1 BUDDHA'S LIFE STORY

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SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVEL I

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BUDDHA´S LIFESTORY

Buddha's life story is not presented uniformly in all details in the various Buddhist traditions; this has to do with the fact that certain aspects of his life serve as inspiration and are emphasized to different degrees.

At the time of the birth of the historical Buddha Siddhartha Gautama Shakyamuni, India was a flourishing advanced civilization, characterized by great spiritual openness. A wide variety of philosophical schools and viewpoints flourished simultaneously. People expected a teaching to be holistic and for a worldview to permeate life. Teachings had to have a foundation, have clear methods, and have an attainable goal. People were very careful with assertions: For as soon as someone held a view that another could refute, he became his disciple - so demanded the intellectual honesty of the time.

Buddha was born around 560 B.C. as the son of a princely family on the southern edge of present-day Nepal near the then city of Kapilavastu in the Lumbini Grove. There was great joy at the birth of the heir to the throne. The family belonged to the Shakya family and to the lineage of the Gautamas, from where his name Siddhartha Gautama Shakyamuni ("the sage from the tribe of the Shakyas") comes.

His birth on a full moon day in May was accompanied by special signs and his parents received the following prophecy: "If the boy does not come into contact with the sufferings of the world, he will become a great ruler and fulfill all your wishes. However, should he see the suffering of the people, he will leave everything and bring a whole new dimension to the world in search of lasting happiness."

The parents then decided to raise the young prince within the palace in an artificially shielded world where there was only youth, beauty, pleasure and joyful experiences. He enjoyed an extensive education in the sciences, the arts, sports and, as a member of the warrior caste, martial arts. In all disciplines he shone with outstanding talent. He was subtle, courageous and strong at the same time. During his few excursions into the "normal" world, everything was prepared so that he saw only young, healthy and happy people. Thus, the young prince grew up in his luxurious world, enjoyed life, married traditionally and had a son, Rahula.
This lasted until he was 29 years old. During secret excursions, he encountered the darker side of life. On three consecutive days he saw one seriously ill person, one old person and one dead person. What one usually gets used to very gradually, hit him completely unprepared and shook him deeply. He suddenly had to understand that worldly pleasures, beauty, strength and youth are conditional and transient. Thereupon he returned to his palace, but nothing could please him anymore. The realization that these sufferings were part of the life of beings gave him no peace and he looked for a way out, a lasting happiness that is not subject to any conditions.

The next day he had another experience that was to shape his life. He saw a man sitting in deep meditation and when their eyes met, he suddenly knew that real freedom and lasting happiness can only be found in one's own mind. However, penetrating to this insight seemed impossible in the context of his social life and he decided to leave his princely existence. He cut off his long hair, the sign of his noble lineage, determined to leave his previous life behind, went out into the woods and studied with many teachers of his time. Although he was a quick learner and usually surpassed his teachers after a short time, none of their methods took him beyond limited, transient experiences. Driven by a deep desire to find something truly liberating, he went on to join a group of five ascetics living in the forests near present-day Bodhgaya. Having experienced all the pleasures of the body and the senses as a prince, he now believed that sense impressions were a hindrance and that suppressing them would lead to mental clarity. So he practiced complete renunciation and almost starved himself to death. Eventually, however, he realized that asceticism weakened not only his body but also his mind and did not bring him closer to his goal. This experience was another turning point in his life - his turning away from extremes and he took food again.

After Siddhartha regained his strength, he sat down in the shade of the now-famous Bodhi tree in Bodhgaya and decided to remain here in recess until he reached his goal. He sat in deep meditation for six days and nights. His absorption was so unshakable that neither external nor internal distractions could disturb him. At

the dawn of the seventh day, the full moon of May, he attained enlightenment at the age of 35 and became the Buddha, the Awakened One - awakened from the dream of ignorance. All the inherent qualities of the mind were unfolded. Perfect enlightenment means the experience of fearlessness, infinite joy and boundless compassion. From this compassion, one acts with wisdom for the benefit of all beings.

Invoking the earth "as a witness to his steadfastness," he touched the ground with the fingertips of his right hand. As a statue, he is often depicted in this earth-touching gesture.

For seven more weeks, Buddha remained in meditation under the Bodhi tree to accustom his body to the powerful currents of inner bliss.

In the forest near Benares (Varanasi) he met his former companions, the five ascetics. They were attracted by his joyful radiance and understood that something special had happened to him. Curious, they asked him for explanations, and Buddha taught the "Four Noble Truths" as the basis, path and goal to liberation and enlightenment.

Already in the first three months, while he stayed in the forest of Benares, the community of his disciples, the Sangha, grew up. Unusual for the time was its mixed composition across all classes of the people: kings, merchants and beggars belonged to the disciples of Buddha. The caste system had no meaning in the sangha. Buddha's wife and his son Rahula also became members of the Sangha.

From then on, Buddha traveled around northern India teaching for 45 years, usually surrounded by traveling disciples. Several places crystallized where he stayed more frequently and gave special teachings. The forest of Benares is especially associated with the lessons of the first cycle, which historically gave rise to the schools of Theravada. At Vulture Hill in Rajgir, he gave mainly the Mahayana teachings on compassion and wisdom (second cycle); at Shravasti (in the kingdom of Magadha) and Vaishali, finally, the Vajrayana with the explanations on direct identification with the qualities of the nature of mind (third cycle).

Although Buddha and his disciples never proselytized, the new teaching spread in northern India through its natural appeal: "Where there is a lake, the swans come". On the other hand, the new movement was also opposed by religious envious people as well as those who feared social upheaval. Finally, the Buddha did not accept the caste system and accepted women as nuns into the religious community. Moreover, his statements on cause and effect (karma) did not conform at all to the norms of the caste system.

Buddha and his disciples spent the rainy seasons in seclusion with intensive meditation practice, while the other times of the year were used for travel and teaching. In 45 years he gave 84,000 teachings, which today have been handed down in the 108 volumes of the Kangyur. When Buddha died at the age of 80 in the small village of Kushinagara - not far from his birthplace - on the night of the full moon in May, his last words are said to have been, "Now I can die happy. I have not held a single teaching in a closed hand. All that is of use to you I have already given." And last of all, "Don't believe anything I say just because I am Buddha, but check if it corresponds to your experience. Be your own light."

After Buddha's death, his teaching discourses were compiled in the First Council of Rajgir. 500 realized practitioners gathered to write down the teaching discourses, which until then had often been recalled and transmitted in verse form. Thus, each sutra begins with the words "Thus I have heard ..." and as introduction, states the place, audience, occasion and circumstances of the teaching. In this way, the Buddha's teaching was preserved for the future. The teachings of the Great Way (Mahayana) and the Diamond Way (Vajrayana) were not published at that time. They were largely passed on orally among practitioners and transmitted from teacher to student. Only in later councils in Vaishali and Pataliputra (Patna) were these teachings also written down. For this reason, there is an early Buddhist canon in Pali and a later canon in Sanskrit.

INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

COURSE OF LESSON - SECONDARY LEVEL I

OBJECTIVES

The students will be able to:

- get to know Buddha as a historical personality and founder of Buddhism.
- to trace the various stages of his life.
- summarize the most important aspects of the different phases of his life in his own words.
- relate Buddha's life story to your own.

(OPTIONAL) DISCUSSION	Buddha's life story in the feature film "Little Buddha"	**Film**
TRANSFER	Buddha's life story - a comparable path for today?	**WS 3** **Answers to WS 3** Students set the foundation, goal and path in relation to their own lives Students present their ideas
(OPTIONAL) REPETITION	Buddha's life story in phases	**WS 2** **Answers to WS 2** Students assign captions Backup in the basement
EXERCISE	Buddha's life story Important phases and their significance	**Material 2 (basic text)** **WS 1** **Answers to WS 1** Students develop contents and note down key points Students present results
INTRO	What do you know about Buddha?	**Material 1** Students express previous knowledge, associations, questions

BASIS

What could interest student on the topic?

- Who was Buddha?
- Why do we find many Buddhist symbols today and what do they mean?
- What does Buddha's life story have to do with us?

INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

DIDACTIC REFERENCES - SECONDARY LEVEL I

Objectives

Students will be able to …

1. get to know Buddha as a historical personality and founder of Buddhism.
2. to retrace the various stages of his life.
3. to summarize the most important aspects of the stages of his life in his own words.
4. to relate Buddha's life story to your own.

INTRODUCTION

Material 1 shows a scroll painting (thangka) of the historical Buddha with the earth touching gesture. The pupils bring associations and previous knowledge into the class discussion. Questions can also be included.

NOTES

Buddha's path of life shows the possibility to become independent of external conditions and - for the benefit of all beings - to perfect all inner qualities. Since all external conditions are constantly changing, they are not a reliable basis for lasting happiness. Buddha as a teacher gives methods to experience "one's own clear light" and to realize liberation and enlightenment.

EXERCISE

The basic text is output as **Material 2** and the associated questions are answered in group work on **Worksheet 1**, this can also be done in a division of labor. Pupils will find suitable terms for the individual phases. The results are presented in the plenum, see **Answers to WS 1**.

EXTRA optional

The pupils receive **Worksheet 2** with pictures from Buddha's life. You will find short, suitable terms to describe the respective phase of life in individual work. **Answers to WS 2** give suggestions for solutions, which are compared in the class discussion.

TRANSFER

The pupils work on the tasks of **Worksheet 3** and discuss their answers in the group. This is about comparing Buddha's life story with the circumstances, ideas and wishes for one's own life. The pupils find similarities in the basic conditions, so for most of them the basic care is ensured and good education is available. In addition, there is a surplus for hobbies and own interests. In order to reach their goal, the pupils note their own ideas, which wishes or dreams motivate them in their lives. They are asked to differentiate between external and internal goals. Their realization needs a feasible way, these ideas should also be formulated. **Answers to WS 3** offer possible results.
In the plenary session, those pupils who wish to do so can present their ideas. They can discuss similarities and differences and address particular impulses.

EXTRA optional

The movie “Little Buddha” is shown. Source: “Little Buddha”, Bernardo Bertolucci , 1993 Trailer: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hD377F1gneE

MATERIAL 1

BUDDHA SHAKYAMUNI



MATERIAL 2

BUDDHA´S LIFE STORY

Buddha's life story is not presented in all details in the various Buddhist traditions; this has to do with the fact that certain aspects of his life serve as inspiration and are emphasized differently.

At the time of the birth of the historical Buddha Siddhartha Gautama Shakyamuni, India was a flourishing high culture. There was great spiritual openness - comparable to the Renaissance and the awakening in the 1960s. Various philosophical schools and views flourished simultaneously. People expected that a teaching would be holistic and that a world view would permeate life. The teachings had to have a foundation, have clear methods and have an attainable goal. Assertions were handled with great care: For as soon as someone held a view that another could refute, he became his disciple - the spiritual honesty of the time demanded it.

Buddha was born around 560 B.C. as the son of a princely family on the southern edge of present-day Nepal near the then city of Kapilavastu in the Lumbini grove. The joy over the birth of the heir to the throne was great. The family belonged to the Shakyas family and belonged to the Gautama's lineage, from where his name Siddhartha Gautama Shakyamuni ("the wise man of the Shakya's tribe") comes.

His birth on a full moon day in May was accompanied by special signs and his parents received the following prophecy: "If the boy does not come into contact with the sufferings of the world, he will become a great ruler and fulfill all your wishes. But should he see the suffering of mankind, he will leave everything and bring a whole new dimension to the world in search of lasting happiness".

The parents then decided to raise the young prince inside the palace in an artificially shielded world where there was only youth, beauty, pleasure and joyful experiences. He enjoyed a comprehensive education in the sciences, in art, in sports and, as a member of the warrior caste, also in martial arts. In all disciplines he excelled by his outstanding talent. He was subtle, courageous and strong at the same time. During his few excursions into the "normal" world, everything was prepared in such a way that he saw only young, healthy and happy people. So the young prince grew up in his luxury world, enjoyed life, married in the traditional way



and had a son, Rahula.

This lasted until he was 29 years old. During secret excursions he encountered the negative aspects of life. On three consecutive days he saw a seriously ill person, an old man and a dead person. The things one otherwise gets used to very gradually met him completely unprepared and shook him deeply. He suddenly understood that worldly joys, beauty, strength and youth are conditional and transitory. He returned to his palace, but nothing could please him anymore. The insight that these sufferings were part of the life of the beings left him no peace and he looked for a way out, a lasting happiness that is not subject to conditions.

The next day he had another experience that would shape his life. He saw a man sitting in deep meditation and when their eyes met, he suddenly knew that true freedom and lasting happiness can only be found in one's own mind. However, it seemed impossible for him to reach this insight within the framework of his social life and he decided to leave his princely existence. He cut off his long hair, the sign of his noble descent, determined to leave his previous life behind, went out into the woods and studied with many teachers of his time. Although he learned quickly and usually surpassed his teachers after a short time, none of their methods led him beyond limited, transient experiences.

Driven by a deep desire to find something truly liberating, he went further and joined a group of five ascetics who lived in the woods near present-day

Bodhgaya. Having experienced all the joys of the body and senses as a prince, he now believed that sensory impressions were an obstacle and that their suppression led to mental clarity. So he practiced in complete renunciation and almost starved himself to death. Eventually, however, he realized that asceticism weakened not only the body but also his mind and did not bring him closer to his goal. This experience was another turning point in his life - his turning away from the extremes and he started eating again.

After Siddharta had regained his strength, he sat down in the shade of the well-known Bodhi tree in Bodhgaya and decided to stay here in deep meditation until he reached his goal. He sat in deep meditation for six days and nights. His immersion was so unshakable that neither external nor internal distractions could disturb him. At the dawn of the seventh day, the full moon in May, he attained enlightenment at the age of 35 and became Buddha, the Awakened One - awakened from the dream of ignorance. All inherent qualities of the mind were developed. Perfect enlightenment means the experience of fearlessness, infinite joy and boundless compassion. Out of this compassion one acts with wisdom for the benefit of all beings.

Calling the earth "as a witness for his steadfastness", he touched the ground with the fingertips of his right hand. As a statue, he is often depicted in this earth touching gesture.

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Although Buddha and his disciples never proselytized, the new teaching spread to Northern India through its natural attraction: "Where there is a lake, the swans will come". On the other hand, the new movement was also met with hostility by those religious forces who were envious as well as from those who feared social upheaval. After all, the Buddha did not accept the caste system and accepted women as nuns into the order. Moreover, his statements on cause and effect (karma) did not at all correspond to the norms of the caste system.

The rainy seasons were spent by Buddha and his disciples in seclusion with intensive meditation practice, while the other times of the year were used for travel and teaching. Over the course of 45 years, he gave 84,000 teachings, which today are handed down in the 108 volumes of the Kangyur. When Buddha died at the age of 80 in the small village of Kushinagara - not far from his birthplace - on the night of the full moon in May, his last words are said to have been: "Now I can die happy. I have never held a single teaching in a closed hand. Everything that is useful to you, I have already given." And last but not least: "Don't believe anything I say just because I am Buddha, but check if it corresponds to your experience. Be your own light."

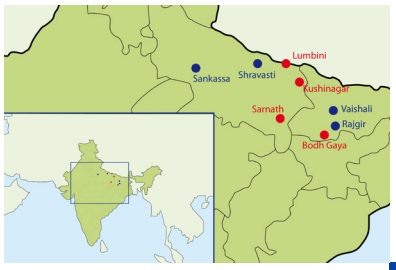
After Buddha's death, his teachings were compiled at the Council of Rajgir. 500 realized practitioners gathered in order to write down the teachings, which until then had often been remembered and transmitted in verse form. Thus, each sutra begins with the words "Thus I have heard it ..." and begins with the place, the listeners, the occasion and the circumstances of the teaching. In this way, the Buddha's teaching has been preserved for the future. The teachings of the Great Way (Mahayana) and the Diamond Way (Vajrayana) were not yet written at that time. They were largely passed on orally among practitioners and transmitted from teacher to student.

WORKSHEET 1

QUESTIONS ABOUT BUDDHA'S LIFE STORY

Tasks

1. Read the text in **Material 2** and answer the questions in the group
2. Find key words for important phases of life.



1. What was India like at that time?
2. Where and when did Buddha live?
3. Into which parental home was he born?
4. What was the prophecy?



5. What was his youth like?
6. What education did he have?
7. What shook him in his 29th year?
8. Why did he leave the palace?



9. What was Prince Siddhartha looking for?
10. What did he try?
11. Why did he leave asceticism?
12. Where is the Bodhi tree?



13. What does deep meditation mean?
14. How is enlightenment described?
15. On what special day was his birth, enlightenment and death?
16. What does the earth touching gesture mean?



17. What were his first teachings?
18. What students did he have?
19. How and where was Buddha's teaching spread?
20. What were his last words and what do they mean?

Umbrella term for the phases of life:

1.

2.

3.

4.

Umbrella term for the phases of life:

5.

6.

7.

8.

Umbrella term for the phases of life:

9.

10.

11.

12.

Umbrella term for the phases of life:

13.

14.

15.

16.

Umbrella term for the phases of life:

17.

18.

19.

20.

ANSWERS TO WS 1

QUESTIONS ON BUDDHA‘S LIFE STORY

Umbrella term for the phases of life: Birth and parent’s house

1. Cultural heyday
2. Northern India, about 560 B.C.
3. King's son, rich, everything available
4. He would find a new way.

Umbrella term for the phases of life: Youth and shock

5. Good education, carefree, fulfillment of all wishes
6. Sports, friends, art, science, martial arts
7. First encounter with age, illness, death
8. He realized that all pleasures in the palace are transient and he wanted to find a way to lasting happiness, there were too many distractions in the palace.

Umbrella term for the phases of life: Searching and path

9. Lasting happiness
10. Different teachers, asceticism, deepening
11. Hunger weakened him, both physically and mentally.
12. In Bodhgaya, northern India

Umbrella term for the phases of life: Meditation and Enlightenment

13. Neither external nor internal distraction can disturb you.
14. Perfect purification of all spiritual veils, perfect unfolding of all inherent qualities of the mind: fearlessness, joy, love
15. On the first full moon in May
16. He has set all causes for enlightenment, the earth is his witness.

Umbrella term for the phases of life: Buddha as teacher

17. The four noble truths
18. From all strata of the population, his wife, his son, women and men, regardless of caste
19. Without missionary work, simply out of interest
20. "I have never held a single teaching in a closed hand. - Now nothing believes me just because I am a Buddha. Be your own light!"
21. This means that he was able to pass on all his experience to his students. He wants his students to have their own experiences and not just follow blindly. He encourages that everyone can follow the path.

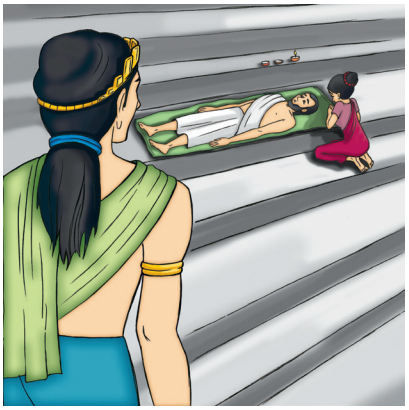
WORKSHEET 2

IMAGES FROM BUDDHA´S LIFE

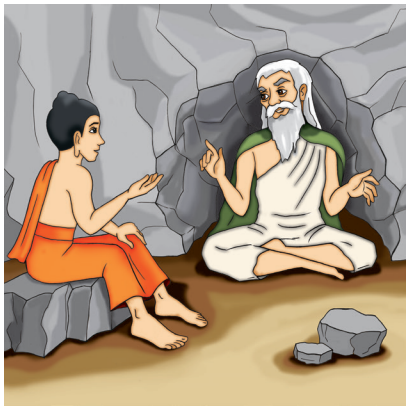
Tasks

Find short, suitable terms to describe the respective phase of life.

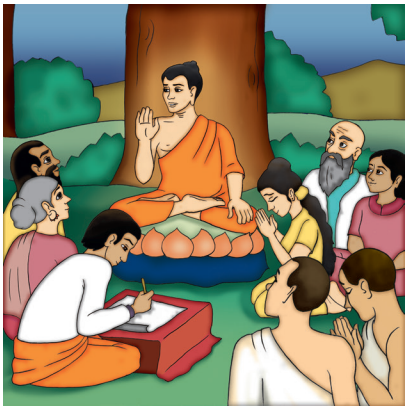












ANSWERS TO WS 2

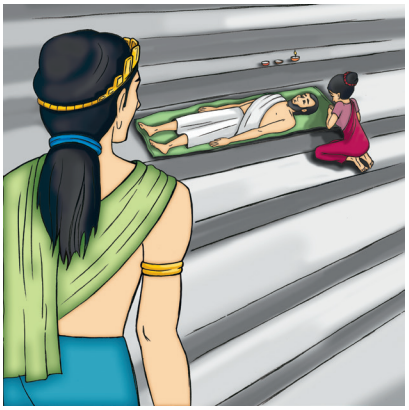
SCENES FROM BUDDHA´S LIFE

EXERCISES

Find short, suitable terms to describe the respective phase of life.



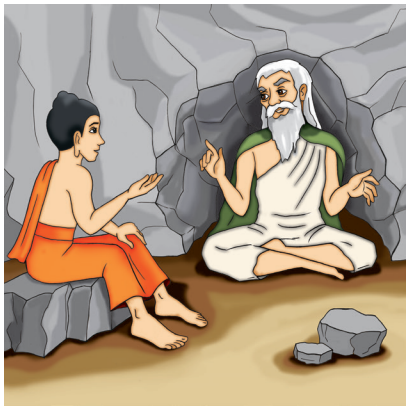
Pleasant life in the palace



Seeing old age, sickness and death



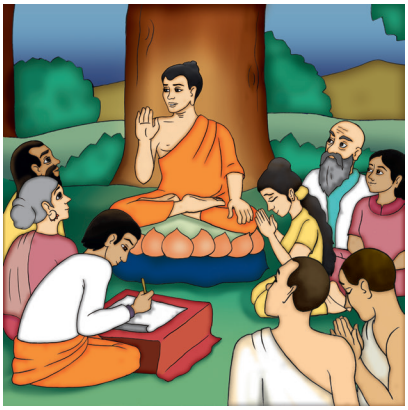
Leaving his previous life



Search and apprenticeship with spiritual masters



Meditation and Enlightenment



Buddha with students, 45 years of teaching

WORKSHEET 3

BUDDHA‘S LIFE STORY – A SIMILAR WAY TODAY?

Exercises

Compare Buddha's life with your circumstances, wishes and goals. Are there similarities? What are differences? Does Buddha's story give impulses for today?

Discuss in the group.

BUDDHAS LIFE STORY		MY LIFE STORY
	What are the basics and conditions in life?	
	What are your wishes and goals? **Outer goals - inner goals?**	
	What possibilities are there to realize these wishes and goals?	

ANSWERS TO WS 3

BUDDHA‘S LIFE STORY – A SIMILAR WAY TODAY?

Exercises

Compare Buddha's life with your circumstances, wishes and goals. Are there similarities? What are differences? Does Buddha's story give impulses for today?

Discuss in the group.

BUDDHAS LIFE STORY		MY LIFE STORY
rich, carefree, good education, good family, friends, expectations of parents	**What are the basics and conditions in life?**	good basic supply, mostly carefree, good education, good family, many friends, freedom
find a way for lasting happiness for all beings	**What are your wishes and goals?** **Outer goals - inner goals?**	learn a good profession to be successful, to start a family, to travel... become a good person, become wise, be loving, ... and more... also unconventional wishes ...
he left the old, he sought teachers, meditated until he realized enlightenment	**What possibilities are there to realize these wishes and goals?**	vocational training, studies, travelling, openness for new things, for friends, getting involved in new experiences, going new ways, questioning things ...