4 KARMA – CAUSE AND EFFECT

INTRODUCTORY TEXT

SECONDARY SCHOOL L EVEL I

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SECONDARY SCHOOL L EVEL II

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Answers to Worksheet 3

KARMA – CAUSE AND EFFECT

According to the Buddhist view, karma is not synonymous with fate, but the basis for personal freedom and responsible, meaningful action.

The term "karma" literally means "action, deed or activity" and refers to the law of cause and effect. According to Buddha, neither a creator god, a force of destiny, nor an external cause are responsible for our experiences. Past actions, words and thoughts became our present world. We are constantly sowing the seeds for our future.
The explanations about cause and effect offer a basis to shape one's life in a self-responsible and meaningful way. One learns to understand connections and applies the insight that one can consciously decide in everyday life.

According to Buddha, the experience of the world arises from one's own mind.
Through "basic ignorance" one considers to be real the idea of an independently existing "I" and an external world separate from it. One is not aware that words, thoughts and actions lead to corresponding experiences with the same feeling content in one's own stream of consciousness. Instead, one experiences oneself as separate from the world around one and thinks one's experiences are caused from the outside. This is called the dualistic view in Buddhism. The result of these misconceptions are disturbing feelings and actions that cause suffering.

Buddha explained that everything we do, think and say is stored in the mind, and how patterns of speech and action subsequently arise from the impressions stored in the mind, i.e. mental habits. Positive actions produce positive results, negative actions produce negative results.
The simple example of the seed shows that the seed turns into a seedling and the fruit ripens based on the information stored in the seed and in turn forms new seeds. An apple seed becomes an apple tree when the necessary conditions such as warmth, nutrients and moisture come together in sufficient quantities. Comparably, karmic causes come to maturity as an effect under appropriate conditions.

Because the effects can often show themselves even in a longer period of time, the connections of cause and effect are not always immediately recognizable. Karma can extend over many lifetimes. After death, the body dissolves, but not the mind with the impressions stored in it. The stream of consciousness continues from birth to birth as one "digests" and dissolves old impressions and places new impressions in the mind's memory in each life situation. Strong habit patterns are formed. However, there is usually some room to change these habits. Therefore, a good understanding of karma brings more freedom.

According to Buddha, the karmic impression is strongest when these four conditions come together. This is true for both positive and negative actions:

- One grasps the situation clearly.
- One wishes to change something.
- One does it or has it done by others.
- Afterwards, one is satisfied with the result.

If one is aware of these four factors, one can specifically strengthen the effect of positive actions.

If one has acted in a way that causes suffering, one can also counteract it. This is done through four stages of attitude.

- One recognizes that one has brought suffering.
- One wishes to remove what is disturbing.
- One makes a firm resolution not to do it again.
- One consciously acts positively.

To train awareness, meditation is an important Buddhist method. Here, one removes the seeds of constricting and sorrowful experiences stored in one's mind before they come to maturity. One gets the necessary distance to disturbing feelings and gains clarity. In this way, meditation frees one from compulsive and unconscious entanglement and confusion.

If one understands these connections, one does not let oneself be discouraged by difficult situations, but uses them as learning processes. And one gains the insight that it is always worthwhile to put positive impressions into the mind by developing good habits. One can make a conscious decision to do this.

INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

COURSE OF LESSON – SECONDARY LEVEL II

OBJECTIVES

The students will be able to:

- explain different models of why things happen in the first place.
- understand the Buddhist view of karma as the cause of happy or sorrowful experiences as an explanatory model.
- explain that every experience depends on accumulated karma.
- demonstrate that one can shape one's own future through appropriate actions with body, speech, and mind.
- understand that karmic impressions can vary in strength.

SECURING KNOWLEDGE	Create a chart with all the influencing factors of karma.	**WS 3** Student do **exercise 2** **Answers to WS 3** Students present their chart
EXERCISE 2	How strong are the individual impressions in the mind? What are the consequences for the environment?	**WS 3** Student do **exercise 1** **Answers to WS 3** Comparing results
DEEPENING KNOWLEDGE	Experience and action are related Karma - cause and effect	**WS 2** **Answers to WS 2** Students consider Buddhist viewpoint Individual work
EXERCISE 1	Buddhist statements on karma Scope of action - personal responsibility	**WS 1** **Answers to WS 1** Students work on part A and part B Comparing results
INTRO	Why do things happen the way they do? What explanatory models are there?	**Material 1 A** **Material 1 B** Students state their assumptions Collecting results

BASIS

What might interest the students about the topic:

- Why do things happen the way they do?
- What explanatory models are there?
- What is karma?

INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

DIDACTIC REFERENCES – SECONDARY LEVEL II

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to . . .

1. explain different models of why things happen in the first place.
2. understand the Buddhist view of karma as the cause of happy or sorrowful experiences as an explanatory model.
3. explain that every experience depends on accumulated karma.
4. demonstrate that one can shape one's own future through appropriate actions with body, speech, and mind.
5. understand that karmic impressions can vary in strength.

INTRODUCTION

The basic question is, why do things happen the way they do?
What explanatory models are there?

Using a suitable medium, **Material 1A and 1B** are presented one after the other and discussed in the plenary. **Material 1A** suggests life circumstances, with **Material 1B** possible forces are named, which are then briefly explained.

EXERCISE 1

Students reflect on difficult life situations and how to deal with them, **Worksheet 1, part A.** They include Buddhist statements on karma and direct their attention to the question of room for maneuver and personal responsibility. From the possible answers to **Worksheet 1, part B,** which the students find in group work, this Buddhist view emerges. In the class discussion this is made comprehensible. The students are offered this explanatory model, and they assess for themselves what they think about it. The **Answers to WS 1** offer possible answers.

NOTES

Everything that one has done in the past with body, speech and mind leaves karmic traces that become ripe again through suitable conditions. Everyone has planted the seeds himself, everything is the consequence of our past deeds. That is why Buddhism does not speak of "guilt" but of personal responsibility. Through personal responsibility, freedom of action arises. Through positive actions happiness arises, through negative actions suffering arises. Habits and tendencies of action are formed.

DEEPENING

The text on **Worksheet 2** gives a short insight into the basics of the Buddhist view on karma. The students reflect again on the Buddhist core statements for themselves in individual work. In a further step, they now reflect on their own scope of action in building up karma and on self-responsibility for the contents of the memory consciousness. Here, too, it is a matter of comprehending the Buddhist explanatory model. **Answers to WS 2** offer possible answers.

EXERCISE 2

Worksheet 3 gives information about when a karmic impression is particularly strong. In **Exercise 1**, the students should discuss real-life examples from their environment in the group. In doing so, they will also reflect on the consequences of their respective attitudes and actions, both for themselves and for the fellow human beings involved. They will grasp the principle of personal responsibility and understand that this leads to the freedom to consciously decide which actions to take and which not to take. They recognize that even previous negative actions can be changed into positive ones through a consciously chosen new attitude.

SECURING KNOWLEDGE

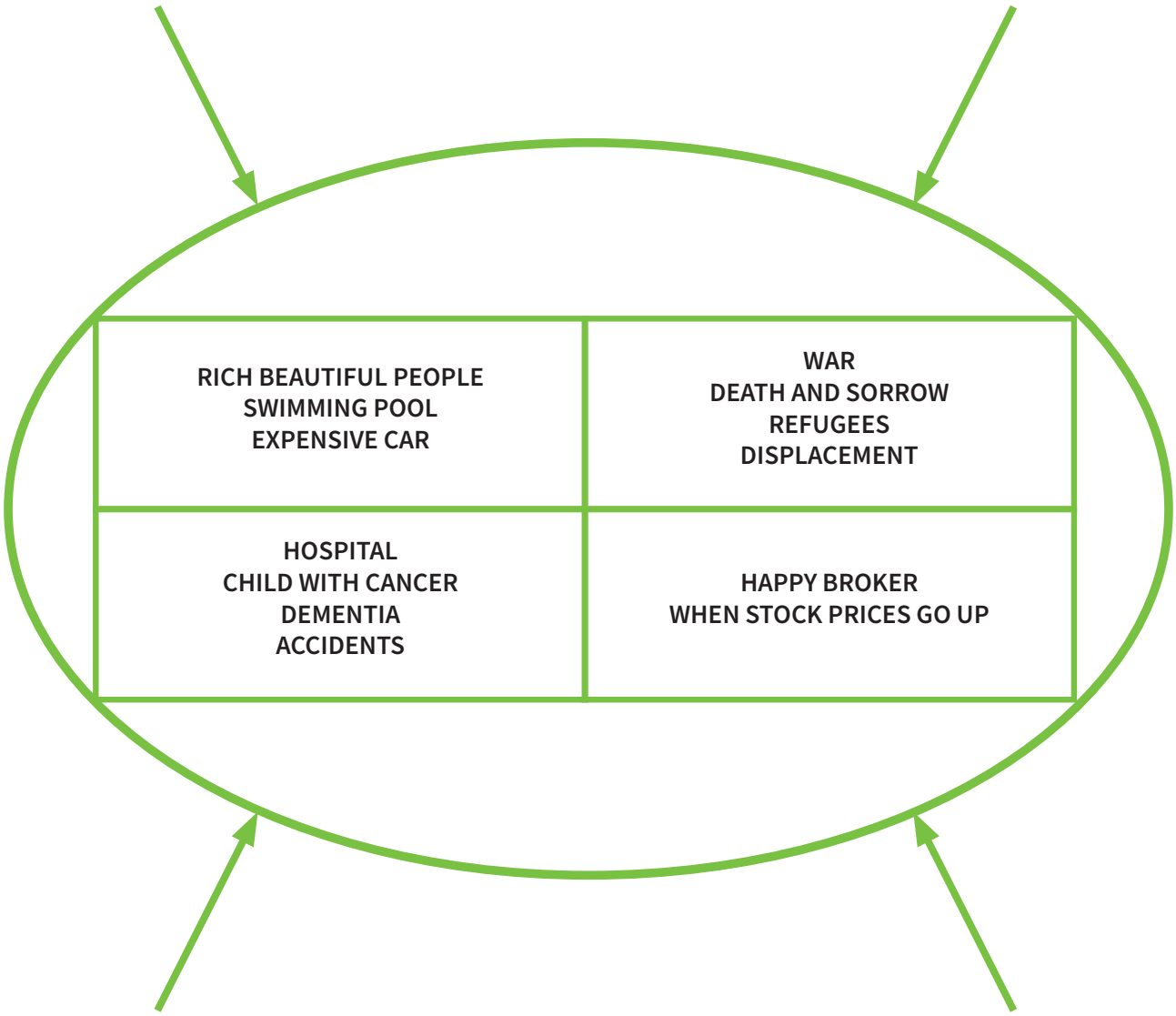
With **Exercise 2 on Worksheet 3,** the students are asked to illustrate their acquired knowledge about karma in the form of a diagram. The teacher summarizes the main factors involved in the creation of karma and how they influence each other. The diagrams can be presented and discussed in plenary.

NOTES

To deepen the topic of **Karma - Cause and Effect**, the topic of the ten useful and harmful actions is suitable. There, among other things, the consequences of one's own actions with body, speech and mind are explained in more detail and also how to remove negative impressions in the mind.

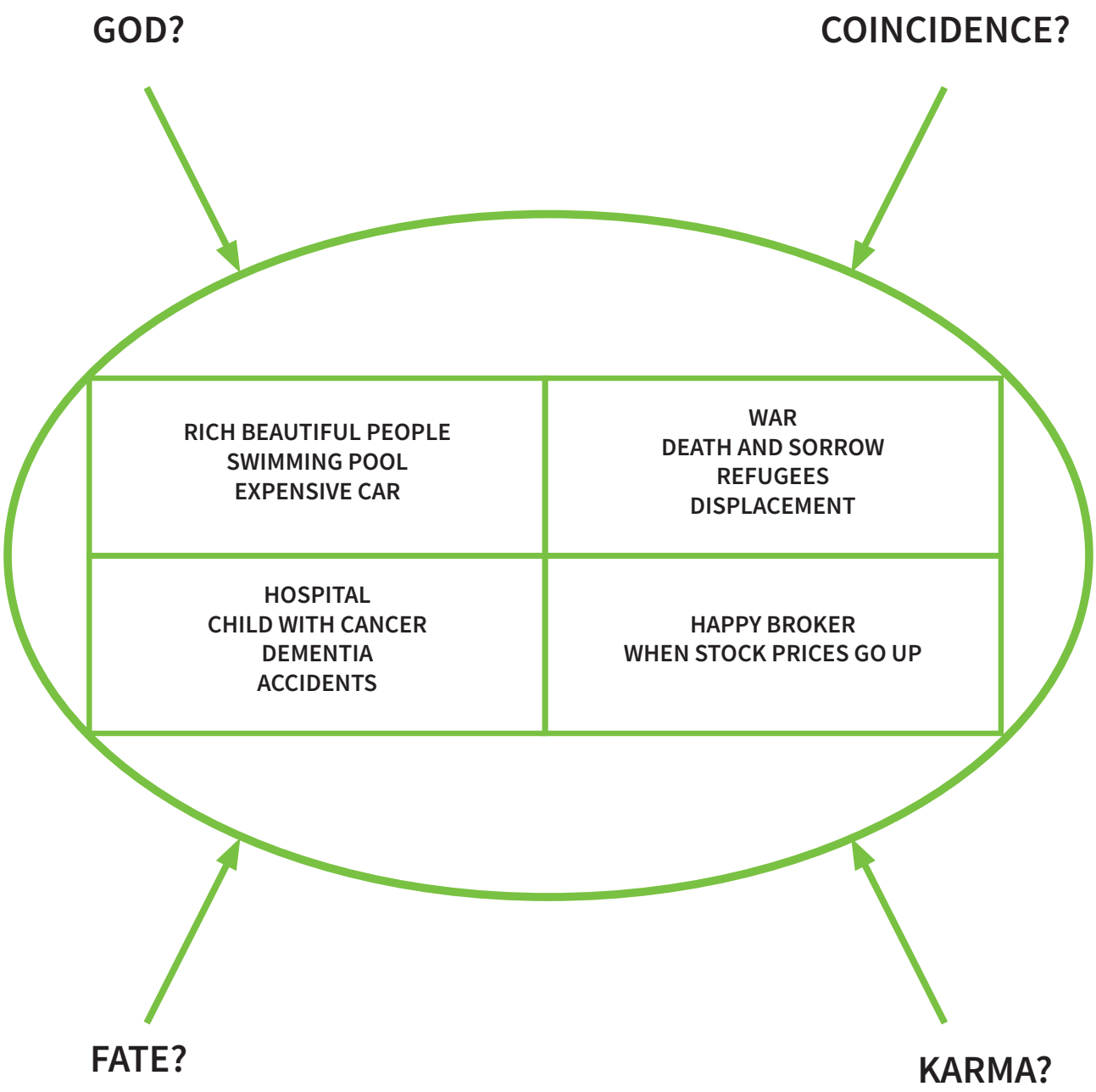
MATERIAL 1A

WHY DO THINGS HAPPEN THE WAY THEY DO? WHAT EXPLANATORY MODELS ARE THERE?



MATERIAL 1B

WHY DO THINGS HAPPEN THE WAY THEY DO? WHAT EXPLANATORY MODELS ARE THERE?



GOD > A force which can influence courses in the life of every being in every direction.

COINCIDENCE> Things happen, because certain conditions came together "by chance", unplanned and unintentionally.

FATE > An unknown power that influences life in a predetermined way.

KARMA (literally "action, deed, activity") > the effect of deeds, words and thoughts (also from previous lives) are the causes of what man experiences.

WORKSHEET 1

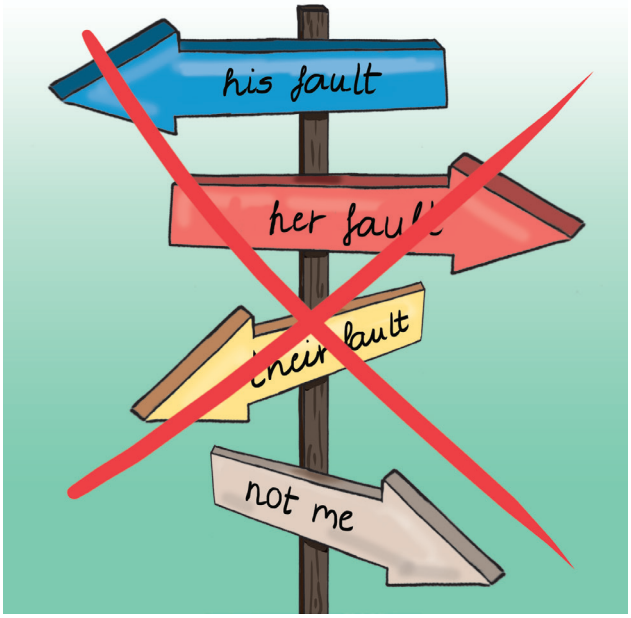
ACTION AND EXPERIENCE ARE INTERRELATED

A

EXERCISES
Discuss the following situations in your group and answer the questions. Imagine you are experiencing this yourself.

a. difficult people (classmates, teachers, neighbors, parents, ...)
b. prolonged illness
c. difficult learning with little success
d. unemployment

1. who is responsible?
2. who is "to blame"?
3. what room for maneuver does one have?



B

Every person collects an infinite number of impressions in the mind based on his actions, views and evaluations. Colored by our own background of experience, everything is experienced personally. No one else experiences and judges the same as oneself.

Buddha explained the connection between view and action:

The more negative the impressions in the mind, the more difficult, unpleasant, gray and constricted one experiences the world, oneself and fellow human beings. Suffering is experienced and seeds for new suffering are planted by further negative actions.

If one has many good impressions in the mind, one experiences the world as exciting, interesting and full of possibilities. Happiness and joy are experienced. From the joyful power, one can do many meaningful things and, through further positive actions, plant seeds for future happiness.

Exercises
1. Share with your classmates in the group one example each of negative and positive impressions.
2. Reflect on the Buddhist statements to see if you find them consistent.
3. Explain the difference between personal responsibility and blame.

ANSWERS TO WS 1

ACTION AND EXPERIENCE ARE INTERRELATED

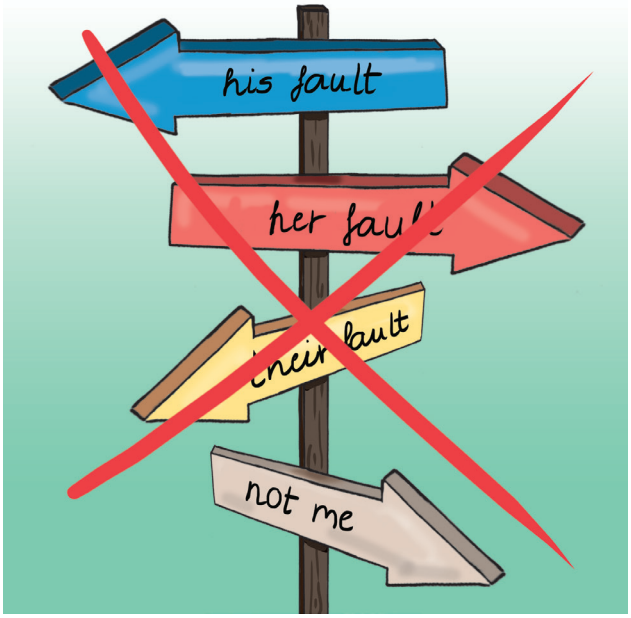
A

EXERCISES

Discuss the following situations in your group and answer the questions. Imagine you are experiencing this yourself.

a. difficult people (classmates, teachers, neighbors, parents, ...)
b. prolonged illness
c. difficult learning with little success
d. unemployment

1. who is responsible?
2. who is "to blame"?
3. what room for maneuver does one have?



B

EXERCISES

1. Share with your classmates in the group one example each of negative and positive impressions.

- Negative: e.g. someone lies and tells inconsistencies, the others do not trust him/her anymore and he/she gets more and more entangled and feels unloved. One becomes suspicious and does not believe the others either.
- Positive: e.g. one is honest, sticks to the truth even if it is uncomfortable. Thus one is perceived as reliable and authentic. One also gets confidence in one's own discernment.

2. Reflect on the Buddhist statements to see if you find them consistent.

- The students explain the connection between actions, attitudes and impressions in the mind.

3. Explain the difference between personal responsibility and blame.

- Personal responsibility means room for maneuver and leads to the freedom to choose.
- Assigning blame is superficially convenient, but it leads to excuses and increasingly restricts one's own room for maneuver.

WORKSHEET 2

A BRIEF EXPLANATION OF KARMA - CAUSE AND EFFECT

Karma translated means deed, activity or action (involving body, speech and mind).
Karma is the doctrine of cause and effect. From a Buddhist perspective, everything we think, say or do leaves an impression on our mind. It is from these impressions that the world we experience is created. Negative actions, words, and thoughts lead to difficult or unpleasant situations; positive thoughts, words, and actions, on the other hand, lead us to have pleasant experiences.

These impressions are like seeds that are stored in the consciousness and that, when the conditions are present, produce a fruit corresponding to them.

No one would expect to sow cacti, for example, and then harvest sunflowers from that field. A wise gardener purposefully selects the seeds and nurtures the plants until he can harvest the fruit. He provides good growing conditions.

This example from the plant world shows that a long time can pass before a seed develops into fruit. It is comparable with the impressions in the mind. Sometimes it even takes longer than a lifetime for an impression to develop its effect in the mind.
For this reason, one does not always recognize to which causes what we experience is due. Thus, one sometimes asks oneself: "Why me?" One is not aware that through one's own actions, words and thoughts in earlier times, one has oneself laid the causes for these experiences.

When a Buddhist is confronted with unpleasant situations, he accepts the challenge in order to improve the situation if possible. This can also be done through the inner attitude, when nothing can be changed on the outside. He takes responsibility because he has understood that he is now planting the seeds for the future.



The basic attitude and motivation is very important, benevolence and compassion are the basis of action. To experience happiness and bring it into the world, one consciously decides to act positively and avoid harmful things. In Buddhism, one is very mindful of one's words, actions and thoughts, because every moment is consciously shaping future experiences.

As a Buddhist, one also uses the effective means of meditation to specifically remove negative impressions in the mind and build up positive ones. Through the resulting peace of mind, one gets the necessary distance from disturbing feelings and gains more clarity. Increasingly, one becomes more aware and can decide to leave out suffering and to behave in a happy way. One no longer takes things personally and through the resulting freedom is able to act meaningfully and powerfully for the best of all beings. One behaves like a Buddha until one has become a Buddha.

Think about the following statements.
1. What I am experiencing now may be related to the old impressions in my store consciousness.
2. I can decide responsibly how I react to certain situations.
3. I can consciously decide which new impressions I put into my store consciousness.

ANSWERS TO WS 2

A BRIEF EXPLANATION OF KARMA - CAUSE AND EFFECT

Consider the following statements

1. What I am experiencing now may be related to the old impressions in my store consciousness.

    - These impressions are like seeds that are stored in consciousness and which, when the conditions for them are present, produce a fruit corresponding to them.

2. I can decide responsibly how I react to certain situations.

    - I develop mindfulness, accept challenges and take responsibility. This allows me to decide what the best possible course of action is instead of reacting reflexively and habitually.

3. I can consciously decide which new impressions I put into my store consciousness.

    - I can act mindfully with words, actions and thoughts, because every moment is consciously shaping future experiences.

WORKSHEET 3

HOW STRONG IS A KARMIC IMPRINT?

One constantly collects impressions in the mind, even if one is not conscious of one's actions.
The more consciously you experience something, the stronger the impression in your mind.
Buddha explained that when these four factors come together, an impression in one's mind is strong:

a. One grasps the situation clearly.
b. One whishes to change something.
c. One does it or has it done by others.
d. Afterwards, one is satisfied with the result.

A complete positive impression would be, for example:
a. The old lady on the 4th floor can walk only with great difficulty.
b. You decide to help her.
c. You go shopping for her.
d. Afterwards, everyone is satisfied.

A complete negative impression would be, for example:
a. A classmate doesn't act the way you like.
b. You decides to annoy him.
c. You post something embarrassing and half-true about him on the Internet.
d. You are satisfied when he is embarrassed.

EXERCISE 1

Discuss the following situations in the group.
- talking badly about a classmate
- being happy when a classmate get a surprisingly good grade on an exam
- first pretending to be in love and then dropping him/her without a second thought

1. How strong do you think the karmic impression is in the minds of the people involved?
2. What are the effects and consequences for the environment?
3. Explain how the karmic impression is particularly strong or only weakened, including the above four factors.
4. Consider how a negative karmic impression can be changed into a positive one.

EXERCISE 2

As a group, create a chart that conveys to a non-Buddhist how karma (the law of cause and effect) works.

ANSWERS TO WS 3

HOW STRONG IS A KARMIC IMPRINT?

EXERCISE 1

Regarding point 1.: The students apply the short explanation on **Worksheet 3** to case studies by differentiating how the strength of the karmic impression is related to the degree of awareness and the inner attitude, both in the happy and the sorrowful sense.

Regarding point 2.: Likewise, the students should reflect that their own actions have consequences on their environment. The fact that one can bring suffering or happiness to others means we have comprehensive personal responsibility. Thus we have the freedom to consciously decide which actions we want to perform and which to avoid.

Regarding point 3.: The students understand that the attitude of really wanting to benefit or harm can vary. Behavior can also be gentle or drastic. The decisive factor is whether one is satisfied with one's own actions or regrets them.

Regarding point 4.: Previous negative actions can be turned into positive ones by deciding to do the opposite. This happens through four stages of attitude:

- First, one recognizes that one has brought suffering.
- Second, one wishes to remove what is disturbing.
- Third, one makes a firm resolution not to do it again.
- Fourth, one consciously decides to act positively.

EXERCISE 2

In the group, create a chart that conveys to a non-Buddhist how karma (the law of cause and effect) works.

The diagram should clearly reflect in its entirety what has been learned so far about karmic relationships.

Components of the chart can be:

- Every experience/experience can be explained as a result of karmic causes.
- Positive actions result in positive impressions, negative actions result in suffering.
- Depending on the attitude of the person acting, impressions of different strength result.
- Karma is therefore the key to creating one's own future happily.
- Negative karma can also be cleared up.
- This means self-responsibility.
- Cause and effect (= Karma) takes place in every moment of thinking, speaking, acting.

Note: refer to teaching unit 5:
THE 10 BENEFICIAL AND HARMFUL ACTIONS