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

COURSE OF LESSON – SECONDARY LEVEL II

OBJECTIVES

The students will be able to:

- recognize that different ways of acting produce different effects.
- apply the first four Liberating Actions in connection with wisdom as a Buddhist method to an everyday situation.
- understand the liberating aspect of the Liberating Actions and relate them to the Bodhisattva Way.
- understand meditation as a method of developing clarity and peace of mind.

AAPPLICATION	The Liberating Action of Meditation	**WS 3** Students observe and share their experience with one another
SECURING KNOWLEDGE	The Path of the Bodhisattvas	**Material 1** Students read text and check their understanding
(OPTIONAL) DEEPENING	What are the immediate and broader impacts of positive action?	**Excerpt from the series "How I met your mother", season 3 "The chain of screaming"**
EXERCISE	Why are the actions liberating? The Buddhist path – The Six Liberating Actions	**WS 2** **Answers to WS 2** Students develop basics and secure understanding through transfer
INTRO	How can you defuse a tense everyday situation?	**WS 1** Students comment on the situation and make suggestions

BASIS

What might interest the students in the topic:

- How can I react in the best possible way in everyday situations?
- Can I bring happiness into the world?
- How can I make the right decisions for my life?

INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

DIDACTIC REFERENCES – SECONDARY LEVEL II

OBJECTIVES

The students will be able to . . .

1. recognize that different actions produce different effects.
2. apply the first four liberating actions in connection with wisdom as a Buddhist method to an everyday situation.
3. understand the liberating aspect of the Liberating Actions and relate them to the Bodhisattva Way.
4. Understand meditation as a method of developing clarity and peace of mind.

INTRODUCTION

Worksheet 1 presents an everyday scene at a supermarket checkout; the students are led to the question of what actions can be taken to react in a tense situation. The research question is: How can the man in the back make the situation easier for everyone? It should first become clear that in everyday life, small actions are often enough to make a positive difference. For this purpose, group work is suitable; with a suitable class, a role play is also conceivable.

EXERCISE

The Six Liberating Actions are a method from Buddhist teachings to develop compassion and wisdom, resulting in more freedom and happiness.

The students receive **Worksheet 2** with an overview of the Six Liberating Actions. As a group, they develop an understanding of the key messages. The assignments guide them to the understanding that these actions are "liberating" because a state free of suffering is attained, combined with the wisdom of not experiencing oneself as separate from others. The students apply this knowledge to the case study of **Worksheet 1**, the assignments are discussed in plenary. **Answers to WS 2** give possible replies. Despite the different suggestions of the students, a distinction should be made

- Those who are emotionally entangled in a situation often react impulsively instead of acting sensibly and in turn provoke a violent counter-reaction in others.
- With enough distance and composure, one usually has several possibilities to act and can consciously exert a positive influence.
- A Bodhisattva acts for the benefit of living beings. From the deep understanding of a situation he gives the beings what they need for their development.

DEEPENING, OPTIONAL

The topic can be further explored in class discussion by looking at the domino effect of actions. The students have already considered the immediate positive effects of the Liberating Actions for all involved. In a further step, they consider what might happen when these individuals walk out of the supermarket. What actions and impacts do they each bring to their environment? Actions touch not only the specific situation, but beyond that, the reaction of others, who in turn touch wider circles. Thus everything is interpenetrated - the mutual conditionality of all phenomena is to be clarified.

A humorous negative example of the mechanism of action - reaction is shown in **"The chain of screaming", "How I met your mother", season 3, episode 15**. The students turn this negative example into a positive one. They can also relate it again to the situation at the supermarket checkout. The exchange takes place in class discussion in plenary.

Source: How I Met Your Mother. The chain of screaming. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7UFgQNqQXsA [27.01.2026)

SECURING KNOWLEDGE

Material 1 informs about the path of the Bodhisattva up to enlightenment. The students check their understanding individually. Any ambiguities are discussed. The backup can also be done as homework.

APPLICATION – MEDITATION

The students are given the opportunity to have their own short experience of the fifth Liberating Action, meditation. To illustrate the effect of meditation, the teacher introduces an experiment: Some soil is poured into a glass of water and stirred with a spoon, then the spoon is taken out and glass is set aside for the time being. The turbid stirred water corresponds to an unclear mind that expresses itself through many - mostly unconscious - thoughts.

The students now experience a short meditation themselves. The one-minute meditation on **Worksheet 3** is read aloud by the teacher, and then the students receive **Worksheet 3** in order to exchange ideas in the plenary. Perhaps individual students have kept an eye on the water glass and point it out so that everyone understands the analogy when they look at it: The earth has settled and the water is completely clear. The thoughts have come to rest, the mind is clear.

NOTES

Thoughts are a natural expression of the mind. The problem is that we are mostly unaware of the ego-centeredness of our thoughts. Moreover, we cling to them, after the first one a second one forms, then a third one on the same subject. Finally, each of our actions is determined by our thoughts and thus takes on a personal coloring. Becoming free from attachment to our thoughts does not mean suppressing them, but simply letting them move on. This relaxation brings more space and joy to the mind, and so it becomes more natural to act compassionately. Compassionate action is characterized by turning to the other without judgment or expectation, wisdom makes one do the right thing, and meditation in turn strengthens and develops Liberating Actions.

WORKSHEET 1

AT THE SUPERMARKET CHECKOUT



At the very front of the checkout line, a customer wants to pay, but she seems to have forgotten her credit card. The man at the back has to put up with a lot: he's had an intense day at work, the woman with the long brown hair is pushing in front of him, and now an inattentive woman is also pushing the shopping cart into his back. The lady pushing in front now shouts loudly, "Can't we open a second checkout here?" Everyone is annoyed, the situation is tense.

EXERCISES

Put yourself in the shoes of the man at the back. Play out ways he can make the situation easier for everyone. Write down bullet points in the three areas.



WORKSHEET 2

THE PATH OF A BODHISATTVA - THE SIX LIBERATING ACTIONS

Realizing that all living beings want to be happy and avoid suffering, a strong desire to be truly useful arises. This desire becomes the driving force for action. In Buddhism, there is the so-called Bodhisattva Pledge, in which one deepens the attitude of developing all abilities with infinite power and perseverance for the benefit of all. In this, it is important to develop compassion and wisdom with equal strength. For it is useful to give what people need, but not always what they desire. Those who are only compassionate but act without wisdom make mistakes.

A Buddhist assumes that one can build and develop all the enlightened qualities attributed to a Buddha. Every situation on the path is used to give one's best. Thus, through perseverance, fearlessness, joy, and comprehensive love are developed to an increasing degree.

The Bodhisattva Attitude is realized in the Six Liberating Actions.

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

Why are they called "liberating"? Because, on the one hand, it gives you a state that is free from suffering, and on the other hand, it gives you the wisdom that you are not separate from others. The first four describe compassionate action that leads to pleasant and friendly relationships. Through meditation, one attains a stable mind that is less and less influenced by disturbances, which produces joy and single-mindedness. Wisdom should permeate all actions.

GENEROSITY

is the sharing of material and immaterial values. It creates trust and openness, fosters friendships and avoids the feeling of confinement. Generosity opens every situation and enriches every human encounter. One can be generous in various ways: by giving material things; with personal commitment, by sharing one's strength, skills, good feelings and qualities; by protecting those in need of help, by giving someone an education, or by simply being there for others when they need you. Of course, the most beneficial way to help others is to help them become self-sufficient.

MEANINGFUL BEHAVIOR

keeps human exchange going and is the basis for more growth. It means avoiding causes of trouble, making one's own life meaningful, and benefiting others as much as possible. This is expressed through the ten positive actions, such as protecting with the body, speaking the truth, speaking in an open way instead of scheming, speaking calmly and kindly instead of speaking disparagingly and disrespectfully, cultivating a benevolent attitude because everyone wants to have happiness and avoid suffering.

PATIENCE

creates distance from difficulties and goes in two directions: Patience with oneself and with others. One gives oneself and others the space to develop. Patience is the ability to deal with difficulties with emotional balance and to go through circumstances that cannot (yet) be changed. However, this does not mean remaining passive in a bad situation. Patience is an antidote to expectations, prejudice, and anger. Since anger can destroy all established good relationships and make one unhappy oneself, Buddha calls the state of patience the most beautiful but most difficult clothing to wear. One who is full of compassion and remains relaxed in any situation cannot be disturbed by anything and becomes unshakable.

JOYFUL EFFORT

includes perseverance and means that you just like to do something useful for the good of all, defeating your passivity at the same time. Each workout 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 habitual limits brings strength and stamina.

In fact, scientific research on happiness has confirmed what Buddha said some 2600 years ago: doing something voluntarily for others makes you

happy. This doing brings growth and makes life rich. Inwardly, one becomes more joyful; outwardly, things change in a way that today might be described as "improving the quality of life."

MEDITATION

creates a stable mind, which gets more and more ability to rest in itself. Inner freedom grows like a joyful force. A deeper understanding towards all living beings and everyday situations arises. (detailed on Worksheet 3)

WISDOM

Buddhist wisdom is not school wisdom and intellectual knowledge, but intuitive, spontaneous insight. Everything restrictive, which refers only to one's own ego, disappears. On the everyday level, the lack of wisdom becomes apparent when one is supposed to decide for oneself or for others, but does not know which action will bring the desired result. Such limitations gradually fall away on the Buddhist path. Through meditation and meaningful action, one increasingly develops intuitive wisdom. This leads to the experience of a beyond personal view that is not colored by one's own concepts. One recognizes which action is meaningful in a situation.

EXERCISES

Read the text and discuss in the group.

1. Explain why these actions are called “liberating”.

2. Why is wisdom so important in the application of all the Liberating Actions?

3. Specify the attitude and motivation of the man at the back of the supermarket checkout line and compare his actions to the Liberating Actions.

ANSWERS TO WS 2

THE PATH OF A BODHISATTVA - THE SIX LIBERATING ACTIONS

EXERCISES

Read the text and discuss in the group.

1. Explain why these actions are called "liberating".
   - They are liberating because they create free space in one's mind. One experiences consciously and has enough distance and clarity to make meaningful choices. Through a perspective that recognizes how everything is interconnected, one becomes more effective in compassionate action because one sees what is truly beneficial. This results in freedom and happiness.

2. Why is wisdom so important in the application of all Liberating Actions?
   - Because without wisdom, one is generous in meaningless areas, cannot distinguish what is meaningful behavior, patiently endures everything like a donkey, and joyfully and energetically performs useless or even harmful things. Wisdom protects against stupidity.

3. Specify the attitude and motivation of the man at the back of the supermarket checkout line and compare his actions with the "Liberating Actions".
   - The backmost man does not think only of himself; he has a supra-personal attitude that involves the welfare of all.
   - Comparison with the Liberating Actions:

WHAT IS THE UNDERLYING ATTITUDE?	HOW IS THAT EXPRESSED IN SPEECH?	WHAT ACTION TAKES PLACE?
• Has also happened to me before. • The woman is an honest person. I want to help her. • Everyone seems to be maxed out. We need to loosen up. • Although I'm tired because I've had a long day at work, I don't let it spoil my good mood. • No situation is unchangeable.	• He asks how he can help. • He reassures those present and, in a calm, friendly tone, asks them to open a second cash register. • He offers to pay the woman the missing amount in exchange for her address.	• He calmly gives way to the woman who bumped into him and makes some space. • He remains relaxed and calm, smiles at the woman who bumped into him so that she can apologize. • He smiles at the others and makes an appropriate joke that loosens up the situation. • He lays out the money to the woman.

MATERIAL 1

THE PATH OF A BODHISATTVA - THE SIX LIBERATING ACTIONS

At the center of the Great Way (sanskr.: Mahayana) is the **enlightened mind** (sanskr.: bodhicitta, literally heart or root of enlightenment), the desire to achieve enlightenment for the benefit of all beings. This attitude is based on the insight that no convincing reason can be found why one's own happiness would be more significant than the happiness of other beings.

As one discovers more and more inherent qualities in the course of the Buddhist path, compassion and the abilities to help others unfold naturally. This attitude makes both meditation practice and action in everyday life very powerful. Every action becomes the action of a Bodhisattva (literally, "hero of the enlightening mind") and thus a step on the path to enlightenment.

The **enlightenment mind of aspiration** refers to mentally aligning oneself with enlightenment and not forgetting the decision once made, but being careful not to exclude any living being from one's mind. One strengthens this inner attitude at every available opportunity.

The **Bodhisattva promise** to work with infinite strength and perseverance for the good of all living beings from now until enlightenment solidifies this resolve. This pledge applies to all future lifetimes.

In the **enlightenment mind of application**, this attitude is expressed concretely through **the Six Liberating Actions** (sanskr.: paramitas). If this compassionate activity is connected with the insight that experiencer, experienced and experienced - subject, object and deed - cannot be separated from each other and are parts of a wholeness, every action becomes liberating in itself.



1.000-armed Tschenresig (Buddha "Loving Eyes")

The core of the Bodhisattva attitude is the determination not only to attain enlightenment for oneself, but to help all living beings to also free themselves from the endless cycle of rebirths (sanskr.: samsara) and to achieve enlightenment.

WORKSHEET 3

THE PATH OF A BODHISATTVA - THE SIX LIBERATING ACTIONS - MEDITATION

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.

Any strong experience of happiness, no matter what the circumstances, takes place within. One is undistracted in the here and now, not mourning the past, not hoping for the future, and not wishing to be in any other place.

Buddhist meditation is a method to make exactly this state permanent, to stay completely relaxed in the here and now beyond the constantly changing feelings, thoughts and events. This creates more space and joy in the mind. One becomes free and can act meaningfully and consciously. The more often one practices meditation, the more stable the mind becomes and one becomes able to avoid what leads to suffering and instead do what benefits others and oneself.

THE ONE MINUTE MEDITATION

Instructions: In this meditation you will be given the task of counting your breaths for one minute. Inhalation and exhalation are counted as one breath. This exercise is not about the number of breaths, but about one-pointedness and calming the mind.

We sit upright and relaxed, close our eyes and feel the formless stream of air coming and going at the tip of our nose.

(pause)

While doing this, we count our breaths and let thoughts and sounds pass by without judging them.

Attention is gently drawn to the breath.

Buddhist meditation is not about having no thoughts or achieving better thoughts. When thoughts arise, you recognize them as such and let them move on. When one is distracted by thoughts, one returns to the breath.

EXERCISES

- Were you able to stay focused on the airflow and counting?
- What were you thinking about? Something in the future, something in the past, other places, this moment?
- Do you think you have just as many thoughts in everyday life, but you don't notice them? Could there be a connection between your thoughts and actions?

Now try not to think of anything, but just rest in awareness.

- Did that work?
- When not, what does that mean for everyday life?
- Are there situations in which you wish you had more distance from thoughts and feelings?
- If yes, which ones and how could you achieve this?

Conclusion:

Only with enough space in the mind do you have enough distance and clarity. For this, one needs mind training (meditation) and awareness in life. Happiness is a choice: through right view, recognizing how everything is interconnected (wisdom), the positive actions become truly liberating. At the same time, one becomes more and more effective in compassionate action because one sees what is really beneficial.