WORKSHEET 2

# DEATH AND REBIRTH FROM A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

From a Buddhist perspective, death, like birth, is a transition. Bodies pass away, while the mind, the "experiencer of all things," is indestructible like space. Our awareness - that which now looks through the eyes and listens through the ears, that which thinks and feels - our mind is, by its very nature, timeless and unlimited. Understanding the fundamental indestructibility of mind, one loses the fear of death.

Buddha explained in the teachings on cause and effect that all living beings have corresponding experiences in the cycle of rebirths due to their thoughts, words and deeds, but can also change them by setting corresponding new causes.

Consciousness (called 'mind' in Buddhism) connects to a new body from life to life, depending on the impressions gathered in previous lives. If one understands the meaning of cause and effect, one will consciously act sensibly and avoid negative impressions as much as possible. Burdensome impressions that one has not cleared up, and things that one always wanted to do and did not do, make the dying process more difficult. Thus, an essential part of Buddha's teaching is to use life meaningfully, as one is constantly planting the seeds for the future, including future lives.



*The Buddha of Limitless Light (sanskr.: Amithaba, tib.: Öpame)*

**What actually happens when we die?**
When a person is dying, processes take place that can be observed. The body becomes heavy, the dying person has less and less control over it. Gradually, the body loses warmth and breathing becomes shallower and shallower until it stops altogether. While doctors declare the person clinically dead at this point, in Buddhist terms he is not yet dead because internal processes are still taking place. It takes about another half hour for all the internal energies to dissolve into each other.
In the half hour after clinical death, it is advisable to leave the body of the dying person alone so that these processes can proceed undisturbed. At this time, the relatives can be of great help through quiet compassion, conscious presence and trust.

The body remains as a corpse, the mind experiences in the next phase of usually 49 days an intermediate state, comparable to the experience in a dream. More and more the bridges to the old life are torn down and the stored habitual patterns lead to a new rebirth.

The consciousness is drawn to the future parents. It connects with the sperm and egg of the parents and a new life emerges. A new body is formed. Here, too, cause and effect apply: Where is one reborn - in an environment and culture where one enjoys freedom and support or under difficult circumstances? What is the nature of the body - strong and healthy or weak and sick? With what mental tendencies is one endowed - is one benevolent and helpful or begrudging and aggressive? An essential part of Buddha's teaching is to use one's life wisely in order to live, die and be reborn well.

Some people - especially in early childhood - can remember past lives. Special abilities of so-called "prodigies" suggest that they have already developed their special talents in previous lives.

There are meditation masters who are consciously reborn because of their Bodhisattva attitude, such as the Karmapas, Shamarpas or Dalai Lamas. They are

enlightened and free from the cycle of rebirths, but they come back in a human body out of compassion for the benefit of living beings.

In some Buddhist schools, there are meditations aimed at bringing the consciousness to a state free of suffering after death, to a so-called "Pure Land", in Tibetan "Dewachen", which means "Land of Supreme Joy".

**EXERCISES**

Discuss the questions with your partner and mark the appropriate places in the text.

1. What is the relationship between mind and body from a Buddhist perspective?
2. How does our life come into being from a Buddhist point of view?
3. Why should the dying person be left alone for half an hour after clinical death?
4. Is it possible to support the deceased?
5. Can one die without fear?