11 DEATH AND REBIRTH

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DEATH AND REBIRTH

From the Buddhist point of view, every period of time is a transition, whether birth, life, death or dying. Every human being has a body, which is composed of conditions and therefore must also die; the mind, which perceives everything, experiences everything and has all qualities inherent in it, is like space and is indestructible by its very nature, beyond time and unlimited. As long as the mind is connected to the body, one lives. If the mind separates completely from the body, one is dead. It connects after about seven weeks with a new developing body at conception. If one fundamentally understands that the mind cannot die because it is not a thing, one loses the fear of death.

Buddha explained in the teachings on cause and effect that all living beings have corresponding experiences in the cycle of rebirths because of their thoughts, words and deeds, but they can also change them by setting corresponding new causes.

The consciousness (in Buddhism called "mind") connects from life to life with a new body, depending on the impressions collected in the previous lives. If one understands the meaning of cause and effect, one will consciously act sensibly and avoid negative impressions as much as possible. Burdensome impressions that one has not cleared up, and things that one always wanted to do and did not do, make the dying process more difficult. Thus, an essential part of Buddha's teaching is to use life wisely, as one is constantly planting seeds for the future, including future lives.

On the dying process, Buddha gave precise descriptions:
When a person is dying, certain processes take place that can be observed, the inner processes are only experienced by the dying person himself. One increasingly loses control over the solid element in the body, over the bodily fluids, over the warmth and breathing. At the same time, the senses become weaker and the mind more confused and one often encounters one's fears, in general it can be said that one dies as one has lived. If clinical death is established in medicine - the end of life - this does not mean death in Buddhist terms. It takes about another half hour for all the inner energies to dissolve into each other and for consciousness to finally leave the body.

During this half hour after clinical death, it is advisable to leave the body of the dying person alone so that these final energy processes can proceed undisturbed. At this time, the relatives or friends are of great help through calm compassion, conscious presence and trust.

In the so-called Bardo teachings, such as those recorded in the "Tibetan Book of the Dead", there are detailed descriptions of which processes take place in the mind after death. Different phases throw the untrained mind uncontrollably back and forth for 49 days.

According to Buddhist terminology, there are six realms of consciousness in which one can be reborn. The six realms of existence are called samsara (sanskr.: "coming and going", tib: khorwa: "the wheel"). They are not created by anything external or by a higher power, but are the result of past attitudes, actions, and the resulting experience. The spectrum includes all mental states: from extremely sorrowful to very joyful. However, all realms of existence are subject to impermanence and therefore offer no lasting happiness. Only liberation from the cycle means ultimate happiness. This is what is meant by the Sanskrit term "nirvana".

When one is reborn as a human being, the consciousness is drawn to the future parents. It connects with the sperm and egg of the parents and a new life is formed. A new body is formed. Here the effects on the causes set earlier are shown: The tendencies in the mind give an appropriate environment and culture, a body - strong and healthy or fragile and weak - and appropriate mental and emotional attitudes.

Some people - especially in early childhood - can remember past lives. Special abilities of so-called "prodigies" suggest that they have already laid out their special talents in earlier lives. But also our own, clearly existing, special talents, which we did not have the opportunity to develop in this life, suggest causes in former lives.

There are meditation masters who are consciously reborn because of their Bodhisattva attitude, such as the Karmapas, Shamarpas or Dalai Lamas. They are highly realized or even fully enlightened and free from the cycle of rebirths, but they come back in a human body out of compassion for the benefit of living beings.

In some Buddhist schools, there are meditations that are aimed at placing the consciousness in a suffering-free state after death, in what is called a "Pure Land." This is the force field of a Buddha, which he manifests based on his strong wishes for the benefit of living beings. The Pure Land of the Buddha of Limitless Light (Tibetan "Dewachen," which means "Land of Supreme Joy") is one of these perfect realms.

INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

COURSE OF LESSON – SECONDARY LEVEL I

OBJECTIVES

The students will be able to . . .

- explain different models of becoming and passing away.
- understand that actions according to cause and effect influence rebirth.
- reflect on the Buddhist view of the dying process, death and rebirth.
- learn about the accompanying steps in the dying process.

DEEPENING KNOWLEDGE	Advice for relatives and friends	**Material 3** Students learn about accompanying steps Students discuss freely
(STEP 2) EXERCISE 2	Dying, Death and Rebirth from a Buddhist Perspective	**WS 2 and Answers to WS 2** Students work out information for themselves Students compare answers
(STEP 1) EXERCISE 2	Which rebirth would you prefer? Reflection on the connection with cause and effect	**WS 1 and Answers to WS 1** Students engage in a thought experiment Students discuss
EXERCISE 1	Three models of becoming and ceasing: nihilism, eternalism, and Buddha's teaching on the space nature of the mind	**Material 2** Students discuss the models and express their own point of view
INTRO	Death - all over and done with? Fear of death?	**Material 1** Students approach the subject matter

BASIS

What might interest the students about the topic:

- Is everything over after death?
- Is there reincarnation?
- Should one be afraid of death?

INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

DIDACTIC REFERENCES – SCONDARY LEVEL I

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to ...

1. explain different models of becoming and passing away.
2. understand that actions according to cause and effect influence rebirth.
3. reflect on the Buddhist view of the dying process, death and rebirth.
4. learn about accompanying steps in the dying process.

INTRODUCTION

Material 1 offers a quiet introduction to the topic of the lesson with the presentation of a simple coffin with flowers. The students are asked to think about death and to ask themselves if and how it somehow continues. A wide variety of ideas and beliefs may be expressed. Fear of death may also be discussed.

EXERCISE 1

Material 2 shows three possible models of life and where it comes from and where it goes. The texts next to the simple sketches explain these models. Students work out an understanding in plenary by mentally acting out these possibilities. The third model leads to the subject of the lesson, the Buddhist understanding of death and birth.

NOTES

According to Buddhist conception, birth and death are not the beginning and end of our being, but transitions. Death is like a change of clothes. The body is transient and dissolves, the "mind" remains. Its essence is omniscient, fearless space and its expression is constant, supreme joy. In enlightenment, the mind is like the sun shining by itself. The experience of this space nature of mind is possible in meditation and in the dying process. The unenlightened mind connects from life to life with a new body and with an ego conception. The Buddhist methods aim at dissolving these and realizing the true nature of the mind.

EXERCISE 2

Step 1:

Worksheet 1 offers a thought experiment. The students playfully get involved in the topic of reincarnation.
Working in groups, the students write down their ideas and gain an understanding of the connection with cause and effect. They formulate a core statement in their own words. They begin to comprehend what Buddha taught: that all actions with body, speech, and mind have effects and influence future rebirths beyond one lifetime.

If needed, open questions and findings are reconciled in plenary. There is no need to decide whether they believe in rebirth or think it is possible. Accordingly to **Answers to WS 1** only offer suggestions.

Step 2:

The text on **Worksheet 2** now brings in detail basic Buddhist information about the indestructible space nature of the mind, the stages of the dying process, and the influencing factors in rebirth.

Students read the text and answer the questions in partner work to ensure their understanding. Afterwards, the answers are presented and compared in plenary. **Answers to WS 2** offer possible solutions to the questions.

DEEPENING KNOWLEDGE

To conclude the topic, the question is asked: What helps in the dying process? What can those present do for the dying person?

Material 3 contains recommendations for relatives and friends. The students first read these silently and let them sink in. The concluding questions provide impulses for the approach that dying can take place without fear if all those involved contribute to a calm atmosphere. The students exchange ideas freely in the plenary.

MATERIAL 1

DEATH – IS IT ALL OVER?

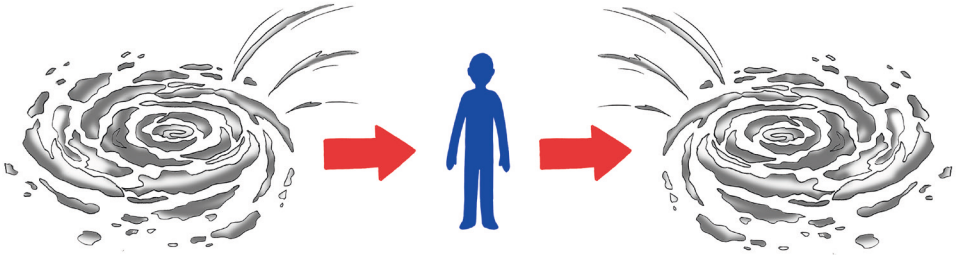


MATERIAL 2

WHERE DO WE COME FROM? WHAT HAPPENS AFTER DEATH?

NIHILISTIC/MATERIALISTIC MODELS

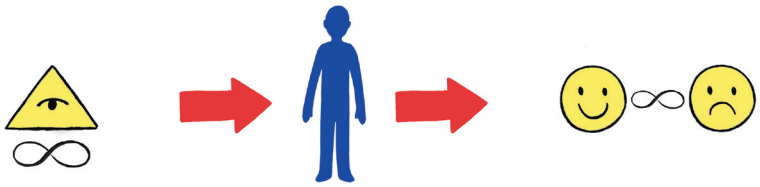
Coincidence rules the world. Our existence has come into being by chance from nothing and dissolves again into nothing. Our brain/the matter is that what produces the mind. After the death of the brain, the mind dissolves again into nothingness.



Nothing/dead matter | Existence | Nothing/dead matter

ETERNALISTIC MODELS

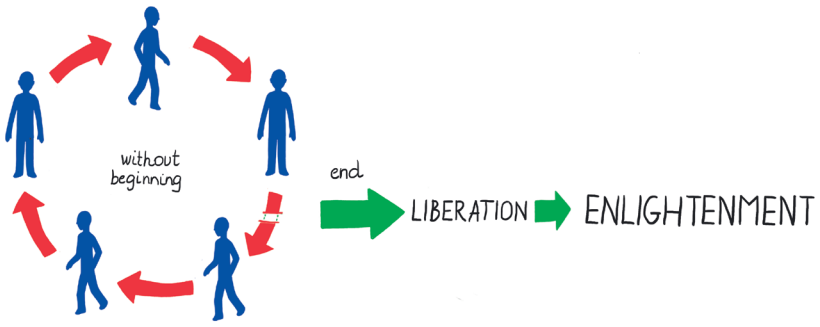
A creator god or a power of fate creates our existence. After death, one enters an eternal state that is pleasant (paradise) or unpleasant (hell).



Power of fate / Creator God | Existence | Heaven / Hell

BUDDHIST MODEL

The mind is, by its very nature, both timeless and unlimited. It is neither born nor can it die. It is like space in that everything is possible. As long as one is not liberated and enlightened, one remains in the cycle of rebirths.
The mind connects to a new body from life to life, depending on the nature of the stored impressions. According to the law of cause and effect, previous thoughts, words and deeds lead to the next rebirth.

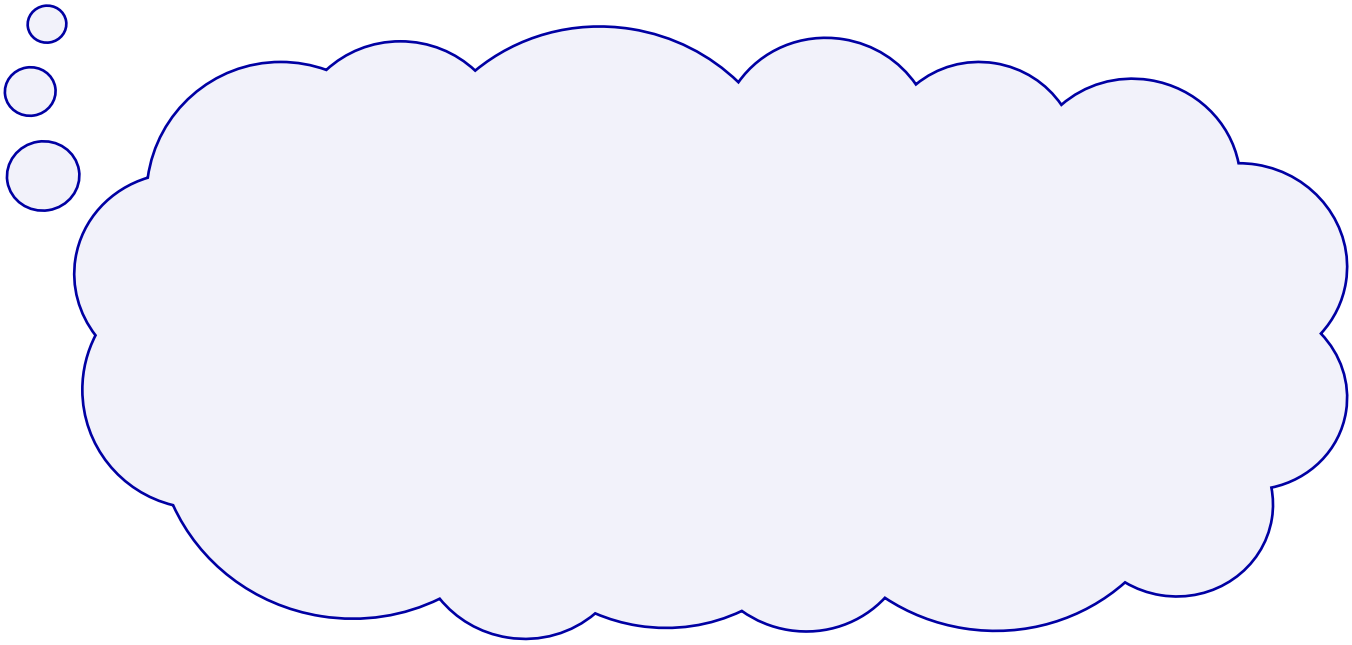


The cycle of rebirths - liberation is possible

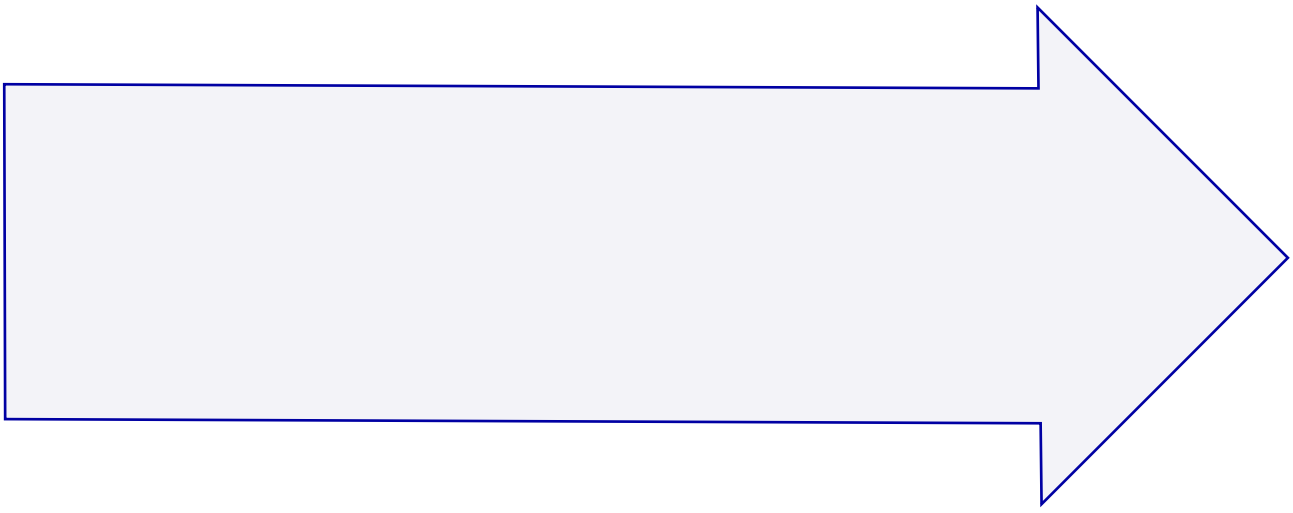
WORKSHEET 1

A THOUGHT EXPERIMENT

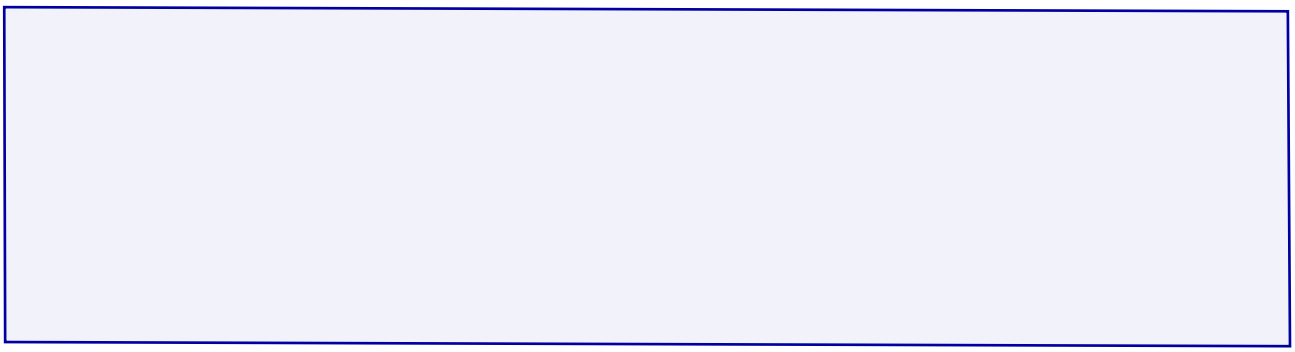
1. If reincarnation exists, which rebirth would you prefer?
   Discuss in the group and write down your ideas.



2. Consider what causes are necessary to achieve this rebirth. What can you do now to start with a better starting position in the next round? Write down your ideas in bullet points - fun ideas are also allowed.



3. Formulate a core statement about cause and effect.



ANSWERS TO WS 1 A THOUGHT EXPERIMENT

1. If reincarnation exists, which rebirth would you prefer?
   Discuss in the group and write down your ideas.

Possible individual answers about what and how you would like to be, and where:

e.g. I would like to be King of England, Formula 1 driver, a famous singer, chef, doctor, inventor ...

a sound in the universe, handsome, intelligent, rich, happy ...

in a good environment, with intact environment ...

2. Consider what causes are necessary to achieve this rebirth. What can you do now to start with a better starting position in the next round? Write down your ideas in bullet points - fun ideas are also allowed.

I should already train and develop appropriate skills!

Doing good brings good results.

I cannot influence it now, can I?

Make wishes that it happens.

Already train myself, maintain appropriate contacts and build up meaningful habits.

3. Formulate a core statement about cause and effect.

Examples:

I can only reap what I have sown.

Every action has consequences.

Without a cause, there is no effect.

WORKSHEET 2

DEATH AND REBIRTH FROM A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

From a Buddhist perspective, death, like birth, is a transition. Bodies pass away, while the mind, the "experiencer of all things," is indestructible like space. Our awareness - that which now looks through the eyes and listens through the ears, that which thinks and feels - our mind is, by its very nature, timeless and unlimited. Understanding the fundamental indestructibility of mind, one loses the fear of death.

Buddha explained in the teachings on cause and effect that all living beings have corresponding experiences in the cycle of rebirths due to their thoughts, words and deeds, but can also change them by setting corresponding new causes.

Consciousness (called 'mind' in Buddhism) connects to a new body from life to life, depending on the impressions gathered in previous lives. If one understands the meaning of cause and effect, one will consciously act sensibly and avoid negative impressions as much as possible. Burdensome impressions that one has not cleared up, and things that one always wanted to do and did not do, make the dying process more difficult. Thus, an essential part of Buddha's teaching is to use life meaningfully, as one is constantly planting the seeds for the future, including future lives.



The Buddha of Limitless Light (sanskr.: Amithaba, tib.: Öpame)

What actually happens when we die?
When a person is dying, processes take place that can be observed. The body becomes heavy, the dying person has less and less control over it. Gradually, the body loses warmth and breathing becomes shallower and shallower until it stops altogether. While doctors declare the person clinically dead at this point, in Buddhist terms he is not yet dead because internal processes are still taking place. It takes about another half hour for all the internal energies to dissolve into each other.
In the half hour after clinical death, it is advisable to leave the body of the dying person alone so that these processes can proceed undisturbed. At this time, the relatives can be of great help through quiet compassion, conscious presence and trust.

The body remains as a corpse, the mind experiences in the next phase of usually 49 days an intermediate state, comparable to the experience in a dream. More and more the bridges to the old life are torn down and the stored habitual patterns lead to a new rebirth.

The consciousness is drawn to the future parents. It connects with the sperm and egg of the parents and a new life emerges. A new body is formed. Here, too, cause and effect apply: Where is one reborn - in an environment and culture where one enjoys freedom and support or under difficult circumstances? What is the nature of the body - strong and healthy or weak and sick? With what mental tendencies is one endowed - is one benevolent and helpful or begrudging and aggressive? An essential part of Buddha's teaching is to use one's life wisely in order to live, die and be reborn well.

Some people - especially in early childhood - can remember past lives. Special abilities of so-called "prodigies" suggest that they have already developed their special talents in previous lives.

There are meditation masters who are consciously reborn because of their Bodhisattva attitude, such as the Karmapas, Shamarpas or Dalai Lamas. They are

enlightened and free from the cycle of rebirths, but they come back in a human body out of compassion for the benefit of living beings.

In some Buddhist schools, there are meditations aimed at bringing the consciousness to a state free of suffering after death, to a so-called "Pure Land", in Tibetan "Dewachen", which means "Land of Supreme Joy".

EXERCISES

Discuss the questions with your partner and mark the appropriate places in the text.

1. What is the relationship between mind and body from a Buddhist perspective?
2. How does our life come into being from a Buddhist point of view?
3. Why should the dying person be left alone for half an hour after clinical death?
4. Is it possible to support the deceased?
5. Can one die without fear?

ANSWERS TO WS 2

DEATH AND REBIRTH FROM A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

EXERCISE

Discuss the questions with your partner and mark the appropriate places in the text.

Possible answers:

1. What is the relationship between mind and body from a Buddhist perspective?
   Mind connects to a new body from life to life. Bodies come into being and pass away.
   Mind is indestructible.

2. How does our life come into being from the Buddhist point of view?
   Consciousness is drawn to the future parents.
   It connects with the seed and egg of the parents and a new life is formed.
   A new body is formed.

3. Why should the dying person be left alone for half an hour after clinical death?
   Because internal processes are still going on that should not be disturbed.

4. Can one support the deceased?
   Yes, with compassion, conscious presence and giving confidence.

5. Can one die without fear?
   - One can consciously live sensibly and do as little as possible that is burdensome
   - One can consider cause and effect and set meaningful seeds for the future
   - One can meditate
   - If one understands that the mind in its true essence is timeless and unlimited

MATERIAL 3

PRACTICAL ADVICE FOR RELATIVES AND FRIENDS

In the dying person's room there should be a pleasant, quiet atmosphere in which one feels comfortable.

The people in the dying person's immediate environment should be real friends. Inauthentic feelings are experienced as disturbing.

One accompanies the dying person as naturally as possible and is aware of the significance of what is happening.

One sits quietly next to him - preferably at the head end - and does not engage in superfluous conversations. One gives thanks for the wonderful time shared, also for what one has learned. One reassures and encourages that he/she will make the transition well.

The dead body should be left alone for the next half hour after the last exhalation, so that the inner dying process can proceed undisturbed.

If desired, relatives and friends can say a final goodbye.

The legacy of the dead should be dealt with appreciatively.

One should speak only well of the dead person and be generous on his behalf.

One makes wishes for the deceased and meditates in his name.

WHAT WOULD YOU PLACE PARTICULAR EMPHASIS ON?

HOW DO THESE RECOMMENDATIONS HELP EVERYONE INVOLVED SO THAT THE DYING PROCESS CAN BE EXPERIENCED AS CALMLY AND SERENELY AS POSSIBLE?