2 BUDDHA‘S TEACHINGS

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BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS

This chapter describes the three pillars on which the Buddha's teaching rests: Knowledge, Meditation, and Holding the Level.
It deals with the levels of meaningful conduct on which one achieves liberation from suffering, the attitude of developing for the sake of all beings, and the highest view with which one becomes enlightened. This most commonly used division into **Theravada (school of [religious] elders), Great Way (Mahayana), and Diamond Way (Vajrayana)** refers both to different emphases of the Buddha's teaching and to different levels of application. All three levels of Buddha's teaching are independent paths.

When asked why and what the Buddha was teaching, he replied, "I teach because all beings want to be happy and avoid suffering. I teach the way things are".
Buddha's teaching is extremely diverse. It includes a total of 84,000 teachings that he gave over the course of 45 years. Traditionally, the teachings are divided into three "collections," the "baskets," which from a western perspective can also be understood as three pillars of a Buddhist building. Each pillar is divided into three levels.

The first pillar includes the necessary knowledge about Buddhism. Here it is about all the topics that one can intellectually grasp, study and pass on. If questions arise, one gets the appropriate answers. However, it is not enough for a Buddhist just to know.

Therefore, **the second pillar** refers to the transformation of knowledge into experience. This is done with the help of a rich treasure of different meditations that bring about corresponding insights and realizations. These meditations are practiced regularly so that the knowledge becomes a living experience.

The third pillar focuses on implementation. Everyday life, with all its challenges, distractions, and pitfalls, reveals the extent to which one has actually internalized the teaching as a Buddhist. Buddha taught how to secure the knowledge and experience from meditation and make it stable and lasting.

From another perspective, the teaching can also be divided into three levels. Although Buddha himself never taught this division in this way, different paths or "vehicles" emerged, each focusing on different approaches and methods. It is important to understand that these are different approaches that complement and build upon each other.

The first level of Buddha's teachings, **Theravada**, is the foundation for all Buddhist schools. It addresses people who seek their own liberation and desire to leave the cycle of suffering as soon as possible. For these people, Buddha primarily explains cause and effect (karma) so that they consciously set only causes for happiness and avoid the causes for suffering. With the understanding that positive actions lead to happiness and negative ones to difficulties, one can take full responsibility for one's own life.
Through appropriate meditation methods, the mind becomes calm and stable. Because of the mindfulness that arises, one no longer follows habits that cause suffering. At the same time, the insight grows that the basis of all difficulties - the "I" or "self" - has no independent existence, and one becomes free.
Thus, one becomes an arhat (sanskr.) or "enemy conqueror" who has realized the state of mind tranquility beyond suffering. All mental tendencies that keep him in the cycle of rebirths are defeated.

The second level of Buddha's teachings, **the Great Way (Mahayana)**, is for altruists, people who have power and surplus for others. The motivation in the Great Way is to achieve enlightenment for the sake of all beings and also to lead all beings to liberation and enlightenment. One needs compassion and wisdom for this. One wants to help beings who are caught in the cycle of suffering due to ignorance to achieve lasting happiness. With wisdom one recognizes what the beings need for their development.
The meditations aimed at this involve all beings. In this way one removes the separation between oneself and the world "outside". This is practiced through the so-called liberating actions (sansk.: paramitas). In addition, one develops an understanding or feeling for the emptiness of

things. Emptiness means that nothing arises from itself, but everything is composed and happens in dependence, constantly changing and eventually dissolving.
In order to hold the level of insight achieved through meditation, one learns above all to avoid anger, to experience pleasant things as blessings and difficult things as a learning process. Often used by lay people, this path emphasizes the underlying motivation or attitude. The methods are aimed at perfecting one's abilities to benefit all beings in the best possible way. The ultimate result of this path is Buddhahood, in which all spiritual qualities are brought to full maturity.

The third level of Buddha's teachings, **the Diamond Way (Vajrayana)**, appeals primarily to people who can identify with the goal of enlightenment. One's own development is never separated from the welfare of all beings. At this level, one realizes that Buddha is the mirror of one's own mind and that all enlightened qualities - fearlessness, joy, energetic compassion and wisdom - are already inherent in every human being. This potential is Buddha nature. Nothing needs to be added from outside.
The structure of meditation is focused on identification, on becoming one with enlightenment. As aspects of meditation one uses Buddha forms that express certain qualities of enlightenment and awaken corresponding qualities in our mind. At the same time, one works with the awareness of the mind, beyond form. One's own mind is experienced as rich and playful. Here, everything is fantastic just because it is happening. This is the view of a Buddha, beyond all conditions and limitations.
As a realizer, one practices raising everything to the highest and purest level possible in every encounter and situation. In this way, it becomes possible to experience the richness contained in every situation of life. Ultimately, through identification with one's Buddha nature, all mental veils fall away and one reaches the goal - Buddhahood or enlightenment.
On this path, one finds highly realized teachers, the so-called "realizers" (yogis), who often teach in an exemplary manner using unusual methods and who have detached themselves from restrictive social norms and generally accepted ways of life.

The roof of the building is formed by the highest and most powerful teachings, which directly aim at the nature of the mind. They are called "The Great Seal" (sanskr. Mahamudra) or "The Great Perfection" (sanskr. Maha Ati). Here one practices the unity of foundation (the perfect nature of mind), path (meditation practice) and goal (liberation and enlightenment) - beyond expectations, hopes, fears and conceptual notions. One behaves like a Buddha until one has become a Buddha.

INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

COURSE OF LESSON – SECONDARY LEVEL I

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to:

- explain the difference between conditional and lasting happiness.
- distinguish between the three paths and the three pillars of Buddhism.
- identify Buddhist philosophies in the pursuit of lasting happiness.

SECURING KNOWLEDGE TRANSFER	According to Buddha's teachings, how is happiness achieved?	**Answers to WS 3** Students present results **Material 3** Students demonstrate knowledge
EXERCISE 2	Overview of Buddha's teachings	**WS 3 Task 1** **Material 2** **WS 3 Task 2** Students work on ways and pillars
DEEPENING	Buddhist symbols for the "mind"	**WS 2** **Answers to WS 2** Students work on the meaning of symbols Students compare results
EXERCISE 1	Lasting Happiness as the goal of Buddhist Practice	**WS 1** **Answers to WS 1** Students interprete the symbols for experiencing inner happiness.
INTRO	The Search for Happiness	**Material 1** Students present their work

BASIS

What might interest the students about the topic:

- What did Buddha teach?
- What are his most important teachings?
- Can we still benefit from his teachings today?

INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

DIDACTIC REFERENCES — SECONDARY LEVEL I

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to …

1. explain the difference between conditional and lasting happiness.
2. distinguish between the three paths and the three pillars of Buddhism.
3. identify Buddhist philosophies in the pursuit of lasting happiness.

NOTES

When Buddha was asked why he taught, his answer was, "I teach because people want to be happy and avoid suffering."
This statement shows the orientation of Buddha's entire teaching. Because people were (and are) so different, Buddha gave different advice and teachings. It is always about developing one's inner qualities and being able to be happy and free more independently of external circumstances. From the Buddhist point of view, the seed and quality of true happiness, enlightenment, lies within every sentient being.

INTRODUCTION

Material 1 provides text and image stimuli for the search for happiness. It is projected using a suitable medium. The students reflect in class on the impermanence of happiness, be it emotional, physical or material. The question of lasting happiness leads to the Buddhist theme of the lesson.

EXERCISE 1

Permanent happiness as a goal of Buddhist practice is addressed in **Worksheet 1**. Students are introduced to the Buddhist view that the external world can never produce lasting happiness. Buddha's statement, "Lasting happiness can only be found in one's own mind, the experiencer of all things," is illustrated by graphics with Buddhist symbols. In a first approach, the students should interpret them freely by exchanging ideas in the group. The **Answers to WS 1** give suggestions for **Worksheet 1**.

DEEPENING

The students are presented in **Worksheet 2** with the same graphics with the Buddhist symbols, this time short texts offer explanations of the "experiencer" or "mind," both core concepts of Buddhist teachings. This states that ultimately lasting happiness refers to the qualities we find in our own minds, regardless of external conditions. The assignments encourage you to grasp the difference between a veiled mind and a liberated mind. For this purpose, partner work is recommended, in plenary the essentials are secured, **Answers to WS 2**.

EXERCISE 2

Buddha said, "There are ways to lasting happiness." From the Buddhist point of view, Buddha himself is the best example of this unchanging happiness. Buddha is an enlightened being - a fully awakened being. He sought and ultimately attained timeless happiness by investigating the causes and conditions for happiness. It is a matter of freeing one's mind from the veils of ignorance and disturbing feelings and realizing all enlightened qualities.

Worksheet 3, Task 1 provides a stimulus for the students to reflect in plenary on how meditation might be related to happiness. Afterwards, the students read **Material 2** with basic statements about Buddha's teachings. They grasp the systematic nature of the three ways and pillars. **Worksheet 3, Task 2** provides a basic grid in which the students enter key points after evaluating the text. This work can be done in small groups.

SECURING AND TRANSFER

The students present their results, possibly in three groups, according to the three paths. Solutions are provided by **Answers to WS 3**. In essence, it should be ensured that Buddhism offers different paths with different emphases to lasting happiness.

Common to all paths is the realization that encounters, experiences and possessions do not ultimately bring happiness because they are impermanent. However, if the focus is on the mind, the "timeless experiencer," one has the inner freedom to decide how to experience: in the here and now, without hope or fear, without concepts and without expectations, with fearlessness, joy and compassion. **Material 3** is projected at the end. The connection to the beginning of the lesson is made, what was learned in the lesson about the Buddhist view is integrated. A short exchange between the students can take place.

MATERIAL 1

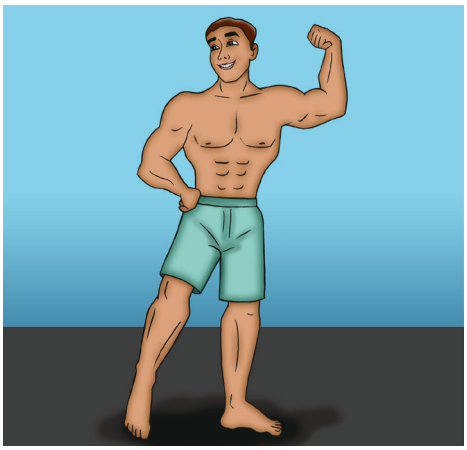
THE SEARCH FOR HAPPINESS

> "All beings seek happiness and want to avoid suffering. But many are looking in the wrong place." Buddha

IMPULS:
WHAT MIGHT BUDDHA MEAN BY LOOKING IN THE WRONG PLACE?

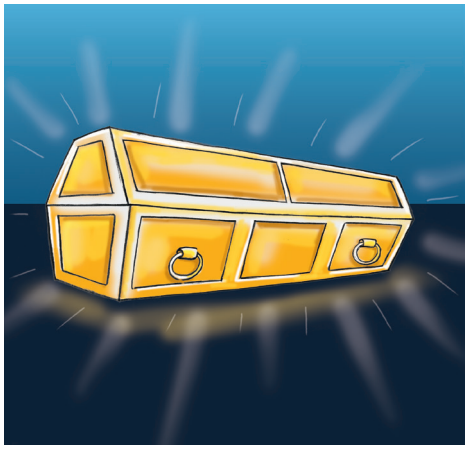












WORKSHEET 1

LASTING HAPPINESS AS THE GOAL OF BUDDHIST PRACTICE

> "All beings seek happiness and want to avoid suffering. But many are looking in the wrong place." Buddha



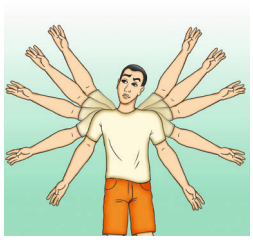
17. Karmapa Thaye Dorje

How much do we really know about happiness? From a Buddhist perspective, all sentient beings, including animals, seek happiness. We have a subconscious instinct to seek happiness – even though many of us don't have a clear idea what it is or how to achieve it. From a Buddhist perspective, there are two types of happiness: emotional happiness and timeless happiness. Emotional happiness could be described as seeking relief from the cold, or searching for sources of earning, position or status. Although there is nothing wrong with this type of worldly happiness, when we reflect on it, we might understand that all of these examples, by their very nature, are temporary. Emotional happiness does not last. Therefore, timeless happiness becomes something very important to seek.

Source:
By H.H. the 17th Gyalwa Karmapa Thaye Dorje, (2018, February 18) Finding Wealth, Freedom and Happiness. BUDDHISM TODAY magazine. https://buddhism-today.org/finding-wealth-freedom-and-happiness . (24.05.2026)

EXERCISES

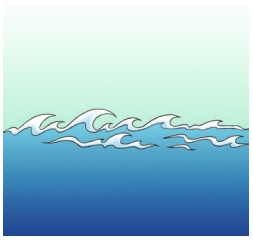
1. Formulate the main message of this text in your own words.
2. What advice could Buddha give about where to find timeless happiness?
3. To what extent do these following Buddhist symbols indicate inner happiness? Discuss in the group and write down key points.



THE TIMELESS EXPERIENCER



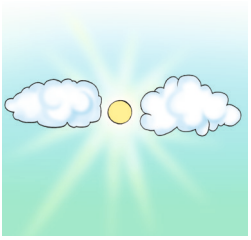
THE RADIANT DIAMOND



THE VAST AND DEEP OCEAN



THE CLEAR MIRROR



THE SHINING SUN

ANSWERS TO WS 1

LASTING HAPPINESS AS THE GOAL OF BUDDHIST PRACTICE

EXERCISES

1. Formulate the essential message of this text in your own words.
   - Everything is changing all the time. Nothing can be held.

2. What advice could Buddha give about where to find timeless happiness?
   - It could be found within.

3. To what extent do these following Buddhist symbols indicate inner happiness? Discuss as a group and write down key points about them.
   - Experiencer: strong, fearless, does not get irritated...
   - Diamond: precious, brilliant, rich, sparkling...
   - Ocean: big, immeasurable, full of possibilities...
   - Mirror: clear, polished, shows everything, omniscient..
   - Sun: powerful, life-giving, warming, joyful, full of love...

WORKSHEET 2

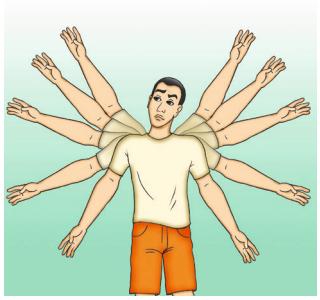
BUDDHIST COMPARISONS WITH THE MIND

Lasting happiness is found in one's own mind, the "experiencer" of all things. That which listens through the ears and looks through the eyes is the conscious "experiencer". Buddha shows how to work with one's own mind. Enlightenment means timeless supreme joy.

EXERCISES

The Buddha gave various symbols for the "timeless experiencer".

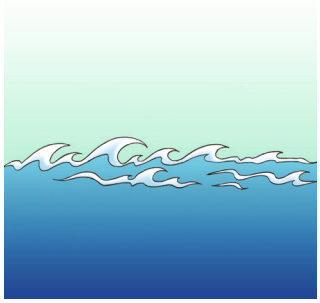
1. Underline the statements that indicate the experience of lasting happiness.
2. Make clear the difference between two possible levels of experience. "Happiness is a conscious choice." Where is the key? With your partner, find a specific example.



There is a timeless experiencer behind the experiences, who can be relied upon. The inner joy of the experiencer (= mind) is much richer than the conditional and constantly changing experiences.



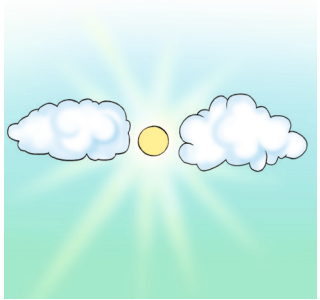
The mind is like a precious diamond. Its radiance emerges when the veils of ignorance and disturbing feelings are completely removed.



If one identifies only with the superficial waves, one experiences a constant up and down. If one rests in the vastness and depth of the ocean, one can enjoy the dance of the waves.



The temporary images in the mirror are evaluated on the basis of concepts and experienced as real. The mirror symbolizes the ability of the mind to experience consciously.



The mind is like the shining sun that is always shining. Clouds come and go, just like our thoughts and feelings.

MIND WITHOUT DISTURBANCES

WHAT WOULD IT BE LIKE IF THE DIAMOND, THE OCEAN, THE MIRROR OR THE SUN WERE OUR TRUE STATE AND WE EXPERIENCED IT?

ANSWERS TO WS 2

BUDDHIST COMPARISONS WITH THE MIND

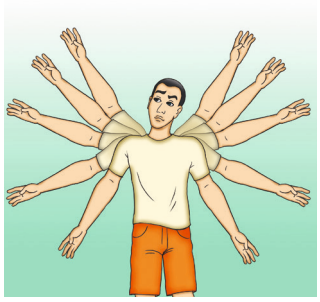
EXERCISES

The Buddha gave various symbols for the "timeless experiencer".

1. Underline the statements that indicate the experience of lasting happiness.
   - See graphic.

2. Make clear the difference between two possible levels of experience. "Happiness is a conscious choice." Where is the key? With your partner, find a specific example.

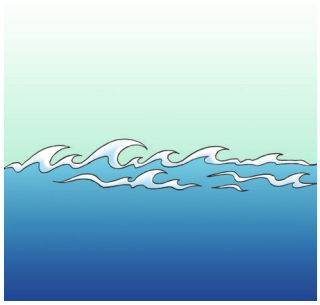
   - By not making oneself crazy through worry. By not identifying with the waves of thoughts, but with one's own experience, which is comparable to the depth of the ocean, the mind agitated by feelings is brought to rest.
   - By not letting oneself get angry and by compassionately changing one's perspective. One understands that the other person is not well at the moment, has patience with him and defuses the situation with kind words. One trusts that the clouds of anger will pass.



There is a timeless experiencer behind the experiences, who can be relied upon. The inner joy of the experiencer (= mind) is much richer than the conditional and constantly changing experiences.



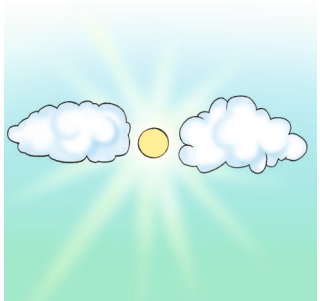
The mind is like a precious diamond. Its radiance emerges when the veils of ignorance and disturbing feelings are completely removed.



If one identifies only with the superficial waves, one experiences a constant up and down. If one rests in the vastness and depth of the ocean, one can enjoy the dance of the waves.



The temporary images in the mirror are evaluated on the basis of concepts and experienced as real. The mirror symbolizes the ability of the mind to experience consciously.



The mind is like the shining sun that is always shining. Clouds come and go, just like our thoughts and feelings.

MIND WITHOUT DISTURBANCES

WHAT WOULD IT BE LIKE IF THE DIAMOND, THE OCEAN, THE MIRROR OR THE SUN WERE OUR TRUE STATE AND WE EXPERIENCED IT?

MATERIAL 2

BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS: WAYS TO LASTING HAPPINESS

Over 2600 years ago, during the time of an advanced civilization in what was then northern India, Buddha showed a path to liberation and enlightenment, a state of lasting happiness.

Buddha explained that the ego illusion limits experience and traps beings in the cycle of suffering. Buddha taught the dreamlike nature of all phenomena, which constantly come and go.

He did not want students to follow blindly. Buddha's teaching knows no dogmas and no mission, but is an offer for interested people and those who have a connection to Buddhism. It is about one's own experiences, whereby everyone can critically question and examine. Buddha advised unlimited self-responsibility. Many have since walked the path and achieved enlightenment.

The term "Buddhist" was never used by Buddha himself. He used an expression that means "man of the inner being." Accordingly, for Buddhist practitioners, the focus also changes. The focus goes to getting to know one's own mind. One goes on a kind of journey of discovery to develop inner qualities.

Since people are very different, Buddha gave a variety of teachings totaling 84,000. Anyone who has faith in Buddha and his teachings can find liberation, something that leads away from suffering to happiness. After Buddha's death, all his statements and their application were collected by his disciples. This collection was later systematized and different Buddhist schools developed.

The Three Paths

In the Southeast Asian region, the methods of **Theravada** (Pali: Way of the Elders) are mainly used. The focus is on mindfulness, meaningful behavior with body, speech and mind and the understanding of cause and effect (sanskr. karma). Through appropriate meditation methods, the mind comes to rest and becomes stable. At the same time, there is a growing realization that the "I" does not have an independent existence. The mental tendencies that keep one in the cycle of rebirth are overcome.



This goal is called liberation.

The Great Way (sanskr. Mahayana) addresses people who have power and surplus for others. Often used by lay people, this path emphasizes the underlying motivation not only to achieve enlightenment oneself, but to help everyone. One needs compassion and wisdom to do this. The meditations directed towards this involve all beings. In this way, one removes the separation between oneself and the world and begins to develop an understanding or sense of the emptiness of appearances. Emptiness means that everything arises interdependently, changes constantly, and eventually dissolves. The realization is practiced with the "Six Liberating Actions" (sanskr. Paramitas). The result of this path is enlightenment, in which all spiritual qualities are brought to full maturity.

The Diamond Way (sanskr. Vajrayana) appeals primarily to people who can identify with the goal of enlightenment. At this level, one realizes that Buddha is the mirror of one's own mind and that all enlightened qualities - fearlessness, joy, active compassion, and wisdom - are already inherent in each person. This potential is Buddha nature. Nothing needs to be added from outside.

Meditation is focused on identification and on becoming one with enlightenment. As aspects of meditation, one uses Buddha forms that express certain qualities of enlightenment. One's own mind is experienced as rich and playful. Every encounter and every situation is experienced on the highest and purest level possible. Pure vision means experiencing the richness contained in every situation in life. Ultimately, through identification with one's Buddha nature, one realizes the goal - enlightenment.

The Three Pillars:
Each of these three paths includes **knowledge, meditation and holding the level** in everyday life, which can be thought of as three pillars.

First pillar: Each practitioner receives the necessary information, which one may also critically question, so that one knows what one is doing and what the path and goal are. Through a clear understanding, one is motivated to apply the teachings.

Second pillar: One needs meditation to realize liberation and enlightenment. The inner qualities such as fearlessness, lasting joy, all-embracing love, compassion and wisdom are not developed and experienced through the intellect alone.

Third pillar: In everyday life, the knowledge and inner abilities discovered in meditation are put into practice. Through meaningful behavior in every situation, the knowledge already gained is secured.

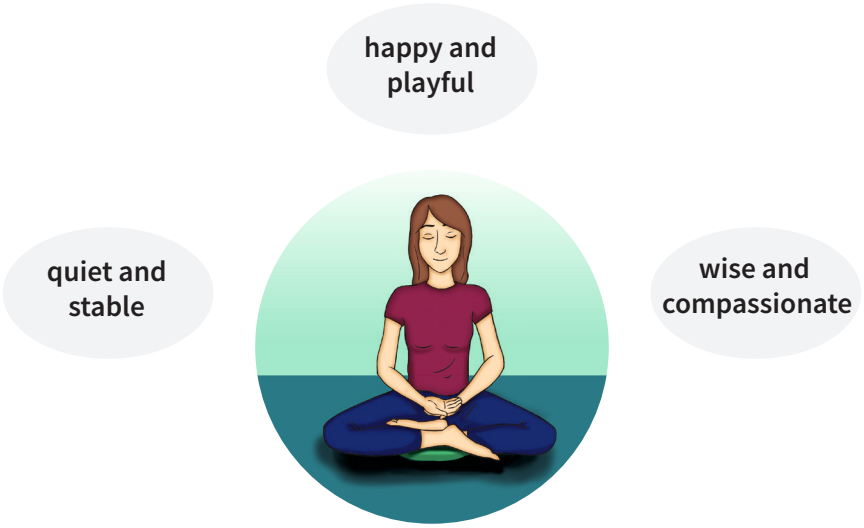
Thus, the one who sets out on the Buddhist path can use every moment for his development. None of these paths is better than the other: The best path is the one that suits you.

WORKSHEET 3

BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS: PATHS TO LASTING HAPPINESS

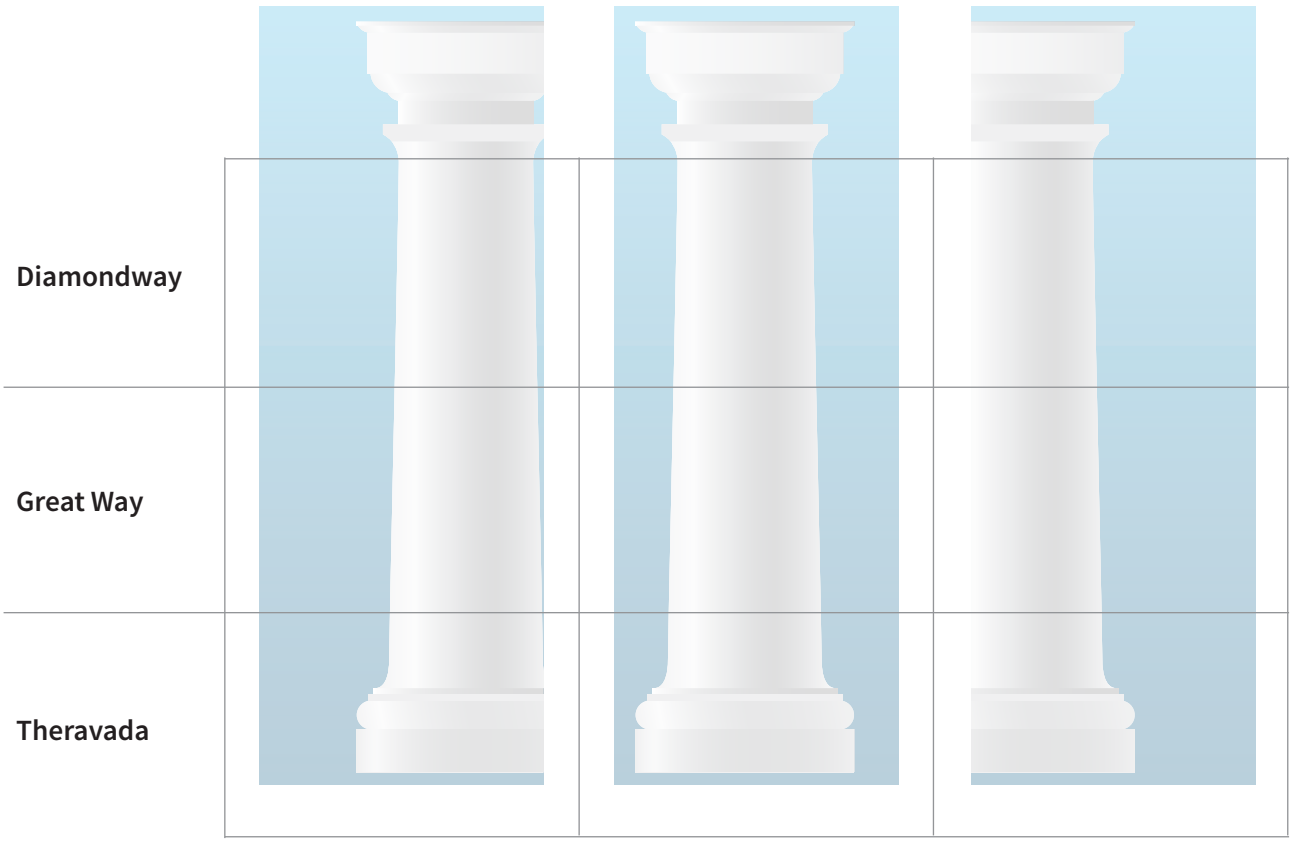
EXERCISE

1. Explain the figure below and the connection with happiness.



2. Read the text in **Material 2** and write down the most important characteristics in the table. Discuss in the group.

OVERVIEW OF BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS



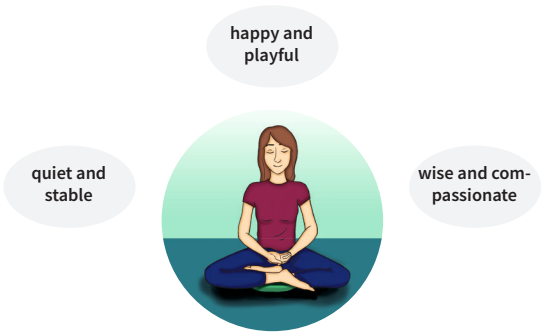
ANSWERS TO WS 3

BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS: PATHS TO LASTING HAPPINESS

EXERCISES

1. Explain the figure below and the connection with happiness.

- When one consider cause and effects, one is mindful in one´s actions, words and thoughts. Positive actions lead to happiness.
- Compassion involves caring to other beings and wishing them well. Wisdom enables one to make meaningful decisions, which leads to happiness.
- Meditation removes confusion and leads to inner freedom. Instead of being entangled in problems, one can act joyfull und playfully.



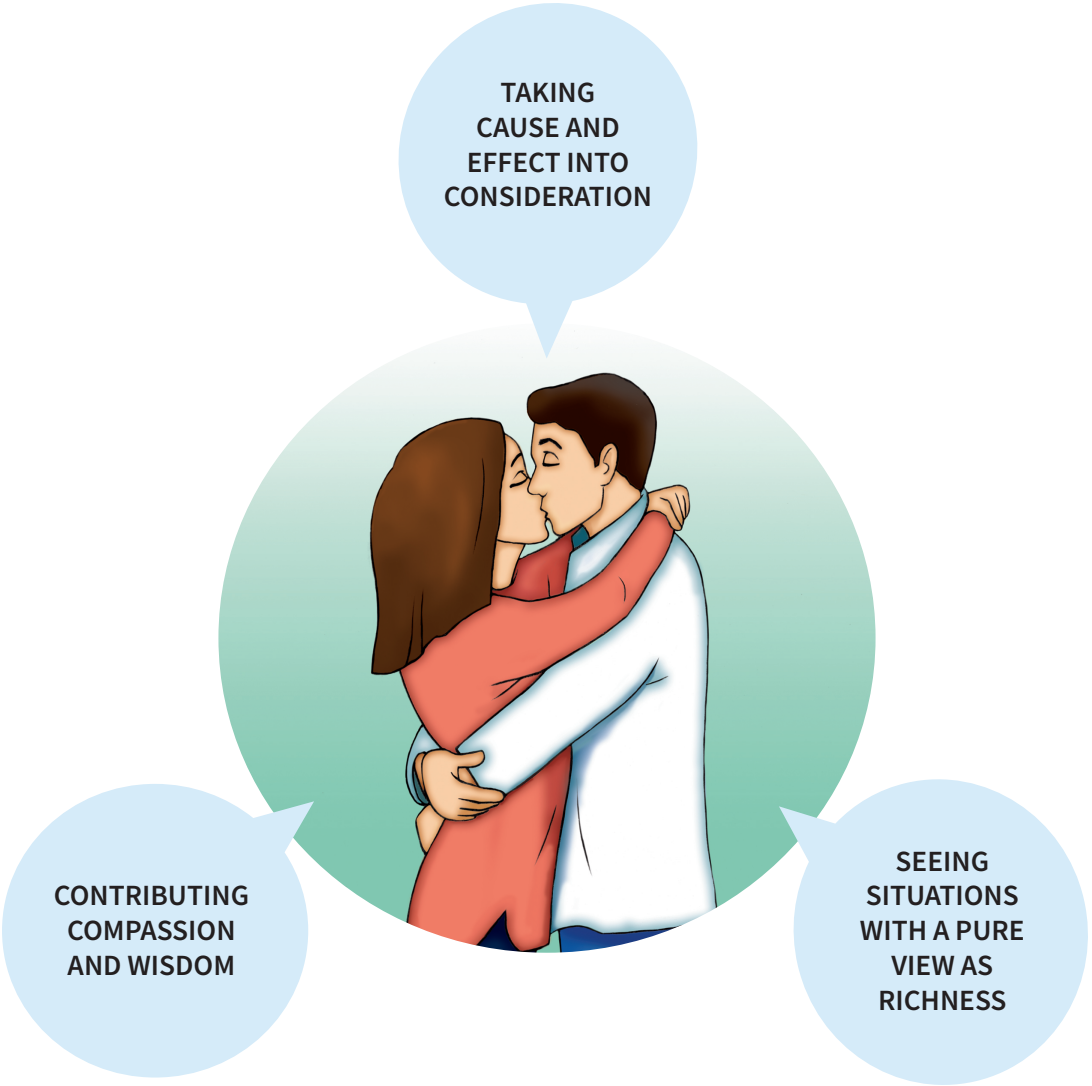
2. Read the text in **Material 2** and write down the most important characteristics in the table. Discuss in the group.

OVERVIEW OF BUDDHA'S TEACHINGS

	KNOWLEDGE OF PATH AND GOAL	MEDITATION AS METHOD	EVERYDAY APPLICATION
Diamondway	• Trust in one´s own Buddha nature • Enlightenment	• Identification with Enlightenment	• Pure View • Experience everything as joyful
Great Way	• Compassion and wisdom • Recognising emptiness • Enlightenment	• All beings are included	• The Six Liberating Actions
Theravada	• Karma • Cause and effect • Dispel the Ego-Illusion • Liberation	• MIndfulness • Stable mind	• Mindfulness of body, speech and mind

MATERIAL 3

"HAPPINESS IS A DECISION"



SEARCHING IN THE WRONG WAY?
WHAT CAN BE CHANGED?

Realization: The focus has changed.
Not seeking happiness in the relationship.
But to live a happy relationship and develop all inner qualities for the best of all..