7 THE SIX LIBERATING ACTIONS

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THE SIX LIBERATING ACTIONS

At the center of the Great Way (sanskr.: Mahayana) is the path of the Bodhisattva.

Fundamentally, this path is characterized by the motivation to lead all beings to liberation and enlightenment. The practical implementation of this path is expressed in the "Six Liberating Actions" (sanskr.: Paramitas).

They are called Liberating Actions because they lead out of a narrowed, ego-centered concept. One gradually begins to understand that subject, object and action are parts of a wholeness.

If one is rooted in the desire to act for the good of all beings, one develops more quickly and can be more useful.

In this way, Liberating Actions can be implemented more and more consciously and naturally in life. What initially requires a conscious effort becomes spontaneous and effortless with time.

The Six Liberating Actions are:

1. Generosity
2. Meaningful behavior
3. Patience
4. Joyful effort
5. Meditation
6. Wisdom

The first four of these six compassionate actions describe characteristics of any joyful human relationship.

In meditation, the experience from the first four actions is internalized and the mind becomes increasingly stable, powerful and joyful. The wisdom that arises directs our actions in the right direction with the natural realization of doing meaningful things. Quantity gradually becomes quality.

1. Generosity is the giving of immediate necessities such as food, money, first aid, and the like; secondly, giving to beings what will help in the long run: Inspiration, protection, knowledge, education, good upbringing, time, etc.; thirdly, living a life for others as an example: One develops oneself so that all may benefit, thus one lives Buddha's example in everyday life. Generosity creates trust and openness, makes every encounter rich and dissolves attachment in one's own mind.

2. Meaningful behavior keeps human exchange going and is the basis for more growth. It means resolving causes of difficulties, developing oneself, making one's own life meaningful and benefiting others as much as possible.

3. Patience creates distance from difficulties and goes in two directions: Patience with oneself and with others. One who is full of compassion and can remain relaxed in any situation cannot be disturbed by anything. Since anger destroys all built-up good impressions in an instant, Buddha calls the state of patience "the most beautiful but most difficult garment to wear."

4. Joyful effort includes perseverance and means that one simply enjoys doing something useful, thus defeating one's passivity at the same time. "For anyone with life experience, the meaning of these four behaviors should be obvious: Generosity creates connections, meaningful behavior makes them supple, by means of patience one secures them, and joyful effort makes them grow." (Lama Ole Nydahl)

5. Meditation creates distance in the mind. Thus, in life, one increasingly gets the choice to participate in the comedies and avoid the tragedies. In Buddha's teaching, the five deeds mentioned are often compared to legs that have strength. However, wisdom makes them go in the right direction.

6. Wisdom means a complete understanding of all things. It overcomes the idea of the independent self of a person and a really existing external world. One understands that beyond space and time something ultimately true exists always and everywhere. Only the conscious mind fulfills these characteristics and, with perfect realization, can therefore express its open, clear and unlimited capacities for the benefit of all.

INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

COURSE OF LESSON – SECONDARY LEVEL I

OBJECTIVES

The students will be able to:

- explain the Liberating Actions as a Buddhist method for achieving happiness.
- understand the connection between a fulfilled life and one's own actions.
- demonstrate the effect of Liberating Actions in everyday situations.

REFLECTING	The Six Liberating Actions - Happiness in Life	Students take a point of view Students draw cartoon
DEEPENING KNOWLEDGE 2	The benefits of meditation and wisdom	**WS 3 B (Meditation)** Students observe their experiences **WS 3 C (Wisdom)** Students reflect on experiences
DEEPENING KNOWLEDGE 1	The benefits of the First Four Liberating Actions in everyday Life	**WS 3 A** Students discuss everyday situations and present results
EXERCISE	The Buddhist Way - The Six Liberating Actions	**WS 2** **Answers to WS 2** Students work out and discuss contents
INTRO	What is happiness? Life timelines and photo album	**WS 1** **Material 1** Students draw and compare

BASIS

What might interest the students in the topic:

- How does one become happy?
- Can I bring happiness into the world?
- How can I make the right choices for my life?

INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

DIDACTIC REFERENCES - SECONDARY LEVEL I

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to …

1. explain Liberating Actions as a Buddhist method for attaining happiness.
2. understand the connection between a fulfilled life and one's own actions.
3. demonstrate the effect of Liberating Actions in everyday situations.

INTRODUCTION

The students receive **Worksheet 1** and work individually to sketch their own life story, which can have high and low points and also includes the future. In the further course, the personal life timelines are compared with points from the life of Mr. Schmitz, shown in a photo album on **Material 1**. Life plans and life courses are examined for aspects of a happy life. The students reflect on whether and to what extent happiness is attainable and discuss this topic in plenary.

NOTES

In general, we have the idea that a happy life is associated with possessions, career and status, i.e. with social recognition. At the same time, it is focused on social areas such as love or partnership and family.

These ideas of life take hold as long as one is in a state in which one can enjoy them, if one has achieved them at all. However, we tend to ignore difficult life situations such as old age, sickness and death. We also run after things that are constantly changing, may not necessarily make us happy, and from which we eventually have to turn away.

This is where the teacher's transition comes in handy: Buddhism assumes that happiness is attainable through the Six Liberating Actions.

EXERCISES

Worksheet 2 contains key statements about the Six Acts of Liberation as well as tasks to ensure understanding. The students work on the contents individually and discuss the tasks and possible ambiguities in plenary. On the **Answers to WS 2** replies are suggested.

DEEPENING 1 AND 2

The students apply the benefits of Liberating Actions to everyday life. The respective questions encourage personal reflection, which varies from person to person. For this reason, there is no general answer sheet.

Worksheet 3 A enables a more detailed understanding of the first four Liberating Actions by having the students answer questions about concrete everyday situations and make the connection to the respective Liberating Action.

Worksheet 3 B deepens the access to the Liberating Action **Meditation**, with specific instructions a short simple experiment of meditative concentration is carried out.
Worksheet 3 C offers a more in-depth examination of the Liberating Action **Wisdom**. Assignments guide the students to connect their own experiences with aspects of Buddhist wisdom in order to concretize them.

For the class, there is the possibility to work on the texts individually with the same or different contents **(WS 3 A, 3 B and 3 C)**. If desired, the experiences made, which are encouraged in the assignments, can be exchanged in class discussion. Because of the personal answers, solution sheets are not necessary.

NOTES

Meditation:
In meditation, the mind practices staying consciously in the here and now, without pursuing external or internal distractions - this is the root of a truly free choice. Not wandering to other places or times is difficult, however; as soon as you notice the digression, you return to the breath.

If we let ourselves be taken in by our feelings in an uncontrolled way and react accordingly, we are often not satisfied with the result afterwards, e.g.:

- An outburst of anger toward a friend or parent may hurt and offend the other person for a long time and work against meaningful discussion.
- Resentment toward the possessions, recognition, or happiness of others divides people and leads to bad feelings. When we are happy with others and for others, we are happy ourselves.
- When we are interested in others, we ourselves become interesting to others.

Wisdom:
Wisdom is intuitive and spontaneous understanding that subject, object and deed are not separate. Across places and time beings are in connection, which is why their impulses lead to each other, one meets or thinks and says the same. The danger in which a loved one finds himself is also grasped. What appears supersensible, the Buddhist explains by the space nature of the mind. From this also arises joy, which does not depend on conditions and their constant change and transience. Wisdom is also experiential knowledge connected with the desire to decide in such a way that benefit is achieved for as many beings as possible in as long a time as possible.

REFLECTING

Here, the core statement of the Six Liberating Actions should be repeated and secured once again.

The Six Liberating Actions are called this because every meaningful action for the good of all is based on the knowledge and experience that subject, object and action are not separate from each other.

Finally, the students turn once again to the question of happiness in life and connect it with the Buddhist knowledge they have acquired. In plenary, they take a stand and justify how the Six Liberating Actions contribute to happiness.

Optional tasks to conclude:
- What Liberating Action inspired you?
- Draw a cartoon of a situation that changes when you use a Liberating Action.

WORKSHEET 1

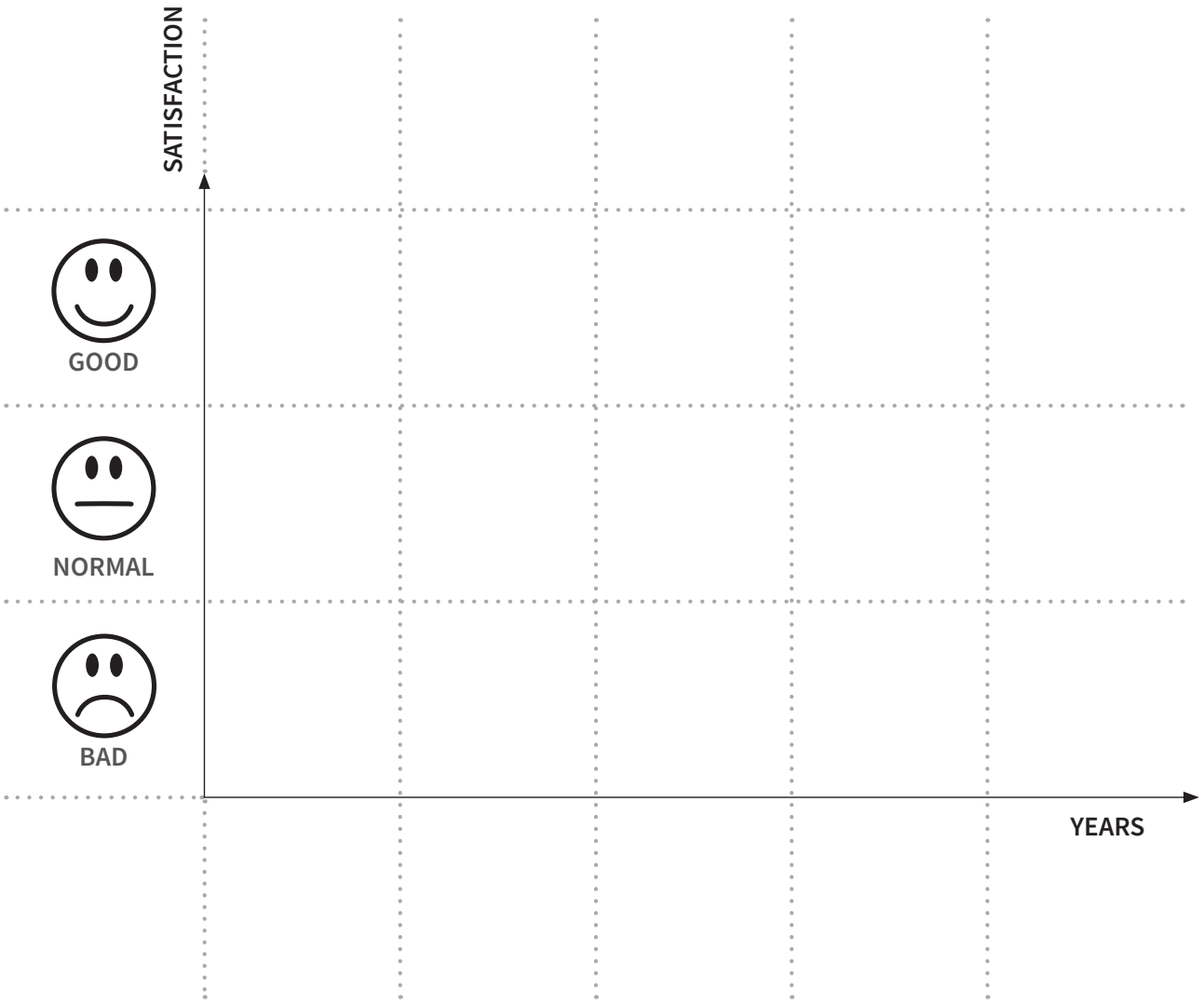
WHAT IS HAPPINESS IN LIFE?

EXERCISES

1. Draw your personal life timeline. Connect each high and, if applicable, low point with an event that has already happened or that you expect to happen in the future.

2. Compare your lifeline with Mr. Schmitz's photo album. What constitutes a happy life for you?

3. Discuss in plenary whether and to what extent lasting happiness is attainable.



MATERIAL 1

PHOTO ALBUM - THE LIFE OF MR. SCHMITZ



"You were so cute," says my Mom.



I managed to graduate from school.



Old car, first girlfriend – it was great!



I am a lawyer, the world is my oyster.



My two sweet kids.



We enjoy life, our children have their own family.



I am in an old age home, and think a lot about my wife who passed away.



I say goodbye to everything I have cherished.



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WORKSHEET 2

THE WAY OF THE BODHISATTVA – THE SIX LIBERATING ACTIONS

THE WAY OF THE BODHISATTVA – THE SIX LIBERATING ACTIONS

In Buddhism, a Bodhisattva is someone who works for the benefit of all beings. Realizing that all people want to be happy and avoid suffering, a strong desire to truly help arises. This becomes the driving force. In the so-called Bodhisattva Pledge, practitioners of Buddhism emphasize that they want to develop their abilities with infinite power and perseverance for the benefit of all. In this, it is important that compassion and wisdom be developed with equal strength. This is because it is useful to give what people need, but not always what they desire. Those who act compassionately without being wise make mistakes, especially in the long run.
A Buddhist assumes that one can develop all the qualities and characteristics attributed to a Buddha. Every situation on the path is used to give the best. Thus, through perseverance, fearlessness, joy and meaningful action are developed to an increasing degree.
One method used by all past and present Bodhisattvas are the Six Liberating Actions:

- **Generosity**
- **Meaningful behavior**
- **Patience**
- **Joyful effort**
- **Meditation**
- **Wisdom**

The first four describe compassionate actions that lead to pleasant and friendly relationships. Through meditation and wisdom, these are internalized and directed in the right direction. Ultimately, this leads to liberation.

Generosity is the sharing of material things, one's strength, time and good feelings. It builds trust and openness, makes friendships rich, and avoids feelings of confinement.

Meaningful behavior keeps human exchange going and is the basis for more growth. It means avoiding causes of trouble and benefiting others as much as possible. Protecting with the body, telling the truth, speaking connectingly instead of intriguing, speaking calmly and kindly instead of speaking disparagingly and disrespectfully, and being benevolent, which means having a fundamentally understanding attitude toward the actions of others, because everyone wants happiness and to avoid suffering and acts out of ignorance rather than malice.

Patience is an antidote to anger. If we give anger a place in our behavior, it eats into us more and more and becomes more and more uncontrollable, so that sometimes friendships become enmities. Patience is the ability to handle difficulties with balance and to face circumstances that cannot be changed, such as illness, without panic.

Joyful Action means always doing our best and working with perseverance and strength for the best for others and ourselves.

Meditation creates space and freedom in one's consciousness. Inwardly, based on good concentration, one sees thoughts and feelings as they appear and pass away. A deeper understanding towards living beings and everyday situations arises.

The growing **wisdom** and insight into one's own mind - the observer who looks through the eyes, hears through the ears and perceives everything - leads to the experience of unconnectedness. Everything and everyone is connected.

EXERCISES

1. Briefly explain the term Bodhisattva.

2. Find appropriate phrases for the first four Liberating Actions and justify your choice.

3. Deepen the first Liberating Action, generosity. For this purpose, imagine an ideal celebration, the moment when you distribute your appropriate and very beautiful gifts:
   How does the person feel who has been given the gift and how does the one feel who has received the gift? In this context, clarify the characteristic of the process of gift giving, keeping in mind the last sentence of the text: "Everything and everyone is connected". Your result will lead you in the direction of Buddhist wisdom.

ANSWERS TO WS 2

THE WAY OF A BODHISATTVA – THE SIX LIBERATING ACTIONS

EXERCISES

1. Briefly explain the term Bodhisattva.

   A Bodhisattva has chosen to develop himself for the benefit of others with all his might.

2. Find appropriate phrases for the first four Liberating Actions and give reasons for your choice.

   Phrases are experiential. They point to certain human characteristics and social values and thus can be a help in various life situations.

   Possible phrases:

   - Generosity: He who gives never loses. Nothing comes from nothing.
   - Sensible behavior: As one calls into the forest, so it resounds out. Everyone is the architect of his own fortune.
   - Patience: Strength lies in calmness. No master has ever fallen from the sky.
   - Joyful effort: The world belongs to the diligent. No pain, no gain.

3. Deepen the first Liberating Action, generosity. For this purpose, imagine an ideal celebration, the moment when you distribute your appropriate and very beautiful gifts:
   How is the one who has been given a gift and how is the one you have given a gift?
   In this context, clarify the characteristic of the process of gift giving, keeping in mind the last sentence of the text: "Everything and everyone is connected". Your result will lead you in the direction of Buddhist wisdom.

   - Both the recipient and the one who gave the gift are happy - and this makes a birthday, anniversary or other celebration a special event. Buddhist wisdom in this context means the interconnectedness of all things and phenomena. The process of giving includes the one who gives from the heart, the giving as an act and a recipient who accepts joyfully. It becomes clear that everything belongs together and no aspect can be missing. If one extends the example, one becomes aware that we influence each other in every situation or with every action - positively as well as negatively.

WORKSHEET 3A

THE FIRST FOUR LIBERATING ACTIONS

GENEROSITY

Generosity opens every situation! It creates trust and makes every human encounter rich. You can be generous in different ways - on the one hand by giving material things and on the other hand with personal commitment, by sharing your strength, good feelings and qualities, by protecting those in need of help, by giving someone an education, by simply being there for others when they need you and giving your time and sympathy. Of course, you benefit others the most by helping them to become independent and always being a good example.

EXERCISES

- Your friend comes to visit. He/she seems grumpy and tense. How can you change the situation in a way that makes sense for everyone involved?
- Do you know situations in which you have acted or reacted generously without thinking about a benefit for yourself? What was that feeling like?
- Have you yourself ever been surprised by someone else's generosity? What effect did this have on you?

MEANINGFUL BEHAVIOR

Every day we do many things, speak countless words, and have many more thoughts of which we are mostly unaware. The second Liberating Action gives tips for valuable interpersonal behavior to shape one's life in a way that is satisfying to oneself and useful to others. When it is understood that behavior governed by love and compassion leads to positive feedback experiences in the long run, everyone will be more responsible with their actions. This only succeeds if one does not allow oneself to be distracted or even determined by external stimuli. If one expresses respect and compassion with what one does, says and thinks, then one not only brings happiness to others, but also places pleasant impressions in one's own mind and thus shapes both the present life and the future.

EXERCISES

- What does a person need from other people in order to feel good? It is best to start from your own desires.
- What does meaningful behavior mean to you on a physical, linguistic, and spiritual level?
- Recall a situation in which you were surprised by the effect of your own compassionate action. What did this trigger internally in you and in the person in question?

PATIENCE

Patience is the opposite of anger! Anger arises from the feeling of weakness, powerlessness, unfulfilled expectations and deeply personal evaluation. Not only friendships and love relationships can be destroyed by it, but also the pleasant impressions in our mind. It's like burning our money to generate some heat. To gain more control over anger, Buddha advises the antidote - patience. Patience is the ability to handle difficulties with emotional balance and to face circumstances that cannot be changed, such as illness, without judgment. When one does not feel oneself to be a target, one better understands that everyone behaves exactly as one feels: one succeeds, for example, in developing compassion for angry people because one understands that they act out of confusion rather than malice and, driven by anger, have little control over their behavior.

EXERCISES

- Imagine you are standing in a queue at the supermarket. There are a few people in front of you and you are already getting a little impatient. Then someone pushes into the queue from the side in front of you.
- Which elements of the situation cannot be changed and which can be changed - externally and internally?
- What possibilities do you have in the situation to master it without getting angry?
- In the situation, how could the person who jumped the gun have behaved to spare your feelings?
- Do you remember a situation where anger caused you to do something that you later greatly regretted? How do you assess that situation today, from a distance and without anger, and how would you act now?

JOYFUL EFFORT

Each training starts with simple tasks, continuously increasing the level of performance. What was laborious and needed overcoming at the beginning, happens effortlessly and playfully after a period of training. It is even fun.

Every time you put extra power into what you are doing, you get extra energy and qualities. Sometimes going beyond usual limits brings strength and endurance. Here everyone has to find out the right measure: to produce a beautiful sound on a guitar, the strings have to be properly tuned. If they are not tight enough, there will be no sound; if they are too tight, they will break. This is as true for working with the mind as it is for all worldly goals.

In fact, scientific research into happiness has confirmed what Buddha said some 2600 years ago: whoever does something voluntarily for others becomes happy. This activity brings growth: Inwardly, one becomes more joyful and powerful; outwardly, things change in a way that today might be described as "improving the quality of life."

EXERCISES

- What do you stand up for? What is meaningful to you and what is meaningful to many people?
- Have you ever achieved something special? What did you put into it?
- Have you ever gotten out of a stuck situation by overcoming yourself? Briefly note your observations.

WORKSHEET 3B

THE FIFTH LIBERATING ACTION

MEDITATION

All people desire happiness and want to avoid suffering. Although this is a universal fact, an outside observer would sometimes have to assume the opposite based on our behavior. Neither schools nor parents can teach their children complete and lasting happiness because they do not have it within themselves.

Every strong experience of happiness, no matter what the circumstances, can be traced back to the same state of mind: One dwells in the here and now; past, future, and other places play no role at this very moment, we just let them go by.

Buddhist meditation is a method of making this state permanent, beyond the ever-changing feelings, thoughts and events. The inner freedom to act, rather than simply to react, grows. This creates space in one's own mind. The more often one practices meditation, the more able one becomes in everyday life to avoid that which leads to suffering and instead do that which benefits others and oneself.

EXERCISES

An experiment: Sit up straight, relax, and focus on your breath as it comes and goes at the tip of your nose. Your entire attention is on the airflow coming and going at the tip of your nose. With each inhale and exhale, count: 1, 2, 3 ... until you reach 21.

Buddhist meditation is not about having no thoughts or achieving better thoughts. When thoughts arise, you recognize them and let them move on. When you get distracted by thoughts, you return to the breath without getting angry.

- Did you manage to stay with the airflow and counting?
- What were you thinking about? About something in the future, about something in the past, about this moment?
- Do you think that you also have so many thoughts in everyday life, you just don't notice them? Could there be a connection between your thoughts and actions?
- Now try to concentrate and not think about a hippo for a while.
- Did you succeed?
- If not, what does that mean for everyday life?
- Are there situations in which you wish you had more distance from feelings?
- If so, which ones?
- Briefly note your observations.

WORKSHEET 3C

THE SIXTH LIBERATING ACTION

WISDOM

Buddhist wisdom does not mean school wisdom and intellectual knowledge, but an intuitive, spontaneous understanding of all things. One experiences every moment in a beyond-personal way, beyond all limiting feelings and conceptual ideas. The more one opens oneself for others, the more one's efforts for one's own "I" recede into the background, and an enormous potential of power is released. This growing treasure of compassion leads at the same time to a clearer understanding of how things are connected and what benefits others. One increasingly experiences that it is natural to be kind. When one realizes that subject, object and action are parts of the same wholeness, the notion of "I'm doing something to you" disappears; instead, one realizes that every action is directly connected to everything. This experience is enriching.

However, it cannot be grasped purely intellectually, but can only be described, for it eludes all concepts and ideas. Much like you can't really convey the taste of sugar with words to someone who has never tasted it.

On the everyday level, everyone encounters their own lack of wisdom again and again: for example, one wants to make a decision for others or oneself, but does not know which action will bring the desired result; it becomes more of a trial-and-error decision in which much hope is placed on the expected solution. All these limitations gradually fall away on the Buddhist path, and every act is imbued with wisdom.

EXERCISES

- You are in the city center. Suddenly, for no apparent reason, you feel like you need to go to a certain building (store, mall, snack bar, etc.). Lo and behold, you run into a very dear person you were going to call today. Has something like this ever happened to you? Tell. What guided you to go into the building?
- Do you know moments when two people think or say the exact same thing?
- Have you ever had inexplicable protection in a dangerous situation?
- Do you know moments when you are just happy, without any external cause or expectation?
- In an argument, is it helpful to look at the whole thing from a higher point of view instead of just insisting on your own point of view? Do you know such situations?
- When planning a major thing, such as a new school building, wisdom is needed to ensure that everyone's needs are considered. Wisdom means comprehensively including everyone. List who to think about.