Progress within a nation cannot be defined only in terms of economic growth. Together with traditional indicators such as gross domestic product, factors indicating quality of life, including social, environmental, cultural, and health factors, and wellbeing must also be considered.

While GDP is a useful economic indicator, it does not take into consideration some factors important to the well-being of a society, such as life expectancy or health care. The inventor of the gross domestic product measure, Simon Kuznets, himself said in 1934, "The welfare of a nation can scarcely be inferred from a measure of national income."

So far, it has not been possible to factor in the additional information required to produce a simple global formula to define wellbeing. Health is defined by World Health Organisation as a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.

We recognize the need to measure and foster well-being in societies, but how can it be measured? How can it be fostered?

Currently, French President Nicolas Sarkozy is urging world leaders to "revolutionize" international definitions of development, progress and achievement. Sarkozy's "revolution" would still use the traditional GDP models to analyse a nation's success. However the definition of success would be expanded to include “measures of well-being, environmental sustainability, the quality of public services, and the amount of time citizens of a country have to meet family responsibilities”.

**Examples of well-being indices**

As a response for the call to measure well-being, surveys of public wellbeing have been commanding greater interest with governments, healthcare agencies, employers and community members. Indices have been developed to point the way to increased well-being either locally or globally.

Examples are:

are assessed according to the Cantril Ladder Scale to be thriving, struggling or suffering.

- Elements of the Australian Personal Wellbeing Index are satisfaction with: health, personal relationships, feeling of safety, standard of living, achievements in life, feeling part of the community, future security. Elements of their National Wellbeing Index are satisfaction with: social conditions, the economic situation, the state of the Australian environment, Australian business, national security and Government.

- The Happy Planet Index looks at environmental impact and human well-being, and measures the environmental efficiency with which, country by country, people live long and happy lives. The HPI indicates that i) high levels of resource consumption do not reliably produce high levels of well-being, ii) it is possible to produce high, sustainable well-being without excessive consumption of the Earth’s resources, iii) there are different routes to achieving comparable levels of sustainable well-being.

**Fostering well-being**

Positive psychology is “the scientific study of optimal human functioning.” First introduced as a field of study in 1998 by Dr. Martin Seligman (University of Pennsylvania’s Positive Psychology Center), the underlying premise is that people can learn to be happier, just as they can learn to play a game or to be proficient at archery.

Scientists can now quantify happiness. Neuroscientists are able to measure pleasure. They suggest that happiness is more than a vague concept or mood; it is real. Social scientists have a simple measure of happiness said to be as good as the economists’ measure of poverty or growth. They simply ask people how happy they are. In their *Science of Happiness* series in 2006, the BBC quotes leading American psychologist Dr. Ed Diener (University of Illinois) as saying, "It may sound silly but we ask people 'How happy are you 1-7, 1-10? And the interesting thing is that produces real answers that are valid, they're not perfect but they're valid and they predict all sorts of real things in their lives."

Happiness contributes greatly to both health and well-being. According to Diener the evidence suggests that happy people live longer than depressed people. In one study, the difference between the happiest group and the unhappiest group was nine years; that is three years more than the difference between the lifespan of heavy smokers and non-smokers.
As yet, scientists have not proved causation, for example whether people are healthy because they are happy, or whether people are happy because they are healthy. But surveys indicate significant correlations between happiness and some factors.

Happiness researchers in developed countries have found that generally there has been an increase in wealth in the last 50 years, but happiness levels have not increased. Dr. Daniel Kahneman (University of Princeton) states: "Standard of living has increased dramatically and happiness has increased not at all, and in some cases has diminished slightly. There is a lot of evidence that being richer... isn't making us happier."

It’s a fact that wealthier countries do tend to be happier than poor ones. However, once people have enough to meet their needs in terms of a home, food and clothes, then extra money does not appear to make people much happier.

A BBC survey in 2006 concluded that 81% of Britain's population would rather the government make them happier than richer.

Diener states that there is no single key to happiness. A list of ingredients are vital: healthy relationships, meaning in life and satisfying and stimulating goals. He says, “first, family and friends are crucial - the wider and deeper the relationships with those around you the better. The second vital ingredient is having meaning in life, a belief in something bigger than yourself - from religion, spirituality or a philosophy of life. The third element is finding fulfillment through having goals that are interesting to pursue and which use our talents, strengths and skills.”

Dr. Tal Ben-Shahar (positive psychology lecturer, Harvard University) states:
“Attaining lasting happiness requires that we enjoy the journey on our way toward a destination we deem valuable. Happiness, therefore, is not about making it to the peak of the mountain, nor is it about climbing aimlessly around the mountain: happiness is the experience of climbing toward the peak.
“When you learn how to live for today and for tomorrow at the same time, you learn how to balance your immediate personal needs with long-term goals and enjoy life as you never have before.”

Research suggests two reasons why we can’t buy happiness. Firstly, we tend to adapt to pleasure. The feeling of happiness doesn’t last. A person, a purchase or gift generally gives a short burst of pleasure which quickly fades. Secondly, we have a habit of comparing ourselves with other people. Richer people may feel happier for a while if they compare themselves with
poorer people, but poorer people are less happy if they compare themselves with people they perceive to be more fortunate.

The good news shared by positive psychologists is that the sparkle of happiness fades less quickly in areas where there is special meaning such as friendship or life goals. Also, every person has the ability to choose whether or not to make comparisons with other people. I create my own thoughts and feelings. If I want a different experience in life I must change the way I think about and respond to the people or situations I meet.

**Theory into practice**

When we examine the impact of happiness on health and well-being, the questions arise: How to do we raise our happiness score and help others raise theirs? How can I build wide, deep, healthy relationships? How do I find my purpose and set meaningful goals? How can I sustain the feeling of happiness? Can I prevent myself adapting to the joys and pleasures that life brings?

Brahma Kumaris have been exploring these questions for over 70 years. Courses, workshops and seminars offer practical methods to raise awareness and create and sustain attitudes that lead to a high level of well-being. It’s evident that when individuals rediscover their capacity to shape their own life experiences, and empower their consciousness, they can generate positive thoughts and live uninfluenced by any challenges that life brings.

Earlier this month, Sister Jayanti (Brahma Kumaris’ European Director and representative to the UN in Geneva) shared 7 Keys to Happiness. These were:

1) I shouldn’t wait for people or situations to change. I am responsible for myself; I create my own thoughts and feelings.
2) Keep this awareness: “I am the master of my own destiny. I have to make a conscious choice as to how I respond and react to people and situations.
3) I appreciate my uniqueness and also everyone else’s. The tapestry of my life is beautiful and my contribution is absolutely distinctive.
4) I make time for myself by turning inward to access the treasures of peace, love, purity, truth and joy within me.
5) I connect with the Divine, the Creator to bring my eternal relationship back into my life to right the wrongs in my life.
6) I share with others my inner treasures, compassion, time, good wishes, words of inspiration and encouragement, sometimes even just a smile. In turn, I get blessings from others and blessings of happiness from God.
7) I recognize time. The present time, when there is so much experience of sorrow, is also the season for healing, compassion and returning to spirituality—the one answer to all troubles.

The latest global Brahma Kumaris project, *Experiencing Inner Power and Protection*, gives people around the world an opportunity to generate happiness through using the last two keys. The project aims to help people find a way to face the insecurities, hardship and challenges of this unpredictable world. Every day, people across the globe rely on their inner strength and courage to make the right choices in life, often finding an experience of protection and strength that is beyond human capacity. Is Divine protection possible? How do we access it? On the Inner Power and Protection blog, people of all cultures and backgrounds are invited to contribute stories of how they have been spiritually empowered, healed and/or protected by a Higher Power. The project offers an opportunity to inspire and help others find the courage to make positive changes to their life.

*Values in Healthcare: a Spiritual Approach* is one of several ongoing programs offered by Brahma Kumaris, aimed at fostering spiritual wellbeing in the workplace. Created to fill an important gap in training for healthcare professionals, it addresses the important question, how can healthcare professionals deliver the best possible care to patients and at the same time, feel enriched and supported by their work? How can they thrive, rather than just survive?

The main premise of *Values in Healthcare* is that in developing a conscious, values-based approach, participants can rediscover their own peacefulness, think more positively, and act with compassion and co-operation, while putting their own self-care at the centre of their efforts.

The seven modules focus on values, peace, positivity, compassion, cooperation, valuing the self and spirituality in healthcare. ‘Tools’ for learning include meditation, visualisation, reflection, listening, appreciation, creativity and play. A typical session lasts approximately six hours. Most of that time is taken up with experiential exercises, followed by feedback. Additional activities include warm-up exercises, movement exercises, meditations and visualisations on CD and closure exercises. References and resources for learning logs, action planning and evaluation, follow-up reading and exploration are included.

Programmes such as *Values in Healthcare* and *Hope in Healthcare* provide the foundation for fostering greater well-being in both patients and care-givers.

**Conclusion**
Researchers are moving closer towards the creation of an index to measure progress of societies that reflects not just economic growth but also physical, mental and social well-being, for which happiness is an indicator. Their work is aimed at helping governments, healthcare agencies, employers and community members improve quality of life in the future. But can we wait for that? What about now?

Positive psychologists have revealed much about happiness. The call of the time is a spiritual one - to take personal responsibility for my thoughts and feelings and choices and thereby to foster my own well-being. As Dale Carnegie said, “It isn’t what you have, or who you are, or where you are, or what you are doing that makes you happy or unhappy. It’s what you think about.”