

BIG IDEAS THAT CHANGED THE WORLD OF DISABILITY

DISABILITY IN BUDDHIST CULTURE

Information Pack

What is the cause of our suffering? The Buddha's Big Idea

Presented by
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About the Workshop

About Mai Anh

Background to Buddha's big idea

"Build your palace" activity

Key words for this workshop

About the Workshop

1. Saying hallo - your name and ONE thing you want to tell us.
2. Mai-Anh will give a short talk with some slides
3. Activity - build your palace...
4. Discussion - what does this mean to you?
5. Final thoughts

ABOUT MAI ANH BOGER



Mai-Anh works at the university of Regensburg (southern Germany). For her research, she works with people who have been traumatized. She is interested in how society deals with trauma, vulnerability, and distress.

We know that disability is seen in different ways in different countries and cultures

My mum is from Vietnam.

In Vietnam many people believe in the teachings of Buddha. Their beliefs affect how they think about disability.

For that reason, I thought a lot about how being disabled feels differently when you live in a different culture.

This helped me to understand my own disability in a new way. Learning about different beliefs gives us new stories on what disability could mean — in a different culture or country or in a different world.

Background - Buddha and Buddhism

The story of the Buddha

[watch an animation here](#)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HLIQCwOYSnY>

He was born a really long time ago: 500 years before Jesus.

Buddha was a rich prince.

A wise man said to his father

“When your son grows up he will see things that make him sad. He will leave home to find out more”.

The King did not want this to happen.

So he kept the young prince in the palace. He gave him a beautiful life with lots of possessions, and a lovely wife.

He thought that his son would never leave, and then would become king.

But one day the prince did go outside the palace with his servant. He saw a very old man for the first time.

“Who is that?” He asked. The servant said “This is an old man. One day we will all be old”. The prince felt sad.

Then he saw an ill man for the first time. “Why is the man crying?” he asked.

The servant said "He is crying because he is ill and in pain".
The prince felt sad again.

Then he saw a dead body for the first time. The family were weeping.

The servant explained about death.

The prince said "Do we all have to get old, ill, and die?"

Now he knew that that something was missing in his palace.

He knew he was rich and privileged

So he asked himself: How can I help other people?"

"How can I do this without looking down to them/patronizing them? "

He left his palace and went out into the world. He just took a bowl for people to give him food.

He went looking for answers to the question

Why do we suffer?

He became a great teacher.

you can watch an animation here

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HLIQCwOYSnY>

The religion is Buddhism

There are millions of Buddhists all over the world.

Disability, Culture and Suffering

People have different beliefs about disability.

In some cultures people think disability is a punishment for something a person, or their family, has done wrong.

In some cultures, people think disability is the result of a curse or a spell.

In many cultures, people think disability is the will of God.

And in some cultures people think a disabled child is very special, a gift to take care of.

In the West, people with disabilities are often shown as suffering and worthy of pity. For example in these adverts¹

Buddhism tells us something different.

Suffering is not caused by disability.

Suffering affects us all.

Buddha believed that disability is NOT the cause of our suffering

If you exclude and refuse to include people with disabilities then you create suffering not only for others but also for yourself

We all need to think about how we are “privileged” and “rich” and what we do not like to see and exclude from our lives

How can we create a place wherein every disabled person feels welcome — no matter from which culture or class they come from or which gender they have?

Mai -Anh will explain

¹ Group differences in response to charity images of children with Down syndrome
Beth Miller, Robert Jones, and Nick Ellis <https://library.down-syndrome.org/en-gb/research-practice/01/3/>

Key words

Culture - the ideas, customs, and social behaviour of a particular people or society.

Suffering - pain, misery, loss

Privilege - having rights and good things that happen because of your position in society.

Comfort zone - the place where you feel things feel safe and in control.

Build your palace

We all like to stay in our comfort zones

We all want to avoid suffering

In this activity we will think about what makes us feel comfortable

We will think about how we might need to come out of our comfort zones to help others and manage our fear of suffering.

You can bring some bricks eg. Lego, if you like

Or just drawing materials

Think about leaving our comfort zone or palace

Choose an **object** you would take with you on your journey to help you and others on the way

Some Questions

- Are these ideas new to you?
- How does the idea about all life being suffering change the way we think about disability?
- Is this idea different to how people in the West think about disability
- Do you know any other religions and their ideas on disability?