3 THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS

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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 II

OBJECTIVES

The students will be able to:

- explain Buddha's teachings on the Four Noble Truths.
- understand the path from suffering to liberation and enlightenment.
- relate the Buddhist explanations to the reality of their own lives.

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

APPLICATION	Present possible behavioral variations.	Students present role plays
EXERCISE 4	Buddha's teachings on the Fourth Noble Truth: There is a way.	**WS 5 and Answers to WS 5** Students read the text and prepare role plays
EXERCISE 3	Buddha's teachings on the Third Noble Truth: There is an end to suffering.	**WS 4 and Answers to WS 4** Students reflect on liberation and enlightenment
DEEP DIVE	The story with the hammer - example of a chain of projections	**WS 3 and Answers to WS 3** Students analyze causes of behavior and make references to Buddhist teachings
EXERCISE 2	Buddha's teachings on the Second Noble Truth: There is a cause of suffering.	**WS 2 and Answers to WS 2** Students transfer central Buddhist terms into a diagram
(OPTIONAL) NOTE	Do you manage to be happy at least for a minute?	**Experiment** Students do a self-experiment
EXERCISE 1	Buddha's teaching on the First Noble Truth: There is suffering.	**WS 1 and Answers to WS 1** Students work out the contents Exchange ideas about the solutions
INTRO	Can you think of anyone who is happy? Why is he happy? Do you think he is always so happy?	**Material 1** Students reflect

BASIS

What might interest the students about the topic:

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

INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

DIDACTIC REFERENCES – SECONDARY LEVEL II

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to . . .

1. explain Buddha's teachings on the Four Noble Truths.
2. understand the path from suffering to liberation and enlightenment.
3. relate the Buddhist explanations to the reality of their own lives.

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

INTRODUCTION

Material 1 provides the impulse for the question of a happy life with the photo of a happy old woman. The other questions encourage reflection on the conditionality of happiness. The students express themselves freely in the plenary.

EXERCISE 1

Worksheet 1 introduces the Buddha's teaching on the First Noble Truth "There is Suffering". Working in groups, students develop an understanding of the three types of suffering using the questions on **Answers to WS 1.** In depth, they reflect on the suffering of ignorance. The **Answers to WS 1** offer possible answers. Open questions are discussed in plenary.

INTRODUCTION, optional

As a preparation for the Second Noble Truth, a small experiment is useful. The students check to what extent they can control thoughts and feelings and whether they can maintain a happy state at will. The teacher gives guidelines:

Try to just be happy! Try that for a minute. Observe what is going on in your mind! Close your eyes and make a line on a piece of paper for every thought or deviant feeling!

As a result, it becomes clear that many different thoughts and also feelings appear in the mind, whether one wants them to or not. An exchange about this experience takes place in a class discussion. This step prepares the understanding of the Second Noble Truth.

EXERCISE 2

Worksheet 2 provides explanations of the Buddha's Second Noble Truth, "There is a Cause of Suffering." The central Buddhist concept of fundamental ignorance is introduced and presented in such a way that the students can grasp the concept, which is not so easy to understand. The related tasks guide the students to deal with the ego-centeredness and the resulting disturbing feelings. The students discuss in the group and fill in the corresponding terms in the chart.

SUPPLEMENT

Worksheet 3 deals with the well-known "story with the hammer" (Watzlawick, Paul, "The situation is hopeless, but not serious", New York: Norton (1983)pp.39) as a stimulus to think about the concatenation of thought processes and the resulting emotions and misbehavior. The pupils relate the story to the Buddhist statements about the cause of suffering. They find possible solutions to end this chain of projections. **Answers to WS 3** give possible answers.

EXERCISE 3

The text of **Worksheet 4** is about liberation and enlightenment. Here the Buddha's teaching of the Third Noble Truth, "There is an end to suffering," is introduced. The students deal with the text by means of the tasks. **Answers to WS 4** give possible answers.

EXERCISE 4

Worksheet 5 contains an overview of Buddha's Fourth Noble Truth "There is a Way to the End of Suffering". Students read the text and relate the Buddhist explanations to Watzlawick's "Story with a Hammer." They prepare a roleplay in partner work and playfully try out different variants of a continuation of the story. **Answers to WS 5** give examples of thought processes and actions.

APPLICATION

Different possibilities are played through and some of them are presented in plenary.

As a result, it should be understood that a conscious decision to weigh the consequences of one's actions

is an essential step. Including others in difficult situations by acting respectfully or kindly rather than reflexively deflecting is the key to happiness-bringing behavior. Detaching from fixation on self is a core message of the Buddhist Four Noble Truths. The topic is rounded off with a meditation, as it is a means/method on this path. The topic thus finds its conclusion.

Note: Buddhist meditation and its effects will be introduced in a separate lesson (No. 9). At this point a first simple understanding is sufficient.

MATERIAL 1

THE FOUR NOBLE TRUTHS



- **CAN YOU THINK OF ANYONE WHO IS HAPPY?**
- **WHY IS HE / SHE HAPPY?**
- **DO YOU THINK HE / SHE IS ALWAYS SO HAPPY?**

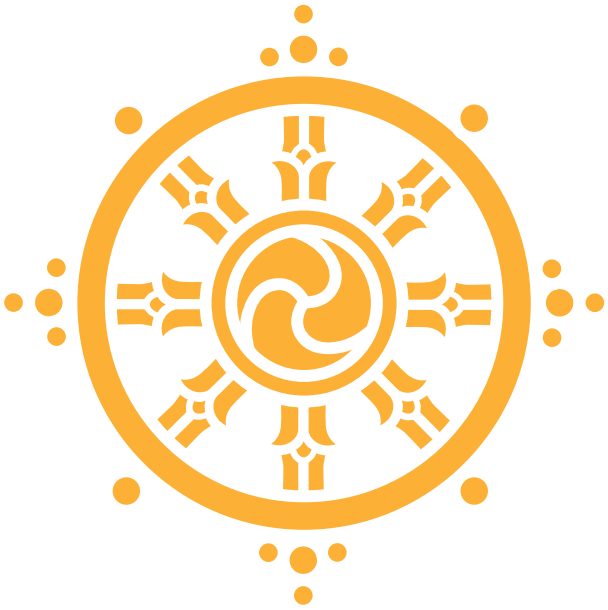
WORKSHEET 1

THE FIRST NOBLE TRUTH "THERE IS SUFFERING"

Seven weeks after his enlightenment, Buddha began teaching the "Four Noble Truths" in the deer park at Sarnath. These were his first teachings ever, which is why this first teaching cycle is called the "first turning of the wheel." 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 path to the end of suffering.

In them, Buddha explained the limitedness of general experience on one hand, and liberation and enlightenment on the other. He starts from the statement that there are painful things in life, then points out the conditionality of all experiences and finally shows the goal of a non-conditional and permanently joyful state. This is called enlightenment. In it, every moment is experienced as fresh and new, as the radiance of open unlimited conscious space is experienced undivided from oneself. Buddhism is about exactly this attainment of lasting happiness.



The First Noble Truth: "THERE IS Suffering".

Buddha spoke of three kinds of suffering to which one is exposed as long as one is not liberated and enlightened.

THE FIRST KIND OF SUFFERING: THE SUFFERING OF SUFFERING

Suffering from that which immediately hurts, e.g. toothache, enduring hunger, 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, even the newest shoes get old. Heartbreak, separation and loss are other examples.

THE THIRD KIND OF SUFFERING: THE SUFFERING OF IGNORANCE

We often rely on changeable, external things. We are unaware of the big picture and have no control over the future. Ignorance means being a pawn in the constant ebb and flow of sorrowful and happy experiences. The lasting inherent joy that is our very essence is not experienced.

EXERCISES

Discuss in the group.

1. Review the three types of suffering for comprehensibility and share your own experiences with the three types of suffering.
2. In what areas of your life do you rely on changeable things?
3. Can you point out situations in your life when you became aware of the suffering of ignorance? How did that feel?

ANSWERS TO WS 1

THE FIRST NOBLE TRUTH "THERE IS SUFFERING"

EXERCISES

Discuss in the group.

1. Review the three types of suffering for comprehensibility and share your own experiences with the three types of suffering.

   The pupils describe their own experiences. Everyone has already experienced something about the first and second type. The third type of suffering is taken up again with the third question.

2. In which areas of your life do you rely on changeable things?

   For example: your own health and physical strength, friends, parents, money, success, love, pleasant feelings, weather, safety, home, ...

3. Can you point out situations in your life when you became aware of the suffering of ignorance? How did it feel?

   Although you thought everything through, things turned out very differently because you didn't take all of the conditions into consideration. You do everything to be in a good mood, but somehow it doesn't work out.
   You want so much to help, but you can't find an appropriate solution.
   You feel like you are in a fog - insecure, frustrated, helpless, at the mercy of others.

WORKSHEET 2

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

Why do we suffer and are not permanently happy? Buddha explained that the cause is basic ignorance. Our experience is dualistic, characterized by the ego illusion, the idea of a permanent, independently existing "I." Although on close examination one finds only a stream of constantly changing thoughts, feelings and impressions, the notion of an "I" is the basis of experience, whereby the outer world (object) is colored by the inner world (subject).

The so-called "disturbing feelings" arise out of this two-part (dualistic) view. We experience "attachment" to pleasant things and want to get and keep what we like. We also experience "aversion" to unpleasant things and try to keep them away. If we cannot make up our minds and think egocentrically in circles, this is called "confusion."
Attachment in turn gives rise to "stinginess" because we can't let go, aversion gives rise to "jealousy" because we don't want others to be happier than we are, and confusion gives rise to exclusionary "pride" because we think we are better and don't grasp the connections.

Countless combinations of "disturbing feelings" shape our experience of the world. We take ourselves and our feelings seriously and hold on to them. Disturbing feelings are followed by negative actions. Thus, one constantly sows seeds both 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 had set the causes oneself. In response to the unpleasant experiences, disturbing feelings arise again, which in turn lead to suffering actions, which lead to further unpleasant experiences. This is called in Buddhism the "cycle of conditioned existence" (Sanskrit: Samsara).
If we are aware of these connections, the desire arises to break this cycle and to overcome the ego illusion with the associated "disturbing feelings".

EXERCISES

1. Complete the chart with the key terms used in the text.
2. With the help of the graphic, explain the Second Noble Truth: "Suffering has a cause."

WORKSHEET 2

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

THE CAUSE OF SUFFERING OR "THE CYCLE OF CONDITIONAL EXISTENCE"

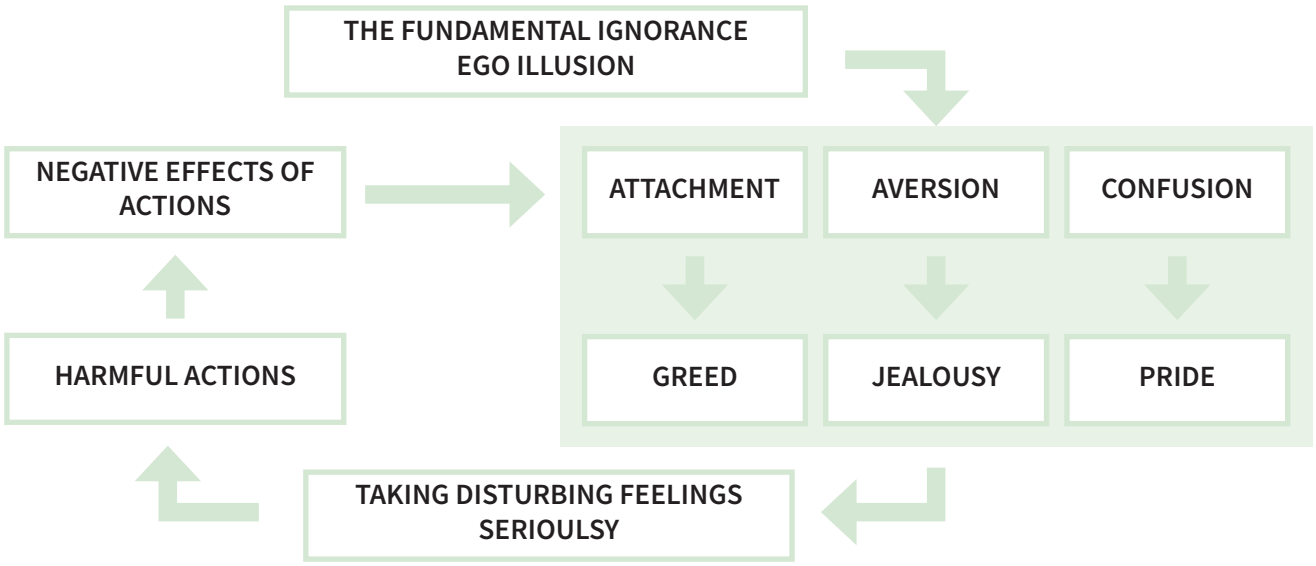
ANSWERS TO WS 2

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

EXERCISES

1. complete the chart with the key terms used in the text.

THE CAUSE OF SUFFERING OR "THE CYCLE OF CONDITIONAL EXISTENCE"



2. With the help of the diagram, explain the Second Noble Truth: "Suffering has a cause."

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The students explain the cycle in their own words, using Buddhist terminology and supporting their understanding with concrete examples. They can illustrate that disturbing feelings lead to harmful actions and thus to suffering, but that one can also consciously make happy choices.

WORKSHEET 3

THE STORY WITH THE HAMMER



"Man wants to hang a picture. He has a nail, but no hammer. The neighbor has one and our man decides to borrow it. But then and there a doubt occurs to him: "What if the neighbor won't let me have it? Yesterday he barely nodded when I greeted him. Perhaps he was in a hurry. But perhaps he pretended to be in a hurry because he does not like me. And why would he not like me? I have always been nice to him; he obviously imagines something. If someone wanted to borrow one of my tools, I would of course give it to him. So why doesn't he want to lend me his hammer? How can one refuse such a simple request? People like him really poison one's life. He probably even imagines that I depend on him just because he has a hammer. I'll give him a piece of my mind!" And so our man storms over to the neighbors's apartment and rings the bell. The neighbor opens, but before he can say, "Good morning," our man shouts, "And you can keep your damned hammer, you oaf!"

(Watzlawick, Paul, "The situation is hopeless, but not serious: (the pursuit of unhappiness)",(pp. 39-40), New York: Norton (1983))

EXERCISES

Discuss in a group.

1. Relate the story of the man with the hammer to the Buddhist statements about the cause of suffering.

2. Analyze the successive disturbances.

3. Where is the solution? What are the different ways to end the chain of projections?

ANSWERS TO WS 3

THE STORY WITH THE HAMMER

EXERCISES

Discuss as a group.

1. Relate the story of the man with the hammer to the Buddhist statements about the cause of suffering.

> Because of basic ignorance, one separates into I here and the world there. The man does not realize that his confused thoughts lead to disturbing feelings. Because of these disturbing feelings, he acts stupidly and still believes that he is right.

2. Analyze the successive disturbances.

- doubt
- insinuation based on the curt greeting
- unfounded suspicion
- justification
- projection of one's own behavior onto the other
- self-aggrandizement
- devaluation of the other
- dissociation
- emotionally charged resolution
- exaggerated action with coarse speech

3. Where is the solution? What are the different ways to end the chain of projections?

- at any moment it is possible to get out of this chain if you become aware of your thoughts and feelings (even at the very end, by apologizing)
- stop the overactive imagination in one’s head
- question the truth of one's own thoughts
- do not get carried away by your own feelings
- do not act on the basis of disturbing feelings
- act respectfully

WORKSHEET 4

THE THIRD NOBLE TRUTH "THERE IS AN END TO SUFFERING"

When one experiences indwelling joy constantly, as Buddha did after his enlightenment, this is the "end of suffering." This is a perfect state, free from any form of suffering.
The name Buddha is Sanskrit and translates as "the awakened one." His name indicates that he awoke from "the dream of ignorance."

Since his enlightenment, Buddha continuously demonstrated the ultimate experience of mind: its essence is omniscient, fearless space and its expression is constant, supreme joy. At this level, every act expresses a supra-personal compassion. Without a dualistic notion of one doing something with the others, the mind is like the sun shining out of itself. Each moment is experienced freshly and joyfully, the qualities of the mind manifesting completely effortlessly and spontaneously. Inner experiences and outer worlds are contained in the mind, comparable to the sea in which the emerging waves are at the same time inseparable from it.

In Buddhism, two levels of realization are distinguished on the path to enlightenment. **Liberation**, in which one develops the insight that everything personal, such as one's own body and inner states, are in constant flux. Accordingly, one lets go of attachment to the ego concept. A deeply relaxed state of inner peace and clarity is experienced, free from any disturbing feelings. For the further path to full **enlightenment**, it is about developing beyond-personal compassion and beyond-personal wisdom with the motivation to be able to benefit all beings. Wisdom means recognizing the emptiness of all phenomena beyond dualistic concepts. In enlightenment, all inherent qualities unfold.



EXERCISES

Work in a group.

1. Explain the term "Buddha".
2. Describe the first level of the end of suffering.
3. How is each moment experienced when one is enlightened?
4. How is the beyond-personal compassion expressed?

ANSWERS TO WS 4

THE THIRD NOBLE TRUTH "THERE IS AN END TO SUFFERING"

EXERCISES

Work in a group.

1. Explain the term "Buddha".

   It means "the awakened one." The limited perception of normal people is compared to a dream. Like the man with the hammer who is entangled in a chain of projections and is not aware of it, this is thought to be reality.

2. Describe the first level of the end of suffering.

   It is called liberation. The attachment to the ego-imagination is released. A deeply relaxed state of inner peace and clarity is experienced, free from any disturbing feelings.

3. How is each moment experienced when one is enlightened?

   Fresh and joyful; everything is spontaneous and effortless.

4. How is beyond-personal compassion expressed?

   At this level, every act expresses a non-separating compassion, with the desire to benefit all beings - like the sun that shines by itself and does not discriminate who stands in its light.

WORKSHEET 5

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

The goal of Buddhist teaching is for beings to develop until they become enlightened. The great difference between Buddha and non-enlightened beings is that he has freed his mind from all ignorance and habits that cause suffering, thus fulfilling the conditions for enlightenment. Non-enlightened beings only have to follow this path. This consists in the application of timeless methods and culminates in enlightenment.

During the 45 years in which he taught, Buddha gave 84,000 teachings that allowed 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 behavior.

View: By understanding cause and effect, one takes responsibility for one's life and is aware that one is constantly planting seeds for the future. With a beyond-personal attitude and the knowledge that one is not separate from others, one realizes that all beings want to be happy. Releasing inner wealth, one sees the potential in every situation.

Meditation: The agitated mind comes to rest and one gains distance, so that one is not carried away by disturbing feelings. Confusion dissolves and more clarity emerges.
Compassion and wisdom unfold in the mind. In meditation, one practices keeping a Pure View by tuning into the joy and love of enlightenment.

Action: One avoids behavior that causes suffering and practices behavior that produces happiness in every situation of daily life. With compassion, one includes the welfare of others. Wisdom is important to see what is really beneficial and useful in the long run. One behaves like a Buddha until one has become a Buddha.

It is very helpful not to follow the Buddhist path alone. The community of friends who travel the path to enlightenment is called the Sangha, the "community of practitioners".

EXERCISES

Role play for the story with the hammer

Imagine that the neighbor in question is a Buddhist and acts according to the above view.

With a partner, develop a role play in which one takes the part of the Buddhist neighbor and the other takes the part of the man who needs the hammer. Develop several possibilities for how the situation might proceed. Prepare a variation for the plenary.

1. Role-play to illustrate how point of view and behavior are related by depicting the thoughts behind the behavior (talking quietly aside).

2. Invite the agitated neighbor to a short meditation exercise to calm him down and explain the effect of meditation.

ANSWERS TO WS 5

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

EXERCISES

Role play on the "story with the hammer"

Imagine that the neighbor in question is a Buddhist and acts according to the above view.

With a partner, develop a role play in which one is the Buddhist neighbor and the other is the man who needs the hammer. Develop several possibilities for how the situation might proceed. Prepare a variation for the plenary.

1. In role-playing, clarify how view and behavior are related by depicting the thoughts behind the behavior (quietly talking aside).

   - I want to gain distance from the disturbing feelings and avoid negative consequences: I'm not yelling back now.
   - I take a beyond-personal attitude and am compassionate: I make him a cup of tea and ask him what's wrong.
   - There is potential in every situation. You just have to recognize the joy and power: I'll just shower it with my good feelings. "I'm glad you rang my bell. I finally get to meet you."

2. Invite the agitated neighbor to do a short meditation exercise to calm him down and explain the effects of meditation.

   The students refer back to the short meditation exercise at the beginning of the lesson and conclude that you can be an observer of your own thoughts and feelings. This distance allows one to calm down, reflect, and consider one's next course of action. One does not get carried away by disturbing feelings and promotes a compassionate attitude.