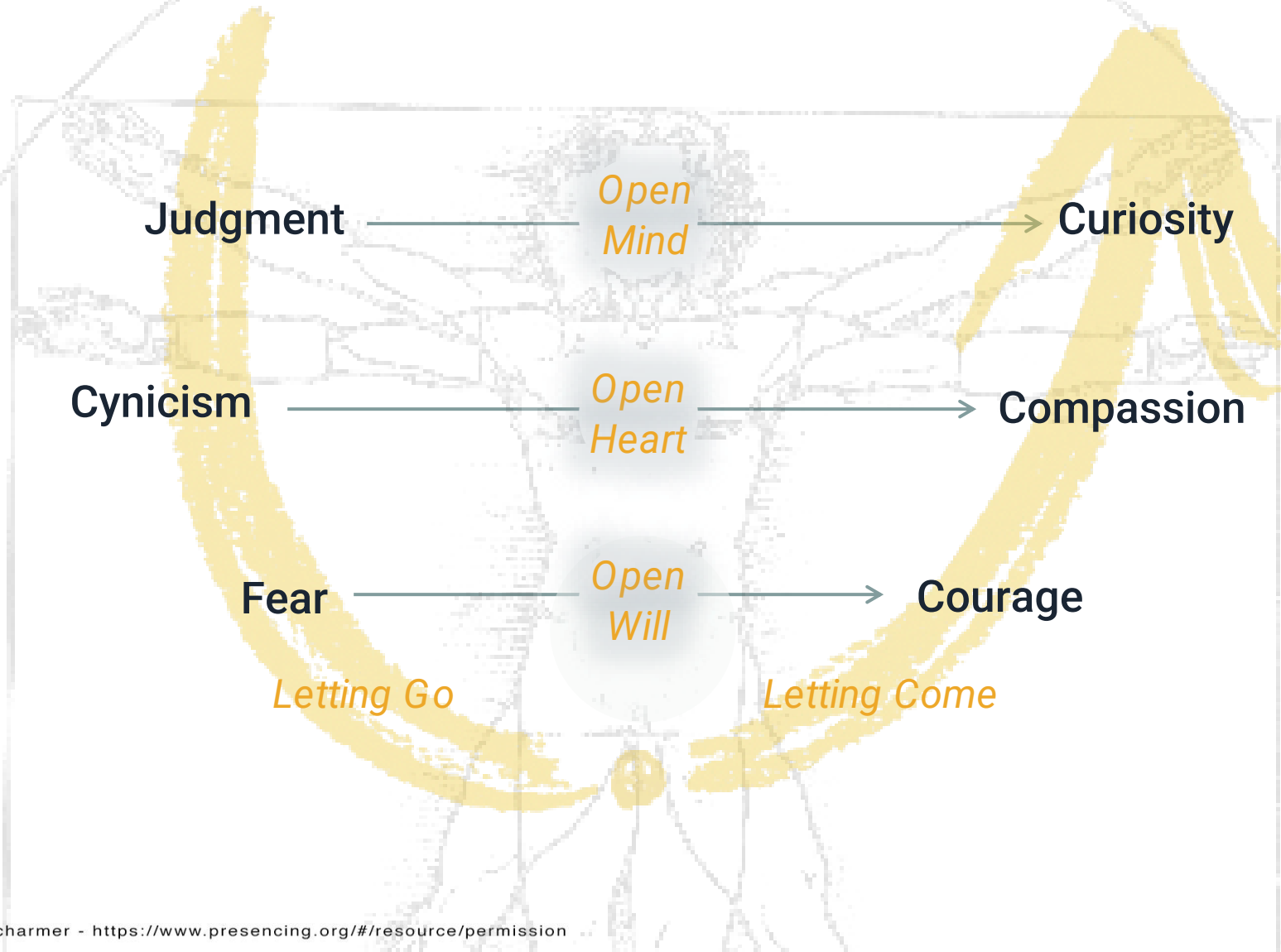
- William O'Brien, Former CEO of the Hanover Insurance Company

*Adapted from Andreas Gradert*

Dr. Julia Kim GNH Centre Bhutan (from Presencing Institute)

# Leadership capacities: Cultivating 3 *intelligences*

Vital for inner leadership for a Wellbeing Economy





# The GNH Centre Bhutan

## National non-profit NGO

- **Patron:** HRH Kesang Choden Wangchuck

## Applying & Adapting GNH

- **Leadership:** Global Leadership Academy (GIZ/Germany), ICLIF (Malaysia)
- **Education:** UNESCO, Mind & Life Institute, Schumacher College
- **Business:** YPO, Eileen Fisher Inc, B.Grimm Group, Small Giants
- **Banking/Finance:** SEACEN (South East Asian Central Banks), VanCity, RMB

## The Approach:

- **Transformative Leadership development** AND
- **Systems change** (wellbeing values, metrics, practices)



# Right Livelihoods: *Leading from the inside-out*

*J Kim & J Richardson, 2021 (forthcoming)*

## **Inner shifts:**

- *“Finding calm inside myself & the courage of stepping out into action.*
- *“Practicing boldness”*
- *“Realising that to change is to become more of who we are”*

## **Outer shifts:**

- Initiated “Silent Spaces” in 44 gardens across UK
- Applied GNH principles to horticultural apprenticeship program (USA)
- Re-designed engineering curriculum to focus on sustainable technologies, using reflexive pedagogies (Thailand)
- Hosted Asian Venture Philanthropy event. Sustainable finance initiative (Hong Kong)

Dr. Julia Kim GNH Centre Bhutan





# Re-imagining a Post-Covid World: *Planting Wellbeing Economy Seeds*

- **Wellbeing Economy Alliance** [weall.org](http://weall.org) – Supporting governments & civil society including: *New Zealand, Scotland, Iceland, Wales, now Canada*

- **Doughnut Economics Labs** – Kate Raworth (Amsterdam, Melbourne, San Francisco...) [doughnuteconomics.org](http://doughnuteconomics.org)

## **Closer to home:**

- David Suzuki Foundation – WE-ALL CAN [weallcanada.org](http://weallcanada.org)
- Engage Nova Scotia [engagenovascotia.ca](http://engagenovascotia.ca)
- Mark Anielsky: First Nations wellbeing surveys K'ómoks & Opaskwayak Cree Nation [anielski.com](http://anielski.com)
- Robert Wood Johnson Foundation - “Wellbeing: Expanding the Definition of Progress” [rwjf.org](http://rwjf.org)

**The choice is ours:** *“Future historians may conclude that even though Covid pandemic had **widespread tragic consequences** ... in the long run, it **may have saved humanity** & large parts of the **community of life** from extinction”*

Fritjof Capra (The Systems View of Life)

## Rediscovering the links between inner experience & the outer world

- *Andreas Weber (Enlivenment 2013)*

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“The **goal of leading a fuller life**, is the most important steppingstone toward **changing our relationships with the animate earth & among ourselves**.

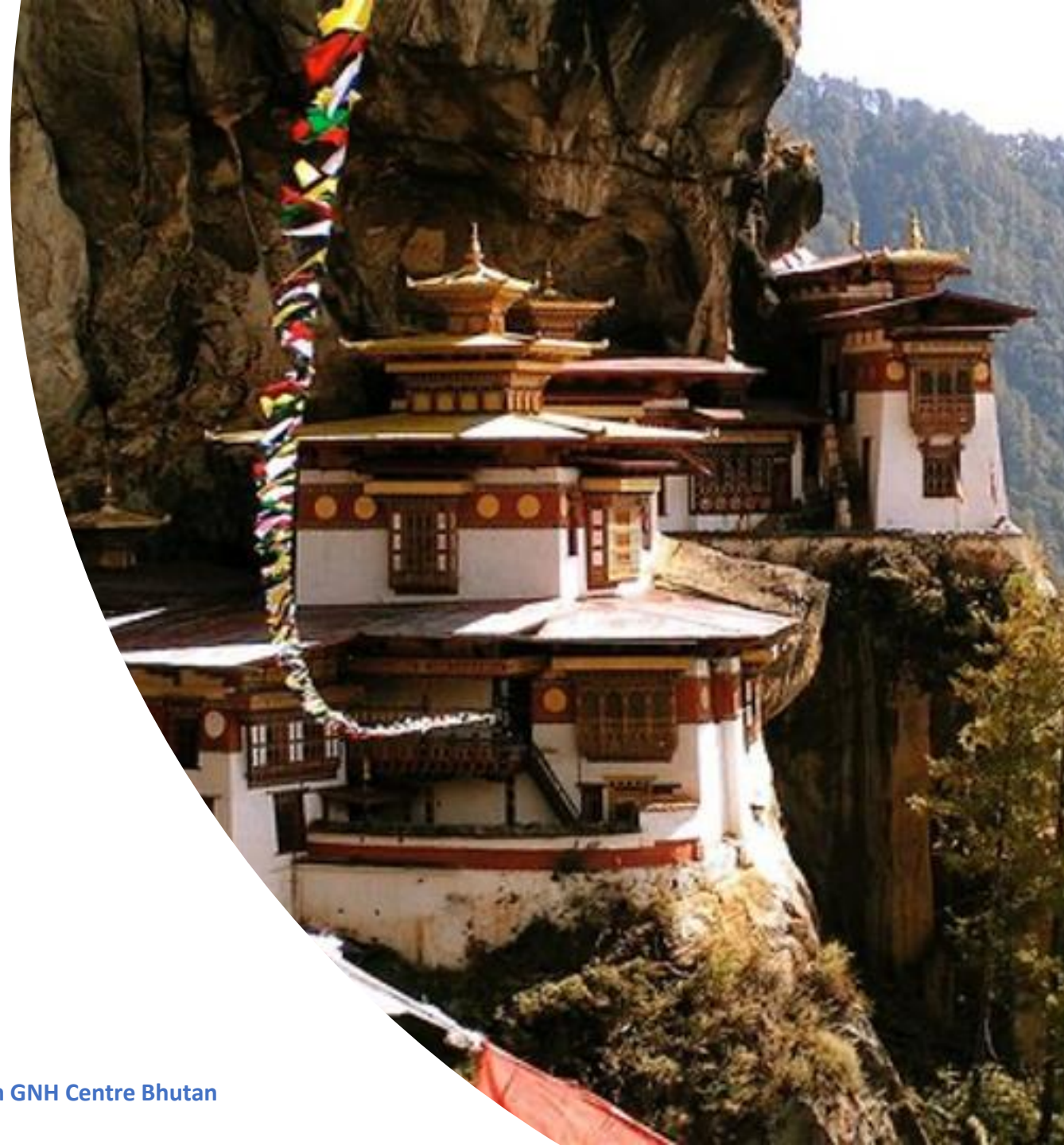
If we adopt this perspective, we will begin to see that something is sustainable **if it enables more life** – for myself, for other human individuals involved, for the ecosystem, on a broader cultural level.

It is crucial to **rediscover the linkage** between our **inner experience & the external natural order**”



# Recap

- **Emerging lessons from GNH & Bhutan**, based on a *systems* thinking perspective (*iceberg*)
- **Wellbeing Economies**: The importance of **inner transformation** as well as outer systems change  
(*Why it's critical now; ancient wisdom & science-based tools & capacities*)
- **Awareness-based systems change**: Cultivating the *capacity* to deeply sense self/system & *co-create* an emerging future
- **Planting seeds**: How can we activate Wellbeing Economies *locally* – in our own contexts, communities, organizations?







THANK YOU

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