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THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

The Four Noble Truths explain the foundation, path and goal. They show why it makes sense to strive for liberation and enlightenment.

With his enlightenment, Buddha realized insight into the nature of mind. Enlightenment is a permanent state of unshakable fearlessness, supreme joy, and active compassion for all living beings. Seven weeks after his enlightenment, Buddha first taught the "Four Noble Truths."

Buddha saw how, on a relative level, happiness and suffering alternate in the lives of beings. Although everyone seeks lasting fulfillment, no one succeeds in attaining it. At the same time, from an absolute point of view, he saw that all are already potential Buddhas. "They are all Buddhas, yet they do not know it." Out of ignorance, beings experience suffering, even though the nature of their mind is timeless supreme joy.

In the explanations that followed, he bridged the gap from showing the limitations of general experience to liberation and enlightenment. Buddha's core statements are:

1. THERE IS SUFFERING
Buddha describes three types of suffering, which are experienced to a greater or lesser degree depending on consciousness:
a. **Suffering of suffering**: old age, sickness, and death: if we identify with the body, we also consider old age, sickness, and death to be real, and thus suffering arises.
b. **Suffering of impermanence**: It is the cause of sorrowful experiences when one is attached to conditional happiness.
c. **Suffering of conditionality**: As the most subtle form of suffering, it expresses itself, among other things, in the experience that our mind is veiled and we do not perceive things as they really are. We have no control over our lives and are thus trapped in the cycle of conditional existence.

In absolute terms, steadfastness, joy and love are the spontaneous expression of the mind when it is free from limitations. Compared to this, even the greatest conditional happiness is limited and imbued with a seed of sorrow, since conditional things change and are impermanent.

2. THERE IS A CAUSE OF SUFFERING
As the cause of suffering, Buddha identifies basic ignorance. It is the inability of the unenlightened mind to recognize itself. This is because it works like an eye: it perceives everything "outside" without seeing itself. Thus, every experience is accompanied by a fundamental sense of separation (duality). The experiencing consciousness experiences itself as "I" (subject), the experienced becomes "you" or something else (object). Although one finds only a stream of thoughts, feelings and impressions that is constantly changing, this idea of an "I" becomes the basis of all experience (ego illusion).

From this dualistic view arises attachment to pleasant things, aversion to unpleasant things, and confusion. From attachment in turn arises avarice, from aversion jealousy and from stupidity pride. These are the so-called six disturbing emotions. If you take them seriously, they lead to sorrowful actions and to further disturbances and suffering for others and yourself. If these causes come back to you as unpleasant effects, you usually think it is the fault of others, and you set negative things in motion again. (> see Karma - Cause & Effect)

3. THERE IS AN END TO SUFFERING
As a goal Buddha shows liberation and enlightenment. In liberation (small nirvana), the idea of a truly existing "I" is recognized as deceptive. Conflicting feelings come to rest, insight and clarity and a state of being free from all limitations and constraints arise.

Enlightenment (great nirvana) is the full experience of the nature of mind: the veils of ignorance are removed and all the inherent qualities of mind are fully developed. For by its absolute nature, consciousness is omniscient fearless space, and its experience supreme joy. From each of its actions "non-separating compassion" expresses itself, loving like the sun, which shines impartially on everything.

4. THERE IS A WAY TO END SUFFERING

This way consists in the application of the timeless methods that Buddha gave. An appropriate view, meditation and behavior are mutually dependent and develop all the qualities of body, speech and mind.

In the 45 years of his teaching, Buddha gave 84,000 teachings that allowed his friends and disciples, according to their ability, to make every moment of life a step on the path to liberation and enlightenment. In Theravada, he taught about cause and effect (karma), that we ourselves create our lives, and how, through developing mindfulness, we can use the body, speech, and mind to bring happiness to others and ourselves (see The Noble Eightfold Path).

In the Great Way, he taught the importance of compassion and wisdom as a liberating attitude and view (see Lojong Mind Training).

In the Diamond Way, he showed them meditations through which they could powerfully identify with the non-conditioned qualities of their own minds.

INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

COURSE OF LESSON – SECONDARY LEVEL I

OBJECTIVES

The students will be able to:

- explain Buddha's teachings on the Four Noble Truths.
- relate them to the reality of their own lives.
- understand that lasting happiness is not achieved through externals.

Since the content of this topic is very extensive, this lesson is designed as a double lesson.

APPLICATION	Engage in an experience or just listen quietly.	**Material 5** Breath-Meditation Students meditate and share their experience
EXERCISE4	Buddha's teachings on the Fourth Noble Truth: There is a way to the end of suffering.	**WS 4 and Answers to WS 4** Students formulate key statements
EXERCISE 3	Buddha's teachings on the Third Noble Truth: There is an end to suffering.	**WS 3 and Answers to WS 3** Students act out the metaphor of climbing a mountain
EXERCISE 2	Buddha's teachings on the Second Noble Truth: There is a cause of suffering.	**Material 4** **WS 2 und Answers to WS 2** Students work on the tasks and find their own examples
NOTE	Aliens wonder: Don't they know?	**Material 3** Students make assumptions
EXERCISE 1	Buddha's teaching on the First Noble Truth: There is suffering.	**Material 2** **WS 1 and Answers to WS 1** Students work out contents Students ask questions
INTRO	Aliens with a research mission: "Suffering on Earth".	**Material 1** Students reflect

BASIS

What might interest the students about the topic:

- Is there lasting happiness?
- What is suffering and where does it come from?
- Is a life without suffering attainable?

INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

DIDACTIC REFERENCES – SECONDARY LEVEL I

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to …

1. explain Buddha's teachings on the Four Noble Truths.
2. relate these to their own realities of life.
3. understand that lasting happiness is not achieved through external conditions.

Since the content of this topic is very extensive, this lesson is designed as a double lesson.

INTRODUCTION

Material 1 provides an impetus for reflection. A cartoon sketches a dialogue of aliens who have the research assignment to explore the suffering of humans. The students are encouraged to take a closer look at a self-evident fact and express themselves freely in the plenary.

EXERCISE 1

Material 2 introduces Buddha's teaching on the First Noble Truth "There is suffering." Students develop an understanding of the three types of suffering using the questions on **Worksheet 1**, sharing with a partner. In depth, they reflect on the suffering of basic ignorance and contrast it with the inherent joy. The **Answers to WS 1** offer possible answers. Questions are shared in plenary until understanding is assured.

INTRODUCTION

Material 3 serves as preparation for the Second Noble Truth. The second cartoon makes the aliens wonder whether the humans do not know what the cause of suffering is.
The students put themselves in their place as observers and make assumptions in plenary.

EXERCISE 2

Material 4 provides explanations of the Buddha's Second Noble Truth "There is a cause of suffering." Here the central Buddhist idea of fundamental ignorance is introduced and made comprehensible. The related tasks of **Worksheet 2** guide the students to deal with ego-centeredness and the resulting disturbing feelings. Through the creative representation of a concrete situation, they are asked to differentiate between different consequences of actions. The **Answers to WS 2** offer suggestions that make clear that disturbing feelings lead to harmful actions and thus to suffering, and counters this with the fact that one can also consciously make happy decisions. For this examination of one's own self, individual work is suitable; a short exchange in class discussion can follow.

EXERCISE 3

On **Worksheet 3**, there is a story of a fictional mountain climb that metaphorically represents the path and goals of "liberation and enlightenment." Here Buddha's teaching of the Third Noble Truth "There is an end to suffering" is presented. The pupils mark essential statements in the text and can follow the stages of the mountain climb as well as understand their metaphorical meaning. This is done in individual work, afterwards they exchange the results in the plenary. The **Answers to WS 3** show the assignment of the figurative and concrete statements on reaching the end of suffering.

EXERCISE 4

Worksheet 4 gives an overview of Buddha's Fourth Noble Truth "There is a way to the end of suffering". Working in partners, the students formulate essential statements in their own words. As a result, it should be understood that considering the consequences of one's own actions on others in difficult situations by weighing the consequences of one's own actions is an essential step towards auspicious behavior. The **Answers to WS 4** show possible answers.

APPLICATION

To round off this detailed discussion of the Four Noble Truths, it is a good idea to meditate.
If you do not want to participate, just listen quietly.

Suitable is the **breath meditation** for attaining peace of mind, which can be found in **Material 5**.

According to Buddhist understanding, it is not enough to have rationally understood the Noble Truths. Their practical implementation in everyday life bears fruit and leads from suffering to happy experience.

The methods of meditation are an offer. The pupils have the opportunity to experience that simple meditations calm the mind and that one can develop more distance to one's thoughts and feelings that permanently occupy one consciously or unconsciously.

Everything that the students experience is perfectly fine. It may also be that they simply become aware of how extremely much they are thinking and feeling. The point here is simply to experience the means of meditation in its approach. One may become aware of how much one can be distracted by others, how relaxing it can be to simply do nothing for a while, how long two minutes can be, etc.
Students can share these insights, but the experience should not be talked down.

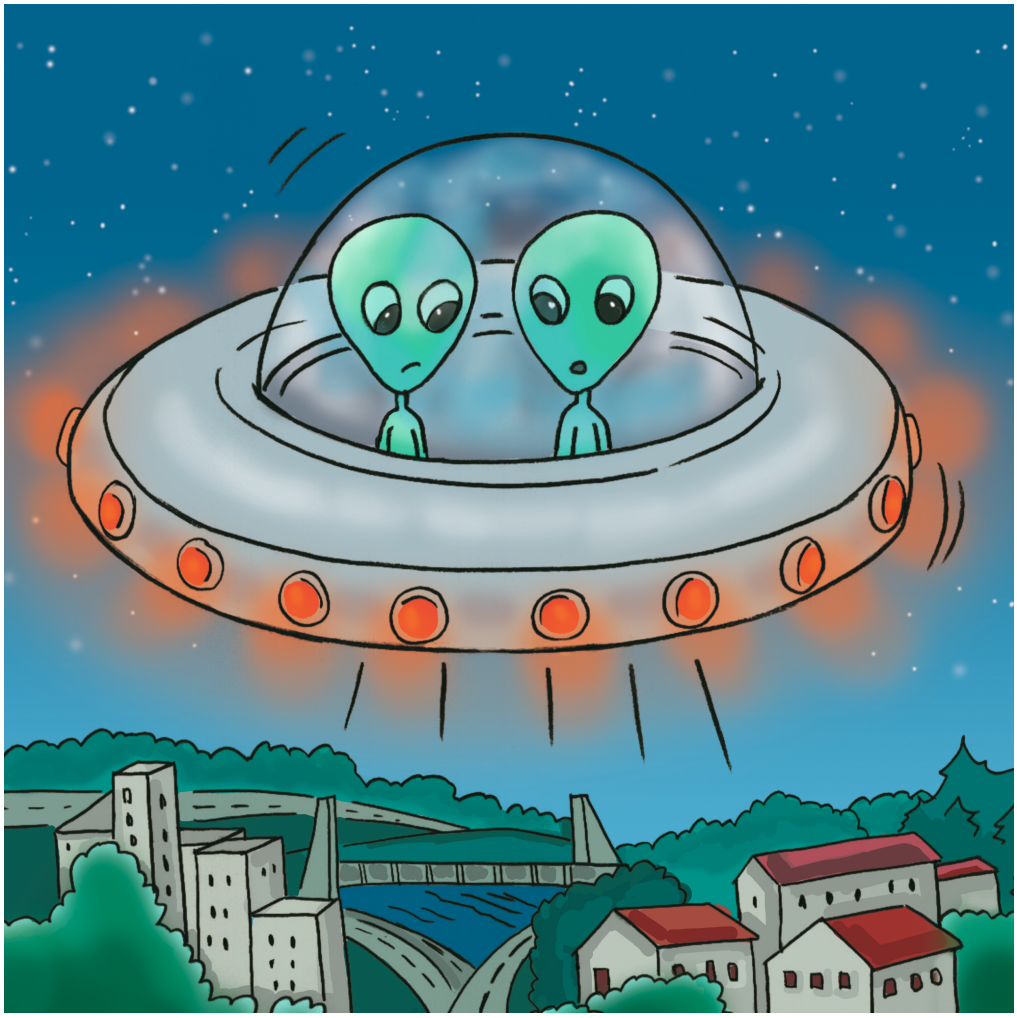
MATERIAL 1

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

BO: Hey, Flix, those on Earth really don't have it easy. Besides war, environmental disasters and other huge problems, they suffer from ...

FLIX: Our research mission from Galaxy X11Z is to explore even the most subtle forms of suffering!

BO: How can we tell that a being is suffering?



MATERIAL 2

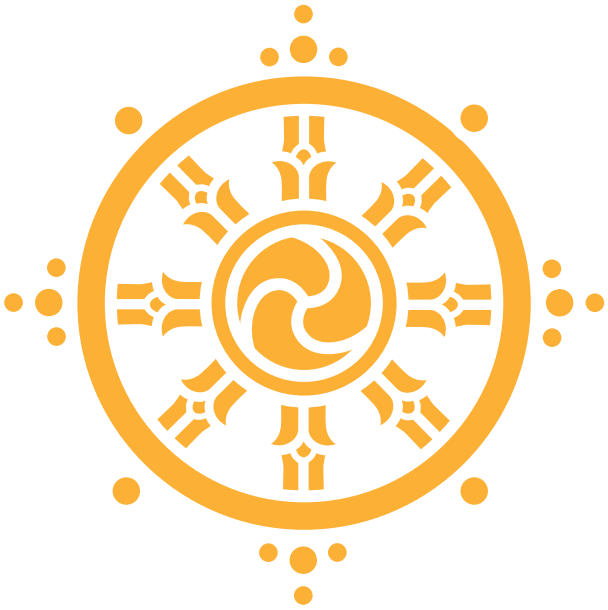
THE FIRST NOBLE TRUTH "THERE IS SUFFERING"

Seven weeks after his enlightenment, Buddha taught the "Four Noble Truths." He presented his teaching, the Four Noble Truths, in the way doctors of his time did, simply drawing on people's experience. First, the nature of the "disease" is described (here, suffering), then comes its history of origin (the cause of suffering); third, the prospects of cure (end of suffering), and fourth, finally, the proposed treatment (way to end suffering).

The Four Noble Truths are:
1. There is suffering.
2. There is a cause of suffering.
3. There is an end to suffering
4. There is a way to the end of suffering.

Buddha's teachings spanned from the representation of the limited nature of general experience (suffering) to liberation (an experience free of suffering) and enlightenment (every moment is characterized by wisdom, joy and compassion).

The First Noble Truth: "THERE IS SUFFERING"



Buddha divided suffering into three types:

THE FIRST KIND OF SUFFERING: THE SUFFERING OF SUFFERING

Suffering from what immediately hurts, e.g. toothache, hunger, enduring cold or heat, etc.

THE SECOND KIND OF SUFFERING: THE SUFFERING OF CHANGE

The suffering we experience when we cannot hold on to pleasant states: Even the most beautiful party comes to an end, and the coolest cell phone will soon be out. Heartbreak, loss, separation, etc. are examples of this second type of suffering.

THE THIRD KIND OF SUFFERING: THE SUFFERING OF IGNORANCE

The Suffering of Ignorance (Part 1):
We forget the conditionality of all experience. We often rely on changeable, external things. In doing so, we are unaware that we do not understand the big picture and have no control over our inner life and future. We are often a pawn in the constant ebb and flow of sorrowful and happy experiences.
The suffering of ignorance (Part 2):
The suffering of not constantly experiencing our inherent joy.

Because the word "suffering" always appears in the Four Noble Truths, one might think that Buddhism is primarily about suffering. However, the opposite is true. Buddhism is about lasting happiness. Buddha taught that we are joyful by our very nature, but we do not experience this all the time. This inherent joy emerges when disturbing feelings and constricting concepts are discarded.

WORKSHEET 1

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

EXERCISES

Read the text in **Material 2** and discuss with your partner.

1. Find more examples of the three types of suffering.

THE SUFFERING OF SUFFERING	
THE SUFFERING OF CHANGE	
THE SUFFERING OF IGNORANCE	

2. Try to better understand the third type of suffering by asking the following questions.

- Have you had your own experience of the "suffering of ignorance"?
- Have you had your own experience of not having control over your feelings and thoughts?
- Have you ever felt the joy inherent in everyone, just like that, without an external cause?
- Draw a symbol for the inherent joy of everyone.

ANSWERS TO WS 1

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

EXERCISES

Read the text in **Material 2** and discuss with your partner.

1. Find more examples of the three types of suffering..

THE SUFFERING OF SUFFERING	For instance, when you hurt yourself, when you are sick, when someone is mean to you, when you suffer from hunger or cold, ...
THE SUFFERING OF CHANGE	For instance, when someone is happy because he has so many friends/ has a lot of money/has a great partner, but then the friends don't like you anymore/you lose all your money/your partner leaves you; when you move and lose your friends because of that; when you were happy just a moment ago because you won in a game/sport and then you lose again ..
THE SUFFERING OF IGNORANCE	Part 1: When you make your happiness dependent on external things e.g. when you want someone to smile at you and they don't and you are sad because of that; when you hope to get a certain present for Christmas and then you don't get it ... We can only find real happiness within ourselves. Part 2: Actually we are joyful/happy, but we are not aware of it all the time; like when it is cloudy or raining, we often forget that the sun is always shining above the clouds. Compared to lasting happiness, all transient happiness is sorrowful precisely because it is short-lived. .

2. Try to better understand the third type of suffering by asking the following questions..

- Have you had your own experience with the "suffering of ignorance"?

  "Yes, sometimes I don't know my way around at all. I don't understand my life, and wonder what the meaning of everything is."

- Have you had your own experience of not having control over your feelings and thoughts?

  "Yes, many times. There's so much going around in my head. I can't turn off my feelings."

- Have you ever felt the inherent joy in everyone, just like that without an external cause?

  Individual answers are to be expected: e.g., "Yes, quite unexpectedly. Very surprising, totally unexpected." "No, I don't know. With me inside, it's rather gray. I don't feel anything."

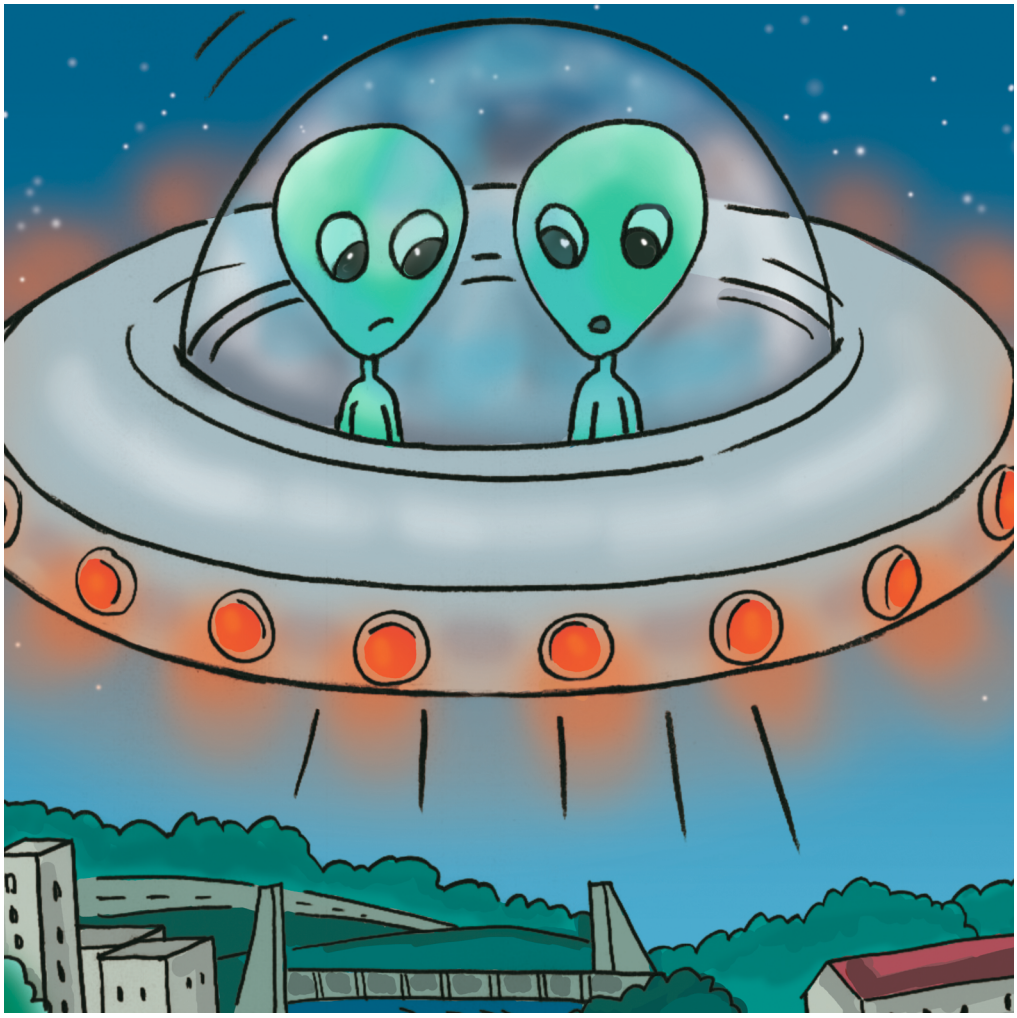
- Draw a symbol for the joy inherent in everyone.

  Individual design is desired: e.g. rainbow, flower, sun, tree, smile, dance ...

MATERIAL 3

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

BO: Hey, Flix, those on Earth really don't have it easy. They take everything seriously.
FLIX: The cause of their bad mood is not yet apparent to me.
BO: Could it be that they don't know?



MATERIAL 4

THE SECOND NOBLE TRUTH "THERE IS A CAUSE OF SUFFERING".

Here Buddha named as the central cause the fundamental ignorance of every unenlightened mind. It is the idea that one has a permanent, unchanging "I."
Although one finds only a stream of ever-changing thoughts, feelings, and impressions, this idea of an "I" becomes the basis of all experience.

Attachment to pleasant things arises because we want to get and keep what is pleasant to us (e.g., a cool cell phone, a pretty girlfriend). We also experience aversion to unpleasant things because we don't want to experience anything unpleasant (e.g., heartbreak, trouble with parents). When we struggle with not being able to decide what we want and don't want, this is called "confusion."

These are disturbing emotional states. They can enter into countless combinations with other feelings and shape our experience of the world. We often take them very seriously, even though our thoughts and feelings are constantly changing. Difficult or harmful actions can result. This creates further disturbance and suffering for others and ourselves. For example, we yell at someone because we are angry. A short time later, however, our anger has faded and we are sorry, but the other person is angry with us and deeply offended. He doesn't talk to us anymore.

In this way, one sows negative seeds in the external world and in one's own mind. By the time the seeds ripen and one experiences the effects of the harmful actions, one has usually already forgotten that one has set the causes oneself. For example, someone would like to have many good friends, but has often talked badly about others or even treated others badly. Or someone thinks badly about him-self/ herself and the world and wonders why he/she is not happy.
So Buddha advises to recognize the causes of suffering in time and thus prevent its occurrence.





WORKSHEET 2

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

EXERCISES

1. Buddha said the main source of suffering is " ego-centeredness."

   Can you back up Buddha's statement with a concrete example?

---

2. Distinguish attachment, aversion, and confusion with examples from your own life.

ATTACHMENT	AVERSION	CONFUSION

3. Create a comic strip, role play, still image, or similar of a specific situation. Depict a first scene in which the cause of suffering is not recognized and a harmful action follows. And create a second scene in which the cause of suffering is prevented..

SITUATION	1. SCENE	2. SCENE

ANSWERS TO WS 2

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

EXERCISES

1. Buddha said that the main source of suffering is "I-centeredness". Can you support Buddha's statement with a concrete example?

Individual responses, e.g.: "I was angry the other day, thought I was in the right, and yelled at the friend. He stopped talking to me and now I feel even worse. I couldn't have taken the anger so seriously and waited for it to pass."

2. Distinguish attachment, aversion, and confusion using examples from your own life.

ATTACHMENT	AVERSION	CONFUSION
I desperately want the latest cell phone, but can't afford it. That's why I'm sad/ suffering.	I don't want a cheap cell phone because otherwise my friends will think I'm uncool. Because I was afraid that I would write a bad class paper, I didn't go to school today. Now I suffer because I'm afraid my parents will punish me for it.	I wanted to buy a new cell phone and didn't know which one to get. So I struggled and suffered with it for days.

3. Create a comic strip, role-play, freeze-frame, or similar of a specific situation. Depict a first scene in which the cause of suffering is not recognized and a harmful action follows. And create a second scene in which the cause of suffering is prevented..

SITUATION	1. SCENE	2. SCENE
In a bad mood	To snap at the little sibling	Take a breath and go for a jog
Being offended	Give the cold shoulder	Clarify the situation and understand each other again

WORKSHEET 3

THERE IS AN END TO SUFFERING

"THE ASCENT OF THE MOUNTAIN"

1. THE VILLAGE IN THE FOG

In a village at the foot of a mountain, people lived a normal life with all the minor and major problems. They made love and fought, cheated on each other and got involved in all kinds of business. Thick fog hung over the place and enveloped it. Most people had become accustomed to this foggy condition. Four friends were not satisfied. One day, a message came on their cell phones, "Look up!" - Sure enough, the blanket of fog had lifted. A patch of sky was visible and, for a very short time, the top of the mountain.

That's when they realized there was something outside the fog. "That's where we're going!" they decided. "Oh, cut the crap, stay there! It's safe down here!" they said. But the desire to discover new things was greater than any fear. So they set out. (Recognizing the suffering)

2. DEPARTURE AND FIRST STAGE

The four friends set off. They walked through the lower layers of fog. There was a narrow path that was not easy to find, but they managed. Apparently, someone had already gone up before them. "We are not at all the first to come up with such an idea!" In a strenuous walk, they climbed higher and higher. And really, after some time the fog cleared and they came out into the open. (Way: consciously distinguish, meditate, live mindfully)

3. THE GREEN MEADOW

They had come above the layer of fog. How wonderful to see the vast blue of the sky and to behold the majestic grandeur of the mountain! The air was fresh and clear. A green meadow, a splendid place of peace, invited us to settle down. "Here we rest, here it is good!" They sat down. "What a relaxation! This peace is wonderful! Finally out of the village clutter, the old fug! No one can disturb us here. Here we are free!" (Goal: Liberation)

4. THE WAY TO THE SUMMIT

After a soothing rest, one said, "Let's keep going, there's still a lot to discover!" But two of the friends preferred to stay in the meadow. "It's good for us here." So the other two set off, full of energy and desire to do something. "What else will we discover, maybe something new for everyone!" Things were going steeply uphill. When it was difficult, they encouraged each other. They jumped over bubbling streams and crossed wide fields. The last stretch to the summit
was not easy to master. But turning back was no longer an option! The joy of discovery was already too great. They gathered all their courage and scaled a rock face. "That was exciting!" They took a deep breath and continued climbing. Happily, they reached the top. (Path to Full Enlightenment)

5. THE SUMMIT

They had an unrestricted panoramic view. Completely free of fear, they enjoyed the open expanse of space. Boundless joy filled them. They saw clearly their own path and also that there were several
paths to the summit. Below lay their village. There they felt the desire to share this wonderful experience of happiness with the other people. "We will go down and show the others the way!" (Goal: Enlightenment)

6. BACK IN THE VILLAGE

They lived in the village again and explained the way to those who wanted to hear it. Not all of them were interested. Some listened with interest but did not want to walk the path themselves. Some went on their way.

Outwardly, our two friends did not live very conspicuously. But if you looked closer, you could feel that the experience they had had at the top of the mountain was deep in their hearts. They were no longer entangled in their own worries or problems and had strength and surplus for others. Full of wisdom and compassion, they did what was meaningful at the time. Our two friends were never discouraged and were steadfast. (Bodhisattva activity for the benefit of others)

EXERCISES

1. With the help of the text, develop an understanding of the stages and label the picture.

2. In the text, two states that describe the end of suffering are depicted: Liberation and Enlightenment. How are they described? Mark corresponding statements in the text.

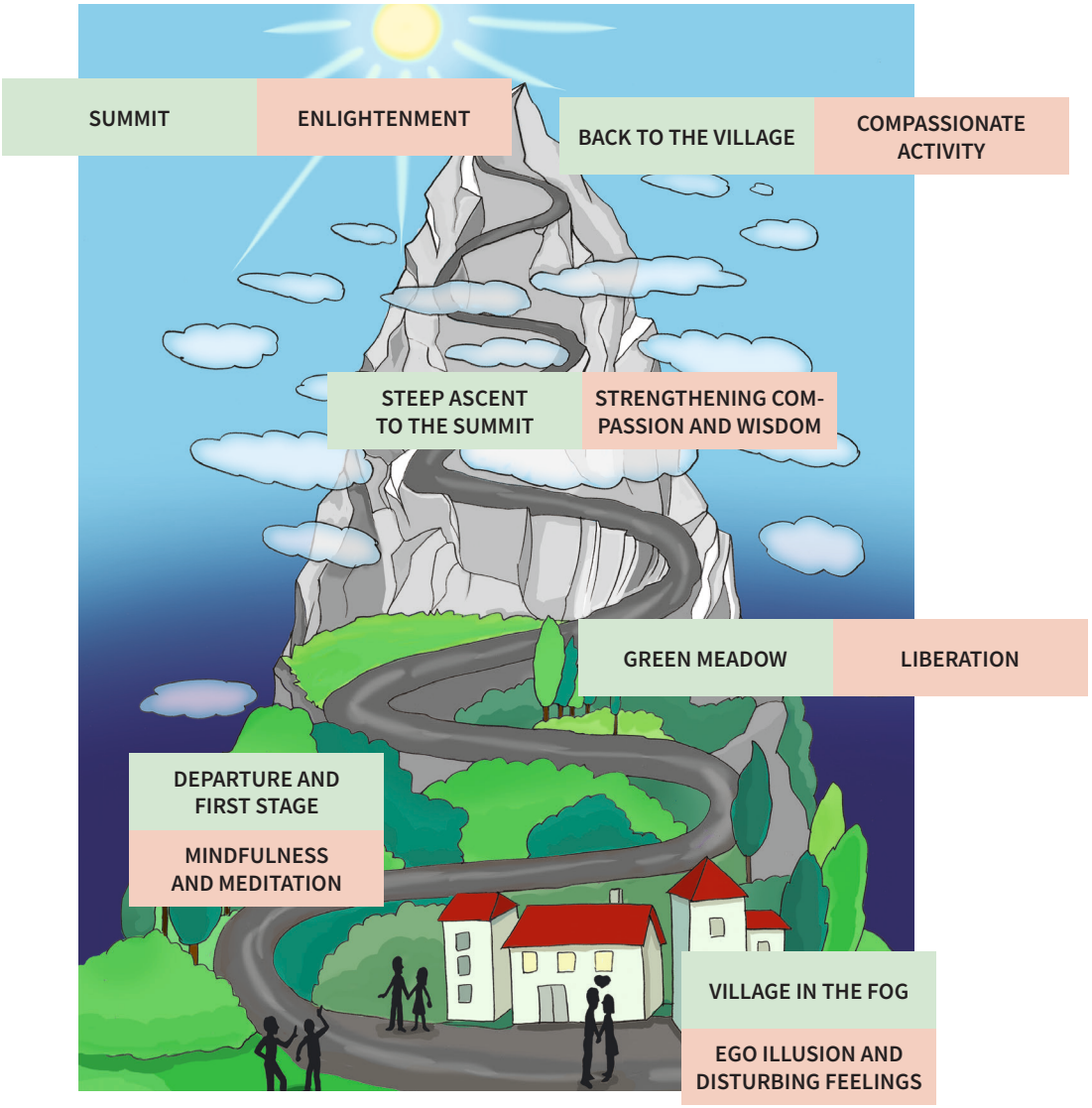


ANSWERS TO WS 3

THERE IS AN END TO SUFFERING

EXERCISES

1. With the help of the text, develop an understanding of the stages and label the picture.



2. In the text, two states describing the end of suffering are presented: Liberation and Enlightenment. How are they described? Mark corresponding statements in the text.

   Liberation: peace, relaxation, tranquility, security, freedom, distance, undisturbedness, freshness.

   Enlightenment: unrestricted panoramic view; completely free from fear; enjoying the open expanse of space; boundless joy; desire to share happiness with others; strength and surplus; wisdom; compassion; meaningful action; steadfastness; outwardly unobtrusive.

WORKSHEET 4

FOURTH NOBLE TRUTH: "THERE IS A WAY TO THE END OF SUFFERING"

In the 45 years of his teaching, Buddha gave 84,000 teachings that enabled his friends and disciples to make every moment of life a step on the path to liberation and enlightenment. His suggestions for ending suffering and experiencing lasting happiness can be categorized into three groups, namely, view, meditation, and action.

View:
"Understand the law of cause and effect and realize that you are not at the mercy of it, but have responsibility for your life. Since you are constantly planting seeds for your future, consciously decide what you do. Do not experience yourself as separate from others, consider the welfare of others more important than your own. Experience everything as meaningful, pure and already perfect in itself, full of compassion and wisdom. Align yourself with a realized teacher who supports you along the way."

Meditation:
"Through meditation, you calm your mind and gain more distance so that you can freely choose not to be carried away by disturbing feelings. This is how you reduce confusion. More compassion and wisdom unfold in your mind. In meditation, you practice holding a Pure View by attuning to the happiness of beings and identifying with enlightened qualities."

Behavior:
"Avoid behavior that brings suffering and practice behavior that brings happiness in every situation of everyday life. Align your behavior with the welfare of others. Act according to the maxim: The greatest possible happiness for the greatest number of people for the longest possible time. Act like a Buddha until you become one yourself."

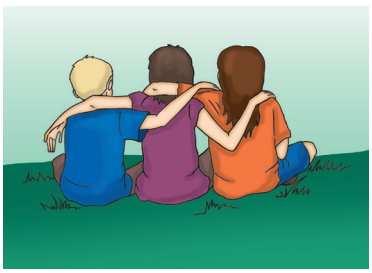
It is very helpful not to walk the path alone.
The community of friends who walk the path to enlightenment is called Sangha in Buddhism. Good friends who have the same view and orientation support one's own development.

EXERCISES

1. Read the text and formulate an essential statement in your own words.

VIEW
MEDITATION
ACTION

2. Why friends are so important along the way?



ANSWERS TO WS 4

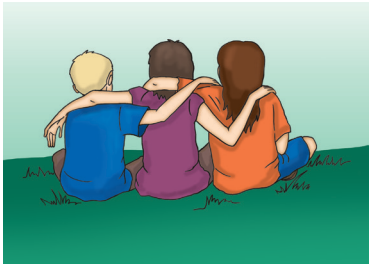
FOURTH NOBLE TRUTH: "THERE IS A WAY TO THE END OF SUFFERING"

EXERCISES

1. Read the text and formulate an essential statement in your own words.

VIEW I am responsible for my own actions. The welfare of others is important.
MEDITATION I can create distance from disturbing feelings and experience more clarity.
ACTION Align behavior with the welfare of others.

2. Why are friends so important?



- They have a great influence.
- They support us in the right point of view.
- They pursue the same goal.
- They help us, they encourage us and sometimes they tempt us to do something ...

MATERIAL 5

BREATH MEDITATION

We sit as straight as possible without being stiff. Now we pay attention to our body and try to relax everywhere – back, stomach, shoulders, hands and arms, neck and head. Our face is also relaxed, our eyes are slightly closed. Our lips are closed.

We pay attention to the flow of air coming and going at the tip of our nose and take a few deep breaths. Now we focus our attention on our breath, either in the area of the nose or the abdomen. We can count from 1 to 21 and then start again, or we can think "in" and "out" each time. Our breathing is completely natural and just as it is. If we breathe quickly, then we breathe quickly, and if we breathe more slowly, that is perfectly fine. We observe our breath as it is and count it. If a distraction enters our mind or our mind wanders, we simply take note of this and return to our breath. If we want to, we can also say "thought" or "wandered" in an inner voice.

(now observe your breath)

And our thoughts come and go, playing in the past and future. We simply take note of this, and our attention returns to our breath. We breathe in and out, our belly filling and emptying with air.

(continue to observe your breath)

Our mind is prone to distraction. And when we catch it doing so, we simply return to our breath: "inhale", "exhale" ...

(continue to observe your breath)

Now we slowly return, open our eyes and become aware of the world around us again.
We end our meditation.

