

## The Compassionate Warrior: Bhutanese Leadership Model for Turbulent Times

<p><b>Author</b></p> <p>Tandin Dorji, President, NRC.</p> <p><b>Key words:</b></p> <p>Compassionate Warrior, Compassion, Four Immeasurable, Paramita, leadership model.</p>	<p><b>Abstract</b></p> <p>Last few years had been trying times for all. The COVID-19 pandemic caused anxiety and turmoil for individuals and nations alike. It exacerbated the economic and social challenges across the globe. Leaders and people embraced different strategies to navigate through these challenging times. Many nations suffered the wrath of COVID-19 pandemic, including the developed countries despite their large economic resources. Bhutan, however, is one of the few countries that successfully navigated the disruptions despite its limited resources. All Bhutanese attribute and honour His Majesty the King for this unprecedented success which the rest of the world could not manage. The King of Bhutan demonstrated unique leadership model to suit the need of the hour. This leadership model may be aptly called “<i>Compassionate Warrior</i>”. Anchored on examples from Bhutan, this paper will illustrate the quintessence of “<i>Compassionate Warrior</i>” leadership model that helped Bhutan to navigate successfully through the turbulent, challenging and trying times posed by COVID-19 pandemic.</p>
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### Introduction

Today, more than ever before, nations are exposed to complex and paradoxical issues. This emergence of unprecedented turmoil has called for new models and styles of leadership which according to Bennett and Lemoine (2014) is caused by VUCA phenomenon – volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity. Since 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic obliged leaders to think and work outside the conventional leadership framework.

The leadership responses to the COVID-19 pandemic varied from nation to nation mainly influenced by differences in world views. Therefore, this paper will illustrate the Bhutanese response to the trying times caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

This paper will also underscore the leadership models outside the confines of the Western worldview. Firstly, it is necessary to understand that the Western assumptions are founded on objective categorization, rule-based rationalism and deterministic thinking. On the other hand, Eastern assumptions look at holism, complexity and contextual thinking (Lowe et al., 2014, p. 306). Further, according to Bedi (1992, p. 4) 'Eastern approaches cultivate and put premium on human relations and social values' and appreciate the complexity of the context. In contrast, Lowe et al., p. 309 underscores that Western thinking is grounded in low-context reality-embedded representation.

Bhutan is one of the countries that responded efficiently to the social and economic repercussions caused by COVID-19 pandemic. The Bhutanese Leadership with His Majesty at the helm of affairs managed the pandemic effectively despite the limited resources. Thus, this paper will discuss the Compassionate Warrior leadership model through a Buddhist World view anchored in Bhutanese Leadership.

### **Quintessence of Compassionate Warrior**

This leadership model is a combination of two paradoxical concepts, 'compassion' and 'warrior.' Therefore, it is important to clarify the contextual meaning of these two terms. The term compassion is drawn from the Four Immeasurables (*tshad med bzh*) which are equanimity (*btang snyoms*), Love (*bymas pa*), Compassion (*snying rje*) and Joy (*dga' ba*).

Generally, compassion is misunderstood as being gentle and ignoring the misconducts that one notices in others. For instance, a teacher intentionally overlooking the misbehaviour of a student or a leader ignoring the misconduct of an employee negates their opportunity to improve and grow. This nature of conduct of people with authority seemingly is compassion but a cause which will encourage misconduct trends and potentially lead the person to suffer. Such compassion is sometimes referred to as a 'misplaced compassion'. This kind of an act is in contrast to the ordinary understanding of compassion when viewed from the frame of Four Immeasurables (*tshad*

*med bzh*). Compassion, in essence from the lens of the four immeasurables, is developing “*the wish that sentient beings be free from suffering and the causes of suffering*” (Dzongsar Jamyang Khentse, 2012, p.128). The intense feeling of concern for others with the valour to point out the opportunities to improve is compassion. Imagine an armless mother who is trying to save her only child being swept away by river. She will have intense feeling and wish to help her child. Like the child being swept away by the river is in need of help, all of us who are being swept away by emotions need help. Similarly, compassion is feeling his/her pain when we see someone in distress as if it were our own and strive to lessen that pain. Therefore, compassion may be understood in simple terms as the wish to help others with intense love and concern (Patrul Rinpoche, 1998).

The bravery to assert and correct the misconducts of other with the good intention of helping is a warrior spirit. This spirit or bravery of a Warrior is beyond the normal understanding of not being afraid of any enemy, willingness to die for a cause and never being intimidated. In the framework of a Compassionate Warrior, bravery or courage is referred to as living and leading without any deception and with incredible compassion and care for others (Chögyam Trungpa, 1984). In this spirit, we see compassion in action where a Compassionate Warrior in the context of leadership is leading with genuine concern without any selfish agenda.

The story of Marpa’s treatment of Milarepa is a fitting example of a Compassionate Warrior. Marpa puts Milarepa under extremely difficult trials before accepting as his disciple. The widely known case is of the construction of a tower, supposedly nine storied which Milarepa had to tear down several times before receiving full transmissions of all the Mahamudra teachings (Evans-Wentz, W.Y., 2002). The difficult trials Marpa designed for Milarepa was to help him cleanse all the demerits he had accumulated (<https://www.karmapa.org/karma-kagyu/lives/milarepa/>).

Thus, the Compassionate Warrior leadership model is premised on the principles of trust, love and genuine concern to help others to improve and grow. This calls for high degree of understanding of the intentions of the Compassionate Warrior by the followers. On the part of the Compassionate Warrior, the leader should uphold the principle of compassion rooted in the imagery of a Warrior. In essence, a Compassionate Warrior is a credible leader who will love and have

genuine concern for the followers as we would love our only child. The leaders who are Compassionate Warriors will care for their followers even at the cost of their own life and well-being.

### **Qualities of Compassionate Warrior**

The qualities of a leader described in leadership literature are important but a Compassionate Warrior should possess wisdom and compassion. These two are the fundamental qualities that a Compassionate Warrior should have without any compromise. Here, we mean the wisdom and compassion to genuinely establish ties with his or her environment to relate to the followers and the joy of cherishing others.

A Compassionate Warrior should possess the wisdom to perceive the true nature of reality and see things as they are and not as they appear. It means knowledge beyond concepts and which is acquired experientially (O'Brien. B., March 2018). This means a Compassionate Warrior should have the wisdom to keep an open mind rather than being closed-minded, listening to other points of view rather than being bigoted; to carefully examine facts that contradict our beliefs rather than burying our heads in the sand; to be objective rather than prejudiced and partisan; to take time about forming our opinions and beliefs rather than just accepting the first or most emotional thing that is offered to us; and to always be ready to change our beliefs when facts that contradict them are presented to us (<http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/qanda07.htm>)

In essence, wisdom covers the intellectual or comprehending side of our nature while compassion covers the emotional or feeling side of our nature. (<http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/qanda07.htm>)

The Prayer to Chenrezig, Compassionate-Eye-Looking One by Dharma King Songtsen Gampo and translated by Lama Zopa Rinpoche provides a clear understanding of the qualities that a Compassionate Warrior should possess:

*"...When I am obscured by the darkness of ignorance,  
Please be my illuminating light, Compassionate-Eye-Looking One.  
When I have a blazing fire of anger toward my enemies,  
Please be the waterfall that extinguishes it, Compassionate- Eye-  
Looking One.*

*When I have violent waves of attachment toward my friends,  
Please help me realize the ultimate nature, Compassionate- Eye-  
Looking One.*

*When I am bound to my possessions by the knot of miserliness,  
Please be my manager of giving, Compassionate-Eye-Looking  
One.*

*When I am intoxicated by the five poisonous delusions,  
Please be my king of medicine, Compassionate-Eye-Looking  
One....”*

*([https://fpmt.org/wpcontent/uploads/education/teachings/texts/son\\_gtsen\\_gompo\\_prayer\\_to\\_chenrezig\\_a5.pdf](https://fpmt.org/wpcontent/uploads/education/teachings/texts/son_gtsen_gompo_prayer_to_chenrezig_a5.pdf))*

Thus, a Compassionate Warrior should have the Wisdom and Compassion to be the illuminating light to dispel ignorance of his or her followers; waterfall to extinguish the blazing fire of anger; facilitate realization of the ultimate nature to remove violent waves of attachment; be manager of giving when bound by knot of miserliness; and be the king of medicine when intoxicated by the five poisonous delusions.

A Compassionate Warrior should have the wisdom and compassion to serve others to free all from suffering and create enabling conditions for generating happiness.

### **Activities of Compassionate Warrior**

The peerless Dzogchen master Kuenkhen Longchen Rabjam who lived in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century taught that the entire conduct of the bodhisattva can be summarized into two aspects. The first aspect is aspirational bodhicitta which is mainly applied at mind and speech level. It is mainly the cultivation of the Four Immeasurable Thoughts which will eventually give us confidence arising from our intention to benefit others.

The second aspect is actualizing bodhicitta which is application part. (<https://www.padmasambhava.org/sermon/four-immesurables/>). It is also referred to as ‘Bodhicitta of Application’ (Dzongsar Jamyang Khentse, 2012, p.130). It is the application of the six Paramitas (*pha rol tu phyin pa drug*) which are generosity (*byin pa*), discipline (*tshul khrims*), patience (*bzod pa*), diligence (*brtson ‘grus*), Samadhi or meditative concentration (*bsam gtan*) and wisdom (*shes rab*).

Many centuries later, Stephen Covey (1991), in “The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People” says that all things are created twice - once in the mind and the other physically. This aligns with the aspirational and actualization aspects. The point is that a Compassionate Warrior should have the courage to actualize the Four Immeasurable Thoughts by practicing the six Paramitas (*pha rol tu phyin pa drug*) so that the followers are safely navigated to the other shore as ‘Para’ which is Sanskrit and means the other shore and also means stepping out of the egocentric mentality. This is also the reason for referring to the six Paramitas as a transcendental action. In the context of this paper, the wisdom and compassion of His Majesty Druk Gyalpo Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck to safely take all his subjects to the other shore of turmoil caused by COVID-19 pandemic clearly illustrates Him as a Compassionate Warrior.

Actualizing or practicing the six Paramitas will transform the six negative emotions<sup>1</sup> which eventually reduce our emotional reactions and bring us joy and happiness. Our concern for others become larger and we will cherish others more.

Bhutanese have always been fortunate as we continue to be blessed with Kings who practice the six paramitas. Each era gave birth to a Compassionate Warrior. When Bhutan was plagued with internal strife and intrigues, Gongsar Ugyen Wangchuk, the Founding Monarch restored law and order and gifted the Bhutanese with peace. Even as the powerful nations were investing their resources and energy for World War One, the Founding Monarch charted a roadmap of development and peace for Bhutan. The reign of Druk Gyalpo Jigme Wangchuck coincided with the time when the world was torn by clash of ideologies, World War Two and struggle for independence. The world was in turmoil but Druk Gyalpo Jigme Wangchuck consolidated the young and fragile Kingdom of Bhutan carved by his father. Within Bhutan, he initiated economic reforms particularly relieved Bhutanese of the immense burden of taxation. The Third Druk Gyalpo Jigme Dorji Wangchuck brought people’s voice to the forefront by establishing the National Assembly and the Royal Advisory Council. He put an end to serfdom and set Bhutan on the path of

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<sup>1</sup> The six negative emotions are ignorance (*ma rig pa*), desire (*‘dod chags*), anger (*khong krao*), pride (*nga rgyal*), doubt (*the tshom*) and beliefs (*lta ba*).

economic development to alleviate poverty. His son the Great Fourth Jigme Singye Wangchuck gifted Bhutan with Gross National Happiness as an alternative development paradigm. His Majesty selflessly led the army and went to the battlefield to flush out insurgents. The greatest gift from the Golden Throne to the Bhutanese is democracy empowering people to engage in decision making and charting their future. Druk Gyalpo Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck initiated many reforms to take Bhutan forward but the most remarkable display of Leadership was manifested during the trying times posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. His Majesty gave confidence and hope to his people with clarity of strategies to address the challenges posed by the pandemic (Karma Pedey, 2020) with compassion and valour of a warrior.

The compassionate and gallant activities of Druk Gyalpo Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck which aligns with the six paramitas exemplify His Majesty as a Compassionate Warrior. This is a Bhutanese model of leadership which has been demonstrated by the Kings of Bhutan over a century. It has now crystallized for others to follow. In this context of Compassionate Warrior, Professor TS Powdyel underscores that “...*the worst fears of an advancing gloom bring out the best in them as they galvanise themselves for a common cause and rally round an extraordinary leader*”. (2020, p. 56). This is the Compassionate Warrior.

The paper will now discuss the activities of Druk Gyalpo Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck as a Compassionate Warrior in the context of six paramitas.

#### *Generosity (Tibetan: jinpa, Sanskrit: dana)*

Druk Gyalpo Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck, the Compassionate Warrior created the causes for material resources and provided them to his people to alleviate their economic distress. Druk Gyalpo's Relief Kidu, National Resilience Fund, deferment of loan instalments and providing ration for the vulnerable and economically challenged Bhutanese during the pandemic was a pure manifestation of generosity. It relieved the distress of a wide range of Bhutanese including business entities to youths pursuing higher studies. This generosity addressed the challenges faced by people resulting from loss of job and business downturn. It came as a great relief during the ordeals caused by the pandemic.

*Discipline (Tibetan: tsultrim, Sanskrit: sila)*

Druk Gyalpo Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck displayed unparalleled degree of discipline so that His Majesty's action did not adversely affect and harm others. The strength of discipline demonstrated by His Majesty to endure negative situations stemming from the material world inspired all the people living in Bhutan and beyond to practice discipline. The befitting illustration was observing the COVID protocol. His Majesty and the Royal entourage took COVID tests after each Royal visit to the different parts of Bhutan to avoid the risk of spreading the disease, exemplify the adherence to the protocol and keep the morale of his people high. His Majesty and the Royal entourage also stayed in quarantine facilities even when, on several occasions, His people faltered.

*Patience (Tibetan: zopa, Sanskrit: ksanti)*

Patience is one attribute that we must possess in turbulent times such as the one created by the pandemic. Patience which can only grow over time when we withstand negative situations again and again has the potential to stop others from indulging in conflicts and engaging in wrong actions. In this context, with sustained patience, His Majesty put all his trust and hope in his people even when His people faltered. Druk Gyalpo Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck patiently walked the length and breadth of Bhutan advocating caution and alertness and not to lose guard of self-discipline of observing the COVID protocols.

*Joyous Effort (Tibetan: tsondru, Sanskrit: virya)*

With sound control of his emotions, Druk Gyalpo Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck with stable clarity of direction marshalled all the effort with joy of serving his people. His Majesty's virtuous actions inspired many people to participate in the combat against the pandemic. His Majesty celebrated the support and unrestrained efforts of his people, and expressed His Majesty's appreciative joy during the Second Royal Addresses which was broadcast by Bhutan Broadcasting Services Television. In this Royal Address on 10 April 2020), His Majesty underscored that "*...our people from all backgrounds are ready to make personal sacrifices, despite facing difficulties themselves, show that they place the interest of the nation above all else.*"



*Concentration (Tibetan: samten, Sanskrit: dhyana)*

The devastation caused by the pandemic escalated. Even the developed and economically well-off countries were distressed. But His Majesty remained in calm state of mind which gave special insight into designing strategies to withstand the pandemic. This also enabled His Majesty to give objective and clear guidance to the Government and his people. His Majesty meticulously analysed the national plan of the National COVID Task Force to fight COVID-19. Druk Gyalpo Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck spent sleepless nights planning and concentrating on strategies to take his people safely to the other shore from the wraths of COVID-19.

*Wisdom (Tibetan: sherab, Sanskrit: prajna)*

Wisdom of Druk Gyalpo Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck is one of the key factors that enabled Bhutan to successfully withstand the wrath of the pandemic. His Majesty had the precise wisdom to guide his people with clarity which planted the much needed hope and confidence in them. The toughest decision but a wise one was the timely sealing of all the entry points to Bhutan. His Majesty visited every nook and corner of Bhutan to stay connected with his people and to keep their morale high during the whole turbulent and distressful times. Druk Gyalpo Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck even thought of the smallest details such as entertainment to encourage people to stay at home. For instance, the Chik Thuen programme which was broadcasted by Bhutan Broadcasting Service Television enticed people to stay at home in safety. The incomparable wisdom of His Majesty led all the people living in Bhutan to navigate to the shore in safety.

**Conclusion**

Many leadership theories have emerged. For instance, the Great-Man Theory asserted that great leaders are born and not made. To a similar extent, the Trait Theory suggested that certain inborn or innate qualities and characteristics make someone a leader. In contrast, action rather than qualities are the focal points of behavioural theory. On the other hand, Contingency Theories proposed that effective leadership is contingent upon the situation at hand which meant that a leader can be an effective leader in one circumstance and an ineffective leader in a different situation. Similar to this emerged the Situational Theory which underscored different leadership styles should be adopted according to the situation. Leadership theories also brought charisma into account where the charismatic leaders are

believed to provide a 'heroic' approach, vision and positive inspiration in turbulent times. Another similar theory termed as the Transformational Leadership theory emphasised that a leader should have the ability to motivate and empower the followers. This was followed by Servant Leadership that put the leader as a facilitator for the good of the team and organisation. Another leadership style is the Distributed Leadership which proposed that every individual can exert leadership influence despite their levels and roles in the organisation. Closely aligned to these leadership theories and styles, is the Compassionate Warrior leadership model which is premised on Bhutanese leadership model that primarily underscores the role of wisdom and compassion.

Compassionate Warrior model most aptly suits the need of turbulent times as exemplified by Druk Gyalpo Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck. His Majesty made selfless sacrifices for all the people living in Bhutan and beyond and put the six paramitas in action by bringing his people safely to the shore. Now, borders are open and quarantine lifted. Life has gradually returned to normal. Bhutan has navigated safely through the trying times with much thanks to the leadership of our Compassionate Warrior.

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