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 II

OBJECTIVES

The students will be able to . . .

- understand that the space nature of mind is timeless and indestructible.
- reflect on the Buddhist view of the dying process, death and rebirth.
- comprehend how cause and effect, motivation and viewpoint affect rebirth.
- learn about the Buddhist concept of Pure Lands.

(OPTIONAL) ROUNDUP	The Buddha of Limitless Light and his Pure Land	**Material 2** Students getting informed
DEEPENING AND SECURING KNOWLEDGE	Using one's life wisely	**WS 3 and Answers to WS 3** Students grasp Buddhist core statements on meaningful action Students discuss
EXERCISE 2	Death, dying and rebirth from the Buddhist perspective	**WS 2 and Answers to WS 2** Students work by asking questions and discussing Students propose answers
EXERCISE 1	Buddha's teaching on the space nature of the mind and the cycle of rebirths	**WS 1 and Answers to WS 1** Students get an initial understanding
INTRO	Suddenly in the vastness of space - a completely new perspective	**Material 1** Students get an idea of the topic

BASIS

What might interest the students about the topic:

- What happens after death?
- What does rebirth mean?
- Is it necessary to be afraid of death?

INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS

DIDACTIC REFERENCES – SECONDARY LEVEL II

OBJECTIVES

Students will be able to ...

1. understand that the spatial nature of mind is timeless and indestructible.
2. reflect on the Buddhist view of the dying process, death, and rebirth.
3. comprehend how cause and effect, motivation and viewpoint affect rebirth.
4. learn about the Buddhist concept of Pure Lands.

INTRODUCTION

Through the illustration of the raptor with a mouse in its claws, the pupils are encouraged to comprehend an unexpectedly sudden change of perspective. Just as the mouse is amazed at the unfamiliar vastness and feels no fear, one can allow a new experience and get an inkling of space and fearlessness. The pupils look at **Material 1** and freely comment on the mouse's extraordinary reaction. The fact that it does not freeze in fear in the face of its certain demise underlines the theme of the lesson.

EXERCISE 1

Worksheet 1 shows the same picture, now short quotations and tasks guide the pupils to the Buddhist idea of the space nature of the mind. The Buddhist model of rebirth is introduced with text and drawing. In this approach, the students gain a first understanding in order to receive basic information about the Buddhist view on **Worksheet 2.** The students exchange information in groups. The teacher gives possible **Answers to WS 1.**

NOTES

According to Buddha's teaching, birth and death are not beginning and end, but transitions. Death is like a change of clothes, so to speak. The space nature of the mind is timeless awareness, indestructible, without beginning and end. The body is transient and dissolves, the mind remains.

EXERCISE 2

On **Worksheet 2**, basic information is given about the space nature of the mind, about the dying process and the influencing factors in rebirth. The students read the text, discuss it in groups and answer the questions. Afterwards, the answers are presented in plenary. **Answers to WS 2** give possible solutions to the questions.

DEEPENING AND SECURING KNOWLEDGE

Worksheet 3 summarizes in three steps the levels on which Buddha gave teachings to use life wisely in order to live, die and be reborn better. The first is to understand that actions have consequences and to use the function of cause and effect wisely. It is further about the basic attitude of not separating one's own happiness from the happiness of others, and lastly about building trust in the space nature of mind through a beyond-personal, limitless view. Buddhist meditation is a proven means of both developing mindfulness and compassion and experiencing the space nature of mind. Students work an understanding and back it up through group work.

Answers to WS 3 give the possible solutions to the questions. In plenary, an exchange takes place.

ROUNDUP, OPTIONAL

Material 2 introduces the Buddha of Limitless Light Opame and his Pure Land Dewachen with text and pictures. The students learn that in Buddhism there is the idea of Pure Lands, which are realms of consciousness without suffering, where one can develop safely and well. The students reflect and express themselves freely on the text and image statements, leaving the information as it is. The encounter with the Pure Land thus offers a quiet conclusion to the lesson's topic.

MATERIAL 1

DEATH - BEYOND PREVIOUS CONCEPTIONS - SUDDENLY IN THE VASTNESS OF SPACE



WORKSHEET 1

DEATH - BEYOND PREVIOUS CONCEPTIONS - SUDDENLY IN THE VASTNESS OF SPACE



EXERCISES

Discuss in groups.

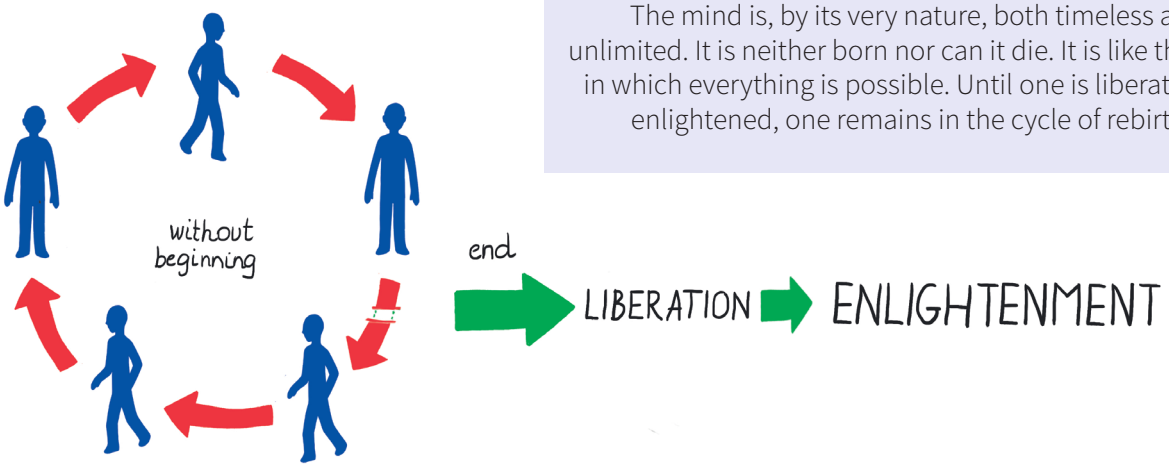
1. What does the change of perspective trigger in the mouse? What is the new experience?

2. Relate this new experience to the Buddhist quotation.

> "May the knowledge of the space nature of the mind remove the fear of dying from many people."

BUDDHIST MODEL - WHERE DO WE COME FROM? - WHAT HAPPENS AFTER DEATH?

3. Explain the illustration.



The mind is, by its very nature, both timeless and unlimited. It is neither born nor can it die. It is like the space in which everything is possible. Until one is liberated and enlightened, one remains in the cycle of rebirths.

ANSWERS TO WS 1

DEATH - BEYOND PREVIOUS CONCEPTIONS - SUDDENLY IN THE VASTNESS OF SPACE

EXERCISES

Discuss in groups.

1. What does the change of perspective trigger in the mouse? What is the new experience?
   - wow, magnificent in the sky
   - the mouse has never seen the world like this
   - it feels free and light
   - it is amazed and stunned
   - it is not afraid
   - it has the view from above for the first time

2. Relate this new experience to the Buddhist quotation.
   - in death the ego leaves the familiar realm
   - the mind can grasp its vastness
   - its essence is like space, open and boundless
   - death is a door into a new space

BUDDHIST MODEL - WHERE DO WE COME FROM? - WHAT HAPPENS AFTER DEATH?

3. Explain the graphic.

The students summarize a description of the cycle of rebirths in their own words. It is not yet about a basic understanding, but the students ask questions and approach by guessing. For instance, is the cycle endless? How do one achieve liberation? Aha, there is a gap! What could it mean? What is enlightenment? Is there no turning back?

WORKSHEET 2

DEATH AND REBIRTH FROM A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

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. Understanding this fundamentally, that the mind cannot die, 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 generally called 'mind' - connects from life to life with a new body, depending on the impressions gathered 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 meaningfully, as one is constantly planting the seeds for the future, including future lives.

The Buddha gave precise descriptions of the dying process:
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 elements in the body, over the body 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.
During this half hour after clinical death, it is advisable to leave the body of the dying person alone



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

so that these final energy processes can proceed undisturbed. At this time, the relatives are of great help through calm compassion, conscious presence and trust.

In the so-called Bardo teachings 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.
When one is reborn as a human being, the 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. Here the effects on the causes set earlier are shown:

The tendencies in the mind give a corresponding environment and culture, a body - strong and healthy or susceptible and weak - and the same 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 invested 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 suffering-free state after death, to a so-called "Pure Land", in Tibetan "Dewachen", which means "Land of Supreme Joy".

EXERCISES

Discuss in your group and mark corresponding passages in the text.

1. How is the "space nature of the mind" described?
2. What is the relationship between mind and body from a Buddhist perspective?
3. Why are beings in the cycle of rebirth?
4. Explain why it is important to become aware of one's habits of thought and action and to change them if necessary.

ANSWERS TO WS 2

DEATH AND REBIRTH FROM A BUDDHIST PERSPECTIVE

EXERCISES

Discuss in your group and mark appropriate passages in the text.

1. How is the "space nature of mind" described?
   - indestructible, timeless, unlimited

2. What is the relationship between mind and body from a Buddhist perspective?
   - The body dies, it remains as a corpse.
   - Mind perceives everything, experiences and all qualities are inherent in it.
     It is always present with all its stored impressions or tendencies and connects with a new body.
   - Mind cannot die, death as well as birth are a transition.

3. Why are beings in the cycle of rebirth?
   - Because they set seeds through their thoughts, words and deeds that lead to corresponding experiences.
   - These main tendencies stored in the mind reappear in the future life, along with the appropriate circumstances and conditions.

4. Explain why it is important to become aware of one's habits of thought and action and to change them if necessary.
   - It makes sense to use life, because according to cause and effect you reap what you have sown.
   - One can consciously act sensibly and avoid negative impressions.
   - Good habits can be further developed and perfected.
   - Burdensome impressions that one has not processed and cleared up make the dying process more difficult.
   - The main tendencies stored in the mind influence where and under which circumstances one is reborn.

WORKSHEET 3

BUDDHIST CORE MESSAGES TO USE LIFE WISELY

1. ABOUT CAUSE AND EFFECT

Actions and their effects correspond to each other. If you wish to be reborn in good conditions, you must set corresponding causes through your actions.

healthy, long life	
wealth, always having enough	
harmony, kindness	
one hears the truth, enjoys prestige	
you have enough friends	
to hear pleasant things about oneself	
what one says causes changes	
balanced state of mind	
one has confidence in others	
acumen	

Task: Assign meaningful actions to.

Protecting life - auspicious sexual behavior - creating harmony - being benevolent - meaningful speech - being frugal and content - generosity - telling the truth - developing the right outlook - speaking calmly and confidently.

2. ABOUT MOTIVATION AND ATTITUDE

Feelings and attitudes color our experience and shape further development. Which attitude brings happiness both in the present and in future lives?

- May all living beings be happy
- I don't care how others are doing
- The main thing is that I have my advantage
- Act for the benefit of all

Task: Give reasons for your selection! Discuss in the group.

3. ABOUT THE VIEW

The more one understands that the mind is intrinsically indestructible, the sooner expectations and fears dissolve and one is free to dwell or act in the moment.

Task: Discuss. This "staying free in the moment" gives a taste of the space nature of the mind. Do you know such brief moments? Do you know the feeling of being more than the limited self? Why can't you hold this feeling of freedom permanently? How what can you practice it?

ANSWERS TO WS 3

BUDDHIST CORE MESSAGES TO USE LIFE WISELY

1. ABOUT CAUSE AND EFFECT

Task: Assign meaningful actions to.

healthy, long life	protect life
wealth, always having enough	generosity
harmony, kindness	happiness bringing sexual behavior
one hears the truth, enjoys prestige	telling the truth
you have enough friends	creating harmony
to hear pleasant things about oneself	speaking calmly and confidently
what one says causes changes	meaningful speech
balanced state of mind	being frugal and content
one has confidence in others	to be benevolent
acumen	to develop the right outlook

2. ABOUT MOTIVATION AND ATTITUDE

Task: Give reasons for your choices. Discuss in the group.

The first and last answers are correct. The attitude should be such that I do not separate everyone's happiness from my own happiness. Because in the long run, this attitude leads to habitual tendencies and shapes the experience.

3. ABOUT THE VIEW

Task: Discuss. This "staying free in the moment" gives a taste of the space nature of the mind. Do you know such brief moments? Do you know the feeling of being more than the limited self? Why can't you hold this feeling of freedom permanently? How what can you practice it?

- The students exchange experiences, such as experiences in sports (skiing, surfing, climbing), in nature (mountains, sea), in love, with good friends, when you help someone ...
- In above mentioned situations you experience the here and now powerfully and intensively and forget to think about yourself.
- The feeling of freedom is not to be held, if fears and hopes of the ego overlay the moment, if expectations narrow, if disturbing feelings cloud, ...
- Meditation is a method to overcome the ego attachment and to dwell in the space nature of the mind. It is also practiced in everyday experience by allowing the aha moments of openness and being aware in the here and now.

MATERIAL 2

THE BUDDHA OF LIMITLESS LIGHT AND HIS PURE LAND

"A pure land is defined as the power-field of a buddha. It is not a place to which one can get physically, but a beyond-personal, unconditioned, joyful-playful state of mind, in which all conditions for liberation and enlightenment are present.

Since the illusion of an existing "I" has been dissolved, both ultimate wisdom and great merit will be accumulated fast and powerfully and will not be lost again. Now fullness and richness of mind are experienced, which is the buddha nature of everybody. [...]

The best known pure Land, accessible to all, is the field of Highest Bliss (Skr. ***sukhavati***, Tib. ***dewachen***) of the Buddha of Limitless Light. [...]

Instead of being driven into a new birth within the cycle of the six worlds of experience during the intermediate state, development is guarenteed here. One will return from this realm in a new body for the benefit of others or work as a helpful influence from out of space."

(Lama Ole Nydahl: Fearless Death, Diamond Way Press, 2012, page 158-9)



„OM AMI DEWA HRIH“ is the mantra of Buddha of Limitless Light. Mantras are recited to awaken the energy field of the respective Buddha.