

# **TRANQUIL WISDOM INSIGHT MEDITATION**

Samatha-Vipassanā Meditation  
based on the Sutta Piṭaka

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***It is said that love comes through a window in the heart.  
But if there are no walls, there's no need to have a window.***

*Rumi (13<sup>th</sup> century Sufi poet)*

***Then, with his heart filled with loving-kindness,  
he dwells suffusing one quarter, the second, the third the fourth.  
Thus, he dwells suffusing the whole world,  
upwards, downwards across, everywhere,  
always with a heart filled with loving-kindness,  
abundant, unbounded, without hate or ill-will.***

*The Buddha, Tevijja Sutta*

## Preface

While living in Japan in the early 1970's I had my first opportunity to participate in a week of intensive Zen meditation. That week changed my life. From that time, I have made daily meditation and occasional meditation retreat a part of my life, no matter how busy the affairs that press for my attention.

Over the past four decades I have had the opportunity to study with a number of excellent Buddhist (and a few non-Buddhist) meditation teachers. Like any normal human being, due to my dispositions, some paths or methods seem to work better for me than others. For all of these teachers and teachings, I am grateful, and hope I am a bit better as a human being due to their guidance, which I have made my best efforts to follow. Meeting with the precious Buddha Dharma in this lifetime, or any lifetime is most auspicious, and an opportunity not to be wasted.

Over time, I perceived that my progress in meditation seemed slower than what I thought was warranted by the amount of effort I was putting into the meditation. Patience in the realm of meditation is certainly a virtue, but slow progress can also indicate either that one's efforts are misguided or that the technique is not the most suitable one.

My meditation experience changed with my discovery of a small book *The Ānāpānasati Sutta* by Ven. Bhante Vimalaramsi Mahathera. While staying in London at a Vajrayāna Buddhist Center, I found a copy of this small book on the *Mindfulness of Breathing Sutta*. It was interesting to find a book concerning a Pali *sutta* amidst so many books by Tibetan Lamas and Rinpoches, and I read it straight through.

In this first edition of the book, published by The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational Foundation in Taiwan, there was no indication of who the author of the book was, other than his name. From a few clues in the book, I guessed him to be a Burmese monk or a foreign monk living in Myanmar (Burma). As I found out later, my

surmise about the author was correct, but it took me about two years to find another copy of the book or to contact the author. As it was a library book, I was unable to take it with me on my flight to New York the next day, and unable to find the book anywhere else, I practiced from memory for the next two years. In those two years, using my memory of his little book as a guide, I changed my approach to meditation and was amazed at how quickly my progress came. Patience may be a virtue in meditation, but progress is also a virtue!

Two years later, upon finding another copy of the book, I was able to track down the author who is, indeed, an American Buddhist monk (*bhikkhu*) who trained in Burma. I have been able to do retreat with him and to get his guidance concerning my practice. Entering Bhante's practice of Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation (TWIM), along with my first experience of sitting Zen week (*sesshin*) in Japan, has been perhaps the most significant event in my life. This book, based on my original PhD thesis, is an effort to evaluate the TWIM claim to be a system of meditation based on the original *sutta-piṭaka*, as well as to demonstrate some of its strengths as a meditation system and its appropriateness for our modern times. It is my sincere hope that this book contributes to an understanding of the theory and practice of meditation as given by Gotama the Buddha in the *suttas* and taught so effectively in our modern times by Ven. Bhante Vimalaramsi.

May all beings be happy!

*May the light of the Buddha's teachings illumine all beings and transform this confused and troubled world into a place of great peace, love and compassion.*

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## List of Abbreviations

AN	Aṅguttara Nikāya (Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi translation)
AA	Aṅguttara Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā (P.T.S.)
Abhdh A	Abhidhammatthasaṅgaha
BPS	Buddhist Publication Society
CS	Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana version of Tipiṭaka (using online text available from Vipassanā Research Institute)
DN	Digha Nikāya (Maurice Walsh Translation)
Dhp	Dhammapada (various translations used)
It	Itivuttaka
M	Majjhima Nikāya (Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi translation)
Mp	Manorathapūraṇī (Aṅguttara Nikāya-aṭṭhakathā)
Mp-t	Manorathapūraṇī-ṭīkā (Sāratthamañjūsā IV-ṭīkā)
MV	Mahāvagga of Vinaya
PED	Pali-English Dictionary (Rhys-Davids version)
PTS	Pali Text Society
Pṭs	Paṭisambhidāmagga (or listed as Ps in some references)
SN	Saṃyutta Nikāya (Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi translation)
Skt	Sanskrit (language)
Sn	Sutta-nipāta
Ud	Udāna
Vbh	Vibhangha
Vin	Vinaya-piṭaka
Vsm	Visuddhimagga

# Introduction

Every being desires happiness and wishes to avoid suffering. This is as true of the lowly ant as it is for the research scientist. All human endeavor being carried out in all parts of the world at this moment, throughout the history of our human race, has been devoted to this pursuit of happiness. Despite progress on the material level, it cannot fairly be said that humans of the modern world, even those who enjoy some measure of wealth and abundance, are any closer to the goal of realizing a happiness that cannot be torn asunder by the changes of circumstance or the corruption of time.

## **The predicament of human beings and of human society**

Human beings living in modern societies are afflicted by unease and disease in a variety of forms, perhaps the most prevalent being stress. Not only individual humans, but also families, societies, nations, and the earth itself is under intensifying stress, threatening the very existence of human society and other forms of life on planet earth.

The causes of such unease and disease are not new, and have been with us for thousands of years. The Buddha diagnosed the problems of the individual as being a life afflicted by *dukkha*, which is normally translated as “suffering”, but which encompasses a variety of forms of stress, unease, dissatisfaction, and disease which manifest from the deeper malaise of being trapped in the rounds of birth and death (*samsāra*).

In our contemporary times, this collective unease and disease has reached the point where the fabric of human society as well as the web of life on earth is under intense pressure and threatening to unravel.

In our modern world, a high level of personal stress among individual humans as well as environmental stress is happening in

virtually every place on earth. The crisis (not in the singular, but very multiple and complex) is upon us. However, such a dire situation may prove to be an opportunity rather than an abject catastrophe. As the old English adage says, “Every cloud has a silver lining.”

Buddhism seems perfectly placed to play a key role in making the best of the opportunity presenting itself to the human race. For Buddhism, this situation is not new, and the root of the problem as well as the solutions have been long ago searched out, tested, and verified by the Buddha and his disciples. Until now, the Buddha’s diagnosis of the problem and advice for treating the malady have been conveniently set aside by the great majority of people even in the lands that are considered to be traditionally Buddhist. However, in the face of this human and ecological crisis, the human race can no longer ignore the Buddha’s advice.

Spiritual awakening is no longer a luxury, so much as a necessity in our modern world. People are looking around for a remedy to their acutely felt suffering (*dukkha*), and large numbers of people are no longer satisfied with the materialistic palliatives that are offered in the modern world. They are searching more deeply.

It is no coincidence that the rising popularity of Buddhism and Buddhist meditation in the western world has coincided with the onset of this worldwide crisis. And for all of its obvious disadvantages, globalization has brought Buddhism to the forefront of progressive thinking and problem solving. With the advent of the information age and the concomitant ease of travel, Buddhist teachings, teachers, and practice centers are springing up all over the globe.

It is by no means a certainty that human civilization or human beings will survive the current crisis of the human psyche which is also creating an ecological crisis of major proportions. However, this level of stress does provide an opportunity. Human beings are being given a chance to survive the crisis, but only through transforming

their way of life through uplifting body, speech and mind individually and collectively.

In his foreword to Ven. Bhikkhu Buddharakkhita's book *Caring for Our Planet: Buddhism and the Environment*, Professor P.D. Premasiri clarifies the roots of the problem.

It is evident today humans have been compelled to think deeply about the environment for no other reason than their actions and modes of living have caused considerable damage to the environment in which they live thereby endangering their own survival. Human behavior which is not regulated by insight inevitably leads to disastrous consequences, and the current environmental crisis may be seen as one that exemplifies this.

The unwholesome psychological roots from which humans generally conduct themselves are, according to the teaching of the Buddha, greed, hatred, and delusion. These roots, if unchecked, have been operative in the past, are operative in the present, and will operate in the future. The special danger in present circumstances is that humans have developed their technological skills to such unprecedented heights, enabling them to tread the path of effective self-destruction in attempting to act on the dictates of these unwholesome roots. Modern science and technology has equipped people with a certain kind of knowledge, but not with the kind of insight that gives them a worldview, along with a system of ethical values, thereby leading to a desirable transformation of their behavior.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Buddharakkhita, Ven. Bhante, **Caring for Our Planet: Buddhism and the Environment**. (Pallekelle, Sri Lanka International Buddhist Academy, 2014), p. xiii.

In the above, Premasiri has succinctly characterized our individual and collective situation. As human beings, we have gained great technological power, and yet our wisdom is undeveloped. Our social, political, economic and technological systems are run by humans whose ambitions are most often fueled by the poisons of the mind, namely attachment, aversion, and ignorance.

With a foundation of unwholesome qualities, the social, economic, and political superstructure being erected on it can hardly be expected to achieve human happiness and the sustained health of the natural world, upon whose well-being our own human life depends. The environment upon which we depend for our life is under intense stress, with one major problem being the heating of the earth due in large part to rapid deforestation, burning of fossil fuels, and disruption of the life systems of the oceans.

This rapid rise in temperatures, popularly called global warming, calls to mind the Buddha's words in the famous Fire Discourse in which he says, "Bhikkhus, all is burning."<sup>2 3</sup> The Buddha was not talking of the current burning of our planet earth, but rather, the sense bases. He was pointing out to his disciples that the burning is due to our unwholesome reactions to the world of sensory stimulation. He explains further,

And what, Bhikkhus, is the all that is burning? The eye is burning, forms are burning, eye consciousness is burning, eye contact is burning, and whatever feeling arises with eye contact as condition—whether pleasant or painful, or neither-painful-nor-pleasant—that too is

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<sup>2</sup> Bodhi, Bhikkhu, translator, **The Connected Discourses of the Buddha**. SN 35.28 [PTS SN iv 19], (Boston, Wisdom Publications, 2000), p. 1143.

<sup>3</sup> *Sabbam bhikkhave ādittam*. SN 35.28, PTS SN iv 19, CS edition.

All quotes from the *tipiṭaka* in this book (unless otherwise indicated) will be Chatṭha Saṅgāyana edition (hereafter called CS edition) of the *tipiṭaka*, online version available from Vipassanā Research Institute, Igatpuri, India, downloadable from: [www.vridhamma.org](http://www.vridhamma.org). We can give only the PTS volume and page numbers as reference as this is an online version rather than from a hard copy.

burning. Burning with what? Burning with the fire of lust, with the fire of hatred, with the fire of delusion; burning with birth, aging, and death; with sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair, I say. (and so, for the ear, nose, tongue, body, mind.)<sup>4 5</sup>

The Buddha's image of a burning of the "all" of the sense world could just as well be a description of the current slow-motion burning of planet earth. As we have seen from Premasiri's quote above, the connection between the unwholesome mental qualities in individual people and a collapsing environment is a direct one. Given the technological power of humankind, we are projecting our unwholesome qualities outward and wreaking havoc upon our own human kind as well as upon the natural world.

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<sup>4</sup> Bodhi, Op. cit., **The Connected Discourses of the Buddha**. SN 35.28 [PTS SN iv 19], p. 1143.

<sup>5</sup> ...*kiñca bhikkhave sabbaṃ ādittaṃ, cakkhuṃ bhikkhave ādittaṃ, rūpā ādittā, cakkhaviññāṇaṃ ādittaṃ. Cakkhusamphasso āditto, yampidaṃ cakkhusamphassapaccayā uppajjati vedayitaṃ sukhaṃ vā dukkhaṃ vā adukkhamasukhaṃ vā tampi ādittaṃ. Kena ādittaṃ: ādittaṃ rāgagginā dosagginā mohagginā, ādittaṃ jātiyā jarāmaṇaṇa, sokehi paridevehi dukkhehi domanassehi upāyāsehi ādittanti vadāmi. Sotaṃ ādittaṃ, saddā ādittā, sotaviññāṇaṃ ādittaṃ, sotasamphasso āditto, yampidaṃ sotasamphassapaccayā uppajjati vedayitaṃ sukhaṃ vā dukkhaṃ vā adukkhamasukhaṃ vā tampi ādittaṃ. Kena ādittaṃ: ādittaṃ rāgagginā dosagginā mohagginā, ādittaṃ jātiyā jarāmaṇaṇa, sokehi paridevehi dukkhehi domanassehi upāyāsehi ādittanti vadāmi. Ghānaṃ ādittaṃ, gandhā ādittā, ghānaviññāṇaṃ ādittaṃ, ghānasamphasso āditto, yampidaṃ ghānasamphassapaccayā uppajjati vedayitaṃ sukhaṃ vā dukkhaṃ vā adukkhamasukhaṃ vā tampi ādittaṃ, kena ādittaṃ: ādittaṃ rāgagginā dosagginā mohagginā, ādittaṃ jātiyā jarāmaṇaṇa, sokehi paridevehi dukkhehi domanassehi upāyāsehi ādittanti vadāmi.*

*Jivhā ādittā, rasā ādittā, jivhāviññāṇaṃ ādittaṃ, jivhāsamphasso āditto, yampidaṃ jivhāsamphassapaccayā uppajjati vedayitaṃ sukhaṃ vā dukkhaṃ vā adukkhamasukhaṃ vā tampi ādittaṃ, kena ādittaṃ: ādittaṃ rāgagginā dosagginā mohagginā, ādittaṃ jātiyā jarāmaṇaṇa, sokehi paridevehi dukkhehi domanassehi upāyāsehi ādittanti vadāmi. Kāyo āditto, phoṭṭhabbā ādittā, kāyaviññāṇaṃ ādittaṃ, kāyasamphasso āditto, yampidaṃ kāyasamphassapaccayā uppajjati vedayitaṃ sukhaṃ vā dukkhaṃ vā adukkhamasukhaṃ vā tampi ādittaṃ, kena ādittaṃ: ādittaṃ rāgagginā dosagginā mohagginā, ādittaṃ jātiyā jarāmaṇaṇa, sokehi paridevehi dukkhehi domanassehi upāyāsehi ādittanti vadāmi. Mano āditto, dhammā ādittā, manoviññāṇaṃ ādittaṃ, manosamphasso āditto, yampidaṃ manosamphassapaccayā uppajjati vedayitaṃ sukhaṃ vā dukkhaṃ vā adukkhamasukhaṃ vā tampi ādittaṃ, kena ādittaṃ: ādittaṃ rāgagginā dosagginā mohagginā, ādittaṃ jātiyā jarāmaṇaṇa, sokehi paridevehi dukkhehi domanassehi upāyāsehi ādittanti vadāmi. Sn 35.28, PTS SN IV 19, CS edition.*

## **The practice of Buddhism as explained in the original teachings of the Buddha as the solution to the problems of human beings**

If we wish to reverse the direction of this accelerating downward spiral that we are caught up in, we must rework the foundations upon which our human life is based. Only then will the power we project through economics and politics begin to contribute more to our well-being than to our destruction. Only then will our lifestyle become harmonious with the natural world and a sustainable way of life be found.

Ven. Bhante Vimalaramsi, the creator of the method known as Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation (TWIM), offers the original teachings of the Buddha as the cure for this fundamental problem of a human society being based on unwholesome roots traceable to a collectivity of deluded minds. He believes the teachings of the Buddha, if followed with confidence, sincerity, and energy, will create a happy human being and society based on wholesome mental factors such as Loving Kindness and Compassion. Bhante writes in the introduction to his book *Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life*,

Many people are now on a spiritual search for a path that leads their mind to peace, happiness, and openness.

They discovered that the norms of the world, which emphasize materialism and success, do not bring real peace, happiness, or security in their life.

Instead, life seems to lead to more pain and dissatisfaction.

Three out of every four people on the street are under some form of treatment for various forms of depressive disorders.



For these people, the Buddha's Noble Eightfold Path offers an opportunity to understand what is really going on in this experience of life.

It's a chance to see how things actually work and what is causing the pain and suffering that goes along with anxiety, panic attacks, obsessive-compulsive behavior, sleeplessness, and depression at all levels.

Buddhist teaching offers us a helpful personal management system that can assist us in these situations.

The teaching exemplifies a simple and contented life, in which learning acceptance of each moment leads to a life that is open, happy, and free.<sup>6</sup>

Bhante is offering the teachings of the Buddha as the healing balm for the world's troubles. It is because of having seen so many people achieve success with the TWIM meditation that Bhante is so convinced of the efficacy of the teachings of the Buddha as taken directly from the suttas. Success means both personal transformation and the ability to bring wholesome qualities to whatever situations we are part of in everyday life. As Ven. Khanti Khema writes in her forward to Bhante's book *Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life*,

When human beings learn the Dhamma in an easy to remember, usable fashion, they can embrace it and use it as a system for relief from suffering. Then we naturally begin to open up an Ocean of Compassion that exists inside each one of us. It has always been there, but most of us are moving too fast to learn about it. The practices discussed in this book can brighten any position in a chosen career path, expand the potential use of mind, considerably increase productivity, and offer tranquility, happiness, and peace.

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<sup>6</sup> Vimalaramsi, Ven. Bhante, **Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life**. (Annapolis, Dhamma Sukha Meditation Center, 2014), p. 2.

This inherent compassion is often released from within us when we are told the true nature of everything and taught how to see it for ourselves.<sup>7</sup>

Thus, with “knowing and seeing things as they truly are” (*yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti passati*) through the practice of *samatha-vipassanā* meditation (TWIM), human beings can release their inherent potential as loving, compassionate beings who can share their inner peace and happiness with others in families, society, work situations and all venues of worldly activity. Moreover, a tremendous potential of creative use of the mind and intelligence can be applied to solving the world’s problems.

In the *Upakkilesasuttaṃ* of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* the Buddha speaks of the possibilities of the mind that has been freed of defilements. Using the image of gold as a simile for the mind, he teaches,

Bhikkhus, there are these five defilements of gold, defiled by which gold is not malleable, wieldy, and luminous, but brittle and not properly fit for work. What five? Iron, copper, tin, lead, and silver. These are the five defilements of gold, defiled by which gold is not malleable, wieldy and luminous, but brittle and not properly fit for work. But when gold is freed from these five defilements, it is malleable, wieldy and luminous, pliant and properly fit for work. Then, whatever kind of ornament one wishes to make from it—whether a bracelet, earrings, a necklace, or a golden garland—one can achieve one’s purpose.

So too, bhikkhus, there are these five defilements of the mind, defiled by which the mind is not malleable, wieldy and luminous, but brittle and not properly concentrated for the destruction of the taints. What five? Sensual desire, ill will, dullness and drowsiness,

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<sup>7</sup> *ibid*, pp. x-xi

restlessness and remorse, and doubt. These are the five defilements of the mind, defiled by which the mind is not malleable, wieldy, and luminous, but brittle, and not properly concentrated for the destruction of the taints. But when mind is freed from these five defilements, it becomes malleable, wieldy, and luminous, pliant and properly concentrated for the destruction of the taints. Then, there being a suitable basis, one is capable of realizing any state realizable by direct knowledge toward which he might incline the mind.<sup>8 9</sup>

The message is clear that by following the methods given by the Buddha and removing the defilements, the creative potential of the mind is opened up. Gotama Buddha accomplished this purification and realization of limitless potential.

By building on a foundation of virtue (*sīla*) perfected over a great expanse of time, the ascetic Gotama sat under the Bodhi tree and realized the Four Noble Truths that offer human beings a way out of their seemingly endless suffering. As the *Discourse on the Fruits of the Homeless Life*, (*Sāmaññaphala Sutta* DN 2) relates,

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<sup>8</sup> Bodhi, Bhikkhu, translator, **The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha**. AN V.23 [PTS III 16], (Boston, Wisdom Publications, 2012), p. 641.

<sup>9</sup> *Pañcime bhikkhave jātārūpassa upakkilesā, yehi upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭhaṃ jātārūpaṃ na ceva mudu hoti, na ca kammaniyaṃ, na ca pabhassaraṃ, pabhaṅgu ca, na ca sammā upeti kammāya. Katame pañca? Ayo lohaṃ tipu sīsaṃ sajjhu. Ime kho bhikkhave pañca jātārūpassa upakkilesā, yehi upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭhaṃ jātārūpaṃ na ceva mudu hoti, na ca kammaniyaṃ na ca pabhassaraṃ, pabhaṅgu ca, na ca sammā upeti kammāya. Yato ca kho bhikkhave jātārūpaṃ imehi pañcahi upakkilesehi vippamuttaṃ hoti, taṃ hoti jātārūpaṃ mudu ca kammaniyaṃca pabhassaraṃ ca, na ca pabhaṅgu, sammā upeti kammāya yassā yassā ca pīlandhanavikatiyā ākaṅkhati: yadi muddikāya yadi kuṇḍalāya yadi gīveyyakāya yadi suvaṇṇamālakāya. Tañcassa atthaṃ anuhoti. Suvaṇṇamālakāya. Tañcassa atthaṃ anubhoti. Evameva kho bhikkhave pañcime cittaṃ upakkilesā yehi upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭhaṃ cittaṃ naceva mudu hoti, na ca kammaniyaṃ. Na ca pabhassaraṃ, pabhaṅgu ca, na ca sammāsamādhīyati āsavānaṃ khayāya. Katame pañca? Kāmacchando vyāpādo thīnamiddhaṃ uddhaccakukkuccaṃ vicikicchā. Ime kho bhikkhave pañca cittaṃ upakkilesā yehi upakkilesehi upakkiliṭṭhaṃ cittaṃ na ceva mudu hoti, na ca kammaniyaṃ, na ca pabhassaraṃ. Pabhaṅgu ca, na ca sammāsamādhīyati āsavānaṃ khayāya. Yato ca kho bhikkhave cittaṃ imehi pañcahi upakkilesehi vippamuttaṃ hoti, taṃ hoti cittaṃ mudu ca kammaniyaṃca pabhassaraṃca, na ca pabhaṅgu, sammāsamādhīyati āsavānaṃ khayāya. Yassa yassa ca abhiññāsacchikaraṇīyassa dhammassa cittaṃ abhininnāmeti abhiññā sacchikiriyāya, tatra tatveva sakkhibhabbataṃ pāpunāti sati sati āyatane. Upakkilesasuttaṃ, AN V 23, PTS AN III 16, CS edition.*

And he, with mind concentrated, purified and cleansed, unblemished, free from impurities, malleable, workable, established and having gained imperturbability, applies and directs his mind to the knowledge of the destruction of the corruptions. He knows as it really is: “This is suffering”, he knows as it really is, “This is the origin of suffering” he knows as it really is “This is the cessation of suffering”, he knows as it really is: “This is the path leading to the cessation of suffering.” And he knows as it really is: “These are the corruptions”, “This is the origin of the corruptions”, “This is the cessation of the corruptions”, “this is the path leading to the cessation of the corruptions.” And through his knowing and seeing his mind is delivered from the corruption of sense desire, from the corruption of becoming, from the corruption of ignorance, and the knowledge arises in him: “This is deliverance!”, and he knows: “Birth is finished, the holy life has been led, done is what had to be done, there is nothing further here.”<sup>10 11</sup>

This story of the Buddha’s enlightenment is becoming known around the world, and it is incredible hopeful, as the Buddha promised that those sincere practitioners who followed his instructions can verify for themselves the truth of what he was relating and can also experience the liberating change of perspective that he experienced. It is this hope that has drawn seekers to the path since the Buddha gathered his first disciples 2600 years ago. Certainly, the suttas are replete with examples

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<sup>10</sup> Walshe, Maurice, translator, **The Long Discourses of the Buddha**. DN 2:97 [PTS i 84], (Boston, Wisdom Publications, 2012), p. 107.

<sup>11</sup> *So evaṃ samāhite citte parisuddhe pariyodāte anaṅgaṇe vigatūpakkilese mudubhūte kammaniye ṭhite āneñjappatte āsavānaṃ khayañāyā cittaṃ abhinīharati abhininnāmeti so idaṃ dukkhanti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti. Ayaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminīpaṭipadā’ti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti. Ime āsavā’ti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti. Ayaṃ āsavasamudayo’ti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti. Ayaṃ āsavanirodho’ti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti. Ayaṃ āsavanirodhagāminīpaṭipadā’ti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti. Tassa evaṃ jānato evaṃ passato kāmāsavāpi cittaṃ vimuccati bhavāsavāpi cittaṃ vimuccati avijjāsavāpi cittaṃ vimuccati. Vimuttasmim vimuttamiti nānaṃ hoti. Khīṇā jāti vusitaṃ brahmacariyaṃ kataṃ karaṇiyaṃ nāparaṃ itthattāyāti pajānāti.* DN 2:97, PTS I 84, CS edition.

of those, both ordained and lay, both male and female, who attained *Nibbāna* by following the Noble Eightfold Path.

Some 2,600 years later, is such a hope still realistic in or is has awakening been exported to somewhere far away in time and space? Is it a relic of only the distant past or the unforeseeable future?

### **Is awakening possible in this lifetime?**

Many tell us that perhaps if we are patient enough, we may experience awakening in a far distant lifetime, perhaps when the next Buddha appears some eons from now. According to many Buddhists, we are in a degenerate era, and the best we can do is keep the precepts and hope for a long-distant change of circumstances.

Although I would not quibble about our present era being degenerate, this “putting off of awakening” is a curious message considering that the Buddha himself told us that by following his methods we could fundamentally uplift and liberate our perspective in a matter of a few years, months or even a few days. In the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, the Buddha ends his teaching with a very positive message,

...Let alone half a month, bhikkhus. If anyone should develop these four foundations of mindfulness in such a way for seven days, one of two fruits could be expected for him: either final knowledge here and now, or if there is a trace of clinging left, non-return.<sup>12 13</sup>

The Buddha was asked on a number of occasions about the success of his ordained and lay disciples. It is clear from his statements in the *sutta-piṭaka* that those who were following his instructions were achieving a high level of success and that this was

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<sup>12</sup> Bodhi, **The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha**. MN 10:46, [PTS i 63], p. 155.

<sup>13</sup> *Tiṭṭhatu bhikkhave māsaṃ, yo hi ko ci bhikkhave ime cattāro sati satipaṭṭhāne evaṃ bhāveyya' addhamāsaṃ, tassa dvinnaṃ phalānaṃ aññataraṃ phalaṃ pāṭikaṅkhaṃ: diṭṭheva dhamme aññā, sati vā upādisese anāgāmitā, tiṭṭhatu bhikkhave addhamāso, yo hi ko ci bhikkhave ime cattāro satipaṭṭhāne evaṃ bhāveyya sattāhaṃ, tassa dvinnaṃ phalānaṃ aññataraṃ phalaṃ pāṭikaṅkhaṃ: diṭṭheva dhamme aññā, sati vā upādisese anāgāmitā.* MN 10:46, PTS i 63, CS edition.

happening to large number of people, both ordained and lay, both male and female. For instance, in the *Mahāvaccagota Sutta*, the Buddha declares that many more than five hundred monks (bhikkhus) and many more than five hundred nuns (bhikkhunīs) have attained arahantship. He also declares that many more than five hundred male lay disciples and many more than five hundred female lay disciples have attained the state of no-returner (*anāgāmi*).<sup>14</sup>

It is thus apparent from the accounts in the suttas that the method of meditation given by the Buddha was accessible to a wide variety and number of people, not only to a very few. According to the accounts given in the suttas, large numbers of meditators had a high level of success with their meditation. It seems that nearly all avid students of the Buddha who applied themselves energetically to following his instructions gained a high level of attainment. This can hardly be said of many or even most of the methods now being practiced. Bhante Vimalaramsi attributes this to reliance upon the commentarial tradition for meditation instruction rather than looking directly to the original instructions in the suttas.

In following the original instructions for mental development (*bhāvanā*) in general, and for meditation (*jhāna*)<sup>15</sup> in particular, TWIM shows promise of once again opening up the accessibility and efficacy of the Buddha's original path to *nibbāna*. This is, in fact, the purpose of having revived the original instructions as given in the suttas.

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<sup>14</sup> Bodhi, Op. cit., MN 73:7-11, [PTS I 491], pp. 596-7.

<sup>15</sup> The word "meditation" is an English word with no exact correspondence in the Pali Buddhist tradition. The favored word in the suttas is *bhāvanā*, but this word carries a much broader meaning of the whole of mental development, and includes factors such as morality (*sīla*). Probably the most accurate correspondence to formal meditation is the Pali word *jhāna*, which represents the various stages of tranquility and understanding reached by the meditator while doing formal meditation practice in one of the four postures (sitting, standing, walking, lying down). Almost invariably, when accounts are given of practices that fit the English word "meditation" in the suttas, the stages of *jhāna* are described. So TWIM takes *jhāna* as a workable translation of the English word "meditation", but also uses "meditation" to correspond with *bhāvanā*. Both *jhāna* and *bhāvanā* are used, depending on the context.

Bhante Vimalaramsi is positive about the chances for the uplifting of consciousness and transformation of the unwholesome mental factors to wholesome mental factors not only because of the descriptions in the suttas, but also because he has tried out the original instructions as given directly by the Buddha and has found them to do what they have promised to do.

Not only for Bhante, but for many others who have entered the TWIM method with dedication and energy, this practice as recommended by the Buddha really seems to work. Bhante is confident that anyone who gets the proper guidance from a qualified TWIM teacher, and who is willing to carefully observe the precepts, will have success with this method.

There can be no effective change in the economic, political, and environmental situation, which as we have noted is in a state of crisis due to unwholesome foundations, until those unwholesome foundations are replaced by wholesome ones. This cannot be done as a social or political movement of people, but only with each one of us doing our part to let go of the unwholesome and bring up the wholesome in our own minds.

This can only be a revolution from within, one person at a time if it is to succeed. All other revolutions based on changing outer circumstance have ultimately failed. Only the quiet revolution offered by the Buddha has a real chance of transforming both the consciousness of the meditator and the outer world of the environment.

Bhante Vimalaramsi offers the original teachings of the Buddha in the form of TWIM meditation as a path to transformation that has proven to be truly and speedily effective. In this book, we will be exploring how TWIM is directly based on the teachings of the Buddha as given in the *sutta-piṭaka*, and we will examine how it is that these teachings can be so effective.

In examining how TWIM draws on the suttas for the structure and theory of practice, we will not attempt to argue that the TWIM

interpretation of the original instructions is the only possible one. Certainly, the vast amount of material in the *sutta-piṭaka* is open to a variety of interpretations. However, TWIM is rare in that it even attempts to base itself on the suttas rather than the *Visuddhimagga* and other commentarial literature.

In addition to examining the uniqueness of TWIM in building a method of *samatha-vipassanā* meditation based on the suttas rather than upon the *Visuddhimagga*, we will also attempt to demonstrate that if TWIM cannot be proven to be the only valid interpretation of the instructions as given in the suttas, at least it is a plausible interpretation. For further validation, we encourage the reader to actually try the TWIM method.

Any book such as this one can only speak to the structure of theory and practice of TWIM. Only actually entering the practice can be truly convincing, and our research can only offer encouragement to do so. The taste of a mango cannot be experienced through reading scientific analysis or by seeing lovely pictures of mangoes. Only through the eating can the taste of a mango be known. Likewise, with the Buddha's instructions on meditation.

### **Most contemporary methods of vipassanā rely primarily on the Visuddhimagga for theory and practice of meditation**

If we look carefully at the roots of contemporary *vipassanā* methods, most of them will not even claim to be directly based on the teachings given by the Buddha in the suttas, but rather are based on the *Visuddhimagga* of Ven. Buddhaghosa. They usually also reference one or two suttas in their method of practice, usually the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* or the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, and these suttas are often emphasized. But these suttas are usually taken largely in isolation from other suttas, and even those two key suttas are usually viewed through the lens of the *Visuddhimagga*.



In following the *Visuddhimagga* method of practice, the methods have become rather complex practices which are difficult for most people to learn and are not easy to practice. They have the potential to bring benefit to the devoted meditator, but for most people the course of study following these methods has proven to be quite difficult and even defeating. The majority of people will not even attempt these methods, and most of those who do find it difficult to integrate the practice into daily life. This results in limited accessibility of these methods and limited popularity.

### **In following the sutta instructions rather than the Visuddhimagga, the TWIM method is immediately effective (akālika)**

Bhante Vimalaramsi has practiced both the *Visuddhimagga*-based forms of *vipassanā* as well as the *sutta*-based Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation and has noted this difference of simplicity of method, ease of practice, and speed of achieving results. He explains,

The dividing up of Samatha and Vipassanā into two separate types of meditation tends to make the meditations quite complicated and one's progress, if it exists at all, seems to take a very long time. This goes against one of the things that describes the brilliance of the Dhamma. That is, that the Buddha's teachings are "immediately effective" ... The importance of practicing Samatha/Vipassanā meditation in exactly the same way as the suttas tell us to *can't be overstated*.<sup>16</sup>

This is one of the primary orientations to practice that makes TWIM different from other *vipassanā* methods. By going directly to the suttas and by taking instructions and guidance from a wide variety of suttas, a practice is put together that is both very simple

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<sup>16</sup> Vimalaramsi, Op. cit., p. 70. "Immediately effective" is *akālika* in Pali, one of the attributes of the *dhamma* as taught by the Buddha.

and very profound. It works quickly and effectively to calm, relax, and open the mind and to let go of craving. As insight arises, the light of clearly seeing dispels ignorance.

### **TWIM is simple, easy, and clear**

TWIM is not difficult to learn. It is also easy to apply to regular life, so meditation is not limited to retreat time. TWIM requires dedication and energy but is not a difficult experience as many other methods have become. It appears that the complexity and difficulty of most of our meditation practices can be traced to modifications of the original teachings that occurred after the passing of the Buddha.

This simplicity and lightness of the practice make TWIM an ideal technique for both advanced meditators and complete beginners. The experience of TWIM suggests that teachings of the suttas work. They can be effective for modern human beings. We can have our quiet revolution, one transformed person at a time.

The TWIM method seems to have a significant advantage in terms of ease of learning, ease of application in daily life, and quick results. This is accomplished while remaining true to the method and goals set out by the Buddha. That makes TWIM a wonderful tool for the transformation of consciousness and the attainment of a higher perspective on life.

By turning directly to the suttas and developing a very simple but profound method based on the Buddha's original instructions, TWIM offers a technique of mental cultivation that provides an opportunity for large numbers of people to become involved in the meditative life and to reach high levels of attainment. This opens the possibility of transforming the current high level of interest in Buddhism and meditation into what Stephen Batchelor calls, "A culture of awakening that addresses the specific anguish of the modern world."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Batchelor, Stephen, **Buddhism Without Beliefs**. (New York, Riverhead Books, 1997), p. 110.

It is not clear whether significant numbers of people will enter the Buddhist path and persevere with their practice to create such a culture of awakening, but it is clear that for such a culture to emerge, there must be methods which are easy to learn and practice, and which yield significant results when followed diligently. The Buddha's original instructions, according to the TWIM interpretation, offer the requisite ease of learning the practice as well as high level of attainment for those who practice avidly.

Let us summarize some of the main aspects of TWIM before exploring them in some detail in the following chapters. Immediately below, we note five main aspects that contribute to defining TWIM as a unique approach.

### **TWIM bypasses the Visuddhimagga and turns directly to the suttas for instruction**

The first and foremost unique characteristic of TWIM is that it uses the suttas as the central guide for practice. The commentaries and other traditions that came subsequent to the life of the Buddha are treated with respect but are not considered as authoritative and are not often referenced. The Buddha (and his immediate disciples such as Ven. Sāriputta) remains the central teacher and his advice for practice as laid out in the suttas is the map for practice.

In TWIM, even the suttas are not treated as being authoritative by the practitioner, but rather as an experiment (“Come and see”, *ehipassiko*). This leads us to the second basis for TWIM, that of actual experience. The teachers of the TWIM method, including Bhante Vimalaramsi, are willing to modify the technique as needed in light of what is experienced directly. Any such modifications are adaptations for modern people and do not compromise the original intent.

The Buddha's teachings are proving their worth in not only theory, but also in practice. They are as valuable for modern people

as for those who lived in the time of the Buddha. We may or may not be living in a degenerate age, but the teachings of the Buddha when diligently and carefully applied, are much more powerful than any exterior unfavorable circumstance or internal obscurations.

In the following chapters, we intend to show that the Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation is a workable and effective interpretation of the original teachings of the Buddha. We will also attempt to show that in relying primarily on the suttas rather than the commentarial literature, that TWIM relies on the Buddha's teachings, whereas many other methods rely primarily on the commentarial traditions. Difference in method between *sutta*-based TWIM and the *Visuddhimagga*-based methods is significant in terms of both theory and practice.

### **TWIM practices the union of samatha and vipassanā**

The second salient characteristic of TWIM is that it treats meditation as a union of *samatha* and *vipassanā*. The two methods are completely integrated from the beginning, not treated separately or sequentially. This synthesis is carried out through the simple but profound TWIM technique of using the 6Rs.<sup>18</sup>

In connection with this is the use of *jhāna* in TWIM and the full integration of *satipaṭṭhāna* practice into the *jhānas*, with resultant insight and wisdom. TWIM practitioners enter into tranquil aware *jhānas*. They do not develop absorption concentration *jhānas*, which are of a different nature.

### **Relaxation of body and mind is a key feature of TWIM**

The third salient characteristic of TWIM is that it emphasizes the relaxation of mind and body as a regular and systematized part of practice, included in the 6Rs. Relaxation is not left to chance or

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<sup>18</sup> In later chapters, we will more fully explain this key component of Right Effort which in the TWIM adaptation for contemporary people is called the 6Rs.

treated as a welcome result of practice but is rather directly structured into the method and practiced regularly, not sporadically.

Within TWIM practice, relaxation is one of the ways of letting go of craving and suffering, the other way being the gaining of insight wisdom. This emphasis upon relaxation and thereby letting go of craving and its related suffering is what helps the TWIM practitioner enter the tranquil aware jhānas mentioned above. Without letting go of tension, tightness, and craving, these tranquil aware jhānas are not accessible.

It is this emphasis on relaxation that produces what may be called “openness meditation” as opposed to “absorption concentration meditation”<sup>19</sup>. In TWIM, the tranquility and understanding gained by the meditator while in the tranquil aware jhānas produces the equanimity and insight needed to attain *nibbāna*. As such, they can also be termed tranquil wisdom jhānas.

Following the TWIM method, *samatha* and *vipassanā* are synergistic in their effect, in that each serves as a platform to develop the other, and once one is developed it reinforces and deepens the other. Calm abiding of mind creates a foundation or framework within which insight wisdom can be developed. The development of such wisdom in turn greatly enhances the calm abiding of mind, and *Nibbāna* itself is the ultimate of calm abiding in complete peace and equanimity.

### **TWIM aims to gain liberating wisdom through direct and practical understanding the Four Noble Truths, Dependent Origination and the Three Characteristics of Existence.**

The fourth salient characteristic of TWIM is its use of the Four Noble Truths (*cattāri ariyasaccāni*) not only as theory but as the

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<sup>19</sup> In the *Visuddhimagga*-based methods, there are a variety of levels of concentration leading to full absorption. In this book, they will often be referred to collectively as “absorption concentration” or “absorption concentration meditation”. As we will explore below, TWIM does not favor this variety of concentration.

basis for practice directly from the first sitting and use of the 6Rs. Closely connected to this is the emphasis upon understanding Dependent Origination (*paṭicca samuppāda*) and clearly seeing how we unconsciously create the causes of our suffering. Seeing how Dependent Origination works produces insight wisdom which illuminates the structure of our craving and clinging to self. With this understanding, the structure of our conditioned mind begins to disintegrate. Seeing of the Three Characteristics of Existence is also vital, and the TWIM approach is described in the next section.

**In TWIM practice, seeing the Three Characteristic Marks of Existence is usually a result of directly seeing and understanding the links of Dependent Origination**

In the TWIM method, seeing the Three Characteristic Marks of Existence, i.e., impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and the impersonal nature of reality (*anatta*) is part of the process of seeing the links of Dependent Origination. Thus, unlike most current *vipassanā* meditations, TWIM puts the understanding of Dependent Origination at the center of practice, out of which comes an understanding of the Three Characteristics. Within TWIM practice, the seeing of the Three Characteristics usually comes as a result of clearly seeing how Dependent Origination works.

The Three Characteristics may be seen apart from Dependent Origination, and this seeing may happen for the TWIM meditator. However, if the Three Characteristics are seen associated with seeing the links of Dependent Origination, there is usually greater depth to the understanding of the Three Characteristics than if seen apart from Dependent Origination. Therefore, in TWIM, the emphasis is usually on seeing Dependent Origination, as the seeing of the Three Characteristics will then naturally occur and at a greater depth of understanding.

## **TWIM and the findings of modern science**

In modern times, due to the rise of the experimental sciences which are based on direct observation, a great deal of information is being made available about the workings of meditation. With modern technology, such as fMRI scanners, we can directly see what is happening in the brain, nervous system, and body of the practitioner. TWIM makes use of such information when it is a helpful aid to practice.

The main example of this use of scientific information in TWIM practice is the emphasis on smiling, the efficacy of which is being well demonstrated by the sciences. In addition, modern science is now demonstrating that Loving Kindness and Compassion Meditation when skillfully done by the meditator has immense benefits, the effects of which reach all the way to the level of DNA replication in the body, as well as tuning the meditator into the frequency of planet earth. This is no longer science fiction but considered as scientifically factual.

In a later chapter, we will have opportunity to discuss what is now being nicknamed by scientists the “*mettā* frequency”. We will explore the scientific findings of how ‘*mettā* waves’ manifest in the physical world. TWIM’s emphasis on *mettā* is thus in keeping with the current discoveries of science.

## **The three parts of this book**

In this book, our study of TWIM will be divided into three parts. The first part, which is the bulk of the chapters, is an analysis of the structure of theory and practice of TWIM and how it is based on the *sutta-piṭaka* rather than upon the literature such as the *Visuddhimagga* that was composed after the time of the Buddha. This will involve looking at how TWIM practice is grounded in the actual teachings of the Buddha as given in the suttas. There will be some

comparison and contrast to *Visuddhimagga*-based methods, which will help us to clarify the unique characteristics of TWIM.

The second part, consisting of one chapter, will be devoted to testimonials of practitioners who have directly experienced the TWIM method. As will be seen, these testimonials are very positive and encouraging to give people confidence and energy for practice. They will help us to understand how TWIM works in practice with real people.

The third part, consisting of one chapter, will be devoted to showing how the scientific study of the mind and body of the human organism can illuminate how TWIM is effective to alleviate human suffering and bring about well-being.

As we have mentioned, the ultimate test of any meditative tradition is not its lineage or its theory, but rather, its effectiveness in alleviating human suffering, transforming consciousness, and leading the ardent practitioner to a change of perspective and ultimately to *nibbāna*. By reading these pages, a person may learn how Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation (TWIM) works to bring a clearer perspective on life. This may help one gain confidence in taking up the path for oneself.

### **Who might find this book to be of interest**

It is hoped that this book will be of interest to scholars who are looking to clarify the roots of the meditation methods based on the Pali tradition, and the roots of TWIM in particular. Buddhism is a great spiritual and religious tradition that has influenced much of human culture in Asia, and now around the world. As such, it deserves study by scholars and educated people in general.

However, the central issue in Buddhism, that of *dukkha* and the way to its cessation, was time and again put forward by Gotama Buddha. He refused to give us yet another theory or belief system. His teaching, given out of his great compassion, was to illuminate for human beings a path to find a way out of their condition of suffering.



Let us take a closer look at how the original teachings of the Buddha as formulated in Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation can lead to the cessation of suffering and the realizing of a happiness that cannot be destroyed by the changing conditions of the world.

### **A note on Pali references in this book**

Most passages from the tipitaka which are given in English in the following chapters will be footnoted with the original Pali text. Unless otherwise indicated, the version used for the Pali will be that of the Chaṭṭha Saṅgāyana (CS) version. I am using an online version of the CS, available for free download from the Vipassanā Research Institute, Igatpuri, India. It is available from: [www.vridhamma.org](http://www.vridhamma.org). When citing the Pali text in the footnotes, we can give only the PTS volume and page numbers as reference, as this is an online version rather than being from a hard copy.

### **The authenticity of the Pali suttas**

TWIM has attempted to return to the original meditation instructions as given by the Buddha by going directly to the Pali suttas. This naturally raises the question of the authenticity of the suttas. Are they, as they purport to be, a reliable record of the life and teachings of Gotama the Buddha?

I have briefly addressed my view on this matter in chapter one, and the appendix deals directly with the question of the reliability of MN 111, the *Anupada Sutta*. Here I will say that I am aware of the wide range of opinions of scholars on this matter, ranging from those who disbelieve the very historical existence of the Buddha to those who are faithful to the orthodox view that the suttas are a completely reliable record. The truth is likely to lie somewhere between these two extremes.

In this book I assume that the suttas are a fairly reliable account of the life and teachings of the Buddha and his disciples, although they may not be an exact verbatim record. In the course of a few

centuries of oral transmission followed by painstaking hand copying through the centuries, there have certainly been additions, omissions, changes of wording, editing, rearranging, and so on. There may have been some substantive changes on controversial doctrinal points, although I believe these would have been the exception rather than the rule.

In general, I believe we can say that the main points of doctrine and method as given in the suttas can indeed be traced to the Buddha Gotama or his immediate disciples, and that any variance from the original words as spoken by the Buddha is likely more a matter of style than of substance.

Scholarship may never be able to fully answer the question of reliability. Much more important is putting the teachings to use and seeing how they work. If they truly deliver on the Buddha's stated goal of ending suffering and bringing the peace and happiness of *nibbāna*, then the question of authenticity may be laid to rest. Our task is more to put the teachings into practice than to labor over scholarly controversies. Thus we can say that 'the proof is in the pudding'.

### **Other methods of practice also based on the suttas**

TWIM is not the only contemporary method of theory and practice to be based primarily upon the Pali suttas. Among other prominent teachers who use the suttas as their primary instruction we can mention Ven. Ajahn Brahm and Ven. Thanissaro Bhikkhu. As our study is focused on that of Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation (TWIM) as taught by Ven. Vimalaramsi, we have not attempted to look at these methods, and personally I have no direct experience with them, although I know people who have practiced with them and benefited greatly.

The four main nikāyas and the oldest parts of the *Khuddaka Nikāya*, which comprise what we refer to as 'the suttas', contain the most reliable record of the original teachings of the Buddha. Together,

they comprise a very large volume of religious literature, and there is a lot of variation and diversity in the teachings as recorded. In addition, many of the most common and central teachings are open to a range of interpretations. We take it that the method of TWIM is not the only possible interpretation of the teachings of the Buddha, and there is plenty of room for a variety of methods, all based on the suttas.

Over time, we will find out what works and what doesn't work so well, always keeping the central goal of the Buddha in mind, to relieve suffering and attain the peace and happiness of *nibbāna*. In the meanwhile, we can welcome and respect diversity of method while supporting and encouraging each other. When appropriate, we can enter into friendly and mutually respectful discussions about matters of theory and practice.



## **Part One**

# **Theory and Practice of Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation**

# Chapter I

## Basing Practice on the Suttas

Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation (TWIM) is a form of *samatha-vipassanā* meditation based on the instructions as given in the *sutta-piṭaka*. It does not follow as authoritative the commentarial traditions or *abhidhamma*, which were compiled subsequent to the life and teaching of the Buddha Gotama.

In TWIM, the primary teacher is the Buddha, and TWIM practice is based on those teachings which can be considered to be the *buddhavaccana*, or words of the Buddha. These original teachings are found in the suttas and in the *vinaya-piṭaka*. TWIM also considers discourses given by the Buddha's immediate disciples in the *sutta-piṭaka* as the *buddhavaccana*.<sup>20</sup>

Bhante Vimalaramsi, who has created TWIM meditation, explains in the preface to his book *Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life*, how the suttas themselves became the primary sources of TWIM. Speaking of his own evolving practice, he explains,

The author [Bhante Vimalaramsi] discovered the simplicity and practicality of the Buddha's dhamma when he began exploring the suttas of the earliest texts available.

This was done by letting go of most of the commentarial writing like the *Visuddhimagga* (The Path of Purification) by Venerable Buddhaghosa.

When putting those commentaries back on the shelf where they belong, I then began investigating the original texts with much enthusiasm, because it was there that I found the true pearls of wisdom that

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<sup>20</sup> Later in this chapter we will briefly look at issues of authenticity of the teachings as given in the *sutta-piṭaka*.

can be used with real success in daily life in a practical way.

This was when I studied and practiced deeply the differences between what I had been taught by the commentaries and what I discovered in the texts [the suttas] before ever showing this amazing path to others...

By teaching straight from the suttas many students have gained deep meditation practice and understanding of why they meditate and how to have a happy mind all of the time. This means not only while doing their formal sitting practice but also throughout all aspects of their life.<sup>21</sup>

We can note here that although TWIM is the product of Bhante's extensive experience of meditation, he is careful to point out that he did not invent this method, but discovered (or, he prefers to say "rediscovered") it by faithfully following the instructions in the suttas and then referencing his own experiences in meditation. Bhante claims to be only a guide, not a teacher, and holds the Buddha and his immediate disciples as the original teachers, with the individual meditator ultimately discovering reality through direct experience and becoming one's own teacher. In this regard, he says,

This is a very natural process of unfolding, and you are your own teachers. I'm not your teacher, I'm a guide. I'll keep you on the path, but you are teaching yourself. This is something that's quite unusual, because most people think you come to a retreat to have a teacher tell you what to do...<sup>22</sup>

In view of the above quotes from Bhante, we can see that in TWIM, the commentarial traditions, the teachings that came into the

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<sup>21</sup> Vimalaramsi, **Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life**, pp. viii-ix.

<sup>22</sup> Vimalaramsi, Ven. Bhante, **Moving Dhamma, Vol. 1**. (Annapolis, Dhamma Sukha, 2012), p. 7.

tradition after the passing of the Buddha, are consulted to the extent that they prove helpful and informative, but they are not considered to be authoritative. They take their places on the bookshelf or in the library as references. The primary guides are the suttas.

Bhante Vimalaramsi's success in practice came after abandoning the commentaries for direct instruction from the suttas. In TWIM the instructions in the suttas are the source and guide for practice, and it was through turning away from commentary-based practice and going directly to the suttas that Bhante rediscovered what he considers to be the original method of the Buddha. And as we have noted, Bhante feels that the TWIM teachers are only acting as guides, and that the real teacher is the Buddha, whose method is being followed in TWIM.

It will be a primary purpose of this book to see how TWIM is derived directly from a wide variety of sources in the *sutta-piṭaka*, and to show that it is not a method based primarily on the *Visuddhimagga*, other commentarial literature, or the *Abhidhamma*. Although a wide range of interpretation as to the meaning of the instructions in the suttas is possible, we will see how TWIM is a very plausible interpretation of those instructions as well as being a very workable and successful one in terms of outcome for those who diligently take up the practice.

## **Bhante Vimalaramsi's life as a meditator and as a Buddhist monk**

As Bhante Vimalaramsi is the creator, or as he prefers, the “rediscoverer” of this TWIM method, let us pause to learn something more of his spiritual journey which led him to a *sutta*-based method of meditation. In his own words, Bhante explains,

My life as a monk has been trying to find the earliest teachings that the Buddha gave to his Disciples and the Saṅgha of Monks 2600 years ago. I have spent the last 37 years of my life doing just this. I did many practices during that time, but it was in 1995 that I decided to drop



all other practices and just use the *Majjhima Nikāya*, which had just been translated and published by Bhikkhu Bodhi through Wisdom Publications, and to actually practice the meditation using only those as a guide and nothing else.

In a sense, it was like remembering the experience of sitting under the rose apple tree after having been through six years of severe ascetic practice. I wanted to go back to what the Buddha was supposed to have said.

Amazingly, I found all the Buddha's teachings contained right there. By that, I mean the entire meditation instructions, the progress of insight, and the final goal and how that is attained.<sup>23</sup>

Bhante gave up his *Visuddhimagga* and *Abhidhamma*-based practices in order to find the original instructions of the Buddha and to try them without modification by later tradition. As he relates, the results were astounding. The instructions were all there, without anything missing or needing to be changed.

Bhante's approach was that of a practicing monk. Although he knows a considerable amount of Pali, he is not a Pali scholar, and he relied on the *Majjhima Nikāya*, so capably translated by Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi who built his translation on the pioneering work of Ven. Ñāṇamoli. The English translation (English being a modern Prakrit that ably conveys most of the original intent of the Pali) proved to be sufficient, and Bhante made great progress with his own meditation and due to his own meditative experience in using these methods, was able to experience the system of meditation originally put forward by the Buddha.

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<sup>23</sup> *ibid*, p. xi

What was Bhante’s background of practice before his discovery of the way of the suttas? In the introduction to his book *Moving Dhamma, Vol. 1*, there is a short biography which we will quote here.

Bhante started practicing meditation when he was 28 years old in California, in the Burmese style of *Vipassanā*. Gradually he gave up the material world and got on a plane for Thailand where he became a monk in 1986. He then went on to practice meditation intensively doing thirty day and three-month retreats, and later even an eight-month retreat plus a two-year retreat in Burma under Sayadaw U Janaka.

At the end of this two-year retreat his Burmese meditation teachers told him they had nothing left to do; he was now ready to go and teach on his own. Even with this high praise a feeling that there was something more to learn kept nagging at him.

He went to Malaysia, and instead of *Vipassanā*, taught *Mettā* (Loving-Kindness) Meditation. Bhante took the advice of an elder Sri Lankan monk by the name of Venerable Punnaji to use only the suttas in his referencing. So Bhante let go of the commonly used commentaries and obtained a copy of Bhikkhu Bodhi and Venerable Ñāṇamoli’s translation of the *Majjhima Nikāya*. With that he headed off for a cave in Thailand where he spent three months practicing with the suttas as a guide and a cobra for company.

He started doing just what the suttas stated. He found out that in the suttas there was another step that appears to have been left out by later-day teachers. The idea of “tranquilizing the bodily formations” (*saṃkhāra*) was included in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* yet had never been mentioned by other teachers Bhante had studied with.

When he added this relaxing step, the practice took on a completely new tone. The *jhānas*, as discussed in the suttas, became very real but with a slightly different flavor which Bhante calls a “Tranquil Aware *jhāna*.” When he added the relax step the meditation completely changed and progress was very fast.<sup>24</sup>

Bhante first experienced this *sutta*-based system of meditation through his own efforts, and by carefully following the instructions as given in the suttas. Bhante has named this approach “Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation” (hence the acronym “TWIM”), in order to describe how *samatha* and *vipassanā* are blended harmoniously into one practice.

Bhante has taught the TWIM method to many other students who have also experienced very rapid progress. Many students have made such progress as to become teachers in their own right, with TWIM teachers being both ordained and lay, as well as both men and women. Bhante has also had great success guiding children in TWIM practice and there are cases of entire families practicing TWIM.

In the world of *vipassanā*, there are numerous students who expend considerable time, effort, and dedication, yet seem to make very slow progress. Many of these *vipassanā* students have come to Bhante, asking to be introduced to the TWIM method.

When a new student comes to Bhante from another *vipassanā* method of practice, it becomes clear to them that TWIM is a new and fresh approach to meditation that diverges in some fundamental ways from contemporary *vipassanā* theory and practice. In our first section of this book we will dedicate a number of chapters to analyzing in what ways TWIM is based on the *sutta-piṭaka* and how it differs from methods that are based on the *Visuddhimagga* and other works that date from after the passing of the Buddha.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid, pp. xv-xvi.

## **TWIM as a “Suttavādin” method, not as a Visuddhimagga-based method**

In emphasizing the direct reliance on the original teachings of the Buddha, Bhante Vimalaramsi has called TWIM a “Suttavādin” tradition. By Suttavādin, it is meant that TWIM advocates returning to the suttas as the primary source of explanation, instruction, practice and inspiration. This also indicates a loyalty to the Early Buddhist Texts (EBT’s) rather than loyalty to the *Visuddhimagga*-based tradition. Let us explore this.

As *Theravāda* has come to be identified with reliance on *Abhidhamma* for theory and *Visuddhimagga* for practice, the TWIM reorientation away from the *Visuddhimagga* represents a divergence with current Theravādin theory and practice. Of course, there is a great deal in common as well, including the emphasis on the keeping of precepts for both *saṅgha* and lay people. It is considered in TWIM that no real progress can be made in mental development (*bhāvanā*) without upholding the precepts.

*Sīla*, or upholding virtue of body and speech at the beginning of practice and body, speech and mind as practice matures, is the foundation of all higher attainment. With respect to the importance of a proper foundation of *sīla* there is agreement between TWIM and other methods of Theravādin practice. *Sīla* is indispensable for higher practice, and leads to *samādhi* and *paññā*.

It is in the emphasis on the overlooked “relax step” in meditation, and in the theory and practice of how calm abiding (*samatha*, which is akin to *samādhi*) and insightful seeing (*vipassanā*, which is akin to *paññā*) function within the TWIM method that TWIM diverges in many respects from other methods of meditation within the *Theravāda*. The foundation of *sīla* is fundamentally the same in most methods, but at the higher levels of practice the *sutta*-based TWIM and the *Visuddhimagga*-based methods diverge in some remarkable ways.

This can be puzzling or even quite challenging to practitioners who have a strong loyalty to the *Visuddhimagga* as the supreme manual of meditation and of the *Abhidhamma* as the ultimate guide to the theory of Buddhism. It is assumed by many that these works are a perfect summary and systematization of that which was given in ordinary language in the suttas. It is also commonly assumed that as a matter of course, any *samatha or vipassanā* method would rely primarily on the *Visuddhimagga*.

TWIM is not the first method within the *Theravāda* to return to the authority of *sutta* and *vinaya* and in taking the *Abhidhamma*, *Visuddhimagga*, and the commentaries as *not* being authoritative. The prominent Thai monk Ven. Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu also cautioned against blind acceptance of the *Visuddhimagga* and commentaries, and believed the suttas to contain the original and reliable instructions. He writes in his book *Paṭiccasamuppāda*,

In studying Dependent Origination, it is necessary to take the original Pali Scriptures as a foundation. Don't surrender to the commentaries with your eyes and ears closed. Don't submit 100% to later works such as the *Visuddhimagga*. Indeed, it is believed that the author of the *Visuddhimagga* is the same person who collected all the commentaries together, so that the total blind acceptance of the commentaries will allow only one voice to be heard, giving rise to an intellectual monopoly. We must guard our rights and use them in a way consistent with the advice given in the *Kālāma Sutta* and according to the principle of *mahāpadesa* as given in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*.

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Already, during the lifetime of the Buddha, questions were arising as to the authenticity of statements attributed to him. The

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<sup>25</sup> Buddhādāsa, Bhikkhu, **Paṭiccasamuppāda**. (Bangkok, Vuddhidhamma Fund, 2002), pp.10-11.

teaching of the criterion (*mahāpadesa*, literally: great authority) for determining an authentic teaching of the Buddha is given in the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*<sup>26</sup> and is also detailed in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*.<sup>27</sup> According to this principle, any statements or expressions (*pada-vyañjana*) that are claimed by a monk to having the authority or status of *dhmma-vinaya* or to be the instruction of the Buddha (*satthu sāsanaṃ*) should be treated as follows,

Suppose a monk were to say, “Friends, I heard and received this from the Lord’s own lips: this is the Dhamma, this is the discipline, this is the Master’s teaching”, then, monks, you should neither approve nor disapprove his words. Then, without approving or disapproving, his words and expressions should be carefully noted and compared with the Suttas and reviewed in the light of the discipline. If they, on such comparison and review are found not to conform to the suttas or to the discipline, the conclusion must be, “Assuredly this is not the word of the Buddha, it has been wrongly understood by this monk”, and the matter is to be rejected. But where, on such comparison and review they are found to conform to the Suttas or the discipline, the conclusion must be, “Assuredly this is the word of the Buddha, it has been rightly understood by this monk.”<sup>28 29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> DN II 123-126.

<sup>27</sup> AN II 167-170.

<sup>28</sup> Walshe, Op. cit., **The Long Discourses of the Buddha**. DN 16:4.8, [PTS II 124], p. 255.

<sup>29</sup> *Idha bhikkhave bhikkhū evaṃ vadeyya: "sammukhā metaṃ āvuso bhagavato suttaṃ, sammukhā paṭiggahitaṃ, ayaṃ dhammo ayaṃ vinayo idaṃ satthusāsananti" tassa bhikkhave bhikkhuno bhāsitaṃ neva abhinanditabbaṃ na paṭikkositabbaṃ. Anabhinanditvā appaṭikkositvā tāni padavyañjanāni sādhuṇaṃ uggahetvā sutte otāretabbāni vinaye sandassetabbāni. Tāni ce sutte otāriyamānāni vinaye sandassiyamānāni na ceva sutte otaranti na ca vinaye sandissanti, niṭṭhamettha gantabbaṃ: addhā idaṃ na ceva tassa bhagavato vacanaṃ. Imassa ca bhikkhuno duggahitanti. Iti hetam bhikkhave chaḍḍeyyātha. Tāni ce sutte otāriyamānāni vinaye sandassiyamānāni sutte ceva otaranti vinaye ca sandissanti, niṭṭhamettha gantabbaṃ: 'addhā idaṃ tassa bhagavato vacanaṃ. Imassa ca bhikkhuno sugghahita'nti. DN 16:4.8, PTS II 124, CS edition.*

Thus, according to the instructions as given by the Buddha, comparison with *sutta* and *vinaya* is the correct criterion for determining the instruction, or word of the Buddha (*satthu sāsanaṃ*). Of course, this does not mean that worthy Buddhist literature could not have been composed subsequent to the passing of the Buddha. In reading such literature today, it can be valued and accepted if it is compared favorably with *sutta* and *vinaya*. This is also true of contemporary works such as meditation manuals, which are worthy if in accordance with the original teachings.

As Buddhadāsa Bhikkhu cautions us, the *Kālāma Sutta* cautions us not to accept the authority of works such as the *Visuddhimagga* due to tradition, or due to it being an already “accepted authority”, or due to the reputation of the author. It needs to be compared with *sutta* and *vinaya* to see if what is contained therein is in accordance with the teachings of the Buddha. With reference to the *Visuddhimagga* and commentaries, he writes,

With the principle of *mahāpadesa* in hand, we can choose what is correct from the large pile of rubbish that has been smoldering in those works. And we will find a lot that is correct. It’s not that there is nothing of value in the commentaries, but that we must be rigorous in choosing what to accept, using the Buddha’s own guidelines to separate out what is not correct. A recent scholar, Somdet Phra Maha Samanachao Krom Phraya Vachira Nyanna Varorot advised that we should investigate carefully, as mentioned above, even the carefully memorized Pali dissertations.<sup>30</sup>

According to Theravādin orthodoxy, it is considered that *Abhidhamma* and *Visuddhimagga* take one to the highest level of theory and practice in Buddhism and that there is no divergence between these works and the content of the suttas. However, such a commonly held view is open to question.

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<sup>30</sup> Buddhadāsa, Op. cit., p. 11.

By examining some of the divergences and innovations in the works composed after the passing of the Buddha, we may be able to see in what way TWIM is holding closer to the original teachings by using the *Abhidhamma* and *Visuddhimagga* as helpful references rather than treating them as primary and authoritative sources. Let us begin to explore this by first looking at what can be considered the original teachings of the Buddha.

### **What is the “Word of the Buddha”?**

In the above quotes, we have examined what is to be considered as the *satthu sāsanaṃ* or *buddhavacana* according to the criterion given by the Buddha. This question of what is taken to be as authoritative is a very fundamental one, and divergence at this point can bring changes in the theory and structure of practice (*bhāvanā*) as well as possible changes in the outcome of practice.

In the traditional Theravādin view, the words of the Buddha, or the *buddhavacana*, are the entire three baskets (*tipiṭaka*) which is *Sutta*, *Vinaya*, and *Abhidhamma*. In addition, the commentaries on the three baskets are generally considered to be authoritative, and the *Visuddhimagga*, which is not a canonical book, is nonetheless held in the highest esteem, and is the primary manual for contemporary Theravādin methods of meditation.

Much of the prestige of the *Visuddhimagga* is based on the widely held opinion that Buddhaghosa was an Arahāt, and that his writings cannot contain errors. However, as noted above, at least one notable Thai scholar and a widely respected Thai monk have questioned this view. In Sri Lanka, the eminent scholar David J. Kalupahana has openly expressed doubts about the reliability of the *Visuddhimagga* as accurately representing the original teachings of the Buddha.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Kalupahana, David J., **A History of Buddhist Philosophy**. (Honolulu, University of Hawaii Press, 1992). Chapter XXI is titled *Buddhaghosa the Harmonizer*. Kalupahana asserts that Buddhaghosa inserted into his works numerous doctrines attributable to the Sarvāstivādins, Sautrāntikas, and even the Yogācārin. This included metaphysical speculations that cannot be traced to the early discourses of the Buddha in the suttas.



From the scholarly perspective, the *Tipiṭaka* evolved over a period of many centuries, incorporating much new material, including virtually the entire *Abhidhamma*. The body of literature which is included in the *Abhidhamma* must be considered as composed after the passing of the Buddha, except for the sections taken directly from the *sutta-piṭaka*. By the time the *Visuddhimagga* was composed, Theravādin Buddhism had come to differ from early Buddhism in some significant ways.

### **The authenticity of the Early Buddhist Texts (EBTs)**

Even within the *sutta-piṭaka*, some suttas appear to be more original than others, and many suttas include both early and late material, “late” meaning that it was likely added to the original *sutta* by editors subsequent to the passing of the Buddha. Each *sutta* also begins with the phrase *evaṃ me sutam*, “Thus I have heard”, which indicates that someone heard it from the Buddha rather than the Buddha himself being the original author.

This does not mean there is no authenticity to the suttas. Bhikkhus Sujato and Brahmali have ably defended such authenticity in their book *The Authenticity of Early Buddhist Texts* (Bhikkhu Sujato and Bhikkhu Brahmali 2014). Their thesis is that there is a body of authentic Early Buddhist Texts (EBTs) that are clearly distinguishable from all other Buddhist scripture, and that these texts originated from a single historical personality, namely Gotama the Buddha. It is the attribution of the sayings in the EBTs to the Buddha or his immediate disciples that qualifies them as being “authentic”. The authors explain,

Most academic scholars of early Buddhism cautiously affirm that it is possible that the EBTs contain some authentic teachings of the Buddha. We contend that this drastically understates the evidence. As sympathetic assessment of relevant evidence shows that it is *very likely* that the bulk of the sayings in the EBTs that are attributed to the Buddha were

actually spoken by him. It is *very unlikely* that most of these sayings are inauthentic.<sup>32</sup>

In his introduction to his translation of the *Dīgha Nikāya*, Maurice Walshe gives a balanced view that may be said to be close to that which is held by a majority of scholars of early Buddhism. Concerning the authenticity of the Pali Canon, he writes,

Certainly, not all parts of the Pali Canon are equally old or can be literally taken to be the Buddha's precise words. This is plain common sense and does not mean completely rejecting their authenticity. Recent research has gone far to vindicate the claim that the Pali Canon holds at least a prime place among our sources in the search for 'original' Buddhism, or, in fact, 'what the Buddha taught'... Personally, I believe that all, or almost all doctrinal statements put directly into the mouth of the Buddha can be accepted as authentic, and this seems to me the most important point.<sup>33</sup>

The general consensus of scholars would be that most of the texts that can be considered original are in the *sutta-piṭaka* and some (presumably older) sections of the *vinaya*. Most of the *sutta-piṭaka* is either original or a reworking of the original in order to make the lengthy suttas easier to memorize. There was also some systemization of important material.

A few suttas seem to add material that is not likely from the Buddha himself, but rather represent the views of later generations of teachers. But this sort of add-on material is not voluminous. Although we cannot point to any one part of the *sutta piṭaka* and say for sure that "these are the words of the Buddha", overall, we can view most of the *sutta piṭaka* as representing the original teachings

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<sup>32</sup> Sujato, Bhikkhu, and Brahmali, Bhikkhu, **The Authenticity of the Early Buddhist Texts**. (Kandy, Buddhist Publication Society, 2014), p. 5.

<sup>33</sup> Walshe, **The Long Discourses of the Buddha**. Introduction, p. 50.

of the Buddha and even the words and phrases are likely to be near to those that were used by the Buddha.

**TWIM takes the suttas as authentic and as the primary authority for understanding the instructions of the Buddha for mental cultivation**

TWIM abides by the opinion of perhaps the majority of scholars who hold with some confidence that most of the *sutta-piṭaka* originates with the Buddha himself, or is at least a reasonable paraphrase of his original teachings. In that TWIM follows the teachings of the suttas, it can be fairly said to be basing itself on the words of the Buddha. It is in this sense that Bhante Vimalaramsi considers TWIM to be a “Suttavādin” method. The Dhamma Sukha Meditation Center (TWIM) website says of TWIM,

We only follow the suttas. We are Suttavada. This is actually a historical sect of Theravada. When Theravada split apart after the 2nd council 18 new sects were created. Suttavada only followed the suttas and the vinaya and was one of the eighteen sects.<sup>34</sup>

To clarify this comment, which is found on the TWIM website, we would say that from a historical point of view, this is only a statement about orientation of practice, and not of philosophy. The Suttavādin school and the closely related Sautrāntika developed and defended many philosophical positions, as was the style in those

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<sup>34</sup> <http://www.dhammasukha.org/>. This website is the home of Dhamma Sukha Meditation Center which is the official website of TWIM. Dhamma Sukha Meditation Center is located in Missouri State USA and is the home base of Bhante Vimalaramsi and other TWIM teachers and practitioners. It can be noted from this quote that TWIM also emphasizes the *vinaya-piṭaka*. The *sutta-piṭaka* and the *vinaya-piṭaka* are the two authoritative baskets for TWIM. TWIM emphasizes the keeping of the precepts for ordained monks and nuns as well as the keeping of the five or ten precepts for lay practitioners. Accessed October 2017.

times.<sup>35</sup> TWIM is not interested in developing any philosophical positions.

We can see that with reference to meditation instruction, TWIM has a “*sutta-only*” orientation. What about the attitude towards other important Theravādin literature? How does TWIM treat the *Visuddhimagga* in terms of authority?

### **TWIM uses the *Visuddhimagga* as a resource book, not as an authoritative guide**

In the 5<sup>th</sup> century CE, the Indian Buddhist monk Ven. Ācariya Buddhaghosa, while living in Sri Lanka, wrote the *Visuddhimagga*, or *Path of Purification*, which is now the basis for much of *Theravāda* as it is now practiced. Most current *vipassanā* teachers rely on the *Visuddhimagga* as the primary textbook for meditation, and use it as a guide to interpret important texts such as the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*.

TWIM takes a different approach to the *Visuddhimagga*, and is in general agreement with the opinions expressed by Buddhādāsa Bhikkhu above. TWIM considers that the *Visuddhimagga* is not an authoritative text, and is not to be assumed to be a correct guide to the teachings of the Buddha. TWIM would consider that the *Visuddhimagga* has much of value with regard to the overall life of mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*), but especially with regard to the technique of meditation it is not a reliable guide.

The TWIM view of the *Visuddhimagga* will be treated more fully in later chapters. Briefly we can say here that in the TWIM view, Ven. Buddhaghosa introduced additions, innovations, and changes to the original meditation instructions in the suttas. Some of these

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<sup>35</sup> The terms *Suttavāda* and *Sautrāntika* are used to describe a group that branched off of the Sarvāstivādins and emphasized the primacy of the *sutta-piṭaka* over that of the *Abhidhamma* or other commentarial literature. The identities and doctrinal positions of the early Buddhist schools is complex and those interested to pursue the subject are referred to Nalinaksha Dutt’s **Buddhist Sects in India**. Motilal Banarsidass, Delhi, 2007. Information on the Sautrāntikas and Suttavādins can be found, among other places, on pp. 174-176.

changes may be considered substantial, and can have impact on theory, practice, and outcome.

TWIM does not follow Buddhaghosa's most important innovation concerning meditation, which was to separate the *samatha* and *vipassanā* aspects of practice. TWIM follows the *sutta* account which unifies these two fundamental aspects of practice. However, TWIM does utilize some of Buddhaghosa's method with regard to Loving Kindness practice, as it has proven its utility. Even in this regard, TWIM incorporates one aspect of Buddhaghosa's method but maintains its use within a unified system of *samatha* and *vipassanā*, which diverges from the method as given in the *Visuddhimagga*, and is true to the *sutta* method. This will be explained in Chapter VI, *Loving Kindness and Four Divine Abodes Meditation in TWIM*.

It is considered by many within the *Theravāda* that Buddhaghosa unerringly summarized the *tipiṭaka* and the commentaries, providing a guide to practice that is generally studied much more earnestly than the *suttas* themselves by Theravādin monks who take up meditation practice. It is claimed that Buddhaghosa's work accurately represents the instructions of the Buddha (The name *Buddhaghosa* means 'Voice of the Buddha'). With regards to the technique of meditation, TWIM does not share this view.

### **There was a large interval of time between the passing of the Buddha and the composition of the Visuddhimagga**

If we take the Theravādin date for the Buddha's teaching career as 6<sup>th</sup> century BCE, that means there was about nine hundred to a thousand years between the time of the Buddha and that of Buddhaghosa. A study of the history of Buddhism during this lengthy period of time shows that there were significant divergences among Buddhist schools and that many changes were made from the original teachings. During the passing of these many centuries, Buddhism had spread throughout the Indian sub-continent and beyond to overseas places such as Sri Lanka and southeast Asia, as well as to Central and

East Asia. Buddhism had not only become geographically diverse, but also varied in terms of doctrines and practices.

It would only be natural for Buddhism to have changed over such a long period of time, despite the efforts of the various competing schools to adhere to what they thought were the original teachings. To understand how long a period of time nine hundred or a thousand years is, let us imagine nine hundred years from the present time back into the past.

In Sri Lanka, going back one thousand years from our present time would take us back to the ancient Polonnaruwa period. In India, such an expanse of time goes back from the present to before the Muslim invasions, to the time of various Hindu and Buddhist kingdoms. In Europe, nine hundred or a thousand years back from the present takes us back to the time of knights and castles. In America, nine hundred or a thousand years back from the present time, there were only Native American cultures. No Europeans even knew of the existence of the Americas at that time. Australia, likewise, was wholly inhabited by aboriginal peoples.

In the countries of Southeast Asia, a span of nine or ten centuries back from the present takes us to a time in Thailand previous to the first Thai Kingdom of Sukkothai. In other words, there was not yet a Kingdom of Thailand. In the case of Myanmar, nine or ten centuries ago takes us to a time when Burma was just getting started with the beginnings of the ancient Kingdom of Pagan.

This gives us an idea of what a long period of time is nine or ten centuries. There was much time for Buddhism to change and evolve in so many centuries. Modern scholarship has allowed us to trace many of the changes and developments. Others are still poorly understood, but we do know the changes began to occur soon after the *parinibbāna* of the Buddha.

## **After the passing of the Buddha, many divergent teachings arose**

From the time of the passing of the Buddha, Buddhism lacked an agreed upon authority to adjudicate disagreements and controversies. During the Buddha's lifetime, the bhikkhus could go to ask the Buddha about vexing problems, at least if he was residing in their vicinity. With his passing, this opportunity was no longer available. Innovations began to occur. Disputes arose.

The centuries following the passing of the Buddha saw the rise of the various abhidhammas, the composition of many commentaries, and the development of various schools and schisms, based on varying interpretations of the *sutta* material and how to apply the *vinaya*. A number of scholars, including Y. Karunadassa, have traced and illuminated many such tendencies which began to fully manifest by the time of the third council during the reign of Emperor Ashoka. At that time, there were avid controversies regarding the nature of the *puggala* (what is it that experiences death and rebirth?) and the nature of the dhammas, or constituents of existence (are they momentary, in the here and now, or do they exist at all times? *sabbam sabbada atthi*), and similar questions. Such questions were not merely academic, but went to the heart of the Buddha's teaching of *anattā*, the impersonal nature of existence.<sup>36</sup>

It is beyond the scope of this book to develop and explain all of these divergences, but we will briefly look at one important tradition, that of *Abhidhamma*.

## **Most of the material in the Abhidhamma was composed in the centuries following the passing of the Buddha**

It is clear from the work of modern scholarship that the Theravādin *Abhidhamma* (as well as the Abhidhammas of other

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<sup>36</sup> Karunadassa, Y., "Theravāda as Vibhajjavāda: A Correct Identification for the Wrong Reasons?", a paper presented at the Symposium on Wilhelm Geiger and the Study of Sri Lanka, Colombo, 1995 (mimeograph copy).

Buddhist schools) is not a direct teaching of the Buddha, although it may be based on the development of tendencies already evident in the suttas. Toward the end of the Buddha's life there were certain suttas that appeared such as *Sangīti Sutta* and *Dasuttara Sutta* of the *Dīgha Nikāya* that were a sort of proto-*Abhidhamma*. They represent early efforts to systematize the teachings, which were found scattered throughout the suttas.

In the centuries that followed, a huge amount of material was added to the *Abhidhamma* proper, enough for it to warrant its own *piṭaka* or basket. By the time of Buddhaghosa in the Fifth Century CE, the *Abhidhamma* was considered to be the *buddhavacana*, i.e. words of the Buddha. The *abhidhamma-piṭaka* was not only given its own status as a basket of scripture, but it came to be considered the highest teaching of the Buddha, in a way, surpassing *sutta* itself.

### **The Abhidhamma was enshrined as the Word of the Buddha in the Visuddhimagga**

By the time of Ven. Buddhaghosa's residence in Sri Lanka, the suttas were coming to be viewed as merely a conventional teaching, considered to be a sort of discourse made understandable to average people, whereas the *Abhidhamma* was thought to be a higher level of analysis of the important aspects of the teaching. Therefore, any apparent discrepancy between *Abhidhamma* and *sutta* was often decided in favor of *Abhidhamma*. It was not really considered there would be any real discrepancy, as they were both the product of the Buddha himself. The only difference was considered to be in the level of sophistication of analysis or the choice of language to be used.

Ven. Buddhaghosa cemented this view of *Abhidhamma* as the highest and original teaching of the Buddha, by enshrining it as such in the *Visuddhimagga*, which became the main practice manual as



well as a sort of encyclopedia of *Theravāda* Buddhism.<sup>37</sup> As Ven. Buddhaghosa lived about 1500 years ago, his teaching is of an antiquity that has lent more weight to his authority within the *Theravāda*.

The *Theravāda* is a very conservative school, loath to change practices or opinions quickly. So Buddhaghosa's views on *Abhidhamma* and much else, once accepted, gained the authority of lineage and time. Few would have thought to question it. Even today, despite the availability of modern scholarship, few outside the world of scholarship would question the supremacy of *Abhidhamma*, or its status as the words of the Buddha.

The tradition has much invested in this particular way of viewing the *Abhidhamma* and to change such a view or related practices is not easy. Not only much of Theravādin philosophy, but also meditation practice derives as much or more from material composed subsequent to the passing of the Buddha such as found in the *Abhidhamma*, in the *Visuddhimagga*, and in other commentaries. TWIM favors material contained in the *sutta-piṭaka*.

### **Testing the teachings of the Buddha to see if they work**

According to Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation (TWIM), the *sutta* material itself (most of which is likely the actual word of the Buddha, or at least a reasonable facsimile thereof), should also be tested according to the results it produces. The Buddha, in the *Kalama Sutta* (AN 3:65) and elsewhere empowered us to challenge

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<sup>37</sup> In *Visuddhimagga* XII.72- 73, Buddhaghosa relates the twin miracle of the Buddha whereby he taught the *Abhidhamma* to the deities of the ten-thousand world spheres while creating an artificial Buddha to teach the *Abhidhamma* on earth to Ven. Sāriputta. As the English translator of the *Visuddhimagga*, Ven Ñānamoli notes in his footnote to this passage (XII, n.15, p. 800), “The only book in the *Tipiṭaka* to mention the Twin Miracle is the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*.” (Ps. i,53). See **The Path of Purification**, trans. by Ven. Ñānamoli, Buddhist Publication Society, Kandy, 1999, p. 386-387 for *Visuddhimagga* XII.72-73, referred to above. As such, this story cannot be attributed to the Early Buddhist Texts (EBT), but rather appears some time after the passing of the Buddha as well as after the passing of his disciple Ven. Sāriputta.

authority. He advised us to maintain a healthy skepticism and give our assent to concepts, ideas, practices, once proven to be for the good (*kusala*) through our own experience. TWIM maintains a great respect for the teachings of the Buddha, and encourages these teachings to be tested to the satisfaction of each individual. They are not to be blindly accepted or followed.

No one is to take authority away from us, not even the Buddha. Nor did the Buddha care to do so. He was interested in empowering his disciples to make their own discoveries and spiritual progress. As Bhante Vimalaramsi said in a previous quote, we are our own teachers. In verse 276 of the *Dhammapada*, the Buddha declares,

You yourselves must strive; the Tathāgatas only point the way. Those meditative ones who tread the path are released from the bonds of Māra.<sup>38 39</sup>

And verse 160 of *Dhammapada*:

One is truly one's protector. Who else could the protector be?

With oneself fully controlled one gains a protector which is hard to gain.<sup>40 41</sup>

And from the *Khandhavagga* of the *Saṃyutta Nikāya*:

Bhikkhus, dwell with yourselves as an island, with yourselves as a refuge, with no other refuge; with the *Dhamma* as an island, with the *Dhamma* as a refuge, with no other refuge. When you dwell with yourselves as an island, with yourselves as a refuge

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<sup>38</sup>, Buddharakkhita, Ven. translator., **The Dhammapada**. v. 276, (Kandy, Buddhist Publication Society, 2007), p. 87.

<sup>39</sup> *Tumhehi kiccaṃ ātappaṃ akkhātāro Tathāgata; paṭipannā pamokkhanti jhāyino Mārabandhanā. Dhammapadapāḷi 276*, CS version, [PTS 40]

<sup>40</sup> Buddharakkhita, Op. cit., **The Dhammapada**, v. 160, p.60.

<sup>41</sup> *Attā hi attano nātho kotho nātho paro siyā Attanā'va sudantena nāthaṃ labhati dullabhaṃ. Dhammapadapāḷi 160*, CS version, [PTS 24]

with no other refuge, with the *Dhamma* as an island, with the *Dhamma* as a refuge, with no other refuge, the basis itself should be investigated thus: ‘From what are sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair born? How are they produced?’<sup>42 43</sup>

## Seeing directly, for oneself

Referring to sorrow, lamentation, pain, displeasure, and despair, the question the Buddha advises his students to apply themselves to is, “How are they produced?” It is the seeing of how these afflictions of mind are produced that gives liberating wisdom. This is done in the suttas, and in the sutta-based TWIM method, by understanding in a practical way, the links of Dependent Origination. Seeing this clearly out of one’s own direct experience is the refuge the Buddha offers. No one, including the Buddha, can do this for us.

In Buddhism, there is no escape from responsibility for oneself, no matter how one tries to look elsewhere. This is very liberating and refreshing. Such freedom from dependency upon gods and gurus comes at a price. We have to live with the consequences of our own actions.

With sufficient striving, energy, dedication, and trust in the dhamma as the path, which is emphasized here, we take up the ultimate investigation. What is it that produces this mass of suffering, and precisely how does it arise? Anyone familiar with the twelve factors of Dependent Origination will recognize the last link here of sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair (*sokaparidevadukkhadomanassa*). Through understanding how they arise, their causes and conditions can

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<sup>42</sup> Bodhi, **The Connected Discourses of the Buddha**. SN.III.43(1), (PTS III 42), p.882-3.

<sup>43</sup> *Attadīpā bhikkhave, viharatha attasaraṇā anaññasaraṇā. Dhammadīpā dhammasaraṇā anaññasaraṇā.*

*Attadīpānaṃ bhikkhave, viharataṃ attasaraṇānaṃ anaññasaraṇānaṃ dhammadīpānaṃ dhammasaraṇānaṃ anaññasaraṇānaṃ, yoniyeva upaparikkhitabbā- "kiñjātikā sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā. Kimpahotikā"ti. Attadīpa Suttaṃ, SN.III.43(1), PTS SN III 42, CS version.*

be allayed and ultimately dispelled. In this manner, “the protector that is hard to gain” is obtained.

## Summary

Basing practice on the *Visuddhimagga* is the standard within the Theravādin tradition, and the *Visuddhimagga* is generally considered an unerring guide to the practice of meditation as laid out by the Buddha. As such, any method of meditation that bypasses the *Visuddhimagga* and other commentaries needs some explanation and justification as far as the *Theravāda* is concerned. Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation (TWIM) is going against the stream by bypassing the commentaries and going directly to the suttas for instruction.

However, the results of practice have shown this approach to be of great value. Bhante Vimalaramsi himself has much greater success with practice after turning directly to the suttas and now through the practice of TWIM, such a method is proving its value with many people. The TWIM method is best learned with a qualified teacher, but once learned the practitioner can see for him or herself the truth of the teachings of the Buddha.

## Chapter II

# The 6Rs: Right Mindfulness and Right Effort in the Practice of TWIM

The Buddha delineated the fundamental problem facing humanity and laid out its solution when he taught the Four Noble Truths. This teaching of suffering (*dukkha*), its cause, its cessation, and the way to its cessation was key to the Buddha's own awakening on the night of his enlightenment<sup>44</sup>, and which he first taught at Benares in the Deer park at Isipatana (*Saccavibhanga Sutta*, MN 141:2). All the other teachings of the Buddha were an elaboration on this central teaching, the full understanding of which provides an end to suffering and the realization of freedom, or *Nibbāna*.

The Buddha laid out clear instructions about how to end suffering and attain *Nibbāna*. Although his teachings could be used to gain a measure of happiness within the worldly life, for the avid practitioner, the Buddha consistently put forth *Nibbāna* as the worthy goal of practice.

The Buddha affirmed that *Nibbāna* is the goal of the practice in his talk with the Jain ascetic Aggivessana in the *Cūlasaccaka Sutta* as follows,

When a bhikkhu is thus liberated, he still honours, respects, reveres and venerates the Tathāgata thus: “The Blessed One is enlightened and he teaches the Dhamma for the sake of enlightenment. The Blessed One is tamed and he teaches the Dhamma for taming oneself. The Blessed One is at peace and he teaches the Dhamma for the sake of peace. The Blessed One has crossed over and he teaches the Dhamma for crossing over. The Blessed One has attained Nibbāna

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<sup>44</sup> MN 4:31, and MN 36:42.

and he teaches the Dhamma for attaining Nibbāna.”<sup>45</sup>

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Ven. Bhante Vimalaramsi also puts forth *Nibbāna* as the goal of the practice of Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation (TWIM). He writes,

The true aim of the Mettā Meditation (Mindfulness of Loving- Kindness) and the Ānāpānasati (Mindfulness of Breathing) is nothing less than the final liberation from suffering, which is the highest goal in the Buddha’s teachings-Nibbāna...

The supramundane Nibbāna takes time and effort to achieve. However, that does not mean it is impossible for lay men and lay women to attain it. They do so by persistent daily practice and by taking an occasional meditation retreat with a competent teacher who understands how the 6Rs, Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation, and Dependent Origination occur.

Even those who live active lives in the world can still achieve the highest goal of Supramundane Nibbāna.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, we see that Bhante Vimalaramsi is very affirming of the active possibility of both ordained and lay practitioners actually attaining *Nibbāna* in this very life. In fact, this is the experience of TWIM teachers and students, not only a theoretical possibility. The end of suffering and the attainment of *Nibbāna* is open to all,

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<sup>45</sup> Bodhi, **The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha**. MN 35:26, [PTS I 236], p. 330.

<sup>46</sup> *Evaṃ vimuttacitto kho aggivessana bhikkhu tathāgataññeva sakkaroṭi, garukaroṭi, māneti, pūjēti "buddho so bhagavā bodhāya dhammaṃ deseti. Danto so bhagavā damathāya dhammaṃ deseti. Santo so bhagavā samathāya dhammaṃ deseti. Tiṇṇo so bhagavā taraṇāya dhammaṃ deseti. Parinibbuto so bhagavā parinibbānāya dhammaṃ deseti "ti.*, MN 35:26, PTS I 236, CS edition.

<sup>47</sup> Vimalaramsi, **Life is Meditation- Meditation is Life**. p. 28-29.

ordained or lay, male or female, in this very life, as affirmed in the suttas<sup>48</sup> and through actual experience.

## The importance of Right Effort

The Noble Eightfold Path for the elimination of suffering and the attainment of *Nibbāna* requires effort and diligence. This key factor of Right Effort, working harmoniously with the other factors of the Noble Eightfold Path is an appropriate starting point for the aspiring practitioner. Right Effort is emphasized in the TWIM practice.

There is a verse in the *Dhammapada* which is often used as an apt summary of the Buddha's teachings,

To avoid evil, to cultivate good, and to cleanse  
one's own mind-this is the teaching of the Buddhas.  
49 50

This verse from the *Dhammapada* is a very concise rendition of the Buddha's teaching of Right Effort (*sammā-vāyāma*), which is one of the principle factors of the Noble Eightfold Path (*ariya-aṭṭhaṅgika-magga*). In the *Maggasaṃyutta*, the Buddha explains Right Effort as follows,

And what, bhikkhus, is right effort? Here, bhikkhus, a Bhikkhu generates desire for the nonarising of unarisen evil unwholesome states; he makes an effort, arouses energy, applies his mind, and strives. He generates desire for the abandoning of arisen evil unwholesome states; he makes an effort, arouses energy, applies his mind and strives. He generates desire for the arising of unarisen wholesome states; he makes an effort, arouses energy, applies his mind and strives.

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<sup>48</sup> MN 73:13, *Mahāvaccagota Sutta* and elsewhere such as MN 5:3, *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta*.

<sup>49</sup> Buddhārakkhita, **Dhammapada**, verse 183, p. 67.

<sup>50</sup> *Sabbapāpassa akaraṇaṃ kusalassa upasampadā Sacittapariyodapanam etaṃ buddhāna sāsanaṃ. Dhammapadapāḷi* 183, PTS 27, CS edition.

He generates desire for the maintenance of arisen wholesome states, for their nondecay, increase, expansion and fulfilment by development; he makes an effort, arouses energy, applies his mind, and strives. This is called right effort.<sup>51 52</sup>

In the above, the Buddha advises us to let go of any unwholesome state of mind, and bring up a wholesome state of mind. Through generating desire for these wholesome states of mind, by making an effort, arousing energy, applying the mind, and striving, the Bhikkhu (practitioner) avoids the dangers of the unwholesome and reaps the benefits of the wholesome.

This letting go of unarisen and arisen unwholesome states and cultivation of unarisen and arisen wholesome states is known as the “Four Right Kinds of Striving”. In Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation (TWIM) these Four Right Kinds of Striving form the basis of practice and the development of Right Effort and indeed of the entire Noble Eightfold Path.

## **Mindfulness as the key factor of Right Effort**

In order to let go of the unwholesome and bring up the wholesome, the practitioner must recognize that an unwholesome state of mind has arisen. This is the key factor, and without this, no meditation can properly take place. For this recognition to occur, the practitioner must have established the practice of turning mind’s attention inward, rather than allowing it to endlessly roam in the world of sensation. This turning of the attention inward is mindfulness (*sati*). TWIM

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<sup>51</sup> Bodhi, **The Connected Discourses of the Buddha**. SN 45:8 [PTS V.9], p.1529.

<sup>52</sup> *Katamo ca bhikkhave, sammāvāyāmo: idha bhikkhave, bhikkhu anuppannānaṃ pāpakānaṃ akusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ anuppādāya chandaṃ janeti vāyamati viriyaṃ ārabhati cittaṃ paggaṇhāti padahati. Uppannānaṃ pāpakānaṃ akusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ pahānāya chandaṃ janeti vāyamati viriyaṃ ārabhati cittaṃ paggaṇhāti padahati. Anuppannānaṃ kusālānaṃ dhammānaṃ uppādāya chandaṃ janeti vāyamati viriyaṃ ārabhati cittaṃ paggaṇhāti padahati. Uppannānaṃ kusālānaṃ dhammānaṃ thitīyā asamosāya bhīyyobhāvāya vepullāya bhāvanāya pāripūriyā chandaṃ janeti vāyamati viriyaṃ ārabhati cittaṃ paggaṇhāti padahati, ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhave, sammāvāyāmo.* SN 45:8, PTS V.9, CS edition.



emphasizes this establishment of mindfulness as the key factor which allows the meditator to successfully practice Right Effort.

To understand Right Effort and the Four Kinds of Right Striving within the TWIM method, we must first look at how TWIM approaches mindfulness (*sati*) which is the key factor of any meditation. The TWIM approach to mindfulness is unique in the world of current *vipassanā* practice.

### **The TWIM method of Mindfulness (*sati*)**

All Buddhist methods of meditation agree that there is no proper meditation without mindfulness. In the suttas, *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* and *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, among others, make this point clear.

And how, bhikkhus, is mindfulness of breathing developed and cultivated, so that it is of great fruit and great benefit?

Here a Bhikkhu, gone to the forest or to the root of a tree or to an empty hut, sits down; having folded his legs crosswise, set his body erect, and established mindfulness in front of him, ever mindful he breathes in, mindful he breathes out.<sup>53 54</sup>

These two suttas instruct that mindfulness is to be put forth right at the beginning of any meditation. But what is mindfulness, and how does TWIM reference the suttas in its use of mindfulness?

In the *Indriyasamyutta* the Buddha explains the faculty of mindfulness as follows.

And what, bhikkhus, is the faculty of mindfulness? Here, bhikkhus, the noble disciple is mindful, possessing supreme mindfulness and

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<sup>53</sup> Bodhi, **The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha**. MN.118.16-7, [PTS iii 82], p. 943.

<sup>54</sup> *Kathaṃ bhāvītā ca bhikkhave, ānāpānasati kathaṃ bahulīkatā mahapphalā hoti mahānisamsā. Idha bhikkhave, bhikkhū araṇṇagato vā rukkhamaḷagato vā suññāgāragato vā nisīdati pallankaṃ ābhujitvā ujum kāyaṃ paṇidhāya parimukhaṃ satim upaṭṭhapetvā so satova assasati, sato passasati. Ānāpānasati Sutta*, MN.118.16-7, PTS iii 82, CS edition.

discretion, one who remembers and recollects what was done and said long ago. He dwells contemplating the body in the body...feelings in feelings...mind in mind... phenomena in phenomena, ardent, clearly comprehending, mindful, having removed covetousness and displeasure in regard to the world. This is called the faculty of mindfulness.<sup>55 56</sup>

In this passage from the *Indriyasamyutta*, we see that *sati*, true to its etymology, has a component of “remembering”<sup>57</sup>, as well as a functioning definition as what mental factor is applied in the practice of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (the four satipaṭṭhānas). These two aspects of *sati* may seem unrelated to each other, but TWIM emphasizes both.

As for the aspect of remembering “what was done and said long ago”, this can be explained by the Buddha’s insistence that he had rediscovered a path that had been trod by numerous previous Buddhas. We can consider that the Buddha Gotama gave essentially the same instructions for the practice of *sati* as given by all previous teaching Buddhas. In any case, the practitioner must hear these instructions from a qualified teacher, remember the instructions, and then remember to practice them continuously until *nibbāna* is attained. Mindfulness is a constant factor of enlightenment throughout the course of practice. It never fades away, but rather grows stronger and sharper.

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<sup>55</sup> Bodhi, **The Connected Discourses of the Buddha**. SN 48:10 [PTS V.198], p. 1672

<sup>56</sup> *Katamañca bhikkhave, satindriyaṃ: idha bhikkhave, ariyasāvako satimā hoti paramena satinepakkena sannāgato cirakatampi cirabhāsitaampi saritā anussaritā. So kāye kāyānupassī viharati ātāpī sampajāno satimā vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassaṃ. Vedanāsu vedanānupassī viharati ātāpī sampajāno satimā vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassaṃ. Citta cittānupassī viharati ātāpī sampajāno satimā vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassaṃ. Dhammesu dhammānupassī viharati ātāpī sampajāno satimā vineyya loke abhijjhādomanassaṃ. Idam vuccati bhikkhave, satindriyaṃ.* SN 48:10, PTS V.198, CS edition.

<sup>57</sup> The Sanskrit equivalent to the Pali *sati* is *smṛti*, which carries the meaning of remembrance, reminiscence, thinking of or upon, calling to mind...memory. See Monier-Williams, **Sanskrit-English Dictionary**, (Delhi, Motilal Banarsidass, 2005 reprint), p.1272.

Bhante Vimalaramsi neatly summarizes the two aspects of *sati* in his definition of Right Mindfulness, which he terms “Harmonious Observation”. In his book *Life is Meditation, Meditation is Life* Bhante writes,

Harmonious Observation (Right Mindfulness)  
means:

“To remember to recognize any distraction that pulls one’s attention away from the object of meditation (or whatever task you are doing in life) in the present moment.”<sup>58</sup>

Thus, in TWIM, the memory aspect of *sati* is to get the instructions from the teacher and then remember to put them into practice, even when distracted. *Especially* when distracted. The second aspect of *sati* mentioned in the *Indriyasamyutta* passage above, of developing *sati* within the practice of the Four Foundations is also included in Bhante Vimalaramsi’s definition of *sati*. This is practiced by carefully observing the movement of mind’s attention. How the TWIM method of mindfulness leads naturally to the practice of *satipaṭṭhāna* will be explored more fully in a later chapter.

In his recent book on mindfulness of breathing (*ānāpānasati*), titled *The Breath of Love*, Bhante Vimalaramsi elaborates on the question: “What is mindfulness?”. He writes, “Mindfulness (*sati*) is ‘remembering to observe HOW mind’s attention moves moment-to-moment, and remembering what to do with any arising phenomena!’” He adds, “Successful meditation needs a highly developed skill of Mindfulness. The 6Rs training taught at Dhamma Sukha<sup>59</sup> is a reclaimed ancient guidance system which develops this skill.”<sup>60</sup> By “ancient guidance system” Bhante is referring to the teaching of the Buddha Gotama and of all previous teaching Buddhas.

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<sup>58</sup> Vimalaramsi, *Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life*. p. 67-68.

<sup>59</sup> Dhamma Sukha Meditation Center is Bhante’s center in Missouri State, USA.

<sup>60</sup> Vimalaramsi, Ven. Bhante, *The Breath of Love*. (Annapolis, Ehipassiko Foundation, 2012), p. 40.

Keeping a clear definition of mindfulness and how it interweaves with meditation is vital to the working of the TWIM approach. Bhante says in this regard,

When you study and practice meditation you will not be entirely successful until you master the definitions and interwoven nature of two words: Meditation and Mindfulness. I can give you the definitions but then you must experience for yourself how these two work together.

In the Buddhist teachings, Meditation means “observing the movement of mind’s attention moment-to-moment, in order to clearly see how the links of Dependent Origination actually work.” Mindfulness means ‘remembering to observe HOW mind’s attention moves from one thing to another.’”

The use of mindfulness actually causes mind to become sharper as you go and as you experience increasingly subtle states of mind. It isn’t hard to see why you must develop this precise mindfulness to keep the meditation going smoothly. <sup>61</sup>

## **The TWIM method of the 6Rs and the application of Mindfulness**

Bhante’s formulation of the 6Rs is the way that the meditator in the TWIM method applies mindfulness. The practice of the 6Rs is the TWIM version of the Four Right Strivings, adapted from the *sutta* teachings for easy usage by modern people. Here we will state only the basic keywords of the 6Rs and then give a full account below. The **Rs** will be put in bold to highlight how the 6Rs are counted as such.

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<sup>61</sup> Vimalaramsi, Ven. Bhante, **Guide to Forgiveness Meditation**. (Annapolis, Dhamma Sukha Meditation Center, 2015, p. 8.

Step one: **Recognize** (that the mind has wandered from its object of meditation), Step two: **Release** (the distraction), Step three: **Relax** (the whole body and mind), Step four: **Re-smile**, Step five: **Return** (to the object of meditation), Step six: **Repeat** (repeat steps 1-5, as necessary).

This is the procedure used repeatedly (step 6 above) in TWIM meditation. For the TWIM meditator, applying these 6Rs is Right Effort (*sammā-vāyāma*). We have already seen how Right Effort is explained by the Buddha to be the Four Right Strivings. This is TWIM’s adaptation of the Four Right Strivings.

The crucial first step in the 6Rs is to recognize that the mind has wandered from its object of meditation. This requires Right Mindfulness, *sammā sati*, which Bhante Vimalaramsi terms ‘Harmonious Observation’. Bhante prefers the English word ‘harmonious’ as a translation of the Pali *sammā*. As we will be using the better-known set of eight ‘Rights’ as well as Bhante’s preferred eight ‘Harmonies’, let us pause here and introduce these equivalents so as to avoid any confusion in the ensuing pages.

*Table 1: Pali, Standard English translation and TWIM equivalents of the Noble Eightfold Path (table created by the author)*

<i>sammā diṭṭhi</i>	Right View	Harmonious Perspective
<i>sammā saṅkappa</i>	Right Thought	Harmonious Imaging
<i>sammā vācā</i>	Right Speech	Harmonious Communication
<i>sammā kammanta</i>	Right Action	Harmonious Movement
<i>sammā ājīva</i>	Right Livelihood	Harmonious Lifestyle
<i>sammā vāyāma</i>	Right Effort	Harmonious Practice
<i>sammā sati</i>	Right Mindfulness	Harmonious Observation
<i>sammā samādhi</i>	Right Concentration	Harmonious Collectedness

The TWIM definition of and practice of Harmonious Observation (Right Mindfulness), is key to the whole TWIM system. It is a necessary foundation for the successful application of the 6Rs. As the meditator becomes adept at applying mindfulness within the practice of the 6Rs, Mindfulness becomes sharper and sharper, allowing the mind to progress from one *jhāna* to the next. Ever-increasing skill in applying mindfulness takes the meditator through the *rūpa* *jhānas* and the *arūpa* *jhānas* all the way to cessation.

### **Comparing the TWIM version of mindfulness with that in other contemporary methods of Visuddhimagga-based vipassanā**

Although there is some variation in how mindfulness is employed among the contemporary methods of *vipassanā* which are based on the *Visuddhimagga*, such variations generally attempt to be true to the *Visuddhimagga*. As the *Visuddhimagga* is still the standard for most *vipassanā* systems, it behooves us to compare how TWIM looks at the key factor of mindfulness with reference to the *Visuddhimagga*-based approaches.

We will find that the TWIM approach to mindfulness, described in some detail below, varies markedly from most other methods. How mindfulness is used sets the general direction of any meditation system. First, let us consider whether it is valid to come up with a new and different interpretation.

In surveying various methods of *vipassanā*, we find that there is a considerable degree of divergence in the definition of mindfulness (*sati*) in the world of *vipassanā* and within Buddhism in general. As George Dreyfus (Dreyfus 2011) in his article *Is Mindfulness Present-Centred and Non-Judgmental?* writes,

Hence, there is no one single view that can ever hope to qualify as ‘the Buddhist view of mindfulness.’  
What is often presented as ‘the Buddhist view of

mindfulness’ is often derived from scholastic traditions, particularly from the multiple versions of the *Abhidharma*. These presentations are certainly of great importance to understand some of the central Buddhist ideas but they cannot be taken to be a normative reference point, in relation to which other presentations can be judged as inauthentic.”<sup>62</sup>

This is important for our discussion as it demonstrates that no one version of *vipassanā* has gained a monopoly on how we look at mindfulness or use it in practice. There is room for legitimate variation, and new approaches. In fact, as Dreyfus points out, current definitions may be beholden to the *Abhidharma* or commentaries. In his article, he points out that the root of the word *sati* has an element of “remembering” in its etymology, and that definitions of mindfulness that ask us to pay “bare attention” are not necessarily taking account of this aspect. As we noted previously, *sati* is related to Vedic Sanskrit *smṛ*, to remember. The verb form of *sati* in Pali is *sarati*, to remember.<sup>63</sup>

## **The TWIM method of mindfulness harmonizes samatha and vipassanā**

As *sarati* means “to remember”, the question arises, “to remember what?” In practicing Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation, it is vital to remember to observe the movement of mind’s attention. This involves remembering to attend to the object of meditation, recognizing when attention is pulled away from the object of meditation, and to observe *how* mind’s attention was pulled away from the object of meditation. This attending to the object of meditation, and carefully observing how it is that attention is pulled away corresponds to *samatha* and *vipassanā*.

When mind’s attention is pulled away from the object of meditation, the meditator remembers to apply the 6Rs, which is in TWIM’s version

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<sup>62</sup> Dreyfus, George, “*Is Mindfulness Present-Centred and Non-Judgmental?*”, **Contemporary Buddhism**, Vol. 12, No. 1, May 2011, p. 42.

<sup>63</sup> Rhys Davids, T.W. and Stede, William, **The Pali-English Dictionary**. (New Delhi, Asian Educational Services, 2011 reprint), p.672 for *sati* and p. 697 for *sarati*.

of Right Effort. In this way, the mind of the meditator is steadied on the object of meditation, and there is a calm abiding (*samatha*). When attention is pulled away, the meditator begins to see the process by which attention is pulled to unwholesome states. This seeing clearly and thereby understanding the process is *vipassanā*. We will explore this in more detail in a later section, but suffice it to say here that this is the beginning of insightfully seeing the links of Dependent Origination.

The meditator who follows the TWIM method will remember to apply the 6Rs when mind's attention wanders. This process creates the proper conditions for insight as well as restoring a state of calm abiding of the mind. It requires great diligence to practice mindfulness in the TWIM manner, and it takes practice to sharpen one's mindfulness to begin to see clearly how the process of the arising and passing of unwholesome (and wholesome) mind states works.

The above is a basic sketch of what is mindfully (attentively) remembered in TWIM practice. Mindfulness improves greatly with repeated and diligent practice of the 6Rs, resulting in a deepening of *samatha* and the gradual development of *vipassanā*.

This harmonious practice of *samatha-vipassanā* within the TWIM system by taking an appropriate object of meditation and using the method of the 6Rs is not complex. Once the meditator becomes adept at the 6Rs, the practice is very simple to carry on. The simplicity is part of its beauty and utility. The object of meditation may change in course of practice, but the method of the 6Rs does not change. It is Right Effort, and takes the diligent meditator all the way to the attainment of *Nibbāna*.

### **Bhante Vimalaramsi prefers to translate *sati* as “Harmonious Observation”**

Let us briefly consider the choice of the English word “mindfulness” to translate the Pali term *sati*. It was T.W. Rhys Davids who came up with this rather masterful phrase which is now



sweeping the English-speaking world.<sup>64</sup> The problem with this translation, is that it suggests that the attentive mind is full, whereas the opposite is really the case. The attentive mind is relaxed and open, not full of the usual activities and perceptions of the mind.

Bhante Vimalaramsi's rendering of *sati* as "Harmonious Observation" avoids the suggestion that the mind with *sati* is full of this and that. Bhante's translation directly points to the fact that *sati* indicates a particular kind of attentiveness.

In this book, we will use both terms, and continue to use the commonly accepted phrase "mindfulness" along with "Harmonious Observation". Our continued use of the common term is partly in deference to the nearly universal acceptance of the translation of *sati* as mindfulness, which translation is now widely accepted in scientific circles.

### **Most contemporary vipassanā methods consider mindfulness as a kind of "bare attention"**

If we can proceed to generalize the diversity of definitions of mindfulness among the various approaches to *vipassanā*, we can say that most *vipassanā* schools consider mindfulness as "paying bare attention to one thing at a time, without judgement, without identification, and while disengaging from habitual patterns of response. It is present-centred, non-judgmental, non-reactive, and results in a kind of equanimity."<sup>65</sup>

In particular, this type of definition has made itself available to the therapeutic work of Jon Kabat-Zinn in his Mind-Based-Stress-Reduction (MBSR).<sup>66</sup> This approach has made mindfulness accessible to many people in hospitals, pain clinics and such venues, and research

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<sup>64</sup> Rhys Davids, T.W. and C.A.F. translators, **Dialogues of the Buddha**. (London, Pali Text Society, 1910), p. 322

<sup>65</sup> Dreyfuss, Op. cit., p. 43.

<sup>66</sup> Kabat-Zinn, Jon, **Full Catastrophe Living**. (New York, Delta Books 1990), see p. 2 for his basic definition of mindfulness as "mindfulness is moment-to-moment awareness" and pp. 33-40 for aspects such as non-judging.

has demonstrated its positive results when applied through MBSR, in relieving human suffering.

Kabat-Zinn explains that part of the effectiveness of this type of mindfulness lies in helping people gain clarity by dispelling the overbearing power of constant thought and reverie. According to Zinn, the application of mindfulness helps people clear the overbearing load of thinking and to have a direct experience of their body sensations and of the world around them.<sup>67</sup> This can result in a reduction of the kind of suffering associated with proliferation of thought (*papañca*), and can bring relief to people who are not only experiencing pain, but dealing with the psychologically magnified experience of their painful sensations.

This may be a partial explanation of how such a present-centered and non-judgmental approach can be of great help to many people in therapeutic settings.

This type of mindfulness as bare attention has become one of the dominant approaches in the world of *vipassanā* meditation. For example, the S.N. Goenka method emphasizes directly experiencing *vedanā*, sensation, without engaging in judgmental thinking.<sup>68</sup> Similarly, Ven. Gunaratana writes, “Mindfulness is mirror-thought, it reflects only what is presently happening and in exactly the way it is happening. There are no biases”.<sup>69</sup> Following the same general approach, in his book *Tranquility and Insight*, Amadeo Sole-Leris defines Right Mindfulness as, “the mindful, unbiased observation of all phenomena in order to perceive them and experience them as they are in actual fact, without emotional or intellectual distortions.”<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> Ibid, p. 22.

<sup>68</sup> Goenka, S.N., *Mahāsatiṭṭhāna Sutta*, (Igatpuri, Vipassana Research Institute, 2006), p. vii.

<sup>69</sup> Gunaratana, Ven. H., **Mindfulness in Plain English**. (Taipei, Corporate Body of Buddha Educational Foundation, 1991), p. 144.

<sup>70</sup> Sole-Leris, Amadeo, **Tranquility and Insight**. (Kandy, Buddhist Publication Society, 1999), p. 19.

Looking at this definition of mindfulness as bare attention without emotional distortions, we can see the likely benefits of this kind of method, the proper practice of which would help to counterbalance the human tendency for getting caught up in like and dislike, and creating stories in the mind to justify one's distorted perceptions. However, this definition and approach is inadequate for the practitioner of the TWIM method.

### **Mindfulness in TWIM adds a deeper dimension of attention beyond bare attention**

TWIM practice results in the observation of the arising and subsiding of phenomena, but adds a crucial element, that of observing *how* it is that mind's attention is pulled from the object of meditation into unwholesome mental states. If there is strong attentiveness to how mind's attention is pulled and pushed hither and thither, the meditator will begin to gain understanding of the mental processes that create suffering.

Such observation is built into the TWIM method from the very beginning and when mindfulness becomes sharp enough, yields insight wisdom, which greatly aids the process of letting go of craving and ignorance. It also yields much deeper levels of calm abiding of mind in a relaxed and open state. The deepened levels of tranquility aid the process of seeing and understanding and vice versa. *Samatha* and *vipassanā* work together harmoniously and synergistically.

This point is a key one for understanding the theory and practice of TWIM. In TWIM, mindfulness is not merely paying attention to what is presenting itself to the senses as *vedanā*, feeling, or as bare attention of the objective world, but is also remembering (*sati/smṛti*) to pay attention to the movement of attention itself and how that process happens.

As the diversity of internal and external phenomena (body, feeling, mind, and dhammas) present themselves to the mind, Right Mindfulness/Harmonious Attention is carefully watching any shift of mind's attention. It is this watching of *how* mind's attention moves that yields significant results in TWIM meditation. Bhante Vimalaramsi elaborates on how mindfulness in the TWIM meditation helps one to begin to see the impersonal nature of phenomena. Regarding Right Mindfulness, he writes,

This means to observe whatever arises in the present moment, let it be, and to see the impersonal nature in all of these phenomena (which is Harmonious Perspective-Right View, *sammā diṭṭhi-anatta*).

This is remembering to clearly observe how mind's attention moves: Harmonious Movement-Right Action, *sammā kammanta*) from one thing to another, and also remembering to let go and let the Harmonious Practice (*sammā vāyāma*, Right Effort of the 6Rs) do its work.<sup>71</sup>

We can note here that according to Bhante, the elements of the Noble Eightfold Path are not practiced in isolation but rather work together, as in the above practice of Right Mindfulness working in concert with Right View, Right Action, and Right Effort. All the aspects of the Noble Eightfold Path are interwoven with each other.

### **“Remembering” in TWIM is the basis of understanding/ insight into the impersonal nature of phenomena**

We can now see clearly that the component of remembering in the TWIM version of *sati* is remembering to observe the movement of mind's attention. This is done against a backdrop of total acceptance of whatever arises. Harmonious Observation for the TWIM meditator means remembering to apply Right Effort, which is the practice of the 6Rs. Bhante tells us that when all of this is carefully done, the

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<sup>71</sup> Vimalaramsi, *Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life*. p. 67-68.

meditator will gain insight into the impersonal nature of phenomena, *anatta*. As we shall see, this insight into the impersonal nature of phenomena comes primarily through clearly seeing the links of Dependent Origination.

In remembering to constantly be mindful in this way (*sati* as remembering to observe), something of inestimable value is gained: the insight into how mind's attention moves from moment-to-moment. This gives direct understanding of the links of Dependent Origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*), the Four Noble Truths, and The Three Characteristic Marks of Existence (*tilakkhāṇa*). In the TWIM method, all of this unfolds from proper use of mindfulness.

### **Observing how craving creates the movement of mind's attention**

Why is it so important to observe how mind's attention is pulled away from the object of meditation? The answer is directly related to the Buddha's teaching of the Four Noble Truths. It is craving (*taṇhā*), that pulls mind's attention towards any phenomena. This craving manifests as a grasping after a self, a subtle sense of 'I' that continually pervades our experience. This is ignorance (*avijjā*), the first of the links of Dependent Origination (*paṭicca samuppāda*). There is ignorance and craving at every link in Dependent Origination.

TWIM teacher David Johnson in his book *The Path to Nibbāna*, emphasizes how the effort of TWIM meditation is to identify and let go of craving. He writes,

Trying to stay with your object of meditation is where you find craving rearing its head. It is your goal to understand fully how craving arises-and by understanding the process you let go of this craving and stay with the object of meditation.<sup>72</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> Johnson, David C., *The Path to Nibbāna*. (Annapolis, Dhamma Sukha, 2016), p. 41.

David Johnson also elucidates on how the TWIM method of mindfulness helps the meditator to see how there is no self. He explains,

It's important to remember what it is you're supposed to be doing: observing the process of mind's attention and its movements as part of an *impersonal process*.

The next part of being mindful is being aware of how mind's attention moves from one thing to another. The Buddha intended that the meditator be mindful of what arises in the present, whatever that may be, and that they specifically see *how* it arises. He didn't care what it was and whether we looked at it closely or not. He did not intend for the meditator to pick out specific parts of the foundations or aggregates and only observe those. That [sort of focus] would be Concentration practice-focusing in on those individual parts.

Rather, he wanted you to see the activity of the mind's attention and to observe (1) how it arises and passes away without any effort on your part, and (2) how you take this mental movement personally as your 'self'-that is, mind clamps down onto a feeling and then identifies with it as "my" feeling even though you did not ask for it to arise or to pass away. You never had any control over it whatsoever. It just arose when conditions were right.<sup>73</sup>

It is this craving for self, and belief in a self, that lures us into ignorance and confusion, and results in much suffering. Ignorance and craving are two aspects of that which binds us and causes us to suffer in the cycle of existence (*saṃsāra*). The factors of ignorance and craving may be seen as two sides of the same coin. They give rise to each other and cannot exist without each other. They directly

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid, p. 39-40.

create our suffering and they are responsible for the movement of our mind's attention.

With proper mindfulness, this craving and self-grasping ignorance can be directly seen. David Johnson explains how identifying with feeling is at the root of our suffering. He writes,

This identification with feeling gives rise to the false belief in a personal self-the concept of "I". When you see how the "I" concept arises, release it by not keeping attention on it, relax the tension or tightness caused by that disturbance, smile, and return to the meditation object, it becomes clear that there is no self at all. There is only an endless stream of activity.

Since you have no control over what comes up, you begin to see how this identification process-this craving-is at the root of suffering. Craving manifests as the desire to control what happens.<sup>74</sup>

David Johnson is explaining how by practicing the 6Rs, the TWIM practitioner sees the links of Dependent Origination and thus gains insight into how the mind creates its own suffering by identifying with feeling (*vedanā*). By clearly seeing the process, the meditator gains insight into how craving arises and manifests, as well as how it subsides. This is seeing the Four Noble Truths.

In the TWIM method, by observing the pull that craving exerts on the mind and observing how it happens the meditator gains understanding of the Four Noble Truths and of Dependent Origination. Understanding of the Four Noble Truths and Dependent Origination is the antidote to ignorance (*avijjā*), and allows for the letting go of craving, its subsidence, and relief from suffering.

It can also be noted from the first of the two previous quotes from David Johnson that TWIM does not attempt to "concentrate" in the way that most contemporary *vipassanā* methods do so. This may

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid, p.40.

need some explanation, and by understanding this point the unique approach of TWIM will be revealed more clearly.

In most translations of the suttas into English, the Pali word *samādhi* is translated as ‘concentration’. This leads most practitioners to equate *samādhi* with concentration, and concentration is almost invariably recommended by most contemporary *vipassanā* methods. This type of concentration is often aimed at a kind of absorption, which is attained by a very strong focus on the object of meditation and exclusion of all else.

Bhante Vimalaramsi and other TWIM teachers would consider “concentration” to be a poor translation of *samādhi*. They prefer such words as “collectedness”, “composure of mind”, or “unified mind”.<sup>75</sup> TWIM is very much in favor of *sammā-samādhi*, or Right Samādhi, but does not favor the type of intense concentration followed in most methods. When practicing TWIM, such a degree of strong concentration proves to be counter-productive. The TWIM meditator does not attempt to control in any way what arises in the mind. Within TWIM, overly strong concentration is considered to be an effort to control the mind. Such an effort at control is rooted in craving, and is therefore not advisable.

Also noteworthy from the quotes from David Johnson’s book above is that the TWIM meditator does not attempt to selectively concentrate on any aspect of what arises in the mind. Most *vipassanā* methods teach some selective concentration, such as selecting the sensation of the breath at the tip of the nose or in the abdomen, the minute movements of the jaw in chewing food or the movement of the foot when walking.

When practicing TWIM, to observe carefully and in detail exactly how one moves one’s hand, the detailed mechanics of

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<sup>75</sup> Vimalaramsi, **Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life**. p. 19. Referring to *samādhi*, Bhante Vimalaramsi writes, “Thus, the true meaning is not merely ‘fixed absorption concentration or access concentration’ but calmness or stillness with sharp and open awareness in different degrees.”



moving the foot forward, or the intricate process of chewing one's meal will not yield this understanding and insight into how craving arises. Rather, it is careful attention to the movements of mind's attention, especially at the point at which the mind is pulled away from the object of meditation, that yields the understanding and insight. This is best done by continued attention to the object of meditation (mindfulness of the breath or mindfulness of Loving Kindness) while walking or eating rather than by attending to the very intricate processes of lifting the foot or chewing the food.

If mindfulness is not strong, the process by which craving pulls mind's attention away from the object of meditation will not be seen clearly. This is why mindfulness is so important and must be supported by diligence and clear comprehension/clear knowing (*sampajāna*). This is Right Mindfulness/Harmonious Observation, which is a fundamental part of the Noble Eightfold Path.

### **How the steps of the 6Rs enhance mindfulness**

Given the busy-ness and indeed chaos of the typical human mind, how can mindfulness be clear enough to see when the mind is on the object of meditation or has wandered away? No doubt this takes practice but as success is gradually achieved a degree of calmness of mind begins to allow for increased mindfulness and alertness on the part of the meditator. The ability to recognize when mind's attention has been pulled away is enhanced with deepened calmness. This calmness brings clarity.

Within the 6Rs, it is steps 2-5 that greatly enhance this calmness and resultant clarity. After Recognizing (#1) that the mind has wandered, the meditator Releases (#2) the distraction, and Relaxes (#3) the mind and body. This is crucial because at this point craving, which manifests as the tension and tightness, is released and relaxed away. Without its load of craving, the mind at that moment is open, relaxed, wholesome, and pure. When a smile (#4) is added, this pure,

wholesome mind is brought back to the object of meditation. With repeated practice (#6), mindfulness becomes stronger and sharper.

Calmness begets clarity. Seeing clearly begets calmness. Here again is the skillful harmonization of *samatha* and *vipassanā*.

## **Diligently practicing the 6Rs quickly leads to mundane Nibbāna**

With the letting go and relaxation something very special happens each time this process is carried out within the practice of the 6Rs. What it creates is a moment, perhaps a series of moments, where the meditator experiences clarity. For a moment, the burden of craving and its attendant suffering is not present. For a moment, the distorted perception that originates in the self-grasping “I” is not clouding the vision of the practitioner. Bhante Vimalaramsi explains this process as follows,

In short, there are two types of nibbāna; one is the worldly or mundane type of nibbāna and the other is the supramundane or unworldly type of nibbāna. The mundane, or worldly nibbāna is attained every time the meditator lets go of craving (*taṇhā*), which is an attachment or hindrance. This type of nibbāna will occur many thousands, hundreds of thousands of times, when one uses the 6Rs during meditation and seriously practices Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation (TWIM).<sup>76</sup>

## **Developing the Seven Factors of Awakening**

Even a brief moment of such a mind free of craving is enough to provide a clear contrast to the return of confusion, craving and distorted perception that is the product of our normal, untamed mind-moments. With continued practice of the 6Rs, the difference between

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<sup>76</sup> Vimalaramsi, *Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life*. p. 29.

the moments of clarity and the moments of obscuration are seen more clearly. Mindfulness (*sati*) increases. With initial success in the practice, interest in the process (*dhammavicaya*) perks up, and energy (*virīya*) for sustained practice is aroused. With energy for practice, the meditator experiences times that his or her mind is free from suffering. As a result of this, joy (*pīti*) unfolds.

The experience of joy can be a very powerful experience. It is enjoyable, and adds incentive for further practice. This state of joy, along with the persistent practice of letting go of craving through relaxing the tension and tightness in the mind and body (steps in the 6Rs), leads to the meditator becoming more and more relaxed and open (*passadhi*). The deepening of this open, relaxed state, with resultant calm abiding and clarity of sight creates an even state of balance (*samādhi*), and increasingly deeper levels of equanimity (*upekkhā*).

This progress in practice and development of the Seven Awakening Factors can happen rapidly if the meditator is earnest and energetic in practice and gains the success that comes quickly with letting go of craving and experiencing a pure mind. As the Buddha reminds us in *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, excellent progress in meditation can be made in a matter of a few days.

Within the TWIM method, everything depends on the correct application of mindfulness in carefully observing how mind's attention moves, and how the process works that pulls attention away from the object of meditation. Without this careful attention, the practice may become misdirected.

The importance of carefully and skillfully directing the mind in meditation (proper or right mindfulness) is explained by the Buddha in the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* using the simile of a sharp piece (spike) of straw in a field of rice or barley, as follows,

Bhikkhus, suppose a misdirected spike of hill rice or barley were pressed by the hand or foot. It is impossible that it would pierce the hand or foot and draw blood. For what reason? Because the spike is misdirected. So, too, it is impossible that a Bhikkhu with a misdirected mind would pierce ignorance, arouse true knowledge, and realize nibbāna. For what reason? Because the mind is misdirected.

Bhikkhus, suppose a well-directed spike of hill rice or barley were pressed by the hand or foot. It is possible that it would pierce the hand or foot and draw blood. For what reason? Because the spike is well directed. So, too, it is possible that a Bhikkhu with a well-directed mind would pierce ignorance.<sup>77 78</sup>

### **When practicing TWIM, the particular method of mindfulness as used in TWIM must be utilized**

Every form of Buddhist meditation has its way to properly direct the mind, depending on the dynamics of that type of meditation and the goals. In TWIM it is through carefully observing the movement of mind's attention that will provide the sharpness of a well-directed mind to pierce ignorance and thereby arouse true knowledge and the realization of *Nibbāna*.

If a meditator who is accustomed to another type of mindfulness comes to TWIM and attempts to use that previous approach to

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<sup>77</sup> Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*. AN. 1.41 [PTS I 7], p. 94.

<sup>78</sup> *Seyyathāpi bhikkhave sālisūkaṃ vā yavasūkaṃ vā micchāpaṇihitaṃ hatthena vā pādena vā akkantaṃ pādaṃ vā bhecchati, lohitaṃ vā uppādessatīti netam thānaṃ vijjati. Taṃ kissa hetu: micchāpaṇihitattā bhikkhave sūkassa. Evameva kho bhikkhave so vata bhikkhu micchāpaṇihitena cittaṃ avijjaṃ bhecchati, vijjaṃ uppādessati, nibbānaṃ sacchikarissatīti netam thānaṃ vijjati taṃ kissa hetu: micchāpaṇihitattā bhikkhave cittaṃ sātīti. Seyyathāpi bhikkhave sālisūkaṃ vā yavasūkaṃ vā sammāpaṇihitaṃ hatthena vā pādena vā akkantaṃ hatthaṃ vā pādaṃ vā bhecchati, lohitaṃ vā uppādessatīti thānametaṃ vijjati. Taṃ kissa hetu: sammāpaṇihitattā bhikkhave sūkassa. Evameva kho bhikkhave so vata bhikkhu sammāpaṇihitena cittaṃ avijjaṃ bhecchati, vijjaṃ uppādessati, nibbānaṃ sacchikarissatīti thānametaṃ vijjati taṃ kissa hetu: sammāpaṇihitattā bhikkhave cittaṃ sātīti.* AN 1:41, PTS I 17, CS edition.

directing the mind, it will fail to get the desired results. TWIM meditation depends upon using mindfulness according to the TWIM method. Without letting go of craving and relaxing tension and tightness, progress stalls.

We have explained some of the TWIM method of the 6Rs above but let us now look at the 6Rs in a more systematic and comprehensive way. In doing so we will understand how TWIM's system of the 6Rs relates to Right Mindfulness, Right Effort and the Four Right Strivings.

### **The simplicity and efficacy of the TWIM method**

The 6Rs are modeled directly on the Four Right Strivings. They represent a very simple and straightforward meditation technique that is used whether the object of meditation is Full Awareness of Breathing (*ānāpānasati*) or *Mettā* Meditation (as the beginning of *Brahmavihāra* meditation), which are the two favored objects of meditation in TWIM. No matter, as the 6Rs are the fundamental structure that guides the meditator throughout either of these meditations. The 6Rs are used whether sitting or walking in meditation. As the meditator moves into the higher *jhānas*, some adjustments to the object of meditation may be made, but the use of the 6R's remains constant. What this means is that TWIM is easy to learn, and some degree of success usually begins from the first few sessions of sitting.

This direct and immediate success is a key factor in the accessibility of TWIM. The method can be learned easily and quickly. Of course, there will be improvement as experience is gained, but most people are able to correctly perform the fundamentals of the meditation in the first or at least in the first few sittings. We are reminded of the description of the *dhamma* given in numerous places in the suttas,

Well-expounded is the teaching by the Blessed One; to be directly experienced, giving results here and now, inviting one to come and see, leading on to

the goal, to be comprehended by the wise, each for himself.<sup>79 80</sup>

What is striking in this description of the *dhamma* is the confidence with which it is proclaimed as being effective right now, without a long wait or going through lots of pain, drudgery, long hours of boredom, or frustration at not being able to comprehend the meditation technique or being unable to perform it successfully. The promise is made that it is immediately effective and to be directly experienced as such. For those of us who have labored long on our sitting cushions and have perhaps experienced some success after long months and years of practice, these words can seem a bit on the optimistic side, perhaps true enough, but exaggerated as to the time frame needed to realize the benefits. But is it possible to see these words as being an accurate description?

### **Relaxing tension and tightness within the system of the 6Rs results in the letting go of craving and the allaying of suffering**

If we take the basic problem of life to be *dukkha*, suffering, and the cause of *dukkha* is craving, then we can immediately begin to relieve this craving, and hence this suffering, through the application of the technique of the 6Rs, which is Right Effort. How is that possible? Simply because craving always manifests in the body and mind as tension and tightness. By learning to relax this tension and tightness, especially in the region of the head, and by applying the other steps of the 6Rs, craving is let go of. Some degree of suffering is dispelled. For a moment, the mind becomes pure, open, relaxed, light.

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<sup>79</sup> Walshe, **The Long Discourses of the Buddha**. DN 18.27, PTS II 218 (I have slightly altered according to my understanding of the Pali) p.299.

<sup>80</sup> ‘*Svākkhāto bhagavatā dhammo, sandhihiko, akāliko, ehipassiko, opanayiko, paccattam vedītabbo viññūhiti*’, DN 18.27, PTS II 218, CS edition.

This usually happens soon after commencing TWIM practice, often from the first session of meditation. The beginning meditator begins to understand how the technique works, and feels immediate relief as the craving is let go. This is a real experience, a coming and seeing, which is directly visible, and it does not take months or years to accomplish. In this way, the wholesomeness of the dhamma is tasted at the beginning. Its efficacy is verified. Confidence is quickly gained. Interest in the practice is raised, and energy for continued practice is forthcoming.<sup>81</sup>

### **Beginning TWIM practice**

TWIM meditation begins with taking the precepts, the setting up of mindfulness and the taking of an object of meditation. This object can be either the breath (*ānāpānasati*) or Loving Kindness (*mettā*), depending on the character and predisposition of the meditator. In most cases, *mettā* is the favored method, as progress is considered much faster for most people by using the Loving Kindness meditation. For the purpose of explaining how the 6Rs work, we will assume that the meditation is that of Loving Kindness.

### **Bringing up the feeling of Loving Kindness**

After sitting comfortably in a chair or on the floor, the body and mind are relaxed and the meditator remembers a time when he or she experienced happiness. A feeling of happiness arises as a warm glowing or radiating feeling in the center of the chest. When the feeling of happiness arises, the meditator makes a sincere wish for his/her own happiness. Any sincere wish such as “May I be happy.” Or “May I be filled with joy.” Or “May I be peaceful and calm.”, or

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<sup>81</sup> Most TWIM meditators feel a significant measure of success within a mere day or two, sometimes within only a few sitting sessions. However, for some, the first success of letting go of craving and feeling significant relief from suffering may take some days. There are many possible reasons why some take longer than others to experience the positive results of practice, but often those who are quickest to succeed have previously been careful to keep the precepts. Bhante Vimalaramsi emphasizes the importance of attention to living a virtuous life.

“May I be peaceful and kind.” will do as an appropriate wish. The meditator always begins with a wish for his/her own happiness. The wish must be sincere and must be felt. It is not repeated over and over like a mantra. The feeling is the key component, and later, the sub-vocalization will be dropped and only the feeling will remain.

This feeling in the center of the chest is the object of meditation. It is home base for the wandering mind. The object of meditation is held attentively but not tightly, not in a way to force the mind to stay on the object of meditation.

### **What to do when the mind wanders from the object of meditation**

When we sit down in meditation without our usual distractions and attempt to hold the object of meditation, the mind will wander. The question becomes: what to do when the mind wanders during meditation? This is the situation which shows the unique qualities of any meditation system, what is done when the mind wanders from its object of meditation. The TWIM method is to employ the 6Rs.

#### **The first step of the 6Rs, “Recognize”**

Step number one of 6Rs is to Recognize that the mind has wandered. This is a function of mindfulness, which is remembering to watch the movement of mind’s attention, however unskillfully at this beginning stage. Without mindfulness at this point, the mind will wander endlessly, as it is accustomed to doing. Therefore, mindfulness is the essential ingredient that creates meditation. As Bhante Vimalaramsi explains,

The first R is to RECOGNIZE but before we do it, the meditator must remember to use their observation power (Mindfulness) for the meditation cycle to start running. Mindfulness is the fuel. It’s just like gas [petrol] for an engine. Without Mindfulness, everything stops! To begin this cycle ‘smoothly’ you must start the engine and have lots of gas (Mindfulness) in the tank! Then we



begin to RECOGNIZE. Mindfulness remembers how you can recognize and observe any movement of mind's attention from one thing to another. This observation notices any movement of mind's attention away from the object of meditation, such as the breath, sending out mettā, or doing a task in daily life. You will notice a slight tightness or tension sensation as mind's attention barely begins to move toward any arising phenomena.

Pleasant or painful feeling can occur at any one of the six sense doors. Any sight, sound, odor, taste, touch, or thought can cause this pulling sensation to begin. With careful, non-judgmental observation, the meditator will notice a slight tightening sensation. RECOGNIZING early movement is vital to successful meditation.<sup>82</sup>

Here, Bhante is affirming what is clearly stated in the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* and the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, that when commencing meditation, the first step is for the meditator to “establish mindfulness in front of him”. Lacking mindfulness, the process of the 6Rs cannot be accomplished. Once mindfulness is established, the meditator can recognize when mind's attention has wandered from the object of meditation. This is the first step of the 6Rs, to “Recognize”.

In the above instruction on Recognizing, Bhante is giving the procedure both for the beginning and more accomplished meditator. At the beginning stages, the meditator may or may not be able to feel the pulling sensation as a result of the painful or pleasant feeling arising at one of the sense doors.

But when a distraction arises and mind's attention wanders, the beginner will at least likely to be able to feel some amount of tension or tightness in the body, particularly in the area of the inside of the head. If the tension is not felt inside the head, then likely he or she

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<sup>82</sup> Vimalaramsi, **The Breath of Love**. pp. 40-42

will be able to feel tension in the face. The more advanced meditator will experience this tension and tightness on an increasingly subtle level, and will certainly feel the tension and tightness inside the head and elsewhere in the body, which manifests when craving arises and pulls at mind's attention.

### **The second step of the 6Rs, “Release”**

After the wandering of mind's attention has been recognized, comes the second step of the 6Rs, namely “Release”. As Bhante explains, after the meditator becomes aware that the mind is no longer on the object of meditation, he or she continues on to:

RELEASE: When a feeling or a thought arises, you RELEASE it, let it be there without giving any more attention to it. The content of the distraction is not important at all, but the mechanics of HOW it arose are important! Just let go of any tightness around it; let it be there without placing attention on it. Without attention, the tightness passes away.<sup>83</sup>

Bhante explains the importance of not keeping mind's attention on the hindrance. “Mind's attention is the nutriment or food for craving and clinging to arise. Without attention, the clinging passes away from a lack of food.”<sup>84</sup>

The distraction has arisen due to craving. It has been recognized as a distraction, and then is released. It is allowed to be there, but is not fed with attention. Since attention is the nutriment (*āhāra*) that feeds any distraction based on craving, the withdrawal of attention brings about the passing away of the distraction.

Unlike many methods which have the meditator look directly at the distraction until it passes, TWIM releases the attention from the distraction, without creating any aversion around the arising of the distraction. This is a middle way approach, neither pushing the

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<sup>83</sup> *ibid*, p.42.

<sup>84</sup> Vimalaramsi, *Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life*. p. 114.

distraction away, not pulling it towards one. Just to let it be, whereupon it will eventually fade away on its own.

The TWIM approach to the arising of distraction is to let whatever has arisen be there without engaging in attraction or aversion regarding the distraction. Instead of pushing or pulling, which create more tension as they are due to craving (I want the distraction, or, conversely, I want the distraction to go away), the meditative mind allows what has arisen to be, and the mind is softened and opened with the next step, the Relax step.

### **The third step of the 6Rs, “Relax”**

Bhante Vimalaramsi explains the Relax step as follows. He writes,

RELAX: After releasing the feeling or sensation, and allowing it to be there without trying to control it, there is a subtle, barely noticeable tension within mind/body. This is why the RELAX step (tranquilization step as stated in the suttas) is being pointed out by the Buddha in his meditation instructions. PLEASE DON'T SKIP THIS STEP! It would be like not putting oil in a car so the motor can run smoothly. The important Pali word here is *pas'sambaya*. This word specifically means “to tranquilize” and appears as “an action verb to be performed” as described in the suttas and is not a “general kind of relaxing” that is included within other release steps found in other kinds of meditation. This point is sometimes misunderstood in translation which then changes the result.

Without performing this step of relaxation every time in the 6R cycle, the meditator will not experience a close-up view of the ceasing (cessation) of the tension caused by craving, or the feeling of relief as the tightness is relaxed. Note that the craving always

first manifests as tightness or tension in both one's mind and body. You have a momentary opportunity to see and experience the true nature and relief of tightness and suffering while performing the RELEASE/RELAX steps.<sup>85</sup>

Most meditation systems agree that relaxation is important. However, it is usually seen as a beneficial product or by-product of the meditation process, which can take some time to manifest. This is the “general” kind of relaxing that Bhante is advising does not go far enough in following the specific instructions of the Buddha or in gaining a clear view of how craving produces tension and tightness in the body and mind.

In TWIM the relaxation is not left to some kind of long, general process, but is directly structured into the meditation at each step of applying Right Effort. It is considered an essential component of the meditation, not only for the value of the relaxation itself in producing tranquility and calmness (*samatha*), but also for the opportunity for insight that it provides (*vipassanā*). Here again is the unity of *samatha* and *vipassanā* within TWIM practice.

As Bhante points out in the above quote, by relaxing the mind and body, and by letting go of the craving that has manifested as tension and tightness, there is a possibility to directly see how suffering (*dukkha*) arises as a result of that tension and tightness. This is *vipassanā*, insight. And the opportunity for such insight arises from calmness and relaxation, which is *samatha*. This is the union of *samatha* and *vipassanā*.

### **The fourth step of the 6Rs, “Re-smile”**

Having relaxed the body and mind, and having relaxed the craving that manifested as tension and tightness, Bhante tells us that

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<sup>85</sup> Vimalaramsi, *The Breath of Love*. p. 42.

mindfulness reminds the meditator to apply the next step of the 6Rs, which is:

RE-SMILE: Learning to smile with the mind and raising slightly the corners of the mouth helps mind to be observant, alert, and agile. Getting overly serious, tensing up or frowning causes mind to become heavy and your mindfulness becomes dull and slow. Your insights become more difficult to see, thus slowing down your understanding of dhamma. Imagine for a moment the bodhisatta resting under the rose apple tree as a young boy. He was not serious and tense when he attained a pleasant abiding (*jhāna*) and had deep insights with a light mind. Do you want to see clearly? It's easy! Just lighten up, have fun exploring, and smile! Smiling leads us to a happier, more interesting practice. If the meditator forgets to Release/Relax, rather than punishing or criticizing yourself, be kind, re-smile, and start again. Keeping up your humor, sense of fun exploration, and recycling is important.<sup>86</sup>

Bhante's emphasis on smiling during meditation (and at all times) is unusual in the world of meditation instruction and practice. Bhante even insists that meditation should be fun, interesting, and done with a sense of humor. Certainly, we can see many meditators who display wonderful smiles and a keen sense of humor in their interactions with people. Seldom is the smile or sense of humor carried into the meditation hall, where it is often considered to be out of place or even unseemly.

We can see the same manifestation of overly serious demeanor when dhamma talks are given. Ordained sangha members who give the dhamma talks may normally be smiling, happy people, but it may be observed that when they give dhamma teachings to the lay public, they usually put on a rather serious face. This may be considered a

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<sup>86</sup> *ibid*, p. 43.

nod to the requirements of what is considered dignified behaviour, but it leads people to believe that dhamma practice is a rather gravely serious affair, within the TWIM framework, such deep seriousness is counter-productive to progress in mental development (*bhāvanā*).

Rather than being full of smiling faces, many meditation halls appear to be places of rather grim determination, with the faces of the meditators reflecting this intense seriousness. Bhante is telling us that being overly seriousness slows down progress, dulls our mindfulness, and slows down the process of insight.

The smile, or lack thereof, is also a way to recognize when the mind has become distracted and craving is manifesting as tension and tightness. Almost invariably, when the smile disappears off the face of the meditator, craving is manifesting and mind's attention to the object of meditation is wavering.

Once the soft, gentle smile has been restored and the mind has been relaxed, opened, softened and lightened through the application of steps 1-4 of the 6Rs, comes the return to the object of meditation.

### **Step five of the 6Rs, “Return” or Re-direct”**

After reminding us to re-smile, Bhante instructs us to:

RETURN or RE-DIRECT: Gently re-direct mind's attention back to the object of meditation (that is the breath and relaxing, or *Mettā* and relaxing), continuing with a gentle collected mind and use that object of meditation as 'home base'. In daily life, having been pulled off task, this is where you return your attention back to releasing, relaxing, and re-smiling into the task.

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After Recognizing that mind's attention has wandered from the object of meditation, after Releasing the distraction, after Relaxing the mind and body, and then Re-smiling to open and lighten the mind

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<sup>87</sup> *ibid*, pp. 43-44.

while sharpening mindfulness, the mind is then Redirected to the object of meditation. This “collects” or “focuses” the mind, which is the original sense of *ekaggatā*, usually translated as “one-pointedness”.

Due to the application of mindfulness and the 6Rs, the mind is relaxed and open, has let go of tension and tightness, and has let go of the associated craving. It is a light and collected mind, with keen mindfulness, but neither overly concentrated, nor allowed to wander aimlessly.

Such a mind can be termed a “Rose Apple Mind”, similar to the mind of the young Gotama when he experienced his first meditation under the rose apple tree at the plowing ceremony. It is this type of mind that the Buddha recalled when sitting under another tree, the Bodhi Tree at Bodhgaya, when he was attempting to find a middle path to avoid the extremes of too much tension and too much laxity. When the bodhisatta remembered his boyhood experience and adopted that mind which was neither too tight nor too loose, he was able to gain *Nibbāna*. The TWIM practice of the 6Rs aims to create such a Rose Apple Mind.

### **The sixth step of the 6Rs, “Repeat”**

After redirecting the mind to the object of meditation, Bhante instructs us to:

REPEAT: Repeat your meditation on your object and keep it going as long as you can and then repeat this entire practice cycle as needed to attain the results the Buddha said could be reached in this lifetime!

Repeating the 6Rs cycle over and over again will eventually replace old habitual suffering as we see clearly for ourselves what suffering actually is: notice the cause of it and how we become involved with the tension and tightness of it; experience how to reach a cessation of that suffering by releasing and relaxing;

and discover how we can exercise the direct path to that same cessation of suffering. We achieve that cessation each time we release and arising feeling, relax and re-smile. Notice the relief!<sup>88</sup>

Bhante ends his instruction above with the advice to notice the relief from suffering that is experienced each time the 6Rs are performed and the mind lets go of the craving that has manifested. When the meditator becomes adept at this practice, such relief from suffering becomes very noticeable, and joy arises. TWIM instructor David Johnson discusses this point in his book *The Path to Nibbāna*. He writes,

Every time you 6R the hindrance it grows weaker. Why? Because you have released the craving which is the cause of it coming up. Finally, you do one last 6R process, and the hindrance *completely* disappears. It just has no further energy. From this release and resulting relief, the first *jhāna* arises and the mind enters into a pure state. When the hindrance runs out of energy, you have a real sense of relief, you feel joy arising, which is a very light, happy feeling. You will feel light in both your mind and your body. Quite nice!<sup>89</sup>

In this way, diligently practicing the 6Rs with ever-sharpening mindfulness leads the meditator directly into the first *jhāna*. Attaining the first *jhāna* in TWIM is not through the suppression of craving by means of intense concentration, but rather by the subsiding or cessation of craving brought about by balance of mind. This is a very simple but effective approach, and TWIM meditators often attain the first *jhāna* and beyond within one retreat. It is not uncommon for TWIM meditators

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid, pp. 44-45.

<sup>89</sup> Johnson, David C., *The Path to Nibbāna*. p.97.



to attain the *arūpa* jhānas in one retreat. David Johnson remarks, “When you add the relax-step, progress is swift!”<sup>90</sup>

## **TWIM is not absorption concentration**

David Johnson explains how the TWIM approach differs from concentration practice/absorption meditation. He writes,

Concentration practice tries to control mind and push away distracting thoughts and sensations. It both focuses down onto the object and then pushes away the wandering mind.

Since what you are trying to achieve here is the removal of craving, you must see and understand it, not push it away. Absorption just puts it on the shelf in such a way that when you come out of the absorption jhāna, the hindrances come back even stronger; like a dog you penned up that was vicious - you open the gate and now he attacks you with full-force. [In TWIM practice] instead of pushing away the distraction, you simply relax into it and accept that it is there.<sup>91</sup>

As David Johnson points out, TWIM aims at the cessation of craving rather than its suppression. This means that there is no rebound of suppressed craving when strong concentration is removed at the end of formal meditation. Rather, TWIM aims at harmonious concentration, holding the attention neither too strongly nor too loosely focused. Nothing is suppressed, and there is no rebound effect when formal meditation comes to an end.

TWIM relies upon the deepening of tranquility gained by the letting go of craving rather than upon forceful suppression of the hindrances and distractions. This is in keeping with the instructions as given in the suttas. The importance of tranquilizing the tension and tightness and

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<sup>90</sup> *ibid*, p. 69.

<sup>91</sup> *ibid*, p. 67.

attaining a unification of mind without forceful suppression is taught by the Buddha in two sections of the *Āṅguttara Nikāya*. In the *Samādhisuttaṃ* of the *Pañcakanipāta* the Buddha explains the nature of the desired type of concentration and unification of mind (*sammā-samādhi*) as follows,

Bhikkhus, being alert and mindful, develop concentration that is measureless. When, alert and mindful, you develop concentration that is measureless, five kinds of knowledge arise that are personally yours. What five? (1) The knowledge arises that is personally yours: ‘This concentration is presently pleasant and in the future has a pleasant result.’ (2) The knowledge arises that is personally yours: ‘This concentration is noble and spiritual.’ (3) The knowledge arises that is personally yours: ‘This concentration is not practiced by low persons’. (4) The knowledge arises that is personally yours: ‘This concentration is peaceful and sublime, gained by full tranquilization, and attained to unification; it is not reined in and checked by forcefully suppressing [the defilements].’ (5) The knowledge arises which is personally yours: ‘I enter this concentration mindfully and I emerge from it mindfully.’ Bhikkhus, being alert and continuously mindful, develop concentration that is measureless. When you are alert and mindful, developing concentration that is measureless, these five kinds of knowledge arise that are personally yours.<sup>92 93</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Bodhi, **The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha**. AN 5:27, [PTS III.25], p. 647.

<sup>93</sup> *Samādhim bhikkhave bhāvētha appamāṇaṃ nipakā patissatā. Samādhim bhikkhave bhāvayataṃ appamāṇaṃ nipakānaṃ patissatānaṃ pañca ñāṇāni paccattaṃ yeva uppajjanti. Katamāni pañca: ayaṃ samādhi paccuppannasukho ceva āyatim ca sukhavipākoti paccattaṃ yeva ñāṇaṃ uppajjati. Ayaṃ samādhi ariyo nirāmisoti paccattaṃ yeva ñāṇaṃ uppajjati. Ayaṃ samādhi akāpurisasevito'ti paccattaṃ yeva ñāṇaṃ uppajjati. Ayaṃ samādhi santo paṇīto paṭippassaddhaladdho ekodibhāvādhigato na ca*

A similar teaching is given in the *Tikanipāta* of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* where the two methods are contrasted, that of forceful suppression, and that of full tranquilization. The Buddha points out the contrast as follows,

...That concentration is not peaceful and sublime, not gained by full tranquilization, not attained to unification, but is reigned in and checked by forcefully suppressing [the defilements].

But Bhikkhus, there comes a time when his mind becomes internally steady, composed, unified, and concentrated. That concentration is peaceful and sublime, gained by full tranquilization, and attained to unification. It is not reigned in and checked by forcefully suppressing [the defilements]. Then, there being a suitable basis, he is capable of realizing any state realizable by direct knowledge toward which he might incline his mind.<sup>94 95</sup>

Notice that qualities of the mind such as steadiness, composure, unification, and concentration, are gained by full tranquilization, not by suppression. Further, this provides a suitable basis for direct knowledge, of which the various kinds are listed in the following sections of the text. The Bhikkhu may incline his mind towards such

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*sasaṃkhāraniggayhavārita vato'ti paccattaṃ yeva nāṇaṃ uppajjati. So kho paṇāhaṃ imaṃ samādhiṃ sato va samāpajjāmi sato va uṭṭhahāmi'ti paccattaṃ yeva nāṇaṃ uppajjati. Samādhiṃ bhikkhave bhāvētha appamāṇaṃ nipakā patissatā. Samādhiṃ bhikkhave bhāvayatāṃ appamāṇaṃ nipakānaṃ patissatānaṃ imāni pañca nāṇāni paccattaṃ yeva uppajjanti'ti. AN 5:27, PTS III.25, CS edition.*

<sup>94</sup> Bodhi, Op. cit., AN 3:101 [PTS I.254], p. 336.

<sup>95</sup> *So hoti samādhi na ceva santo na ca paṇīto na paṭippassaddhiladdho na ekodibhāvādhigato, sasaṃkhāraniggayhavāritavato. Hoti so bhikkhave samayo, yaṃ taṃ cittaṃ ajjhataññeva santiṭṭhati, sannisīdati, ekodihoti, samādhiyati. So hoti samādhi santo paṇīto paṭippassaddhiladdho ekodibhāvādhigato, na sasaṃkhāraniggayhavāritavato. Yassa yassa ca abhiññā sacchikaraṇīyassa dhammassa cittaṃ abhininnāmeti abhiññā sacchikiriya, tatra tatre'va sakkhibhabbatāṃ pāpuṇāti sati sati āyatane. AN 3:101, PTS I 254, CS edition.*

things as the divine ear, the recollection of past lifetimes, and the divine eye, culminating in, according to the Buddha,

“If he wishes ‘May I, with the destruction of the taints, in this very life realize for myself with direct knowledge the taintless liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, and having entered upon it, may I dwell in it’, he is capable of realizing it, there being a suitable basis.”<sup>96 97</sup>

Therefore, concentration (collectedness of mind) based on tranquilization provides the basis for the attainment of liberating knowledge, whereas concentration based on forcible suppression provides no such basis.

### **The simplicity and profundity of the TWIM method**

With TWIM, the method is simple and the practice is profound. It is easy to learn and only requires the commitment to practice regularly and with full mindfulness for substantial progress to be made. Upon the advice of the teacher, the object of meditation may change as one reaches the higher jhānas, but the practice of the 6Rs remains the same throughout. Thus, there is no need to radically shift the method of meditation or to learn new complexities of technique.

Most people who receive instructions in the TWIM method from a qualified teacher can learn the method quite well within one or two retreats. Although the ongoing guidance of a qualified teacher is of value, once the method is learned, the practitioner can make substantial progress on his or her own.

This means that TWIM is very accessible to the average person, an important factor if meditation is to become part of mainstream society (part of a “culture of awakening”) rather than the practice and domain

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<sup>96</sup> Bodhi, Op. cit., AN 3:101 [PTS I 256], pp. 337-338.

<sup>97</sup> *So sace ākaṅkhati "āsavānaṃ khayā anāsavaṃ cetovimuttiṃ paññāvimuttiṃ diṭṭhe'va dhamme sayam abhiññā sacchikatvā upasampajja vihareyya"nti, tatra tatre'va sakkhibhabbatam pāpuṇāti sati sati āyatane'ti.* AN 3:101, PTS I 256, CS edition.

of a very few. In the introduction, we discussed the importance of making the practice of meditation more widely available and accessible to the average person in society. TWIM does so in a way as to make the learning of the technique easy, and the practice is straightforward, while the experience and understanding gained through practice is very deep and far-reaching.

In making meditation accessible to the average person, TWIM does not compromise the rigorous methods put forth by the Buddha. Ease and rigor are harmoniously blended in TWIM. Certainly, with sharp mindfulness, the meditation will become much more subtle and profound, but this is due to a deepening of practice, rather than due to a shift of method. The TWIM instructions avoid complexity and are not difficult to follow. They await the earnest practitioner.

### **Practicing according to the instructions given by the Buddha in the suttas is immediately effective**

The meditator may experience the 6Rs as being a bit mechanical and clumsy at first, but with sustained practice, the method becomes smooth and rolls as one exercise rather than 6 separate steps. This TWIM version of Right Effort does not change. The object of meditation may be adjusted in the higher jhānas, but the 6R practice remains the same, the only difference being the skill with which it is executed. Bhante assures us that all that is needed to realize *Nibbāna* is Right Mindfulness and the persistent practice of the 6Rs. He summarizes,

Mindfulness (*sati*), is very relevant to Buddhist meditation and daily life. Sharpening your skill of Mindfulness is the key to simple and smooth meditation. The process of remembering keeps the six steps of the practice moving. Practicing this meditation as close to the instructions (found in the suttas) as possible will lighten life's experience. A very similar practice was taught to people in the time of the Buddha. It was taught

as Right Effort. Within the 6Rs we have added a couple more steps to make things a little easier to understand.

The remarkable results of doing the practice in this way are “immediately effective” for anyone who diligently and ardently embraces these instructions. When you have an attachment arise this practice will eventually dissolve the hindrance, but it does take persistent use of the 6Rs to have this happen.

When you practice in this way, because it is found to be so relevant in daily life, it changes your perspective and leads you to a more successful, happy, and peaceful experience. As mindfulness develops, knowledge and wisdom grow naturally as you see HOW things work by witnessing the impersonal process of Dependent Origination.<sup>98</sup>

## Summary

Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation uses the practice of the 6Rs as the basis of the meditation. The basic method is to attend to the object of meditation, which is either the feeling of Loving Kindness or the breath. When the mind is pulled away from the object of meditation, the 6Rs are used. First of all, mindfulness must be alert enough to see that the mind has been pulled away. Then the distraction is let go, without pushing away or pulling (neither aversion nor attraction). This much is common in many *vipassanā* methods, including TWIM.

At this point, the unique characteristic of TWIM emerges. As the distraction is caused by craving, and manifests as tension and tightness, the TWIM meditator relaxes the tension and tightness in mind and body and smiles before returning the mind to the object of meditation.

Mindfulness in TWIM is to observe the movements of mind’s attention. It is mindfulness which informs the meditator that the mind

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<sup>98</sup> Vimalaramsi, **The Breath of Love**. pp. 44-45.

has been drawn away from the object of meditation. In TWIM, the observation of changes in attention is the key to understanding how mind works and how we create our suffering.

The TWIM method is simple to learn and to practice. For success the meditator needs remember the instructions and to remember to carefully carry them out. Due to its simplicity and ease, TWIM is accessible to many people who can make excellent progress immediately upon commencing practice. The TWIM method is easily applicable to daily life.

## Chapter III

# Harmonious Practice

With an understanding of the practice of the 6Rs, we understand the basic technique of Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation. Following the method of the 6Rs is the basis of Right Effort (*sammā vāyāma*) which Bhante Vimalaramsi prefers to call “harmonious practice”.

Of course, to understand such a practice conceptually is very different from having actually used the practice and directly experienced it. The practice of the 6Rs is very simple and easy to apply, but the beneficial effects are profound.

### The importance of the relax step in TWIM

The key part of the 6Rs is the inclusion of the relax step. This intentional relaxation changes the meditation from absorption concentration to a tranquil wisdom, or what can be termed “openness” meditation. In TWIM, the relaxing is not left to chance, but is directly structured into the “letting go” of whatever hindrance arises. After some practice, this relaxation is done automatically, as soon as tension and tightness are felt. In this way, the meditator can let go of a hindrance. It may return, many times, but each time it is let go followed by relaxing of body and mind, its power weakens, and eventually it will disappear completely.

The 6Rs will greatly aid the meditator in developing *samatha*, or calmness and tranquility. When the proper mindfulness is applied, it also makes the meditation an effective form of *vipassanā*. This is how TWIM develops the harmony of *samatha* and *vipassanā*.

The 6Rs are the mainstay of TWIM practice but could actually be applied to any form of Buddhist meditation that uses an object of meditation. Buddhist meditators of many traditions may find the method of the 6Rs useful in their practice. It is a very adaptable technique. It is rare to find such intentional, systematic relaxation as



a structured part of practice among various forms of *vipassanā*. The inclusion of the “relax step” is a unique characteristic of TWIM.

## Rolling the Rs

As in any method which employs a series of steps, going through the 6Rs can feel a bit clumsy to the beginner. But it is meant to become smooth and fluid in its application, which one TWIM meditator termed “Rolling the Rs”. The step-by-step numbering of the procedure is used to break the technique down into easily learnable steps in which each aspect is clearly highlighted.

Bhante Vimalaramsi encourages meditators to use the 6Rs in a free-flowing manner. Referring to Recognize, Release, Relax, Re-smile, Return, and Repeat, he writes,

These words do not have to be said internally to oneself. The meditator needs to “roll their Rs” so it becomes a flowing action of whatever arises to be there by itself. The 6Rs are just a reminder to let go of any distraction that pulls mind’s attention away from the object of meditation. They also allow us to come back to the meditation object with a happy, clear mind that has no craving or clinging in it. In other words, by letting go of craving and clinging and any idea you may have of a personal self is how to purify mind of all kinds of troubles, cravings, and fetters.<sup>99</sup>

According to Bhante, this method allows the meditator to make progress in some of the most important aspects of Buddhism from the very beginning of practice, such as letting go of self-concept. As *Anupada Sutta* (MN 111) teaches, the basic method of Buddhist meditation is to let go of mental states one by one as they occur. There is no need to jump ahead or anticipate. Rather, whatever arises

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<sup>99</sup> Vimalaramsi, *Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life*. p. 66-67

in the present moment, one does not cling, but merely lets it go and relaxes the tension.

### **Letting go of self-craving**

In his first teaching at the deer park in Isipatana the Buddha identified “thirst” (craving, *taṇhā*) as the cause of suffering (*dukkha*). In that same teaching the Buddha explained that *taṇhā* was of three kinds, (1) the craving for sense pleasure (*kāma-taṇhā*), (2) the craving for existence (*bhava-taṇhā*), and (3) the craving for non-existence (*vibhava-taṇhā*).<sup>100</sup>

If we look for a common denominator between the three aspects of craving, it would be the grasping for a self-identity, or belief in an experiencer (myself) who enjoys experience. The craving for sense pleasure and craving for existence are directly related to this belief in a self who enjoys experience. The craving for non-existence, may in some cases be due to the imagined self being so miserable and unhappy that there is a desire to end experience altogether. In this case, if we cannot have life on our terms, better not to be here at all. Even in the Buddha’s time there would have been suicidal people or people who stayed alive only because there was no apparent or easy alternative to living. There may be other aspects of the craving for non-existence.

If this interpretation is correct, craving has a back side or flip side of self-grasping, like two sides of the same coin. Craving for a self and craving for experience (or for the end of experience as per number three above) go hand in hand. The world as seen through the eyes of a person caught up in such craving is productive of suffering and confusion. Due to our distorted view, we see the world as we imagine it, not as it truly is. The practice of the 6Rs is designed to give us a structure to let go of our distorted views and to enable us to abide in clarity.

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<sup>100</sup> SN V 421.

Due to our ignorance, we constantly imagine a self. This mentally constructed self is dependently originated. As Bhante Vimalaramsi explains,

Craving always manifests as tightness or tension in your head/mind. It is identified with the “I like it” or “I don’t like it” mind and is the first sign of the I/ME/MINE belief. When you let go of tightness, what you are actually doing is letting go of craving and the false idea of “a personal self” or “ego identification”.<sup>101</sup>

Bhante shows how the self is dependently arisen. He explains that while sitting in meditation,

You may feel an itch, heat, tension, a feeling of coughing, wanting to sneeze, a pain. Please don’t move your body for any reason at all. When such a feeling arises, mind’s attention will immediately go to that feeling. Let’s say an itch or a cough. Mind’s attention moves to the distraction by itself. The first thing that mind does is it begins to think about the feeling: “I wish this would go away”... “I want this to stop bothering me”... “I hate this feeling”... “Why doesn’t it just go away”... “I want this to stop”.<sup>102</sup>

In this way, the “I like it”, “I don’t like it” mind arises, due to sensory contact and imagining a self that is experiencing the feeling. Bhante recommends “We need to open up and allow the feeling to be there” as an alternative to the arising of craving, grasping, becoming, and the load of suffering they create.<sup>103</sup>

As we enter into *samatha-vipassanā* meditation we begin to let go of this gross form of self and to enter into more refined states of mind such as those of the *rūpa* jhānas. In these states, we still imagine

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid, p.141.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid, p. 141-142.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, p.142.

a self. As we let go of even this, we enter into the *arūpa* jhānas, and the imagined self can become quite refined. At each step of the way, we imagine our self to be like that.

In the *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta*, the Buddha likens these stages of the refining and letting go of the imaginary self to the stages of making clarified ghee from milk. In this *sutta*, he illustrates the process of refining the assumed self to ascetic wanderer Poṭṭhapāda and the elephant trainer Citta,

In just the same way, Citta, from the cow we get milk, from the milk, curds, from the curds, butter, from the butter, ghee, and from the ghee, cream of ghee. And when there is milk, we don't speak of curds, of butter, of ghee, or of cream of ghee, we speak of milk...when there are curds, we don't speak of butter...when there is cream of ghee...we speak of cream of ghee.

So too, whenever the gross acquired self is present, we do not speak of the mind-made or formless acquired self; whenever the mind-made acquired self is present, we do not speak of the gross or formless acquired self. Whenever the formless acquired self is present, we do not speak of the gross acquired self or the mind-made acquired self, we speak of the formless acquired self.

But, Citta, these are mere names, expressions, turns of speech, designations in common use in the world, which the Tathāgata uses without misapprehending them.<sup>104 105</sup>

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<sup>104</sup> Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*. DN.9.52-53, [PTS i 202], p.169.

<sup>105</sup> *Seyyathāpi citta gavā khīraṃ, khīramhā dadhi, dadhimhā navanītaṃ, navanītamhā sappi, sappimhā sappimaṇḍo, yasmim samaye khīraṃ hoti, neva tasmim samaye dadhīti saṅkhaṃ gacchati. Na navanītanti saṅkhaṃ gacchati. Na sappīti saṅkhaṃ gacchati. Na sappimaṇḍoti saṅkhaṃ gacchati. Khīraṃ tveva tasmim samaye saṅkhaṃ gacchati. Yasmi samaye dadhi hoti, neva tasmim samaye navanītanti saṅkhaṃ gacchati. Na sappīti saṅkhaṃ gacchati. Na sappimaṇḍoti saṅkhaṃ gacchati. Yasmim samaye navanītaṃ hoti, neva tasmim samaye sappinti saṅkhaṃ gacchati. Na sappimaṇḍoti saṅkhaṃ gacchati. Na khīranti*

The final sentence is vital to understanding what the Buddha is teaching. We imagine a self at each stage of our existence and in every mental state, but this self is illusory. It only exists due to a particular set of causes and conditions. As such a temporary, conventional self, it can be talked about and referred to. But this is using the commonly agreed upon language to describe a commonly agreed upon self that has no ultimate existence. There is no ultimate, fixed reality in any of this. To believe in the ultimate reality of such a conceptualized self is to give ourselves over to the world of *samsāra* and to incur a load of suffering.

### **The TWIM practice of the 6Rs enables the practitioner to let go of illusion**

The practice of the 6Rs immediately assists us in the process of letting go of these illusory states of mind one by one, as they occur. Through this simple but profound method, unwholesome states are let go, and wholesome states of mind are brought up. Eventually, *all* constructed states of mind are let go of. This is the practice of Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation leading to *Nibbāna*.

Even as the Buddha used the analogy of a cow producing milk, from which curd, butter, ghee, etc. is obtained, we obtain a temporary self (*attapaṭilābho*) through our kammic actions of body speech and mind.

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*saṅkhaṃ gacchati. Yasmim samaye sappi hoti, neva tasmim samaye sappimaṇḍoti saṅkhaṃ gacchati. Na khīranti saṅkhaṃ gacchati. Na dadhīti saṅkhaṃ gacchati. Yasmim samaye sappimaṇḍo hoti, neva tasmim samaye khīranti saṅkhaṃ gacchati. Na dadhīti saṅkhaṃ gacchati. Na navaṇītaṅti saṅkhaṃ gacchati. 'Sappimaṇḍo'tveva tasmim samaye saṅkhaṃ gacchati. yasmim samaye oḷāriko attapaṭilābho hoti, neva tasmim samaye manomayo attapaṭilābho'ti saṅkhaṃ gacchati. Na arūpo attapaṭilābho'ti saṅkhaṃ gacchati. 'Oḷāriko attapaṭilābho'tveva tasmim samaye saṅkhaṃ gacchati. Yasmim citta samaye manomayo attapaṭilābho hoti, neva tasmim samaye arūpo attapaṭilābho'ti saṅkhaṃ gacchati. Na oḷāriko attapaṭilābho'ti saṅkhaṃ gacchati. 'Manomayo attapaṭilābho'tveva tasmim samaye saṅkhaṃ gacchati. Yasmim citta samaye arūpo attapaṭilābho hoti, neva tasmim samaye oḷāriko attapaṭilābho'ti saṅkhaṃ gacchati. Na manomayo attapaṭilābho'ti saṅkhaṃ gacchati. 'Arūpo attapaṭilābho'tveva tasmim samaye saṅkhaṃ gacchati. Imā kho citta lokasamaññā lokaniruttiyo lokavohārā lokapaññattiyo yāhi tathāgato voharati aparāmasanti. DN.9.52-53, PTS i 202. CS edition.*

As long as we identify with any of these states, we are trapped in *samsāra*. In fact, we are continually identifying ourselves with whatever state we find ourselves in. To free ourselves from this series of mistaken perceptions is the purpose of mental cultivation (*bhāvana*), which includes meditation (*jhāna*).<sup>106</sup>

## **Advancing through the jhānas in meditation refines and purifies the mind**

The *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta* and the *Anupada Sutta* illustrate this meditative process of letting go of such an assumed self. In the Buddha’s simile of refining the milk to clarified ghee, regular human life is akin to what is usually obtained from the cow, that is, milk. When meditation is taken up, there is a refinement of states as the gross and eventually even the subtle falls away. This is similar to the processing of milk into curds, then into butter, etc., up to clarified ghee. In meditation, these are the meditative stages of *jhāna*, with each successive *jhāna* being a refinement of the previous one, as grosser factors of mind are let go. They are let go one by one as they occur.

We are able to let go through being aware in each successive *jhāna* and by observing each successive state, letting it go and understanding the process of how it arises and then ceases (that is, seeing the links of Dependent Origination and thereby seeing impermanence, suffering, and no-self). By following the practice of the 6Rs, whatever arises is let go, with subsequent relaxation of the accrued tension and tightness. With avid Harmonious Observation (*sammā-sati*) and Investigation of

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<sup>106</sup> There is no exact Pali equivalent of the English word “meditation”. The suttas refer to *bhāvana* which includes all aspects of practice including virtuous conduct and also what we refer to as meditation. *Bhāvana* is thus too large a term to refer only to sitting (or walking etc.) meditation. The closest term in the suttas to meditation is “*jhāna*”. There is little doubt that practice of the jhānas was the norm in early Buddhism when it came to meditation. TWIM employs the word meditation as a translation of *bhāvana*, as meditation within the TWIM context is not only formal meditation but also the practice in daily life. TWIM also refers to formal meditation, in which case the closest equivalent is *jhāna*.

Dhammas (*dhammavicaya*), insight wisdom is gained during the progression through the jhānas.

This purification through the jhānas is suggested by the standard lists of *jhāna* factors which show a dropping of certain factors as a new *jhāna* is entered. In the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, this process is explicitly shown. Ven. Sāriputta teaches,

Here, friends, secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, a bhikkhu enters and dwells in the first jhāna, which consists of rapture and pleasure born of seclusion, accompanied by thought and examination. If, while that bhikkhu is dwelling in this way, perception and attention accompanied by sensuality occur in him, he feels it as an affliction. But the Blessed One has called that affliction suffering. In this way can be understood how nibbāna is happiness.

Again, with the subsiding of thought and examination, a bhikkhu enters and dwells in the second jhāna.... If, while dwelling in this way, perception and attention accompanied by thought occur in him, he feels it as an affliction. Just as pain might arise for one feeling pleasure only to afflict him, so too if that perception and attention accompanied by thought occur to him, he feels it as an affliction. But the Blessed One has called affliction suffering. In this way, too, it is understood how nibbāna is happiness.

Again, with the fading away as well of rapture... he enters and dwells in the third jhāna.... If, while that bhikkhu is dwelling in this way, perception and attention accompanied by rapture occur to him, he feels it as an affliction.... In this way, too, it can be understood how nibbāna is happiness.

Again, with the abandoning of pleasure and pain.... a bhikkhu enters and dwells in the fourth jhāna.... If, while that bhikkhu is dwelling in this

way, perception and attention accompanied by the pleasure [connected with] equanimity occur in him, he feels it as an affliction.... In this way, too, it can be understood how nibbāna is happiness. (and so on for the formless jhānas)<sup>107 108</sup>

It is quite interesting that this process is taught here by Ven. Sāriputta, who knew the process of purification while advancing through the jhānas quite well as his experience of such is reported by the Buddha in *Anupada Sutta* (MN 111). At each *jhāna* level, the factors that have been let go of previously are experienced as suffering if they arise once again. If the mind once more identifies with what has been let go of, the craving becomes obvious to the

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<sup>107</sup> Bodhi, **The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha**. AN 9.34(3).1-4 [PTS IV 415-16], p. 1293.

<sup>108</sup> 1. *Idhāvuso bhikkhu vivicceva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi paṭhamam jhānam upasampajja viharati. Tassa ce āvuso bhikkhuno iminā vihārena viharato kāmasahagatā saññāmanasikārā samudācaranti, svāssa hoti ābādho. Seyyathāpi āvuso sukhino dukkham uppajjeyya, yāvadeva ābādhāya, evamevassa te kāmasahagatā saññāmanasikārā samudācaranti svāssa hoti ābādho, yo kho panāvuso ābādho dukkhametaṃ vuttam bhagavatā. Imināpi kho etaṃ āvuso pariyāyena veditabbaṃ yathāsukhaṃ nibbānanti.*

2. *Puna ca paraṃ āvuso bhikkhu vitakka vicārānaṃ vūpasamā ajjhattaṃ sampasādanam cetaso ekodibhāvaṃ avitakkaṃ avicāraṃ samādhijaṃ pītisukhaṃ dutiyaṃ jhānam upasampajja viharati. Tassa ce āvuso, bhikkhuno iminā vihārena viharato vitakkasahagatā saññāmanasikārā samudācaranti, svāssa hoti ābādho. Seyyathāpi āvuso sukhino dukkham uppajjeyya yāvadeva ābādhāya, evamevassa te vitakkasahagatā saññāmanasikārā samudācaranti. Svāssa hoti ābādho. Yo kho panāvuso ābādho dukkhametaṃ vuttam bhagavatā. Imināpi kho etaṃ āvuso pariyāyena veditabbaṃ yathāsukhaṃ nibbānanti.*

3. *Puna ca paraṃ āvuso pītiyā ca virāgā upekkhako ca viharati. Sato ca sampajāno sukhañca kāyena paṭisamvedeti. Yantaṃ ariyā ācikkhanti: upekkhako satimā sukhavihārīti taṃ tatiyaṃ jhānam upasampajja viharati. Tassa te āvuso bhikkhuno iminā vihārena viharato pītisahagatā saññāmanasikārā samudācaranti, svāssa hoti ābādho. Seyyathāpi āvuso, sukhino dukkham uppajjeyya yāvadeva ābādhāya, evamevassa te pītisahagatā saññāmanasikārā samudācaranti svāssa hoti ābādho. Yo kho panāvuso, ābādho dukkhametaṃ vuttam bhagavatā. Imināpi kho etaṃ āvuso, pariyāyena veditabbaṃ yathāsukhaṃ nibbānanti.*

*Puna ca paraṃ āvuso, bhikkhu sukhasa ca pahānā dukkhasa ca pahānā pubbeva somanassadomanassānaṃ atthaṅgamā adukkhamasukhaṃ upekkhāsati pārisuddhiṃ catutthaṃ jhānam upasampajja viharati. Tassa ce āvuso, bhikkhuno iminā vihārena viharato upekkhā sahagatā saññāmanasikārā samudācaranti, svāssa hoti ābādho. Seyyathāpi āvuso, sukhino dukkham uppajjeyya yāvadeva ābādhāya, evamevassa te upekkhā sahagatā saññāmanasikārā samudācaranti, svāssa hoti ābādho. Yo kho panāvuso, ābādho dukkhametaṃ vuttam bhagavatā. Imināpi kho etaṃ āvuso, pariyāyena veditabbaṃ yathāsukhaṃ nibbānanti. AN.9.34(3).1-4, PTS IV 416-17, CS edition.*



meditator who has strong mindfulness. Hence, for example, in the second *jhāna*, if thought (*vitakka*) occurs, it is experienced as tension, tightness, and suffering.

Later we will see how in the Loving Kindness Meditation, the subvocal wish or thought for well-being sent out as part of the breaking down the barriers practice eventually becomes a burden, and thought must be let go. The practice then goes to a deeper level.

It is also noteworthy that the meditator in *jhāna* is having insight into how the mind creates suffering and the contrasting happiness of *Nibbāna*. This is a natural part of the 6R practice which gives the meditator the experience of pure mind when the tension and tightness of craving is let go and a relaxed, open, smiling, alert mind returns to the object of meditation.

All three of these suttas, *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta*, *Anupada Sutta*, and the above section of *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, are showing us the process of purification through the *jhānas*, the giving up of the self that becomes finer and finer, but persists in an increasingly subtle manner until Arahantship.

## **The 6Rs avoids the complexity and difficulty of most other vipassanā methods**

For those who are familiar with other schools of *vipassanā* practice, the TWIM method is amazingly simple. In most other methods it takes months or years to learn the practices and how to effectively apply them. Most *vipassanā* practices are considered to be quite difficult to learn and to practice.

I remember being in Kathmandu, Nepal a few years ago and being in a discussion with a Buddhist shop keeper. When he learned of my practice of *samatha/vipassanā*, he smiled and said there was an excellent *vipassanā* center in the Kathmandu Valley holding a ten-day Goenka-style course. He had a friend who had done the course and had loved it so much he was going back to do volunteer service at the next course and eventually do more of the ten-day retreats. The

shopkeeper related that when his friend had returned from the first ten-day meditation course, he was radiating deep peace.

When I asked the shopkeeper if he had an interest in doing the course that his friend had done, he said that he would love to, but the Goenka ten-day course is “harder than army boot camp”. It wasn’t for him. He knew a few people who had started the course and then ran away, never to return. “Too hard” he said, and smiled. He said he would stick with reciting his mantra “Om Mani Padme Hum”, as he showed me his prayer beads.

The same can be said of many other *vipassanā* methods that have emerged in recent centuries and in the past few decades. They tend to be difficult to learn and to practice. Some people do well with them and their lives are transformed, but many other people are either defeated by the difficulty of the meditation course, or they never attempt it in the first-place due to its reputation for severity.

Although it can be fairly said that the Goenka (U Ba Khin) method of *vipassanā* has greatly contributed to the revival of the Buddha Dhamma in India, and that the Mahasi Sayadaw method and its variations have brought in significant numbers of meditators including lay people to a practice that was previously reserved for a handful of monks, this popularization is still among a tiny percentage of the total population in the countries where these methods are common. Due to the difficulty of these techniques, the TWIM method has much to offer in making *samatha-vipassanā* available and accessible to significantly larger numbers of people than are now attempting a *vipassanā* practice.

If accessibility of practice is a worthy value, assuming that it is good for individuals and for society to have more people practicing the teachings of the Buddha, let us look a bit more closely at how TWIM works to help relieve human suffering and to promote well-being through the practice of the 6Rs.

## **A summary review of how the novice at TWIM begins practice**

To sum up this easy<sup>109</sup> and straightforward practice; the meditator makes him or herself comfortable and relaxes as much as possible. A good feeling and a smile is brought up. Then he or she brings up mindfulness and becomes aware of any movement of mind's attention. The object of meditation, a happy feeling is held in a relaxed but attentive way in the center of the chest. A wish is made for one's happiness. This is the beginning of the meditation.

When the mind wanders from the object of meditation, the presence of mindfulness alerts the meditator to the fact that mind's attention has wandered to a distraction and is no longer on the object of meditation. This is Recognizing that mind's attention has wandered, the first of the 6Rs. Then, due to Mindfulness, the other 6Rs are applied.

The distraction is allowed to be, without either pushing it away or pulling it in. Mind's attention is Released from the distraction (the second of the 6Rs). Any tension or tightness is noticed and Relaxed. This is the third of the 6Rs. As a result of this relaxation and letting go of the tension and tightness, mind is purified, and the meditator Re-smiles. This is the fourth of the 6Rs. Only after this release, relaxation and re-smiling is the mind brought back to the object of meditation. This Return to the object of meditation is the fifth of the 6Rs. This process is repeated until *Nibbāna* is attained. This Repeat (as necessary) step is the sixth of the 6Rs.

## **TWIM practice leads to contentment, happiness, joy**

In the short term, applying this method leads to happiness and contentment. In discussing the benefits of the practice, Bhante Vimalaramsi explains,

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<sup>109</sup> It is to be emphasized that “easy” with reference to the practice means that the instructions are clear, and the “how to” of the practice is not difficult to learn. Good results can be expected as long as the practice is diligently undertaken and proper effort is applied. “Easy” does not mean that progress can be expected without the application of effort.

This leads to a form of happiness the Buddha called “Contentment”. Contentment is the by-product of living the Buddhist practice. This meditation leads to balance, equanimity, and the dissolution of fear and other dis-ease. With less fear and dread you find new confidence. Then Loving Kindness, Compassion, Joy, and Equanimity can grow in our lives. Your degree of success is directly proportional to how well you understand mindfulness, follow the directions precisely, and use the 6Rs in both your sitting practice and in daily life. This is the way to end suffering. It’s interesting and fun to practice this way and certainly it helps you smile while changing the world around you in a positive way.<sup>110</sup>

Not only is the practice easy and accessible, it leads directly and rapidly to happiness and contentment, the cessation of fear and conditions related to stress, the gaining of balance and equanimity. Due to its easy adaptability into everyday life situations, it also has a visible impact on social relations and an uplifting effect on the lives of other people with whom the meditator has contact.

It is important for a meditation practice to be one that brings happiness, pleasure, contentment. These signal the unraveling of the knots that bind one to saṃsāric suffering. For the beginning meditator who is accustomed to seeking for happiness through the world of the senses, the arising of happiness and joy in meditation is a great aid to helping turn one away from the transitory pleasures offered by the world. The suttas are careful to list the positive feelings such as happiness and joy that come to the meditator as he or she progresses into and through the jhānas.

In addition to the list of mental factors in the standard list of the jhānas such as rapture, pleasure and joy, the *Bahuvedanīya Sutta* (Discourse on the Many Kinds of Feeling) teaches that the five

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<sup>110</sup> Vimalaramsi, **The Breath of Love**. p. 45.

chords of sensual pleasure are incomparably inferior to the pleasure experienced in the *jhānas*, with each *jhāna* being increasingly pleasurable up to the cessation of perception and feeling.<sup>111</sup>

The first section of the *Mahāvagga* of the *Vinaya Piṭaka* states that the Buddha experienced the great bliss of liberation (*vimuttisukha*) upon his awakening, when “the Lord sat cross-legged in one [posture] for seven days at the foot of the Tree of Awakening experiencing the bliss of freedom.”<sup>112 113</sup>

In the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* (Discourse on the Fruits of the Homeless Life), the Buddha explains to the inquiring King Ajātasattu the benefits of the homeless life. Among the benefits of the homeless life listed by the Buddha are “blameless bliss”, Ariyan contentment, rejoicing and gladness, delight and joy which “suffuses, drenches, fills and irradiates his body so that there is no spot in his entire body that is untouched by this delight and joy born of detachment.”<sup>114</sup>

Even without the attainment of *Nibbāna*, these would be remarkable achievements and a wonderful outcome for the quality of life. But such benefits come as benefits of traversing the path and pale in comparison to the attainment of *Nibbāna* itself. The Buddha says of *Nibbāna*, “And, sire, there is no fruit of the homeless life, visible here and now, that is more excellent and perfect than this.”<sup>115 116</sup>

Within TWIM practice these benefits begin to come immediately as effort is applied and as progress is made. Within the practice of the 6Rs, each time tension and tightness are dispelled and craving is let go of, there is tangible relief. This is *sandiṭṭhiko*, to be experienced

<sup>111</sup> MN 59 *Bahuvedanīya Sutta*. [PTS i 396]

<sup>112</sup> Horner, I.B., translator, **The Book of the Discipline, Vinaya Piṭaka, Mahāvagga**. I.I [PTS I.I], (London, Luzac & Company, 1971), p. 1.

<sup>113</sup> *Atha kho bhagavā bodhirukkhamūle sattāhaṃ ekapallaṅkena nisaadhikaraṇasamathāsaṃvidī. (“Vimuttisukhaṃ paṭisaṃvedī” itipi pāṭho). Vinaya Piṭaka, Mahāvagga, I.I, PTS I.I, CS edition.*

<sup>114</sup> DN 2:67, 73, 75. [PTS i 72-74]

<sup>115</sup> Walshe, **The Long Discourses of the Buddha**. DN 2:98, [PTS i 74], p. 108.

<sup>116</sup> *Imasmā ca pana mahārāja sandiṭṭhikā sāmaññaphalā aññaṃ sandiṭṭhikaṃ sāmaññaphalaṃ uttaritaraṃ vā pañītataraṃ vā natthīti*. DN 2:98, PTS i 74, CS edition.

directly or directly visible, *akāliko*, with immediate result, *ehipassiko*, open to investigation, *opānāyiko*, leading straight to the goal, and *paccattam veditabbo viññūhiti*, able to be realized by any intelligent person.

The immediacy of success is vital for such a practice to be accessible to many people, including those who would like to attempt meditation but are hesitant to do so, perhaps because they believe it to be too difficult. When the meditator has his or her first few successes with the 6R method and begins to get the feel for how tension and tightness along with its attendant craving can be let go of, and for at least a brief moment experiences a mind free from chatter and clutter, it is an amazing and heartening experience.

When craving is let go of with consistency, and the mind and body are relaxed, bliss arises. This is a glimpse of the bliss of *Nibbāna*, a bliss which does not depend upon sensual pleasures. The Buddha explained this in the *Māgandīya Sutta* to the wandering ascetic Māgandīya as follows,

...there is, Māgandīya, a delight apart from sensual pleasures, apart from unwholesome states, which surpasses even divine bliss. Since I take delight in that, I do not envy what is inferior, nor do I delight therein...

The greatest of all gains is health,

Nibbāna is the greatest bliss.<sup>117 118</sup>

### **Progress in practice: quick or sluggish, painful or pleasant?**

There are some practitioners and teachers who value the slow route of practice and are skeptical about anything that yields rapid results. This is understandable insofar as some people in our modern age often

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<sup>117</sup> Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*. MN 75:10 [PTS 504-5], p. 610, and MN 75:21 [PTS 510], p. 614

<sup>118</sup> *yā hayaṃ māgandīya ratī aññatreva kāmehi aññatra akusalehi dhammehi api dibbaṃ sukhaṃ samadhigayha tiṭṭhati, tāya ratiyā ramamāno hīnassa na pihehi. Na tattha abhiramāmi...Ārogyaparamā lābhā nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ.* MN 75:10, PTS 504-5 and MN 75:21, PTS 510, CS edition.

misrepresent and exaggerate their spiritual attainment for purposes such as material gain. However, the suttas are full of instances where people achieved very rapid progress when conditions were right, including the attainment of *Nibbāna* by hearing a single sutta or stanza of a *dhamma gatha*. For those who did need to go to the foot of a tree or an empty hut for their practice, there are numerous reports of immediate progress and even attainment of the highest goal.

The Buddha did not make a virtue of slow progress or difficulty in practice. In the *Dasakanipāta* (Book of Tens) of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya*, he teaches,

Bhikkhus, there are these four modes of practice. What four? Practice that is painful with sluggish direct knowledge; practice that is painful with quick direct knowledge; practice that is pleasant with sluggish direct knowledge; and practice that is pleasant with quick direct knowledge. These are the four modes of practice. Of these four modes of practice, this is the foremost, namely, practice which is pleasant with quick direct knowledge.<sup>119 120</sup>

In light of the above, it is difficult to justify the view that rapid progress is somehow illegitimate and that only a slow and painful approach yields results that are true to the Noble Eightfold Path. However, as the Buddha points out, there are those who, for whatever reason or reasons, hold to the path of slow and/or painful progress.

## **The 6Rs as the TWIM version of Right Effort and the Four Right Strivings**

How is the practice of the 6Rs an adaptation of Right Effort (*sammā vāyāma*) and of the Four Right Strivings (*cattāro sammappadhāna*)?

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<sup>119</sup> Bodhi, **The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha**. AN.10.III.29.6, [PTS V 63], p. 1382.

<sup>120</sup> *Catasso imā bhikkhave paṭipadā. Katamā catasso: dukkhā paṭipadā dandhābhiññā, dukkhā paṭipadā khippābhiññā, sukhāpaṭipadā dandhābhiññā, sukhāpaṭipadā khippābhiññā. Imā kho bhikkhave catasso paṭipadā. Etadaggaṃ bhikkhave imāsaṃ catunnaṃ paṭipadānaṃ yadidaṃ sukhā paṭipadā khippābhiññā.* AN.10.III.29.6, PTS V 63, CS edition.

That is, by not encouraging unarisen unwholesome states, dispelling arisen unwholesome states, bringing up wholesome states, and continuing wholesome states. The application of the 6Rs with attendant Mindfulness and the wisdom to be gained by the practice are very purifying practices.

Although unarisen unwholesome states will for some time continue to arise as distractions and hindrances, each time they are 6Rd (In TWIM parlance, “6R” can be a noun or a verb, and here it is used as a verb in the past tense), they weaken their hold on the mind of the meditator. They are mental formations (saṅkhāras) which the meditator mistakenly takes to be a self. They need nutriment to sustain themselves. They need attention, self-identification, and mental, verbal and/or physical action to continue or for them to grow in power. Through practice, this nutriment is denied, so they weaken and eventually cease. Thus, eventually, unarisen unwholesome states do not arise.

As for arisen unwholesome states, these also manifest as distractions that draw the attention of the meditator away from the object of meditation. They are craving and self-identification (grasping at a self), two different sides of the same coin, that manifest as tension and tightness. When the distraction is let go of and neither pushed away nor grasped (either pushing away or grasping are an attempt at control and only reinforce the ego), they lose their grip on the mind. When the tension and tightness is relaxed and the mind is uplifted to a wholesome state, these unwholesome states are no longer given nourishment and fade away.

Thus, unarisen unwholesome states and arisen unwholesome states are dispelled by constant mindfulness and application of the 6Rs. How does this work to help the meditator attain *Nibbāna*? To illustrate how this is done, we will borrow an apt simile from the Hindu tradition.

In the book of meditation instructions *Who Am I?* Sri Ramana Maharsi used the analogy of a fortress under siege. In this simile, the fortress is the structure of saṅkhāras, the unwholesome mental



formations that continually produce unwholesome states of mind. The forces laying siege to the fortress are the application of *bhāvana*, meditation practice. He said that the fortress will continue to be busy, as long as there are enemies in the fortress, the gates will open and forces will sally forth to attack the besiegers. If each time a force sallies out of the fortress, it is destroyed as it emerges, the fortress will eventually weaken and must fall.<sup>121</sup>

Likewise, with the TWIM method whenever the distractions or hindrances arise, their power is undercut (attention is withdrawn and no nutriment is provided), leading to their eventual cessation. If the 6R method is followed, each time a hindrance returns, its power will be less than the previous time, until it disappears altogether.

As for the third and fourth of the Four Right Strivings, by application of Right Mindfulness and the 6Rs, any unwholesome state of mind is replaced by a wholesome, uplifted, purified mind which is then brought back to the object of meditation. By returning to the object of meditation, and by repeating the cycle of the 6Rs as needed, the mind increasingly abides in the wholesome, and eventually is purified of the taints (*āsavas*), and becomes completely wholesome. This is continuing in the wholesome states. Thus, the Four Right Strivings and Right Effort are accomplished.

This practice uplifts the mind. We have seen how according to the Buddha, Right Effort consists of four main steps: recognizing and letting go of unwholesome (Pali: *akusala*, also translated as ‘unskillful’) mental states as well of letting go of conditions for their further arising, cultivating wholesome (Pali: *kusala*, also translated as ‘skillful’) mental states and working for their continuity.

## **The importance placed by the Buddha on the Four Right Strivings**

The Buddha repeatedly emphasized this process. It is basic to the mental development (*bhāvana*) that he taught to his disciples. A

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<sup>121</sup> Sri Ramana Maharshi, **Who am I?** one of three short books included in **Words of Grace**, Tiruvannamalai, Sri Ramanasramam, 2008, p.9.

passage from the *Mahāsakuludāyi Sutta*, *The Greater Discourse to Sakuludāyin* in the *Majjhima Nikāya* can illustrate the importance the Buddha placed on this process. The Buddha explains to the wanderer Sakuludāyin,

Again, Udāyin, I have proclaimed to my disciples the way to develop the four right kinds of striving. Here, a Bhikkhu awakens enthusiasm for the non-arising of unarisen evil unwholesome states, and he makes effort, arouses energy, exerts his mind, and strives. He awakens enthusiasm for the abandoning of arisen evil unwholesome states, he makes effort, arouses energy, exerts his mind, and strives. He awakens enthusiasm for the arising of unarisen wholesome states, and he makes effort, arouses energy, exerts his mind, and strives. He awakens enthusiasm for the continuance, non-disappearance, strengthening, increase, and fulfillment by development of arisen wholesome states, and he makes effort, arouses energy, exerts his mind, and strives. And thereby many disciples of mine abide having reached the consummation and perfection of direct knowledge.<sup>122 123</sup>

## Successful practice of the Four Right Strivings and resultant transformation is possible

This abandonment of the unwholesome (*akusala*) and cultivation of the wholesome (*kusala*) brings the consummation and perfection

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<sup>122</sup> Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*. MN 77:16 [PTS MN ii 11], p.636.

<sup>123</sup> *Puna ca param udāyi, akkhātā mayā sāvakanāṃ paṭipadā. Yathāpaṭipannā me sāvakā cattāro sammappadhāne bhāventi. Idhūdāyi, bhikkhu anuppannānaṃ pāpakānaṃ akusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ anuppādāya chandaṃ janeti vāyamati viriyaṃ ārabhati cittaṃ paggaṇhāti padahati. Uppannānaṃ pāpakānaṃ akusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ pahānāya chandaṃ janeti vāyamati viriyaṃ ārabhati cittaṃ paggaṇhāti padahati. Anuppannānaṃ kusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ uppādāya chandaṃ janeti vāyamati viriyaṃ ārabhati cittaṃ paggaṇhāti padahati. Uppannānaṃ kusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ thitīyā asammosāya bhīyyobhāvāya vepullāya bhāvanāya pāripūriyā chandaṃ janeti vāyamati viriyaṃ ārabhati cittaṃ paggaṇhāti padahati. Tatra ca pana me sāvakā bahū abhiññāvosānapāramippattā viharanti.* MN 77:16, PTS MN ii 11, CS edition.

of direct knowledge, that is to say, insight and wisdom. The Buddha makes clear that this is not an impossible task, but rather one within the abilities of the diligent meditator. He says in the *Āṅguttara Nikāya*,

Bhikkhus, abandon the unwholesome! It is possible to abandon the unwholesome. If it were not possible to abandon the unwholesome, I would not say: “Bhikkhus, abandon the unwholesome!” But because it is possible to abandon the unwholesome, I say: “Bhikkhus, abandon the unwholesome!” If this abandoning of the unwholesome led to harm and suffering, I would not tell you to abandon it. But because the abandoning of the unwholesome leads to welfare and happiness, I say: “Bhikkhus, abandon the unwholesome!”

Bhikkhus, develop the wholesome. It is possible to develop the wholesome. If it were not possible to develop the wholesome, I would not say: “Bhikkhus, develop the wholesome!” But because it is possible to develop the wholesome, I say: “Bhikkhus, develop the wholesome!” If this developing of the wholesome led to harm and suffering, I would not tell you to develop it. But because the developing of the wholesome leads to welfare and happiness, I say: “Bhikkhus, develop the wholesome!”<sup>124 125</sup>

<sup>124</sup> Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*. AN 2.2.19 [PTS AN I 59], p.150.

<sup>125</sup> *Akusalaṃ bhikkhave pajahatha. Sakkā bhikkhave akusalaṃ pajahituṃ. No ce taṃ bhikkhave sakkā abhaviṣṣa akusalaṃ pajahituṃ, nāhaṃ evaṃ vadeyyaṃ "akusalaṃ bhikkhave pajahathā"ti. Yasmā ca kho bhikkhave sakkā akusalaṃ pajahituṃ, tasmāhaṃ evaṃ vadāmi "akusalaṃ bhikkhave pajahathā"ti. Akusalaṃ ca hidaṃ bhikkhave pahīnaṃ ahitāya dukkhāya saṃvatteyya, nāhaṃ evaṃ vadeyyaṃ "akusalaṃ bhikkhave pajahathā"ti. Yasmā ca kho bhikkhave akusalaṃ pahīnaṃ hitāya sukhāya saṃvattati, tasmāhaṃ evaṃ vadāmi "akusalaṃ bhikkhave pajahathā"ti.*  
*Kusalaṃ bhikkhave bhāvettha. Sakkā bhikkhave kusalaṃ bhāvetuṃ. No ce taṃ bhikkhave sakkā abhaviṣṣa kusalaṃ bhāvetuṃ, nāhaṃ evaṃ vadeyyaṃ "kusalaṃ bhikkhave bhāvetthā"ti. Yasmā ca kho bhikkhave sakkā kusalaṃ bhāvetuṃ, tasmāhaṃ evaṃ vadāmi "kusalaṃ bhikkhave bhāvetthā"ti. Kusalaṃ ca hidaṃ bhikkhave bhāvitaṃ ahitāya dukkhāya saṃvatteyya, nāhaṃ evaṃ vadeyyaṃ "kusalaṃ bhikkhave bhāvetthā"ti. Yasmā ca kho bhikkhave kusalaṃ bhāvitaṃ hitāya sukhāya saṃvattati, tasmāhaṃ evaṃ vadāmi "kusalaṃ bhikkhave bhāvetthā"ti. AN 2.2.19, PTS AN I 59, CS edition.*

## The 6Rs and the Four Noble Truths

What relationship does the practice of the 6Rs have to the Four Noble Truths? On the Dhamma Sukha Meditation Center (DSMC) website (DSMC is Bhante Vimalaramsi's practice and retreat center in North America) there is short guide to Dependent Origination. In this guide, the relationship of the 6R practice to the Four Noble Truths is explained thus,

Does this practice develop an understanding the 4 Noble Truths? Yes!

Every time you complete the 6Rs, you experience these 4 Noble Truths:

1. There is Suffering=RECOGNIZE the movement of mind's attention and witness the tension and tightness. You see suffering;
2. There is a cause of Suffering= RELEASING the tension and tightness is letting go of CRAVING; witnessing the root cause of suffering;
3. There is a cessation of suffering= RELEASING and RELAXING we witness the Mundane Cessation of suffering and see PURE MIND;
4. There is a Path to the cessation of Suffering= RE-SMILE/ RETURN and REPEAT, completes the entire Noble 8-Fold Path!<sup>126</sup>

Although it takes practice to learn to do the 6Rs skillfully and fluently, most people who put in earnest endeavor can approximate it with some effectiveness soon after they take up the practice. This means that soon after beginning practice, most TWIM practitioners can have a direct experience of how the Four Noble Truths work.

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<sup>126</sup> www.dhammasukha.org - DSMC form-107B- 2011- Filename: '107B-SEP-2011-Dependent Origination Chart in color'. Accessed October 2017.

Once the meditator begins to have some facility with the practice of the 6Rs, he or she can directly see at the gross level how suffering is being self-created, then can have an experience of letting go of that suffering, followed by lightness and clarity of mind. Through this practical understanding of the Four Noble Truths, the meditator begins to see that creating and holding onto this suffering is a choice they are making on a moment-to-moment basis.

The meditator can also begin to see that he or she has the means to let go of that suffering (the practice of *samatha-vipassanā*), and that the means is effective. In other words, the meditation works. The meditator can directly see that there is an effective and accessible path for letting go of this suffering. Such initial insight naturally gives rise to confidence in the path and enthusiasm for practice.

Bhante Vimalaramsi emphasizes the importance of discovering the efficacy of the practice and then sticking with it. He writes about the practice of the 6Rs as follows,

Repeat this entire practice of staying with the object of meditation to attain the results the Buddha said could be reached in this lifetime! Repeating the 6Rs cycle over and over again eventually replaces old habitual suffering, as we see and experience for ourselves what suffering actually is. Notice the cause which is becoming involved in the tension and tightness in any way. Experience how to reach the cessation by releasing and relaxing; and discover how to exercise the direct path to that Cessation of Suffering. This happens each time the meditator Releases an arising feeling, Relaxes, and Re-smiles. Notice the relief.<sup>127</sup>

Bhante emphasizes the relief from suffering that can be noticed as a result of doing this practice. This is a tangible fruit of the meditation, and is a positive result of '*ehipassiko*', of coming and investigating for oneself, which the Buddha invited among his

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<sup>127</sup> Vimalaramsi, **Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life**, p. 116-117.

followers. The Buddha understood that confused humanity needed some tangible result of the practice in order to gain confidence in the teaching.

In the previously cited passage in AN 9.34(3) [PTS IV 415] we have seen how Ven. Sāriputta emphasizes how the meditation can reveal the nature of suffering and the happiness of *Nibbāna*. This seeing of the happiness of *Nibbāna*, however momentary it may be, is essential in giving people energy for continued practice.

As the practice of the 6Rs is an application of the technique taught by the Buddha, it results in the practitioner gaining such direct seeing, tangible relief from suffering, and resulting confidence in the instructions for practice. Without such immediate seeing for oneself how the practice works in the light of the Four Noble Truths, the average person may lose interest and enthusiasm for practice and they will likely eventually seek for happiness in some other way.

However, with the TWIM practice of the 6Rs, which is a modern version of the Four Right Strivings, the average person can have immediate success, and can see for themselves how the teaching of the Four Noble Truths is able to bring relief from suffering. In the contemporary world of overly-stressed people living in a fast-paced materialistic society, this ability to deliver the real result of relief of suffering has a transformative effect upon people who attempt the practice.

It is remarkable the level of success meditators are having with TWIM and the number of people who are making substantial progress, even at their first retreat. David Johnson reports on the rate of success as follows,

Progress using the relax step is incredibly fast. In the Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta, the Buddha says awakening can happen in a single lifetime, in seven years, six years, five years...or even as little as seven days. When you

follow the instructions precisely, your progress can be very quick.

On a typical ten to fourteen-day TWIM retreat, almost 80% of the students attain to the 4<sup>th</sup> jhāna and 50 percent to the higher *arūpa* (formless) jhānas. A few might even attain to the path of *Sotāpanna* (the first experience of *Nibbāna*). It doesn't happen every retreat, but some people are just ready for it. They understand and follow the directions perfectly and have a successful retreat in every sense of the word!<sup>128</sup>

The success of TWIM meditators demonstrates that the Buddha was not exaggerating about the potential for awakening for those who follow his instructions.

### **The Buddha's methods can address the root cause of suffering**

Human beings know that we are carrying a huge and very heavy mental load. All sorts of remedies are attempted, such as alcohol and drugs, shopping for luxury goods, various kinds of entertainment, vacations to leisure resorts where all needs are provided for. All such methods at best provide only temporary relief from suffering.

The Buddha has provided us with a way to cut at the root of the problem of suffering. His methods can transform our perspective without a change of place or of circumstance. After all, it is our mistaken perception that is the problem, not the world of circumstance. There is not something *more* that we need, but rather to find peace and understanding no matter the circumstances or situation we might find ourselves in. We need to address the root problem of craving due to ignorance.

The Buddha's remedy is *samatha-vipassanā* meditation. It can be done anywhere, at any time, under any circumstance, and it is free

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<sup>128</sup> Johnson, David C., *The Path to Nibbāna*. p. 74.

of charge. It is very possible to experience the world directly without the filter of our busy mind distorting our perception. That is exactly the discovery made among meditators when they discover their ability to drop the distortion and bring up pure mind while practicing the 6Rs.

When this is experienced, even for the first time, it can be tremendously rewarding for the meditator. With practice, such moments of clarity become more frequent and enduring.

### **Even brief experiences of success with the meditation provide great benefit**

The power of such brief experiences of freedom from craving and resultant clarity to bring benefit to the meditator in the initial stages of meditation should not be underestimated. In the *Anguttara Nikāya* there is an entire *vagga* titled *Finger Snap* which gives numerous examples of attainments that happen for only the momentary time it takes to snap your fingers, and how this means the practitioner is “not devoid of jhāna and the monk is worthy of the offerings of food.” In other words, this indicates the practitioner is truly and firmly on the path, and his or her practice is of benefit to all of society. As the Buddha explains,

Bhikkhus, if for just the time of a finger snap a Bhikkhu develops the first jhāna, he is called a Bhikkhu who is not devoid of jhāna, who acts upon the teaching of the teacher, who responds to his advice, and who does not eat the country’s alms food in vain. How much more, then, those who cultivate it! (and for second jhāna, third jhāna, fourth jhāna, the liberation of the mind by loving kindness, by compassion, by altruistic joy, by equanimity)

Bhikkhus, if for just the time of a finger snap a Bhikkhu generates desire for the non-arising of unarisen bad unwholesome qualities, makes an effort,



arouses energy, applies his mind and strives, he is called a Bhikkhu who is not devoid of jhāna, who acts upon the teaching of the teacher, who responds to his advice, and who does not eat the country's alms food in vain. How much more, then, those who cultivate it! (generates desire for the abandoning of arisen bad unwholesome qualities..., generates desire for the arising of unarisen wholesome qualities..., generates desire for the maintenance of arisen wholesome qualities...)<sup>129 130</sup>

The above is just a sampling of practices that are listed in this section of the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* as greatly beneficial if practiced for a mere finger snap. Each stanza ends with the declaration that even more so will be the benefit accrued by those who cultivate the practices. This is exactly what happens in TWIM. With the initial success of letting go of tension, tightness and craving, and the subsequent experience of pure mind, the practitioner is filled with relief (due to cessation of suffering), joy, confidence (in a path that really works), and resultant enthusiasm for practice. Cultivation of the path follows naturally.

## Bounced out of jhāna by the arising of a hindrance

<sup>129</sup> Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*. AN I.XVIII.394-401 and 406-409 [PTS i 38], p.124-5.

<sup>130</sup> *Accharāsaṅghātamattampi ce bhikkhave bhikkhu paṭhamaṃ jhānaṃ bhāveti, ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhave bhikkhu arittajjhāno viharati, satthusāsanakaro ovādapatikaro amoghaṃ raṭṭhapiṇḍaṃ bhuñjati. Ko pana vādo ye naṃ bahulīkaronti. (...dutiyaṃ jhānaṃ bhāveti...tatiyaṃ jhānaṃ bhāveti...catutthaṃ jhānaṃ bhāveti...mettaṃ ceto vimuttiṃ bhāveti...karuṇaṃ cetovimuttiṃ bhāveti...muditaṃ cetovimuttiṃ bhāveti...upekkhaṃ cetovimuttiṃ bhāveti...)*

*Accharāsaṅghātamattampi ce bhikkhave bhikkhu anuppannānaṃ pāpakānaṃ akusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ anuppādāya chandaṃ janeti vāyamaṭṭi, viriyaṃ ārabhati, cittaṃ paggaṇhāti padahati. Ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhave bhikkhu arittajjhāno viharati, satthusāsanakaro ovādapatikaro amoghaṃ raṭṭhapiṇḍaṃ bhuñjati. Ko pana vādo ye naṃ bahulīkaronti. (...uppannānaṃ pāpakānaṃ akusalānaṃ dhammānaṃ pahānāya... anuppannānaṃ kusālānaṃ dhammānaṃ uppādāya... uppannānaṃ kusālānaṃ dhammānaṃ ṭhitiyā asammosāya bhiyyobhāvāya vepullāya bhāvanāya pāriṇipīyā)* AN I.XVIII.394-401 and 406-409, PTS i 38, CS edition.

It can be noted that the wording of the passages related to successful practice for the length of time of a finger snap suggests that the Buddha did not assume his practitioners would always be in a long-enduring “absorption” while in *jhāna*. Rather, practitioners following the Buddha’s instructions might be in *jhāna* and then bounced out of *jhāna*, presumably by the arising of a hindrance. As we shall explore later, according to the TWIM method, the arising of the hindrances is not to be resisted by overly concentrating the mind.

It is not unusual in TWIM practice to be in a *jhāna* and then to be bounced out of *jhāna* due to the arising of a distraction that captures the mind. This is particularly true of the first and even of the second *jhāna*, before equanimity is firmly established. As a result of being open to whatever arises, the average TWIM practitioner learns to be patient with the process of dealing with distractions, and will often find his or her calm abiding to be interrupted by the arising of a hindrance which pulls the meditator out of *jhāna*.

However, if the 6Rs are applied each time the mind is pulled away from the object of meditation, the power of craving gradually subsides, and the meditator experiences an equanimity that does not depend on the forcible concentration of mind and the suppression of the hindrances. This is tranquil aware *jhāna*.

### **Very rapid progress for those who have diligently kept the precepts**

Some meditators who have been diligently keeping the precepts throughout this lifetime, and perhaps for many previous lifetimes, go straight through to cessation and then *Nibbāna*, without much distraction. Such was evidently the case for Ven. Sāriputta, as related in the *Anupada Sutta* (MN 111). Such wholesome roots resulting in quick realization are perhaps rare among modern students, but Bhante Vimalaramsi has students who have very quickly progressed through the *jhānas*, without much difficulty.

## What is a “good” meditation session?

However, people with such wholesome roots are rare. Most meditators will experience their mind being pulled away from the object of meditation, and if they are abiding in *jhāna*, they may find an unwholesome state of mind has overtaken them and they are no longer in the *jhāna*. This is not unusual among TWIM meditators.

In order to practice in this way, there has to be a readjustment of expectation as to what constitutes “good” meditation practice. Most meditators have preconceived expectations that a “good” practice is one in which thinking and emotionality will quickly subside and deep peace will be experienced. Bhante Vimalaramsi has had numerous students who have entered the meditation with such preconceived notions and whom he has helped to be open to the reality of their mental states and work with that reality. He relates experiences of guiding students in retreats,

If you come and tell me, “Ah, I had the most terrible meditation, my mind was all over the place!”

My next question to you is, “Well, did you recognize that? Did you let it be? Did you relax? Did you come back to your object of meditation?”

“Oh yes, I did all of that, but it [my mind] still kept running around.”

[Bhante responds] ‘Then you had a great meditation then, didn’t you?’

[Bhante’s comment:] It’s exactly the opposite of what everybody thinks is a good meditation. Why? Because when you let go of the distraction, relax, smile, and come back to your object of meditation, you are building up your mindfulness muscles. You’re building up your ability to observe what is happening in the present moment.

You had an active meditation, that means you had to roll your sleeves up and do some real work. But it was good meditation, just like lifting weights. You do that, you repeat it over and over, eventually you get pretty strong.

When you have an active meditation, it means you are learning how to strengthen your mindfulness muscles, and that is a great meditation, it's not just a good meditation.<sup>131</sup>

Allowing for such an active meditation, especially at the beginning of practice, means a recalibration of expectation for many meditators. It means giving up any attempt to control the mind. Without the use of the 6Rs, such activity of the mind in meditation is likely to lead to frustration and perhaps defeat. But by applying the 6Rs consistently and diligently, real progress is made, and mindfulness is strengthened every time the mind strays from the object of meditation and the technique is applied. Not only is mindfulness strengthened thereby, but the meditator learns to give up preconception and to skillfully handle the dhamma of the moment, what arises in the mind. With diligence and patience, a tranquility arises which is quite firm, because the power of craving has been greatly weakened.

### **Most contemporary vipassanā methods favor intense concentration**

Many methods of meditation avoid the kind of “active meditation” that Bhante describes above. Rather than allowing distraction and craving to arise and be dealt with through an ever-strengthening mindfulness, they use *samatha* as a way to eliminate craving through the force of intense concentration. A whole vocabulary, not to be found in the suttas, has arisen to describe this sort of concentration. Hence, we find terms such as momentary (*khanika*) concentration,

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<sup>131</sup> Vimalaramsi, **Moving Dhamma**, Vol. 1. p. 29-30.

access concentration (*upacāra samādhi*), absorption concentration (*appaṇa samādhi*).

Such intense concentration on the object of meditation as to remain absorbed without interruption in a deep state of *jhāna* has been the norm in Buddhist meditation for at least the past one thousand years. Such absorption does not appear to result in *Nibbāna*, but it can give the dedicated practitioner a respite from the tension and stress of the chaotic, busy human mind.

This may be why absorption meditation has remained as a vibrant tradition for so many centuries. For those who have the strength and endurance to repeatedly suppress the distractions through forceful concentration, a very peaceful and blissful state can be reached.

Unfortunately, such peaceful states, which are based on forceful concentration and suppression, cannot last. They are, however, continually accessible to those who become adept at the absorption practices. Absorption concentration methods are a difficult but effective path to these realms of peace and bliss for those who can stay with the program.

### **TWIM is the middle way between intense concentration and laxity**

From the TWIM perspective, it is not necessary to go through this kind of difficult practice of absorption concentration and its adjuncts. In fact, if the goal is *Nibbāna* rather than a temporary state of absorbed peacefulness, such practices appear, from the TWIM perspective, to be counter-productive. This was the Buddha's discovery, that a path avoiding the extremes of extreme concentration and suppression on the one hand and total indulgence and laxity on the other, a path of the middle way, is effective in bringing one a lasting peace that does not depend on the causal factor of forceful concentration.

In TWIM practice, rather than suppressing the hindrances that arise, they are neither pushed away nor grasped at. They are allowed their

space, but starved of the nutriment of attention. They disappear, and will perhaps reappear later, but with less intensity. Through repeated practice, they cease altogether, along with any deeper patterns to which they are connected. This is the process of the uprooting of the weeds of the mind, the *saṃkhāras*.

When this approach is taken, there is no buildup of craving forced into the process of suppression. Craving will not spring back once the mind is relaxed. In fact, in TWIM, the mind is always relaxed, so there is no sharp dividing line between formal practice and the activities of everyday life. What is keenly applied is harmonious observation, or mindfulness. With this application of harmonious observation, there is no need to suppress anything. Nothing is forced.

TWIM is decidedly not absorption meditation and does not use any techniques of absorption meditation. Bhante Vimalaramsi reminds us that rather than trying to forcefully have a mind free from hindrances, we are to welcome the opportunity they give us to develop our understanding. He writes,

The Harmonious Practice is not a way to shield or block the hindrance from re-arising. It will come up again and again, so the meditator will use this as an opportunity to learn.

Eventually, the hindrance will fade away and the meditator will like what comes next. Promise!

Every time meditators try to control their thoughts or feelings, they are identifying personally (*Attā*) with them, and this causes more pain and frustration. Please, don't fight with any hindrance! Instead, learn from it. See how mind's attention actually gets pulled to that hindrance. It will teach you firsthand HOW Dependent Origination occurs.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Vimalaramsi, **Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life**. p. 64-65).

## **The main points of the difference between TWIM and methods that utilize absorption concentration**

What separates TWIM from absorption meditations? When the hindrance is Recognized, it is then Released. It is neither indulged in (pulling) nor pushed away. It is allowed to be there, but attention is withdrawn. Deprived of attention, the hindrance is like a bubble that floats away in the breeze and then pops. No need to actively pop it. Only attention has the power to feed the thought bubble and keep it alive. Once the attention is withdrawn the thought bubble, or bubble of emotion, whatever it may be, just pops and disappears. But if it abides for a while, or once again becomes a distraction which returns and pulls mind's attention toward it, that is no problem. It is 6Rd once again.

The next step in the 6Rs also separates TWIM from absorption meditation. It is the Relax step. By relaxing the tension and tightness in the mind and body each time the mind's attention is pulled away from the object of meditation, craving is released. A purified, open, relaxed, smiling, light mind is brought back to the object of meditation. The distraction is allowed to come up, and allowed to be, but is not fed by attention.

Any such distraction is not considered something to be avoided or pushed away. It is merely an arisen *dhamma*, what is, the truth of the moment. No effort is made to control the mind, or to avoid the arising of such a distraction. If it arises repeatedly, it is allowed to be and repeatedly released and the tension and tightness is repeatedly let go.

The intentional relaxing of the mind and body avoids any subtle buildup of tension and tightness. Without the inclusion of the relax step, the meditation tends towards absorption concentration. Without attention to relaxing the tension and tightness, the mind can become tightly wound around the object of meditation or around any distractions that might arise.

## **In TWIM, there is no pre-conceived expectation of a quiet mind**

The idea that a good meditation can be one where there are repeated distractions that arise, as long as they are repeatedly 6Rd, may come as a surprise to many people. Many meditators have a pre-conceived idea that what we are attempting to create in meditation is a quiet mind, and the arising of distraction represents a kind of failure.

If new students come to TWIM from an absorption *vipassanā* method, they may have been taught that the hindrances are enemies to be removed by the force of attention. But Bhante Vimalaramsi insists that when we are on the path, the hindrances are our friends in that they point out exactly where we are attached, and provide us with the opportunity, right at that moment, to weaken the grip of craving that creates those distractions and attachments. Bhante Vimalaramsi in one of his *dhamma* talks explains how to skillfully deal with hindrances,

The hindrances are the greatest teacher I've ever run across, except for the Buddha. When a hindrance arises, you make a decision. Either you fight it and control it "I want to be a certain way" or you allow the hindrance to be there but without paying attention to it, without identifying with it. When you give up trying to control, it gradually fades away. That's how you go into the next *jhāna*. WHO doesn't want it to be there? *I don't*. WHO is taking it personally? *I am*.

Thoughts? Thoughts come up. WHO is worried? WHO is trying to control thoughts and feelings? WHO is causing themselves pain? When you have hindrances, and use the 6Rs you are teaching yourself how the process works.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> <http://dhammasukha.org/uploads/1/2/8/6/12865490/mn-010-p2-dsmc-130528.mp3>  
*Satipatthana Sutta* MN 10, part 2, accessed 10 October 2017.



## **Skillfully dealing with the hindrances opens the door to deeper levels of jhāna**

In the path of TWIM, skillfully dealing with the hindrances and maintaining a relaxed mind with keen mindfulness is the doorway from one *jhāna* to the next. By using the 6Rs and observing carefully how the process works, one's *samatha* is deepened and insight (*vipassanā*) is gained. With the deepened tranquility and understanding, one progresses through the *jhānas*. Bhante explains as follows,

Almost everyone defines *jhāna* as concentration. It is a poor definition. I define it as a stage of mental development. When I first started doing TWIM and relaxing, I went much deeper, immediately, than I had gone in years of straight *vipassanā* practice. So, the relax step is crucial. When your mindfulness sharpens, mind will feel the disturbance when it is still a subtle feeling and relax it right there. You begin to develop disenchantment. This turns to dispassion. “Well, that’s there. Relax. Fades away. Relax,”

What helps you go from one *jhāna* to the next *jhāna* are the hindrances. It is a result of seeing how the process works, of how contact gives rise to feeling which gives rise to craving etc. *Bhāva*, habitual tendency, is an attempt to take control. It creates suffering. As opposed to this, have total acceptance. See whatever arises as impersonal. It is an impersonal process. Relax into it.<sup>134</sup>

### **If a hindrance arises while in jhāna**

While abiding in a *jhāna*, a distraction or hindrance may arise. Depending on the level of mindfulness of the meditator, one can either be bounced out of the *jhāna* by identifying with the hindrance,

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<sup>134</sup> <http://dhammasukha.org/uploads/1/2/8/6/12865490/mn-010-p2-dsmc-130528.mp3>  
*Satipatthana Sutta* MN 10 part 2, accessed October 2017.

or one may skillfully handle the hindrance and move to a deeper level.

Bhante explains,

OK, you are in a *jhāna*. Mindfulness becomes weak for whatever reason. A hindrance arises. You recognize that mind's attention has moved away from the object of meditation to the hindrance. You 6R it, allowing it to be and return mind to the object of meditation. Eventually the hindrance fades, becomes weaker as nothing is pushing back against it. 'I' am not there. The hindrance comes back. But each time with the 6Rs it becomes weaker and weaker. As it fades that is the next stage of *jhāna*. You become more relaxed, more open, and understand more and more the impersonal process of how these hindrances arise.<sup>135</sup>

The mind may be busy with arising hindrances, but as long as mindfulness is maintained and the 6Rs are followed, the result is the weakening of the *saṃkhāras* and the dissipation of related tension, tightness, and suffering. If the mind follows the distraction and identifies with it, the *jhāna* will be temporarily lost, but with recognition of the wandering of the mind and application of the 6Rs the *jhāna* may be regained. With the development of strong mindfulness, the mind will not be captured by the arising of the distraction which will be 6Rd immediately. This leads to deeper levels of *samatha* and *vipassanā*.

If a strategy of suppression is followed, the mind may enjoy a feeling of clarity, and freedom from hindrances, but craving is not let go of, and any such positive effect is only temporary. Suppression depends upon the continual application of the mind in a forceful way to the object of meditation. When that force is relaxed, the hindrance is sure to return. In fact, it may come back even stronger than

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid, dhamma talk on *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, MN 10 part 2, from TWIM website, <https://www.dhammasukha.org/>, accessed October 2017.

previously, as the exclusion of hindrances through forceful application of the mind can be a kind of craving and self-grasping. It may be an effort to control the mind in order to create a pre-conceived peaceful state.

### **TWIM provides an alternative way to enter jhāna without using absorption concentration**

As we have seen above, TWIM avoids any method of strong absorption of attention such as momentary, access, or fixed concentration. This may come as a surprise as TWIM emphasizes the jhānas, and most meditation teachers and scholars equate the jhānas with absorption and strong concentration.

This equation of *jhāna* with absorption follows from the opinion that *samatha* meditation is accomplished through a kind of super-concentration resulting in a suspension of sense perception, interruption of the verbal, rational activities of the mind, and feelings of bliss, happiness, and serenity.<sup>136</sup> Such states of absorption are not conducive to insight, therefore, *vipassanā* is favored over *jhāna* by most modern teachers.<sup>137</sup>

### **TWIM jhānas are not of the same quality as absorption jhānas**

The jhānas in TWIM are of a different nature than those of the absorption meditation schools as the object of meditation in TWIM is held not too loosely and not too firmly, allowing hindrances to arise and to be let go of. The craving that is the basis of the arisen distractions is also let go of. As the mind clears of unwholesome qualities and insight is gained, the mind progresses to deeper levels of understanding and peaceful abiding. Without suppression of the hindrances, the mind enters the higher jhānas. Thus, the jhānas in TWIM are not stages of absorption the way they are in many systems of meditation. We will

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<sup>136</sup> Solé-Leris, **Tranquility and Insight**. (Kandy, Buddhist Publication Society, 1999), p. 25.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid, p.24.

explore this theme more thoroughly in a later chapter that contrasts openness meditation with absorption concentration meditation, as well as in the chapter on the union of *samatha* and *vipassanā*.

### **The importance of smiling during practice**

In looking at the 6Rs, the other very unusual feature is the emphasis on smiling. This is not meant only for social situations, but also for sitting and walking meditation as well as any activities carried on in daily life, whether in the company of other people or not. At retreats, Bhante Vimalaramsi is constantly exhorting people to smile. As in the above quotes, he speaks of meditation as an interesting and fun activity designed to make the mind light and buoyant. It is not a grim affair to be accompanied by an overly serious face or a frown.

It would be rare to find another meditation teacher within the *samatha-vipassanā* tradition who is prescribing smiling during meditation, although many of the experienced meditators are smiling people outside of the meditation hall or *kuti*. Bhante Vimalaramsi cites scientific research that shows the effectiveness of smiling in uplifting the mind, as well as his own and others' personal favorable experience with smiling. Bhante's challenge to those hesitant to smile during meditation is *ehipassiko*, "Come and see, try it for yourself." The nearly unanimous conclusion of those who have actually tried smiling during meditation is that it is effective in uplifting the mind and in sharpening mindfulness.

### **Did the Buddha and the arahants smile?**

It is difficult to find an image of the Buddha that is without a soft smile. The same is true of the arahants. Artists have nearly universally portrayed the Buddha and his disciples as smiling, and there are accounts in the suttas such as in the *Dhammacetiya Sutta*<sup>138</sup>, which portray the faces of the Buddha and his disciples as having radiant,

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<sup>138</sup> MN 89

smiling faces. The artists are following these accounts as well as their own intuition in giving smiles to the Buddha and the arahants. In selecting an image to display in the temple or the home, perhaps the most important feature looked for is the beautiful, gentle, radiant, calm, and softly smiling face of the Buddha.

Did the Buddha and the arahants leave their smile at the door when they entered their kutis for meditation? When gathered together in silent assembly, did they put on grim or overly serious faces? It is doubtful. Visitors such as King Pasenadi and King Ajātasattu were struck by their radiant, smiling faces<sup>139</sup>. The pleasant and uplifting feeling prevalent among followers of the Buddha are often favorably contrasted in the suttas with the way the other ascetics presented themselves.

A smile can be a skillful means as in TWIM meditation but is also a natural outcome of the uplifting of the mind and good feelings that accompany progress on the Buddhist path. A few verses from the *Dhammapada* will be sufficient to illustrate the happiness, delight, bliss and peace that comes to the Bhikkhu:

The monk who abides in universal love and is deeply devoted to the Teaching of the Buddhas attains the peace of Nibbāna, the bliss of the cessation of conditioned things.<sup>140 141</sup>

The monk who abides in the Dhamma, delights in the Dhamma, meditates on the Dhamma, and bears the Dhamma well in mind-he does not fall away from the sublime Dhamma.<sup>142 143</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Walshe, **The Long Discourses of the Buddha**, DN 2.12 [PTS I 52], p.93.

<sup>140</sup> Buddhārakkhita Thera, **The Dhammapada**, v. 368, p. 111

<sup>141</sup> *Mettāvihārī yo bhikkhu pasanno Buddhasāsane Adhigacche padam santam saṅkhārūpasamam sukham*, *The Dhammapada*, v. 368, Buddhārakkhita text.

<sup>142</sup> Buddhārakkhita, Op. cit., v. 364, p.110

<sup>143</sup> *dhammārāmo dhammarato dhammam anuvicintayam dhammam anussaram bhikkhu saddhammā na parihāyati*, *The Dhammapada*, v. 368, Buddhārakkhita text.

We can conclude from the above that Bhante Vimalaramsi's emphasis on the smile is certainly not out of place when we view the suttas. Words such as joy, love, rejoicing, delight, do not indicate a heavy, overly serious mood or demeanor. We can imagine this group of people as light-hearted, relaxed, open, happy and smiling. It is so reported in numerous accounts. Later, in our discussion of scientific research on meditation, we will have opportunity to illustrate the efficacy of the smile on the mind of the practitioner.

## Summary

The method of the 6Rs is a way to uplift the mind, to let go of the unwholesome and cultivate the wholesome. It is the TWIM version of Right Effort and of the Four Right Strivings. It is meant to be a constant practice for the dedicated practitioner, both in formal meditation and in daily life.

By the means of relaxing, opening the mind, and smiling after letting go of a distraction, a pure mind, temporarily free of craving is returned to the object of meditation, allowing the meditator to go deeper into the meditation. When this pure mind is experienced, even briefly, it greatly enhances the energy for practice as this helps the meditator to directly see the contrast between the self-inflicted suffering of *samsāra* and the peace and happiness of *Nibbāna*.

The 6Rs is the TWIM method to proceed into *jhāna*, as opposed to the suppression of the hindrances, which is the more common method as found in the in the *Visuddhimagga*-based methods. By not suppressing the hindrances, and adopting an open, relaxed, alert mind, the TWIM meditator is accepting of whatever arises, not trying to create a peaceful mind or a mind without disturbance. There is no effort at control, because in the TWIM view, any effort to control the mind is considered to be based on craving.

By persistent application of the 6Rs, eventually craving is allayed and the meditator proceeds deeper and deeper into *jhāna* without any

suppression. Because the mind is relaxed, open, and alert, the TWIM meditator can have insight while in *jhāna*.

The relaxation of mind and body as well as the consistent smiling (and re-smiling, as necessary) deepens the *samatha* and enhances mindfulness, both of which create conditions for the arising of liberating insight. Thus, by using the 6Rs, TWIM is both a *samatha* and a *vipassanā* practice, with both aspects of practice enhancing each other.

## Chapter IV

# The Union of *Samatha* and *Vipassanā* in TWIM

The method of meditation taught by the Buddha in the suttas was clearly *samatha-vipassanā* meditation. While it is true that insight alone sufficed for the awakening of a very few ripe disciples, the Buddha himself followed *samatha-vipassanā* the night of his awakening, and his great disciple, Ven. Sāriputta did so as well. In the case of the Buddha, the account given in MN 36, The Greater Discourse to Saccaka, details how he entered and passed through the *jhānas*. As the Buddha relates,

When my concentrated mind was thus purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, attained to imperturbability...I directed it to knowledge of the recollection of past lives ...knowledge of the passing away and reappearance of beings...knowledge of the destruction of the taints. I directly know as it actually is: ‘this is suffering...this is the origin of suffering...This is the cessation of suffering...This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering...’<sup>144 145</sup>

With such a mind he was able to gain the Three True Knowledges, directly see the Four Noble Truths, and attain to *Nibbāna*. He gained insight wisdom while in *jhāna* and became the Awakened One.

Venerable Sāriputta’s attainment of arahantship is described in detail in MN 111, the Discourse on One by One as They Occurred

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<sup>144</sup> Bodhi, **The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha**. MN 36:42[PTS i 249], p. 341.

<sup>145</sup> *So evaṃ samāhite citte parisuddhe pariyodāte anaṅgaṇe vigatūpakkilese mudubhūte kammaniye ÷ite āneñjappatte pubbe nivāsānussatiñāṇāya cittaṃ abhininnāmesim...So evaṃ samāhite citte parisuddhe pariyodāte anaṅgaṇe vigatūpakkilese mudubhūte kammaniye ÷ite āneñjappatte sattānaṃ cutūpapātañāṇāya cittaṃ abhininnāmesim...So evaṃ samāhite citte parisuddhe pariyodāte anaṅgaṇe vigatūpakkilese mudubhūte kammaniye ÷ite āneñjappatte āsavānaṃ khayāñāṇāya cittaṃ abhininnāmesim. So idaṃ dukkhanti yathābhūtaṃ abbhāññāsim, ayaṃ dukkhasamudayoti yathābhūtaṃ abbhāññāsim, ayaṃ dukkhanirodhoti yathābhūtaṃ abbhāññāsim, ayaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadāti yathābhūtaṃ abbhāññāsim.* MN 36:42, PTS i 249, CS edition.



(*Anupada Sutta*). In this *sutta*, the Buddha tells of how Ven. Sāriputta progressed through the *jhānas* and gained insight wisdom (practiced *vipassanā*) while in *jhāna*. It is clear from the experience of Gotama the Buddha and of Ven. Sāriputta that *jhāna* is meant not only for abiding in equanimity, but also for gaining liberation through insight wisdom.

This was not only the method followed by the Buddha leading to his own awakening, but also the one he taught to countless disciples. David Johnson has tallied the number of *suttas* in which *jhāna* is taught in the *Majjhima Nikāya*. Out of a total of 152 *suttas* in the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the Buddha teaches *jhāna* in fifty of them.<sup>146</sup> The other *nikāyas* also contain numerous examples of *jhāna* practice leading to liberation. To give one prominent example, The Discourse on the Fruits of the Homeless Life (*Sāmaññaphala Sutta*) relates how traversing the *jhānas* while investigating the *dhammas* results in seeing the Four Noble Truths, knowledge of the cessation of the corruptions, and deliverance.<sup>147</sup> It seems clear that the Buddha laid the utmost emphasis upon dwelling in *jhāna* through cultivating *samatha* and that this was meant as a harmonious practice together with *vipassanā*.

### **Samatha and vipassanā are like two oxen harmoniously pulling the cart of meditation**

The name Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation (TWIM) demonstrates the unity of *samatha* and *vipassanā* in this system of meditation. It also highlights some of the distinctive characteristics of TWIM. Bhante Vimalaramsi explains how *samatha* and *vipassanā* are two aspects of meditation that must work together harmoniously to bring about the desired result of *Nibbāna*.

Currently there seem to be some disputes regarding the kinds of meditation the Buddha actually

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<sup>146</sup> Johnson, David C., *The Path to Nibbāna*. p. 70.

<sup>147</sup> Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*. DN 2:97 [PTS i 84], p. 107.

taught. One school of thought says, “the meditator must begin by practicing *jhāna* (fixed) concentration meditation and then proceed to the fourth *jhāna* before switching over to the practice of *vipassanā* meditation or momentary concentration (*khandika samādhi*)-straight *vipassanā*.

Other schools of thought say one can attain *nibbāna* without going through the *jhānas*, but by only practicing straight *vipassanā* meditation or developing access concentration (*upacāra samādhi*) right from the beginning of their meditation practice. Interestingly, the word *vipassanā* or *vidassanā* (which has the same meaning) is mentioned only a few times in the suttas and is almost always mentioned with *samatha* (*jhāna*) practices.

*Samatha* and *vipassanā* are yoked together. They are like two strong oxen pulling a cart. To go straight down the path, the two oxen need to pull evenly together. In sutta 149:10 of the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the *Mahāsaḷāyatanika Sutta*, it says, “These two things-*samatha* and *vipassanā* (serenity and insight)-occur in him yoked evenly together.”<sup>148</sup>

Thus, we can see that in the view of TWIM, *samatha* and *vipassanā* are distinct in that they serve different functions, but they must work in harmony to produce the correct results. A calm, collected, serene mind is a mind that can have insight leading to the development of wisdom and liberation.

## **Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation as a translation of the Pali *samatha-vipassanā***

*Samatha* is often translated from the Pali as “serenity” or “concentration”. *Vipassanā* is usually understood as insight, and

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<sup>148</sup> Vimalaramsi, *Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life*, p. 40.

sometimes as analytical insight. Both of these words occur in the Pali version of the term Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation (TWIM) which is an English language rendering of *samatha-vipassanā* meditation. The “tranquil” is a rendering of *samatha*, and the “wisdom (plus) insight” in the name stems from the Pali *vipassanā*. In the west, *vipassanā* meditation is often known by the term “insight meditation” so the use of the term “insight” is informative to the English-speaking westerner. In the context of Buddhist meditation, insight yields wisdom (*paññā*), so the use of the word wisdom reflects this natural and inseparable nature of *vipassanā* and *paññā*.

Thus, we have “Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation” as a translation of *samatha-vipassanā*. This is abbreviated as TWIM.

### **There are prominent teachers of diverse methods of meditation who have seen the need to unify samatha and vipassanā**

Bhante Vimalaramsi is not alone in his call for bringing *samatha* and *vipassanā* together into one harmonious practice rather than favoring one over the other or treating them sequentially. Ven Ajahn Chah repeatedly emphasizes that *samatha* and *vipassanā* are best harmonized into one practice. In one of his *dhamma* talks he says,

Meditation is like a single stick of wood. Insight (*vipassanā*) is one end of the stick and serenity (*samatha*) the other. If we pick it up, does only one end come up or do both? When anyone picks up a stick, both ends rise together. Which part then is *vipassanā*, and which is *samatha*? They are both the mind. As the mind becomes peaceful, initially the peace will arise from the serenity of *samatha*. We focus and unify the mind in states of meditative peace (*samādhi*). However, if the peace and stillness of *samādhi* fades away, suffering arises in its place. Why

is that? Because the peace afforded by *samatha* meditation alone is still based on attachment.<sup>149</sup>

.... the Buddha saw from his own experience that such peace of mind was not the ultimate. The causes underlying the process of existence (*bhava*) had not yet been brought to cessation (*nirodha*).... Personally, I prefer to use the word wisdom (*paññā*) rather than *vipassanā*. If we think we are going to sit down from time to time and practice “*vipassanā* meditation,” we’re going to have a very difficult time of it. Insight has to proceed from peace and tranquility. The entire process will happen naturally of its own accord. We can’t force it.<sup>150</sup>

Here, Ven. Ajahn Chah is looking at the relationship of *samatha* and *vipassanā* in much the same light as does Ven. Vimalaramsi. Both of them are in disagreement with any approach that tries to separate *samatha* and *vipassanā* from each other, and both agree that insight comes from peace and tranquility.

In this regard, Ven. Vimalaramsi continues with his analysis of the *sutta* instructions,

So, it is very apparent that what the Buddha was teaching most has to do with the practice of attaining *jhāna* while simultaneously using *vipassanā* (insight) in those states of understanding. Moreover, the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* (Discourse on Mindfulness of Breathing) and mindfulness of *mettā* show that the Buddha taught only one kind of meditation, that is, by simultaneously developing both the *jhāna* and insight (*samatha/vipassanā*) through practicing the 6Rs (Right Effort/Harmonious Practice). This *sutta* actually shows the method of how to tranquilize

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<sup>149</sup> Chah, Ajahn, **Meditation**. (Kandy, Buddhist Publication Society, 2010), p. 20.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, p. 36.

mind/body and develop wisdom at the same time by seeing the true nature of existence.<sup>151</sup>

## **The practice of samatha-vipassanā allows the development of insight**

Bhante Vimalaramsi then shows how this practice of *samatha* /*vipassanā* develops insight and how the different factors of the path unfold and are developed. He explains,

Through the eyes of the Four Noble Truths, while following this set pattern of investigation using the 6Rs, a meditator observes the cause and effect relationship of Dependent Origination and by repeatedly witnessing *anicca* (impermanence), *dukkha* (suffering) and *anatta* (not-self), they come to understand “the true nature of everything.” At the same time, the practice of meditation fulfills the Thirty-Seven Requisites of Awakening which are: The Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the Four Kinds of Right Effort, the Four Bases of Spiritual Power, the Five Faculties, the Five Powers, the Seven Factors of Awakening, and the Noble Eightfold Path.<sup>152</sup>

It is evident that TWIM emphasizes the *samatha* aspect in harmony with the *vipassanā*. From the tranquility, equanimity, and deep relaxation of mind comes the sharp mindfulness that allows for insight wisdom to arise.

## **Most contemporary vipassanā methods separate samatha and vipassanā**

If we can generalize about the methods based on the *Visuddhimagga*, we can say that they fall into one of two strategies. In the first, *samatha* is strongly developed, usually by a type of concentrated *ānāpānasati* and/or concentration on some sign or

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<sup>151</sup> Vimalaramsi, **Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life**, p. 40.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid, p.40.

*nimitta*. After strong concentration is developed, the meditation changes to some form of *vipassanā*. This could be termed the graduated approach. In the second, the *samatha* aspect is largely or entirely skipped over and the meditator goes directly into *vipassanā*. This is generally known as “dry *vipassanā*” or “dry insight”.<sup>153</sup>

We see that according to these two schemes of practice, *samatha* and *vipassanā* are discretely separated. They may be treated completely apart from each other, they may be used sequentially, in which case the *samatha* creates conditions for the next stage of meditation, which is the stage of *vipassanā*, or the *samatha* aspect may be dropped altogether. We will look at two prominent examples of this.

### **The methods of S.N. Goenka and the variations of Ven. Mahasi Sayadaw’s system both separate samatha from vipassanā and employ them sequentially**

The most widespread traditions of *vipassanā* meditation taught in the world today are likely those of Mr. S.N. Goenka, which is in the tradition of Ven. Sayagyi U Ba Khin, and that of Ven. Mahasi Sayadaw. Both traditions are originally from Myanmar, and have become widespread throughout the world. Goenka style has remained “pure” in that the original style is closely adhered to in all Goenka *vipassanā* centers. Mahasi Sayadaw style has gone through numerous transformations and permutations, although its source is usually recognizable by the distinctive method of “noting” phenomena as they arise. In this book, rather than attempting to name the numerous variations of the styles using the noting method, we will use the blanket term “Mahasi Sayadaw style” to indicate those methods derived from this method.

The Goenka style has been particularly successful in reaching populations of non-Buddhist countries and has been one of the main sources of the revival of the Noble Eightfold Path in India, the original

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<sup>153</sup> Johnson, David C., *The Path to Nibbāna*. p. 29-30.

source of Buddhism. By de-emphasizing traditional Buddhist symbols, the Goenka style is not always thought of as “Buddhism” by the population, and thusly draws Hindus, Christians, Muslims, as well as Buddhists, to the free 10-day courses.

The Mahasi Sayadaw tradition is particularly influential within Theravādin countries, where in its many variations it may be said to be the main system followed by the Buddhist *saṅgha*. In Myanmar, Thailand, Sri Lanka, Laos, and Cambodia, much of the *vipassanā* meditation is done following some sort of Mahasi Sayadaw style or a variation. Local teachers have certainly added their particular variations on the original practice. In those countries, but also in the western world, many prominent meditation centers for laypeople also use this system or its variants. Between the Goenka system and the Mahasi Sayadaw system in its variety of forms, we would have the great majority of practicing *vipassanā* meditators in the world.

Both of these systems separate, or at least sequence *samatha* and *vipassanā*. *Samatha* is looked upon as a stepping stone to *vipassanā*, as it develops the requisite concentration of mind to successfully apply the *vipassanā* techniques. In the Goenka courses, approximately one third of each retreat is begun by *ānāpāna*, concentration (*samatha*) on the sensation (*vedanā*) of the breath at the tip of the nose. Thus, in a 10-day course, 3-4 days would be *ānāpāna*. In a 45-day course, the first 15 days would be *ānāpāna*. Of course, the acquired *samatha* concentration of mind is then utilized in the *vipassanā* section of the retreat.

In answer to a question, S.N. Goenka explains how this works as follows,

Question: Why do you teach students to practice *ānāpāna* concentrating of the nostrils rather than on the belly?

S. N. Goenka: Because for us *ānāpāna* is practiced as a preparation for Vipassanā, and in this type of

Vipassanā, a particularly strong concentration is necessary. The more limited the area of attention, the stronger the concentration will be. For developing concentration to this degree, the abdomen is too large. Most suitable is the area of the nostrils. This is why the Buddha guided us to work in this area.<sup>154</sup>

In the Mahasi Sayadaw system, there is no numerical ratio of *samatha* to *vipassanā*, but depending on the variation of the system, students may begin with the *samatha* and then go on to the *vipassanā*, or they may go directly to the “dry *vipassanā*”. In Ven. Sayadaw U Janakabhivamsa’s book *Vipassanā Meditation*, the discreet use of *samatha* and *vipassanā* is carefully explained in his chapter “Distinguishing Between *Samatha* and *Vipassanā* Meditation”. He writes,

Here, we should know the difference between *samatha* meditation and *vipassanā* meditation. *Samatha* means ‘concentration, calmness, tranquility’.

When the mind is deeply concentrated on the object of meditation, it becomes calm and tranquil. The purpose of *samatha* meditation is to attain deep concentration of mind using a single object. So, the result of *samatha* meditation is the attainment of deep concentration such as *jhāna*, *appanā samādhi* (absorption concentration) or *upacāra samādhi* (access concentration). When the mind is deeply concentrated on the object of meditation, all the defilements such as lust, greed, hatred, desire, conceit, ignorance, and so on, are not present in the mind which is absorbed in the object. Thus, the mind is purified from defilements or hindrances. When the mind is purified from all these defilements and hindrances, we feel calm, tranquil,

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<sup>154</sup> Hart, William, **The Art of Living: Vipassanā Meditation as Taught by S.N. Goenka**. (Igatpuri, Vipassanā Research Institute, 2008 (reprint), p. 79.



happy, and peaceful. *Samatha* meditation, therefore, brings some degree of happiness through the attainment of deep concentration such as *jhāna*, or *upācara samādhi* (access concentration) but does not enable the meditator to rightly understand the bodily or mental phenomena as they really are.

The purpose of *vipassanā* meditation, on the other hand, is to attain the cessation of suffering through right understanding of the body and mental processes and their true nature. For this, we need some degree of concentration.<sup>155</sup>

This passage by Ven. Sayadaw U Janakabhivamsa's is very instructive, and will help us to see how TWIM departs from the common *vipassanā* approach in some important ways. The absorption methods require intense concentration which excludes the arising of phenomena other than the object of meditation. Such an approach can be directly traced to the influence of the *Visuddhimagga*.

We can see this need for narrow and intense focus in S. N. Goenka's explanation of the need to narrow the attention to a small area at the tip of the nose. In the system that he teaches, the belly is too large an area for the required narrowness of focus. The tip of the nose is used instead. Such narrow concentration takes tremendous energy and willpower. This allows for the development of great concentration, but not of insight. As S. N. Goenka explains in a question about *samādhi*,

Question: Why is the practice of *samādhi* not sufficient for liberation?

S.N. Goenka: Because the purity of mind developed through *samādhi* is achieved primarily by suppression, not elimination of conditioning, it is just

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<sup>155</sup> Janakabhivamsa, S.U., **Vipassanā Meditation**. (Nugegoda, Buddhist Gem Fellowship, 1985), p. 11-12.

as if someone cleans a tank of muddy water by adding a precipitating agent, for example, alum. The alum causes the mud particles suspended in the water to fall to the bottom of the tank, leaving the water crystal-clear. Similarly, *samādhi* makes the upper levels of the mind crystal-clear, but a deposit of impurities remains in the unconscious. These latent impurities must be removed in order to reach liberation. And to remove the impurities from the depths of the mind, one must practice vipassana.<sup>156</sup>

This view of *samādhi* as a kind of suppression is not the approach of TWIM. Bhante Vimalaramsi makes this clear when discussing the word. He writes,

According to Rhys-Davids, the word “Samādhi” was never used before the time of the Buddha. The Buddha made this word up to describe Samatha/Vipassanā meditation, which, when practiced in the way he describes in the instructions, leads directly to Nibbāna!

...when the Buddha came along and chose the word “Samādhi” to describe Samatha/Vipassanā (Sammā Samādhi or Harmonious Collectedness), the Brahmins began to use this same word “Samādhi” with their own definition of one-pointed concentration.<sup>157</sup>

We can see that TWIM *samādhi* does not involve suppression, but rather the open, relaxed, alert mind we have been discussing. This mind is capable of having insight while in *samādhi*, and it is not necessary to introduce *vipassanā* as a next step. In the TWIM method of *samādhi*, *vipassanā* is already being practiced.

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<sup>156</sup> Hart, **The Art of Living**, p. 79.

<sup>157</sup> Vimalaramsi, **Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life**, pp. 72-3.

**In TWIM, the object of meditation is held with energy but without tension or tightness, neither too loosely nor too tightly**

In understanding how TWIM meditation contrasts to the above *Visuddhimagga*-based systems, the first thing to understand is that the use of absorption concentration is foreign to the TWIM system. Although the Ven. Sayadaw U Janakabhivamsa has explained well how such concentration works within the Mahasi Sayadaw system, within the TWIM system, this would be considered to be holding the object of meditation too tightly.

In TWIM, the meditator concentrating in this narrowly focused way would be encouraged to relax tension in the mind and body and to hold the object of meditation lightly but attentively. TWIM teacher David Johnson explains how to follow the TWIM method of staying with the object of meditation as follows,

Trying to stay with your object of meditation is where you find craving raising its head. It is your goal to understand fully how craving arises-and by understanding the process you let go of this craving and stay with the object of meditation. And don't do this by clenching your teeth and pushing it away! Bhante Vimalaramsi says you need to understand how "DROPSS" (don't resist or push; soften and smile) is the way.<sup>158</sup>

According to this idea of neither resisting nor pushing, the object of meditation is to be held with energy, but not so tightly as to exclude or push away distractions or hindrances from arising. As this approach goes against the commonly assumed purpose of concentration, we will explain it further in a later chapter. Suffice it to say at this point that in TWIM the object of meditation is to be held with energy but not with any tightness or tension. The meditator is meant to "soften and smile",

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<sup>158</sup> Johnson, David C., *The Path to Nibbāna*. pp. 41-42

even when a distraction arises. This is considered neither too loose nor too tight.

## **Holding the object of meditation too tightly-the story of Soṇa Koḷivāsa**

What would be holding the object of meditation too tightly? The Buddha's instructions to monk Soṇa Koḷivāsa can be helpful to understand this point. The story of Ven. Soṇa occurs in both the *Aṅguttara-nikāya* and in the *Mahāvagga* of the *Vinaya Piṭaka*.

Soṇa had lived a pampered life as a young layman, but after hearing the Buddha teach the *dhamma* he took ordination and became an energetic practitioner. But his meditations were not yielding results. He redoubled his efforts, but still nothing significant happened as a result of his efforts. He began to despair, and to consider disrobing and returning to lay life. When his fellow monks saw his blood on the trail where he did his walking meditation, they decided it was time to confer with the Buddha.

When the Buddha came to the place where Ven. Soṇa was staying, he too saw the blood and then questioned Ven. Soṇa about his meditation. The Buddha asked if it were not the case that as a layman Soṇa had played the lute, which was in fact the case. Then the Buddha asked Ven. Soṇa about how to tune a lute, what happens if the stings are either too tight or too loose. Ven. Soṇa said that the strings of the lute must neither be too tight nor too loose for the lute to sound properly. Using the analogy of a properly tuned lute to illustrate the correct application of energy to the mind, the *Aṅguttara Nikāya* reports the Buddha as saying,

So too, Soṇa, if energy is aroused too forcefully this leads to restlessness, and if energy is too lax this leads to laziness. Therefore, Soṇa, resolve on a balance of

energy, achieve evenness of the spiritual faculties, and take up the object there.<sup>159 160</sup>

Having understood the point of the Buddha’s teaching and having determined upon “balance of energy”, Ven. Soṇa returned to his meditations and soon attained arahant. This balance of the spiritual faculties is termed *viriyasamatha* in the Pali. In comparing the various versions of the Pali, Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi gives the above passage as: *viriyasamathaṃ adhiṭṭhaha, indriyānaṃ ca samataṃ paṭivijja, tatha ca nimittaṃ gaṇhāhi*.<sup>161</sup> Here we have a compound word made of *viriya* and *samatha*, which combines energy/effort with calmness/ tranquility.

### **Balancing energy/effort with calmness and tranquility**

As the *Soṇa Sutta* indicates, the Buddha is advising monk Soṇa to balance his energy/effort (*viriya*) with calmness and tranquility (*samatha*). This puts *samatha* at the opposite pole to the extreme of too much energy. In light of this story and the key Pali term *viriyasamathaṃ*, it is difficult to interpret *samatha* primarily as deep concentration, which is usually considered a kind of vigorous exertion of focus upon the object of meditation. Rather, in view of this passage, our concept of *samatha* needs to include the meaning of calmness/tranquility, a relaxed awareness. Too much intense concentration is too tight. The guideline as given by the Buddha in his instructions to Ven. Soṇa is “not too loose, not too tight”.

In TWIM, *samatha* is a balance of energy (*viriya*) with tranquility (*passadhi*). If we see that deepening *samatha* also includes attention to the object of meditation (mindfulness leading to mental collectedness

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<sup>159</sup> Bodhi, **The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha**. AN 6.2.1.55 [PTS III.374-9], p. 933. The story also occurs in the Vinaya Piṭaka Volume IV, *Mahāvagga*, p.237 (PTS IV.237). The story is in agreement in the two versions, but the Vinaya version is longer.

<sup>160</sup> *Evameva kho soṇa accāraddhaṃ viriyaṃ uddhaccāya saṃvattati. Atilīnaṃ viriyaṃ kosajjāya saṃvattati. Tasmātiha tvaṃ soṇa, viriyasamataṃ adhiṭṭhaha, indriyānaṃ ca samataṃ paṭivijja, tatha ca nimittaṃ gaṇhāhī*. AN 6.2.1.55, PTS III.374-9, CS edition. Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi’s rendering (above) varies slightly from the CS edition.

<sup>161</sup> Bodhi, Op. cit., AN, p.1763, f. n. 1368.

(*sati* and *samādhi*), and equipoise (*upekkhā*), we have five of the Seven Awakening Factors (*sati-sambojjhaṅga*) as part of a balanced approach to meditation which is neither too loose nor too tight.

We can see here the importance of balancing energies which left unchecked can tend towards extremes, and leave “blood on the path”, as Ven. Soṇa did before he was instructed by the Buddha. Without the balancing factor of tranquility, energy tends to the extreme of too much tension and tightness, and without the balancing factor of energy, tranquility can tend to laxity or sloth and torpor. The experienced meditator learns to balance these energies, leading to awakening.

Thus, if sloth and torpor inhibit clarity of meditation, the TWIM meditator applies more energy, often in the form of increased interest in the object of meditation or of investigation of experience (*dhammavicaya*). Or if application of too much energy creates restlessness, the meditator may apply more tranquility. With experience in the path, balancing and fine-tuning the factors of awakening becomes natural and effortless.

### **The Pali term *viriyasamathaṃ* translates well as “collectedness of mind”**

Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi’s above interpretation of *viriyasamathaṃ* in the context of the story of Ven. Soṇa fits well with the TWIM view of *samatha*, and explains why Ven. Vimalaramsi is loath to translate it as “concentration”. He prefers the phrase “collectedness of mind”, which doesn’t suggest going to an extreme with holding the object of meditation through overly strong and narrow intensity of focus.<sup>162</sup>

These methods of strong and intense focus may work well within the *Visuddhimagga*-based traditions such as those of S.N. Goenka, or Ven. Mahasi Sayadaw, but they are not the appropriate method within TWIM. The outcome will be different depending on whether

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<sup>162</sup> Ibid., p. 1763.

narrowness and intensity of attention or tranquil aware attention is used.

### **Too much effort can be counter-productive in meditation**

We can remember that monk Soṇa was putting in so much effort that he was leaving blood on the trail where he was doing his walking meditation, an extreme which the Buddha saw as both unnecessary and counter-productive. In fact, monk Soṇa, despite his great efforts, was not achieving the results he was hoping for. He had come to the point of leaving the sangha and returning to lay life. The Buddha showed him how to properly tune his mind to the object of meditation, and this yielded immediate results. This is clearly a case where too much effort was not helpful.<sup>163</sup>

Too much effort in this case, as the Buddha points out to Ven, Soṇa, leads to restlessness, one of the five hindrances, and a consistent visitor to the mind of the meditator. When sitting in meditation and having the mind wander from the object of meditation, the antidote may be to lighten up and loosen up a bit rather than to bear down and try harder. The mind does not want to be controlled. If we have a strong expectation of having a quiet mind, the mind will likely rebel and create numerous distractions.

### **Samatha without absorption concentration**

This story of monk Soṇa also suggests that an interpretation of *samatha* as absorption concentration is not the only valid way to look at it. TWIM teaches that a relaxed mind can also be energetic and acutely attuned to the movement of mind's attention, that is, full of mindfulness/*sati*. In TWIM, a meditator with such a mind is not engaging in absorption concentration.

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<sup>163</sup> Johnson, M.E., "Not Too Tight, Not Too Loose", **Sri Lanka International Buddhist Journal**, Vol. 1, No. 3, 2012. See for a full treatment of this story of monk Soṇa as regards balancing the energy of meditation.

Most meditators bring their expectations to the meditation cushion. We want to have a quiet mind that easily has insight after insight, and carries up on to some high level of spiritual attainment. The mind, which is naturally active and restless, is unwilling to cooperate in this endeavor. Hence, we often get into a struggle with our unruly minds.

### **The effort to control the mind tends towards absorption concentration**

In our effort to control our minds and control our experience to meet our expectations, there is a tendency towards absorption meditation. Why? Because it often works as a tool to meet our preconceived expectations of what a ‘good’ meditation should be like. Absorption can clear our minds of disturbance through the force of concentration. The result can be a very pleasant, clear state of mind. With enough practice, this state of mind becomes readily attainable to the meditator, but there is a catch. As Bhikkhu Bodhi explains in his introduction to his translation of *Āṅguttara Nikāya*,

When pursued as an end in itself, deep concentration is accompanied by exalted joy, bliss, calm, and equanimity. These experiences can convince the unwary meditator that he has reached the final goal and discovered “the nirvanic peace within.” Such lofty states, however, are achieved simply through the intensification of consciousness, not through the deep insight that cuts off the bonds of repeated existence. The superior states of concentration generate powerful wholesome karma, which can lead to rebirth in the form or formless realm—the realms of super-divine stature—depending on the states reached during the meditator’s human existence. Without the deep discernment of wisdom, this kamma will eventually be exhausted, and the divine being will pass away and take rebirth elsewhere, perhaps even in the bad destinations. For the



path to reach completion and culminate in wisdom, it must eventually bring forth wisdom. Thus, the Buddha praises wisdom as the foremost splendor, radiance, light, luster, and luminary.<sup>164</sup>

### **Previous to his awakening, the Buddha learned methods involving intense concentration but failed to awaken using these methods**

There is broad agreement among meditative traditions, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist, that intense concentration has the ability to achieve states of exhaltation, bliss, joy, calm, and equanimity. Many of the śramanic traditions contemporary with the Buddha, and likely many of the brahmanic traditions that were emerging from the Upaniṣadic schools were availing themselves of this strong concentration/absorption approach.

As told in the *Ariyapariyesana Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*, Gotama trained himself in such absorption meditations with Āḷara Kālāma and with Uddaka Rāmaputta, followed by intense concentration methods as an ascetic. With the two aforementioned teachers, he went very deeply into the jhānas and reached a level of spiritual attainment with each of these teachers that these teachers and their most accomplished students found to be rewarding enough to consider as the goal of spiritual life.

These two teachers offered Gotama a position as co-teacher, equal to themselves. But Gotama declined their offer. His realization that he had not yet achieved the final goal of the spiritual life were for reasons similar to what Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi offers above. Gotama realized he had not quenched the fires of craving and self-grasping ignorance. Not being satisfied that he had found true liberation he left each of his teachers in turn. As he describes it,

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<sup>164</sup> Bodhi, **The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha**. AN, introduction, p. 49.

Thus Āḷara Kālama, my teacher, placed me, his pupil, on an equal footing with himself and awarded me the highest honor. But it occurred to me: “This dhamma does not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to *Nibbāna*, but only to reappearance of the base of nothingness. Not being satisfied with that, I left.

Thus Uddaka Rāmaputta, my companion in the holy life, placed me in the position of a teacher and accorded me the highest honor. But it occurred to me: “This dhamma does not lead to disenchantment, to dispassion, to cessation, to peace, to direct knowledge, to enlightenment, to *Nibbāna*, but only to reappearance in the base of neither-perception-nor-non-perception). Not being satisfied with that, I left.”<sup>165 166</sup>

Not satisfied, Gotama left each of these teachers in turn, despite the offer of becoming a celebrated meditation teacher. Yet, the two *jhānas* that he mastered with these two teachers later formed part of the highest level of *arūpa jhāna* practice which he instructed and encouraged his disciples to master as part of the quest for *Nibbāna*. Only the cessation of perception and feeling (*saññāvedayitanirodha*) is a higher level of *jhāna* preceding the breakthrough to *nibbāna*. What made these *jhānas* a sort of spiritual dead-end when practicing

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<sup>165</sup> Bodhi, **The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha**. MN 26:15 [PTS i 165-6], pp 258-9.

<sup>166</sup> Iti kho bhikkhave āḷāro kālāmo ācariyo me samāno antevāsīṃ maṃ samānaṃ attano samasamaṃ ṭhapesi, uḷārāya ca maṃ pūjāya pūjesi. Tassa mayhaṃ bhikkhave etadahosi: " nāyaṃ dhammo nibbidāya na virāgāya na nirodhāya na upasamāya na abhiññāya na sambodhāya na nibbānāya saṃvattati, yāvadeva ākiñcaññāyatanūpapattiyā"ti. So kho ahaṃ bhikkhave taṃ dhammaṃ analaṃkaritvā tasmā dhammā nibbijja apakkamīṃ...

Iti kho bhikkhave uddako rāmaputto sabrahmacārī me samāno ācariyaṭṭhāne va maṃ ṭhapesi. Uḷārāya ca maṃ pūjāya pūjesi. Tassa mayhaṃ bhikkhave etadahosi: nāyaṃ dhammo nibbidāya na virāgāya na nirodhāya na nibbānāya saṃvattati, yāvadeva nevasaññānāsaññāyatanūpapattiyāti. So kho ahaṃ bhikkhave taṃ dhammaṃ analaṃkaritvā tasmā dhammā nibbijja apakkamīṃ. MN 26:15, PTS i 165-6, CS edition.

with these forest yogis, but a path to *nibbāna* when part of the Buddha's teaching?

We can never know the answer to this question with certainty, but similar to the difference between Buddhist *mettā* practice and the *mettā* practice of other ascetic schools, a practice taken out of context from the Noble Eightfold Path was not conducive to awakening.<sup>167</sup> Connected with this is the likelihood that these teachers were directing mind's attention (mindfulness) in a way not in keeping with the Buddha's later instructions.

From the description of why he left these teachers, it is clear that their *jhāna* practice did not lead to disenchantment, dispassion, cessation, or insight wisdom. It is very possible that it was due to their reliance upon intense concentration/absorption meditation. As a result, practitioners such as Gotama were not letting go of craving and self-grasping ignorance. They were deep in meditative trance, but were not having insight leading to wisdom, liberation, and ultimate peace.

### **Absorption concentration jhānas can lead to deep states of peace but not to final awakening**

We can term the jhānas that the Buddha learned with these two teachers “absorption concentration jhānas”, which in this case is a kind of yogic trance. Later, in the TWIM view, the Buddha taught a different kind of *jhāna* not based on absorption concentration. These are the jhānas attained in Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation. They are tranquil aware jhānas.

A well-developed state of absorption *jhāna*, as Bhikkhu Bodhi points out in his quote above, can generate much wholesome karma leading to exalted but temporary high levels of peace and joy in this life and in the next. But when the force of the concentration wanes, the deeply rooted craving will likely again manifest. Gotama was aware enough to realize there was yet more to accomplish.

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<sup>167</sup> See SN PTS V.115-118.

Even Gotama's deep foray into severe ascetic practices had this strong element of absorption. Only through intense concentration of the mind and extreme suppression of feelings of discomfort and pain can any human being endure the types of torments that Gotama put himself through. The details of his ordeals are listed in *Mahāsaccaka Sutta* of *Majjima Nikāya*. We will mention only that he deprived himself of such things as food and even air for long periods of time, nearly killing himself in the process. Yet he could not find ultimate peace. The reason he gives for failure at each point is, "But although tireless energy was aroused in me and unremitting mindfulness was established, my body was overwrought and uncalm because I was exhausted from the painful striving."<sup>168 169</sup>

We can notice that in his extreme asceticism, the Buddha mentioned that he had highly developed factors of mindfulness and energy. But the balancing factors of tranquility and equanimity, as well as a balanced *samādhi*, were absent. This was productive only of excessive pain, restlessness, exhaustion, and harm to the body.

### **Practicing some varieties of Buddhist meditation in retreat may be a very difficult and exhausting experience, but TWIM is refreshing**

Although the Buddha's asceticism was very excessive, and he abandoned it, advising others to do so as well, many people who go through Buddhist meditation retreats and long-term sitting experience similar extreme discomfort. They may not die from these practices, but

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<sup>168</sup> Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*. MN 36 [PTS I 244], p.338.

<sup>169</sup> *Āraddhaṃ kho pana me aggivessana viriyaṃ hoti asallīnaṃ. Upaṭṭhitā sati asammuṭṭhā. Sāraddho ca pana me kāyo hoti appaṭippassaddho tene va dukkhappadhānena padhānābhittunnassa sato.* MN 36, PTS I 244, CS edition.

they may sometimes incur lasting damage to their bodies. Unfortunately, there have been cases of mental damage as well.<sup>170</sup>

The idea of going beyond the normal limits of the body through excessive use of concentration can achieve much in the short run but the long-term effects are not always beneficial. We may not like to think of Buddhist meditation as having potentially damaging effects, but the evidence is there that it can be so. Caution is needed.

### **In TWIM, meditation is meant to be comfortable**

Within the practice of TWIM, such intense practices are unnecessary and counter-productive. Sitting meditation is meant to be comfortable. Nothing is gained from excessive pain. In fact, it interferes with the ability to sit quietly for a long period of time. Walking meditation is done with energy and briskness, in order to circulate the blood, wake up the possibly drowsy mind, and give energy to the next session of sitting.

Most meditators experience some degree of discomfort, especially when first meditating. The body is not accustomed to sitting still for long periods of time, and there may be strange sensations as well as pain. Due to the inclusion of the relax step in TWIM, there is not the danger of psychological stress being incurred during the meditation that may be a danger in absorption concentration methods.

As for the possibility of physical damage, Bhante Vimalaramsi helps the meditator understand the difference between the kind of pain that occurs and will pass with no damage, and the kind of pain that signals a danger to the body and should not be ignored or suppressed by force of concentration. Bhante explains,

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<sup>170</sup> See the article “The Dark Knight of the Soul” in **The Atlantic** (magazine) where Dr. Willoughby Britton discusses psychological damage incurred to meditators, a subject that is usually ignored in discussions of meditation. Accessed online at: <http://www.theatlantic.com/health/archive/2014/06/the-dark-knight-of-the-souls/372766/>, referenced October, 2017.

There are two different kinds of pain that a meditator can experience while doing the meditation. There is ‘real pain’ and there is ‘meditation pain’. The way to tell the difference is this:

*Real Pain...*When the meditator is doing their sitting meditation and a pain arises, sometimes the pain can be quite intense. When the meditator gets up from the sitting practice, if the pain stays or becomes worse, then please don’t sit in that way again. This is a ‘real pain’ and it can cause some real physical problems for the meditator, if they continue to sit that way again.

The meditation is not about causing permanent damage to the body. It is not about ‘biting the bullet’ and making oneself suffer! It is about seeing the true nature of HOW Dependent origination actually occurs. Meditators don’t have to torture themselves or cause physical damage to themselves; this is unskillful practice. Finding a posture that has very little pain arising in it is best! Sometimes if the meditator sits in a chair, it can bring relief.

*Meditation Pain...*The other kind of pain that can sometimes arise can be just as intense as the real pain, but when the meditator gets up to do the walking meditation, the pain goes away after a short period of time. This is called a “meditation pain”. When the meditator recognizes this kind of pain, it is best to sit through it without moving at all. The author [Bhante Vimalaramsi] promises that if the meditator does this, they will have some wonderful experiences when the pain fades away by itself. Promise!<sup>171</sup>

Sitting may be done on the floor or on a chair. Bhante reminds the students that there is no magic in the floor and if sitting on the floor gives excessive pain, it is better to make oneself more comfortable in a

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<sup>171</sup> Vimalaramsi, **Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life**, pp. 180-183.

chair. He also encourages meditators to take breaks as needed. However, sitting itself should be done as motionless as possible, and once the meditator is ready, long sits are encouraged. With longer sitting the mind becomes more relaxed, free of tension and craving, and goes deeper. Without the fatigue that can accumulate from absorption concentration, the TWIM meditator can enter into the tranquil wisdom *jhānas* and gain understanding leading to freedom.

The experience of *jhāna* when practicing TWIM is considerably different from the experience of *jhāna* in absorption meditation. We are suggesting in this book that the absorption concentration *jhānas* may not have been the method used and taught by Gotama the Buddha. There is evidence in the suttas and from the direct experience of meditators that the tranquil aware *jhānas* as taught by TWIM are possibly closer to the *jhāna* experience of the Buddha and his disciples.

### **What is *ekaggatā*?**

We can see the difference in the two approaches to *jhāna*, the deep concentration method of the absorption methods and the collectedness of mind produced by the following of the method of the 6Rs in TWIM by how they interpret a key word, the Pali *ekaggatā*.

This word *ekaggatā*, is usually translated as “one-pointedness” and is found in compound with *citta* to form *cittass’ekaggatā*, which is a key *jhāna* factor included in the standard lists for the second through fourth *jhānas* and into the *arūpa jhānas* up to cessation. It is even included in the account of Ven. Sāriputta’s traversing the *jhānas* to awakening in MN 111, Anupada Sutta, the Discourse on One by One as they Occurred. Hence, we can consider that *cittass’ekaggatā* is a vital component of meditation through the *jhānas* from beginning to end.

The Pali *cittass'ekaggatā* is usually translated as “one-pointedness of mind”. Such a translation would be adequate except that the means to such one-pointedness is usually assumed to be strong concentration which excludes everything save for the object of meditation. Such an interpretation is the predominant one among both scholars and practitioners.

For example, R.M.L. Gethin in his book *The Buddhist Path to Awakening* favorably quotes another prominent scholar, L.S. Cousins as follows,

It [*cittass'ekaggatā*] refers specifically to a state in which the mind is absorbed in a single object. In the present context [as a *jhāna* factor] it is the ability to keep the attention, without wavering or trembling, aware only of the object of meditation.<sup>172</sup>

To which Gethin adds, “*Samādhi* is a state of firm concentration where the mind is completely absorbed in and content with its object.”<sup>173</sup> This definition reflects the TWIM understanding, but where TWIM diverges is with the means to achieve such one-pointedness. Gethin’s phrase “state of firm concentration” suggests that the mind is being controlled in some way. Perhaps this is not the intention of his wording here, but it is the usual understanding of the means to achieve one-pointedness. TWIM does not favor this approach.

### **The careful use of language in TWIM so as to avoid unbalanced meditation and attempts to control the mind**

In TWIM, *cittass'ekaggatā* is not attained by forceful control, but by balancing the awakening factors and letting go of craving. This is why Bhante Vimalaramsi is hesitant to use the phrase “one-pointedness” as a translation of *cittass'ekaggatā* and prefers the phrase

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<sup>172</sup> Gethin, R.M.L., *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*. (Oxford, Oneworld Publications, 2007 Asian edition), p. 119

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid*, p.119



“collectedness of mind”, which phrase also suggests a focus of the mind, but not through forceful means. For similar reasons, TWIM teacher David Johnson rejects use of the word “concentration” to describe the method pursued by the TWIM meditator.

When westerners hear such words as “single-pointedness” and “concentration”, they tend to become aggressive in their meditation and attempt to achieve such one-pointedness through strong concentration, which is an attempt to get a pre-conceived state of mind through a process of control. From the TWIM point of view, this is too much energy and not enough tranquility. It is an unbalanced approach. Hence, the softer phrases such as “collectedness of mind”, “stillness of mind”, “composure of mind”, and “unified mind” are employed.<sup>174</sup> These phrases suggest a mind that is balancing the factors of awakening.

In discussing MN 111, *Anupada Sutta*, Bhante Vimalaramsi points out that Ven. Sāriputta’s experience includes *cittass’ekaggatā*, but not in the sense of absorption concentration. He explains about the first *jhāna* experience in a *dhamma* talk as follows,

Actually, the word *jhāna* means a stage of your meditation. It’s just a level of your understanding about Dependent Origination; it’s just a level. The joy arises, right after that, when it fades away, you feel very comfortable in your mind and in your body. This feeling is what the Buddha called “*sukhā*” in Pāli, which is happiness. Your mind doesn’t wander very much in your meditation; your mind doesn’t wander away. It stays with your meditation; you feel very peaceful and very calm. In Pāli, the word for that is “*ekaggata*”. If you look up the word in the Pāli dictionary, it means tranquility<sup>175</sup>, it means peacefulness, it means stillness

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<sup>174</sup> Vimalaramsi, **Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life**, pp. 19-20.

<sup>175</sup> Rhys-Davids, **Pali-English Dictionary**, p. 159. In the P.E.D. *ekagga* is translated as calm, tranquil, collected and *ekaggatā* as concentration, capacity to individualize, contemplation, tranquility of mind. See p.159 under entry for *eka*.

of mind. *Ekaggata* means the act of this stillness. These are the things Sāriputta experienced in the first *jhāna*.<sup>176</sup>

Following Bhante’s use of language, in this book we will use the term “unification of mind” to represent the TWIM approach and “one-pointedness” to represent that which leads to intense concentration and eventually to absorption. The two translations represent two significantly different interpretations of *cittass’ekaggatā*, and two different approaches to attaining *cittass’ekaggatā* through meditation. Bhante highlights this subtle but significant difference in language and method in discussing the TWIM approach.

...mind has the need to be calm, composed, and clear, while it is in *jhāna*, in order to see clearly the interconnectedness of the Four Noble Truths and Dependent Origination. This is why the practice of straight *vipassanā* has led to so much disappointment after so many years of hard work for some students.

The Buddha taught us to practice *samatha/vipassanā* together and this is the difference between the commentary-based meditation practices and the *sutta* approach to meditation. The results of those two practices are different.

One-pointed concentration or absorption concentration is not the same kind of mental development that the Buddha shows us. The Buddha taught us to tranquilize our mind and body every time mind’s attention shifts from one thing to another.

The collected mind is not so deeply one-pointed that the force of concentration causes mind to stay on one object of meditation, even if that attention concentrates on something momentarily. The collected mind is able to observe how mind’s attention goes from one thing to

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<sup>176</sup> Vimalaramsi, Bhante, **Moving Dhamma, Vol.1.** (Annapolis, Dhamma Sukha, 2012/2013), p. 128.

another very precisely. There is much more full awareness of both mind and body here [with collected mind] than with a deeply concentrated one-pointed mind or absorbed mind.<sup>177</sup>

### **By using the TWIM method, the meditator enters tranquil aware *jhāna* and can develop insight**

Bhante Vimalaramsi's personal experience after years of intensive absorption meditation practice is that there is a very different quality of *jhāna* when the mind is not forced into absorption by the use of one-pointed concentration. This other experience of *jhāna* coming from a collected but relaxed mind can be called "tranquil aware *jhāna*". It is this type of *jhāna* which is used in TWIM.

By using the method of the 6Rs, which suppresses nothing but rather relaxes and opens the mind, the meditator is able to see clearly what arises and how it arises. This means that the meditator is able to practice *vipassanā* while in *jhāna*, which is the union of *samatha* and *vipassanā*. This is TWIM practice.

David Johnson describes the process in the following way,

When we release the tension and tightness from a hindrance, it gradually disappears. When that happens, you will have joy and your mind will become, for a short time until another hindrance comes up, free from craving.

This experience then is the Tranquil Aware *jhāna*: a fully energetic, balanced and sublime deep state of mind from which one can see the impersonal process of mind. From here you can see deeply into all twelve links of dependent origination, by which you can go on to attain Nibbāna.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Vimalaramsi, **Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life**, p. 307.

<sup>178</sup> Johnson, David C., **The Path to Nibbāna**, pp. 74-75.

The idea that one can carry on *vipassanā* within the context of *jhāna* is unusual in the world of *vipassanā* due to the prevalent idea that the fully concentrated mind becomes oblivious to everything except for the object of meditation. The only “insight” that might occur in such a state of absorption is to see, for example, the impermanence of the breath, its rise and fall.

TWIM teacher David Johnson has extensive experience in other *vipassanā* methods before becoming a student of Bhante Vimalaramsi and of TWIM. He describes the state of absorption meditation as follows,

When one is absorbed, one cannot hear sounds, feel anything in the body, or sense anything at the bases of seeing, smelling, or tasting—so desire at the physical level is suppressed. In addition, because one is so tightly focused on their object of meditation, desire is also suppressed at the mental level. At the fourth absorption *jhāna* and higher, it is said that one even stops breathing through his mouth and nose, and ‘breathes’ through his ears. This is not the case with the Tranquil Aware *jhāna*, in which one continues to be aware of the outside world and continues to breathe normally.<sup>179</sup>

David Johnson then points out how the TWIM variety of *jhāna* allows for the development of insight wisdom. He writes,

Since what you are trying to achieve here [in meditation] is the removal of craving, you must see and understand it, not push it away. Absorption just puts it on the shelf such that when you come out of the absorption *jhāna* the hindrances come back even stronger; like a dog you penned up that was vicious—you open the gate and now he attacks you with full

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<sup>179</sup> Ibid, p. 55.

force. Instead of pushing away the distraction, you simply relax into it and accept that it is there.<sup>180</sup>

Previous to TWIM, Bhante Vimalaramsi also had years of practice using absorption concentration. He points out what he considers the limitations of such a method in the following way,

When the one-pointed concentration is used, it suppresses the hindrances (*nīvaraṇa*) by the force of that concentration. This includes access concentration (*upacāra samādhi*) as well as absorption concentration (*appaṇa samādhi*).

The hindrances are where our attachments to a personal self are stored. When one practices one-pointed concentration and the force of one's concentration pushes down a hindrance, it is not considered to be purifying the meditator's mind in the same way as the Buddha taught us to practice.

Anything that is suppressed is not let go of, but is stopped from arising while this strong concentration is present. The suppressed hindrance has a real tendency to arise even more strongly when the meditator's one-pointed concentration weakens.

With the practice of samatha/vipassanā, or the letting go and then relaxing, over time the hindrance will fade away, never to rise again. The samatha/vipassanā meditation is the way to actually purify one's mind.<sup>181</sup>

## Summary

In TWIM, the emphasis is upon an open, relaxed mind in a state of tranquil awareness, in which craving is let go as it arises, and the Four Noble Truths and the links of Dependent Origination are seen.

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<sup>180</sup> Ibid, p. 67.

<sup>181</sup> Vimalaramsi, **Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life**, p. 71.

Through practicing the 6Rs the mind is relaxed and opened, and the resultant calmness and clarity allows for the development of insight. This is the unity of *samatha* and *vipassanā*, two vital aspects of practice harmoniously woven together into one single practice. By this means, the TWIM meditator enters into progressive stages of tranquil aware *jhāna*, which is not attainable by means of suppression and absorption concentration.

Tranquil aware *jhāna* and the TWIM method of *samādhi* based on the unity of *samatha* and *vipassanā* are attainable only through relaxation of mind and body and the letting go of craving, not through intense concentration leading to suppression of craving. The TWIM method is easy to learn and to practice and for the diligent practitioner, quickly leads to the relief of suffering and the happiness and joy which accompany this letting go of old unwholesome habitual patterns.

## Chapter V

# Mindfulness of Loving Kindness and The Four Divine Abodes Meditation

Loving Kindness is a wonderful attribute which is cultivated to some extent by all practicing Buddhists. Loving Kindness Meditation, widely known in English by its Pali term, *mettā* meditation (*mettā bhāvanā*) is a deeply respected practice in the world of Theravāda Buddhism. Indeed, Mahāyāna Buddhism also has its own version of the practice, which is considered fundamental to the *Mahāyāna* path.<sup>182</sup>

Loving Kindness Meditation is emphasized in TWIM practice to a degree not often encountered among contemporary methods. This is because the feeling of *mettā*, (*karuna*, *muditā*, *upekkhā* etc.) is most often taken as the object of meditation in TWIM and is favored over *ānāpānasati* for that purpose. Bhante Vimalaramsi explains,

One of the things I like to do with students who have practiced the breath meditation without the 6Rs is to ask them to take *Mettā* as their object of meditation while they are learning TWIM. I do this because it is easier for them to progress without having to break old bad habits from a previous practice, before they can learn to 6R smoothly. If they are not progressing extremely well, later on, they can decide to go back to the breath. But usually students do not because of how much emphasis the Buddha placed on practicing this meditation in the texts. The Loving-kindness Meditation was practiced far more often than the Breathing Meditation.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> In *Mahāyāna* the practice is the development of *bodhicitta*, the heart and mind of enlightenment. The practice of the Brahmavihāras is fundamental to the way most *Mahāyāna* schools practice *bodhicitta*.

<sup>183</sup> Vimalaramsi, **The Breath of Love**, p.141.

Taking the feeling of Loving Kindness as the object of meditation is the favored method in TWIM, as Bhante explains above. He encourages those who have practiced breath meditation with one of the *vipassanā* teachers to switch to taking *mettā* as the object of meditation when coming to TWIM. The need to switch away from the breath is because of ingrained habit. With meditators from other traditions coming to TWIM, the habit is to let go of a distraction and bring the mind back to the object of meditation. This will not work in TWIM meditation, as the mind and body must first be relaxed and then a smile brought to the mouth (also to the eyes, mind, and heart) before returning to the object of meditation.

Switching from the breath to mindfulness of the feeling of *mettā* allows a fresh start, without the old habits. In that way, the 6Rs can be effectively learned.

For those with no previous experience with using the breath as an object of meditation, Bhante still encourages most to take the feeling of *mettā* as the object of meditation, but for some the breath is the prescribed object. This varies according to the characteristics of the individual meditator.

Bhante values the effects of the *mettā* practice as given in the suttas for the immediate happiness it can bring to oneself and to others. He explains about the TWIM approach to *mettā*,

These instructions may be a little different from what you are used to, because I have followed the instructions in the suttas very closely. If you practice in this way, the end results can bring great benefit to you and all other people around you. This, in turn, will bring great happiness in your daily life.<sup>184</sup>

Below, we will explore how the TWIM method of Loving Kindness differs from other methods in some significant ways. However, all methods based on the teachings of the Buddha have

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<sup>184</sup> Ibid, p. 141.



some component of Loving Kindness, and it is almost universally given great importance within the world of Buddhism.

Ven Ācariya Buddhārakkhita, in his book *Mettā: The Philosophy and Practice of Universal Love* expresses his admiration for the practice in the following words,

Let not *mettā* be mistaken as a mere sentiment. It is the power of the strong. If the leaders from different walks of life were to give *mettā* a fair trial, no principle or guideline to action would be found to possess greater efficiency or fruitfulness in all spheres.

...If man decides to substitute *mettā* as a policy of action for aggression and ill will, the world will turn into a veritable abode of peace. For it is only when man shall have peace within himself, and boundless goodwill for others, that peace in the world will become real and enduring.<sup>185</sup>

In these words, we can see the possibility for fulfillment of the goal of transformation of consciousness for the benefit of oneself and the world that was discussed in the introduction. This practice of Loving Kindness is a great teaching of the Buddha. How can we skillfully follow this teaching?

### **Loving Kindness meditation as taught in the Discourse on the Threefold Knowledge**

The instructions for Loving Kindness Meditation are found in numerous places in the suttas. Typical is the story in the Discourse on the Threefold Knowledge (*Tevijja Sutta*, DN 13) where two young Brahmins, Vāseṭṭha and Bhāradvāja, come to the Buddha to see if he can help them understand the teaching of how to find “union with

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<sup>185</sup> Buddhārakkhita, Ven. Ācariya, **Metta: The Philosophy and Practice of Universal Love**. (Kandy, Buddhist Publication Society, 2013), p. 44.

Brahmā<sup>186</sup>. The Buddha gives the following instruction to illustrate the path and to encourage them to take up the practice.

Then with a heart filled with loving kindness, he dwells suffusing one quarter, the second, the third, the fourth. Thus he dwells suffusing the whole world, upwards, downwards, across, everywhere, always with a heart filled with loving kindness, abundant, unbounded, without hate or ill-will.

Just as if a mighty trumpeter were with little difficulty to make a proclamation to the four quarters, so by this meditation, Vāseṭṭha, by this liberation of the heart through loving kindness, he leaves nothing untouched, nothing unaffected in the sensuous sphere. This, Vāseṭṭha, is the way to union with Brahmā.

Then with his heart filled with compassion, ...with sympathetic joy, ... with equanimity, he dwells suffusing one quarter, the second, the third, the fourth. Thus he dwells suffusing the whole world, upwards, downwards, across, everywhere, always with a heart filled with loving kindness (compassion, sympathetic joy, equanimity), abundant, unbounded, without hate or ill-will.<sup>186 187</sup>

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<sup>186</sup> Walshe, **The Long Discourses of the Buddha**. DN 13:76-78 [PTS i 252], p.194.

<sup>187</sup> *So mettāsahagatena cetasā ekaṃ disaṃ eritvā viharatī tathā dutiyaṃ tathā tatiyaṃ tathā catutthiṃ. Iti uddhamadho tiriyaṃ sabbadhi sabbattatāya sabbāvantaṃ lokaṃ mettāsahagatena cetasā vipulena mahagatena appamāṇena averena avyāpajjhena pharitvā viharatī. Seyyathāpi vāseṭṭha balavā saṅkhadhamo appakasireneva cātuddisaṃ sarena viññāpeyya, evameva kho vāseṭṭha evaṃ bhāvītāya mettāya cetovimuttiyā yaṃ pamāṇakataṃ kammaṃ na taṃ tatrāvasissatī, na taṃ tatrāvatiṭṭhati. Ayampi kho vāseṭṭha brahmuno saḥavyatāya maggo. Puna ca paraṃ vāseṭṭha bhikkhu karuṇāsahagatena..... Puna ca paraṃ vāseṭṭha bhikkhu upekkhāsahagatena cetasā ekaṃ disaṃ eritvā viharatī tathā dutiyaṃ tathā tatiyaṃ tathā catutthiṃ. Iti uddhamadho tiriyaṃ sabbadhi sabbattatāya sabbāvantaṃ lokaṃ upekkhāsahagatena cetasā vipulena mahagatena appamāṇena averena avyāpajjhena pharitvā viharatī. Seyyathāpi vāseṭṭha balavā saṅkhadhamo appakasireneva cātuddisaṃ sarena viññāpeyya, evameva kho vāseṭṭha evaṃ bhāvītāya mettāya cetovimuttiyā yaṃ pamāṇakataṃ kammaṃ na taṃ tatrāvasissatī, na taṃ tatrāvatiṭṭhati. Ayampi kho vāseṭṭha brahmuno saḥavyatāya maggo.* DN 13:76-78, PTS i 252, CS edition

As the story goes, the respective teachers of the two young Brahmins were of differing opinions about this issue of how to find union with Brahmā, and the two young Brahmins had heard that the Buddha had knowledge of these matters. They proceeded to the Buddha to see if he could shed light on the question.

The *Tevijja Sutta* (Discourse on the Threefold Knowledge) represents a time when the brahmanical religion was changing from an old view to a very new perspective.

In the old brahmanical way of thinking, the purpose of life was to live according to *dharma* and thus attain the heaven of God Brahmā. But now, in this period of the Upaniṣadic teachings a higher meaning was being given to this “union with Brahmā”. Although the two young Brahmins had probably not encountered the Upaniṣads in the form we have them now, they likely were encountering the ideas that were being developed among the forest Ṛṣis and were being widely discussed and debated, as this was a fundamental shift in religious perspective. This new meaning of union with Brahmā had to do with giving up the false self of the phenomenal world and dwelling in that which is beyond the conditioned.

### **A liberated mind without boundary**

Adopting their use of language, the Buddha responded to the two youths in both of these senses. Through practice of the Brahmavihāras, one could certainly attain rebirth in the high heaven of god Brahmā, but much more important could realize the liberation of the mind (“liberation of the heart” (*cetovimutti*) in Walshe’s translation above) and develop a “mind without boundary” (*appamāṇa*).

The later term, *appamāṇa*, is listed in the Pali-English Dictionary as having the following meanings: “without measure, immeasurable, endless, boundless, unlimited, unrestricted, all-permeating.”<sup>188</sup> Any of these English terms would carry a sense of dynamic transformation of

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<sup>188</sup> Rhys-Davids, *PED.*, p. 57.

the perspective of the practitioner. As for the use of the term *cetovimutti* in connection with loving kindness and the other Brahmavihāras, we find many references in the suttas such as this one in *Aṅguttara Nikāya*,

Here, a Bhikkhu might say thus: ‘I have developed and cultivated the liberation of the mind by loving kindness, made it my vehicle and basis, carried it out, consolidated it, and properly undertaken it, yet ill-will still obsesses my mind.’ He should be told: ‘Not so! Do not speak thus. Do not misrepresent the Blessed One. For it is not good to misrepresent the Blessed One. The Blessed One would certainly not speak in such a way. It is impossible and inconceivable, friend, that one might develop and cultivate the liberation of the mind by loving kindness, make it one’s vehicle and one’s basis, carry it out, consolidate it, and properly undertake it, yet ill-will could still obsess one’s mind. There is no such possibility. For this, friend, is the escape from ill-will, namely, the liberation of the mind by loving kindness.’

.....It is impossible and inconceivable, friend, that one might develop and cultivate the liberation of the mind by compassion, make it one’s vehicle and one’s basis, carry it out, consolidate it, and properly undertake it, yet the thought of harming could still obsess one’s mind. There is no such possibility. For this, friend, is the liberation of the mind by compassion.

.....It is impossible and inconceivable, friend, that one might develop and cultivate the liberation of the mind by sympathetic joy, make it one’s vehicle and one’s basis, carry it out, consolidate it, and properly undertake it, yet discontent could still obsess one’s mind. There is no such possibility. For this, friend, is the liberation of the mind by sympathetic joy.

.....It is impossible and inconceivable, friend, that one might develop and cultivate the liberation of

the mind by equanimity, make it one's vehicle and one's basis, carry it out, consolidate it, and properly undertake it, yet lust could still obsess one's mind. There is no such possibility. For this, friend, is the liberation of the mind through equanimity.<sup>189 190</sup>

## The antidote to the self-grasping, selfish mind

As we can see from the impressive list of unwholesome qualities that are dispelled by these practices, the “carried out, consolidated, and properly undertaken” practice of the Brahmavihāras must purify the mind and take one very near the breakthrough to *nibbāna*. The practice produces an open mind and heart with no boundary, which is the antithesis of the craving, self-grasping mind of ignorance.

A mind based on craving and self-grasping is erected upon the foundations of demarcating difference between self and other, between mine and what is not mine, between my body and the bodies of others. A deluded mind cannot stand when the barriers are all broken down.

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<sup>189</sup> Bodhi, **The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha**, AN 6.1.13 [PTS III 291], p.867-8.

<sup>190</sup> *Idha bhikkhave bhikkhu evaṃ vadeyya "mettā hi kho me ceto vimutti bhāvitā bahulikatā yānikatā vatthukatā anuṭṭhitā paricītā susamāradhā, atha ca pana me byāpādo cittaṃ pariyādāya tiṭṭhati"ti. So mā hevantissa vacanīyo: "māyasmā evaṃ avaca, mā bhagavantaṃ abbhācikkhi. Na hi sādhu bhagavato abbhakkhānaṃ. Na hi bhagavā evaṃ vadeyya. Aṭṭhānametaṃ āvuso anavakāso yaṃ mettāya cetovimuttiyā bhāvitāya bahulikatāya yānikatāya vatthukatāya anuṭṭhitāya paricītāya susamāradhāya, atha ca panassa byāpādo cittaṃ pariyādāya ṭhassatīti netaṃ ṭhānaṃ vijjati, nissaraṇaṃ hetamaṃ āvuso vyāpādassa yadidaṃ mettācetovimutti"ti.*

.....*Aṭṭhānametaṃ āvuso anavakāso yaṃ karuṇāya cetovimuttiyā bhāvitāya bahulikatāya yānikatāya vatthukatāya anuṭṭhitāya paricītāya susamāradhāya, atha ca panassa vihesā cittaṃ pariyādāya ṭhassati, ti netaṃ ṭhānaṃ vijjati, nissaraṇaṃ hetamaṃ āvuso vihesā, yadidaṃ karuṇā cetovimutti"ti.*

..... *Aṭṭhānametaṃ āvuso anavakāso yaṃ muditāya cetovimuttiyā bhāvitāya bahulikatāya yānikatāya vatthukatāya anuṭṭhitāya paricītāya susamāradhāya, atha ca panassa arati cittaṃ pariyādāya ṭhassati, ti netaṃ ṭhānaṃ vijjati. Nissaraṇaṃ hetamaṃ āvuso aratiyā yadidaṃ muditā cetovimutti"ti.*

..... *Aṭṭhānametaṃ āvuso anavakāso yaṃ upekkhāya cetovimuttiyā bhāvitāya bahulikatāya yānikatāya vatthukatāya anuṭṭhitāya paricītāya susamāradhāya, atha ca panassa rāgo cittaṃ pariyādāya ṭhassatī, tī netaṃ ṭhānaṃ vijjati. Nissaraṇaṃ hetamaṃ āvuso rāgassa yadidaṃ upekkhācetovimutti"ti. AN 6.1.13, PTS III 291, CS edition*

This *sutta* is often used to support the belief that the meditation of the Brahmavihāras only leads to rebirth in the Brahma realms, but I read something different here. In this teaching, the Buddha is opening the door for his two young Brahmin interlocutors to a perspective far beyond any mere heaven, however exalted it might be. Certainly, the Buddha was not adopting the language of the Upaniṣads and advocating the concept of some substantial Brahman. He was using the language of convention (brahmanical convention and discourse) with which the two Brahmins were conversant, to point beyond language, beyond conventional reality, beyond the world of identification with changing phenomenon. Evidently his words hit the mark, as both the young men became lay disciples at the end of this discourse, later took ordination, and attained arahantship.

### **The importance of Loving Kindness within the Buddha's path**

This is merely one place among many that this meditation is described in the suttas and its benefits extolled. It is clear from a reading of the suttas that Loving Kindness meditation is of paramount importance in the path to freedom as taught by the Buddha. Loving Kindness Meditation is mentioned many times more often than Mindfulness of Breathing Meditation.

If we look at the suttas which give an account of the Loving Kindness Meditation in the *Majjhima Nikāya*, we find it highlighted in the following: *Vatthūpama Sutta*: The Simile of the Cloth (MN7), *Kakacūpama Sutta*: The Discourse on the Simile of the Saw (MN 21), *Cūla-Assapura Sutta*: The Shorter Discourse at Assapura (MN 40), *Mahāvedalla Sutta*: The Discourse on the Greater Series of Questions and Answers (MN 43), *Māratajjaniya Sutta*: The Discourse on the Rebuke to Mara (MN 50), *Aṭṭhakanāgara Sutta*: The Discourse on the Man from Atthakanagara (MN 52), *Jīvaka Sutta*: Discourse to Jīvaka (MN 55), *Mahārāhulovāda Sutta*: The Greater Discourse of Advice to

Rahula (MN 62), *Makhādeva Sutta*: The Discourse to King Makhādeva (MN 83), which list totals 12 suttas.

By way of comparison, Mindfulness of Breathing Meditation is discussed in the following suttas in the *Majjhima Nikāya*: *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*: The Foundations of Mindfulness (MN10), *Mahārāhulovaāda Sutta*: The Greater Discourse of Advice to Rahula (MN 62), *Ānāpānasati Sutta*: Mindfulness of Breathing (MN 118), *Kāyagatāsati Sutta*: Mindfulness of the Body (MN 119), which totals four suttas.<sup>191</sup>

This means that in the *Majjhima Nikāya*, the number of places where Loving Kindness Meditation is prominently mentioned is three times more frequent than for Mindfulness of Breathing. This is not to slight the importance of Mindfulness of Breathing in any way, but rather to restore some balance to our perspective of what the Buddha taught. If sheer frequency of teaching is any indication, Loving Kindness was given at least as much importance and emphasis by the Buddha as Mindfulness of Breathing. It was taught as a central, main practice, not as a “side practice” or “supplemental practice”.

## **The benefits of practicing Loving Kindness**

As mentioned above, one direct result of developing Loving Kindness is the cessation of ill will (*vyāpādo*) and hence the elimination of anger and hatred towards other beings. As the Buddha teaches in the *Anguttara Nikāya*,

Bhikkhus, I do not see even one other thing on account of which unarisen ill will does not arise and arisen ill will is abandoned so much as the liberation of mind by loving-kindness. For one who attends carefully to the liberation of mind by loving-kindness,

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<sup>191</sup> Johnson, David, article on DSMC website, *Number of times the Brahmavihāra Meditation Practice vs. Mindfulness of Breathing in Majjhima Nikāya Suttas*, available at: <http://library.dhammadownload.com/brahmavihara-vs-breath.html>, accessed October 2017.

un arisen ill will does not arise and arisen ill will is abandoned.<sup>192 193</sup>

There is also the well-known list of the eight benefits of Loving Kindness given in the *Āṅguttara Nikāya*, ranging from the mundane to the lofty.

Bhikkhus, when the liberation of mind by loving kindness has been pursued, developed and cultivated, made a vehicle and a basis, carried out, consolidated, and properly undertaken, eight benefits are to be expected. What eight? 1. One sleeps well; 2. one awakens happily; 3. one does not have bad dreams; 4. one is pleasing to human beings; 5. one is pleasing to spirits; 6. Deities protect one; 7. fire, poison, and weapons do not injure one; and 8. if one does not penetrate further, one moves on to the *Brahmā* world. When, bhikkhus, the liberation of the mind by loving-kindness has been pursued, developed, and cultivated, made a vehicle and basis, carried out, consolidated, and properly undertaken, these eight benefits are to be expected.

For one who is ever mindful, develops measureless loving kindness, the fetters thin out as he sees the destruction of acquisitions.

If, with a mind freed from hate, one arouses love toward just one being, one thereby becomes good.

Compassionate in mind toward all beings, the noble one generates abundant merit.

Those royal sages who conquered the earth with its multitude of beings traveled around performing

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<sup>192</sup> Bodhi, **The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha**. AN 1.17 [PTS I 5], p. 92.

<sup>193</sup> *Nāhaṃ bhikkhave aññaṃ ekadhammam pi samanupassāmi yena anuppano vā vyāpādo nuppajjati, uppanno vāvyāpādo pahiyati. Yathayidaṃ bhikkhave mettā cetovimutti. Mettaṃ bhikkhave cetovimuttiṃ yoniso manasi karoto anuppanno ceva vyāpādo nuppajjati, uppanno ca vyāpādo pahiyatīti.*

AN 1.17, PTS I 5, CS edition.



sacrifices: the horse sacrifice, the person sacrifice, *sammāpāsa*, *vājapeyya*, *niraggala*.

All those are not worth a sixteenth part of a well-developed loving mind, just as the host of stars cannot match a sixteenth part of the moon's radiance.

One who does not kill or enjoin killing, who does not conquer or enjoin conquest, one who has loving-kindness toward all beings harbors no enmity toward anyone.<sup>194 195</sup>

The ending of the *Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta*, The Discourse on Loving Kindness, adds the following significant benefit of the practice,

(The person who cultivates loving-kindness in this manner) being freed from wrong views: virtuous, and acquiring insight and dispelling greed for sense desires, does no more take conception in a (mother's) womb.<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>194</sup> Bodhi, **The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha**. AN 8.1.1 [PTS IV 150-51], p.1111-2.

<sup>195</sup> *Mettāya bhikkhave cetovimuttiyā āsevitāya bhāvitāya bahulikatāya yānikatāya vatthukatāya anuṭṭhitāya paricitāya susamāradhāya aṭṭhānisamsā pāṭikaṅkhā. Katame aṭṭha:*

*Sukhaṃ supati, sukhaṃ paṭibujjhati, na pāpakaṃ supinaṃ passati, manussānaṃ piyo hoti, amanussānaṃ piyo hoti, devatā rakkhanti, nāssa aggi vā visaṃ vā satthaṃ vā kamati, uttariṃ appaṭivijjhanto brahmalokūpago hoti.*

*Mettāya bhikkhave cetovimuttiyā āsevitāya bhāvitāya bahulikatāya yānikatāya vatthukatāya anuṭṭhitāya paricitāya susamāradhāya ime aṭṭhānisamsā pāṭikaṅkhāti.*

*Yānikathāyamachasaṃ.*

1. *Yo ca mettāya bhāvayati, appamāṇaṃ patissato Tanū saṃyojanā honti, passato upadhikkhayaṃ.*

2. *Ekampi ce pānamaduṭṭhacitto, mettāyati kusālī tena hoti, Sabbeva pāṇe manasānukampī, pahūtamarīyo pakaroti puññaṃ.*

3. *Ye sattasaṇḍaṃ paṭhavim jinitvā, rājisayo yajamānānupariyagā, Sassamedhaṃ purisamedhaṃ, sammāpāsaṃ vācapeyyaṃ niraggalaṃ.*

4. *Mettassa cittassa subhāvitassa, Kalampi te nānubhavanti soḷasiṃ, Candappabhā tāragaṇāca sabbe, Yathā na agghanti kalampi soḷasiṃ.*

5. *Yo na hanti na ghātetī, na jināti na jāpaye, Mettaṃ so sabbabhūtaṃ, veraṃ tassa na kenacīti.* AN 8.1.1, PTS IV 150-151, CS edition.

<sup>196</sup> Medhananda Thero, Ven. W., **Daily Buddhist Worship**. (New Delhi, Mahabodhi Society of India, 1997/2540), p. 25

From these sections of the suttas, we can see the importance that the Buddha placed on the practice of Loving Kindness as a part of the path to *Nibbāna*. Not only is Loving Kindness of benefit to oneself and other beings, but the practice can yield at the least, a favorable rebirth, and may result in the end of rebirth altogether. The later would be either the attainment of once-returner (*anāgāmi*) or arahantship.

The practice of *metta* or Loving Kindness, is represented as freeing the practitioner from wrong views, dispelling greed and the fetters, allaying ill-will and greed for sense desires, as well as enabling the acquiring of insight.

We can also turn to the *Mahārāhulovāda Sutta*, where the Buddha advises his son the monk Rāhula on how to meditate. He instructs him as follows,

"Rāhula, develop meditation on loving-kindness; for when you develop meditation on loving-kindness, any ill will be abandoned.

"Rāhula, develop meditation on compassion; for when you develop meditation on compassion, any cruelty will be abandoned.

"Rāhula, develop meditation on altruistic joy; for when you develop meditation on altruistic joy, any discontent will be abandoned.

"Rāhula, develop meditation on equanimity; for when you develop meditation on equanimity, any aversion will be abandoned.<sup>197 198</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> Bodhi, **The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha**. MN 62:18-21 [PTS i 424], p.530.

<sup>198</sup> *Mettaṃ rāhula bhāvanaṃ bhāvehi. Mettaṃ hi te rāhula bhāvanaṃ bhāvayato yo vyāpādo so pahīyissati. Karuṇaṃ rāhula bhāvanaṃ bhāvehi. Karuṇaṃ hi te rāhula bhāvanaṃ bhāvayato yā vihesā sā pahīyissati. Muditaṃ rāhula bhāvanaṃ bhāvehi. Muditaṃ hi te rāhula bhāvanaṃ bhāvayato yā arati sā pahīyissati. Upekkhaṃ rāhula bhāvanaṃ bhāvehi. Upekkhaṃ hi te rāhula bhāvanaṃ bhāvayato yo paṭigho so pahīyissati.* MN 62:18-21, PTS i 424, CS edition

## **The practice of Loving Kindness in the suttas compared with how it is generally done in modern times**

It appears from the above references that the practice of Loving Kindness, together with Compassion, Joy, and Equanimity was expected to yield very impressive results and move the practitioner to the higher *jhāna* stages and on to *Nibbāna*. TWIM practitioners have confirmed this through their direct experience. By using all the Brahmavihāras in turn as objects of meditation, a number of TWIM meditators have attained to the *jhāna* level of the base of nothingness.<sup>199</sup>

This level of attainment for the practice of Loving Kindness, Compassion, Altruistic Joy, and Equanimity is confirmed in the *Bojjhaṅgasamyutta*. With respect of each of these practices, the Buddha says,

Bhikkhus, the liberation of mind by lovingkindness has the beautiful as its culmination, I say, for a wise bhikkhu here who has not penetrated to a superior liberation.

...Bhikkhus, the liberation of the mind by compassion has the base of infinity of space as its culmination, I say, for the bhikkhu who has not penetrated to a superior liberation.

...Bhikkhus, the liberation of mind by altruistic joy has the base of the infinity of consciousness as its culmination, I say, for the bhikkhu who has not penetrated to a superior liberation.

...Bhikkhus, the liberation of mind by equanimity has the base of nothingness as its culmination, I say,

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<sup>199</sup> We will explore some accounts of this attainment below.

for the bhikkhu who has not penetrated to a superior liberation.<sup>200 201</sup>

What the Buddha is teaching in the *Bojjhaṅgasamyutta* is that these practices lead deep into the *arūpa* jhānas, to the level of the base of nothingness, and he appears to be suggesting that each practice could lead to an even higher “superior liberation”.

In reviewing how the suttas list the level of attainment available to the practitioner of the four brahmavihāras, it appears that this practice takes one to the very highest levels of accomplishment, and either to *Nibbāna*, or to the levels of jhāna just previous to the attainment of *Nibbāna*.

There is a gap between the level of achievement using the practice of the brahmavihāras as detailed in the suttas and what is expected of the practice in the contemporary world of meditation. In contemporary times, Loving Kindness is given importance, but when real progress is to be made meditators turn to mindfulness of breathing or some version of *satipaṭṭhāna*. Loving Kindness has been given a place more as a support of meditation or as an important side-meditation. Why this gap between its importance in the suttas and the place it is given in contemporary *vipassanā*?

I will suggest that the practice of Loving Kindness as done in contemporary *vipassanā* is not, in some respects, the same practice as was done by the Buddha and his disciples. People don’t expect these kinds of results from Loving Kindness Meditation these days because the practice seldom yields them. Will it help quench the fires of hatred? Yes. Will it lead to *Nibbāna* or even into and beyond the

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<sup>200</sup> Bodhi, *The Connected Discourses of the Buddha*, SN 46:54 [PTS V 119], pp. 1609-11.

<sup>201</sup> *Subhaṃ vā kho pana vimokhaṃ upasampajja viharati, subhaparamāhaṃ bhikkhave, mettā cetovimuttiṃ vadāmi idha paññassa bhikkhuno uttariṃ vimuttiṃ appaṭivijjhato... ākāsaṇāñcāyatanaparamāhaṃ bhikkhave, karuṇācetovimuttiṃ vadāmi, idha paññassa bhikkhuno uttariṃ vimuttiṃ appaṭivijjhato... viññāṇāñcāyatanaparamāhaṃ bhikkhave, muditācetovimuttiṃ vadāmi idha paññassa bhikkhuno uttariṃ vimuttiṃ appaṭivijjhato... ākiñcaññāyatanaparamāhaṃ bhikkhave, upekhā cetovimuttiṃ vadāmi idha paññassa bhikkhuno uttariṃ vimuttiṃ appaṭivijjhatoti.* SN 46:54, PTS V 119-121, CS edition.

fourth jhāna? Many practitioners and teachers say no. As we shall see, Bhante Vimalaramsi disagrees with that assessment. We will discuss this and other related issues below. Let us see how TWIM approaches Loving Kindness Meditation.

### **The TWIM approach to Loving Kindness Meditation**

If we look at the TWIM method of Loving Kindness, we may perceive why the TWIM method, like its predecessor of 2,500 years ago, can yield insight wisdom, free the practitioner from wrong views, and dispel greed and ill-will.

One significant aspect of the TWIM practice is that Loving Kindness is set within the context of the 6R practice. The 6Rs are the real practice in TWIM. Loving Kindness or Mindfulness of Breathing are the objects of meditation and are necessary to the practice, but the essential practice of the Four Right Strivings, that is, Right Effort (*sammā-vāyāma*), is the 6Rs.

Any appropriate object of meditation within the context of the practice of the 6Rs becomes both a *samatha* and a *vipassanā* practice. How does that work? Because the Right Mindfulness practice of remembering to observe the movement of mind's attention is carried out no matter the object of meditation. When practicing the 6Rs, whether the object of meditation is Loving Kindness or *ānāpānasati*, the meditation is to observe the movement of mind's attention for the purpose of seeing clearly the impersonal process of Dependent Origination and the Four Noble Truths.

Understanding and clearly seeing how mind's attention is drawn away from the wholesome to the unwholesome gives insight into the links of Dependent Origination, the Three Characteristic Marks of Existence, and the Four Noble Truths. This yields insight and wisdom. With the Loving Kindness meditation operating as a *samatha* and *vipassanā* practice, the above benefits are quite within the realm of possibility. In fact, TWIM practitioners having Loving Kindness,

Compassion, Sympathetic Joy and Equanimity as successive objects of meditation are attaining very high *jhānas*. Mindfulness and proper use of the 6Rs are the key to success.

Due to the practice of the 6Rs, the vital step of relaxing the body and mind before returning to the object of meditation is a consistent part of TWIM practice, including in the practice of Loving Kindness. Without including the relax step, the practice tends towards absorption concentration and, in the TWIM view, the wholesome results of letting go of craving and self grasping will either be delayed or possibly not come at all. This relax step is vital in the practice of Loving Kindness within the TWIM method.

In view of the above, we can use a special phrase to describe the TWIM method of *mettā* meditation, namely “Mindfulness of Loving Kindness”. This mindfulness is not only a general mindfulness, but rather a taking of Loving Kindness as the object of meditation and carefully observing the movement of mind’s attention when craving pulls the mind away from the object of meditation.

### **Loving Kindness changes to Compassion etc. in a very natural way as the meditation deepens into the *arūpa jhānas***

With the fourth *jhāna* and beyond, into the *arūpa jhānas*, the immaterial *jhānas*, Loving Kindness will change to Compassion, Joy, and Equanimity. In TWIM practice, this happens naturally as the mind quiets, the hindrances begin to weaken, and craving loses its power. At this point, the energy of Loving Kindness shifts naturally to Compassion, Sympathetic Joy, and on to Equanimity. The meditator does not control this process. It happens when conditions are right. With the transition from Loving Kindness to a level of stable equanimity reached in the fourth *jhāna*, the way is then open to the experience of boundless space, boundless consciousness, the base of nothingness, and the base of neither perception nor non-perception.

Bhante Vimalaramsi discusses how *mettā* naturally changes to *karuna* and so on through the *arūpa* jhānas. In referring to the *Bojjhaṅgasamyutta* section on the practice of the brahmavihāras and the development of the enlightenment factors (SN V:54, p. 1609-11 in Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi translation, PTS V 119-121), Bhante explains,

This sutta is a very eye-opening discourse. It says the practice of Metta meditation will take the student to the fourth jhāna. Then it naturally changes to Compassion and “the Realm of Infinite Space.” The First Arūpa (Immaterial) Jhāna. Again, the practice naturally changes to Unselfish Joy and “the Realm of Infinite Consciousness.” The Second Arūpa (Immaterial) Jhāna. It naturally changes once more to equanimity and “the Realm of Nothingness.” The Third Arūpa (Immaterial) Jhāna.

By that time, the meditator is committed to seeing it through, continuing to practice the 6Rs, and they will eventually reach the realm of “Neither Perception nor Non-Perception” (neither feeling nor non-feeling; neither consciousness nor non-consciousness). The fourth Arūpa (Immaterial) Jhāna). From there the meditator will experience cessation (nirodha) and attain the goal of Nibbāna!

The Metta Meditation includes the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, the four Spiritual Powers, the four Kinds of Right Striving, the five Faculties, the Five Powers, the Seven Enlightenment Factors, and the Eight-fold Path.

The meditator will learn these thirty-seven requisites of Enlightenment through direct experience, when they practice either Mindfulness of Metta or the Mindfulness of Breathing meditation.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>202</sup> Vimalaramsi, **Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life**, pp. 131-2.

Although the *mettā* brings great benefit due to the nature of its loving energy, it is the working of the practice within the framework of the 6Rs that makes it a *samatha-vipassanā* practice. This allows the meditator using the succession of *mettā*, *karuna* etc., to reach the highest of the *arūpa* jhānas. As a *samatha-vipassana* practice, all of the thirty-seven requisites of enlightenment are fulfilled. This means that the TWIM method of *mettā* allows the meditator to progress beyond the levels attained by *mettā* meditation in most other methods.

It is important to remember that in many of the places in the suttas where benefit is ascribed to *mettā* (Loving Kindness) meditation, that only Loving Kindness itself is being discussed and those particular benefits are then specific to Loving Kindness. When taken as an entire set of four Brahmavihāras, or “Four Divine Abodes” meditation, there are other important benefits that accrue, and when equanimity is counted in as part of the whole meditation, craving in the form of lust is also eliminated, as well as eliminating aversion.

We have seen in the above quotes from the Buddha’s advice to Ven. Rahula in the *Mahārāhulovāda Sutta* (MN 62) that, as a set, the first three Brahmavihāras are the antidote to various types of aversion, and the fourth, equanimity is the antidote to attachment. With the elimination of attachment and aversion, there remains ignorance, which needs insight wisdom as antidote. The four Brahmavihāras when practiced using the method of the 6Rs in TWIM meditation will yield this kind of insight as well. This is because the structure of the 6R practice leads naturally to *satipaṭṭhāna* meditation, which we will examine in a later chapter.

## **Contemporary vipassanā methods often make Loving Kindness a preliminary practice or adjunct practice**

Despite its paramount importance in the suttas, it is often considered in the contemporary world of *vipassanā* meditation that *mettā* meditation is a vital preliminary practice, or important adjunct



practice, to be followed in sequence by the deeper practices of *ānāpānasati* and/or *satipaṭṭhāna*. Sometimes *ānāpānasati* comes first, with the gains from the practice to be “protected” by *mettā* practice, and then this is followed by *satipaṭṭhāna*.

We can see an example of this kind of sequencing with a perusal of the website of the world-famous Pa-Auk Forest Monastery in Myanmar, an international center for the propagation of *samatha* and *vipassanā* meditation. At Pa-Auk, the Loving Kindness is usually done after the development of *samatha* and before the launching of *vipassanā*. The meditation at this monastery is summarized on their website as follows:

The meditation taught at Pa-Auk Tawya is based on the instructions by The Buddha as found in the *Tipiṭaka* (the *Pali* Canon) and its commentaries.

In brief, the main practice is to begin with *Samatha* (tranquility) meditation, which is to develop absorption concentration, also called *jhāna*. A yogi (meditator) is free to choose any of the forty *Samatha* subjects as taught by The Buddha. In Pa-Auk Tawya, most yogis develop *jhāna* with mindfulness-of-breathing (*ānāpānasati*). Having developed *Samatha*, the yogi may proceed to the practice of *Vipassanā* (insight) meditation.

As an alternative, the yogi may omit the development of *jhāna*. He/she (“he”) will be taught instead to develop the less powerful access concentration with the *Samatha* subject of Four-Elements meditation, prior to the practice of *Vipassanā* meditation. In either case, the concentration attained by the yogi produces the 'light of wisdom'.

Having completed the development of his/her (“his”) *Samatha* meditation, the yogi is then taught to protect his practice with the Four Protective Meditations

of *Mettā* (Loving Kindness), *Buddhānussati* (Recollection of The Buddha), *Asubha* (Repulsiveness of the Body), and *Maranānussati* (Recollection of Death).

Following that, the yogi will be taught to prepare the way for *Vipassanā* meditation, which is to use the ‘light of wisdom’ to discern ultimate materiality and mentality. The yogi will also be taught to discern the workings of Dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*). This means he will discern a number of past and future lives, and to discern the causes for certain rebirths.

Only upon having discerned ultimate materiality and mentality and their causes (Dependent Origination), does the yogi have the necessary objects for *Vipassanā* meditation. The practice of *Vipassanā* meditation is to discern the three characteristics of impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and non-self (*anatta*) in ultimate materiality and mentality – of past, present, and future, internal and external, gross and subtle, inferior and superior, far and near. In accordance with the *Visuddhimagga* (Path of Purification), the yogi will be taught a series of detailed practices by which to develop and strengthen his *Vipassanā* knowledge of materiality and mentality of past, present and future. In this way, the yogi may progress through the different insight knowledges, preliminary to the attainment of *Nibbāna*.

Should the yogi attain *Nibbāna*, he will be taught how to discern which defilements have been destroyed, and which stage of enlightenment he has reached. With continued practice, the yogi may destroy all the taints,

and be able to attain Arahantship, meaning he will have put a complete end to rebirth and suffering.<sup>203</sup>

Before proceeding further with our exploration of Loving Kindness meditation in TWIM, let us note that in the description of meditation at Pa-Auk Forest Monastery, the goal is being set as *nibbāna*. It is heartening to see that the various traditions of *samatha-vipassanā* are restoring *nibbāna* to its rightful place as the goal of Buddhist *bhāvanā*. Not only TWIM, but also Mahasi Sayadaw style, Pa-Auk style, Goenka style and others are now restoring hope to people that they may attain the highest goal by following the Noble Eightfold Path.

The first barrier to be passed at Pa Auk or in any style of absorption concentration is the rigor of developing deep absorption *samatha* practice. A cursory examination of the main points of practice at this monastery will help us to highlight some of the differences with TWIM, and how we see TWIM as being more accessible to larger numbers of people without sacrificing quality.

### **At Pa-Auk, Mettā Meditation is included as a protection practice**

At Pa-Auk the emphasis is upon laying a foundation of *samatha*. *Ānāpānasati* is used as a *samatha* technique to gain power of concentration. Then the yogi at Pa-Auk can continue into *jhāna* or skip *jhāna* altogether and proceed to *vipassanā*, which is treated apart from *jhāna*. *Mettā* meditation is included as a “protection” practice to help maintain what has been gained through the *samatha* practice. The teaching of *paṭiccasamuppāda* is mainly used to illustrate the past and (causes for) future lives and causes for certain rebirths. The main focus of *vipassanā* is to discern the three characteristics. There is then a set of insight knowledges to be passed through before the attainment of *Nibbāna*.

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<sup>203</sup> <http://www.paaukforestmonastery.org/meditation.htm>, accessed October 2017

As we can see from the above quote from the Pa-Auk website, they are following the general method laid out in the *Visuddhimagga*. In this method, *mettā* is given great importance, but not as a way to go into the fourth jhāna and higher.

By contrast, the unique approach to *Nibbāna* within the TWIM method relies mainly upon the *sutta* tradition. Loving Kindness, following the emphasis as laid out in the suttas, is given central importance and with the other Brahmavihāras, leads to the higher jhānas.

TWIM is certainly closely related to currently popular versions of *vipassanā* and shares much of technique and goal. But TWIM gives a different approach to much of the above material that yields a significantly different flavor to practice. Let us examine the above quote from Pa-Auk to show some of the contrasts with TWIM.

### **Comparing and contrasting TWIM with Pa-Auk and other related vipassanā methods with regard to treatment of mettā as well as some other points**

In TWIM, *ānāpānasati* is used by a minority of practitioners as the object of meditation. Most use *mettā* practice from the beginning. In TWIM, either *ānāpānasati* (breathe in and out while relaxing and opening) or *mettā* practice (radiating *mettā* while relaxing and opening) serves as both *samatha* and *vipassanā* support from the start of practice. There are no necessary preliminary practices to eventually advance to *vipassanā*. This is unless the meditator is blocked by past experience or trauma, in which case Forgiveness Meditation (a type of *mettā*) is used as an entry meditation.

TWIM has essentially one practice all the way from the first meditation experience to the higher jhānas and *nibbāna*. There may be adjustments and pointers from the teacher, especially as the meditator enters the higher jhānas. The meditator's facility with *vipassanā* will, of course, greatly improve with practice. So, in

TWIM the difference in practice between the beginning stages and the higher levels comes more from increased comprehension of the dhamma, deep relaxation, and openness, and sharpened mindfulness, rather than due to a structured change in the method of practice. There is basically one practice throughout, that of the 6Rs.

In TWIM there is no separation between *ānāpānasati* practice and *jhāna*. One leads naturally to the other. In TWIM, the meditator practices *ānāpānasati* while in *jhāna* or *mettā* while in *jhāna*, depending on the object of meditation. This is due to the all-important relax step and allowing the development of insight wisdom to take place. In the case of *ānāpānasati*, the object of meditation is not only the breath, it is the breath *and* relaxing, opening, expanding the mind. In the case of *mettā* meditation the object of meditation is not only the feeling of *mettā*, it is the feeling of *mettā* and relaxing, opening, expanding the mind.

There is no skipping of *jhāna* in TWIM, nor any need to skip them, as *jhāna* and *vipassanā* are practiced together, harmoniously. Understanding of the workings of Dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) is the backbone of TWIM practice. Some intellectual study can be done, and can have great value, but the main way that Dependent Origination is understood is directly observing it while in and out of formal meditation. This may involve the seeing of former lives, but the emphasis is on the practical side of seeing the causes and conditions that have given rise to any state of mind which produces suffering.

Seeing the three characteristics (*anicca, dukkha, anatta*) is also vital in TWIM but they are understood mainly through seeing the links of Dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), not usually through placing them at the center of contemplation, although this can also be done. Seeing the links of Dependent Origination is through attending to one's object of meditation and carefully observing the movement of mind's attention. When this is seen

clearly, impermanence, the nature of suffering, and the impersonal nature of reality can be seen.

### **Insight Knowledge in TWIM differs from that in most vipassanā methods, and mettā practice can yield such insight**

In the TWIM context, insight is not a special set of knowledges preliminary to *Nibbāna* but rather insights occur during every step of the practice. Of course, for final liberation, insight must be profound. The conditions for such profound insight is created by having many insights along the way, by seeing the links of Dependent Origination more and more clearly. As insight and understanding is gained, the practitioner moves more deeply into the practice. The deeper levels of practice will yield the deepest insights, but this depends upon the level of understanding that is gained from the beginning of the practice.

The practice of the *Brahmavihāras* can yield insight when practiced as a *samatha-vipassanā* practice. This is suggested in the *Discourse to the Man from Aṭṭhakanāgara* (MN 52). In this *sutta*, the Buddha says,

Again, a bhikkhu abides pervading one quarter with a mind imbued with loving-kindness, likewise the second, likewise the third, likewise the fourth, so above, below, around, and everywhere, and to all as to himself, he abides pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind imbued with loving-kindness. Abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill-will. He considers this and understands it thus: “This deliverance of mind through loving-kindness is conditioned and volitionally produced. But whatever is conditioned and volitionally produced is impermanent, subject to cessation.” If he is already steady in that, he attains the destruction of the taints. But if he does not attain the destruction of the taints because of that desire for the Dhamma, that delight in the Dhamma, then with the

destruction of the five lower fetters he becomes one due to reappear spontaneously [in the Pure Abodes] and there to attain to final Nibbāna without ever returning from that world.

This too is one thing proclaimed by the Blessed One who knows and sees, accomplished and fully enlightened, wherein if a bhikkhu abides diligent, ardent, and resolute, his unliberated mind comes to be liberated, his undestroyed taints come to be destroyed, and he attains the supreme security from bondage that he had not attained before. (and so on for compassion, altruistic joy, equanimity)<sup>204 205</sup>

This practice of the brahmavihāras can lead to the supreme security, but for that to happen, there must be investigation and insight, as mentioned in the quote from the discourse. This can be accomplished if Loving Kindness is practiced as part of a *samatha-vipassana* practice, which it is in the TWIM method. That it was so in the context of the Buddha's teachings above, indicates that the practice of Loving Kindness as taught by the Buddha included not only the radiation of *mettā*, but also attention to mind and mental factors. This makes *mettā* a practice of *satipaṭṭhāna*.

Such would be the approach TWIM takes to *mettā* meditation. The TWIM method integrates various aspects of the practice into a harmonious whole. These various aspects of practice can, and indeed

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<sup>204</sup> Bodhi, **The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha**. MN 52:8-9 [PTS i 351], p. 456.

<sup>205</sup> *Puna ca param gahapati bhikkhu mettāsahagatena cetasā ekaṃ disaṃ pharivā viharati. Tathā dutiyaṃ, tathā tatiyaṃ, tathā catutthiṃ iti uddhamadho tiriyaṃ sabbadhi sabbattatāya sabbāvantaṃ lokaṃ mettāsahagatena cetasā vipulena mahaggatena appamānena averena abyāpajjhena pharivā viharati. So iti paṭisañcikkhati: ayampi kho mettācetovimutti abhisankhatā abhisāñcetayitā, yaṃ kho pana kiñci abhisankhataṃ abhisāñcetayitaṃ tadaniccaṃ nirodhadhammanti pajānāti, so tatha ṭhito āsavānaṃ khayayaṃ pāpuṇāti. No ce āsavānaṃ khayayaṃ pāpuṇāti, teneva dhammarāgena tāya dhammanandiyā pañcannaṃ orambhāgiyānaṃ saṃyojanānaṃ parikkhayaṃ opapātiko hoti tatha parinibbāyī anāvattidhammo tasmā lokā. Ayampi kho gahapati tena bhagavatā jānatā passatā arahatā sammāsambuddhena ekadhammo akkhāto, yattha bhikkhumo appamattassa ātāpino pahitattassa virato avimuttañceva cittaṃ vimuccati. Aparikkhūnā ca āsavā parikkhayaṃ gacchanti, ananuppattañca anuttaraṃ yogakkhemaṃ anupāpuṇāti.* MN 52:8-9, PTS i 351, CS edition

must be harmonized together as a whole in order to get the best results. TWIM represents a synthesizing approach, which reflects the approach taught by the Buddha in the suttas.

## **The value of analyzing the components of practice and the importance of synthesizing them**

The process of analyzing and categorizing the suttas, which began during the time of the Buddha, but was carried on particularly after his passing, represents the approach of the *Abhidhamma* and the commentaries. Such an approach can be very valuable, but there can be a tendency to split the practice into component parts through analysis, without resynthesizing them in practice. The value of analysis regarding practice is to make sure that each component is given its place within the whole. If the components are split apart from each other, such practice may function differently from the original and have a different outcome.

In the suttas the teachings are often analyzed into component parts but they are also shown to be synthesized, for instance how each step of Dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) includes all Four Noble Truths. In speaking of *paṭiccasamuppāda* in the *Nidānasamyutta*, the Buddha says,

Herein, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu understands aging and death, its origin, its cessation, and the way leading to its cessation. He understands birth...existence.... clinging.... craving.... feeling...contact...the six sense bases...name and form...consciousness... volitional formations, their origin, their cessation, and the way leading to their cessation.<sup>206 207</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Bodhi, **The Connected Discourses of the Buddha**. SN II.28 [PTS II 44], p.564.

<sup>207</sup> *Idha bhikkhave, bhikkhu jarāmaṇaṃ pajānāti, jarāmaṇasamudayaṃ pajānāti, jarāmaṇanirodhaṃ pajānāti, jarāmaṇa nirodhagāminiṃ paṭipadaṃ pajānāti. Jātiṃ pajānāti, jāti samudayaṃ pajānāti, jātinirodhaṃ pajānāti, jātinirodhagāminiṃ paṭipadaṃ*



In both theory and in practice *sutta* lays emphasis upon integrating and synthesizing these components which are not meant to be isolated and separated. In the commentaries and *Visuddhimagga*, the emphasis is upon analysis and the tendency is generally towards separation and/or sequencing. As TWIM is based on skillful synthesis, it lays out the path to liberation and *Nibbāna* by weaving together *sutta* teachings rather than relying on the analysis into components as often given in the commentaries.

That being said, it is also true that TWIM judiciously uses the commentaries when they prove to be of practical use. Later, we will see how TWIM skillfully uses some methods developed in the *Visuddhimagga* to supplement *sutta* teachings. But such is the exception rather than the rule. In TWIM, the emphasis is definitely on weaving together the teachings of the suttas to create a skillful meditation practice.

## **The TWIM practice of the Brahmavihāras includes satipaṭṭhāna and proceeds to the fourth jhāna and beyond**

To return to our discussion of *mettā* practice, due to the way TWIM structures *mettā* meditation, it is not a preliminary, an adjunct, or a protective meditation. It certainly serves the function of protection, but that is not the primary purpose. Rather, within TWIM practice, with Loving Kindness and the other Brahmavihāras as an

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*pajānāti. Bhavaṃ pajānāti, bhavasamudayaṃ pajānāti, bhavanirodhaṃ pajānāti, bhavanirodhagāminiṃ paṭipadaṃ pajānāti. Upādānaṃ pajānāti, upādānasamudayaṃ pajānāti, upādānanirodhaṃ pajānāti, upādānanirodhagāminiṃ paṭipadaṃ pajānāti. taṅhaṃ pajānāti, taṅhasamudayaṃ pajānāti, taṅhanirodhaṃ pajānāti, taṅhanirodhagāminiṃ paṭipadaṃ pajānāti. Vedanaṃ pajānāti, vedanāsamudayaṃ pajānāti, vedanānirodhaṃ pajānāti, vedanānirodhagāminiṃ paṭipadaṃ pajānāti. Phassaṃ pajānāti, phassasamudayaṃ pajānāti, phassanirodhaṃ pajānāti, phassanirodhagāminiṃ paṭipadaṃ pajānāti. Saḷāyatanaṃ pajānāti, saḷāyatanasamudayaṃ pajānāti, saḷāyatanirodhaṃ pajānāti, saḷāyatanirodhagāminiṃ paṭipadaṃ pajānāti, nāmarūpaṃ pajānāti, nāmarūpasamudayaṃ pajānāti, nāmarūpanirodhaṃ pajānāti, nāmarūpanirodhagāminiṃ paṭipadaṃ pajānāti. Viññānaṃ pajānāti, viññānasamudayaṃ pajānāti, viññānanirodhaṃ pajānāti, viññānanirodhagāminiṃ paṭipadaṃ pajānāti. Saṅkhāre pajānāti, saṅkhārasamudayaṃ pajānāti, saṅkhāranirodhaṃ pajānāti, saṅkhāranirodhagāminiṃ paṭipadaṃ pajānāti. SN II.28, PTS II 44. CS edition. The full Pali text has been included.*

object of meditation, the ardent meditator proceeds right to the heart of the meditative experience through at least the first four jhānas, and beyond. TWIM teacher David Johnson explains,

In the Saṃyutta Nikāya, there is a section on loving kindness meditation that refers to the factors of awakening. This sutta is a real revelation because it is talking about practicing loving-kindness in the fourth jhāna. The reason this is a revelation is because it is widely held that loving-kindness can only take you to the third jhāna...

The Loving-kindness meditation that we are talking about is not just a side meditation to help us calm down after a long day at the office, or to prepare for our meditation on the breath, it is a powerful system in its own right as part of the Brahmavihāra meditation path and does, indeed, culminate in full awakening.<sup>208</sup>

Here, David Johnson is referring to SN.V.54 (PTS V.122). We will be discussing passage more fully below.

It should also be kept in mind that within TWIM, *mettā* meditation and *satipaṭṭhāna* are not exclusive of each other. Rather, *satipaṭṭhāna* is fully integrated into TWIM meditation. So *satipaṭṭhāna* is being practiced while Loving Kindness, Compassion, Sympathetic Joy, or Equanimity are being held as the object of meditation. This is part of the synthesizing approach of TWIM, following the synthesizing approach of the suttas. In a subsequent chapter, we will explore how in the TWIM method, Loving Kindness Meditation and Mindfulness of Breathing Meditation are integration with *satipaṭṭhāna*.

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<sup>208</sup> Johnson, David C., *The Path to Nibbana*. pp. 111-112

## **Loving Kindness Meditation is easy to integrate into daily life**

A big advantage of Loving Kindness meditation (*mettā bhāvana*) is how well it carries into the regular life of ordinary people. It is one thing to do a 10-day retreat and feel some kind of deep peace, but quite another to have that peace amidst the events of life. What happens when the pot on the stove boils over and makes a mess of the kitchen floor? What happens when we must get to work on time and we get into a traffic jam on the road? How about when someone says something unpleasant to us or perhaps outright mean and cruel? Where is our peace at that time?

With Loving Kindness meditation, the feeling of *mettā* is carried out of the formal meditation session or meditation retreat right into places and situations of daily life, such as into the kitchen, onto the traffic choked roadway, into the contact between us and the person who is feeling terrible and taking it out on us with unkind words and a not pleasant facial expression.

Bhante Vimalaramsi gives instructions on how to carry the practice into daily life, both for the benefit of oneself and for others. In his book *A Guide to Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation*, Bhante instructs the meditator to do the following,

Once you master staying with the spiritual friend, there are more instructions for breaking down barriers and radiating the feeling of *mettā* in all directions. The teacher will give you those directions and advise you when you are ready. This is where the practice of the Brahmavihāras really takes off.

Again, when you are outside moving around in daily life, remember to smile and radiate *mettā* to all beings. Use Right Effort to recondition your mind. Bring up the wholesome quality of Lovingkindness instead of allowing whatever ‘ho-hum’ mind is there.

Stuck in a long line (queue) at the checkout line (at a store)? Radiate *mettā*. It is a tough job being a cashier at a store. Smile at the cashier and be friendly.

Traffic bogged down and you just can't move? Rather than getting upset, radiate *mettā* to your fellow drivers and passengers. 6 R your upset mind and replace it with a wholesome uplifted mind. Put a CD in the car player and listen to a dhamma talk to learn more about the Eightfold Path of the Buddha, rather than wasting your life ho-humming yourself along.

Share what you have learned with other people, and have them benefit from your practice. Don't proselytize! Just talk about what happened to you in your own words. How is TWIM helping you to be happier? Be the *Buddha* rather than being a *Buddhist*.

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## **How the TWIM approach to Loving Kindness differs from most current practices**

The TWIM method Loving Kindness Meditation is a very powerful and effective method that quickly leaves the realm of technique and becomes a way of life. It is similar to the commonly practiced forms of *mettā* in that it also goes through the steps of directing the *mettā* to particular people until the barriers are broken down. In this practice of breaking down the barriers, TWIM is using a theme developed in the *Visuddhimagga*. However, there are important differences which we will explain below.

From the beginning of practice, TWIM emphasizes the feeling of *mettā* rather than the verbalization or sub-verbalization of a prayer or wish. For the beginner, there is some sub-vocalization, but this is dispensed with as the practice matures. This sets the TWIM method

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<sup>209</sup> Vimalaramsi, Bhante, with David Johnson, **A Guide to Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation**. (Annapolis, Dhamma Sukha Publishing), 2015, pp. 39-40.

apart from most of the *mettā* methods practiced in contemporary Buddhism, although there are some very interesting and creative variations of *mettā bhāvana* being practiced in Sri Lanka and elsewhere that do emphasize the feeling aspect.

### **How contemporary mettā practice has come to diverge from the original instructions**

As we hope to make clear in this chapter, the meditation practices taught by the Buddha and most of the methods of *mettā* that are being practiced in the present day are similar but also different in some important ways. To understand why this divergence has happened, we need to look at the influence of the commentarial works and abhidhammic traditions, and to the *Visuddhimagga* of Ven. Buddhaghosa, which has become the single most authoritative work in the practice of Theravāda Buddhism.

Buddhaghosa had a clear impact not only on the acceptance of *abhidhamma* as *Buddhavacana* but also of the consolidation of abhidhammic concepts and methods into Theravādin meditation. When we examine the difference between early Buddhism and modern Theravāda, we see the clear impact of Buddhaghosa's life and work. The version of *mettā* he recommended is a different approach than that of the suttas. To examine this difference, we can begin by turning to the book *Buddhist Ethics*, by the renowned scholar monk Hammalawa Saddhatissa. He gives an account common method for the development of *mettā* practice by the novice Theravādin monk or practicing layperson. He writes,

*The first step:* For the beginner in this practice of meditation on *mettā*, it should be developed first of all toward oneself, mentally repeating the following or any other formula similar in sense, either in Pali or in one's own tongue:

*Aham avero homi* (May I be free from enmity);

*abbyajjho homi* (may I be free from ill will);

*anigho homi* (may I be free from distress);

*sukhī attānaṃpariharāmi* (may I keep myself happy)<sup>210</sup>

This is the standard recitation in what has become the most widespread form of *mettā* meditation. Once *mettā* is offered to oneself, it is then given to a teacher, preceptor, or respected person, followed by friends, family, people for whom there is no particular feeling (neutral), and finally towards people for whom one feels anger, hostility, or any other negative emotion.

The benefits of this are clear, though we will question below the depth of change that results from such recitation. The main limitation of this method is that it is based on language and concept. Its transformative effect is limited by its reliance on *vitakka*, thought. In the practice of *mettā* meditation, transformation of the individual relies on the depth of feeling that is generated while doing the recitation.

In the scheme of the *jhānas*, this recitational form of *mettā* meditation is limited to the first *jhāna*, as *vitakka* and *vicāra* are dropped from the second *jhāna* onwards. *Vicāra* will continue, but in a much subtler form, as *dhammavicaya*, investigation of phenomena.

This formulation, or organization of *mettā* as given in the *Visuddhimagga* has much to commend it, and Ven. Buddhaghosa clearly saw the necessity of beginning *mettā* meditation by giving *mettā* to oneself and then systematically extending it to others, including, eventually, to enemies.

### **TWIM utilizes the method of breaking down the barriers, but as a samatha-vipassanā practice**

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<sup>210</sup> Saddhatissa, Ven. Hammalawa, **Buddhist Ethics**. (Somerville, Wisdom Publications, 2003), p 62.

In fact, TWIM relies on Ven. Buddhaghosa's method of breaking down the barriers as the entry to *mettā* practice. Only after *mettā* is given to oneself, the spiritual friend, family members and loved ones, neutral people, and to 'enemies' (people who we feel uncomfortable with, irritated with, or even angry with), only then does the practice move to radiating to the directions as given in the suttas.

Even though TWIM follows the scheme laid out by Ven. Buddhaghosa in the *Visuddhimagga*, there are also differences between the two meditations. First of all, TWIM does not rely on the recitation of the *mettā* prayer, and it is vital to develop a strong heartfelt feeling right from the start. In TWIM, there is a subvocal ('subvocal' is when words are 'heard' in the mind) wish such as "May I be happy and at peace", but after the wish is made, the mental wording stops while the feeling continues. After the appropriate amount of time, after the feeling wanes, the wish is again subvocalized. So, there is a lot of space between the sub vocalization of the wishes. This space is filled with feeling of *mettā*.

Another crucial difference with the *Visuddhimagga*-based method is that TWIM *mettā* meditation is done within the framework of the practice of the 6R's. This means that *mettā* practice in TWIM is a form of *samatha-vipassanā* practice, which includes the crucial relax step when mind's attention wanders from the object of meditation which in this case is when mind's attention wanders from the feeling of *mettā*. As mentioned previously, the TWIM practitioner who is using *mettā* as the object of meditation is also practicing *satipaṭṭhāna*. The contemporary recitational approach does not include any component of *satipaṭṭhāna*.

One more difference is that in the popular form of *mettā* recitation, the wishes are made in turn for oneself and continues all the way to wishes for enemies. This means there is a lot of shifting of attention as the script is gone through. TWIM does not do this, or at least not all in one sitting. The TWIM practitioner will spend

considerable time on oneself and then on sending *mettā* to the spiritual friend before going on to the other people in the cycle. One ‘finishes’ parts of the cycle in one or more meditation sessions and only goes on to complete the entire cycle over a series of meditation sessions.

The speed of completing the cycle is based on the ability to successfully feel the sending of the *mettā* to the various people. It may take hours, days or weeks to complete. The *mettā* builds in strength and power. One progresses through the cycle of the breaking of the barriers as the *mettā* is successfully felt and the feeling of giving it to friends, family, enemies, etc.

**In the TWIM practice of *mettā*, the subvocal and mental recitation is eventually dropped, but the practice continues to a deeper level**

After some time, the sub vocalization and mental wording becomes more of a bother than a help, and it is dropped. It is also a sign of progress for the meditator to begin to feel the unnecessary tension and tightness caused by the mental formation of words. This means the mind is beginning to quiet down and that the *mettā* meditation is becoming effective as a *samatha* practice.

As the barriers are broken down, the meditation shifts to the sending of *mettā* to the six directions and all around. At this point it is the feeling of *mettā* without the mental wording. The meditation then becomes identical to that described in so many places in the suttas.

Though some people might object that starting the practice by giving *mettā* to oneself is selfish rather than generous, TWIM maintains that starting with oneself is necessary, as self-healing likely needs to be done before allowing *mettā* to be given to others. An emotionally wounded or crippled person has little or nothing to



offer other people, so oneself needs nurturing and healing as a first step. One is unable to give to others what one does not have oneself.

TWIM is not alone in this assessment of the importance of beginning with oneself. Venerable Bhante Henepola Gunaratana takes up this point when he writes,

We must start with the practice of loving kindness with ourselves first. Sometimes some of you may wonder why we have to love ourselves first. Wouldn't that amount to self-love and lead to selfishness? When you investigate your own mind very carefully, you will be convinced that there is no one in the whole universe that you love more than yourself. The Buddha said, "Investigating the whole world with my mind never did I find anyone dearer than oneself. Since oneself is dearer than others, one who loves oneself should never harm others". One who does not love oneself can never love another at all. By the same token one who loves oneself will feel the impact of loving kindness and then can understand how beautiful it is if every heart in the whole world is filled with the same feeling of loving kindness.<sup>211</sup>

As Bhante Gunaratana points out, that the Buddha valued love for oneself as a foundation for the practice of loving others. The standard formula for sending *mettā* in the nikāyas includes radiating the *mettā* to oneself. Thus, it is clear that beginning with oneself is a valid starting point.

In Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation, *mettā* is given first to oneself and then to others, in agreement with Bhante Gunaratana, and in keeping with Ven. Buddhaghosa's system. In TWIM, the *mettā* is then extended to a respected person, to loved ones and friends, to people who are usually ignored, and to those for whom there may be

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<sup>211</sup> Gunaratana, Bhante Henepola, "Meditation on Loving-Kindness" in **BPS Newsletter**. No. 69, 2013, p.1.

irritation, anger, resentment or even hatred. Following Buddhaghosa's system, this systematically breaks down the barriers between oneself and others.

### **The helpfulness of subvocalizing the wish for mettā at the beginning of practice but eventually becomes counter-productive**

When first beginning the practice, it is helpful to most people to include the thought/conceptualization (*vitakka*) of sending the *mettā* to various people, as it helps the mind to develop a new mental pattern, and results in the directing of the *mettā*.

Bringing up the feeling of Loving Kindness may be easy for some people but others need some assistance to do so. There are instructions within the TWIM method on how to do that. These instructions are to bring up a happy feeling, perhaps due to a pleasant, happy memory, to place it in the heart, and then to keep it going. After some time, the *mettā* needs not be artificially produced. It becomes the very life energy of the meditator.

The conceptualization and sub vocalization at the beginning stages of *mettā* practice (for example, thinking "May you be happy."), which in Pali is termed *vitakka*, produces subtle tension in the mind and body. That is why verbalization of any phrase is dropped in second *jhāna* level in TWIM. Then, after the *mettā* has been directed through the cycle of relationships, and the barriers between oneself and others have been broken down, one then radiates *mettā* in all directions.

By this time, the TWIM meditator will have a mind which is relaxed and more open which means it will feel any sub vocalization and associated thought as tension and tightness in the head and perhaps elsewhere. At this point the mental verbalization is dropped and the sincere feeling remains as the focus and object of meditation.

After the mental verbalization and thought are dropped, the TWIM *mettā* meditation becomes virtually identical to that which is described

in the suttas, being a radiation of Loving Kindness to the six directions and then all around, to all beings everywhere. Having dropped the *vitakka*, thought, and having dropped any sub vocalization, the meditation can proceed on to the second *jhāna* and beyond.

If there is any subtle *vitakka* remaining, it is absorbed into mindfulness (*sati*) remembering to direct the mind to maintain the radiance of Loving Kindness, and remembering to observe the movement of mind's attention. Any tension or tightness due to *vitakka* is let go and the mind can then go deeper into the meditation. *Vicāra* is effectively absorbed into the Awakening Factor of investigation of phenomena, *dhammavicaya*. Some use of occasional flash of *vitakka* will come in the important function of seeing and understanding, that is, in gaining insight.

In the TWIM view, the recitation of the *mettā* prayer can only carry one so far into the *mettā* practice, and needs to be let go once the meditator relaxes enough to feel the tension that is created by the sub vocalization (thinking of the words). Not only Ven. Vimalaramsi but many other prominent teachers have questioned the efficacy of the recitational method as handed down by commentarial tradition.

### **Some prominent non-TWIM teachers also question the efficacy of the recitational approach to mettā practice**

It may be assumed that whenever such a recitation is offered in earnest, there is some beneficial effect. The earnestness will produce some feeling of responsibility to share *mettā*, as well as awareness of its beneficial effects, which seems to be the prime mover of this meditation. But this approach lacks the depth of feeling suggested by descriptions of *mettā* meditation given in the suttas. Ven. Dr. Saddhatissa recognizes this when he writes,

For even if one developed it [the above formulated *mettā* meditation] for a hundred or a thousand years in

this way, mentally repeating, ‘May I be free from enmity’ And so on, absorption would never arise.<sup>212</sup>

In the absence of strongly developed feeling of *mettā*, any changes in attitude will likely be shallow. Ven. Dr. Saddhatissa, who wrote profoundly on ethical issues, recognized this fact. Due to his familiarity with the abhidhammic perspective, he contrasts such lack of depth of feeling with what he considers its opposite, which he terms “absorption”. It can be assumed from the context that he is referring to depth of feeling without distraction.

Bhante Henepola Gunaratana agrees with Ven. Saddhatissa that merely repeating the Loving Kindness formula cannot bring a deep change in our attitude. He writes,

Loving Kindness or *Mettā* cannot be cultivated by mere repetition of words of loving kindness. Repetition of such formula is very much like repeating a prescription to a patient in a hospital or a menu to a hungry person in a restaurant. Repeating a list of things will never produce the tangible result of the words in the list. Loving Kindness is something we have to cultivate intentionally in our minds by ourselves.<sup>213</sup>

Interestingly, Bhante Gunaratana does not offer any particular practice in place of recitation of the standard formula, except to do *vipassanā* practice, with Loving Kindness developing as a natural effect of the meditation. He continues,

When we meditate, our minds and bodies become naturally relaxed. Our hindrances dissolve. Our sleepiness and drowsiness, for instance, are replaced by alertness. Doubt is replaced by confidence, hatred by joy, restlessness and worry by happiness. As our resentment is replaced by joy, loving kindness hidden in our subconscious mind expresses itself, making us

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<sup>212</sup> Saddhatissa, **Buddhist Ethics**, p. 63.

<sup>213</sup> Gunaratana, Op. cit., p. 2.

more peaceful and happy. In this state of meditation, we gain concentration and overcome greed. We can see how meditation destroys hatred and cultivates loving kindness, which in turn supports our practice of meditation. Together, these two operate in unison, culminating in concentration and insightfulness. Therefore, to pick up one's own mind-wave of loving kindness one must fine tune oneself through the practice of mindfulness meditation.<sup>214</sup>

Most of what Bhante Gunaratana says here fits perfectly with the TWIM approach. He is showing us how well the different aspects of practice fit together and work in harmony. They are not to be artificially separated, but rather are totally interdependent and synergistic in their effect. TWIM would want to clarify that the “concentration” that Bhante refers to is best characterized as “collectedness of mind”, with nothing that arises being excluded or suppressed. It is also interesting that Ven. Gunaratana writes of a “mind-wave of loving kindness”. This is in keeping with modern scientific research and we will treat this topic in our final chapter concerning the science of meditation.

### **The recitation style of mettā practice does not likely take one past or even into the third and fourth jhānas**

In modern times, it is considered by many *vipassanā* teachers and practitioners that *mettā* meditation cannot take the meditator beyond the third or fourth *jhāna*. It is likely that given the liturgical nature of the practice as it has now come to us from Ven. Buddhaghosa, this is, in fact, the case. Such recitation, as Ven. Saddhatissa has pointed out, cannot produce the necessary absorption that carries the mainstream *vipassanā* meditator into the higher *jhānas*. If using absorption meditation, the liturgical type of *mettā* practice is limited

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<sup>214</sup> Ibid, p. 2.

to the first *jhāna* due to its component of *vitakka*, use of words and concept.

Buddhaghosa's manner of *mettā* meditation (using the recitative approach) had antecedents in the commentaries to the suttas, which likely informed his approach, which has now become the dominant one in the Theravādin world. The commentaries had likely changed the original *mettā* practice as given by the Buddha by the time Buddhaghosa translated them. For instance, the *Manorathapūraṇī* (*Anguttara-nikāya-aṭṭhakathā*) states:

“Loving kindness pervades all beings with [the wish for] their welfare. Since the mind associated with it is liberated from the opposed states such as the hindrances, it is called liberation of mind (*cetovimutti*). Specifically, this ‘liberation of mind’ is liberation from obsession by ill will. Here, what is intended by ‘liberation of mind’ is absorption (*appanā*) by three or four *jhānas* [depending on whether the fourfold or fivefold scheme of *jhānas* is used].” (the explanation in brackets added by Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi).<sup>215</sup>

*Manorathapūraṇī-ṭīkā* (*sāratthamañjūsā IV-ṭīkā*) states:

[This is said] because there is no thorough liberation [of the mind] by loving kindness until one obtains absorption.” (the explanation in brackets added by Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi).<sup>216</sup>

In the view presented here from the commentaries, the power of *mettā* to achieve *cetovimutti*, liberation of the mind, is dependent upon the attainment of absorption meditation. And as Ven. Saddhatissa has pointed out, this level of attainment is nearly impossible given the liturgical approach. As long as the practice is one of recitation, even with good and heartfelt intentions, there remains *vitakka*, thought or concept, in the mind. This results in some measure of tension and

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<sup>215</sup>Bodhi, *The Numbered Discourses of the Buddha*. AN, f.n.31, p.1594

<sup>216</sup> Ibid, p. 1594.

tightness, and the meditator would normally be unable to proceed beyond the first *jhāna*. Hence, in mainstream *vipassanā* methods, *mettā* meditation becomes a preliminary or an adjunct to the meditation of *samatha* and/or *vipassanā*, albeit a crucially important one.

In the Goenka system, beginning with day nine of the ten-day retreat, Loving Kindness is also done at the end of a session of *vipassanā* sitting, to share the benefits with all beings. This becomes a regular practice for the meditator in this tradition from that time on. It is primarily done as a *feeling* meditation, so in this way is similar to TWIM practice. The meditator is directed to think of the various kinds of beings who will receive the *mettā*, so there may be still an element of *vitakka*, thought, involved.

### **TWIM challenges the view that mettā meditation is of limited value for going into deep jhāna**

The various traditions value and sustain various methods of *mettā* practice, but there is still a commonly held belief that practice of Loving Kindness cannot take one further than the third *jhāna*. Therefore, it is seen as not the highest practice in the path to liberation. Bhante Vimalaramsi has this to say about that view,

The Buddha taught the Mindfulness of Mettā or Loving Kindness Meditation as a tool that leads the meditator directly to the attainment of Nibbāna, even more quickly and easily than any other kind of meditation practice.<sup>217</sup>

Bhante clarifies this by pointing out that *mettā* meditation itself as part of a larger meditation of the Brahmavihāras will take one to *Nibbāna*. In the higher *jhānas* there may be some further adjustments in the object of meditation as needed. In any case, *mettā* takes one to the fourth *rūpa jhāna* and the *arūpa jhānas* are extensions of the fourth *jhāna*. We will explore this more fully later. In the meanwhile,

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<sup>217</sup> Vimalaramsi, **Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life**, p. 25.

Bhante clarifies how the practice of *mettā* as part of the Brahmavihāras takes one to the fourth *jhāna*.

The practice of Loving Kindness meditation can lead you directly to the experience of *Nibbāna* if you follow all of the Brahma Vihāras, that is, the practice of Loving Kindness, Compassion, Unselfish Joy, and Equanimity. This is mentioned many times in the suttas (the original discourses of the Buddha). Many times, other teachers will say that this practice (Loving Kindness) alone does not directly lead the meditator to the experience of *Nibbāna*. This is true. But, when Loving Kindness meditation is practiced as part of the Brahma Vihāras, then it will take the meditator to the fourth *Jhāna*, or level of meditation. This is where the Buddha tried to have all of the students who practiced meditation get to. The fourth meditation level is where the meditator first experiences deep states of equanimity. According to the suttas there are three different paths that can be taken once the meditator reaches this level. These paths can take the meditator directly to the experience of *Nibbāna*.<sup>218</sup>

### **The sutta evidence for deep jhāna while practicing the Brahmavihāras**

The ability of the Brahmavihāras to take one into the higher jhānas is given in the *Bojjhaṅgasamyutta* where the Buddha discusses the liberation of mind by loving kindness (*mettācetovimutti*). We have looked at this passage above, but let us examine it more thoroughly. In this section of the *Bojjhaṅgasamyutta*, the Buddha shows how *brahmavihāra* meditation does not stand alone, but rather is skillfully interwoven with the Factors of Enlightenment, giving them power to lead to liberation of mind.

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<sup>218</sup> Ibid, pp. 151-152.



And how, bhikkhus, is the liberation of mind by loving kindness developed? What does it have as its destination, its culmination, its fruit, its final goal? Here, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu develops the enlightenment factor of mindfulness accompanied by loving kindness based upon seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, maturing in release. He develops the enlightenment factor of discrimination of states based upon seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, maturing in release. He develops the enlightenment factor of energy based upon seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, maturing in release. He develops the enlightenment factor of rapture based upon seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, maturing in release. He develops the enlightenment factor of tranquility based upon seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, maturing in release. He develops the enlightenment factor of concentration based upon seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, maturing in release. He develops the enlightenment factor of equanimity based upon seclusion, dispassion, and cessation, maturing in release..... Bhikkhus, the liberation of mind by lovingkindness has the beautiful as its culmination, I say, for a wise bhikkhu here who has not penetrated to a superior liberation.

And how, bhikkhus, is the liberation of mind by compassion developed?.....Bhikkhus, the liberation of mind by compassion has the base of the infinity of space as its culmination, I say.....

And how, bhikkhus, is the liberation of mind by altruistic joy developed?.....Bhikkhus, the liberation of mind by altruistic joy has the infinity of consciousness as its culmination, I say, .....

And how, bhikkhus, is the liberation of mind by equanimity developed?.....Bhikkhus, the liberation of mind by equanimity has the base of nothingness as

its culmination, I say, for a wise bhikkhu who has not penetrated to a superior liberation.<sup>219 220</sup>

The suggestion here is that the practice of the Divine Abodes is able to lead the meditator into the arūpajhānas and to liberation of mind when skillfully combined with the Seven Factors of Enlightenment. We will return to this theme below, but it is instructive to examine how the post-*sutta* literature deals with this idea of Brahmavihāras leading to the *rūpa* jhānas.

### The Visuddhimagga adds the kasiṇa to mettā meditation

The *Visuddhimagga* and commentaries seem to labor to present the idea of an upper limit for each of the Brahmavihāras.<sup>221</sup> The

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<sup>219</sup> Bodhi, **The Connected Discourses of the Buddha**. SN V.46.54 [PTS V.122], pp.1609-11.

<sup>220</sup> *Kathaṃ bhāvitā ca bhikkhave, mettācetovimutti kiṃgatikā hoti kiṃparamā kiṃphalā kiṃpariyosānā: idha bhikkhave, bhikkhu mettāsahagataṃ satisambojjhaṅgaṃ bhāveti vivekanissitaṃ virāganissitaṃ nirodhanissitaṃ vossaggapariṇāmiṃ. Mettāsahagataṃ dhammavicayasambojjhaṅgaṃ bhāveti vivekanissitaṃ virāganissitaṃ nirodhanissitaṃ vossaggapariṇāmiṃ. Mettāsahagataṃ viriyasambojjhaṅgaṃ bhāveti vivekanissitaṃ virāganissitaṃ nirodhanissitaṃ vossaggapariṇāmiṃ. Mettāsahagataṃ pūṭisambojjhaṅgaṃ bhāveti vivekanissitaṃ virāganissitaṃ nirodhanissitaṃ vossaggapariṇāmiṃ. Mettāsahagataṃ passaddhisambojjhaṅgaṃ bhāveti vivekanissitaṃ virāganissitaṃ nirodhanissitaṃ vossaggapariṇāmiṃ. Mettāsahagataṃ samādhisambojjhaṅgaṃ bhāveti vivekanissitaṃ virāganissitaṃ nirodhanissitaṃ vossaggapariṇāmiṃ. Mettāsahagataṃ upekkhāsambojjhaṅgaṃ bhāveti vivekanissitaṃ virāganissitaṃ nirodhanissitaṃ vossaggapariṇāmiṃ. .... subhapparamāhaṃ bhikkhave, mettā cetovimuttiṃ vadāmi idha pañṇassa bhikkhuno uttariṃ vimuttiṃ appaṭivijjhato.*

*Kathaṃ bhāvitā ca bhikkhave, karuṇācetovimutti kiṃgatikā hoti kiṃparamā kiṃphalā kiṃpariyosānā: ..... ākāsañcāyatanaparamāhaṃ, bhikkhave, karuṇācetovimuttiṃ vadāmi, idha pañṇassa bhikkhuno uttariṃ vimuttiṃ appaṭivijjhato.*

*Kathaṃ bhāvitā ca bhikkhave, muditā cetovimutti kiṃgatikā hoti kiṃparamā kiṃphalā kiṃpariyosānā: ..... viññānañcāyatanaparamāhaṃ bhikkhave, muditācetovimuttiṃ vadāmi idha pañṇassa bhikkhuno uttariṃ vimuttiṃ appaṭivijjhato.*

*Kathaṃ bhāvitā ca bhikkhave, upekkhācetovimutti kiṃgatikā hoti kiṃparamā kiṃphalā kiṃpariyosānā: ..... ākiñcaññāyatanaparamāhaṃ bhikkhave, upekkhā cetovimuttiṃ vadāmi idha pañṇassa bhikkhuno uttariṃ vimuttiṃ appaṭivijjhatoti.* SN V.46.54, PTS V.122, CS edition.

<sup>221</sup> Buddhaghosa, **The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga**. trans. by Bhikkhu Ñāṇamoli, Bhikkhu, Vsm. IX. 119-124, (Kandy, Buddhist Publication Society, 1991), pp. 351-3. See also SN (BB trans. page 1912, f.n.111 for an overview of how *Sārahappakāsini* and

*Visuddhimagga* also suggests that higher levels of attainment in *mettā* meditation are accompanied by the appearance of a *kasina* as object of meditation. Thus, it is not only the *mettā* practice that leads the practitioner on to the higher *jhānas*, but the addition of a *kasina*.<sup>222</sup>

The use of the term “the beautiful” in the above quote from the *Bojjhaṅgasamyutta* to describe the attainment reached by *mettā* meditation, is most likely referring to the fourth *jhāna*, as compassion is next listed as leading to the infinity of space. Ascribing “the beautiful” to a *kasina* is likely due to later tradition and not necessitated by language used in the suttas.

Due to the esteem with which Ācariya Buddhaghosa is held, the idea of upper limits on the attainments possible with *Brahmavihāra* meditation, and the admixture with *kaṣiṇas* and such has likely resulted in the idea current in contemporary Theravāda that the practice of the *Brahmavihāras* cannot take one all the way to *Nibbāna*. This in turn has possibly led to their marginalization in favor of versions of *ānāpānasati* and *satipaṭṭhāna* practices. This is in spite of the fact that Buddhaghosa writes eloquently about the importance of the *Brahmavihāras*, especially *mettā*, in removing barriers in the heart and mind of the practitioner.<sup>223</sup>

### **TWIM favors the Brahmavihāras as objects of meditation and adjusts the object of meditation in the higher jhānas as necessary**

In Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation, there is no hesitancy to take the *Brahmavihāras* as the object of meditation leading to the most refined states of mind, and combining them skillfully with the

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*Visuddhimagga* deal with this issue and put upper limits on the attainment achieved by *Brahmavihāras*.

<sup>222</sup> Buddhaghosa, *The Path of Purity: Visuddhimagga*. IX.39, p. 332.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, chapter IX, p. 321-353

Factors of Enlightenment to proceed to the deathless. In fact, beginning the practice with the feeling of *mettā* as the object of meditation is the favored method.

It is true that for most meditators, at some stage deep in the *arūpa* jhānas, it is skillful to leave the Brahmavihāras as an object of meditation and change the object of meditation to observation of mind itself, but this is also true when taking *ānāpānasati* as the object of meditation. By the time the meditator reaches the state of neither perception nor non-perception (*nevasaññānāsaññāyatana*), there is no longer any radiating of equanimity. At this point, no matter the previous object of meditation, the meditator takes as object awareness clear quiet mind.<sup>224</sup>

Up to the seventh *jhāna*, taking the Brahmavihāras as the object of meditation is skillful practice for most people, although meditation on the breath while relaxing also works well.<sup>225</sup> By working with a skilled teacher, the meditator knows how and when to adjust the object of meditation in the higher jhānas.

## **The conjunction of Brahmavihāra practice with the Factors of Enlightenment**

Using the Brahmavihāras as the object of meditation in Right Effort (the 6Rs) in conjunction with the skillful use of the Factors of Enlightenment, as above, produces the conditions for insight to arise, which in turn produces wisdom, liberation, awakening. Bhikkhu Bodhi in a footnote to this section of *Bojjhaṅgasamyutta* points out how the practice of the Four Divine Abodes combined with other factors of the path can bring about synergistic results. He observes,

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<sup>224</sup> Johnson, David, **The Path to Nibbāna**. p. 149.

<sup>225</sup> The meditator may shift to taking clear quiet mind as the object of meditation by the seventh jhāna. See Kraft **The Buddha's Map**. p.226, for a further discussion on taking mind as the object of meditation.

This conjunction of the enlightenment factors with the four divine abodes is unusual. On their own momentum, the divine abodes lead to rebirth in the brahma world rather than to Nibbāna. When integrated into the structure of the Buddha's path, however, they can be used to generate concentration [*samādhi*] of sufficient strength to serve as a basis for insight, which in turn brings enlightenment. A striking instance is at MN I 351.<sup>226</sup>

Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi is referring to MN 52, *Aṭṭhakanāgara sutta*, which we have looked at previously, but is worth considering more fully at this point. In this *sutta*, Venerable Ānanda, speaking of that which is proclaimed by the Blessed One, relates how a bhikkhu dwells in turn in Loving Kindness, Compassion, Sympathetic Joy, and Equanimity, and realizes how each state of mind connected with these qualities, however exalted, is conditioned, volitionally produced, impermanent, and subject to cessation. By remaining steady in this the bhikkhu attains the destruction of the taints.

This is no other than seeing the subtle craving and self-grasping arising while in the Brahmavihāras. When this is seen clearly, it is a realization of the Four Noble Truths, the links of Dependent Origination, and the Three Characteristics. This produces the wisdom that gives rise to the destruction of the taints and liberation. Thus, integrated into the structure of the Noble Eightfold Path, and utilizing the balanced energies of the Factors of Enlightenment, any wholesome object of meditation can yield such liberating results, and the meditation of the Four Divine Abodes is such a suitable object of meditation. In fact, it is certainly one of the best objects of meditation as evidenced by the frequency with which it was taught by the Buddha and the emphasis he gave it.

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<sup>226</sup> Bodhi, **The Connected Discourses of the Buddha**. SN. f.n. 109, p.1911.

## **How did Buddhist mettā meditation differ from that of the other ascetics?**

This aspect of the integration of components into an overall structure is the reason given by the Buddha to show how his method of Loving Kindness meditation differed from and was superior to that of the other ascetics in India during his time.

The suttas relate that the non-Buddhist sects had their own version of Loving Kindness Meditation. In *Samyutta Nikāya* it is related that The Blessed One was residing among the Koliyana in the town named Haliddavasana with a number of the bhikkhus. Those bhikkhus went to the park of the wanderers of other sects and were asked about whether the Buddha really had anything unique to teach. The wandering ascetics pointed out that they too had a practice of loving kindness (compassion, altruistic joy, equanimity) that pervaded all the quarters and the whole world. They claimed to be able to develop a mind that is vast, exalted, measureless, without hostility, without ill will. By this means, they were able to abandon the five hindrances. The bhikkhus went to ask the Buddha about whether there was something unique or special about the Buddhist practice of *mettā*. The Buddha instructs them thusly,

Bhikkhus, when wanderers of other sects speak thus, they should be asked: ‘Friends, how is the liberation of the mind by loving kindness developed? What does it have as its destination, its culmination, its fruit, its final goal? How is the liberation of mind by compassion developed? .....How is the liberation of the mind by sympathetic joy developed? ....How is the liberation of the mind by equanimity developed? What does it have as its destination, its culmination, its fruit, its final goal?’

Being asked thus, those wanderers would not be able to reply and, further, they would meet with

vexation. For what reason? Because that would not be within their domain.<sup>227 228</sup>

To practice such meditations as Loving Kindness apart from the Noble Eightfold Path (*ariya-aṭṭhaṅgika-magga*) may have some value, but it is when such practices are integrated with the overall practice of the path that it yields results in keeping with the Buddha's teaching of Path and Fruit. These meditations cannot be separated from the other aspects of the path and still get the same results. Any analysis of the components of the path must be balanced by synthesis, in both theory and practice. All aspects need to be integrated into the overall structure.

In the *Mahāparinibbāna Sutta* the Buddha emphasizes to wanderer Subhadda the necessity of integrating practice into the framework of the Noble Eightfold Path. He explains,

In whatever discipline the Noble Eightfold Path is not found, no ascetic is found of the first, the second, the third, or the fourth grade. But such ascetics can be found, of the first, second, third, and fourth grade in a Dhamma and discipline where the Noble Eightfold

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<sup>227</sup> Bodhi, **The Connected Discourses of the Buddha**. SN.V.2.6.4 [PTS V.115-118], p.1607-9.

<sup>228</sup> *Mayampi kho āvuso, sāvakānaṃ evaṃ dhammaṃ desema: "etha tumhe bhikkhave, pañcānīvaraṇe pahāya cetaso upakkilese paññāya dubbalīkaraṇe mettāsahagatena cetasā ekaṃ disaṃ pharitvā viharatha. Tathā dutiyaṃ, tathā tatiyaṃ, tathā catutthiṃ, iti uddhamadho tiriyaṃ sabbadhi sabbattatāya sabbāvantaṃ lokāṃ mettāsahagatena cetasā vipulena mahaggatena appamāṇena averena avyāpajjena pharitvā viharatha. Karuṇāsahagatena cetasā ekaṃ disaṃ pharitvā viharatha, tathā dutiyaṃ, tathā tatiyaṃ tathā catutthiṃ, iti uddhamadho tiriyaṃ sabbadhi sabbattatāya sabbāvantaṃ lokāṃ karuṇāsahagatena cetasā vipulena mahaggatena appamāṇena averena abyāpajjena pharitvā viharatha. Muditāsahagatena cetasā ekaṃ disā pharitvā viharatha. Tathā dutiyaṃ, tathā tatiyaṃ, tathā catutthiṃ, iti uddhamadho tiriyaṃ sabbadhi sabbattatāya sabbāvantaṃ lokāṃ muditāsahagatena cetasā vipulena mahaggatena appamāṇena averena abyāpajjena pharitvā viharatha. Upekkhāsahagatena cetasā ekaṃ disaṃ pharitvā viharatha. Tathā dutiyaṃ, tathā tatiyaṃ, tathā catutthiṃ, iti uddhamadho tiriyaṃ sabbadhi sabbattatāya sabbāvantaṃ lokāṃ upekkhāsahagatena cetasā vipulena mahaggatena appamāṇena averena abyāpajjena pharitvā viharathā"ti. Idha no āvuso, ko vīseṣo ko adhippāyo kiṃ nānākarāṇaṃ samaṇassa vā gotamassa amhākaṃ vā yadidaṃ dhammadesanāya vā dhammadesanaṃ anusāsaniyā vā anusāsanti. SN.V.2.6.4, PTS V.115-118, CS edition.*

Path is found. Now, Subhadda, in this Dhamma and discipline, the Noble Eightfold Path is found, and in it are ascetics of the first, second, third, and fourth grade. Those other schools are devoid of true ascetics; but if in this one the monks were to live a life of perfection, the entire world would not lack for arahants.<sup>229 230</sup>

It can be said in the light of the above that synthesizing the various aspects of the Noble Eightfold Path is of more importance than any particular object of meditation. That being said, to take up Loving Kindness as the object of meditation brings great blessing to oneself and to those with whom one has contact. In fact, the blessing extends without barrier in all directions. So, the particular object of meditation is also worthy of consideration.

For some people, Loving Kindness may not be an appropriate object of meditation. For those people Bhante Vimalaramsi prescribes *ānāpānasati*, mindfulness of breathing. There are some marked differences in the way TWIM practices *ānāpānasati* and how it is taken up by other contemporary *vipassanā* groups. We will next have a look at mindfulness of breathing within the context of TWIM practice.

## Summary

Although any method of Loving Kindness meditation brings great benefit to the practitioner and to many others, the TWIM method has special features that make it an especially powerful practice as well as

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<sup>229</sup> Walshe, **The Long Discourses of the Buddha**. DN.16.5.27 [PTS ii 152], p. 268.

<sup>230</sup> *Yasmiṃ kho subhadda dhammavinaye ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo na upalabbhati, samaṇo pi na upalabbhati, dutiyo pi tattha samaṇo na upalabbhati, tatiyo pi tattha samaṇo na upalabbhati, catuttho pi tattha samaṇo na upalabbhati. Yasmiṃca kho subhadda dhammavinaye ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo upalabbhati, samaṇo pi tattha upalabbhati, dutiyo pi tattha samaṇo upalabbhati, tatiyo pi tattha samaṇo upalabbhati, catuttho pi tattha samaṇo upalabbhati. Imasmiṃ kho subhadda dhammavinaye ariyo aṭṭhaṅgiko maggo upalabbhati. Idhe va subhadda samaṇo, idha dutiyo samaṇo, idha tatiyo samaṇo idha catuttho samaṇo. Suññā parappavādā samaṇehi aññe. Ime ca1 subhadda bhikkhū sammā vihareyyuṃ asuñño loko arahantehi assā"ti. DN.16.5.27, PTS ii 152, CS edition.*



a path to *Nibbāna*. This is primarily due to practicing *mettā* within the framework of the 6Rs, which makes it a *samatha-vipassanā* practice. Practicing mindfulness of Loving Kindness by using the 6Rs allows the meditator to progressively relax and open the mind, and to develop an ever-deepening understanding of Dependent Origination, The Four Noble Truths, and the Three Characteristic marks of Existence.

Most methods of *mettā* use the recitation of a text to share the *mettā* with oneself, friends and relatives, and so on. This is based on the “breaking down the barriers” method as taught in the *Visuddhimagga*, which method is an elaboration of principles given in the suttas. In the beginning stages of *mettā* meditation, TWIM also uses the breaking down the barriers, as this has proven value to meditators.

However, the TWIM method avoids the recitation of the text in favor of a minimal subvocal wish for *mettā*, with the feeling of *mettā* being the predominant factor, and such feeling being taken as the object of meditation as a *samatha-vipassanā* practice. After progressing in practice, even this minimal subvocal wish is felt as tension and tightness, and is abandoned. This leaves only the feeling itself as the object of meditation, and the abandonment of the sub vocalization allows for progress deeper into *jhāna*.

Within TWIM, taking of the feeling of *mettā* as the object of meditation is the favored method, with relatively fewer meditators taking the breath as object of meditation. In addition to its efficacy as an object of meditation leading through the *rūpa* and *arūpa* jhānas to cessation (*nirodha*) and *Nibbāna*, the practice of *mettā* has the power to bring great joy and happiness to the meditator and to all whose lives he or she touches.

## Chapter VI

# Mindfulness of Breathing (*ānāpānasati*) in TWIM

We have seen how the Buddha repeatedly emphasized the integration of individual practices into the overall framework of the Noble Eightfold Path (*ariya-aṭṭhaṅgika-magga*). TWIM does this with both Four Divine Abodes Meditation and with Mindfulness of Breathing Meditation. No matter the object of meditation, the practice is integrated with the practice of the 6Rs (Right Effort, Right Mindfulness), and with insight leading to liberation and *Nibbāna*. Both practices are fully integrated with *satipaṭṭhāna* practice and develop the thirty-seven requisites of enlightenment.

In this chapter we will explore the TWIM version of *ānāpānasati* and how it integrates with *satipaṭṭhāna*. All of our observations on this integration of the two aspects of practice (in the TWIM method they are two aspects of one practice) with mindfulness of breathing also hold as well for mindfulness of Loving Kindness.

### **The TWIM method of Mindfulness of Breathing is based directly on the instructions on the *Ānāpānasati Sutta***

Bhante Vimalaramsi wrote his first book, *Ānāpānasati*, to show this kind of integrated approach to Mindfulness of Breathing Meditation. A number of years later, he wrote a follow up book, *Breath of Love*, which incorporates the previous book and adds much new material. Bhante bases his method directly upon the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* and quotes that *sutta* as follows,

Monks, when mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated, it is of great fruit and benefit. When mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated, it fulfills the four foundations of mindfulness. When the four foundations of mindfulness are developed and

cultivated, they fulfill the seven awakening factors. When the seven awakening factors are developed and cultivated, they fulfill true knowledge and deliverance.<sup>231 232</sup>

Bhante continues with the following observation,

Please observe that the Four Foundations of Mindfulness are in this *sutta* and they are fulfilled through practice of *jhāna* and Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation (TWIM) which lead to wise meditative states of mind. This is decidedly different from the current theory that you don't observe the Four Foundations of Mindfulness while experiencing *jhānas* (meditative stages of understanding).<sup>233</sup>

We can explore how mindfulness of breathing is fulfilled in *satipaṭṭhāna* and with the seven awakening factors after we have a look at the basic instructions Bhante Vimalaramsi gives for how to do *ānāpānasati* practice. By comparing this with the instructions that come from *Visuddhimagga* we can gain some interesting perspectives on the unique approach that TWIM offers. Let us turn to the instructions for the meditator.

### **After taking refuge and keeping the precepts, the basic instructions are given**

As always, taking refuge and embracing the precepts are the foundation. The next steps are taken directly from the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya*,

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<sup>231</sup> Vimalaramsi, **Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life**. p. 69, paraphrasing Bodhi, **The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha**. MN 118:15 [PTS iii 82], p.943. Bhante Vimalaramsi is following Bhikkhu Bodhi translation but varies a few of the words to, in his opinion, better convey the meaning.

<sup>232</sup> *Ānāpānasati bhikkhave, bhāvitā bahulīkatā mahapphalā hoti mahānisamsā. Ānāpānasati bhikkhave bhāvitā bahulīkatā cattāro satipaṭṭhāne paripūreti cattāro satipaṭṭhānā bhāvitā bahulīkatā satta bojjhaṅge paripūrenti satta bojjhaṅgā bhāvitā bahulīkatā vijjāvimuttiṃ paripūrenti.* MN 118

<sup>233</sup> Vimalaramsi, **The Breath of Love**. pp. 69-70.

And how, bhikkhus, is mindfulness of breathing developed and cultivated, so that it is of great fruit and great benefit?

Here, a bhikkhu, gone to the forest or to the root of a tree or to an empty hut, sits down, having folded his legs crosswise, set his body erect, and established mindfulness in front of him, ever mindful he breathes in, ever mindful he breathes out.<sup>234 235</sup>

At this point the commentarial tradition and TWIM begin to diverge. Bhante raises some interesting points in connection with this passage,

The phrase “gone to the forest or to the root of a tree or an empty hut” means that you go to a reasonably quiet place where there will be few distractions while learning the meditation...The thing that happens with many absorption concentration practitioners is that even the smallest sound turns into a ‘thorn in their side’. This occurs because concentration is out of balance with your mindfulness. Many students complain about a fan being on and how it makes noise, or when someone opens or shuts a door. The absorption practitioner will jump because the noise kind of shocks them. Again, this occurs because the meditator’s mindfulness is weak and their concentration is out of balance. This is one of the disadvantages of doing absorption concentration.<sup>236</sup>

In TWIM practice as Bhante states, it is good while learning the meditation to keep noise and disturbances at a minimum. But it is not necessary to create a perfectly quiet environment, which is impossible to do in any case. A fundamental part of TWIM training is to learn to

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<sup>234</sup> Bodhi, **The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha**. MN 118:17 [PTS iii 82], p.943.

<sup>235</sup> *Kathaṃ bhāvitā ca bhikkhave, ānāpānasati kathaṃ bahulikatā mahapphalā hoti mahānisamsā. Idha bhikkhave, bhikkhū araṇṇagato vā rukkhamūlagato vā suññāgāragato vā nisīdati pallaṅkaṃ ābhujitvā ujum kāyaṃ paṇidhāya parimukhaṃ satim upaṭṭhapetvā so satova assasati, sato passasati.* MN 118:17. PTS iii 82, CS edition.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid, pp. 70-71.

give up control (which was only an illusion to begin with) and accept any disturbances which arise. Bhante continues,

During the time of the Buddha, most people sat on the floor. Hence, the phrase, “sits down; having folded his legs crosswise sets his body erect”, but today, sitting on the floor can be very painful and trying experience because people mostly sit on chairs, stools, or couches. In fact, it is far more important to observe what is happening in mind than it is to sit with uncomfortable or painful sensations. Remember there is no magic in sitting on the floor. The magic comes from a clear, calm mind that has fun watching how mind’s attention moves from one thing to another and learning how to 6R any distraction and gently be at ease, as much as possible...

“Sets his body erect” means you sit with a nicely straight back which is not rigid and uncomfortable ...thus please do not lean against anything when sitting. And you must sit without moving the body for any reason.<sup>237</sup>

### **Making the sitting position as comfortable as possible to enable longer sitting**

Bhante allows sitting in chairs. The basic needs for comfort of the meditator are met at TWIM retreats. However, after making the body as comfortable as possible in whatever sitting position, sitting is strict and meant to be without movement.

Meditation retreats are often known as difficult, exhausting experiences. Many retreatants experience considerable discomfort and pain. Some meditators weather the discomfort and go on to having a successful meditation. Others drop out, or don’t even

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<sup>237</sup> Ibid, pp. 70-71

attempt meditation due to its perceived difficulties. This is seldom the case at TWIM retreats.

Bhante Vimalaramsi realizes that nothing is to be gained by discomfort of the body, especially if it becomes extreme. He helps to make the meditator as comfortable as possible. In addition to allowing the use of a chair, Bhante makes sure retreatants get sufficient sleep and enough walking meditation to refresh the body and rejuvenate the circulation of blood. TWIM walking meditation is vigorous for that purpose.

When the body is given what it needs for its basic comfort, the quality of meditation increases. While allowing for a level of comfort, Bhante still maintains high standards for participants. The back is to be kept erect either while sitting on the floor or in a chair, and the body should be kept completely still.

### **Breathing, letting go, opening, relaxing**

Bhante continues with his comments on the instructions from the *sutta*,

The phrase “establishing mindfulness in front of him” means that you put aside all other worldly affairs and involvement with sensual pleasures. Then you softly close your eyes and whenever there is a distracting sound, smell, taste, sensation or thought, you are aware of that and simply let it go. You then relax the tightness in your head, smile, and redirect mind’s attention back to the object of meditation and relax.

“Ever mindful he breathes in; ever mindful he breathes out.” This tells us the way to practice mindfulness of breathing. Being aware of the breath means to know when you are experiencing the in-breath, then relaxing, and to know when you are experiencing the out-breath and relaxing. You use the

breath as a reminder to relax on both the in-breath and the out-breath. It simply means to open up your awareness and to be attentive to the breath as much as possible and at the same time, relax the tightness in the head.<sup>238</sup>

With the above explanation we can see the unique TWIM approach emerging. The object of meditation, which in this case is the breath, is not the sole object to the exclusion of all else. Rather, the object of meditation is the breath *and* letting go, opening, and relaxing.

Through the practice of the 6Rs nearly anything wholesome could be the object of meditation. But the breath is an excellent object as it is with us always. Alternatively, Loving Kindness, which meditation has marvelous effects due to the development of *mettā*, is also an excellent choice of meditation object, which we have examined in the previous chapter. Here we discuss the meditation of mindfulness of breathing.

Again, we emphasize that to understand the TWIM approach it must be kept in mind that focusing on the breath is not the main point here. The object is to be aware of the breath while engaging in the process of letting go, opening up, relaxing, and smiling.

### **Experiencing the whole body rather than only the whole body [of breath]**

The next section of the *sutta* is very instructive.

Breathing in long, he understands: ‘I breath in long’; or breathing out long he understands: ‘I breath out long’. Breathing in short, he understands, ‘I breathe in short’; or breathing out short, he understands: ‘I breath out short.’ He trains thus: ‘I shall breathe in experiencing the whole body’; he trains thus: I shall

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<sup>238</sup> Ibid, p. 72.

breathe out experiencing the whole body.’ He trains thus: ‘I shall breath in tranquillizing the bodily formation’; he trains thus: I shall breathe out tranquillizing the bodily formation.<sup>239 240</sup>

The above section really sorts TWIM out from absorption meditation methods of *ānāpānasati*. This section is usually taken as instruction to concentrate fully and exclusively on the breath. In addition, the “experiencing the whole body” phrase (*sabbakāyapaṭisaṃvedī*) is usually followed in the English translation by an insert “[of breath]”, thus changing the reading from “experiencing the whole body” to “experiencing the whole body of breath”, an insert which is not warranted by a strict reading of the Pali text but is widely followed in modern works promoting absorption concentration.

This insertion of the phrase [of breath] is in keeping with the use of the breath in absorption concentration approaches as a means to exclude all extraneous sensory impressions and to narrow the focus as much as possible into one-pointed concentration. Thus, the whole body is left out and the field of perception is narrowed to only that part of the body directly involved in the breath, or to a narrow area of sensation such as the tip of the nose or the rise and fall of the abdomen.

## **TWIM does not narrow the focus on the breath, but relaxes and opens experience**

Bhante Vimalaramsi advises against this narrowing process. In his commentary on the verse, he writes,

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<sup>239</sup> Bodhi, **The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha**. MN 118:18 [PTS iii 82], p. 94 following Bhikkhu Bodhi’s translation, but I have taken out the words “[of breath]” inserted by him and by others into this sutta, but not warranted by the Pali text. See the Pali below.

<sup>240</sup> *Dīghaṃ vā assasanto dīghaṃ assasāmīti pajānāti. Dīghaṃ vā passasanto dīghaṃ passasāmīti pajānāti. Rassaṃ vā assasanto rassaṃ assasāmīti pajānāti. Rassaṃ vā passasanto rassaṃ passasāmīti pajānāti. Sabbakāyapaṭisaṃvedī assasissāmīti sikkhati. Sabbakāyapaṭisaṃvedī passasissāmīti sikkhati. Passambhayaṃ kāyasaṅkhāraṃ assasissāmīti sikkhati. Passambhayaṃ kāyasaṅkhāraṃ passasissāmīti sikkhati.* MN 118:18, PTS iii 82, CS edition.



The words ‘he understands’ is emphasized to show that you do not focus with strong attention on the breath to the exclusion of everything else. You merely ‘understand’ what the breath is doing in the present moment. That’s all there is to this! You simply know when your breath is long or short. There is no controlling of the breath at any time. Instead, there is only understanding what you are doing in the present moment. If you try to ‘over focus’ or ‘concentrate’ on the breath to the exclusion of everything else, you will develop a headache due to ‘wrong concentration’.

Whenever you hold tightly onto the meditation object and try to force the mind to ‘concentrate’ or push away distractions, the head will develop a very tight and painful tension. This tightness or tension occurs when the meditator attempts to control the sitting by throwing down any distracting thoughts and feelings and quickly rushing back to the meditation object. This happens with ‘momentary concentration’ as well as any other kind of ‘absorption concentration’ technique. This doesn’t happen when you relax on the in-breath and on the out-breath.<sup>241</sup>

By following Bhante’s instructions, which are in keeping with the original *sutta* instructions, we have an object of meditation which is held alertly but without tension and without any attempt to exclude other sense impressions. If mindfulness is sharp, such distractions will be few. If it grows weak for some reason, there will be distractions and hindrances arise. They are handled through the method of the 6Rs.

The 6Rs is a middle path method which deals with hindrances not by letting the mind run to them (extreme of looseness with mind driven to and fro by endless craving), nor by extreme concentration,

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<sup>241</sup> Vimalaramsi, **The Breath of Love**. pp. 73-74.

which forces the distractions to hide in a deeper level of the mind, waiting for their turn to emerge. The middle path offered here is to be completely accepting of the present moment, neither pushing away the distraction nor pulling towards it. This is done while keeping one's mindfulness of the movement of mind's attention at the forefront.

Previous to the development of the 6Rs as an easy-to-use method based directly on the Four Right Strivings, Bhante used an acronym DROPPS as a guide. It means 'Don't Resist or Push. Soften and Smile. Whatever arises, do not resist it or push it. Just soften into it and smile, open mind and accept it. In other words, "To love what we are doing." Bhante observes that we must accept the fact that when we sit in meditation things are not always like what we want them to be.<sup>242</sup>

### **The most important part of the instructions**

And the last part of the verse? He trains thus: 'I shall breathe in tranquilizing the bodily formation'; he trains thus: I shall breathe out tranquilizing the bodily formation.<sup>243 244</sup> Bhante has this to say,

This simple statement is the most important part of the meditation instructions. It instructs you to notice the tightness which arises in the head with every arising of consciousness and to relax that tightness while on the in-breath and out-breath. Then you feel your mind open up, expand, relax, become tranquil, and then you smile.

This process occurs because there is a membrane that is wrapped around the brain called the 'meninges'. The purpose of the meninges is to hold the two hemispheres of the brain in place inside the skull.

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<sup>242</sup> Ibid, p. 76.

<sup>243</sup> Bodhi, **The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha**. MN 118:18 [PTS iii 83], p. 944.

<sup>244</sup> *Passambhayaṃ kāyasaṅkhāraṃ assasissāmīti sikkhati. Passambhayaṃ kāyasaṅkhāraṃ passasissāmīti sikkhati.* MN 118:18, PTS iii 83, CS edition.

When a thought or feeling arises, the gray matter of the brain expands very slightly and pushes up against the membrane. This creates a subtle tension and tightness which can be felt.

Every time the one sees that mind is distracted away from the observing the breath and relaxing, you simply let go of the distraction by not keeping mind's attention on it, then relax the tightness in the head or brain, and feel mind become open and expanded. You can feel the mind become relaxed, calm and clear. Next, you softly smile and re-direct mind's attention back to the breath. On the in-breath relax, feel it expand and become calm. On the out-breath relax, feel the tension and tightness relax, expand, feel mind become alert and pure. In this way tension in the head (brain) and mind gently goes away.<sup>245</sup>

This is, essentially, the whole meditation method of *ānāpānasati* within the TWIM tradition. The other 14 breaths are a natural unfolding of these first two instructions to know that you are breathing and to relax the whole body as you breathe in and as you breathe out. With the in-breath one relaxes and opens, with the out-breath one relaxes and opens. When a distraction arises, if mind's attention is pulled away, the distraction is 6Rd.

The simplicity of this approach is amazing. The depth to which one can go can only be imagined until the meditation is experienced for oneself. The suttas give us some clues about that depth, and we will look at those clues when we examine more closely how *satipaṭṭhāna* is integrated into this practice, and how the links of Dependent Origination are seen.

For the TWIM practitioner, there is no need for the complexity of the meditation as taught in the absorption traditions. As the mind stays relaxed and open rather than intensely concentrated on a single

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<sup>245</sup> Ibid, pp. 77-78.

sensation, there will be no sign or *nimitta* arise. Instead, through the same simple breath meditation, one enters the jhānas and discerns how the links of Dependent Origination occur and this is where the deep insights and understanding really happen.

### **Passambhaya is a key word in the Pali instructions**

The key Pali word in the above passage is *passambhaya*, related to *passambhati*, to calm down, to quiet, to relax, to tranquilize. Here it is the *kāyasaṅkhāra*, or bodily formation that is being calmed. There is an active calming action here. The calming is an activity, something that needs to be done. The verb *sikkhati* at the end of the sentence means the meditator ‘trains’ in this calming of the bodily formation.<sup>246</sup>

*Passaddhi* is a related word, meaning tranquility, and is one of the seven *bojjhangas*, or factors of enlightenment, the first being mindfulness, *sati*. Tranquility is essential for enlightenment, and here in this *sutta* it is being recommended not as a result or side benefit of practice, but as an activity to bring about calmness of the body formation on the in-breath and on the out-breath. Once this is accomplished, the bodily formation is *passaddha*, calmed down, allayed, quieted composed, relaxed, at ease. There has to be an activity of *passambhaya* or *passambhati* to bring this about. It is intentionally done as a vital part of the training.

What does this *passambhaya* mean? As can be predicted, with such an important word in such a key passage, it has been a point of discussion and some controversy. Bhante Vimalaramsi suggests a meaning in line with those above, but much more practical and experiential, a meaning that can be confirmed by direct experience. That word, as an active verb, would be to ‘relax’. The Buddha is telling us to relax and open up. To let go of the unwholesome and

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<sup>246</sup> Rhys Davids, T.W. **The Pali-English Dictionary**. p. 447.

bring up the wholesome. This is Right Effort, which Bhante calls ‘Harmonious Practice’.

### **When pain arises in sitting**

What happens if something comes along in one’s meditation that intends to upset this nice, relaxed open feeling? During long sitting practice, people quite often experience pain. Sometimes the pain can become intense. Any part of the body can hurt during meditation, but in sitting cross legged, the ankles, knees, hips, back and neck are especially prone to pain. And Bhante is instructing us to sit still like a Buddha statue, not to move at all. How to handle this kind of pain in TWIM?

Bhante gives instruction about how to handle pain by contrasting TWIM with the way he was taught in Myanmar. He writes,

Many meditation teachers tell their students to put their attention right in the middle of the painful sensation and see its true nature. This will cause a few different things to occur. Firstly, you will develop a stronger pain and this becomes a distraction instead of an investigation. It is because these meditation teachers tell their students to stay with the pain until it goes away. Unfortunately, this can take an unbelievably long time. In addition, you naturally need to tighten and toughen mind in order to observe the sensation.

This tightening and toughening of the mind is not being mindful. You begin to develop a mind that hardens when pain arises. It is only natural for this to happen as it takes a lot of courage and fortitude to watch pain in this way. At this time, a type of aversion is naturally developed and this hardening of the mind is not being noticed as *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anatta*, or the links of Dependent Origination and you are not

noticing the craving which is the tightening of mind and body.

Consequently, even when you are not meditating, this suppression can cause personality hardening, and that causes true problems to arise. Without the relax step, mind has a tendency to become critical and judgmental and the personality development of the meditator becomes hard. Many people say they need to do a Loving Kindness retreat after doing this kind of meditation because they discovered that they begin to say and do things in daily life that are not so nice to other people.

The Buddha's method is whenever a painful sensation arises in the body, you first recognize that mind's attention has gone to the sensation and you begin to think about the feeling. You then let go of any thoughts about that sensation, open mind and let go of the tight mental fist that is wrapped around the sensation, or you can let the sensation be there by itself without any mental resistance or aversion to it. Next, relax the tightness in the head...feel mind expand and become calm...then smile and re-direct mind's attention back to the object of meditation, i.e. the breath and relaxing on both the in and out-breath.

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## **Doing walking meditation as needed to resolve pain in the body during long sitting**

We can see that painful sensation is handled as any other distraction is in TWIM, by allowing the sensation but not feeding it with attention, and by using the 6Rs. Bhante is clear that the meditator must not ignore strong, persistent physical pain that may indicate possible damage to the body. At such a time, there should be

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<sup>247</sup> Vimalaramsi, **The Breath of Love**. pp. 74-75.

a shift to walking meditation. Common sense is needed. Most small pains will disappear through use of the 6Rs and will not become magnified by being fed with attention. But some severe, persistent pains are a signal that the body needs a change, such as a period of walking meditation.

Walking meditation in TWIM is done energetically and at a normal pace of walking, in order to restore blood circulation to the body and brain. It is not done very slowly as is the fashion in many *vipassanā* methods. Rather than focusing on tiny increments of movement, the pace of movement is normal and the mind is kept on the object of meditation.

Bhante emphasizes walking meditation and teaches that with proper mindfulness, the meditator can remain in deep meditation while walking. Bhante explains that while doing walking meditation,

At first, mind's attention will be somewhat active and lots of wandering thoughts will invade it. But with calm patience in 6R-ing those distractions will eventually settle down and the meditator will be able to stay with their object of meditation. Eventually the walking meditation will be as good as the sitting meditation. This way, when one is off of retreat, they can bring their meditation into their daily activities more easily. <sup>248</sup>

The Buddha taught the Brahmins in the village of Venāgapura that he was in a “celestial state” when doing walking meditation and in other postures such as standing, sitting, and lying down. Speaking of being in *jhāna*, he told Brahmin Vacchagotta,

Then, Brahmin, when I am in such a state, if I walk back and forth, on that occasion my walking back and forth is celestial. If I am standing, on that occasion my standing is celestial. If I am sitting, on that occasion my sitting is celestial. If I lie down, on

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<sup>248</sup> Vimalaramsi, *Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life*, p. 138.

that occasion, this is my celestial high and luxurious bed. This is that celestial high and luxurious bed that at present I can gain at will, without trouble or difficulty.<sup>249 250</sup>

Although the commentaries have difficulty with this passage, as they maintain that a person in deep absorption *jhāna* should be unable to carry out these activities while maintaining *jhāna*, the passage fits TWIM tranquil aware *jhāna* very nicely. With practice and mindfulness, all can be done while in *jhāna*.<sup>251</sup>

### **Ānāpānasati practice is the practice of satipaṭṭhāna**

Sections 23 through 28 of the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* detail how the practitioner uses mindfulness of breathing to develop, cultivate and fulfill the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. Clearly, in the *sutta* practice, there is no separation between Mindfulness of Breathing and the Four Foundations of Mindfulness. They are integrated practices. The Buddha explains that during *ānāpānasati* practice, body, feelings, mind, and mind objects will arise and avail themselves for contemplation and insight. In our chapter on *satipaṭṭhāna*, we will explore more fully how *Brahmavihāra* Meditation and *Ānāpānasati* Meditation are integrated with the practice of *satipaṭṭhāna* and fulfill the Factors of Awakening.

TWIM does not use mindfulness of breath as a technique for developing strong absorption concentration, and Bhante teaches that the TWIM version is true to the original intent of the suttas. This is definitely against the stream of contemporary *vipassanā* practices, where *ānāpānasati* is mainly used as a technique *par excellence* for

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<sup>249</sup> Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, AN 3.63 [PTS I 183], p. 275.

<sup>250</sup> *So ce ahaṃ brāhmaṇa evambhūto caṅkamāmi, dibbo me eso tasmim samaye caṅkamo hoti. So ce ahaṃ brāhmaṇa, evaṃ bhūto tiṭṭhāmi, dibbaṃ me etaṃ tasmim samaye ṭhānaṃ hoti. So ce ahaṃ brāhmaṇa, evambhūto nisīdāmi, dibbaṃ me etaṃ tasmim samaye āsanaṃ hoti. So ce ahaṃ brāhmaṇa, evambhūto seyyaṃ kappemi, dibbaṃ me etaṃ tasmim samaye uccāsayanamahāsayaṇaṃ hoti. Idaṃ kho taṃ brāhmaṇa dibbaṃ uccāsayanamahāsayaṇaṃ, yassāhaṃ etarahi nikāmalābhī akicchālābhī akasiralābhī'ti.* AN 3.63, PTS I 183, CS edition.

<sup>251</sup> For a discussion of the ways Mp and Mp-t explain this passage with difficulty, see Bodhi, *The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha*, AN, pp. 1650-51, fn. 444.



gaining strong concentration of mind. It is not generally combined with *satipaṭṭhāna*, which would be a separate practice. And it would be considered to be a *samatha* practice, not a *vipassanā* practice in that it can help with gaining calmness of mind through concentration, but does not lend itself to insight.

### **Pa-Auk is an example of the contemporary separation of samatha from vipassanā**

We can see an example of this use of *ānāpānasati* primarily as a concentration (*samatha*) method by once again looking at the Pa-uk website. With regard to use of *ānāpānasati* as a concentration method, it says, “In Pa-Auk Tawya, most yogis develop *jhāna* with mindfulness-of-breathing (*ānāpānasati*). Having developed *Samatha*, the yogi may proceed to practice *Vipassanā* (insight) meditation.”<sup>252</sup>

Here we can see that mindfulness of breathing is primarily a concentration/ *samatha* practice followed by *vipassanā*. The two practices are separated and sequenced. Yet, when we search the instructions in the suttas, *samatha* and *vipassanā* are considered as two components of one practice. How is it that the original instructions have been altered? How has this method of separating and sequencing *samatha* and *vipassanā* become so widespread in the Buddhist world?

### **How contemporary practitioners have been influenced by the commentarial tradition**

If we have a look at some of the commentarial tradition, we can trace this change and its development over time. It is beyond the scope of this book to trace this development in detail, although its general outlines are relevant to our discussion as we are attempting to show the *sutta* basis of TWIM and to account for how other methods are distinctly different in their approach to mindfulness and attention.

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<sup>252</sup> <http://www.paaukforestmonastery.org/meditation.htm>, accessed Oct. 2017.

In claiming that TWIM is at least a plausible way of interpreting the Buddha's original instructions on meditation, the question then arises as to why the great majority of other *vipassanā* methods do not have the same or at least similar interpretation of the Buddha's original instructions.

Such differences could be attributed to honest differences of opinion over how to interpret the original instructions. But what we are suggesting is that most contemporary methods of *vipassanā* are not attempting to base their methods of mindfulness and attention on the original instructions in the suttas, but are relying on the commentarial tradition and *Visuddhimagga* for guidance. They may reference such suttas as the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* and the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, but these suttas are viewed through the eyes of the commentaries, especially through the interpretation as given in the *Visuddhimagga*.

After researching this question, we have concluded that there is a considerable gap between the original instructions and those in the commentaries. This illuminates why the method of *sutta*-based TWIM is markedly different from most other *vipassanā* methods. In order to explore this, we will briefly examine how commentary has interpreted the instructions on Mindfulness of Breathing as it developed through the centuries from the time of the Buddha to the writing of the *Visuddhimagga*.

Let us first look at a prominent western Bhikkhu of the twentieth century who based his method primarily on the commentarial tradition. This is the tradition he inherited from his teachers and which he endeavored to study and follow.

### **Ven. Ñānamoli demoted the suttas and promoted the commentaries as instructions for practice**

Bhikkhu Ñānamoli compiled a small book for his own personal use on the subject of mindfulness of breathing which was later published by Buddhist Publication Society (BPS) under the title of *Mindfulness of Breathing*. He compiled passages mainly from the

suttas, from the *Paṭisambhidhāmagga*, and from *Visuddhimagga*, as well as some other sources. Using the original *Ānāpānasati Sutta* and then reading Bhikkhu Ñānamoli's book, we can see a progression from the *samatha-vipassanā* of the suttas to the contemporary use of *ānāpānasati* as a concentration/*samatha* technique for developing absorption concentration leading to *vipassanā* practice at the next stage.

As his book indicated, during the course of his studies, Ven. Ñānamoli became aware of the divergences between the suttas and the commentaries. Rather than question the authority of the commentaries, he developed a way to account for such differences. Regarding the suttas and the commentarial tradition, Ven. Ñānamoli treats them as giving a different quality, type, or genre of information, with no substantial inconsistencies between them. In the forward to his book *Mindfulness of Breathing*, he explains,

In the *Vinaya* and *Sutta* Piṭakas, the description, or as it might be termed, “the statement,” of *ānāpānasati* appears as a fixed formula; it is repeated unchanged in many different *suttas*. Instructions for the ‘practice’ are detailed in the Ven. Buddhaghosa’s work, the *Visuddhimagga*. The canonical work, the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, a technical work dealing with the analysis of different kinds of knowledge, devotes a self-contained treatise to it, the *Ānāpānakathā*, which could be called the ‘Theoretical Analysis’.<sup>253</sup>

There you have it. In one stroke of the pen, the original *sutta* instructions are demoted from being instruction to being a “statement” that there is, indeed, a practice of Mindfulness of Breathing. For the theory of the practice, he recommends going to the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, and for the instructions on how to actually do the practice, he recommends going to the *Visuddhimagga*.

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<sup>253</sup> Ñānamoli, Ven., **Mindfulness of Breathing**. (Kandy, Buddhist Publication Society, 2015), p. vii.

What Ven. Ñānamoli did with this deftness of intellect is not really different from what the tradition itself did, perhaps more unconsciously, over a period of centuries. The tradition has also demoted the suttas away from being instructions for practice and now looks to the commentaries for the actual “how to”, as well as for the correct interpretation of the original *sutta* instructions.

As long as there is no discrepancy in the three versions of the practice (the “statement” that there is a practice in the suttas, the theoretical analysis in the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, and the actual instructions for practice in the *Visuddhimagga*), there is no problem. But if there is, indeed, a change that has been made in the original practice in the transition from *sutta* to *Visuddhimagga*, such a change is either ignored or given consent by Ven. Ñānamoli’s statement, and by the tradition in general.

It is rather obvious that the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* and the *Visuddhimagga* treat the subject of *ānāpānasati* differently. Why is this not mentioned by Ven. Ñānamoli? I believe it is likely a case of Ven. Ñānamoli affirming the prevailing attitude of Theravāda Buddhism at the time of his writing (mid-twentieth century). The virtually unchallenged assumption at that time was that the *Visuddhimagga* represented the authentic teaching of the Buddha passed down by Ven. Buddhaghosa, and that if any changes had been made they were merely utilitarian and in no way detracted from the essence of the original teaching. The same attitude is still predominant.

### **Examining the continuity and divergence from the suttas to the Paṭisambhidāmagga**

In the above passage, Ven. Ñānamoli mentioned not only the well-known *Visuddhimagga*, but also the lesser known *Paṭisambhidāmagga*. As this work forms a link between the time of the suttas and that of Ven. Buddhaghosa, we can thereby trace the outlines of the development of the method of *ānāpānasati* by giving it a brief examination.

The *Paṭisambhidāmagga* is the twelfth book of the *Khuddaka Nikāya* and is traditionally attributed to Ven. Sāriputta. However, it was composed in all likelihood some centuries after Sāriputta's passing. It is variously dated to third century BCE (A.K. Warder) and Second Century CE (Oscar Von Hinuber). L.S. Cousins believes Warder's date to be more accurate.<sup>254</sup> In either case, chronologically it falls between the time of the suttas and the time of Buddhaghosa.

The tendency towards analysis and the breaking of the practice into parts is evident in the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*. It also tends towards complexity. For example, the practitioner is to develop the sixteen-based mindfulness of breathing concentration which results in more than two hundred different kinds of knowledge, which are listed by category.<sup>255</sup> This is perhaps to be expected from a work titled *The Path of Analysis* which was composed in the era of the composition of the *Abhidhamma*. It is an attempt to gather the widespread references in the suttas and systematize them into one convenient book. In this endeavor, the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* is anticipating the method of *Abhidhamma*.

### **The Paṭisambhidāmagga seems to indicate an open, aware jhāna which is a union of samatha and vipassanā**

*Paṭisambhidāmagga* is remarkably true to the original *Ānāpānasati Sutta* in that it goes through the *sutta* line by line as commentary, points out the many insights to be gained from the practice, and seems to advocate a mode of concentration that allows the practice to be fully integrated with *satipaṭṭhāna* and for insight to develop. As such it seems to predate the time when Buddhist meditation was shifting from tranquil wisdom *jhāna* to absorption concentration *jhāna*. This is difficult to ascertain merely from the language that is used, as it is primarily a systematization of the *sutta* teachings. We do not know exactly how the practice was being

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<sup>254</sup> <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Patisambhidamagga>, accessed Oct. 2017.

<sup>255</sup> Ñānamoli, Op. cit., p.47

applied in real life at this time. Here is a typical quote on the subject of *ānāpānasati*,

For one who knows one-pointedness and non-distractedness of mind by means of long in-breaths and long out-breaths, feelings are known as they arise, known as they appear, known as they subside. Perceptions are known as they arise, known as they appear, known as they subside. Applied thoughts are known as they arise, known as they appear, known as they subside.<sup>256</sup>

The language here is reminiscent of *Anupada Sutta, One by One as They Occurred*, MN 111. *Anupada Sutta* indicates open awareness while in *jhāna*, and we can see the same in this passage from the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*.

*Paṭisambhidāmagga* is indicating open awareness in *jhāna* while practicing *ānāpānasati*. This indicates the object of meditation is not being held with intense one-pointed absorption concentration, in such a way as to exclude awareness of the rising and passing of the aggregates. It suggests a collectedness of mind approach, which allows a wider awareness than only holding the object of meditation. *Paṭisambhidāmagga* is indicating tranquil aware *jhāna*, following the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*.

In later passages, while performing Mindfulness of Breathing, the meditator observes body, mind, the five aggregates, mind objects, and more.<sup>257</sup> Again, this indicates collectedness of mind, in which the object of meditation is being used in such a way as to tame the restless mind, but nothing is being suppressed. *Paṭisambhidāmagga* is indicating a middle way of concentration, not too tight, not too loose.

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<sup>256</sup> Ibid, p. 61, v. 15. We are using Ven. Nāṇamoli's translation in **Mindfulness of Breathing**.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid, p. 75, v. 208.

In all methods including TWIM, non-distraction is highly prized. TWIM insists that such non-distraction be due to the letting go of and weakening of craving, not through its suppression. These are two very different approaches to the desired outcome of non-distraction of mind. In particular, the two approaches differ markedly in their handling of the arising of hindrances. We will discuss this in later sections.

The *Paṭisambhidāmagga* is loyal to the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* tradition in that it generally attempts a systematization of what is already given in the *sutta* rather than attempting to innovate or provide an alternative practice. We cannot know with certainty how the actual practice of *ānāpānasati* was being done at the time the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* was composed, but it appears that changes from the original tranquil aware *jhāna* approach to *ānāpānasati* were minimal.

### **The Paṭisambhidāmagga introduces an innovation, concentrating on the sensation of the breath at the tip of the nose**

One significant innovation that *Paṭisambhidāmagga* does employ is selecting the sensation of the breath at the nose tip as the point of awareness during *ānāpānasati*. This is introduced through a simile of a woodcutter sawing a felled log. In this simile, the workman is sawing a felled tree by running his blade back and forth over the piece of wood. The passage is as follows,

It is as though a man were to cut with a saw a tree trunk placed on level ground. His mindfulness is established by the teeth of the saw at the point where they come into contact with the tree trunk, without his giving attention to the teeth of the saw as they approach and recede, although he is not unaware of

these; and he manifests endeavor, accomplishes the task, achieves distinction.<sup>258</sup>

What we notice in this simile is that the woodcutter is aware of the sensation of the blade making contact with the wood as it glides across the wood. This is his point of attention, but he is not focusing on the point of attention to the exclusion of other sensation related to the action of sawing. The full swing of the saw back and forth, to and fro, is not the point of attention, but he is “not unaware” of these actions and sensations. His awareness is open rather than closed and is not narrowly or exclusively focused. However, he has selected a particular sensation to be the point of attention, which befits the job of sawing. This selection of a particular point of focus is not to be found in the *sutta* accounts and we may deem it an innovation. But it is not yet a method of intense concentration to the exclusion of all else.

Thus, the well-known method of awareness of the sensation of the breath at the tip of the nose is introduced into Buddhist meditation. This method was later picked up in the *Visuddhimagga*, and by many contemporary *vipassanā* methods, such as that of S.N. Goenka. In the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, this method of concentration has not tended fully towards one-pointed absorption concentration, as the awareness has not been narrowed down to a single point. Awareness is still open. By the time of the *Visuddhimagga*, the narrowing of the focus to a single point is combined with an intense focus on that point which means the exclusion of other sensations.

### **Possible reasons for the development of this innovation**

Why this innovation? In the suttas, the Buddha was content to state that the meditator “knows he is breathing”. However, it is not stated how that knowing comes about. Clearly, such knowing would involve sensation (*phassa*). Breathing is physiologically a complex

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<sup>258</sup> Ñāṇamoli, Op. cit., p. 54, quoting section 22 of *Paṭisambhidāmagga Ānāpānakathā*.



phenomenon, and there are a wide range of sensations involved. The Buddha left the instructions such that no particular sensation would be selected as the point of attention. In the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, the Buddha instructs to experience the whole body with the flow of the in and out breath. This is not a narrow point of concentration. However, some practitioners might find this to be imprecise and want to know on which sensation or set of sensations to focus.

Selecting the sensation of breathing at the tip of the nose is the solution offered in the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* for those who want or need more precision in the focus on sensation. As long as this is combined with maintenance of a tranquil (relaxed) and aware state of mind, there need not be any fundamental conflict with the technique as given by the Buddha. With the sensation of the breath providing a focus for the collecting of mind, other phenomena can arise, and attention can be given to the movement of mind's attention. Unwholesome states of mind can be recognized and released and wholesome states cultivated.

This might still be done with the attention on the sensation at the tip of the nose, as long as the attention is not held too tightly. With this innovation of the tip of the nose, the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* is tending towards a more absorbed form of concentration, but it is not yet a full-absorption method. There are still elements of open awareness while holding the object of meditation.

### **The Paṭisambhidāmagga is tending towards intense concentration as a method**

The narrowing of attention to a single sensation invites a further narrowing process. Rather than being open to whatever arises, so that craving can be recognized and released, the thrust of the meditation can easily slip towards absorption concentration. With the attainment of absorption, a blissful state of mind free of craving can be attained. This can be very alluring.

This makes it likely that in the time of the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, some meditators, using the innovative method of concentrating on the sensation of the breath at the tip of the nose, went into a deeply peaceful state through attaining absorption concentration. It is possible they would have promoted that method. In addition, the single-pointed concentration method was the favored one in the brahmanical meditative traditions, and this likely influenced the Buddhist tradition. So, by the time of Ven. Buddhaghosa, this method may have become the dominant one.

### **Further development of the method of single-pointed concentration in the *Visuddhimagga*, the simile of the calf tied to the post**

Ven. Buddhaghosa was aware of the treatment of the meditation on the breath in the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* and took a further step towards full absorption concentration. In Ven. Buddhaghosa's treatment of *ānāpānasati* in Chapter VIII of his *Path of Purification*, he treats *ānāpānasati* as a tool to go into *jhāna* (that is, as a method of *samatha*) by way of one-pointed concentration on a single sensation leading to absorption. He uses an interesting simile to illustrate how this is done. Realizing that the mind is wild and unruly, he recommends “tying” the mind to the breath in order to tame it. He gives the simile in this way,

Now suppose a cowherd wanted to tame a calf that had been reared on wild cow's milk, he would take the calf away from the cow and tie it up apart with a rope to a stout post dug in the ground; then the calf might dash to and fro, but being unable to get away, it would eventually sit down or lie down by the post, so too, when a bhikkhu wants to tame his own mind which has long been spoiled by being reared on visible data, etc., as object for its food and drink, he should take it away from visible data, etc., as object and bring

it to the forest or to the root of a tree or to an empty place and tie it up there to the post of in-breaths and out-breaths with the rope of mindfulness. And so, his mind may then dash to and fro when it no longer gets the objects it was formerly used to, but being unable to break the rope of mindfulness and get away, it sits down, lies down, by that object under the influence of access and absorption.<sup>259 260</sup>

The simile of tying a calf to a post suggests an approach to mindfulness as a forcible suppression of the mind and of distractions during meditation. Ven. Buddhaghosa makes clear that he is recommending a suppression of the hindrances through using the object of meditation to gain access and absorption. Tying the mind to the breath in this manner produces one-pointed concentration leading to absorption concentration. This is the *Visuddhimagga* method of taming the mind.

This simile of mindfulness as a post or stake to which mind is tethered may have found its origin in the *Samyutta Nikāya*. However, the example as given in the Simile of the Six Animals (*Chappānakasuttaṃ*) in the *Salāyatanaṣamyutta* does not suggest access or absorption concentration, but rather a mindfulness in which sensory phenomena is not excluded but rather is overcome through sharp mindfulness and allaying of craving. The Buddha illustrates mindfulness as a post or pillar as follows,

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<sup>259</sup> Buddhaghosa, **The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga**. trans. by Ven Ñāṇamoli, Kandy, Buddhist Publication Society, 1991, VIII.153 [PTS 29], p. 262.

<sup>260</sup> *Tasmā seyyathāpi nāma gopo kūṭadhenuyā sabbam khūraṃ pivitvā vaḍḍhitam kūṭavacchaṃ dametukāmo dhenuto apanetvā ekamante mahantaṃ thambhaṃ nikhañitvā tattha yottena bandhēyya athassa so vaccho ito cito ca vipphanditvā palāyitum asakkonto tameva thambhaṃ upanisīdeyya vā upanipajjeyya vā, evameva imināpi bhikkhunā dīgharattaṃ rūpārammaṇādirasapānavaḍḍhitam duṭṭhacittaṃ dametukāmena rūpādiārammaṇato apanetvāraññaṃ vā rukkhamūlaṃ vā suññāgāraṃ vā pavisitvā1 tattha assāsapassāsathamhe satiyottena bandhitabbaṃ. Evamassa taṃ cittaṃ itocito ca vipphanditvāpi pubbe āciññārammaṇaṃ alabhamānaṃ satiyettaṃ chinditvā palāyitum asakkontaṃ tamevārammaṇaṃ upacārappanāvasena upanisīdati ceva upanipajjati ca. PTS 269, CS edition.*

Suppose, Bhikkhus, a man would catch six animals-with different domains and different feeding grounds-and tie them with a strong rope. He would catch a snake, a crocodile, a bird, a dog, a jackal, and a monkey, and tie them each with a strong rope. Having done so, he would bind them to a strong post or pillar. Then those six animals with different domains and different feeding grounds would each pull in the direction of its own feeding ground and domain. The snake would pull one way, thinking, "Let me enter an anthill." The crocodile would pull another way thinking, "Let me enter the water." The bird would pull another way, thinking, "Let me fly into the sky." The dog would pull another way, thinking, "Let me enter a village." The jackal would pull another way, thinking, "Let me enter a charnel ground." The monkey would pull another way, thinking, "Let me enter a forest."

Now when these six animals become worn out and fatigued, they would be dominated by the one among them that was the strongest; they would submit to it and come under its control. So, too, bhikkhus, when a bhikkhu has not developed and cultivated mindfulness directed to the body, the eye pulls in the direction of agreeable forms and disagreeable forms are repulsive; the ear pulls in the direction of agreeable sounds and disagreeable sounds are repulsive; the nose pulls in the direction of agreeable odours, and disagreeable odours are repulsive, the tongue pulls in the direction of agreeable tastes and disagreeable tastes are repulsive; the body pulls in the direction of agreeable tactile objects and disagreeable tactile objects are repulsive; the mind pulls in the direction of agreeable mental phenomena and disagreeable mental phenomena are repulsive.

It is in such a way that there is unrestraint.

And how, bhikkhus, is there restraint? Here, having seen a form with the eye, a bhikkhu is not intent upon a pleasing form and not repelled by a displeasing form. He dwells having set up mindfulness of the body, with a measureless mind, and he understands as it really is that liberation of the mind, liberation by wisdom, wherein those evil unwholesome states cease without remainder. Having heard a sound with the ear... Having smelled an agreeable smell with the nose... Having tasted an agreeable taste with the tongue... Having cognized a mental phenomenon with the mind, he is not intent upon a pleasing mental phenomenon and not repelled by displeasing mental phenomenon. He dwells having set up mindfulness of the body, with a measureless mind, and he understands as it really is that liberation of mind, liberation by wisdom, wherein those evil unwholesome states cease without remainder. It is in such a way that there is restraint.<sup>261 262</sup>

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<sup>261</sup> Bodhi, **The Connected Discourses of the Buddha**. SN.35.247 (10) [PTS IV 199-200], pp. 1255-6.

<sup>262</sup> *Seyyathāpi bhikkhave puriso chappāṇake gahetvā nānā visaye nānāgocare dalhāya bandheyya: ahiṃ gahetvā dalhāya rajjuyā bandheyya, suṃsumāraṃ gahetvā dalhāya rajjuyā bandheyya, pakkhiṃ gahetvā dalhāya rajjuyā bandhayya, kukkuraṃ gahetvā dalhāya rajjuyā bandheyya, sigālaṃ gahetvā dalhāya rajjuyā bandheyya, makkaṭaṃ gahetvā dalhāya rajjuyā bandheyya; dalhāya rajjuyā bandhitvā majjhe gaṇaṭhiṃ karitvā ossajjeyya, aṭha kho te bhikkhave chappāṇakā nānā visayā nānā gocarā sakāṃ sakāṃ gocaravisayaṃ āviñjeyyūṃ, Ahi āviñjeyya vammikaṃ pavekkhāmīti, suṃsumāro āviñjeyya udakaṃ pavekkhāmīti, pakkhi āviñjeyya ākāsaṃ ḍessāmīti, kukkuro āviñjeyya gāmaṃ pavekkhāmīti, sigālo āviñjeyya sīvathikaṃ pavekkhāmīti, makkaṭo āviñjeyya vanaṃ pavekkhāmīti. Yadā kho te bhikkhave chappāṇakā jhattā assu kilantā, aṭha yo nesam pāṇako-Balavatāro assa, tassa te anuppavatteyyūṃ, anuvidhāyeyyūṃ, Vasam gaccheyyūṃ. Evameva kho bhikkhave yassa kassaci bhikkhuno kāyagatā sati abhāvitā abahulikā, taṃ cakkhu āviñjati manāpikesu rūpesu, amanāpikassa rūpā paṭikkulā honti, sotam āviñjati manāpikesu saddesu, amanāpikassa saddā paṭikkulā honti, ghānaṃ āviñjati manāpikesu gandhesu, amanāpikassa gandhā paṭikkulā honti, jivhā āviñjati manāpikesu rasesu, amanāpikassa rasā paṭikkulā honti, kāyo āviñjati manāpikesu phoṭṭhabbesu, amanāpikassa phoṭṭhabbā paṭikkulā honti, mano āviñjati manāpikesu dhammesu, amanāpikassa dhammā paṭikkulā honti. Evaṃ kho bhikkhave asaṃvaro hoti. Kathaṅca bhikkhave saṃvaro hoti:*

This passage is not suggestive of full absorption in the object of meditation. The bhikkhu is experiencing the arising of sensory phenomena at the six sense gates, but through keen mindfulness is not swayed into identifying with those sensations. Keen mindfulness is the alternative to suppression through absorption. With the persistent application of mindfulness, craving is allayed, insight is gained, and liberating wisdom arises. This simile points to a harmonious *samatha-vipassanā* practice, based on mindfulness of body. Mindfulness of body includes *ānāpānasati*. The TWIM method of mindfulness of breathing is in keeping with the approach suggested in this *sutta*.

### **The importance of taming the mind and various approaches to doing so**

The simile of the post speaks directly to the need to tame the mind. All methods of *samatha-vipassanā*, can agree on the importance of taming the mind, and all methods of *ānāpānasati* are

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*idha bhikkhave bhikkhu cakkhunā rūpaṃ disvā piyarūpe rūpe nādhimuccati, appiyarūpe rūpe na vyāpajjati, upaṭṭhitakāyasati ca viharati appamāṇacetaso, tañca cetovimuttiṃ paññāvimuttiṃ yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti yatthassa te uppannā pāpakā akusalā dhammā aparisesā nirujjhanti. Sotena saddaṃ sutvā piyarūpe sadde nādhimuccati, appiyarūpe sadde na vyāpajjati, upaṭṭhitakāyasati ca viharati appamāṇacetaso, tañca cetovimuttiṃ paññāvimuttiṃ yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti yatthassa te uppannā pāpakā akusalā dhammā aparisesā nirujjhanti. Ghānena gandhaṃ ghāyivā piyarūpe gandhe nādhimuccati, appiyarūpe gandhe na vyāpajjati, upaṭṭhitakāyasati ca viharati appamāṇacetaso, tañca cetovimuttiṃ paññāvimuttiṃ yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti yatthassa te uppannā pāpakā akusalā dhammā aparisesā nirujjhanti. Jivhāya rasaṃ sāyivā piyarūpe rase nādhimuccati, appiyarūpe rase na vyāpajjati, upaṭṭhitakāyasati ca viharati appamāṇacetaso, tañca cetovimuttiṃ paññāvimuttiṃ yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti yatthassa te uppannā pāpakā akusalā dhammā aparisesā nirujjhanti. Manasā dhammaṃ viññāya piyarūpe dhamme nādhimuccati, appiyarūpe dhamme na vyāpajjati, upaṭṭhitakāyasati ca viharati appamāṇacetaso, tañca cetovimuttiṃ paññāvimuttiṃ yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti yatthassa te uppannā pāpakā akusalā dhammā aparisesā nirujjhanti. SN.35.247 (10), PTS IV 198-199, CS edition.*

aimed to do so. The Buddha speaks directly to the importance of taming the mind in the *Ānguttara Nikāya*,

Bhikkhus, I do not see even one other thing, that, when untamed, unguarded, unprotected, and unrestrained, leads to such great harm as the mind. The mind, when untamed, unguarded, unprotected, and unrestrained, leads to great harm.

Bhikkhus, I do not see even one other thing that, when tamed, guarded, protected, and restrained, leads to such great good as the mind. The mind, when tamed, guarded, protected, and restrained, leads to great good.<sup>263 264</sup>

Taming, guarding, protecting, and restraining the mind is an agreed upon necessity for letting go of the unwholesome and bringing up the wholesome on a regular basis. The question is how to skillfully do so? Ven. Buddhaghosa's simile of the calf tied to the post is an appealing one but then a question arises about this simile. What happens if the knot that ties the calf to the post slips and the calf is no longer bound to the post? What will the calf do? We can all surmise that the calf will wander off back into the wilds. The calf is not really tamed; it is only constrained by the rope. When the rope is gone, so is the calf.

Thus, it is with a mind constrained but not necessarily tamed by being tied to an object of meditation through force of concentration. The sources of wildness are not necessarily fundamentally changed by the

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<sup>263</sup> Bodhi, **The Numerical Discourses of the Buddha**. AN 1.IV.39-40 [PTS I 8], p. 95.

<sup>264</sup> *Nāhaṃ bhikkhave aññaṃ ekadhammampi samanupassāmi, yaṃ evaṃ adantaṃ aguttaṃ arakkhitaṃ asaṃvutaṃ mahato anathāya saṃvattati, yathayidaṃ cittaṃ. Cittaṃ bhikkhave adantaṃ aguttaṃ arakkhitaṃ asaṃvutaṃ mahato anathāya saṃvattatīti.*

*Nāhaṃ bhikkhave aññaṃ ekadhammampi samanupassāmi, yaṃ evaṃ dantaṃ guttaṃ rakkhitaṃ saṃvutaṃ mahato athāya saṃvattati, yathayidaṃ cittaṃ. Cittaṃ bhikkhave dantaṃ guttaṃ rakkhitaṃ saṃvutaṃ mahato athāya saṃvattatīti.* AN 1.IV.39-40, PTS I 8, CS edition.

concentration. They are suppressed. When the force of concentration returns, they will likely emerge from their hiding place.

However, it is possible that if the calf is tied to the post for long enough, perhaps months or years, it may stay in the general area of the post even should the knot that binds it be released. This would be due to force of habit, and perhaps also due to having forgotten some of its previous ways. This is how absorption concentration may affect a more permanent change. But this generally takes a very long time to accustom the mind to the new regimen in order to affect such change.

So, to carry the analogy of the calf to absorption meditation, we might say that persistent and long-term training may produce more permanent change through forming new habits of mind and gradually forgetting the older ones. However, even reform of habitual action may not eliminate the deeper sources of unruliness, as long as craving has not been reduced or eliminated.

The TWIM method of *ānāpānasati* aims to eliminate craving through the harmony of *samatha* and the insight of *vipassanā*. In the case of TWIM, the calf has not been narrowly tied to the post, but given a large, spacious pasture with plenty of food. The calf will not wish to wander back into the wilds.

## **The innovation of counting the breath in the Visuddhimagga**

Let us continue to examine the main points of the method of taming the mind offered in the *Visuddhimagga*. After Buddhaghosa introduces the importance of taming the mind through fixing it on the object of meditation (leading to absorption), he faithfully follows the text of the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* and *Paṭisambhidāmagga* for some pages. Then he declares that most of this is for the beginner (the first



tetrad of four tetrads<sup>265</sup>) and then proceeds to give a new explanation not found in the *sutta* or in *Paṭisambhidāmagga*. In Vsm.VIII.189 he introduces the stages of giving attention of which counting the breath is listed as the first. Counting the breath has no other purpose than to firmly fix the mind by force of concentration on the breath. This is to be carried on until without counting, mindfulness is settled on the breath. (VIII. 195).

If we can step back and look at the overall process at work here in *Visuddhimagga*, first, a practice is analyzed into components some of which are diagnosed as being too difficult or impossible for the average practitioner, then a new practice or set of practices is introduced, some for the slow learner, and others for the more advanced. Many of these practices, like the counting of the breath, are innovations unknown to the *sutta* instructions.

Ven. Analayo in his book *Satipaṭṭhāna* has noticed this process in the *Visuddhimagga* and has commented on it thusly,

According to Vism. 277, and 287-90, the second and third triads are practicable for jhāna-attainers only. Vism. suggests two alternatives, either actual development of jhāna, or insightful contemplation after emerging from jhāna. Nevertheless, both of these two would only be practicable for someone able to enter absorption. The net result is, that for someone unable to attain jhāna, a considerable part of the Buddha's exposition on mindfulness of breathing moves beyond reach. Quite possibly because of this, additional methods came into being for the less proficient in concentration, such as counting the breaths (cf. Vism 278-83 for detailed instructions). Instructions of this type are not found anywhere in the discourses of the Buddha. Though counting the breaths may be helpful to the

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<sup>265</sup> The *Visuddhimagga* follows the organization of the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, which gives sixteen aspects of the meditation of mindfulness of breathing, organized into four groups, or tetrads.

newcomer to mindfulness of breathing, it does to some extent constitute a change in the mood of this contemplation, since sustained counting can dull the mind (which is the reason underlying the traditional advice to use counting exercises to conquer insomnia) and also tends to stimulate the conceptual activity of the mind instead of quietening it.<sup>266</sup>

The implications of this are surprising. A method of breath meditation which the Buddha gave as practicable for almost anyone has been altered into a form where its advanced levels are no longer available to many practitioners and the beginning levels are such, if Ven. Anālayo's assessment is correct, that they tend to dull the mind, lead to sleep, and to increased conceptualization. The *Visuddhimagga* seems to have analyzed the meditation as given in the suttas as being too difficult, and then changed it to a different and not necessarily improved version.

### **Watching the sensation at the tip of the nose like the gatekeeper of a town**

Buddhaghosa next analyzes the breath into three sections (Vsm. VIII.197), the navel (wind issuing out), the heart (in the middle) and the nose tip. The meditator is meant to feel the sensation of the breath in those places. Finally, that is analyzed to be too difficult as there is too much to pay attention to, so the point of concentration is located only at the tip of the nose. This is likened to the gate keeper (Vsm. VIII.200) who cannot keep track of everything in town but by placing himself at the gate and observing keenly, can keep track of all who enter or leave.

The simile of the gatekeeper first appears in the commentary to the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* which is part of the text of the *Visuddhimagga*. It is one of three similes used to illustrate the proper use of attention on the breath. The others are the simile of the lame man and the

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<sup>266</sup> Anālayo, Bhikkhu, **Satipaṭṭhāna**. (Kandy, Buddhist Publication Society, 2010, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition), p.133 f. n.

simile of the saw. The latter simile appears in *Paṭisambhidāmagga* previous to the composition of *Visuddhimagga*, but as we have seen, there is a notable difference in the way the simile is employed in the *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, namely that the awareness is still open and not exclusive.

Many traditions favor this method of using the tip of the nose, while others prefer the sensation of the rise and fall of the abdomen. In either case, they are relying on an innovation introduced by the *Paṭisambhidāmagga* and developed further in the commentary to the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* in the *Visuddhimagga*. All of this was enshrined by Ven. Buddhaghosa in the *Visuddhimagga* and is now accepted as standard practice. Only a few methods, such as TWIM, follow another approach. TWIM would also consider that the *Visuddhimagga* method is an innovation not contained in the suttas.

If the goal is to concentrate the mind and gain absorption *jhāna*, exclusive one-pointed concentration on a single sensation such as that of the breath at the tip of the nose is a very effective technique. The breath lends itself well to such a meditation as it is always with us, and is rather neutral in that it does not bring up a lot of associated feelings or proliferation of mind. By narrowing the focus to one sensation only, the meditator will not get lost in the flood of sensations. With diligent practice, the mind becomes absorbed and the concentration is very deep. Eventually, there will be few distractions to emerge in the mind.

### **The innovation of emergence of a nimitta through concentration on the breath**

Following Buddhaghosa, now that absorption concentration has been achieved a sign will appear. As Buddhaghosa writes in *Vsm.* VIII.204,

When someone gives his attention to this meditation subject, sometimes it is not long before the sign arises in him, and then the fixing, in other words,

absorption adorned with the rest of the jhāna factors,  
is achieved.<sup>267</sup>

The sign is the *nimitta*, which Buddhaghosa introduces here as an outcome of using *ānāpānasati* as an absorption concentration meditation. First there is the preliminary sign, *parikamma nimitta*, which is the initial fixing of concentration exclusively on the object of meditation. This is the level of preparatory concentration, *parikamma samādhi*. This is followed by the learning sign, *uggaha nimitta*, which is a result of steadier, more intense concentration. For the diligent meditator, this is followed by the counterpart sign, *patibhāga nimitta*, which is an indication of access concentration, *upacāra samādhi*.<sup>268 269</sup>

All of this is innovation and is never mentioned in the suttas. It is uncertain if Ven. Buddhaghosa inherited these techniques from tradition or if they were original to the *Visuddhimagga*. We may assume that the commentaries on the suttas mentioned in the *Visuddhimagga* are from the commentaries translated from ancient Sinhala into Pali by Buddhaghosa. We must remember that the nine hundred or a thousand years passing from the time of the Buddha to the time Ven. Buddhaghosa means that innovations unknown to the *sutta* tradition or to the Buddha himself could have become quite old and hallowed by tradition by the time they were transmitted to Ven. Buddhaghosa. Beyond the commentaries on the suttas, the various innovations as relates to the practice of *ānāpānasati* could have been introduced by Ven. Buddhaghosa himself.

There is much more that is new and innovative in Buddhaghosa's description. Overall, the practice becomes quite complex, and very difficult. It is possible to achieve such absorption *jhāna* through this method, but Buddhaghosa himself acknowledges the difficulty and that this path will be for the very few. As he explains in the *Visuddhimagga*,

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<sup>267</sup> Buddhaghosa, **The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga**. Vsm. VIII.204, p. 275.

<sup>268</sup> Sole-Leris, *Tranquility and Insight*, pp. 27-30.

<sup>269</sup> Buddhaghosa, Op. cit., Vsm. IV.126, p. 148.

Although any meditation subject, no matter what, is successful only in one who is mindful and fully aware, yet any meditation subject other than this gets more evident as he goes on giving it his attention. But this mindfulness of breathing is difficult, difficult to develop, a field in which only the minds of Buddhas, Pacceka Buddhas, and Buddhas' sons are at home. It is no trivial matter nor can it be cultivated by trivial persons. In proportion as continued attention is given to it, it becomes more peaceful and subtle. So strong mindfulness and understanding are needed here.<sup>270</sup>

Buddhaghosa quotes from *Ānāpānasati Sutta* (MN 118:26, PTS MN iii.84) in support of his method of absorption concentration *jhāna*, as follows,

This is why the Blessed One said; “Bhikkhus, I do not say of one who is forgetful, who is not fully aware, [that he practices] development of mindfulness of breathing.”<sup>271</sup> (Vsm. VIII.210)

The need for keen mindfulness is agreed upon by all teachers of meditation. The question is exactly what is that mindfulness, and how best to apply that mindfulness in order to achieve the desired results. In this chapter of *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa lays out the procedure for absorption concentration as the basis for a shift to *vipassanā* meditation.

### **Tradition has assumed that Ven. Buddhaghosa was faithfully following the sutta account and explaining it more fully**

Ven. Ñāṇamoli likely took for granted that the *Visuddhimagga* was giving in detail the method the Buddha had given in terse language some nine or ten centuries previous to Buddhaghosa. Even when Ven.

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<sup>270</sup> Buddhaghosa, Op. cit., Vsm. VIII.211, p. 276.

<sup>271</sup> Ibid, Vsm. VIII.210, p. 276. (Brackets in above quote supplied by Ven. Ñāṇamoli).

Vimalaramsi began his twenty years of *vipassanā* training in Myanmar and elsewhere, there were no obvious alternatives to absorption concentration being talked about, written about or verbally taught to beginners of meditation. At that time, it was nearly universally assumed that the Buddha had taught absorption concentration.

This assumption is beginning to be challenged. With the dissemination of TWIM and a handful of other techniques, there is an alternative way of applying mind's attention that is being offered to those who do not wish to use *ānāpānasati* as a way to attain deep absorption concentration, but rather wish to develop an open, aware method of attention.

Absorption concentration is, by Buddhaghosa's own admission, a difficult path that will remain accessible for the few who choose to go through its system of rigorous and sometimes severe training. It is very helpful that more accessible alternative approaches are being brought forward. In the case of TWIM, this method of attending to the breath while opening and relaxing is proving to be a successful method for many practitioners.

The suitability of a method of meditation for a particular person cannot be judged by scholarship or research but only by actual practice of the method itself. However, it can be helpful to people to understand the theoretical and perhaps the historical underpinnings of any method. This may inform a person's choice about which method to take up for practice.

### **A difficult practice likely means that few will attain success, and few will attain Nibbāna**

It is also clear from the description of the path as laid out in *Visuddhimagga* that the path has become complex and quite difficult. This has likely resulted in the widespread cultural assumption within the Theravāda that the attainment of *Nibbāna* is extremely rare even among the sangha and impossible for lay practitioners. This can be

assessed as a cultural assumption because it is an attitude and belief that has no basis in the suttas. If we take the suttas as our guide, any dedicated practitioner can attain *Nibbāna*, whether ordained or lay, male or female. If the path is not difficult for the dedicated practitioner, what is it that is needed to attain *Nibbāna*?

## The qualities needed to reach Nibbāna

The Buddha clearly answers this question. In the *Mahāsakuludāyi Sutta* the Buddha emphasizes the essential qualities in a disciple of awakening enthusiasm, making effort, arousing energy, exerting the mind, and striving. Then he teaches the Four Bases of Spiritual Power, The Five Faculties, the Five Powers, the Seven Enlightenment Factors and the Noble Eightfold Path. The teaching of the Five Faculties clearly shows how early success in meditation gives renewed energy to practice. He explains as follows,

Again, Uddayin, I have proclaimed to my disciples the way to develop the five spiritual faculties. Here a bhikkhu develops the faculty of faith, which leads to peace, leads to awakening. He develops the faculty of energy which leads to peace, leads to awakening. He develops the faculty of mindfulness which leads to peace, which leads to awakening. He develops the faculty of concentration which leads to peace, leads to enlightenment. He develops the faculty of wisdom, which leads to peace, leads to enlightenment. And thereby, many disciples of mine abide having reached the consummation and perfection of direct knowledge.<sup>272 273</sup>

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<sup>272</sup> Bodhi, **The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha**. MN 77:18 (4) [PTS ii 12], p.637.

<sup>273</sup> *Puna ca paraṃ udāyi, akkhātā mayā sāvānaṃ paṭipadā. Yathāpaṭipannā me sāvakā pañcendriyāni bhāventi. Idhūdāyi bhikkhu saddhindriyaṃ bhāveti upasamaḡāmiṃ sambodhagāmiṃ. Viriyendriyaṃ bhāveti upasamaḡāmiṃ sambodhagāmiṃ. Satindriyaṃ bhāveti upasamaḡāmiṃ sambodhagāmiṃ. Samādhindriyaṃ bhāveti upasamaḡāmiṃ sambodhagāmiṃ. Paññindriyaṃ bhāveti upasamaḡāmiṃ sambodhagāmiṃ. Tatra ca pana me sāvakā bahū abhiññāvosāna pāramippattā viharanti.* MN 77:18, PTS ii 12, CS edition.

Ven. Vimalaramsi comments on the faculties of faith and energy and how a natural progression of practice takes place, giving more energy and enthusiasm to the practice of the person,

The faculty of faith is also called the faculty of confidence. As a meditator becomes interested in letting go of the pain of living, their curiosity becomes stronger. Thus, they begin to look for meditation teacher. If the meditator is fortunate enough to learn from a competent teacher who includes the teaching of how Dependent Origination actually occurs, they will begin to see some slight changes in the way they perceive the world.

As the meditator begins to see and to understand this through direct practice, their confidence will grow and then the meditator will use patience in their daily life! As a result, the meditator's enthusiasm towards the practice becomes more persistent and they will want to practice more often!

When one's confidence grows, he or she will naturally put more energy into practice. The meditator begins to sit a little longer and the mind becomes a little clearer.<sup>274</sup>

These Five Faculties also appear as the Five Powers once they become more automatic and accessible to the meditator. Then there are the Seven Awakening Factors. In the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* the Buddha lays out the conditions necessary for *Nibbāna*. They are the awakening factors of mindfulness (*sati*), investigation of dhammas (*dhammavicaya*), energy (*viriya*), joy (*pīti* which transforms into *muditā*), tranquility (*passadhi*), collectedness of mind (*samādhi*), and equanimity (*upekkhā*) coming into complete balance.

Of the above, the factors of mindfulness, investigation of dhammas, and energy come about due to the efforts of the meditator.

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<sup>274</sup> Vimalaramsi, **Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life**, pp. 178-179.



The factors of joy, tranquility, collectedness of mind, and equanimity arise as the result of proper practice, and actually give energy to the meditator. They add necessary balance to the practice due to the cultivation of the previous factors.

Constant attentiveness is needed to balance the above factors. The fruit will surely not come without sufficient effort. However, the practice does not have to be difficult if the instructions given by the Buddha are carefully and diligently followed.

### **Nibbāna is possible in this very life**

Fortunately, the ingrained attitude that *Nibbāna* is very difficult for *sangha* and impossible for lay people is changing. What is the motivation to practice if there is no hope of success? People need to hear from their teachers of meditation that both mundane and supramundane liberation from suffering in this life is, indeed, possible. That is the Third Noble Truth. Good news indeed.

As cited earlier in this book, TWIM teachers have no doubt that both ordained and lay meditators can, and do, attain *Nibbāna*. For those who fall short of that lofty attainment, deep levels of *jhāna* and insight can be attained. TWIM is encouraging rather than discouraging.

### **By following the original instructions on Mindfulness of Breathing in the suttas, TWIM makes the meditation more easily accessible to meditators**

The change in the mindfulness of breathing practice from the *sutta* version to the mode taught in the *Visuddhimagga* resulted in meditation becoming more difficult and complex, and in becoming a specialized occupation in the hands of a relatively few monks who treated it as a sort of arcane knowledge. The practice as taught in *Visuddhimagga* will continue to have its adherents and some will be successful in their practice.

For the practice to leave the realm of the arcane and enter into the everyday life of larger numbers of people whether ordained or lay, it may prove wise to return to the original instructions as laid out by the Buddha in the suttas. Part of the genius of the Buddha was in devising a path that was clearly laid out and not difficult to follow if the instructions were clearly adhered to by the diligent practitioner. In reviving the *sutta* instructions, TWIM shows promise of reopening the direct path to *Nibbāna*.

### **The TWIM sutta-based alternative to the Visuddhimagga method of Mindfulness of Breathing**

Having examined the trend of practice as laid out in the *Visuddhimagga*, we can now return to our examination of the TWIM method of Mindfulness of Breathing. We will continue to see ways in which, with regard to meditation, the two methods are significantly different.

If the TWIM method of *ānāpānasati* is not about gaining strong absorption concentration as a preliminary to entering *vipassanā* meditation, what does it offer? For the answer to this question, we can return to the original *sutta* itself which uses Mindfulness of Breathing as an integrated *samatha-vipassanā* meditation. Through practice of *ānāpānasati*, the TWIM meditator enters into the *jhānas* and while in *jhāna* practices *satipaṭṭhāna* and gains insight wisdom.

We have already quoted above section 15 of *Ānāpānasati Sutta* in which the Buddha states that when mindfulness of breathing is developed and cultivated it fulfills the Four Foundations of Mindfulness and the Seven Enlightenment Factors. When the Seven Enlightenment Factors are developed and cultivated, it enables true knowledge and deliverance.

If we look at the subsequent sections (17 through 22) of the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, the Buddha lays out a sequence of events in the mind of the meditator who is cultivating mindfulness of breathing.

First, the practitioner establishes mindfulness. This is followed by understanding that the breath is flowing in and out, long or short. The meditator experiences the whole body. He or she then relaxes the whole body. Joy and happiness are experienced. One then experiences and relaxes the mental formations. Then the mind is experienced and uplifted. The meditator then brings the mind to a productive level of collectedness, and liberates it. He or she contemplates impermanence, the arising, fading away, and cessation. The meditator contemplates relinquishment.

In sections 23 through 28, the meditator practices the Four Foundations of Mindfulness (*satipaṭṭhāna*) and there is some overlap with the previous section. The sequence goes as follows: The meditator understands that he or she is breathing and that the breath is long or short. He experiences the whole body. He relaxes the body. He contemplates the body (body as body). He is ardent, fully aware, and mindful. He lays aside covetousness and grief for the world. He experiences joy. He experiences pleasure. He experiences the mental formation. He relaxes the mental formation. He contemplates feelings. He experiences the mind. He gladdens the mind. He concentrates (collects) the mind. He liberates the mind. He contemplates impermanence, the arising, fading away and cessation. He contemplates relinquishment. He contemplates mind-objects. He sees with wisdom the abandoning of covetousness and grief. He looks on with equanimity.

**The account in the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* shows the harmony of *samatha* and *vipassanā*, and suggests that *satipaṭṭhāna* is practiced while in *jhāna***

A quick overview of the above sequential summary, taken from the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, shows the practice is composed of both *samatha* and *vipassanā* and that the meditator is practicing *satipaṭṭhāna* and gaining insight wisdom. The description suggests the meditator has reached at least the fourth *jhāna* with the appearance of strong equanimity (*upekkhā*). This progression assumes the meditator

is practicing with persistence, consistency, and increasing skill (sharpness of mindfulness).

### **Diligence, but not pushing too hard**

Bhante Vimalaramsi points out that consistency is important but one should never push too hard or be too hard on oneself. The jhānas will develop naturally as the practice progresses. He explains,

This is actually an incredibly easy practice and a simple way to develop the mind. It is alright if you happen to miss one in-breath or one out-breath at first. You should not put unnecessary pressure on yourself or criticize yourself. This might cause you to think how difficult this practice is, and it does take some getting used to before our practice becomes proficient. Thus, if you occasionally miss the in-breath and relaxing, or, and out-breath and relaxing, just let it go and catch the next in-breath or out-breath. Simple and easy, isn't it?

The jhānas (meditative stages of understanding) will appear by themselves as mind becomes calm and more peaceful. You do not have to push, force, or 'concentrate with a fixed mind'. Actually, the Buddha taught this most natural form of meditation to work for every type of personality or individual.<sup>275</sup>

We note here how Bhante is giving hope to the common person who applies these instructions. He refers to the practice as "simple and easy". The practice is neither arcane, complex, or difficult. To make progress requires effort and diligence, but the fruit of successful practice gives energy to the practice.

The *Ānāpānasati Sutta* does not give the standard description of the jhānas that is found in numerous places in the suttas but it lists many of the mental factors that arise naturally for the meditator as a result of going deeply into the practice as a result of the body

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<sup>275</sup> Vimalaramsi, **The Breath of Love**. pp. 80-81.

relaxing, mind opening and relaxing, and mindfulness becoming sharper. Due to all of this, the meditator also begins to understand how the process of the mind works, how we are creating our own suffering, and how that suffering can be alleviated. This is the beginning of insight wisdom and as the insights arise, the practitioner goes deeper into the various jhānas.

### **Seclusion from unwholesome states and the arising of joy**

The *Ānāpānasati Sutta* describes how the meditator is secluded from unwholesome states. We can surmise that this is not mere physical isolation into a quiet place. Anyone who has had a first experience of a meditation retreat in such a quiet place can readily vouch for the fact that the mind continues to be busy despite the quiet of the surroundings, and in many places the Buddha points out this very fact. So, here, the *sutta* is also talking about the choice to let go of worldly pursuits as well as the beginning stages of practice in which the mind begins to become quiet. At this stage, as mind quiets, joy arises. This joy occurs in the first two jhānas. Bhante Vimalaramsi discusses the process of entering the first *jhāna* as follows,

When you start your meditation session, you first close your eyes. This is being secluded from the sensual pleasure of seeing. Whenever a sound distracts mind, the instructions are to let the sound be there by itself, without thinking about whether you like the sound or not. Simply let the sound go. Let go of the mental fist around the sound. Relax the craving or tightness in the head and feel mind become clam and at ease. Now smile and redirect (happy) mind's attention back to the object of meditation, i.e., the breath. Relax the tightness in the head, feel mind open up, expand, and become tranquil. Smile on the in-breath, relax the tightness in the head on the out-breath, feel mind become alert, peaceful, and pure because there is no more craving in it. You stay

with the breath and relax the tension in the mind until the next distraction occurs.

As a meditator you do this with smelling, tasting, bodily sensations, and thoughts or any kind of sensual pleasure which distracts mind's attention away from the breath and relaxing. Whenever there is a distraction at one of the sense-doors you simply and softly let it go, relax that mental fist around the distraction, relax the tightness in the head, feel mind expand, and redirect mind's attention back to the breath and relaxing again. It doesn't matter how many times the sensual pleasure arises. You have to allow it to be there every time it arises. Just remember to let it go, relax the tightness in the head, feel mind expand and smile, then come back to the breath and relaxing.<sup>276</sup>

## **Entering the first jhāna**

When the mind relaxes, opens, expands, and becomes pure (temporarily without craving), the meditator begins to experience relief from suffering and joy arises. At this point, he or she is entering into jhāna. It may not last long. And especially for the beginning meditator it may be interrupted by distractions again and again.

It takes practice for this state of open, expanded, pure mind to deepen and lengthen in duration. At the beginning of practice, it will likely be only a short glimpse, or as the suttas sometimes say, a finger snap. There is great benefit here, even in the experience of a brief opening. Yes, the next distraction will come, craving will return, and mind's attention will be pulled into a gross state. This is natural, this is the process.

With practice, the mind will enter more and more easily into the state of purity and openness without craving. The duration will increase. Such progress takes dedication and persistence. A lifetime of

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<sup>276</sup> Ibid, pp. 81-82.

unwholesome habits is there to keep the uncultivated mind in a state of perpetual craving and suffering. The ardent practitioner can begin to let go of these unwholesome states and feel the opening of a relaxed, uplifted, wholesome mind. Bhante explains how this happens,

When mind's attention begins to stay on the object of meditation for longer and longer periods of time, relief and joy will become quite strong. You will naturally feel like smiling because the joy is such a pleasurable feeling in both mind and body. At that time, the body and mind feel very light until it is almost like floating. This is quite a pleasant experience. As the joy fades away, mind will become very calm, peaceful and comfortable. It is this comfortable and tranquil feeling that is 'happiness born of seclusion'.

At first, you can sit in this stage of meditation for five or six minutes. You can do this for longer periods as mind becomes quieter. This is the first *jhāna* (meditative stage of understanding) and it will arise when you have let go of sensual pleasure for a period of time, and have also let go of unwholesome habits or states of mind (the craving and clinging) which stop the meditator from having a mind without distractions in it.

Once you have experienced this state of calm, you will begin to realize the reasons you are meditating. At the same time, mind is nicely composed and happy with very few distractions. There is more peace of mind than has ever been experienced before.<sup>277</sup>

### **Letting go of the burden of suffering, and consequent relief**

This is the meditator's first experience of real peace and tranquility, with accompanying joy, and relief due to laying down some, at least, of the burden of suffering. The practitioner is entering for brief periods of time into the first *jhāna* at this stage, and even a

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<sup>277</sup> Ibid, pp. 88-89.

brief glimpse of this (a finger snap as the *Āṅguttara Nikāya* says) is enough to bring a happiness and joy of a quality that has never been experienced before. It is joy stemming from presence and wakefulness rather than from getting something desirable from the outside world.

Although mixed with impure qualities which are progressively given up with progress through the jhānas, this quality, variously translated as joy, bliss, happiness, is found as one of the few descriptions of *Nibbāna* given by the Buddha. The Buddha characterizes *Nibbāna* in the *Dhammapada*, as the highest bliss (*nibbānaṃ paramaṃ sukhaṃ*)<sup>278</sup> In the *Poṭṭhāpada Sutta* (DN 9) the Buddha informs wandering ascetic Poṭṭhāpada that the cessation of defiling mental states brings happiness and delight. He explains,

Now, Poṭṭhāpada, you might think: “Perhaps these defiling mental states might disappear . . . , and one might still be unhappy.” That is not how it should be regarded. If defiling states disappear . . . , nothing but happiness and delight develops, tranquility, mindfulness and clear awareness-and that is a happy state.<sup>279 280</sup>

From the beginning of practice with the 6Rs, when the craving is truly let go, some measure of this happiness and delight is experienced. This experience of inner bliss not dependent upon outer circumstances can have a profound impact on the meditator.

For a person who has been raised to believe that the path to happiness is in getting what you like and avoiding what you don't like, this experience of inner joy is a real eye-opener. It is the beginning of experiencing a new dimension of consciousness.

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<sup>278</sup> Buddhārakkhita, **The Dhammapada**, verse 203, p. 71.

<sup>279</sup> Walshe, **The Long Discourses of the Buddha**, DN 9:40 [PTS i 196], p. 167.

<sup>280</sup> *Siyā kho pana te poṭṭhāpāda evamaṃsa: saṅkilesikā dhammā pahīyissanti, vodāniyā dhammā abhivaḍḍhissanti, paññāpāripūriṃ vepullattaṅca diṭṭheva dhamme sayaṃ abhiññā sacchikatvā upasampajja viharissāma. Dukkho ca kho vihāro'ti. Na kho panetaṃ poṭṭhāpāda evaṃ daṭṭhabbaṃ. Saṅkilesikā ceva dhammā pahīyissanti. Vodāniyā dhammā abhivaḍḍhissanti. Paññāpāripūriṃ vepullattaṅca diṭṭheva dhamme sayaṃ abhiññā sacchikatvā upasampajja viharissanti. Pāmujañceva bhavissati pīti ca passaddhi ca sati ca sampajaññaṅca sukho ca vihāro.* DN 9:40, PTS i 196, CS edition.



These first openings of what life is like when living with an uplifted, wholesome mind bring enthusiasm to the practice. They have the capacity to profoundly change the life and perspective of the practitioner.

This peace and clarity is so pleasant, and creates such pleasant feelings that the practitioner wants more of it. Craving for this peace and clarity may arise and provide an obstacle to obtaining the peace and clarity. It is not something that can be obtained because we want it and seek it. With practice, this can be sorted out. Unlike most happiness in the world, this happiness comes not through grasping at something, but rather through letting go and opening up.

### **Entering the Noble Silence**

Whenever we have expectations and try to force things in our meditation it creates more craving and disturbance. This is part of the process, and by learning to let go of expectation and using the 6Rs every time such a disturbance arises, the mind becomes calmer and more peaceful. At some point the busy thinking mind begins to become quiet. This is called entering the Noble Silence and with this, even more joy arises. When it departs there is still a comfortable feeling of contentment and happiness. Bhante quotes the *sutta* description and gives the following comments,

“Again, with the stilling of thinking and examining thought, the monk enters and abides in the second *jhāna* (meditative stage of understanding), which has self-confidence and singleness of mind without thinking and examining thought, with joy and happiness born of stillness of mind.”

The stilling of thinking and examining thought means that at that time mind becomes very still and stays on the object of meditation quite nicely. There is no discursive thinking about the past or future. However, there can still be ‘observation thoughts’.

Remember that true meditation is silent, open observation. There is still feeling in the body as all of the sense doors are working and five aggregates are present. But, for example, if a sound arises it doesn't make mind shake or move. You know where you are and what you are doing.

The self-confidence mentioned in the sutta comes from the confidence you gain when you see clearly for yourself how well the meditation works. The self-confidence not only arises when you are sitting in meditation, but also during daily activities. The singleness of mind means mind is very calm and doesn't run around. Mind is very contented to stay on the breath and relaxing on the in-breaths and the out-breaths.<sup>281</sup>

In connection with this stage, *Ānāpānasati Sutta* says,

He trains thus: "I shall breath in experiencing happiness";

He trains thus: "I shall breath out experiencing happiness."<sup>282</sup>

## **Joy fades and equanimity and calm lead into the fourth jhāna**

Bhante points out that the feeling of joy becomes too coarse and the feeling fades away. Most people feel disappointment with the fading of the joy and need to be encouraged by the teacher to continue, as everything is going along just fine. When the joy fades, a very strong sense of equanimity and calm become apparent. Actually, there has been some equanimity from the time of the first successful efforts at letting go of tension, tightness, and craving. But at this stage it

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<sup>281</sup> Ibid, pp. 91-92.

<sup>282</sup> Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*. MN 118:19 [PTS iii 83], p. 944.

becomes much stronger, more consistent, and more apparent. Bhante explains how the next stage arises, first quoting the classic description,

“Again, with the fading away of joy, a monk abides in equanimity, and mindful and fully aware, still feeling happiness (or pleasure) with the body, he enters upon and abides in the third jhāna (meditation stage), on account of which noble ones announce: “He has a pleasant abiding who has equanimity and who is mindful.”

With the description above you can plainly see that being in the third jhāna (meditation stage of understanding), mind is very clear, alert, and balanced. You are aware of what is happening around you, but mind stays on the object of meditation easily and comfortably.

Being alert (being mindful) and having equanimity of mind is an unusual thing to experience because this state of meditation is the highest and best feeling that you have ever experienced in your whole life. Furthermore, you are not attached to it due to strong equanimity. At the same time, both body and mind are exceptionally relaxed and at ease. What a nice state to be in! This is why this state is praised by the noble ones.<sup>283</sup>

### **The tranquil aware experience of the third jhāna is quite different from that of the absorption jhānas**

From the standard *sutta* description of the experience of the third *jhāna* and from Bhante’s comments, we see some further significant divergences between the tranquility jhānas and the absorption jhānas. Due to the force of concentration in the absorption jhānas, the meditator begins to lose contact with the body and sense doors.

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<sup>283</sup> Ibid, p. 93.

Bhante explains how the tranquil wisdom experience of *jhāna* is different in this respect,

Some ‘Fixed Concentration Meditation’ teachers say that when one is in the state of *jhāna*, the meditator can no longer experience the body or any of the sense doors. They claim that the meditator will not know if someone were to hit them with a stick or someone were to change the position of their hands and feet. This is because their mind is so deeply absorbed in the object of meditation that they can’t be fully aware. This is clearly not true in the meditation described in the suttas or if one were practicing ‘Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation’ (TWIM).<sup>284</sup>

### **The *Ānāpānasati Sutta* uses language similar to the third and fourth *jhānas***

The *Ānāpānasati Sutta* gives descriptions of the process by which the meditator goes more and more deeply into the *jhānas*. Bhante quotes verse 19 of the sutta and adds his commentary,

He trains thus: “I shall breath in experiencing the mental formation”;

He trains thus: “I shall breath out experiencing the mental formation”;

He trains thus: “I shall breath in tranquilizing the mental formation”;

He trains thus: “I shall breath out tranquilizing the mental formation.”

As you continue calming, expanding, and relaxing mind, it naturally begins to go deeper. Finally, the feeling of pleasure in the body/mind becomes too

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<sup>284</sup> Ibid, p. 94, quoting MN 118:19 [PTS iii 83].

course and mind experiences exceptional equanimity and balance of mind.<sup>285</sup>

Bhante supplements the description in *Ānāpānasati Sutta* with the classic description of the fourth *jhāna*,

Here with the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the previous disappearance of joy and grief a bhikkhu enters upon and abides in the fourth *jhāna* (meditation stage), which has neither pleasure nor pain and has purity of mindfulness due to equanimity.

When mind's attention becomes very calm and still, you will experience deep tranquility and equanimity of mind. You can still hear sounds and feel sensations with the body, but these do not shake or move mind at all. Another description of this stage of *jhāna* is:

“My composed mind was purified, bright, unblemished, rid of imperfection, malleable, wieldy, steady, and attained to imperturbability.”

This gives the serious meditator an idea of what to expect when they attain this stage. Mind's attention is exceptionally clear, bright, and alert. Mind can even see when a distraction begins to arise, then let it go, relax, expand mind, and calm down again before smiling and coming back to the breath.<sup>286</sup>

In last quote above, concerning the composed mind, Bhante is giving us a verse from the *Mahāsaccaka Sutta*. Here, the Buddha gives an account of his progressing through the *jhānas*. As a result, he relates how his mind became purified, workable, and deeply peaceful before his gaining of the *tevijja* (three true knowledges) as he attained awakening. So, from the Buddha's own account, we can

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<sup>285</sup> Ibid, p. 94.

<sup>286</sup> Ibid, p. 95, quoting MN 36:38 [PTS i 249].

see how mind in the fourth *jhāna* becomes an ally of the meditator rather than being primarily a source of distraction and confusion.

Bhante uses the standard description of the fourth *jhāna* to add some clarification, as follows,

The abandoning of pain and pleasure does not mean that occasionally pain or pleasure won't arise. They will arise, but mind's attention is in such a state of balance that it won't shake or become involved with the distractions. At that time, mind is very aware when pleasure or pain arises but the mindfulness and equanimity are so strong that it does not become concerned with it.

With the previous disappearance of joy and grief means your mind's attention has let go of the lower emotional states of liking and disliking. All of the stages of lower *jhānas* (meditative stages of understanding) involve letting go of emotional states of mind. At first, when you begin to learn about meditation, you let go of very low course states which frequently move mind's attention.<sup>287</sup>

The process of going through the first three *jhānas* and attaining the fourth involves not only relaxation of the mind, but the beginnings of understanding how the process of mind and attention work. This process involves practicing *satipaṭṭhāna* and seeing the links of Dependent Origination. We will develop this further in the chapters devoted to *satipaṭṭhāna* and Dependent Origination and how they are integral to TWIM practice.

The arising of pain and pleasure, joy and grief (mentioned above) are due to craving. This craving (*taṇhā*) arises when we have pleasurable or painful feeling (*vedanā*) due to sensory contact. We identify with these feelings and want to maximize the pleasure and avoid the pain. This produces the craving for a particular kind of

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<sup>287</sup> Ibid, p. 95.

experience which expresses itself as an “I like it.” or “I don’t like it.” mind.

Humans wish to grasp the pleasure and push away the pain. This pattern of attraction and aversion is clinging (*upādāna*) which is followed by all of our opinions, judgements, strategies, memories and the like which give us a firm idea of who we are, what we want and don’t want, how we feel emotionally about all of this, and what we are going to do about it.

Once we reach the stage of reacting to the stimulus (usually a well-practiced response pattern) due to identifying with the craving and grasping, we reach the link of habitual tendency (*bhava*).<sup>288</sup> This all happens very, very quickly, thousands of times each day. Dependent Origination is a description of how the unconscious mental processes create a cycle of suffering.

Through acting out this repetitive and unconscious process, we become an actor in a drama that we take very seriously. We believe in an abiding self (the primary ignorance) and assume our role without knowing that all that appears is an impersonal show, just a fictional stage. We play out old patterns, think old thoughts, feel old emotions, all pulled up from our files of who we are and how we act when such a situation as this arises. Almost all of this is recycled material, which within the scheme of Dependent Origination comes from the link of *saṃkhāra*. We replay these old *saṃkhāras* as our reaction to the new situation, producing *bhava* and reinforcing both *bhava* and our residue of *saṃkhāra*. This produces the mass of suffering, again and again.

This process of the links of Dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*) is a detailed description of the cause of suffering, the second of the Four Noble Truths. We will have a closer look at this

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<sup>288</sup> We follow the TWIM favored translation of *bhava* as “habitual tendencies” rather than the usual “being”. Bhante Vimalaramsi uses the translation “habitual tendencies” as a useful definition for practitioners, but admits this is only one aspect of what is covered by the Pali word.

process in an upcoming chapter on Dependent Origination. For now, it suffices for us to observe that through the first three tranquil aware *jhānas* we become aware of this process, see it for what it is and see how it works, and begin to let go of it. The good news is that there is an end to suffering and a way to do so.

These gross mental states occur again and again. This is a terrible situation for the average person, but for the meditator, it presents an opportunity. As they arise over and over, the practitioner gets plenty of practice in recognizing them and in letting them go. Also, our minds repeatedly follow the same rather stupid patterns, so with attentiveness the obscured confused mental patterns soon become rather familiar to us. “Oh, here it is again.”

There is not that much new material that the mind comes up with. It tends to be the same old craziness, over and over again. And our personal craziness is more or less the same as everyone else’s. When we look deeply enough, we see that actually it is only an impersonal process. Our thoughts, our emotions, our problems, our dramas; all impersonal. They are just happening. We only think we are important actors in the whole thing.

These gross mental states are naturally quieted during Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation. They are not swept into a dark corner somewhere as in absorption meditation. They are allowed to come up, and let go each time they do so. With practice they begin to lose their power over us. Without that mental and emotional buzz, our minds become quiet, we gain insight wisdom into how all this is happening, and the mind goes deeper into the *jhānas*.

As the practitioner goes through this process, he or she begins to understand how the links of Dependent Origination work. This is the practice of *satipaṭṭhāna*, as the rise and subsidence of body, feeling, mind, and mind objects is seen. The meditator begins to see the Three Characteristic Marks of Existence in a deep rather than intellectual and superficial way.



This letting go of these gross mental states is described in the *Ānāpānasati Sutta* in the following verses which Bhante quotes and comments on as follows,

He trains thus: “I shall breath in liberating mind.”

He trains thus: “I shall breath out liberating mind.”

Bhante’s comment: Liberating mind means that you stay on the breath and relaxing with enough joyful interest so that when mind begins to move or go away from the breath and relaxing, you are aware of it and you let the distractions go without identification. You then relax mind before smiling and coming back to the breath and relaxing. When a hindrance arises, you see it quickly and let it go without hesitation. At this point sloth and torpor, or restlessness and anxiety, are the biggest obstacles to your practice. Whenever a hindrance arises, it will knock you out of the *jhāna* and can cause all kinds of disturbances.

The phrase ‘liberating mind’ also means to let go of the lower *jhānas* (meditation stages of understanding) and all of the *jhāna* factors by not being attached (thinking about and identifying with) them in any way. This is the liberating way of relaxing craving and experiencing the Third Noble Truth! <sup>289</sup>

Bhante reminds us here that our practice is seeing the Noble Truths, and that the practice is designed for that purpose. With the first success in giving up craving even for a finger snap, all the way to the much deeper and more abiding calm of the fourth *jhāna*, the TWIM meditator experiences the Third Noble Truth (and the fourth as well), that there is an end to craving and a way to end that craving and suffering. Practicing TWIM is an accessible way to let go of that craving and suffering, and to find a deeper happiness.

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<sup>289</sup> Ibid, p.98.

## Summary

The TWIM practitioner who takes Mindfulness of Breathing as the object of meditation lets go of unwholesome mental states, cultivates and stabilizes wholesome mental states, and as a result has an uplifted mind. By using the 6Rs, Mindfulness of Breathing is a *samatha-vipassanā* practice, in which the unification of calm abiding and liberating insight create conditions for letting go of craving and the load of suffering that has been the result of unwholesome and unconscious mental states. This letting go of suffering, subsequent relief, and experience of joyful calm, gives energy and enthusiasm for further practice. Gross states of mind are purified as tension and tightness is let go and the meditator begins to see clearly the workings of the mind which is understanding of Dependent Origination. True to the Buddha's statement in the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*, the ardent practitioner of Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation can experience *Nibbāna* in this very lifetime.

## Chapter VII

### The TWIM Practice of *Satipaṭṭhāna*

The tendency of Buddhism since the passing of the Buddha has been to systematize and analyze various aspects of the teaching of the suttas and through analysis to break aspects of the teachings down into understandable component parts. This tendency is epitomized by the *Abhidhamma*, which is largely a collection of systematization and analysis. The abhidhammikas also recognized the need for synthesis and devoted a significant part of their work to that end.

Yet, how to accomplish synthesis in a practical way for the practitioner is not always clearly understood. Especially due to the analysis of meditation by Buddhaghosa in *Visuddhimagga*, there is a tendency to treat aspects of practice separately and/or sequentially. Some parts are emphasized while others tend to be marginalized. Using the *Visuddhimagga* schema, fitting the numerous components together into a coherent practice, can make for a very complex and rather unwieldy approach. Hence, meditation systems based on the *Visuddhimagga* tend to be complex and rather difficult to learn and to practice. They yield rewards for the dedicated few, but can be very difficult and intimidating for the many.

TWIM synthesizes all aspects of the practice, and does it in such a way that the actual moment-to-moment technique is very simple, easy to learn, and easy to practice for the dedicated meditator. The use of the word “easy” to describe the TWIM approach is not to be confused with laxity in any way. TWIM meditation only works when combined with energy and enthusiasm for practice. What “easy” means in the context of the practice of TWIM is that complexity or severity does not create an obstacle to practice.

In one sense, it is absolutely true that there is difficulty in the practice of meditation, including TWIM. The difficulty lies in the mind’s tendency to run wild and chase after sensual pleasures in order

to gratify a perceived (or rather misperceived) permanent self. This makes it difficult to see the wisdom of attempting to begin meditation practice in the first place, and it can also pull one away from practice and plunge one back into the world of craving for sense pleasures. Human beings are constantly imagining a self and attempting to find sense gratification for that self.

### **Satipaṭṭhāna is a teaching designed to help the meditator let go of craving and to see the impersonal nature of existence**

To help people understand the impersonal nature of existence, the Buddha used various approaches, most of which are found in TWIM, working together in a coherent and harmonious practice. He pointed out that the person is not a soul or substance, but rather a collection of what could be analyzed into five aggregates. The Buddha taught the *satipaṭṭhāna*, the Foundations of Mindfulness, as the direct method to see through the deceptive personal appearance to the impersonal nature of these aggregates and elements (*dhatu*).

The main point of *satipaṭṭhāna* is to help the practitioner see how the various phenomena that we continually take to be a real ‘something’, and that we continuously and habitually identify with, are actually illusory. They are mere concept. There is nothing permanent at all in them and our attempts to find and grasp at such an imagined permanence creates the suffering we experience. Our unawakened perception is flawed. It is oriented towards suffering. It is craving which traps us in this flawed perception and the resultant suffering.

The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* of the *Majjhima Nikāya* and its larger version, the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta* in the *Dīgha Nikāya* are the main texts on meditation used by most of the contemporary methods of *vipassanā*. The emphasis on the *Satipaṭṭhāna* and *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna* Suttas over other suttas has been upheld by the idea that they teach the

“only way” (*ekāyano maggo*) to *Nibbāna*, that somehow the other suttas form a support system with *satipaṭṭhāna* as the highest instruction.

TWIM takes a different approach and considers the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* to be one of many suttas that each teach important aspects of satipaṭṭhāna practice. By valuing the teaching of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* and also looking to other pertinent suttas for instructions on practice, TWIM aims to reach an understanding of the practices based on the *sutta-piṭaka* as a whole, rather than relying on a few suttas as interpreted by the *Visuddhimagga*.

### **The “direct path” rather than the “only path”**

Bhikkhu Bodhi and Ven. Anālayo have translated *ekāyano maggo* as “direct path” rather than as “only path”.<sup>290</sup> Bhikkhu Bodhi follows the Ven. Ñānamoli’ translation of “a path that goes in one way only”, that is, towards *Nibbāna*. In that sense, *satipaṭṭhāna* does indeed take one directly to *Nibbāna* but other suttas are of equal importance in this process, and *satipaṭṭhāna* is not meant as a separate or exclusive practice as it is sometimes taken to be. It is fully integrated into other parts of the Noble Eightfold Path and is both a *samatha* and *vipassanā* practice. As such, it is an integral part of TWIM meditation.

Bhante Vimalaramsi sums up the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* in the following words, “The whole point of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* is to try to teach us how to let go of craving, how to improve our observation power, and watch how mind’s attention goes from one thing to another.”<sup>291</sup>

In TWIM, the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* is a highly valued *sutta*, and the TWIM meditator embarks on a practice of *satipaṭṭhāna* through the practice of the 6Rs. With the practice of the 6Rs, the meditator enters

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<sup>290</sup> Anālayo, *Satipaṭṭhāna*. p.27 and Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*.

p.1188, f.n.135.

<sup>291</sup> Vimalaramsi, *Moving Dhamma Vol.1*. p. 69.

into a state of calm abiding, within which the Four Foundations of Mindfulness can be clearly seen as they arise, abide, and cease.

### **The Four Foundations of Mindfulness are a summary of all that arises within the mind**

Rather than taking the *sutta* to be a sort of meditation curriculum to be worked through with respect to the separate sections of body, feelings, mind, and mind objects, Bhante considers that this is a fourfold scheme to show the meditator that mindfulness is to be applied in all possible situations and no matter what phenomena rises in mind. Rather like the five khandas as a system of classification meant to include all aspects of a person, the Four Foundations of Mindfulness are a system to cover all possible arising of phenomena and the need to keep mindfulness (*sati*) sharp at all times.

Another example of such listing as meant to cover all possibilities (from the *sutta* itself) is that mindfulness is to be maintained while sitting, walking, standing, and lying down. This does not mean that mindfulness is only to be applied to these four postures. Rather, the naming of these four postures are meant to represent *all* postures and activities. For instance, a practitioner might be in a squatting position. Merely because it is not listed among the four postures does not mean mindfulness is not to be applied while squatting. Likewise, these four satipaṭṭhānas are meant to emphasize that mindfulness (*sati*) is to be kept in all situations, activities, and states of mind.

In keeping with the *sutta*, no matter what arises, the meditator is meant to maintain his or her mindfulness and let go of identifying with whatever presents itself. Bhante quotes a section of the *sutta* recommending full awareness (*sampajāna*) and illustrates the TWIM approach,

“Again, monks, a monk is one who acts in full awareness when going forward and when returning; who acts in full awareness when looking ahead and looking away; who acts in full awareness when

flexing and extending his limbs; who acts in full awareness when wearing his robes and carrying his outer robe and bowl; who acts in full awareness when eating, drinking, consuming food, and tasting; who acts in full awareness when defecating and urinating; who acts in full awareness when walking, standing, sitting, falling asleep, waking up, talking, and keeping silent.” (*Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* section 8)

The question is, full awareness of what? It’s a really easy answer. Full awareness of your object of meditation. What this is trying to tell you is that it doesn’t matter what you’re doing, stay with your object of meditation.<sup>292</sup>

### **The TWIM method of satipaṭṭhāna is simple rather than complex**

No matter what arises (among body, feelings, mind, and mind objects), the TWIM meditator is to keep his or her attention on the object of meditation, this is in keeping with the TWIM approach of one simple meditation that is easy to learn and is consistently practiced. TWIM does not develop a complex curriculum based on *Satipaṭṭhāna* or any other *sutta*. It is the same practice of opening, relaxing, uplifting the mind no matter what presents itself, no matter the activity.

For the TWIM practitioner, the object of meditation is not only what arises in the moment or in the activity at hand. In TWIM, the object of meditation is either Mindfulness of Loving Kindness or Mindfulness of Breathing, while opening and relaxing and attending to the situation in the present moment. While eating, drinking, walking, standing, the object of meditation is the feeling of loving kindness or awareness of the breath.

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<sup>292</sup> Ibid, p. 72.

The TWIM approach is to be mindful *while* eating, walking, breathing, etc., not only to be mindful *of* the eating, walking, breathing, etc. The TWIM emphasis is on being mindful *while* rather than being only mindful *of*. This is a key point in understanding TWIM. The awareness is opening rather than narrowing, while holding the object of meditation not too tightly and not too loosely.

### **Awareness of the Four Foundations while keenly observing the movements of mind's attention**

In TWIM, Mindfulness is not only 'bare attention', i.e., concentrating on every aspect of the activity. Mindfulness is observing the movement of mind's attention, and noticing how it impersonally shifts from one thing to another. This is maintained with a presence and awareness of the now moment. If one is eating, one will smile and radiate loving kindness into the eating. If one is sitting, one will smile into the sitting. There will be the awareness of the activity or situation and a smiling loving kindness will be brought into the activity or situation.

TWIM emphasizes the practice of watching mind no matter the activity and no matter what arises in the mind. Only by seeing how mind's attention moves can craving and the grasping at self be let go of and relaxed. When the craving and grasping at self are let go of, the obscurations of the mind subside, and then the meditator can be fully in the moment with the sitting, walking, eating, working, or whatever activity.

### **In TWIM, it is not necessary to examine movements etc. in detail as the main focus is not on the external, but rather on mind's movement**

Bhante explains how TWIM uses this approach to *satipaṭṭhāna* and contrasts it with the methods he learned in Myanmar,



When I was practicing the Mahasi method when I was in Burma, they were encouraging us to eat very, very slowly, and watch every little movement as you had it occur. Sometimes it would take us an hour to finish; this is of constant movement, to finish a meal. I never was able to translate those kinds of slow, meticulous actions into everyday living. I never did quite figure out: “Why are we doing that?”

When I was doing a walking meditation I was seeing five hundred, a thousand or more little tiny movements as I was picking the heel up; and then I saw that many again as I was picking the toe up, and I saw that many again as I was moving my foot forward, and I saw that many again as I was dropping it. It took me forty-five minutes to walk the length of the meditation hall one time.

But how does that translate into everyday life? (their answer): “Well, you need to see the intention before every movement.” It made me wonder—was that practicing full awareness?

When I started getting back into the suttas, I started reflecting on those times when I was moving very slowly all the time, and I started thinking about those things they were talking about, of watching all of those tiny movements of the body. But one thing they never told me was to watch what my mind was doing.

They wanted me to focus my attention on actions of the body and completely let mind alone. I don't think that's what the Buddha had in mind when he was teaching the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*.

I think the Buddha had intended that he wants you to watch what mind is up to all the time no matter what your actions are. He wants you to see when craving arises; he wants you to see when clinging

arises. How do these movements of mind's attention occur?

That's how you start to see what Dependent Origination is all about. Not by keeping your attention in an external way on a movement, but by keeping your attention on mind's movement, when it goes from one thing to another.<sup>293</sup>

Here we have a clear illustration from Bhante's personal experience of the difference between the TWIM approach to *satipaṭṭhāna* and that of many *vipassanā* methods. This is a difference in how Mindfulness (*sati*), is defined and applied. When Bhante was a monk in Myanmar, his attention was supposed to go directly to the tiniest movements of any activity, such as walking or eating, breaking it down into the minutest components. As he points out, whatever the value of such meditation may be, it is largely confined to the time spent in the temple or on retreat. Such meditation cannot effectively be carried over to everyday life, at least not to such an extreme.

Alternatively, to this approach, Bhante is advocating for full awareness of the object of meditation and mindfulness of the movement of mind's attention no matter the activity. This model of mindfulness can be learned while in retreat and effectively carried into everyday life. No matter the object of meditation, be it mindfulness of Loving Kindness or mindfulness of Breathing, the purpose of the meditation is to carefully observe the mind.

Being aware of the object of meditation itself may bring some benefits but is not the main point. In the case of mindfulness of breathing, there may be some health benefits and in the case of mindfulness of Loving Kindness, the benefit of giving *mettā* to oneself and others can be very great. All the while, during these practices, observing the movement of mind's attention is the real meditation. It is this observation of mind that results in deep insight.

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<sup>293</sup> Ibid, p. 75-76.

## **Seeing the links of Dependent Origination and gaining liberating insight through the practice of the Four Foundations of Mindfulness**

In addition, Bhante points out that such mindfulness yields insight into the links of Dependent Origination, and that such insight cannot be gained by the minute examination of outward movement, but by watching the movement of mind. Craving arises in the mind, not in the foot taking a step. How does that craving arise? TWIM explains the arising of craving in the following manner.

The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* lists body, feeling, mind and objects of mind as phenomena that can arise for the meditator. When anything presents itself to the mind in such a way as to pull the mind from the object of meditation, there is tension and tightness that arises with craving. Attached to the craving is a sense of “I am that”. We take what arises in the mind as “This is me, this is who I am, this is myself.”

When we let go of the craving we see these things just as they are. If anger arises, we recognize it is impersonal, not really ‘Me’. It is just anger. It is merely a painful feeling (*vedanā*) until I feed it with the opinion that “I” don’t like it. My personal dislike turns this painful feeling into the emotion of anger. When I remove “my personal dislike” it departs. Uninvited it arises, unfed, it departs. When we don’t feed it, don’t believe it is “Me”, its power is lost and it fades away. When we let go of the tension and tightness, let go of the craving, we let go of the “I, me, mine”. This leads to the cessation of suffering.

The cessation of suffering is brought about by letting go of unwholesome mind states and bringing up wholesome mind states. This, in turn, is brought about by letting go of the tension, tightness, and self-craving (“I”-dentification). All of this is accomplished by practicing the 6Rs, Recognizing (that mind’s attention has shifted away from the object of meditation), Releasing (letting go) of the distraction, Relaxing (the tension and tightness), Re-smiling, and

Returning to the object of meditation with a light, smiling, wholesome mind and feeling. By repeating the above steps as necessary, a more wholesome mind is being cultivated.

Keeping this process going is Full Awareness (*sampajāna*), maintained in all situations, no matter what arises. It is the practice of the Four Satipaṭṭhānas. No matter what arises, the more one relaxes and lets go of everything that arises, seeing it as impersonal (“Oh, it’s just anger.”), the more calmness, peace, clarity and freedom one has. With practice, the unconscious becomes conscious. With practice, rather than: “I really don’t like it when he does that!” it becomes “There goes the ‘I don’t like it mind’ again.”

When it is seen that one’s reaction is just a rerun of the same old mind of like and dislike, the “I” begins to fade away. This is insight that produces real personality change. Mindfulness operating within calm abiding creates the conditions for this insight to arise.

For the above process to work properly within the TWIM method, it is important that the mind is not absorbed in the object of meditation. If mind is fully absorbed, how can the *satipaṭṭhāna* be practiced? In absorption concentration, mindfulness cannot easily observe the movement of mind’s attention and see how attention is pulled away from the object of meditation.

By understanding mindfulness (*sati*) as being the watching of mind’s attention rather than a looking at a particular set of phenomena, the TWIM method of *satipaṭṭhāna* is the same meditation all the way through from the beginning of meditation to the attainment *Nibbāna*. In other words, using these 6Rs is the continuous practice of Right Effort and also the continuous practice of *satipaṭṭhāna*. The practice of the 6Rs does not change as phenomena change. It does not matter if one is sitting, breathing, eating, laying down. The application of the 6Rs is the same throughout, all the way to *Nibbāna*. It is a direct path to *Nibbāna*.

In the previous chapter we looked at the TWIM treatment of Mindfulness of Breathing, which falls under the *paṭṭhāna* of body within the Four Foundations. Practicing Mindfulness of Breathing is a practice of *satipaṭṭhāna*.

As we discussed previously, in TWIM, the breath alone is not the object of meditation. The TWIM meditator is aware of the movement of the breath and of relaxing the body and mind, while keenly watching the movement of mind's attention. The TWIM version of Mindfulness of Breathing is not bare attention to the sensation of breathing.

In TWIM, the sensation of the breath is not the main point of meditation on the breath. By holding the object of meditation neither too loosely nor too tightly, the open awareness allows phenomena to arise. These will be body, feelings, mind and objects of mind. It is craving that moves mind's attention from the breath to the various phenomena. This process is to be seen clearly. This is TWIM *satipaṭṭhāna*, done while practicing *ānāpānasati*.

### **Mind precedes all mental states**

The *Dhammapada* says in two oft-quoted verses “Mind precedes all mental states. Mind is their chief; they are all mind-wrought.”<sup>294</sup> TWIM takes this stanza to heart and puts mindfulness to work watching the movement of mind's attention from the beginning of practice all the way to *Nibbāna*. Awareness of the breath is a suitable object of meditation to gain understanding of what the mind is doing, and how various mental states arise. This is seeing how the mind works. Seeing exactly how the breath works can be left to the medical profession. It is enough to *know* one is breathing.

In the introduction to his translation of the Ven. Buddhārakkhita translation of the *Dhammapada*, Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi points out the primary importance of keeping the mind under constant observation. He writes,

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<sup>294</sup> Buddhārakkhita **The Dhammapada**, verses 1-2, p. 21.

What is needed most urgently to train and subdue the mind is a quality called heedfulness (*appamāda*). Heedfulness combines critical self-awareness and unremitting energy in the task of keeping the mind under constant observation to detect and expel defiling impulses whenever they seek an opportunity to surface. In a world where we have no savior but ourselves, and where the means to deliverance lies in mental purification, heedfulness becomes the crucial factor for ensuring that we keep to the straight path of training without deviating due to the seductive allurements of sense pleasures or the stagnating influences of laziness and complacency. Heedfulness, the Buddha declares, is the path to the Deathless; heedlessness, the path to death. The wise who understand this distinction abide in heedfulness and experience *Nibbāna*, “the incomparable freedom from bondage”.<sup>295</sup>

In TWIM practice, this heedfulness is the energy which directs the attention to the object of meditation and the movements of mind’s attention. The movements of the foot or hand, or the sensation of the rise and fall of the breath are not the primary aim of heedfulness in TWIM. Rather, awareness of these sensations allows understanding of the mind.

In TWIM there is awareness of the now moment, including of the phenomena of the world, but awareness of these phenomena is always through the focus of the object of meditation and with alert awareness watching what the mind is doing. In TWIM, maintaining this keen heedfulness is a component of “unification of mind” (*cittass’ekaggatā*).

What greatly aids unification of mind in TWIM is the simplicity of the method of the 6Rs, which upholds unconfused meditation and

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<sup>295</sup> Ibid, p. 17, introduction by Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi citing Dh. verses 21-23.

mindfulness. The object of meditation does not change with the arising of any phenomena. No matter what arises (Four Foundations of Mindfulness), the method is closely adhered to. In TWIM sitting meditation mind's attention does not move to a phenomenon that arises in order to 'stay with observing it' until it goes away. There is no need to change method depending upon activity (sitting, walking, eating etc.) or what arises in the mind (pain, emotion, thinking etc.)

Generally speaking, the simple but profound 6R technique works very smoothly from the beginning of practice through the jhānas. If a special problem arises, the teacher may suggest some adjustments if needed, but these are always within the 6R framework. In the higher jhānas, especially, the teacher's assistance may be needed to know how to see and understand the subtle craving and self-grasping. The teacher may make suggestions, but the actual seeing and understanding is always the direct experience of the meditator through the method of the 6Rs.

**The simple but profound method of TWIM can be effectively carried out in sitting meditation, walking meditation, and in the activities of daily life**

*Jhāna* can continue in daily life activities if mindfulness is sharp enough, and the mind stays on the object of meditation while performing the various activities. This may come as a surprise to those who are only familiar with *jhāna* practice only through the method of absorption. David Johnson explains,

One of the mistakes that people make when they are talking about jhānas is to think that a jhāna only arises while you're doing your *sitting* meditation. However, you can take any one of these jhānas and stay with it while you get up and do your walking meditation. You can also be in this state when you're washing the dishes; you could even be taking a bath or standing in the checkout line at the store. Staying

with your object of meditation while you are walking and during all your activities will help you progress further.

Unlike being in absorption jhāna, any one of the tranquil aware jhānas can arise during your daily activities. This is one of the reasons you keep your meditation going all the time. It doesn't matter what you are doing-it's all part of the practice.<sup>296</sup>

By keeping the meditation going all the time, no matter the activity, the meditator is maintaining mindfulness and keen heedfulness. This constant heedfulness both in formal meditation and in daily life is unification of mind. Unification of mind is the preferred translation of the Pali *cittass'ekaggatā*, which may also be translated as one-pointed meditation. The phrase "one-pointed" is a translation that Bhante Vimalaramsi is loath to use because it brings up images of intense concentration, which TWIM eschews.

It is very difficult to maintain a super-concentrated version of one-pointedness while bathing. But it is very possible to maintain the TWIM method of open awareness while holding the object of meditation while bathing or in any other activity. If *cittass'ekaggatā* means one-pointedness in the sense of the mind unifying itself around the object of meditation with unremitting observation of mind's shifts of attention, all done with the 6Rs while staying relaxed and open, then it can be said that TWIM is practicing one-pointedness of mind. However, "unification of mind" is a better translation, more in keeping with the TWIM approach.

### **Bhante Vimalaramsi avoids translations which he considers will possibly mislead meditators**

Bhante Vimalaramsi's avoidance of the English term 'one-pointedness' is understandable as so many meditators who come to

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<sup>296</sup> Johnson, David C., *The Path to Nibbāna*. pp. 104-5.



him immediately try to apply absorption concentration. In that case, their meditation will not be effective, as this kind of concentration is incompatible with the TWIM 6Rs. It is hard enough to get some people to drop their tendency towards absorption concentration without compounding the difficulty by using terms that tend towards misunderstanding and misinterpretation, leading to misapplication of the meditation technique.

Bhante also avoids the use of the term “concentration” as it tends to lead people astray for the same reason. Of course, the TWIM meditator uses concentration, but it is not a sort of concentration that selects some things and excludes others. Therefore, it is also good to avoid using this word in TWIM instructions for practice. In giving instructions to TWIM meditators, there will not be any use of the words “concentration” or “one-pointedness”. Instead, “collectedness of mind” or some variation is preferred.

### **The gaining of insight wisdom through seeing the links of Dependent Origination**

By practicing TWIM *satipaṭṭhāna*, knowledge and insight wisdom are gained. This is primarily through clearly seeing and understanding the links of Dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*). With this understanding comes also an understanding of the Three Characteristic Marks of Phenomena (*tilakkhāṇa*). Seeing these clearly brings an end to suffering, as Ven. Buddhārakkhita explains in his commentary on *Dhammapada* verses 277-79. He writes,

“All conditioned things are impermanent”-when one sees this with wisdom one turns away from suffering. This is the path to purification.

“all conditioned things are unsatisfactory”-when one sees this with wisdom one turns away from suffering. This is the path to purification.

“All things are not self”-when one sees this with wisdom one turns away from suffering. This is the path to purification.<sup>297 298</sup>

## Seeing the Three Characteristics through understanding the links of Dependent Origination

All schools of *vipassanā* agree that seeing the Three Characteristics (*anicca, dukkha, anatta*) is crucial to liberating the mind. TWIM looks to see these Three Characteristics primarily through understanding the links of Dependent Origination.

Understanding Dependent Origination may be aided by gaining some intellectual knowledge through reading, hearing *dhamma* talks, discussion and contemplation. It is the experiential learning that will ultimately lead to the clear seeing of the Three Characteristics and thusly lead to *Nibbāna*. Through this process, the Four Noble Truths are seen and understood with insight wisdom. At each link of Dependent Origination insight can be gained into the Four Noble Truths and the Three Characteristics.

In order for this integrated approach to function, the TWIM meditator must be aware (while abiding in *jhāna*) of body, feeling, mind, and mind states. The meditator cannot be absorbed into one object and excluding all else. Only openness meditation works with this synthetic approach. In fact, the TWIM meditator is quite aware of what is going on around him or her as well as mental phenomena while in the *jhānas*. Bhante explains,

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<sup>297</sup> Buddhārakkhita, **The Dhammapada**. verses 277-9, p. 88.

<sup>298</sup> *Sabbe saṅkhāra aniccā ti yadā paññāya passati.*

*Atha nibbindati dukkha; esa maggo visuddhiyā.*

*Sabbe saṅkhāra dukkha ti yadā paññāya passati, atha nibbindati dukkha;*

*esa maggo visuddhiyā.*

*Sabbe saṅkhāra anattā ti yadā paññāya passati,*

*Atha nibbindati dukkha; esa maggo visuddhiyā. verses 277-9, Ven. Buddhārakkhita translation.*

When you are in the ‘Tranquil Wisdom Jhānas’, you are definitely very aware of what is happening around you and your mindfulness is sharp and clear. You are able to observe all mind states, feelings, sensations, or distractions, as well as the Jhāna factors when they arise in the mind, i.e., joy, happiness, equanimity, stillness of mind, calm composure of mind etc.<sup>299</sup>

In illustrating how the meditator can perform observation of the body (*kāyanupassana*) while abiding in the tranquility jhānas Bhante quotes *Ānāpānasati Sutta* (MN 118:27) and points out the significance of the statement “Monks, on whatever occasion a monk...”

The phrase ‘on whatever occasion’ (*yasmim samaye bhikkhave*) is very interesting and has far reaching implications. ‘On whatever occasion’ does not mean only while sitting in meditation, but all of the time.

During your daily activities, your mind becomes heavy and full of thoughts, as you notice it simply let go of the thoughts, calm and relax the tightness in your head, feel mind expand and become tranquil and then smile and go back to the breath, relax and smile for one or two breaths. This will help you greatly in calming mind and it will improve your mindfulness during your daily activities.

The more you smile into your daily activities, the better your mindfulness becomes. This is definitely a practical way to practice your daily activities and improve your awareness of states of consciousness. Every time you do this it brings a kind of awareness and perspective into your life. It becomes easier to see the

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<sup>299</sup> Vimalaramsi, Ven. Bhante, *The Ānāpānasati Sutta*. (Taipei, The Corporate Body of the Buddha Educational foundation, 1997 reprint), p. 109.

three characteristics of existence of impermanence, suffering, and the impersonal nature of everything, even while you are working or playing.<sup>300</sup>

Bhante is explaining how to practice TWIM during daily activities. In fact, without practicing during regular activities, progress is slowed considerably. Bhante is referring above to activity carried out while maintaining the breath as object of meditation. The meditator can breathe, relax, and smile into every situation, every movement of the body. If the object of meditation is loving-kindness rather than the breath, the meditator can smile and radiate *mettā* into every situation, every movement of the body in daily activity.

For the TWIM meditator, mindfulness brings awareness of the present moment as well as remembering to observe what the mind is doing while activity is being carried on. By keeping awareness of the body while remembering to attend to the movement of mind's attention, the meditator can observe how craving arises and manifests in the realm of form.

### **The importance of walking meditation, and the TWIM method of practicing it**

TWIM practice includes walking meditation, and this is a very important component of the practice. Bhante shows how this meditation is not something apart from sitting meditation or daily activity, but all are part of a seamless meditation that carries on 24/7 (24 hours a day, seven days a week) for the avid meditator. He continues,

The statement, 'On whatever occasion' (*vasmim samaye bhikkhave*) extends into your walking meditation as well. Instead of putting mind's attention onto your feet, (as some meditation teachers recommend), you can still keep your attention on

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<sup>300</sup> Ibid, p. 107.

observing mind, and relaxing on the in and out breath while walking. This is mindfulness of body and can even extend into other activities.<sup>301</sup>

It is consistent with the overall TWIM approach that during walking meditation, there is no change of the object of meditation, which remains the same whether sitting, walking, or carrying out daily activities. During walking meditation, the practitioner is carrying on *samatha-vipassanā* meditation and the practice of the satipaṭṭhānas. Bhante emphasizes that walking meditation is a very important part of practice and explains its importance as follows,

The walking meditation is a very important part of the training and needs to be practiced! When it's time for the sitting to change position, after sitting for no less than 30 minutes, then do the walking meditation.

The meditator stays with the object of meditation, i.e., the breath and relaxing, or the mettā and relaxing and doesn't change to focusing on the body movements. Please don't place mind's attention on the feet while walking, or begin walking very slowly. If the mind's attention is on the feet, the meditator is not very aware of what mind's attention is doing. Why? Because the meditator is not watching what mind's attention is doing and they are trying to over-focus on just the movements of the feet.

The question that needs to be asked here is: "Is the meditator truly being mindful of HOW mind's attention moves from one thing to another, when over-focusing on only the movements of the feet?"

The meditator needs to walk at a regular pace just as they do when walking from one place to another in their normal life! There are some real advantages to walking this way, because the blood starts moving around better

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<sup>301</sup> Ibid, p. 107.

and one's body gets some exercise, so muscles can stretch out and let any stiffness go. Walking in a normal to fast pace also energizes one's body so sloth and torpor won't become as much of a problem.

When the meditator is doing walking meditation, they need to keep their eyes down, not looking around. Why? Because where the eyes go, so goes mind's attention.<sup>302</sup>

In the TWIM walking meditation there is awareness of the movement of walking and of the surroundings just enough to carry out walking without falling down or running into something or someone. The attention stays on the object of meditation and mindfulness attends to the movement of mind's attention if and when it strays. When it does, the meditator uses the 6Rs, as usual. Whatever arises among body, feelings, mind, and objects of the mind is let go of and the mind is uplifted by relaxing, opening, smiling, and returning to the object of meditation.

While walking, Bhante encourages a fast pace and sometimes even advises to walk up and down stairs or steps in order to really get the heart pumping and the blood circulating.

Nearly all TWIM meditators who carry out walking meditation according to these instructions find that their sitting meditation is greatly enhanced after such walking meditation. As Bhante points out, the banes of sitting meditators, namely sloth and torpor, are greatly lessened by doing vigorous walking meditation. And after some practice the walking itself becomes quite a good meditation session, with mind able to successfully stay on the object of meditation and to 6R when attention wanders.

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<sup>302</sup> Vimalaramsi, **Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life**, pp. 136-7.

## **TWIM meditation fulfills all four satipaṭṭhānas**

The TWIM meditation fulfills the other three satipaṭṭhānas as well as that of observation of body. Quoting both *Ānāpānasati Sutta* and *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* Bhante explains a key phrase,

“Having put away covetousness and grief for the world” means mind has gone beyond the simple liking and disliking of distractions, emotions, painful feeling (*vedanā*), happy feeling, and the thinking about them. It means to let go of attachment to things (craving and clinging) which cause suffering to arise.<sup>303</sup>

Here, Bhante has given us an overview of some key links in Dependent Origination which are being understood through mindfulness of breathing and *satipaṭṭhāna*. We can see how, when a pleasant or painful feeling arises, the meditator recognizes it as such and abides with equanimity rather than identifying with the feeling and getting caught up in the mind of “I like it”, “I don’t like it”, which is craving leading to clinging and suffering.

By letting go of taking the feeling personally, it becomes merely “Oh, a painful feeling” which is given open space within which to arise, perhaps abide for a while, and then subside. This is seeing impermanence and the falling away of suffering. It is the Four Noble Truths.

This is observation of feeling (*vedanānupassana*) as well as observation of mind (*cittānupassana*). Quoting *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (verse 34), Bhante explains how the TWIM meditator is aware of mind,

*Quote from the sutta:* And how, monks, does a monk abide observing mind as mind? Here a monk understands mind affected by lust as mind affected by lust, and mind unaffected by lust as mind unaffected by lust. He understands mind affected by hate as mind

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<sup>303</sup> Vimalaramsi, *The Breath of Love*. p. 109.

affected by hate and mind unaffected by hate as mind unaffected by hate. He understands mind affected by delusion as mind affected by delusion and mind unaffected by delusion as mind unaffected by delusion.

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*Bhante's comment:* A mind affected by lust, hate and delusion actually means a mind affected by craving. Craving is the “I like it” (lust mind) or the “I don’t like it” (hatred mind) and delusion is just taking whatever arises as being ours personally (“This is ME”). So, lust, hatred and delusion are always referring to the craving mind.<sup>305</sup>

Bhante adds some instructive comments on the remainder of verse 34.

He understands contracted mind as contracted mind.

*Saṅkhittaṃ vā cittaṃ saṅkhittaṃ cittaṃ pajānāti.*

Bhante: A contracted mind has sloth and torpor in it.

And distracted mind as distracted mind.

*Vikkhittaṃ vā cittaṃ vikkhittaṃ cittaṃ pajānāti.*

Bhante: A distracted mind is a mind that has restlessness or anxiety in it.

He understands exalted mind as exalted mind, and unexalted mind as unexalted mind.

*Mahaggataṃ vā cittaṃ mahaggataṃ cittaṃ pajānāti. Amahaggataṃ vā cittaṃ amahaggataṃ cittaṃ pajānāti.*

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<sup>304</sup> *Kathaṅca bhikkhave bhikkhu citte cittānupassī viharati?*

*Idha bhikkhave bhikkhu sarāgaṃ vā cittaṃ sarāgaṃ cittaṃ pajānāti. Vītārāgaṃ vā cittaṃ vītārāgaṃ cittaṃ pajānāti. Sadosaṃ vā cittaṃ sadosaṃ cittaṃ pajānāti. Vītadosaṃ vā cittaṃ vītadosaṃ cittaṃ pajānāti samohaṃ vā cittaṃ samohaṃ cittaṃ pajānāti. Vītamohaṃ vā cittaṃ vītamohaṃ cittaṃ pajānāti.* MN 10:34, PTS, i 59.

<sup>305</sup> Vimalaramsi, **The Breath of Love**, p. 112, quoting MN 10:34.



Bhante: An exalted mind is a mind that experiences one of the *rūpa* or material jhānas.

He understands surpassed mind as surpassed mind and unsurpassed mind as unsurpassed mind.

*Sauttaraṃ vā cittaṃ sauttaraṃ cittaṃ pajānāti.  
Anuttaraṃ vā cittaṃ anuttaraṃ cittaṃ pajānāti.*

Bhante: A surpassed mind is a mind that can get into any of the *arūpa* or immaterial realms-that is the realm of infinite space, the realm of infinite consciousness, the realm of nothingness, and the realm of neither perception nor non-perception.<sup>306</sup>

That being the case for the surpassed mind, we would then expect the unsurpassed mind to be the liberated mind. So here we have different levels of mind presenting themselves to the TWIM meditator. When first beginning meditation practice, most of one's mind states that arise are full of craving. As practice progresses, and the craving is let go of, the mind goes deeper into the jhānas. Throughout this process, the avid meditator keeps full awareness of this foundation of observation of mind.

## Observation of objects of the mind

Sections 36-45 of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* concerns observation of mind objects (*dhammanupassana*). These are the Five Hindrances, the Five Aggregates, the Six Bases, the Seven Factors of Awakening, and the Four Noble Truths. As the *sutta* points out for each group, the meditator contemplates their nature of arising, their nature of vanishing, and their nature of both arising and vanishing. This is insight wisdom which leads to liberation. For what reason is this arising and vanishing so important to see, and how does it bring a transformation of consciousness?

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<sup>306</sup> Ibid, p. 112-13. I have added the line-by-line Pali text above, for easy reference, taken from MN 10:34, PTS i 59, CS edition.

The simple answer is that the Five Hindrances, the Five Aggregates, and The Six Bases are what we identify with. We think of these phenomena as ‘Me’. However, ‘I’ am supposed to be something solid, permanent, reliable. A careful examination shows they are not solid at all, definitely not permanent, and completely unreliable. An intellectual examination can be helpful, but much more powerful and transformative is a direct experience of this nature of impermanence (*anicca*).

When people lose a loved one such as a beloved parent, it can be a real psychological shake up. In theory, we know that our parents will someday die, likely before we do. Yet such theoretical knowledge does not prepare us for the actual event of having someone who was a pillar of our life when we were a child disappear without a trace. The experience is deep and raw. Life deals us these experiences whether we want them or not. Meditation can also give us this direct experience, but in an even more powerful way.

## **How TWIM practice observes objects of mind**

Let us consider how TWIM develops the practice of observing mind objects. We have considered how the practice of the 6Rs is Right Effort, and how this practice takes one into stages of understanding (*jhāna*). As TWIM is not absorption concentration, the hindrances can arise and distract one from the *jhāna*. Bhante explains how this process works after he quotes *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*,

And how, monks, does a monk abide observing mind-objects as mind-objects? Here a monk abides observing mind-objects as mind-objects in terms of the five hindrances. And how does a monk abide observing mind-objects as mind-objects in terms of the five hindrances? Here, there being sensual desire in him, a monk understands ‘there is sensual desire in me’; or there being no sensual desire in him a monk knows ‘there is no sensual desire in me’, and he also understands how there comes to be the arising of

un arisen sensual desire, and how there comes to be the abandoning of the arisen sensual desire, and how there comes to be the future non-arising of the abandoned sensual desire. (verse 36 of MN 10)

You understand that your mindfulness has faded away and the un arisen hindrance of sensual desire has arisen. So, when your mindfulness becomes weak and disappears, then this hindrance will arise. This happens because you have lost keen interest in your meditation object.

*...and he understands how there comes to be the abandoning of the hindrance of sensual desire:* is by remembering to use the 6Rs. That is, recognizing that mind is distracted, releasing or letting go and not keeping your attention on that hindrance, relaxing the tightness in your head caused by that distraction, re-smiling to bring up a wholesome object, returning to your meditation object, and to repeating this same cycle if needed while using your meditation object for as long as possible-this is the 6Rs.<sup>307</sup>

*...and he also understands how there comes to be the future non-arising of the hindrance:* This happens by taking strong interest in your meditation object which may be the breath or loving-kindness depending on your choice of meditation.<sup>308</sup>

This works in the same way for sloth and torpor, restlessness and remorse, and for doubt. The meditator will become quite familiar with these hindrances as they are uninvited guests all the way through the jhānas. By balancing and fine-tuning the Factors of Awakening, these hindrances can be skillfully handled.

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<sup>307</sup> Ibid, pp. 115-116.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid, p. 116.

## The importance of cultivating and balancing the Seven Factors of Awakening

In the section on Mind Objects, the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* discusses how the practice of *satipaṭṭhāna* fulfills the Seven Awakening Factors (*sattabojjhaṅga*), which are important enough to be prominently mentioned many places elsewhere in the nikāyas, including in the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*. These factors are given as: the awakening factor of mindfulness (*sati-bojjhaṅga*), the awakening factor of investigation of experience (*dhamma-vicaya-bojjhaṅga*), the awakening factor of energy (*virīya-bojjhaṅga*), the awakening factor of joy (*pīti-bojjhaṅga*), the awakening factor of tranquility (*passadhi-bojjhaṅga*), the awakening factor of collectedness (*samādhi-bojjhaṅga*), and the awakening factor of equanimity (*upekkhā-bojjhaṅga*).

In the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, there is a similar use of descriptive language for each of the seven factors. As given for the first factor, mindfulness, it says,

Again, bhikkhus, a bhikkhu abides contemplating mind-objects as mind-objects in terms of the seven enlightenment factors. And how does a bhikkhu abide contemplating mind-objects as mind-objects in terms of the seven enlightenment factors? Here, there being the mindfulness enlightenment factor for him, a bhikkhu understands, ‘there is the mindfulness enlightenment factor in me’; or there being no mindfulness enlightenment factor in him, he understands: ‘There is no mindfulness enlightenment factor in me’; and he also understands how there comes to be the arising of the unarisen mindfulness enlightenment factor, and how the

arisen mindfulness enlightenment factor comes to fulfillment by development.<sup>309 310</sup>

Bhante Vimalaramsi has this to say about this section of the *sutta*,

This is rather straightforward. It simply says that one knows when their mind is silent, sharp, clear, and joyfully interested in the breath and relaxing [the object of meditation]. The meditator also knows when mindfulness is dull, not sharp, and mind tends to be a little bored or disinterested. When that happens, the meditator knows that they must pick up their interest and see how everything that arises is truly different. One then sees how every breath that arises is different, never exactly the same. This is how mindfulness awakening factor comes to fulfillment by development.<sup>311</sup>

Bhante then proceeds to discuss the remaining enlightenment factors, beginning with investigation of experience. He discusses how the method of the 6Rs develops this factor. He relates this factor directly to the seeing of the links of Dependent Origination and seeing the impersonal nature of reality (*anattā*) as follows,

It is very important to be familiar with the factor of investigation of one's experience. The meditator takes a true interest in HOW things arise. One must always use the 6Rs rather than get caught in the conceptual process of thinking about why the distraction arose. The content and reasons why distractions arise is of no consequence to the Buddhist meditator.

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<sup>309</sup> Bodhi, **The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha**. MN 10:42 [PTS i 62], p. 153.

<sup>310</sup> *Puna ca paraṃ bhikkhave bhikkhu dhammesu dhammānupassī viharati sattasu bojjhaṅgesu. Kathaṅca bhikkhave bhikkhu dhammesu dhammānupassī viharati sattasu bojjhaṅgesu? Idha bhikkhave bhikkhu santam vā ajjhataṃ satisambojjhaṅgam atthi me ajjhataṃ satisambojjhaṅgo'ti pajānāti. Asantaṃ vā ajjhataṃ satisambojjhaṅgam 'natthi me ajjhataṃ satisambojjhaṅgo'ti pajānāti -Yathā ca anuppannassa satisambojjhaṅgassa uppādo hoti, taṅca pajānāti. Yathā ca uppannassa satisambojjhaṅgassa bhāvanāpāripūrī hoti, taṅca pajānāti.* MN 10:42, PTS i 62, CS edition.

<sup>311</sup> Vimalaramsi, **Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life**. pp. 263-4.

The meditator must closely see HOW the process of Dependent Origination works in order to know it as an impersonal process. This means whatever arises, whether it is any of the five hindrances, an emotional state, or a physical feeling, the meditator impersonally examines the process with interest.

This is done not by getting involved with thinking about the arising phenomena, but rather 6R-ing and observing it, allowing the distraction to be there, then letting it go mentally.

Next, the meditator relaxes that tight mental fist which hardily grabs the distraction, and relaxes. Loosening the tightness in mind/head/body, i.e. letting go of the craving, smiling, and redirecting mind's attention back to the breath and relaxing is what needs to be done.

Every time mind's attention is pulled away from the object of meditation, the meditator tries to see clearly the different aspects about that distraction. Then 6R it, let go, relax mind, smile and come back to the breath and relax again. In this way the meditator becomes more familiar with the distraction and is able to recognize it more quickly.<sup>312</sup>

This illustrates the efficacy of the TWIM method. By practicing the 6Rs, the meditator is fulfilling the satipaṭṭhānas, in this case the Awakening Factors. In one method, all the various factors of mental development (*bhāvanā*) are accomplished in one simple practice. In the case of investigation of experience, Bhante is carefully differentiating between the correct approach of seeing how a disturbance has arisen as opposed to examining it through thinking and conceptualization. The former approach leads directly to seeing

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<sup>312</sup> Ibid, pp. 264-5.

the links of Dependent Origination and a direct experience of the impersonal nature of reality.

Bhante emphasizes the balance of mind during meditation, which is achieved primarily through careful attention to the awakening factors. They can be used as antidotes to the hindrances (*nīvaraṇas*). He explains,

These first four awakening factors are very important when one experiences sloth-and-torpor. Sloth means sleepiness and torpor means dullness of mind. When one gets into the fourth *jhāna* and above, the two main hindrances which arise are restlessness and torpor. However, when one brings up the investigation factor of awakening and examines this torpor, they have to use more energy, and this overcomes the dullness. When one gets into the higher *jhāna*, they must learn to fine-tune their practice little by little. By being familiar with these awakening factors, the meditator will learn how to eventually balance all of the factors. This directly leads to the supramundane state of *Nibbāna*.<sup>313</sup>

For liberating wisdom to arise, it is crucial to see the impersonal nature of reality. Bhante ties this directly with the enlightenment factor of equanimity (*upekkhā bojjaṅga*). He explains,

The equanimity awakening factor is again a very important factor to develop. It keeps mind's attention balanced even when one's attention becomes unsettled. The equanimity awakening factor is the only factor which allows mind to lovingly-accept whatever arises in the present moment. For example, if there arises any kind of pain (physical or emotional), it doesn't attract the meditator. The equanimity awakening factor is the factor which helps one to see things impersonally and without the ego-identification of getting involved with

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<sup>313</sup> Ibid, p. 269.

distractions. It is the seeing of what arises in the present moment with complete balance.<sup>314</sup>

### **The awakening factors of tranquility, collectedness, and equanimity as antidote to the hindrance of restlessness**

In general, it can be said that the awakening factors are the antidote to the hindrances. The *Bojjhaṅgasamyutta* regularly contrasts the seven awakening factors with the five hindrances, and about half the *Bojjhaṅgasamyutta* is devoted to that theme.<sup>315</sup> We have already mentioned the hindrance of sloth and torpor, and how the first four of the awakening factors are effective as an antidote to that hindrance. The hindrance of restlessness is also quite familiar to meditators. As Bhante Vimalaramsi points out, “The meditator had better become friends with these two hindrances, because they will stay around until they become an arahant.”<sup>316</sup>

Bhante teaches that restlessness has a lot of ego-identification (*atta*) as its basis. He describes the effect restlessness has on the meditator and how to effectively counteract it,

Restlessness makes mind think many thoughts and causes a lot of unpleasant feelings to arise in the body. As a result, the meditator feels like breaking the meditation and distracting themselves in one way or another. To say the least, it is a very hard mind that causes suffering to be more noticeable. The only way to overcome restlessness is by developing stillness of mind and tranquility of body along with strong equanimity.

When mind has restlessness in it, there is no balance of mind at all, mind is very distracted. Instead there is a lot of ego identification (*atta*) with that terrible feeling. To overcome this hindrance, one has to allow it to be

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<sup>314</sup> Ibid, p. 274.

<sup>315</sup> Gethin, R.M.L., *The Buddhist Path to Awakening*, p. 173

<sup>316</sup> Vimalaramsi, *Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life*, p. 278.



there by itself and to still mind. By bringing forth the stillness, tranquility and equanimity awakening factors and focusing mind on these different factors, the meditator will overcome restlessness.

The two major hindrances that always seem to trouble meditators are torpor, or dullness of mind, and restlessness, or over-activity of mind. The sooner we drop all resistance to these states when they arise and begin to explore them with joyful interest, the faster we will be able to recognize them. As a result, we will be able to let these hindrances go faster and return into the *jhāna*.<sup>317</sup>

True to the TWIM approach, Bhante is not recommending suppression of the hindrances. Rather, the TWIM meditator allows the hindrance of restlessness to be there, but upon exploring with joyful interest how it has arisen, it is let go and not fed with attention. By then relaxing mind and body, smiling, and returning to the object of meditation, the awakening factors are employed as antidote to the hindrance.

The arising of a hindrance has the power to knock a meditator out of *jhāna*, as the person cannot remain in *jhāna* if the mind is caught up in ego-identification and craving. However, with the application of the awakening factors, the meditator can return to *jhāna*.

### **The awakening factor of *samādhi* creates conditions for liberating insight**

In the previous quote, Bhante employed the term “stillness” to translate the Pali *samādhi*. He also favors the term “collectedness of mind”, as we have seen previously. The awakening factor of *samādhi* in TWIM partakes of these qualities of stillness and collectedness. *Samādhi* is often translated as concentration or absorption, but TWIM avoids such terminology, especially the latter, which has no

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<sup>317</sup> Ibid, p. 278.

basis in the suttas. The *Saccasaṃyutta* suggests a *samādhi* that is open, not one that is narrowly concentrated. If we take Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation and leave the word *samādhi* untranslated, we read,

At Sāvattthī. “Bhikkhus, develop *samādhi*. A bhikkhū who is in *samādhi* understands things as they really are. And what does he understand as it really is? He understands as it really is: ‘This is suffering.’ He understands as it really is: ‘This is the origin of suffering.’ He understands as it really is: ‘This is the cessation of suffering.’ He understands as it really is: ‘This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering.’

“Bhikkhus, develop *samādhi*. A bhikkhu who is in *samādhi* understands things as they really are.

“Therefore, bhikkhus, an exertion should be made to understand: ‘This is suffering.’ An exertion should be made to understand: ‘This is the origin of suffering.’ An exertion should be made to understand: ‘This is the origin of suffering.’ An exertion should be made to understand: ‘This is the cessation of suffering.’ An exertion should be made to understand: ‘This is the way leading to the cessation of suffering.’”<sup>318 319</sup>

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<sup>318</sup> Bodhi, **The Connected Discourses of the Buddha**. SN 56:1(1) [PTS V.XII. i.414], p.1838. We follow Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation except for leaving the Pali word *samādhi* untranslated.

<sup>319</sup> *Evam me sutam ekam samayam bhagavā sāvattthiyam viharati jetavane anāthapaṇḍikassa ārāme. Atha kho bhagavā bhikkhū āmantesi bhikkhavoti. Bhadanteti kho te bhikkhū bhagavato paccassosum bhagavā etadvoca. Samādhiṃ bhikkhave, bhāvētha. Samāhito bhikkhave, bhikkhu yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti. Kiñca yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti: idaṃ dukkhanti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti. Ayaṃ dukkhasamudayoti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti. Ayaṃ dukkhanirodhoti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti. Ayaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadāti yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti. Samādhiṃ bhikkhave bhāvētha, samāhito bhikkhave, bhikkhu yathābhūtaṃ pajānāti.*

*Tasmātiha bhikkhave, idaṃ dukkhanti yogo karaṇīyo, ayaṃ dukkhasamudayoti yogo karaṇīyo, ayaṃ dukkhanirodhoti yogo karaṇīyo, ayaṃ dukkhanirodhagāminī paṭipadāti yogo karaṇīyoti.* SN 56:1(1),

PTS V.XII.I. 414, CS edition.

The TWIM model of open, relaxed, tranquil aware mind in *samādhi* fits this description very nicely. An absorbed meditator would find it difficult or impossible to “see things as they really are” due to a narrowed focus which excludes all but the object of meditation. The TWIM meditator is aware of the movements of mind’s attention, and even the arising of hindrances, if allowed and 6Rd as necessary, allows the meditator to see suffering and how it arises, as well as its cessation and the way leading to that cessation. This is a regular practice within the method of the 6Rs. For the TWIM meditator, the Four Noble Truths become practical and liberating knowledge based on direct experience. This is TWIM *samādhi*.

### **Seeing non-self, which is the impersonal nature of reality**

The supposed solidity of the self is shown in meditation to be composed of five aggregates. Having an intellectual understanding of this may not shake up one’s belief in an eternal self, but having a direct experience not only of the composite nature of the self but also of the disappearance of these components can radically shift the perspective of the meditator. Through this, a deep understanding of *anattā* or the impersonal nature of phenomena can be gained. Bhante quotes *Satipaṭṭhāna* and *Ānāpānasati* Suttas on this matter and shows how the tranquil aware jhānas can yield these crucial insights,

Again, monks, a monk abides observing mind objects as mind-objects in terms of the five Aggregates affected by craving and clinging. Here a monk understands ‘Such is material form, such its origin, such its disappearance; such is feeling, such its origination, such its disappearance; such is perception, such its origin, such its disappearance; such are thoughts (formations), such their origin, such their disappearance, such is consciousness, such its origin, such its disappearance.’ (*Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* verse 38)

On that occasion a monk abides observing mind-objects as mind-objects, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. Having seen with wisdom the abandoning of covetousness and grief, he closely looks on with equanimity. That is why on that occasion a monk abides observing mind-objects as mind-objects, ardent, fully aware, and mindful, having put away covetousness and grief for the world. (*Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* v.39)

Bhante's commentary: When you experience the higher jhānas (meditation stages of understanding), your mind develops a finer and finer balance in it. You then experience the 'abandoning of covetousness and grief, he closely looks on with equanimity'. You see clearly how tricky mind truly is, and you keep a sense of equanimity in it, even though some unpleasant things may arise. The true balance of meditation is learned when you go into the immaterial realms of mind. This is when there is a real letting go of mental concepts and attachments. Mind develops such a beautiful equanimity that even when the most unpleasant feeling arises, mind will accept it without being disturbed. This is how the Fourth Foundation of Mindfulness of Mind-Objects is fulfilled.<sup>320</sup>

## **Cultivating a balanced mind**

The usual description of the Five Aggregates is that they are affected by craving and clinging. That is, they are being taken personally. This produces suffering, so we have here the first and second of the Noble Truths. Through practicing these Four Foundations, the craving and clinging associated with the Five Aggregates can be uprooted. There can still be the five aggregates, and a person composed of these five.

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<sup>320</sup> Ibid, pp. 117-118.

But when through avid practice, there is no more craving and clinging, the self is known for what it is: a temporary concept that arises and then passes. With the deep equanimity mentioned by Bhante, the arising and passing of the self is not a problem. The mind is wonderfully balanced.

With the mind in such equanimity and balance, the meditator in the *rūpa* and *arūpa* jhānas can see the aggregates and the elements (dhatus) arise and subside. This close observation of the arising and subsiding of form, feelings, mind, and mind objects with consequent liberating wisdom is *vipassanā*.

### **A key sutta for understanding this process of satipaṭṭhāna while in jhāna is Anupada Sutta (MN 111)**

The *Anupada Sutta*, MN 111, titled *One by One as they Occurred* in Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation, deserves the attention of those who are examining the original meditation instructions and method as given by the Buddha to his disciples. It is an account, given by the Buddha, of the various stages of *jhāna* experienced by his foremost disciple, Ven. Sāriputta, as he went through to *Nibbāna*. What is notable is that Ven. Sāriputta was clearly practicing *vipassanā* while in *jhāna*. His *jhāna* was not only a *samatha* practice but rather a union of *samatha* and *vipassanā*.

As we see by the list of mental factors that arose and subsided in each *jhāna*, Ven. Sāriputta was open to whatever arose in his mind and was not attempting to suppress anything. Rather, he let go craving through letting go of his identification with what presented itself. He also understood the process of how this was all happening in the mind and gained liberating insight all the way to *Nibbāna*. From a TWIM point of view, he was practicing calm abiding and insight while in tranquil aware *jhāna*.

In this *sutta* we see the beginnings of *abhidhamma* type analysis, as the as the standardized lists of *jhāna* factors as usually found in

the *nikāyas* is supplemented by a list of mental factors experienced in each of the *jhānas* as Ven. Sāriputta went through them.

This *sutta* may be puzzling to those who view or experience *jhāna* only through the method of absorption concentration, and there are claims that the *Anupada Sutta* represents not the original teaching of the Buddha, but an add-on from a later time. I have examined these arguments and do not find them to be persuasive. Please see Appendix 1 for a consideration of this matter. Here, we take the *Anupada Sutta* to be an authentic teaching of the Buddha.

Our previous sections on the *Ānāpānasati* and *Satipaṭṭhāna* suttas are suggestive of teachings by the Buddha with regard to tranquil aware *jhānas*. Therefore, the teaching of tranquil aware *jhānas* does not rest solely on the content of the *Anupada Sutta*. However, this *sutta* is very instructive and explicit in some of its teachings and proves to be quite helpful to the TWIM meditator.

### **The title of the Anupada Sutta suggests Ven. Sāriputta's process of meditation**

*Anupada Sutta* is titled *One by One as They Occurred* in Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi's translation.<sup>321</sup> The title *One by One as They Occurred* is suggestive of the process of meditation in a tranquil aware *jhāna*, for in Ven. Sāriputta's experience, various mental factors presented themselves one by one (this is the reason for the extensive list of mental factors in this *sutta*), and he let them go and gave up any attached craving in the process. He did this one mental factor at a time.

The title is also appropriate in the Ven. Sāriputta proceeds from the first *jhāna*, one by one through each of the *jhānas* all the way to the cessation of perception and feeling. At that point the *sutta* says,

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<sup>321</sup> Bodhi, **The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha**. MN 111 [PTS iii 25], p. 899.

“and his taints were destroyed by his seeing with wisdom.”<sup>322 323</sup>  
Within two weeks of practice, Ven. Sāriputta had attained arahantship.

As Bhante Vimalaramsi explains while reading aloud from the *Anupada Sutta* in a *dhamma* talk,

MN 111: ... the enthusiasm, decision, energy, mindfulness, equanimity, and attention— these states were defined by him one by one as they occurred; ...

BV: They didn’t all happen at the same time, they happened separately.<sup>324</sup>

In seven of the eight levels of *jhāna* that Ven. Sāriputta went through, he saw the arising and cessation of the aggregates, states of mind, mind objects, and remained “unattracted, unrepelled, and detached”, and thereby gained understanding, insight, and wisdom leading to freedom (*Nibbāna*).

Ven. Sāriputta went through this training while maintaining tranquil awareness *jhānas*. To see this arising and cessation of mental states with such clarity and openness, he could not have been in a state of deep absorption. In this *sutta*, by recounting Ven. Sāriputta’s experience, the Buddha is demonstrating the use of tranquil aware *jhānas* to attain liberation.

## Seeing the five aggregates while in *jhāna*

The *Anupada Sutta* illustrates that in tranquil aware *jhāna* the meditator can see the Five Aggregates, the Four Foundations and the *jhāna* factors as they occur. In a *dhamma* talk, Bhante Vimalaramsi explains it in the following way,

Now, this next little bit is very interesting because this is the description of the five aggregates. OK? The five aggregates and the four foundations of

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<sup>322</sup> Ibid, MN 111:19 [PTS iii 29], p. 902.

<sup>323</sup> *Paññāya cassa disvā āsavā parikkhūṇā honti*. MN 111:19, PTS iii 29, CS edition.

<sup>324</sup> 4 March 08, <http://talks.dhammasukha.org/mn-111-jt3-080304.html>, referenced October 2017.

mindfulness are just different ways of saying the same thing. You have five aggregates: you have the body, you have feeling, you have perception, you have thoughts, you have consciousness. You have the four foundations of mindfulness: you have body, the same in both the aggregates and four foundations; feeling, the same in both; perception is part of feeling and it is also part of consciousness; and you have dhammas; and you have consciousness. So those four foundations of mindfulness and the five aggregates are just different ways of saying the same thing. So, the point being - these states in the *jhāna* - while you're in the *jhāna* you are able to practice the four foundations of mindfulness at exactly the same time. Now, the way that this is described is a little bit different than the five aggregates. Instead of 'body' it says 'contact' here because when you get into the later *jhānas* you don't feel your body unless there is contact. OK?

When you get to the fourth *jhāna*, you're not going to be able to radiate loving kindness from your heart anymore because you won't feel it. The feeling of loving kindness will come up into your head. The only thing that you will feel in your body is if there is contact, if something touches. So, he just uses 'contact' and changes it with... changes 'body' into 'contact' because of the later meditations.<sup>325</sup>

The *sutta* is listing what was seen by Ven. Sariputta, "one by one as they occurred". It is also listing the factors in addition to the usual list of *jhāna* factors that are helping Ven. Sāriputta had to be deep enough in *samatha* meditation and with resultant sharp mindfulness to see these things occur one by one. Ven. Vimalaramsi explains,

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<sup>325</sup> <http://talks.dhammasukha.org/mn-111-jt7-120318.html>, MN 111, 18-Mar-2012, referenced October 2017.



MN: 111. “And the states in the fourth *jhāna*—the equanimity, the neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling, the mental unconcern due to tranquility, the purity of mindfulness, and unification of mind; ...

BV: Your mind begins to stay on your object of meditation for a longer period of time, and your mind becomes very tranquil, very much at ease. Any little movement of mind’s attention you’re able to see, and when you see that is... when your mind is on your object of meditation, what happens is - a thought, or sensation, or whatever a distraction is - will start your mind to wobble. And then it wobbles, and it gets bigger and bigger until finally there’s a distraction. But now, when you get into the fourth *jhāna*, you’ll start to see your mind wobble, and you 6R right then, and then your mind stays on your object of meditation. You’re starting to learn what it is to have a still mind, a composed mind.<sup>326</sup>

Bhante is pointing out how staying on the object of meditation produces tranquility and ease. There is a clarity that allows one to see HOW mind’s attention begins to move, what it looks like and feels like when that happens. In a tranquil aware *jhāna* this is what happens. It happened to Ven. Sāriputta, and according to the TWIM teachers, it happens to anyone who with diligence pursues the practice.

### **Samatha creates the conditions for vipassanā and vipassanā furthers samatha**

Deep tranquility (*samatha*) creates the proper setting to be able to observe the details of the movement of mind due to craving. Thus, *samatha* creates the opportunity for *vipassanā*. With resultant *vipassanā* insight into the workings of the mind (how craving manifests etc.), the calm abiding (*samatha*) of the meditator is greatly enhanced, which, in

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<sup>326</sup> <http://talks.dhammasukha.org/mn-111-ana-100328.html>, referenced October 2017.

turn, leads to deeper insight. This is how *samatha* and *vipassanā* work harmoniously together to take the meditator through the jhānas. Following this process, it took Ven. Sāriputta only two weeks to attain arahantship.

## Seeing how impermanence occurs at each link of Dependent Origination

What is seen while in tranquil aware fourth *jhāna*, through practice of *satipaṭṭhāna*, is impermanence (*anicca*). Bhante Vimalaramsi explains how that works while reading from the sutta and offering commentary,

MN:111: “And the states in the fourth *jhāna*—the equanimity, the neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling, the mental unconcern due to tranquility, purity of mindfulness, and unification of mind; the contact, feeling, perception, formations, and mind; ...

BV: You still have the five aggregates here, and this is important to realize because if you’re practicing a one-pointed kind of concentration where your mind stays on one object only, you’re not able to see these five aggregates because your mind is glued to that thing, whatever you put your attention on.

MN:111 ... the enthusiasm, decision, energy, mindfulness, equanimity, and attention - these states were defined by him one by one as they occurred; known to him those states arose, known they were present, known they disappeared. ...

BV: So, he’s still seeing impermanence. You’re seeing change continually; you’re seeing it with a very balanced mind. Now, people that practice straight *vipassanā*, seeing impermanence is a major thing, and they focus on seeing impermanence, suffering, and the impersonal nature of things, and when they do that, they don’t see how dependent origination arises, they

don't see dependent origination at all. But when you're practicing the way that I'm showing you, you are able to see more deeply how these links arise, and how they are there for a moment and disappear. So, what you're seeing is dependent origination, and you're seeing the impermanence at a much finer level. It's not this big, gross level up here (gesture), it's at a much deeper level that you're seeing impermanence happening all the time, and it happens with each link of the dependent origination.<sup>327</sup>

### **With the seeing of impermanence, the meditator also sees suffering and the impersonal nature**

Talking of the *Anupada Sutta*, section 4, and of Ven. Sāriputta's experience, Bhante Vimalaramsi comments,

When Sāriputta got into the first *jhāna*, he knew there was still more work to be done. But while he was in the *jhāna*, he was seeing impermanence. Anyone that sees impermanence sees a lot of unsatisfactoriness because we want things to be permanent, and when they are not, there's this little dissatisfaction that arises.

We're seeing the impersonal nature of all these different states as they arise and pass away. You don't have any control over these; they happen when the conditions are right for them to arise. There's no "me", there's no "my", there's no "I".

You're seeing *anicca*, *dukkha*, *anattā* while you are in the *jhāna*. You're also seeing the Five Aggregates. This is very key. Seeing these things, and we shall see that Sāriputta saw these things all the way up to the Realm of Nothingness.

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<sup>327</sup> <http://talks.dhammasukha.org/mn-111-ana-100328.html>, referenced October 2017.

About seeing the Five Aggregates; in the *Samyutta Nikāya*, there's a section on the Five Aggregates, and it says that the Five Aggregates and the Four Foundations of Mindfulness are the same thing. When you're practicing and getting into the *jhāna*, by adding that extra step of relaxing, you're practicing the Four Foundations of Mindfulness, while you're in the *jhāna*.<sup>328</sup>

We can see from Bhante's comments why *Anupada Sutta* is such a valued text in the TWIM method. Using Ven. Sāriputta's experience as example, Bhante Vimalaramsi is showing how an aware meditator in *jhāna* sees *anicca*, *dukkha* and *anattā* as well as the Five Aggregates and is practicing the *satipaṭṭhāna* while in *jhāna*. That Ven. Sāriputta was practicing while in tranquil aware *jhāna* is clear from the *sutta*.

As Bhante Vimalaramsi says, "This particular *sutta* is very important because it's showing you that there is full awareness while you're in *jhāna*."<sup>329</sup> Such experiences as those of Ven. Sāriputta whole traversing the *jhānas* can be had only through abiding in open, relaxed, tranquil aware *jhāna*.

## **Seeing clearly the links of Dependent Origination results in insight wisdom**

Bhante makes it clear that all of this understanding and insight comes as the meditator begins to see clearly the links of Dependent Origination. In discussing Ven. Sāriputta's experience of self-confidence in the second *jhāna*, Bhante asks,

Why do you have self-confidence when you're starting to develop your deeper stages of meditation? Because you're really starting to understand the process of Dependent Origination and you're starting

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<sup>328</sup> Vimalaramsi, *Moving Dhamma*, Vol. 1. pp. 130-131.

<sup>329</sup> *Ibid*, p. 132.

to see it as being an impersonal process; you're starting to *see*.

Yesterday [during a dhamma talk at a retreat] I was telling everyone I want you to see how the movement of mind's attention works. What happens? How does it happen? As you start seeing that, you start seeing individual parts of Dependent Origination, and you see that there is a cause and effect; when this arises then that arises.

When you let go of the craving, when you let go of that tension and tightness caused by mind's attention and its movement, then there's no clinging. There's no habitual tendency (*bhava*) arising. At that moment, you have a very clear mind. It's alert, there are no thoughts, and you bring your mind's attention back to your object of meditation. You can see how Sāriputta's experience, while he was in each one of those jhānas, is a lot different than the ones that are being described as absorption concentration.<sup>330</sup>

Bhante is advising us that we must have acute mindfulness and full awareness in the jhānas in order to see the arising and passing of phenomena and to observe how that arising and passing happens, which is seeing the links of Dependent Origination. It is this seeing of mental states one by one as they arise, not grasping them but rather letting them go and relaxing and opening, that leads on progressively deeper and deeper into the jhānas.

**At each level of jhāna, the mind imagines a self, as illustrated in the Poṭṭhapāda Sutta.**

In the *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta* (DN 9), the Buddha explained to wandering ascetic Poṭṭhapāda how there are three kinds of acquired (imagined) self, the gross acquired self, the mind-made acquired self,

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<sup>330</sup> Ibid, pp. 132-133.

and the formless acquired self. These correspond to the mental state of uninstructed people (gross acquired self), the meditator abiding in the jhānas of form (mind-made acquired self), and the meditator abiding in the formless jhānas (formless acquired self). The Buddha explains to Poṭṭhapāda that he has a doctrine for getting rid of each of these acquired selves in turn. He says,

But I teach a doctrine for getting rid of the gross acquired self, whereby defiling mental states disappear and states tending to purification grow strong, and one gains and remains in the purity and perfection of wisdom here and now, having realized and attained it by one's own super knowledge...

I also teach a doctrine for getting rid of the mind-made acquired self...

I also teach a doctrine for getting rid of the formless acquired self...<sup>331 332</sup>

Although he does not identify it as such in this particular *sutta*, we may surmise that the Buddha's doctrine for getting rid of the various acquired selves is *samatha-vipassanā* meditation progressing through the jhānas to cessation and *Nibbāna*. This is certainly the method illustrated in *Anupada Sutta* and many other places in the *nikāyas*.

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<sup>331</sup> Walshe, **The Long Discourses of the Buddha**. DN 9:40-42 [PTS 195-6], p. 167.

<sup>332</sup> *Oḷārikassapi kho ahaṃ poṭṭhapāda attapaṭilābhassa pahānāya dhammaṃ desemi yathāpaṭipannānaṃ vo saṅkilesikā dhammā pahīyissanti, vodāniyā dhammā abhivaḍḍhissanti, paññāpāripūriṃ vepullattaṅca diṭṭheva dhamme sayaṃ abhiññā sacchikatvā upasampajja viharissanti.*

*Manomayassa pi kho ahaṃ poṭṭhapāda attapaṭilābhassa pahānāya dhammaṃ desemi yathāpaṭipannānaṃ vo saṅkilesikā dhammā pahīyissanti, vodāniyā dhammā abhivaḍḍhissanti, paññāpāripūriṃ vepullattaṅca diṭṭheva dhamme sayaṃ abhiññā sacchikatvā upasampajja viharissathāti.*

*Arūpassapi kho ahaṃ poṭṭhapāda attapaṭilābhassa pahānāya dhammaṃ desemi yathāpaṭipannānaṃ vo saṅkilesikā dhammā pahīyissanti, vodāniyā dhammā abhivaḍḍhissanti, paññāpāripūriṃ vepullattaṅca diṭṭheva dhamme sayaṃ abhiññā sacchikatvā upasampajja viharissathāti.* DN 9:40-42, PTS 195-6, CS edition. I have included text of the Pali some of which is elided in the English translation.

As we have seen in a previous chapter, in the *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta*, the Buddha likens this process of progressive letting go of the acquired selves to the purification of milk from the cow into curds, from curds into butter, from butter into ghee and from the ghee into cream of ghee, which in northern India is much sought after and is considered the purest form of cooking oil.

By this simile, the Buddha demonstrates how the *samatha-vipassanā* meditator progressively purifies the mind through the stages of *jhāna*. At each level of understanding, the acquired (imagined/conceptualized) self of the previous stage is seen to be illusory, until even the very refined self of the *arūpa* jhānas is seen to be a falsehood.

As in *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta*, the *Anupada Sutta* shows how by progressing through the jhānas, each of these illusory selves is in turn abandoned. Each state of mind is in turn realized to be the illusory appearance of compound phenomena. Only with the attainment of the base of neither perception nor non-perception and the attainment of cessation of perception, feeling, and consciousness, does awareness of phenomena drop away.

*Anupada Sutta* states that up to those two jhānas, there is awareness of the rise and fall of the five aggregates and the awakening factors. Seeing this with insight wisdom is the practice of *satipaṭṭhāna* through understanding the Four Noble Truths, the links of Dependent Origination, and the Three Characteristics of Existence. For instance, in the *jhāna* of the base of nothingness, it is said,

And the states in the base of nothingness—the perception of the base of nothingness and the unification of mind; the contact, feeling, perception, volition, and mind; the enthusiasm, decision, energy, mindfulness, equanimity and attention—these states were defined by him one by one as they occurred; known to him those states arose, known they were present, known they disappeared. He understood thus: There is an escape

beyond.’ And with the cultivation of that [attainment], he confirmed that there is.<sup>333 334</sup>

At each *jhāna* (level of understanding) is stated that Ven. Sāriputta understood “there is an escape beyond”. This indicates his insight into the subtle craving for self at each level, even up to the *jhāna* of neither-perception-nor-non-perception. At each level of *jhāna*, Ven. Sāriputta saw how his increasing refined self was dependently originated, a product of ignorance and a burden of suffering. This is how tranquil aware *jhāna* works, and both the *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta* and the *Anupada Sutta* are wonderful teachings about the way to awakening from this false self.

In the upcoming chapter we will explore how TWIM meditation works to help people understand the process of Dependent Origination, which teaching shows us how we create this false self. We will see that in the TWIM method, Dependent Origination is very much a working framework, very practical and not at all consigned to the area of mere theory. It is the very spine of the teaching, becoming the central understanding leading to the peace of *Nibbāna*.

## Summary

The practice of *satipaṭṭhāna* is at the core of TWIM practice. The *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* is one of a number of texts that teach about *satipaṭṭhāna*, and TWIM references a wide variety of suttas rather than relying one on one or two suttas. TWIM greatly values the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* as a key instructional sutta and looks also to a

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<sup>333</sup> Bodhi, **The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha**. MN.111.16 [PTS iii 28], p.901.

<sup>334</sup> *Puna ca paraṃ bhikkhave, sāriputto sabbaso viññāṇañcāyatanam samatikkamma 'natthi kiñci'ti ākiñcaññāyatanam upasampajja viharati. Ye ca ākiñcaññāyatane dhammā ākiñcaññāyatanasaññā ca cittekaggatā ca phasso. Vedanā saññā cetanā cittaṃ chando adhimokkham viriyaṃ sati upekkhā manasikāro, tyāssa dhammā anupadavavatthitā honti. Tyāssa dhammā viditā uppajanti, viditā upaṭṭhahanti, viditā abbattham gacchanti. So evaṃ pajānāti: 'evaṃ kira me dhammā ahutvā sambhonti, hutvā paṭivenī'ti. So tesu dhammesu anupayo anapāyo anissito appaṭibaddho vipparamutto visamṃyutto vimariyādīkatena cetasā viharati so atthi uttarim nissaraṇanti pajānāti. Tabbahulīkāra atthitvevassa hoti.* MN.111.16, PTS iii 28, CS edition.



wide array of suttas such as *Poṭṭhāpada Sutta*, *Anupada Sutta*, and many others to give a rounded account of the Buddha's method of *satipaṭṭhāna*.

In practicing the TWIM method of *satipaṭṭhāna*, mindfulness is present whatever arises in the field of consciousness, be it body, feeling, mind, or objects of the mind. Within TWIM practice, *satipaṭṭhāna* is carried out as part of *samatha-vipassanā* practice, within the framework of the 6Rs. For *satipaṭṭhāna* to be effectively practiced, the meditator needs a level of calm abiding and an open, relaxed, uplifted mind. This allows for a sharp mindfulness which allows the meditator to carefully observe how craving pulls mind's attention away from the object of meditation, and how that craving can be effectively allayed and eventually let go of completely.

Seeing the Four Foundations is seeing the Five Aggregates. As many suttas demonstrate, including the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* and *Anupada Sutta*, the meditator observes the Five Aggregates and the Four Foundations clearly while in tranquil aware *jhāna*. By carefully attending to the rise and fall of these phenomena, the links of Dependent Origination are seen and thereby there is insight into the Three Characteristic Marks of Existence, which brings liberation.

## Chapter VIII

# Seeing the Links of Dependent Origination

There are many great religions in the world and many teach various forms of meditation. What is it that sets Buddhism apart? What is its defining characteristic?

That was the question of wandering ascetic Upatissa (Sāriputta) when he questioned Ven. Assaji about the doctrine of this Awakened One who was Ven. Assaji's teacher. Upatissa asked, "But what is the doctrine of your reverence's teacher, what does he point out?"

Assaji was new to the doctrine, and hesitant to give an answer, but when pressed he replied,

Of these things that arise from a cause,

The Tathāgata has told the cause,

And also, what their cessation is:

This is the doctrine of the great Recluse. <sup>335 336</sup>

Upon hearing these words Upatissa's dhamma eye opened, and he went off to share his understanding with his friend, wandering ascetic Koliya. When Koliya heard these words, he too had a great insight. The two of them went to find the Buddha and became his foremost disciples, Ven. Sāriputta and Ven. Moggallāna.

What is it that is so transformative about these simple words? They are easy enough to understand on a surface level and to pay lip service to. Observant people can agree that things in the world have a cause, that they come and go as causes and conditions change. This is an understanding of impermanence that common people can and do have, and it does constitute a kind of insight; it does result in more

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<sup>335</sup> Nyanaponika Thera and Helmuth Heckler, **Great Disciples of the Buddha**. (Kandy, Buddhist Publication Society, 2007, reprint of Asian edition), p. 7. The source of the story and the gatha is *Vinaya Piṭaka* PTS I 40, found in translation in *The Book of the Discipline*, translated by I.B. Horner, (London, Luzac & Company LTD., 1971, 3<sup>rd</sup> printing), p. 54.

<sup>336</sup> *Ye dhammā hetuppabhavā tesam hetum tathāgato āha, Tesañca yo nirodho evaṃvādi mahāsamaṇo*"ti. PTS I 40, CS edition.

acceptance of things as they are. Such a common understanding of impermanence does alleviate our suffering to some extent.

However, we are still largely in denial about impermanence and the impersonal nature of existence, because if we look at the nature of the world with real understanding, it threatens everything that we think we are. A seeing of things as they are means the end of the world as we know it. It is the end of how we mentally construct our illusory world on a daily, or even moment-to-moment basis.

If we were to truly see this impermanence and the impersonal nature of existence we would be left with nothing to hold on to, nothing to cling to. Our entire way of projecting ourselves and the world we see is directly opposed to this understanding of impermanence and the impersonal nature of everything. Our lives are a constant struggle to project reality and solidity onto ourselves and the world we live in. We have created a self, and we must then protect it.

This is the projection of a false reality based on craving, conceit, and views (*taṇhā, māna, and diṭṭhi*), and is termed ignorance (*avijja*). Being caught up in this ignorance is suffering, *dukkha*. Seeing the truth of the impersonal nature of arising and ceasing (*anatta and anicca*), that is, seeing Dependent Origination and the Four Noble Truths, is wisdom. Such wisdom leads to the end of suffering, *Nibbāna*.

When we see clearly the truth of impermanence of all compounded phenomena, and as a result understand that the self we have so carefully and laboriously constructed is impermanent, we have gained liberating wisdom. This is the teaching the Buddha Gotama gave to the world, the Lion's Roar of the *Tathāgata*.

### **Seeing the builder of saṃsāra**

Mere intellectual assent to these ideas has some value, but doesn't do much to bring about personality change, a transformation of consciousness, or a fundamental change of perspective. As humans, we generally do anything we can on a daily basis to deny these truths and to pretend that our self is real and everlasting and is

doing a fine job at giving us the sense gratification that we need to keep the structure going.

Under the Bodhi Tree, the Buddha saw through this deceptive structure of a self, built upon craving, conceit, and views. His first utterances upon awakening refer to the ending of this false structure of self. As the *Dhammapada* relates the words of the Buddha,

Through many a birth in saṃsāra have I wandered  
in vain, seeking the builder of this house (of life).  
Repeated birth is indeed suffering!

O house-builder, you are seen! You will not build  
this house again. For all your rafters are broken and  
your ridgepole shattered. My mind has reached the  
Unconditioned: I have attained the destruction of  
cravings.<sup>337 338</sup>

The commentary to these verses of the *Dhammapada* call these stanzas the Buddha's "Song of Victory", saying it is his first utterance after his enlightenment. They explain the house to be individualized existence in *saṃsāra*; the house-builder is craving; the ridge pole is ignorance.<sup>339</sup>

As befits the Song of Victory, the verses highlight the heart of the Buddha's teaching. Here we see the key concepts that the Buddha later developed in his first teaching to the five ascetics as the Four Noble Truths and soon thereafter in his exposition of Dependent Origination. The commentary to the verses in the *Dhammapada* identifies the carpenter and his illusory but troublesome house as being *taṇhā*, craving, and *avijjā*, ignorance. These are the builders and props of individualized existence in *saṃsāra*.

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<sup>337</sup> Buddharakkhita (2007), *The Dhammapada*, verses 153-154, p. 58.

<sup>338</sup> *Anekajātisaṃsaram sandhāvissam anibbisam  
gahakārakaṃ gavesanto: dukkhā jāti punappunam.  
Gahakāraka diṭṭho 'si puna geham na kāhasi'  
Sabbā te phāsukā bhaggā, gahakūtam visankhitam;  
visaṅkhāragatam cittam taṇhānam khayam ajjhagā.* Pali text from Buddharakkhita translation, cited above.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid, p. 59.

## **Dependent Origination as an explanation of the structure of our suffering**

The First Noble Truth speaks of suffering (*dukkha*). The Second Noble Truth gives craving as the cause of this suffering. The Third Noble Truth gives hope for an end to suffering, even as the Buddha proclaims in the *Dhammapada* verses. The Fourth Noble Truth lays out clearly a path to eliminating the craving, and hence the suffering.

Dependent Origination is an elaboration of the Four Noble Truths, an elaboration on how the housebuilder constructs his illusory but troublesome structure. By using the imagery of a house, the Buddha is pointing out that a state of suffering is where we abide throughout these innumerable rebirths. Dependent Origination is the blueprint for the house of suffering. By gaining insight into the workings of Dependent Origination, we come to understand how we so thoroughly construct the structure of our own misery, and how it can be taken apart.

Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation places these two teachings at the center of understanding and practice, that is, the Four Noble Truths and Dependent Origination. Of course, any system of thought and practice which claims to be based on the teaching of the Buddha must embrace the Four Noble Truths, some basic version of which is known by many well-educated people around the world, even by non-Buddhists.

## **The Four Noble Truths and Dependent Origination are key to practice in TWIM**

Within the practice of TWIM, the Four Noble Truths and Dependent Origination are not meant as merely theoretical knowledge or a preliminary understanding that convinces the practitioner of the benefit of undertaking the Noble Eightfold Path. They are valuable in those ways, but their place in the path goes much deeper than that. In fact, they are used at every step of practice, from the first attempts to meditate all the way to *Nibbāna*. They are practical, working tools for seeing through the housebuilder's tricks. They are the key to both theory and practice.

The study of Dependent Origination can greatly assist directly seeing Dependent Origination through the method of *samatha-vipassanā* practice. At retreats, Bhante Vimalaramsi reads suttas such as MN 38, The Greater Discourse on the Destruction of Craving (*Mahātaṇhāsankhaya Sutta*) aloud to retreatants. In fact, reading the suttas aloud forms the greatest part of Bhante’s *dhamma* talks, and a full library of talks on suttas from the Nikāyas is available on the Dhamma Sukha Meditation Center website.<sup>340</sup> Bhante emphasizes the importance of directly seeing the links of Dependent Origination.

### **The importance of recognizing mental proliferation**

In addition to *dhamma* talks, Bhante recommends what he calls “my favorite book on dhamma except for the suttas”, namely Bhikkhu Kaṭukurunde Ñānananda’s masterly *Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought*.<sup>341</sup>

This book, *Concept and Reality in Early Buddhist Thought* highlighted the understanding of *papañca* as “mental proliferation”, that is proliferation of either thinking or emotion. Understanding this key concept and then seeing it happening in one’s own mind is productive of real insight for the meditator. Bhante Ñānananda’s book is of great assistance in understanding and then seeing for oneself how Dependent Origination works. This is no other than seeing and understanding the Four Noble Truths. These are the two central teachings of the Buddha.

Speaking of these two central teachings, Bhante points out,

The Buddha taught this in discourse after discourse,  
so much so that the Four Noble Truths and Dependent  
Origination have become the backbone of his teachings,

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<sup>340</sup> [www.dhammasukha.org](http://www.dhammasukha.org), accessed October 2017.

<sup>341</sup> This book is currently out of print but available over the web in PDF format. It can be accessed at: [ahandfulofleaves.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/concept-and-reality-in-early-buddhist-thought\\_nanananda\\_1971.pdf](http://ahandfulofleaves.files.wordpress.com/2012/02/concept-and-reality-in-early-buddhist-thought_nanananda_1971.pdf). Accessed October 2017. I heard Bhante speak highly in this way of Ven. Ñānananda’s book at a *dhamma* talk during a TWIM retreat in Colombo in February 2015.

and is the *most essential and important teaching of all!*<sup>342</sup>

Bhante cites the verses given by Venerable Arahāt Assaji in answer to ascetic wanderer Sariputta’s question about the Buddha’s teaching to illustrate the central importance of this teaching of Dependent Origination. Bhante writes, “When the Venerable Arahāt Assaji was asked to state the master’s message as precisely and as briefly as possible, he gave the doctrine of arising and ceasing of phenomena as seen through the eyes of Dependent Origination.”<sup>343</sup>

By hearing this teaching from Ven. Assaji, two of the Buddha’s greatest disciples, Sāriputta and Moggallāna, came to understand that the Buddha indeed was the teacher, and his *dhamma* the teaching they had been seeking.

### **Dependent Origination is the key to understanding the Four Noble Truths and the Three Characteristics of Existence**

As we will see in subsequent parts of our discussion, according to TWIM, deep insight into the Three Characteristics of Existence, (Pali: *tilakkhāṇa*), i.e. impermanence, suffering, and the impersonal nature, (Pali: *anicca, dukkha, and anatta*) are best gained through a clear view of Dependent Origination. It is also the case that a clear understanding of Dependent Origination is the same as understanding the Four Noble Truths. As Bhante Vimalaramsi points out (quoting MN 28:38) about this conversation between Ven. Assaji and the two wanderers, “with a single sentence the Lord Buddha dispels doubt about the correctness of [Ven. Assaji’s] summary of the Buddha’s teachings thus, “He who sees Dependent Origination

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<sup>342</sup> Vimalaramsi, *Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life*, p.31.

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 39.

sees the dhamma, he who sees the Dhamma sees Dependent Origination.”<sup>344 345</sup>

Readers familiar with this passage will remember that it is Ven. Sariputta that speaks these words, attributing them to the Buddha by prefacing them with the statement. “Now this has been said by the Blessed One.” Furthermore, he adds that, “These five aggregates affected by clinging are dependently arisen.”<sup>346</sup>

Bhante explains the above as “...seeing and realizing all of the Noble Truths along with the links of Dependent Origination and the Three Characteristics.” He adds, “This is the only way to attain Nibbāna!”<sup>347</sup>

Bhante Vimalaramsi’s emphasis on Dependent Origination is echoed in all traditions of Buddhism, whether Theravāda or Mahāyāna. All traditions also look upon Dependent Origination as a complex and multi-layered teaching which is not easy to grasp in all of its dimensions. In general, Dependent Origination has served in Buddhism to explain the nature of the arising and ceasing of phenomena in the universe, the continuity of the stream of consciousness over three (or more) lifetimes, and what is arising in the present moment. This makes for a uniquely Buddhist way of viewing these three aspects.

## **The varied interpretations of Dependent Origination in Buddhism**

Let us summarize these three uses of Dependent Origination as follows. It is used to show that: 1. All phenomena arise and cease interdependently and without a first or ultimate cause. There is no need to posit a divine creator to explain the world of phenomena. 2. Conditions in the present life are due to actions (*kamma*) in the

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<sup>344</sup> Ibid, p. 39.

<sup>345</sup> *Yo paṭiccasamuppādaṃ passati, so dhammaṃ passati. Yo dhammaṃ passati, so paṭiccasamuppādaṃ passatīti.* MN 28:38, PTS i 191, CS edition.

<sup>346</sup> *Paṭiccasamuppānā kho panime yadidaṃ pañcupādānakkhandhā.* MN 28:38, PTS i 191, CS edition.

<sup>347</sup> Ibid, p. 39.



past life or lives, and action in this life will contribute as causes for the ripening of conditions in the next life. 3. Arisen phenomena at this moment are caused by actions in prior moments, and actions (*kamma*) in this moment will contribute to the ripening of conditions in the next moment.

### **TWIM emphasizes the practical, here and now aspect of Dependent Origination**

In TWIM the emphasis is on the third of these aspects of Dependent Origination, as this is a very practical way to use Dependent Origination in meditation and in gaining an understanding of how conditions are arising in our experience of everyday life. In gaining a working understanding of how Dependent Origination actually works, most people find it easiest to begin with having a look at how conditions have arisen in our day-to-day life. As this basic understanding of Dependent Origination is gained on a gross level, one's understanding can be refined to seeing how mind states arise moment-to-moment while engaged in meditation.

Gaining an understanding of how Dependent Origination works is to see how it is that we create our suffering moment-to-moment. By grasping at a permanent self (*attā*), human beings fall into action (*kamma*) based on ignorance (*avijjā*), which leads to grief and despair etc. (*jarāmarana, soka, parideva, dukkha, domanassa, upāyāsa*).

Albert Einstein, who had some deep insights not only into the realities of space and time, but also into human nature, referred to the attempt to hold onto a separate substantial self as an “optical illusion of consciousness”.<sup>348</sup> Einstein also saw in part what the Buddha saw about the insanity of human behavior. Of our human tendency to continue to attempt to find happiness through the pursuit of selfishness and sense

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<sup>348</sup> [blog.gaiam.com/quotes/authors/albert-einstein?page=6](http://blog.gaiam.com/quotes/authors/albert-einstein?page=6), accessed October 2017.

gratification, Einstein commented, “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over while expecting different results.”<sup>349</sup>

Fortunately, there is an escape from this trap of illusion the Buddha described so aptly with his scheme of Dependent Origination. If we can clearly see the illusion as illusion, it dissolves. The survival of the illusory self depends upon our believing in it, and upon our feeding it. When this process of nourishing the illusion stops, it melts away. Self-grasping (*attā*) is at every link in Dependent Origination and through seeing this self-grasping clearly, we can step out of bondage into freedom.

As Dependent Origination illuminates the activities of the builder of the samsaric house of suffering, we can understand why the Buddha emphasizes the understanding of the links of Dependent Origination and thereby, insight into the impersonal nature of reality (*anattā*). Following the emphasis placed on understanding Dependent Origination, TWIM uses Dependent Origination as a practical tool for finding an escape from an end to suffering. The TWIM meditator can see the housebuilder even as Gotama the Buddha did. This is liberating insight.

### **The impact of dialogue with other Indian religious traditions on the Buddhist interpretation of Dependent Origination**

When Buddhism was in dialogue with philosophical schools of other traditions from the time of the Buddha for the following centuries, the first (no ultimate cause) and second (continuity of consciousness from lifetime to lifetime) aspects of Dependent Origination were emphasized. This was to show that the world of phenomena could be explained without resorting to a creator god. Also important was to show the continuity of *kamma* and ripening of *kamma* from lifetime to lifetime. It was this multi-lifetime use of Dependent Origination that

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<sup>349</sup> [www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/a/alberteins133991.html](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/a/alberteins133991.html), accessed October 2017.

came to prominence in the *Visuddhimagga* and has since that time dominated the interpretation of the twelve links (*nidāna*).

This interpretation by Ven. Buddhaghosa was useful in differentiating Buddhism as a non-theistic system and to account for the continuity of the stream of consciousness. Ven. Buddhaghosa divided the links of Dependent Origination into those pertaining to the past (previous) lifetime, those pertaining to the present lifetime, and those pertaining to the future lifetime of the individual. However, by emphasizing this interpretation of Dependent Origination, it became more useful as a philosophical scheme rather than a practical tool.

### **The three-lifetime model of Dependent Origination is of limited value to the meditator**

This analysis of the links of Dependent Origination into a span of three lifetimes is not particularly useful in meditation or in daily life. TWIM does not make much use of the three lifetimes analysis as TWIM is much more interested in helping the meditator understand how these present phenomena have arisen, and by understanding the links of Dependent Origination, to find a way to step out of this endless cycle that causes us our suffering. Bhante Vimalaramsi has this to say of the way TWIM uses Dependent Origination,

The hindrances are your teacher because they're showing you very clearly how mind's attention moves. When you see it very clearly, you start seeing more and more clearly the tiny pieces, and you will start recognizing parts of Dependent Origination.

Dependent Origination happens fast. I know there's some commentaries where they talk about Dependent Origination happening over three lifetimes. That's wishful thinking. But with the snap of a finger, that was a million cycles of the twelve links of Dependent Origination arising and passing away. It happens in a thought moment.

As you become more familiar with how the process works, you start educating yourself and teaching yourself how to let go of believing that anything that arises is personal. You start seeing everything as an impersonal process, and that is incredibly freeing and liberating when you are able to do that.<sup>350</sup>

According to the experience of TWIM meditators, Dependent Origination is occurring very rapidly at every moment. Once the mind relaxes, lets go of some of its craving, and mindfulness sharpens, the meditator begins to see for himself or herself the links of Dependent Origination. As Bhante points out, the seeing of the impersonal process (*anatta*) is part of that seeing. Such seeing and understanding leads to freedom.

### **Beginning TWIM meditation and the early process of seeing the links of Dependent Origination**

How is seeing the links of Dependent Origination done in practice?

When a novice begins the practice of Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation, what most people immediately notice is the business of the mind. There is a veritable flood of thoughts constantly coming up, bringing up other related thoughts. Turning the attention inward reveals this chaotic mental state.

This flood of thoughts can be quite discouraging to the first-time meditator as he or she may feel like the purpose of meditation is to have a quiet mind, and it seems like just the opposite is happening. What most people don't realize is that this flood of voices, images, memories and feelings in the mind are happening at all times, both during meditation and also in daily life. However, in daily life, the flood of thoughts is not obvious to the person, as it is a subconscious process. When the meditator sits down and looks inwards, rather than busying the mind with external objects and affairs, this chaos of

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<sup>350</sup> Vimalaramsi, *Moving Dhamma*, Vol. 1. p. 102.

mental activity becomes obvious to the meditator. The subconscious becomes conscious.

Following the TWIM method, there is no attempt to one-pointedly fix the mind on a single object or sensation. Rather, the object of meditation is held attentively but lightly for the express purpose of having a homebased to return to should them be pulled away. The 6R technique is to allow phenomena to arise as they will but to be let go of one by one as they occur. While doing so, the TWIM meditator closely watches the movement of mind's attention and begins to discern the patterns of how phenomena arise. In this way begins the first understanding of the links of Dependent Origination.

The first realizations about Dependent Origination usually come in the links related to the gross, everyday level of mind. When first beginning with meditation, that is the level that readily presents itself. When we first take up the object of meditation, mind's attention will be frequently pulled away. It is common for the meditator to have a proliferation of thought and emotion that may last minutes. Then he or she wakes up and realizes mind's attention has wandered. Right at that point is the opportunity to see Dependent Origination. Bhante Vimalaramsi advises,

Please don't fight with any hindrance. Instead, learn from it. See HOW mind's attention actually gets pulled to that hindrance and this will teach you firsthand HOW Dependent Origination occurs. Fighting or trying to control a hindrance is the cause of the tightness or tension (which is craving) arising.

This happens every time mind's attention gets pulled away and this causes craving (*taṇhā*), clinging (*upādāna*), and our habitual tendency (*bhava*) to arise.

These are three very important parts of Dependent Origination to be recognized and observed closely. The habitual tendency (*bhava*) always reacts in the same way when this sort of distraction arises.

The more one sees clearly how these different aspects of Dependent Origination occur, the easier it is to let them go.<sup>351</sup>

## Recognizing craving when it arises

In TWIM practice, craving (*taṇhā*) is considered the “weak link” in the chain of Dependent Origination which keeps us bound to *saṃsāra*. Bhante explains how a feeling arises, and then,

There is craving that arises right after feeling. And craving is always the “I like it, I don’t like it” mind. Craving always manifests as tension and tightness in your mind and in your body, including inside of the head, which we sometimes forget is part of the body.

Right after craving is clinging. Clinging is the thoughts, the story, the opinions, the concepts about why you like or dislike that feeling. The weak link in Dependent Origination is craving. Why?

It is because craving is the easiest thing to recognize when it comes up. It always comes up in your mind and in your body. There is tightness, there is tension. When a feeling arises, we like it or don’t like it, whichever one it happens to be.

Then we have thoughts and then we have our habitual tendencies [*bhava*] about those thoughts. We always think this way when that kind of feeling arises.<sup>352</sup>

There are a couple of important points here. Bhante is showing us how to recognize craving as it arises. This does not have to be abstract in any way. Rather, it is quite direct and obvious once we practice it. Craving always manifests as tension and tightness. This tension and tightness can occur anywhere in the mind and body but

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<sup>351</sup> Vimalaramsi, *Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life*, p. 64.

<sup>352</sup> Vimalaramsi, *Moving Dhamma*, Vol. 1. pp. 96-97.

it nearly always manifests inside the head. The TWIM meditator is instructed to pay special attention to any tightness in this part of the body. Bhante explains it as follows,

The easiest place to first see this tension and tightness is in one's head/brain. Everyone has a thin sac wrapped around the brain called the meninges [pronounced men-en-jeez]. When a thought or feeling arises, there is an expansion of the grey matter in the brain and the brain presses up against the meninges. This is noticed by the meditator as a feeling of tension and tightness. Noticing the tension is how craving can be recognized and seen. Being able to feel this tightness and relax or let go is practicing Right Effort or the 6Rs.

When this is done, mind's attention becomes clear, and with no distracting thoughts arising, mind becomes very alert and pure. This is what the Third Noble Truth (cessation of suffering) is all about.<sup>353</sup>

### **Dependent Origination shows us the pattern of how our suffering arises**

Despite the seeming complexity and chaos of our mind when it is untrained by meditation, actually the mind operates in a rather simple way. With some introspection, we find we are running the same patterns over and over again. When we understand how our patterns arise, we can find an escape to clarity and freedom.

Following the scheme of Dependent Origination, a sensation (*phassa*) arises. Due to the arising of the sensation, a feeling arises.<sup>354</sup> This will be pleasant, painful, or neither-pleasant-nor-painful. Without keen mindfulness, we identify with the feeling, we think it belongs to us. Due to this identification, craving arises and seeks gratification. We want to obtain the pleasant or avoid the painful.

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<sup>353</sup> Vimalaramsi, **Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life**, pp. 10-11.

Anything else is ignored. This craving for gratification brings a danger and the possibility of an escape. In *Khandhasamyutta*, the Buddha explains it as follows,

“Bhikkhus, before my enlightenment, while I was still a bodhisatta, not yet fully enlightened, it occurred to me: ‘What is the gratification, what is the danger, what is the escape in the case of form? What is the gratification, what is the danger, and what is the escape in the case of feeling...perception...volitional formations...consciousness?’

Then, bhikkhus, it occurred to me: ‘the pleasure and joy that arise in dependence on form: this is the gratification in form. That form is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change: this is the danger in form. The removal and abandonment of desire and lust for form: this is the escape from form.

The pleasure and the joy that arise in dependence on feeling...in dependence on perception...in dependence on volitional formations...in dependence on consciousness. That consciousness is impermanent, suffering, and subject to change: this is the danger in consciousness. The removal and abandonment of desire and lust for consciousness: this is the escape from consciousness.’ ”<sup>355 356</sup>

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<sup>355</sup> Bodhi, **The Connected Discourses of the Buddha**. SN 22.26(5) [PTS III 27-8], p.873-4.

<sup>356</sup> *Pubbeva me bhikkhave, sambodhā anabhisambuddhassa bodhisattasseva sato etadahosi:*

*Ko nu kho rūpassa assādo, ko ādīnavo, kiṃ nissaraṇaṃ:*

*Ko vedanāya assādo, ko ādīnavo kiṃ nissaraṇaṃ:*

*Ko nu kho saññāya assādo, ko ādīnavo, kiṃ nissaraṇaṃ:*

*Ko nu kho saṅkhārānaṃ assādo, ko ādīnavo, kiṃ nissaraṇaṃ:*

*Ko nu kho viññāṇassa assādo, ko ādīnavo, kiṃ nissaraṇaṃ: tassa mayhaṃ bhikkhave etadahosi: yaṃ kho rūpaṃ paṭicca uppajjati sukhaṃ somanassaṃ, ayaṃ rūpassa assādo. Yaṃ rūpaṃ aniccaṃ dukkhaṃ vipariṇāmadhammaṃ, ayaṃ rūpassa ādinavo, yo rūpasmiṃ chandarāgavinayo chandarāgappahānaṃ, idaṃ rūpasasa nissaraṇaṃ.*



According to this teaching of the Buddha, beings can derive pleasure and joy from the objects of the senses, either by obtaining what is wanted or by avoiding what is not wanted. This is playing a dangerous game, as the sense objects upon which we rely for this gratification are unreliable and unstable, subject to change and impermanence. The opportunity for escape from this danger is available to the introspective meditator.

If we fail to recognize and let go of the craving when it arises, we will be caught up in it. If the feeling of the sense object is pleasant, we will try to obtain or to remain with what we see as the source of the pleasant feeling. If it is unpleasant, we will try to remove it.

Once we identify with this craving (“I want it.” or “I want it to go away.”) and allow it to control our mind, the thoughts, stories, opinion and concepts arise (*upādāna*) to inform us why we like or dislike that feeling (*vedanā*). We have the same old reactive patterns (*bhava*) occur over and over in any given situation.

## Seeing of the links of Dependent Origination in the here and now

When we look at Dependent Origination as a description of a series of mind moments rather than as occurring over three lifetimes, the arising of the habitual tendency (*bhava*) in turn gives rise to the birth of action (*jāti*) which, being based on ignorance of Dependent Origination and of the Four Noble Truths, produces various levels of

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*Yaṃ vedanaṃ paṭicca uppajjati sukhaṃ somanassaṃ, ayaṃ vedanassa assādo, yaṃ vedanaṃ aniccaṃ dukkhaṃ viparināmadhammaṃ, ayaṃ vedanassa ādinavo, yo vedanasmim chandarāgavinayo chandarāgappahānaṃ, idaṃ vedanassa nissaraṇaṃ.*

*Yaṃ saññaṃ paṭicca uppajjati sukhaṃ somanassaṃ, ayaṃ saññassa assādo, yaṃ saññaṃ aniccaṃ dukkhaṃ viparināmadhammaṃ, ayaṃ saññassa ādinavo, yo Saññasmim chandarāgavinayo chandarāgappahānaṃ, idaṃ saññassa nissaraṇaṃ.*

*Yaṃ saṃkhāre paṭicca uppajjati sukhaṃ somanassaṃ, ayaṃ saṃkhārānaṃ assādo, ye saṃkhārā aniccā dukkhā viparināmadhammā, ayaṃ saṃkhārānaṃ ādinavo, yo saṃkhāresu chandarāgavinayo chandarāgappahānaṃ, idaṃ saṃkhārānaṃ nissaraṇaṃ.*

*Yaṃ viññānaṃ paṭicca uppajjati sukhaṃ somanassaṃ, ayaṃ viññānassa assādo, yaṃ viññānaṃ aniccaṃ dukkhaṃ viparināmadhammaṃ, ayaṃ viññānassa ādinavo, yo viññānasmim chandarāgavinayo chandarāgappahānaṃ, idaṃ viññānassa nissaraṇaṃ. SN 22.26(5), PTS III 27-28, CS edition.*

sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair due to the passing of that series of mind moments. All of this reinforces our ignorance (*avijjā*) and mental formations (*saṅkhāra*). By identifying with any feeling when it arises, the resulting mental proliferation drives us more deeply into the wheel of *samsāra*.

The practice of the 6Rs including the relax step can bring about cessation of mental proliferation. The tendency to mental proliferation likely will return, but each time the meditator lets go of craving, clinging, or habitual tendencies, the mind becomes more relaxed and open and there is more clarity.

With practice, the process of mind's attention going off into proliferation is recognized a bit earlier in the process. Rather than waking up from a dream having proliferated for some minutes on, for instance, formulating a plan of action (*bhava*), the meditator begins to recognize at an earlier step, perhaps catching some of the mental tapes playing in his or her head, the same old arguments and opinions that always produce a certain string of thoughts whenever this situation arises (recognizing at the link of *upādāna*).

### **Seeing the links of Dependent Origination first at a gross level and then developing the ability to see finer and finer links**

For the beginner, it is often easier to see the links of Dependent Origination at a gross level, that of habitual action (*bhava*), or at the earlier link of clinging (*upādāna*). With deep equanimity, the subtler links of Dependent Origination can be seen.

The TWIM meditator pays keen attention to the movement of mind's attention. This results in a heightened awareness of how certain things arise. The meditator begins to notice that certain thoughts or emotions that arise are always preceded by certain other thoughts or emotions. Things are not arising chaotically, but according to a cause, and repeated arising is due to a pattern. As *Nidānasamyutta* says,

Thus, when this exists, that comes to be;

With the arising of this, that arises.

When this does not exist, that does not come to be; with the cessation of this, that ceases.<sup>357 358</sup>

With the deepening relaxation and sharpening of mindfulness, one can recognize the mental proliferation at an earlier link (working backward from the links of *bhava* and *upādāna*), at the link of craving (*taṇhā*). When craving arises it manifests, as Bhante Vimalaramsi has pointed out, as the “I like it; I don’t like it mind.” For most humans our entire experience is being run through this narrow door of craving in its manifestation as attachment and aversion.

With a deepening understanding of Dependent Origination, it becomes clear that emotions such as anger, memories of angry episodes with other people, and much more mental proliferation has come from this simple I like it, I don’t like it way of experiencing.

With this realization, much of the accumulated load of habitual thoughts, feeling, arguments, opinions, judgements, and even habitual activities and actions based on these proliferated emotions and memories begin to come apart. A transformation of consciousness and wholesome development of personality begins to take place. This is due to releasing, relaxing, sharpening mindfulness, and beginning to see clearly what are the causes and conditions that bring about mental proliferation. This is seeing the links of Dependent Origination through the practice of *satipaṭṭhāna*.

## **Tranquil aware jhāna allows for investigation of states of mind**

The practice is to recognize that the mind has wandered from the object of meditation and then to use one’s curiosity which is the Awakening Factor (*bojjhaṅga*) of investigation of states (*dhammavicaya*) to find out how any particular distraction has arisen.

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<sup>357</sup> Bodhi, **The Connected Discourses of the Buddha**. SN 12:21(1) [PTS II.I.III.28], p.552.

<sup>358</sup> *Iti imasmiṃ sati idaṃ hoti. Imassuppādā idaṃ uppajjati. Imasmiṃ asati idaṃ na hoti. Imassa nirodhā idaṃ nirujjhati.* SN 12:21(1), PTS II 28, CS edition.

To do this, one develops the ability to look at what has just preceded the arising of the distraction. For most meditators, this can only be done most effectively in a state of tranquil aware *jhāna* as one-pointed absorption is difficult to combine with clear seeing of the process of arising and ceasing.

Another key factor is the use of ‘forwards’ and ‘backwards’ Dependent Origination. This is familiar from numerous suttas as the Buddha listed the causation of the links of this process in the ‘forwards’ order to show how they arise and used both the ‘forwards’ and ‘backwards’ order to show their cessation. TWIM teacher Doug Kraft uses the image of the flow of a river, with the links of ignorance (*avijjā*) and formations (*saṅkhāra*) listed at the top of the events, even as a river originates up in the highlands, and then flows downwards to the lowlands of birth (*jāti*) and aging and death (*jarāmarana*). The other links are in order along the flow of the river. He calls this the “downstream” flow of D.O. Below is an adaptation of a chart from his book *Buddha’s Map*.

Table 2: *The Events of Paṭiccasamuppāda (Dependent Origination) as they flow ‘downstream’ when the psycho-spiritual system is relatively unconscious and responding mechanically*<sup>359</sup>

	<i>English</i>	<i>Pāli</i>	<i>Other Translations</i>
1	Ignorance	Avijjā	Delusion
2	Formations	Saṅkhāra	Potential, Fabrications
3	Consciousness	Viññāṇa	Awareness, Life force, Mind
4	Mentality-Materiality	Nāmarūpa	Mind and Body, Name-and-Form
5	Six Sense Bases	Āyatana	Eye, Ear, Nose, Tongue, Touch and Mind
6	Contact	Phassa	Perception
7	Feeling Tone	Vedanā	Feeling, Valence
8	Craving	Taṇhā	Thirst, Desire
9	Clinging	Upādāna	Attachment, Grasping
10	Habitual Tendencies	Bhava	Existence, Becoming, Emotional stuff
11	Birth of Action	Jāti	Birth, Rebirth
12	Sorrow and Grief	Jarāmarana	Aging and Death, Sorrow, Lamentation, Pain, Grief, Despair

## The downstream flow of Dependent Origination

This is the ‘downstream flow’, the order in which the links are created by the requisite condition. It occurs in *Nidānasamyutta* as follows:

And what, bhikkhus, is dependent origination? With ignorance as condition, volitional formations (come to be); with volitional formations as condition, consciousness; with consciousness as condition, name-and-form; with name-and-form as condition, the six

<sup>359</sup> Kraft, Doug, **Buddha’s Map**. (Nevada City, Blue Dolphin Press, 2013), p. 59.

sense bases; with the six sense bases as condition, contact; with contact as condition, feeling; with feeling as condition, craving; with craving as condition, clinging; with clinging as condition, existence, with existence as condition, birth; with birth as condition, aging-and-death, sorrow, lamentation, pain displeasure, and despair come to be. Such is the origin of the whole mass of suffering. This, bhikkhus, is called dependent origination.<sup>360 361</sup>

To see how this works in TWIM meditation, we will continue with our previous example. The meditator has gotten insight into the link of craving (*taṇhā*) and sees that he or she is judging the continual stream of sensation (*phassa*) and feeling (*vedanā*) in terms of “I like it.” or “I don’t like it”. Following the links downstream, the meditator sees the opinions, judgements, views, rationalizations, emotions, stories and such that arise whenever there is a “I like it” or “I don’t like it” reaction. Even further downstream, the meditator discovers many habitual patterns and emotional reactions that follow the playing of these mental and emotional tapes. Following the links further downstream, the meditator can see how this creates situations in life built on these habitual patterns. Further downstream comes the suffering.

## **The teaching of Dependent Origination was a unique and original teaching of the Buddha**

With clarity, much of the suffering and its cause can be seen and let go of. As the Buddha said of his realization of Dependent

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<sup>360</sup> Bodhi, **The Connected Discourses of the Buddha**. SN 12.1(1), [PTS II.I.12.1]. p.533.

<sup>361</sup> *Katamo ca bhikkhave, paṭiccasamuppādo? Avijjāpaccayā bhikkhave saṅkhārā. Saṅkhārapaccayā viññānaṃ. Viññānapaccayā nāmarūpaṃ. Nāmarūpapaccayā saḷāyatanaṃ. Saḷāyatanapaccayā phasso. Phassapaccayā vedanā. Vedanāpaccayā taṇhā. Taṇhāpaccayā upādānaṃ. Upādānapaccayā bhavo. Bhavapaccayā jāti. Jātipaccayā jarāmaraṇaṃ, sokaparidevadukkhadomanassupāyāsā sambhavanti. Evametassa kevalassa dukkhakkhandhassa samudayo hoti. Ayaṃ vuccati bhikkhave paṭiccasamuppādo.* SN 12.1(1), PTS II.I.12.1, CS edition.

Origination on the eve of his awakening, “ ‘Origination, origination’ - thus, bhikkhus, in regard to things unheard before there arose in me vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge, and light.”<sup>362</sup> <sup>363</sup>

In this way the Buddha describes his understanding based on seeing clearly how Dependent Origination works. In the suttas, when the Buddha talks of the wisdom that leads one to awakening, he is referring to the understanding of Dependent Origination, of the Four Noble Truths, and the Three Characteristics.

Prior to the teaching of Gotama the Buddha, this knowledge was unknown in ancient India. This was the great gift of the Buddha to the world of suffering beings, the great balm for the ills of *saṃsāra*. This very same vision, knowledge, wisdom, true knowledge, and light is available to those who follow the Buddha’s advice on practice. Clearly seeing the links of Dependent Origination through the practice of *satipaṭṭhāna* is a fundamental aspect of TWIM meditation.

## **Beyond a world of gain and loss**

With practice, the TWIM meditator understands something of how craving (*taṇhā*) creates a mind of attachment and aversion, of gain or loss. Once this is clearly seen, there is a shift in perception. The world is seen in a different light. It is no longer a world comprised of gain and loss.

For the untrained mind, gain and loss are paramount. The mind is turned towards survival and sense gratification. These things which have the potential to give us what we want, and that which we want to avoid are selected by our consciousness and energized in our field of awareness. Nearly everything else is irrelevant and is ignored.

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<sup>362</sup> Bodhi, **The Connected Discourses of the Buddha**. SN 12.11(1) [PTS II.1.12.12], p.541.

<sup>363</sup> "*Samuḍayo samuḍayo*"*ti kho me bhikkhave pubbe ananussutesu dhammesu cakkhum udapādi. Nāṇaṃ udapādi. Paññā udapādi. Vijjā udapādi. Āloko udapādi.* SN 12.11(1), PTS II.1.12.12, CS edition.

With the abandonment and relaxation of the patterns of craving in the mind due to practicing Right Effort through using the 6Rs, the field of vision begins to change. Gain and loss begin to lose their magnetism, and that which we conceptualized (*saññā*) as being important to us due to our attachment and aversion begins to lose its characteristic of appeal or its avoidance.

An entire world that we had previously ignored begins to emerge, the world of neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant that formerly was merely a backdrop. In addition, the experience that we were craving or pushing away (attraction and aversion) becomes lovingly accepted in a relaxed, open way. therefore, whether pleasant, unpleasant or neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant feelings arise, the TWIM meditator abides in stillness and equanimity.

Paradoxically, this newly emerging world of neither-pleasant-nor-unpleasant phenomena, as well as pleasant and unpleasant which we are no longer attempting to control, is very satisfying and gives us a newfound sense of gratitude and contentment. There is a sense of peace and stillness that replaces our previous seeking for sensory gratification. In Buddhism this is often identified as deep happiness (*sukhā*). We begin to experience a new way of living in the world through simplicity and perceiving our world with the newfound eyes of equanimity.

The mind begins to quiet. The mental chatter is nearly gone. Mental verbalization and conceptualization, *vitakka*, have faded out. Our insane drive to attempt to personally control our situation begins to quiet. The mind that is constantly figuring out how to control things, to maximize pleasure and avoid pain, *vicāra*, begins to fade into a natural and healthy investigation of how our mind works. This *vicāra* gradually transforms into *dharmavicaya*, investigation of phenomena. We are beginning to experience life as it can be when lived free from desire, *virāga*.



## **A continued role for occasional refined thinking beyond the first jhāna**

Bhante Vimalaramsi reminds us that even beyond the first *jhāna*, when we enter the second *jhāna*, which is characterized by the dropping of thinking and examining thoughts (*vitakka* and *vicāra*), there is some occasional role for *vitakka*. It is generally a great relief to get away from the burden of obsessive thinking, but occasional precise observational thoughts continue to have their place within the practice. They are needed to realize the links of Dependent Origination. In a *dhamma* talk on MN 18, Bhante explains this point,

Not all thinking is bad in meditation. Because sometimes you need to have a little bit of thought that describes what's happening in the present moment, but the thought just occurs one time and then you let it go. You don't try to delve into it, because if you delve into it, then you're thinking about this, you're thinking about that, and then you are, bye bye, off in *papañca*. The observation thoughts, are part of the necessary practice, and you're not going to have them all the time, but they'll pop up, and it'll be like: "Oh! Things just happened.", and then you continue on. That's not a distracting thought. A distracting thought is: "Well, I remember the last time that happened." So, you have to let that kind of thought go, because then you're thinking about the past. Your observation thought is about what's happening in the present moment.<sup>364</sup>

Bhante is explaining here how insight occurs and is supported by observation thought. The skillful meditator gains the insight and returns to the meditation without indulging the thought, so the thought does not

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<sup>364</sup> <http://talks.dhammasukha.org/uploads/1/2/8/6/12865490/mn-018-a07-070818-et.pdf>, accessed Oct. 2017

proliferate. It is a refined kind of thinking, appropriate for meditation, and is an investigation of experience (*dhammavicayabojjhaṅga*).

The Buddha reminds us that eventually thought will be altogether dispensed with. Speaking of a monk who has attained the *arūpa* jhānas, he tells wandering ascetic Poṭṭhāpada,

Poṭṭhāpada, from the moment when a monk has gained this controlled perception, he proceeds from stage to stage till he reaches the limit of perception. When he reaches the limit of perception it occurs to him: “Mental activity is worse for me, lack of mental activity is better. If I were to think and imagine, these perceptions [that I have attained] would cease, and coarser perceptions would arise in me. Suppose I was not to think or imagine?” So, he neither thinks nor imagines. And then, in him, just these perceptions arise, but other, coarser perceptions do not arise. He attains cessation. And that, Poṭṭhāpada, is the way in which the cessation of perception is brought about by successive steps.<sup>365 366</sup>

This complete letting go of thinking occurs at the summit of the jhānas. Until that time, occasional observation thoughts are of value to the meditator for attaining insight into the process of Dependent Origination.

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<sup>365</sup> Walshe, **The Long Discourses of the Buddha**. DN 9:17 [PTS I 184], p. 162-3.

<sup>366</sup> *"Yato kho poṭṭhapāda bhikkhu idha sakasaññī hoti, so tato amutra tato amutra anupubbena saññaggam phusati. Tassa saññagge ʔhitassa evam hoti: 'cetayamānassa me pāpiyo acetayamānassa me seyyo. Ahañceva kho pana ceteyyam abhisankhareyyam, imā ca me saññā nirujjheyuṃ, aññā ca oḷārikā saññā uppajjeyuṃ. Yannūnāham 'na ceva ceteyyam na cābhisankhareyya'nti. So na ceva ceteti na cābhisankharoti. Tassa acetayato anabhisankharoto tā ceva saññā nirujjhanti, aññā ca oḷārikā saññā na uppajjanti. So nirodham phusati. Evam kho poṭṭhapāda anupubbābhisaññānirodhasampajānasamāpatti hoti. Tam kimmāññasi poṭṭhapāda? Api nu te ito pubbe evarūpā anupubbābhisaññānirodhasampajānasamāpatti sutapubbā?'"Ti.* DN 9:17, PTS I 184, CS edition.

## **The TWIM meditator learns to “look upstream”**

At the beginning stages, seeing how the “I like it, I don’t like it” mind distorts one’s perception of the world is an important insight. The meditator begins to have a mind that is sufficiently relaxed, combined with sharpened mindfulness, and begins to notice what is occurring just before this craving arises, just before the tension and tightness arises.

In TWIM meditation, this examination of what came before the arising of a distraction, is an effective strategy for seeing the preceding link in Dependent Origination. This is the method of “looking upstream”, against the flow of the links. This is a method which the Buddha taught to the monks on many occasions. For instance, in the Greater Discourse on the Destruction of Craving, we can take an excerpt from his teaching, as follows,

“‘With clinging as condition, habitual tendencies’: so it was said. Now, bhikkhus, do habitual tendencies have clinging as condition or not, or how do you take it in this case?”

“Habitual tendencies have clinging as condition, venerable sir. Thus, we take it in this case: ‘With clinging as condition, habitual tendencies.’ ”

“‘With craving as condition, clinging’: so it was said. Now, bhikkhus, does clinging have craving as condition or not, or how do you take it in this case?”

“Clinging has craving as condition, venerable sir. Thus, we take it in this case: ‘With craving as condition, clinging.’ ”

“‘With feeling as condition, craving’: so it was said. Now bhikkhus, does craving have feeling as condition or not, or how do you take it in this case?”

“Craving has feeling as condition, venerable sir. Thus, we take it in this case: ‘With feeling as condition, craving.’”<sup>367</sup> 368

We can see how the Buddha is carefully training his monks to be able to look to each successive previous link in the Dependent Origination to realize the cause of an arisen phenomenon. This would be of value as an exercise in learning the links and how they fit together, but it seems that such rigorous and detailed training was for the practical purpose of having the monks learn how to look to the previous condition whenever a phenomenon would arise in their meditation.

As the monks were practicing in tranquil aware *jhāna*, they were seeing the five aggregates and four satipaṭṭhānas. As each would arise, the monks would look for the previous dependent link to see the condition upon which the phenomenon had arisen.

Doug Kraft has a chart showing this ‘looking upstream’ approach. It is adapted below.

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<sup>367</sup> Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*, MN 38:18 [PTS i 262], p.354. Bhante Vimalaramsi is following Bhikkhu Bodhi’s translation but is using “habitual tendencies” to translate *bhava*, as this has been shown to be more meaningful to TWIM meditators. “Being” is a literal but rather unhelpful translation of the Pali.

<sup>368</sup> *Bhavapaccayā jāṭīti iti kho panetaṃ vuttaṃ. Bhavapaccayā nu kho bhikkhave jāti no vā, kathaṃ vo ettha hotīti? Bhavapaccayā bhante jāti. Evaṃ no ettha hoti: bhavapaccayā. Upādānapaccayā bhavoti iti kho panetaṃ vuttaṃ. Upādānapaccayā nu kho bhikkhave bhavo no vā, kathaṃ vo ettha hotīti? Upādānapaccayā bhante bhavo. Evaṃ no ettha hoti: upādānapaccayā bhavoti. Taṇhāpaccayā upādānanti iti kho panetaṃ vuttaṃ. Taṇhāpaccayā nu kho bhikkhave upādānaṃ no vā, kathaṃ vo ettha hotīti?. Taṇhāpaccayā bhante upādānaṃ. Evaṃ no ettha hoti: taṇhāpaccayā upādānanti. Vedanāpaccayā taṇhāti iti kho panetaṃ vuttaṃ. Vedanāpaccayā nu kho bhikkhave taṇhā no vā, kathaṃ vo ettha hotīti? Vedanāpaccayā bhante taṇhā. Evaṃ no ettha hoti: vedanāpaccayā taṇhāti.* MN 38:18, PTS i 262, CS edition.

Table 3: *Paṭiccasamuppāda as seen traveling “upstream” with deeper and clearer mindfulness*<sup>369</sup>

	English	Pali
1	Old Age and Death, Sorrow and Grief Lamentation, Pain, Grief, and Despair	Jarāmaraṇa, soka, parideva, dukkha, domanassa, upāyāsa
2	Birth of Action	Jāti
3	Habitual Tendencies	Bhava
4	Clinging	Upādāna
5	Craving	Taṇhā
6	Feeling Tone	Vedanā
7	Contact	Phassa
8	Six Sense Bases	Āyatana
9	Mentality-Materiality	Nāmarūpa
10	Consciousness	Viññāṇa
11	Formations	Saṅkhāra
12	Cessation	Nirodha
13	Awakening	Nibbāna

While the downward flow is how our suffering is created by Dependent Origination, the upstream direction brings cessation.

<sup>369</sup> Kraft, **Buddha’s Map**, p. 63.

## **Looking upstream in Dependent Origination to see how we came to eat ice cream**

For instance, we may observe ourselves stopping at a store on a hot day to buy ice cream. This is a habitual tendency (*bhava*) which we can examine by looking to the previous link in D.O., clinging (*upādāna*).

We may observe that despite the fact that our doctor has told us that eating ice cream is not good for our blood sugar, we are convincing ourselves that this is just a nice treat on a hot day and that just an occasional ice cream can't really hurt us. Our mind is playing our old thinking patterns to justify our eating of the ice cream.

If we look further upstream to craving (*taṇhā*) we may observe that we have a strong desire to walk into the store, get some ice cream from the freezer, buy it, and eat it.

Looking to the next upstream link of feeling (*vedanā*), we have a very pleasant feeling when we see the logo of brand of ice cream that is our favorite, etc. this is based upon past experiences of liking the taste of the ice cream.

The next link upstream is sensation (*phassa*) of seeing the shape and color of the ice cream brand displayed in the store window. (Advertisers are very good at manipulating our reactions via advertising. They are using a piece of Dependent Origination to make money by stimulating us to activate our habitual patterns of buying and consumption.)

## **Belief in a self underlies our reactive patterns which create our suffering**

Ultimately, this whole reactive sequence is being caused by our attempt to further the interest of our self (*atta*). We gain a sense of self by gratifying it with sensory pleasure and avoiding pain. We believe we are the actor who buys the ice cream and the enjoyer of the ice cream.

This self is the ultimate delusion. With practice, we can begin to trace the links of Dependent Origination all the way back to this original ignorance (*avijja*) or misperception. Once we succeed in doing this with regularity, our unskillful actions will be curtailed and we will be entering the real heart of Buddhist practice. We begin to step away from the misperception of a self that is in opposition to the world. We begin to see all of this sensory world as an impersonal process.

This is the basis for the Buddha's statement to Daṇḍapāni in the *Madhupiṇḍika Sutta*,

Friend, I assert and proclaim [my teaching] in such a way that one does not quarrel with anyone in the world with its gods, its Māras, and its Brahmās, in this generation with its recluses and brahmins, its princes and its people; in such a way that perceptions no more underlie that Brahmin who abides detached from sensual pleasures, without perplexity, shorn of worry, free from craving for any kind of being.<sup>370 371</sup>

### Stopping the flow of dependently arisen suffering

With sufficient insight, we can break the flow at any link of Dependent Origination, and release the pattern that is causing suffering. This process is aided when we learn the links and understand how each one works in reference to our everyday behavior. The further upstream we can trace the links, the more thorough is our understanding and the greater the ability to step out of the pattern of suffering.

As our minds become quieter and our mindfulness is more attuned to the movement of mind's attention, we catch this flow of reactions more and more quickly. We begin to see how the process works further and further upstream. Very seldom do we let things

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<sup>370</sup> Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*. MN 18:4 [PTS i 108], p. 201.

<sup>371</sup> *yathāvādī kho āvuso sadevake loke samārake sabrahmake, sassamaṇabrāhmaṇiyyā pajāya sadevamanussāya na kenaci loke viggayha tiṭṭhati, yathā ca pana kāmehi viṣaṃyuttaṃ viharantaṃ taṃ brāhmaṇaṃ akathāṅkathim chinnakukkuccaṃ bhavābhavē vītataṅhaṃ saññā nānuseṅti, evaṃ vādī kho ahaṃ āvuso evamakkhāyī*. MN 18:4, PTS i 108, CS edition.

cascade, proliferate, and flood our lives with misery the way they used to do so. We have changed. The process of mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*) is having its positive effect.

As one gains skill in seeing how Dependent Origination works, there are occasions to look both upstream and downstream. Some meditators will favor one direction over the other, and many will use both directions. While in retreat, the teacher may suggest looking in one or the other direction. In either case, the goal is to see through the falsity of the self-grasping (*atta*) and to develop the impersonal (*anatta*) perspective. With the development of the impersonal perspective, when things arise, rather than, “This is happening to me.” or “I am really upset about this.”, it is something like “OK, fine. That’s nice. Beautiful. It’s just that!”.

### **Seeing the Three Characteristic Marks of Existence**

This is the point at which the practice of *satipaṭṭhāna* within the TWIM method begins to yield deeper insight into impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and the impersonal nature of reality (*anatta*). One sees mental phenomena arising and ceasing (*anicca*), one sees the suffering caused by mental proliferation (*dukkha*), and one sees that this process of dependently arising and ceasing mental phenomena is impersonal (*anatta*). It is just a process that happens naturally.

However, until our awakening, we think that it is very personal, and by understanding Dependent Origination we learn to see how there is self-grasping (*atta*) and craving at every link. Once this is seen clearly, the personal perspective fades away and is replaced by the impersonal perspective.

The Three Characteristics are seen more clearly as the mind becomes more tranquil. Doug Kraft shares his experience of the experience in the Base of Infinite Consciousness (*viññāṇaṅcāyatana*). He writes,

In the sixth jhāna, the ‘three characteristics’ become more obvious. The three are dissatisfaction



(*dukkha*), impermanence (*anicca*) and selflessness (*anattā*). We see on a microscopic level how thoughts and sensory-contact arise, flicker, and sputter out or fade away. Seeing how they come and go, it's obvious that holding onto them is unsatisfactory (*dukkha*) because none of them lasts (*anicca*). This happens by itself. There is no one doing it (*anattā*).<sup>372</sup>

We can note here that in addition to having insight into how we are creating our own suffering through the downstream flow of Dependent Origination, we are also experiencing the third and fourth Noble Truths. We begin to see that through the practice of letting go of the unwholesome and cultivating the wholesome that suffering can be let go. There is freedom, and there is freedom to choose happiness and the causes of happiness.

### **Seeing the impersonal nature of reality (anatta) is a Buddhist perspective**

In a *dhamma* talk, Bhante Vimalaramsi explains the seeing of the impersonal nature of reality,

The Brahmins follow the Vedas. Basically, they teach one-pointed concentration and they teach reincarnation. They believe in a permanent self, permanent soul, going from one lifetime to the next. But in Buddhism we believe in rebirth. Rebirth is something like this: do you remember what happened yesterday? It's gone, not here now. What happened is that yesterday is dead. What happens right now is the present moment, but that will die, and then a new present moment will be reborn.

Everything that arises is part of an impersonal process. You will be able to see that more and more clearly as you go deeper into the meditation. For

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<sup>372</sup> Kraft, **Buddha's Map**, p. 211

example, you're sitting and all of a sudden, a pain arises. Whose pain is that? Who would ever say, "I haven't felt pain for a long time, so I want pain to arise right here, right now." No. That doesn't work that way. You can't control the pain. The pain arises because conditions are right for the pain to be there. As you let go and relax, that pain will either go away or it won't. But if it doesn't go away after you keep allowing it to be, your mind will become so balanced that it doesn't even go to the pain. You will see that this is an impersonal process; it's not a personal process. That is one of the main differences between the Buddhists and the Brahmins.<sup>373</sup>

### **Finding a way to true happiness**

With sufficient practice, the meditator begins to understand that the old strategy of grasping at sense gratification is not a successful way to find happiness. Our attempts to control the situation when we experience a pleasurable feeling or an unpleasurable feeling only bring us more suffering. Bhante points out that we cannot successfully control or fight with painful feelings. He writes,

The Buddha teaches us how to be more and more awake, more and more alert to how we cause our own suffering. There is not another person in this world that causes your suffering. You cause your own suffering by the decision you make when a feeling arises, and it is a painful feeling. You don't like it. You grab onto it and try to control it and fight with it.

Then you wind up saying things and doing things that cause suffering for yourself and other people around you. But it's your choice, your decision.

When you become more and more awake as to how this process of Dependent Origination works,

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<sup>373</sup> Vimalaramsi, **Moving Dhamma**, Vol. 1. p. 234.

you start seeing and becoming more aware of how you cause your own suffering, and you start letting that go, more and more.

Then your mind starts to get into a state of equanimity. With that, there are no more reactions; you no longer act as you usually act when this particular feeling arises. You start letting go of the old reactions and you start responding in a new way, in a way that has happiness and leads you to happiness for yourself and for everyone around you.<sup>374</sup>

**The earlier links in the sequence of Dependent Origination are very subtle and seeing them requires a very clear, tranquil, equanimous mind**

The higher we look upstream in the process of Dependent Origination, to contact (*phassa*), the six sense bases (*salāyatana*) and beyond, the subtler everything becomes. We cannot perceive how these links work without a very tranquil mind, deepening equanimity, and very alert mindfulness. For the avid TWIM practitioner, these links can be perceived, can be directly seen and experienced, and the transformative effect is very impressive. One's whole perspective on life changes.

With deepening relaxation and equanimity, accompanied by insight into and understanding of some of the links of this impersonal process, the meditator attains the third and fourth jhānas. The deepening stillness of the mind means that most of the mental proliferation is calming down. This provides a clarity which allows for a much subtler observation of how craving arises. Bhante Vimalaramsi explains this in one of his *dhamma* talks,

(Bhante is reading MN:10 aloud to the retreatants)

“And the states in the fourth jhāna—the equanimity, the neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling, the mental

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<sup>374</sup> Ibid, p. 135.

unconcern due to tranquility, the purity of mindfulness, and unification of mind;

Bhante's comment: Your mind begins to stay on your object of meditation for a longer period of time, and your mind becomes very tranquil, very much at ease. You are able to see any little movement of mind's attention, and when your mind is on your object of meditation, what happens is - a thought, or sensation, or whatever a distraction is - will start your mind to wobble. And when it wobbles, and it gets bigger and bigger until finally there's a distraction. But now, when you get into the fourth jhāna, you'll start to see your mind wobble, and you 6R right then, and then your mind stays on your object of meditation. You're starting to learn what it is to have a still mind, a composed mind.<sup>375</sup>

## **Mind wobbles**

Seeing the mind 'wobble' and then seeing the wobbling grow in intensity and develop into a distraction is directly seeing how craving arises. With clarity of mind and sharp mindfulness of the movement of mind's attention, craving is let go of by using the process of the 6Rs and there is no proliferation into a stream of thoughts or emotions downstream in the flow of Dependent Origination. Through repeated practice, this results in the letting go of a load of habitual patterns of body, speech and mind. They begin to fade and their grip on the mind of the meditator is loosened and the mind is liberated step by step.

With this increasing clarity of mind, the meditator can look further upstream in the flow of Dependent Origination. Doug Kraft uses the example of seeing a strawberry pie in the refrigerator and

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<sup>375</sup> <http://talks.dhammasukha.org/mn-111-ana-100328.html>, accessed Oct. 2017.

having a craving arise from the sensory stimulation as an example of Dependent Origination. He writes,

Our strawberry pie story began with the sense-contact (*phassa*): the eye seeing the pie in the refrigerator. When the Buddha described the river of causation to people who didn't meditate, this is where he began. When he spoke to monks with advanced meditation practices, he described subtler events further upstream. Since these events arise before sense-based perceptions, they cannot be perceived in usual ways. They are below the threshold of ordinary awareness. In most of us, most of the time, they occur mechanically and unconsciously. However, as the mind becomes deeply relaxed and alert, it is possible to "see" them.<sup>376</sup>

The direct seeing of how Dependent Origination works can go upstream all the way to seeing the formations, *samkhāras*. During retreat, Doug Kraft went to see Bhante Vimalaramsi and gives us an account of the pointers he got from Bhante that helped him to see how this link works. He writes,

While I was first working with the seventh *jhāna*, every time I went for an interview with Bhante, he asked me what I was experiencing. I might say, "The mind dropped into stillness. I just hung out watching it. Then it started to wobble."

"What happened before it wobbled?," he would ask.

"Nothing". I said. "It was just still and then it wobbled."

"No," he said, "something happened before it wobbled. You need more mindfulness."

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<sup>376</sup> Kraft, *Buddha's Map*, p. 58.

So, I'd go back to my kuti, balance the awakening factors, become very still, and watch some more, trying to stay relaxed and attentive to see what happened before the wobble.

Eventually I saw it. I won't tell you what it was. Bhante doesn't like people to know beforehand. He would rather have them discover for themselves. I honor his wisdom in this.

The point is that by the seventh jhāna, the links of Dependent Origination become clear and clearer. They are no longer conceptual. They don't resemble neat arrows on a flow chart. They are tangible events that flow one to the next.<sup>377</sup>

## Summary

Understanding the links of Dependent Origination through directly seeing them is a fundamental practice in TWIM meditation. The object of meditation will be either the Brahmavihāras or *Ānāpānasati* until in the highest *arūpa* jhānas, the object of meditation becomes mind itself. The practice of the 6Rs will take one all the way to this point as all of this clarity and insight comes by letting go of each mental state one by one as it occurs and then relaxing the mind, uplifting it with a smile, and returning to the object of meditation.

There is no need for complexity in technique or in meditation. This is because in the tranquil aware jhānas, the mind is open and relaxed yet with sharp mindfulness. The Buddha used this middle way method of meditation to attain awakening, rather than the one-pointed concentration techniques that he learned from his teachers of yogic trance. As none of his contemporaries had discovered this profound method, he looked to his boyhood experience to give him the guidance on how to proceed under the Bodhi tree.

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<sup>377</sup> Ibid, p. 227.

## Chapter IX

# The Rose Apple Tree: Meditation that is open, relaxed, aware

Trees played a significant role in the life, and indeed, the death of Gotama the Buddha. As the story has it, the bodhisatta was born outdoors, under a Sal tree (*Shorea robusta*, also known as *śāl*, sakhua or shala tree) to his mother Queen Māyā. It was in a grove of Sal trees that he died amongst his disciples. The other famous tree in his life is, of course the Bodhi Tree (*Ficus religiosa* or sacred fig, also known as *pippala* tree, *peepal* tree or *ashwattha* tree in India and Nepal). This is the tree under which Gotama sat and attained *Nibbāna*, an event which was to greatly change the world.

Less known except by those quite familiar with the life of the Buddha is another very significant tree, the rose apple tree (*Syzygium jambos*, also known as the *jambu*).<sup>378</sup> The rose apple is a small and seasonally abundant fruit (not related to the *Malus domestica* species of common apple), much prized by the local people for its taste and health qualities. In season, groups of boys can be seen climbing the trees with long sticks trying to knock the fruit to the ground to eat together with friends and to be gathered and taken home to their grateful families.

It was due to an experience while sitting under the rose apple tree that Gotama had as a boy, that he was able to find his way to enlightenment decades later, while sitting under the Bodhi Tree. The story is briefly related in the *Mahāsaccaka Sutta*, *sutta* 36 of the *Majjhima Nikāya*, but is detailed in the *Majjhima Nikāya Aṭṭhakathā*

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<sup>378</sup> The *Mahāvagga* of the *Vinaya Piṭaka* also relates that after sitting for seven days in the bliss of liberation under the Tree of Awakening, the Buddha sat for seven days, in turn, under the Goatherds' Banyan Tree, the Mucalinda Tree, the Rājāyatana Tree, and again the Goatherds' Banyan Tree. Indeed, a variety of trees were of importance in the weeks following the great awakening. See *Mahāvagga* of *Vinaya Piṭaka* [PTS 1-4].

(MA). As the story as related in the MA is so beloved among Buddhists, and is relevant to our topic in this chapter, I will briefly relate that version.

It was the time for the ploughing festival. The young Gotama and his father, King Suddhodana, lived the land of the Sakya Clan, in southern Nepal near the border of what is now India. This is part of the Gangetic Plain. Agriculture was, and still is the main source of livelihood for the people of this area. They are totally dependent upon rain for watering their crops and the monsoon rains come only during a particular time of the year, usually arriving in late May or June. After the rains cease in early October there is very little rain until the arrival of the next monsoon. Just before the arrival of the rains is the very hot season. Anything planted at that time is likely to die due to heat and lack of water. But with the arrival of the rains, the crops flourish, and it is a very productive agricultural area.

To properly grow the crops, the timing of the ploughing is crucial. It is best to plough just before the arrival of the rains. If ploughed too early, the earth will dry out and bake. If too late, the ploughing becomes very difficult due to the wet soils. Therefore, proper timing is crucial.

Ancient cultures relied on a lunar calendar, and the moon changes phase every day, so this calendar cannot be used to predict the proper timing for ploughing. Instead, the learned men, in those days the astrologers, would study the position of the rising and setting of the sun as well as the alignments of the stars to ascertain which day would be best to begin the ploughing. These astrologers were supported by the wealthy, especially by those of royalty such as the father of young Gotama.

Of course, the first ploughing would be a ceremonial affair, accompanied by auspicious rites and rituals designed to ensure the timely arrival of the rains and the abundance of the crops of rice, wheat, barley, millet and various vegetables. Only the King could



perform the first ploughing, and for this great event all of the people were gathered. It was not only a ritual event but also a festival. All the people put on their best clothes and prepared gifts for donation to the sages and to the many mendicants who gathered at the festival.

First place in seats of honor was given to the wandering ascetics and Brahmins. The royal family and others of the *khattiya* (Skt: *kṣtriya*) caste made offerings to these people. They were followed by the common people. The Brahmins made a fire ceremony into which offerings of ghee, spices and grains were poured. Then, with the signal from the astrologer, accompanied by the dramatic sound of trumpets and beating of giant bass kettle drums, it was time for the ploughing to begin. The prized oxen were hitched to the silver plough and everyone crowded forward to see the sight.

Everyone except young Gotama, who had escaped the searing heat by seating himself in the cool shade under a rose apple tree. With the sounding of the trumpets and drums, his attendants left him to participate in the festivities. He was alone. It was a peaceful spot in the shade of the tree, but he was on the edge of a lot of noise and commotion. Yet, his mind became very serene and peaceful.

### **Remembering his boyhood experience of meditation**

Many years later, when Gotama the wanderer left his practice of severe asceticism and took up his seat under the Bodhi Tree, he was unsure of how to proceed. He remembered back on the time when he was a boy sitting under the Rose Apple Tree and had naturally entered into a deep state of meditation, how he had fallen into *jhāna*. It was this experience that pointed the Buddha in the right direction, towards Right Effort and Right *Samādhi*. As the Buddha relates the story to wandering ascetic Saccaka ‘the Nigaṇṭha’s son’ (a Jain ascetic) in the *Mahāsaccaka Sutta*,

I considered [while sitting under the Bodhi Tree]:  
“I recall that when my father the Sakyan was occupied,  
while I was sitting in the cool shade of a rose-apple

tree, quite secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states, I entered upon and abided in the first *jhāna*, which is accompanied by applied and sustained thought, with rapture and pleasure born of seclusion. Could that be the path to enlightenment?’ Then, following on that memory came the realization: ‘That indeed is the path to enlightenment.’ » 379 380

After many unsuccessful years of searching, Gotama had finally found the key in his memory of the time under the rose apple tree. He had reached the highest *jhānas* by using the means offered by his teachers, likely intense absorption concentration. This was of no lasting value. He had tried severe asceticism, again relying on nearly super human will-power and strength of mind. This had nearly killed him without any positive spiritual gain. The experience under the rose apple tree held the secret and was to show the way forward to awakening. What was the path to enlightenment that he remembered?

## **What meditation did young Gotama practice under the rose apple tree?**

We don’t know exactly what the boy Gotama did with his mind while sitting under the rose apple tree. I have read many accounts of this by Buddhist writers, teachers of meditation, and practitioners. Naturally, most accounts project upon young Gotama the kinds of practices the writers themselves used as *samatha* to gain their first experiences of calmness of mind. Usually, they suggest that young Gotama engaged in *ānāpānasati*, which took him into the first *jhāna*.

It is very possible that the boy was aware of his breath. The breath is always with us, and as we calm the mind and look inside, the

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<sup>379</sup> Bodhi, **The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha**. MN 36:31 [PTS i 247], p. 340.

<sup>380</sup> *Tassa mayhaṃ aggivessana etadahosi: abhijānāmi kho pañāhaṃ pītusakkassa kammante sītāya jambucchāyāya nisinno vivicceva kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi savitakkaṃ savicāraṃ vivekaṃ pītisukhaṃ paṭhamaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharitā. Siyā nu kho eso maggo bodhāyāti. Tassa mayhaṃ aggivessana satānusāriviññānaṃ ahoṣi: esova maggo bodhāyāti.* MN 36:31, PTS i 247, CS edition.

various sensations of the body, the rhythm of the flow of the breath become obvious. But what most people take as mindfulness of breath is to concentrate on the tip of the nose or on the rise and fall of the abdomen to the exclusion of other sensations. I doubt that a boy who had no previous training would be engaged in such a mental exercise. I think he found his way into *jhāna* in a much more natural way.

### **Secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states**

We have some clues from the *sutta* as to what the boy did with his mind. He was “secluded from sensual pleasures, secluded from unwholesome states”. Although he was sitting in the shade of a tree, there was a lot of activity nearby at the festival. When his senses picked up on that activity, rather than engaging with it, he let it go and relaxed into a deeper state of consciousness. Bhante Vimalaramsi gives instructions on how to seclude the mind from sensual pleasure without rejecting the experience or pushing it away. He writes,

*Quite secluded from sensual pleasures:* Whenever there is a distraction at one of the sense-doors, you simply and softly let it go, relax the mental fist around the distraction, relax the tightness in the head, feel mind expand, and redirect mind’s attention back to the breath and relaxing again. It doesn’t matter how many times sensual pleasure arises. You have to allow it to be there every time it arises. Just remember to let it go, relax the tightness in the head, feel mind expand and smile, then come back to the breath and relaxing.

*Secluded from unwholesome states:* When mind’s attention is distracted from the breath and from relaxing, and it begins to think about a feeling that arises, then there is a tendency for mind to like or dislike that feeling. This thinking about and trying to control feeling by thinking about what arises, causes the feeling to get bigger and more intense. Thus, more pain arises. When

you practice the Buddha's meditation method, you begin to understand and let go of this old habit of thinking the feeling. Thus, when a feeling arises, no matter whether it is physical or emotional, first, let go of any thoughts about the feeling and relax the tightness in your head caused by the movement of mind's attention. Next, let go of that tight mental hold around that feeling. Now relax the tightness in the head and feel mind expand. Notice it becomes calm and tranquil. Next, smile and redirect mind's attention back to the breath and relaxing.<sup>381</sup>

Rather than focusing his attention on the sensation of the breath at the tip of the nose or wherever, this sounds much more like what young Gotama was experiencing under the rose apple tree. Bhante Vimalaramsi is explaining the process of letting go of anything that arises due to external stimulation (in this case, sensual pleasure) or that which is generated by the mind (unwholesome states), followed by relaxing and opening. To make the process understandable for us, Bhante is breaking it down into steps. It is the practice of the 6Rs, which we have previously examined.

Once the meditator gets used to the process, the step-by-step gives way to an easy, natural flow.... For instance, while taking the breath as object of meditation, a distraction arises. The mind allows it and neither pulls it towards nor pushes it away. Instead, the mind softens, opens, relaxes, smiles. So simple.

This is likely something like the approach that young Gotama was using. We don't know if he was using an object of meditation or not. He may have performed this process of letting go, opening, and relaxing quite naturally. No teacher or books were needed. Most people familiar with the life of the Buddha would agree that the Buddha had a natural talent for this sort of thing!

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<sup>381</sup> Vimalaramsi, **The Breath of Love**. pp. 81-82

## **Failing to find enlightenment in absorption concentration jhāna practice or in extreme asceticism**

After years of practicing absorption concentration jhānas with his two teachers Āḷāra Kālāma and Uddaka Rāmaputta, and then nearly killing himself with extreme asceticism, Gotama the wanderer considered alternatives. This is where the meditation experience under the rose apple tree becomes relevant. As Bhante Vimalaramsi tells it,

The future Buddha was disappointed because he saw that there were still many more things to let go of in his mind. He observed that these absorption concentration techniques, which focused intensely on the object of meditation, caused tightening in mind. The Buddha reasoned that there was still attachment whenever there was tension in mind. He noticed that if any part of the experience were suppressed or not allowed to arise, there was still some kind of holding on or attachment to an ego belief. This occurs with every form of ‘concentration’, that is fixed absorption concentration, or access concentration.

This, after six long years of trying all of the spiritual and ascetic practices from body mortifications like starving the body, to holding the breath, he realized that these practices did not lead him to a calm and open mind which was free from craving and suffering. On the night of the Bodhisatta’s realization of supreme *Nibbāna*, he recalled an incident at a plowing festival while he was just a young boy. When his attendants left him alone under a rose-apple tree, he sat in Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation and experienced a mind that was expanded and opened! He saw that this form of meditation would lead him to the experience of ‘tranquility jhānas’, as opposed to ‘concentration jhānas’.<sup>382</sup>

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<sup>382</sup> Ibid, pp. 17-18.

From the TWIM perspective, this is the crux of the matter. In meditation, when a distraction presents itself, do we choose to suppress or do we choose to open up? The choice between these two alternatives is a choice of how we define and use the faculty of attention and mindfulness. Young Gotama's experience under the rose apple tree suggests that he was choosing the way of opening.

In the TWIM method of sitting or walking meditation, there is an object of meditation, which helps the mind settle and collect itself. But the object of meditation, although held with attention and interest, is not held so tightly as to exclude whatever wishes to arise in consciousness. Whatever arises is lovingly accepted as the truth of now. It is not pushed away or swept into a corner for the collection of unwanted mental phenomena.

Bhante Vimalaramsi believes this is the type of attention that the Buddha practiced and taught to his disciples. It is the middle path of mindfulness as evidenced in the suttas. For Bhante this goes to the heart of the issue. He asks us to examine carefully the basic premises that guide our meditation. He suggests that we ask some questions,

In Buddhist meditation, have the questions ever come up, "What is mindfulness (*sati*), really?", "Exactly how do you practice being mindful?", "Can mindfulness really lighten up my perspective and help bring joy, happiness, and balance into every aspect of my life?" If mindfulness is observing how mind's attention moves when a distraction arises and pulls you away from whatever you are doing, and then by doing this practice, life becomes easier and more stress free, doesn't it seem like a useful tool to develop?

To clearly understand this connection, you first have to start with a precise definition of meditation (*bhāvanā*) and mindfulness (*sati*). Seeing this will help you gain a new harmonious perspective (*sammā-ditṭhi*) of exactly how mind works and teaches the

meditator ‘HOW’ to change old painful habits that cause suffering into a new way of having a contented, balanced mind. This is the point of all the Buddha’s teachings, isn’t it?

Meditation (*bhāvanā*) is “observing how mind’s attention moves moment-to-moment in order to see precisely ‘How’ the impersonal (*anattā*) process of Dependent Origination (*paṭicca-samuppāda*) occurs and to completely understand the Four Noble Truths (*cattāri ariyasaccāni*). Seeing and understanding ‘HOW’ mind’s attention moves from one thing to another and understanding that everything is an impersonal process is what the main thrust is in Buddhist Meditation! This is why Dependent Origination is so important to see and understand. It helps us to develop an impersonal perspective and leads you to see for yourself the true nature of all existence.<sup>383</sup>

### **The middle path between a chaotic mind led by sensory craving, and a suppressed mind created by absorption concentration**

By precisely understanding what is mindfulness and how it works in the meditation, Right View is established that will then guide the TWIM meditator. This point is crucial, as most people who come to TWIM from other traditions are expecting to learn some variation of absorption concentration. Many of those who come with no previous meditation experience also have such an expectation, because most people do not know there is a middle path between the chaos of the sensory-led mind on the one hand and suppression of the hindrances on the other. But TWIM offers a middle ground between what it considers to be the two extremes.

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<sup>383</sup> Vimalaramsi, *The Breath of Love*. p. 39.

As we have seen, TWIM is most definitely not absorption meditation or an approach to absorption meditation in any variety. It is not preliminary concentration (*parikammasamādhi*), which is produced in other methods of *vipassanā* as a result of the meditator's initial efforts to focus his mind on his meditation subject. It is not access concentration (*upacārasamādhi*), which is marked by the suppression of the five hindrances, the manifestation of the *jhāna* factors, and the appearance of a luminous mental replica of the meditation object called the counterpart sign (*paṭibhāganimitta*). It is not absorption concentration (*appanāsamādhi*), which is the complete immersion of the mind in its object effected by the full maturation of the *jhāna* factors.

We cannot find any of the terms associated with access concentration in the suttas. They are not there. They were developed some time after the life of Gotama Buddha and are found in the body of literature developed subsequent to the passing of the Buddha, such as the commentaries. They were systematized in the *Visuddhimagga*. We can turn to Ven. Buddhaghosa's work and find all of these terms, their definitions and usages, or in modern works based on Buddhaghosa's work.<sup>384</sup>

For instance, in the *Visuddhimagga*, Buddhaghosa writes,

WHAT IS CONCENTRATION? .....calling concentration profitable unification of the mind (citass'ekaggata).

IN WHAT SENSE IS IT CONCENTRATION? It is concentration (*samādhi*) in the sense of concentrating (*samādhāna*). What is this concentrating? It is the centering (*ādhāna*) of consciousness and consciousness-concomitants evenly (*samaṃ*) and rightly (*sammā*) on a single object; placing, is what is meant. So, it is the state, in virtue of which consciousness and its concomitants

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<sup>384</sup> For instance, see Gunaratana, Bhante Henepola, **Jhānas in Theravāda Buddhism**. (Kandy, Buddhist Publication Society, 2007), pp. 9-10.



The Rose Apple Tree: Meditation that is open, relaxed, aware

remain evenly and rightly on a single object undistracted and unscattered, that should be understood as concentrating.

WHAT ARE ITS CHARACTERISTIC, FUNCTION MANIFESTATION, AND PROXIMATE CAUSE? Concentration has non-distraction as its characteristic. Its function is to eliminate distraction. It is manifested as non-wavering. Because of the words “Being blissful, his mind becomes concentrated” (D I 73)

HOW MANY KINDS OF CONCENTRATION ARE THERE? 1. First of all it is of one kind with the characteristic of non-distraction. 2. Then it is of two kinds as access and absorption.<sup>385</sup>

The parts of the *Visuddhimagga* dealing with meditation are mostly based on this kind of absorption for the exclusion of intrusions in the mind of any unwanted distractions. With this as the basic assumption, *sati*, mindfulness will be brought into service as a strict trainer of attention and the hindrances will be looked upon as unwanted intruders, to be banished from the mind once arisen, and if possible, to be prevented from arising.

It seems that the basic difference in approach between *Visuddhimagga*-based meditations (absorption concentration meditations) and the TWIM-based tranquil awareness *jhānas*, stems primarily from the inclusion of the relax step in TWIM, the smile which lightens mind and sharpens observation, versus the absence of these steps in absorption concentration methods. In TWIM, tranquility is gained by consistently relaxing the tension and tightness that are the manifestations of craving. The *Visuddhimagga*-based methods seem to rely on the gaining of tranquility as an effect of absorption and of insight, as an eventual fruit of the path.

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<sup>385</sup> Buddhaghosa, **The Path of Purification: Visuddhimagga**. Vsm II.III.2, pp. 84-85.

Every method prizes tranquility, *passaddhi*, which is an awakening factor. TWIM follows *Ānāpānasati Sutta* and *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 118:18 and MN 10:4) in making relaxation a part of the path. Indeed, as an integral part of the 6R method, and these become regular features of the practice. This is not usually taught directly as such in absorption methods but is considered a desirable outcome of *samatha* practice.

## **Relaxing as a structured part of the practice rather than as a hoped-for outcome**

Making the relax step a regular, structured part of the practice is in keeping with the section on nutriments for the enlightenment factors of the *Bojjhaṅgasamyutta*. In discussing the nutriments for the enlightenment factors, the Buddha says,

And what, bhikkhus, is the nutriment for the arising of the unarisen enlightenment factor of tranquility? There are, bhikkhus, tranquility of body, tranquility of mind: frequently giving careful attention to them is the nutriment for the arising of the unarisen enlightenment factor of tranquility and the fulfillment by development of the arisen enlightenment factor of tranquility.<sup>386 387</sup>

And what, bhikkhus, is the denourishment that prevents the unarisen enlightenment factor of tranquility from arising and the arisen enlightenment factor of tranquility from reaching fulfillment by development? There are, bhikkhus, tranquility of body and tranquility of mind: not frequently giving attention to them is the denourishment that prevents the unarisen enlightenment

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<sup>386</sup> Bodhi, **The Connected Discourses of the Buddha**. SN 46.51 [PTS V.105], p. 1599.

<sup>387</sup> *Ko ca bhikkhave, āhāro anuppannassa vā passaddhisambojjhaṅgassa uppādāya uppannassa vā passaddhisambojjhaṅgassa bhāvanāpāripūriyā: atthi bhikkhave, kāyapassaddhi, cittapassaddhi, tattha yonisomanasikārabahulikāro, ayamāhāro anuppannassa vā passaddhisambojjhaṅgassa uppādāya uppannassa vā passaddhisambojjhaṅgassa bhāvanāpāripūriyā.* SN 46.51, PTS V.105, CS edition.

factor of tranquility from arising and the arisen enlightenment factor of tranquility from reaching fulfillment by development.<sup>388 389</sup>

### **The character of a method of meditation may be defined by how it handles the arising of hindrances**

We do not know if young Gotama had to deal with distractions from the festival while sitting under the rose apple tree. He may have easily and naturally found a state of mental seclusion. What we do know is that later in his life, as the Buddha, he taught people to relax body and relax mind and to do so by frequently giving attention to tranquility, in other words, to consistently check for tension, tightness, and disturbance.

It is craving which produces this tension and tightness, and craving manifests as the “I like it”, “I don’t like it” mind. This is attachment and aversion, and to gain a state of seclusion like young Gotama, the meditator must step out of the mental framework of attachment and aversion and accept whatever is. This includes when a hindrance arises, to accept it lovingly as what is, but not to feed it or encourage it in any way, nor to have a negative reaction to it. Understanding that the hindrance is pointing out to us exactly where our attachment is, each time a hindrance arises, it is a great opportunity.

### **Acceptance and non-resistance**

The acceptance and non-resistance to hindrances when they arise is another aspect of TWIM that is likely similar to young Gotama’s rose apple tree meditation.

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid, p. 1601 [PTS V.107].

<sup>389</sup> *Ko ca bhikkhave, anāhāro anuppannassa vā passaddhisambojjhaṅgassa uppādāya uppannassa vā passaddhisambojjhaṅgassa bhāvanāpāripūriyā: atthi bhikkhave, kāyapassaddhi, cittapassaddhi, tattha amanasikārabahulīkāro, ayamanāhāro anuppannassa vā passaddhisambojjhaṅgassa uppādāya uppannassa vā passaddhisambojjhaṅgassa bhāvanāpāripūriyā.* SN. 46.51, PTS V. 107, CS edition.

Both absorption concentration and open aware methods agree that to attain Arahantship, the defilements, that is the hindrances/fetters and taints, which cause undesirable tension and tightness, must cease. During the pursuit of the supramundane *nibbāna* the hindrances must be greatly dispelled or reduced in their intensity. There is no doubt that they are the obstacle to *nibbāna* in that they are the expression of craving and ignorant self-grasping. However, the way to deal with hindrances when they arise in the mind of the meditator varies greatly between absorption meditation and TWIM.

In TWIM, the way of eventually dispelling the hindrances and obscurations of mind is paradoxically to allow them to arise with full understanding of how this happens. When they are allowed to arise, it can be observed how they have arisen, that is, how craving and clinging caused them to arise. The meditator can then let go of whatever hindrance has arisen, and eventually lets go of the root causes of the hindrance. Absorption meditation must find another strategy to deal with the roots of the hindrances, and when they are suppressed, it is not clear exactly how that might be done. Presumably this is why there is a shift from absorption *jhāna* to *vipassanā*.

### **The five hindrances are bound to arise in meditation but present not a problem but an opportunity for the TWIM meditator**

Let us take the case of how TWIM looks at the subject of distractions arising during meditation. Bhante notifies the meditator that the five hindrances of 1. lust or greed, 2. hatred or aversion, 3, sloth and torpor (sleepiness and dullness), 4. restlessness, guilt, remorse, anxiety or scatteredness, and 5. doubt, are going to arise in the mind. These five hindrances are well known to all meditators. He explains,

A hindrance is an obstacle or distraction because it completely blocks your progress during sitting meditation or it can make things difficult during your

daily activities. It keeps you from seeing things clearly in the present moment. It also causes you to take personally what is in reality an impersonal process. Whenever these hindrances arise you identify with them very strongly and you take them personally i.e., “I am sleepy”, “I am restless” “I like and I want” “I dislike and I hate” “I have doubt” These hindrances completely cloud your mind and stop you from seeing clearly whatever happens in the present moment due to the ego involvement of “I am that”.

When you are practicing ‘fixed absorption concentration’ you let go of any distraction and then redirect your mind’s attention back to the object of meditation. On the other hand, while you are practicing Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation, you let go of the distraction, and this part is exactly the same as the ‘fixed absorption concentration’, but then you relax the tightness in your head and feel mind become open, expanded, and calm. Now, you smile. Only then do you redirect mind’s attention back to the object of meditation.

Over the past fifteen years [written in 2012], the author [Bhante Vimalaramsi] has developed a training aid to assist the student to practice this technique which is in line with the suttas and which improves mindfulness very much. This is called the 6Rs. The small difference of relaxing mind and feeling it open and calm, changes the whole meditation from a ‘fixed absorption concentration’ to a more flowing, tranquil kind of awareness, that doesn’t go as deep into concentration as the absorption types of meditation. As a result, the meditator becomes more in tune with the teachings in the suttas.<sup>390</sup>

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<sup>390</sup> Vimalaramsi, **The Breath of Love**. pp. 37-38.

## **Rose apple meditation embraces relaxation of mind and body**

Using the TWIM method, rather than returning the wandering mind directly back to the object of meditation, it is important to relax and open the mind before redirecting attention back to the object of meditation. Can such a subtle difference really be of importance? In Bhante's experience, it made a huge difference when he changed from his approximately twenty years of absorption concentration practice to TWIM. His progress was deep, immediate, and rapid.

What about the meditator who has invested years in a variety of *vipassanā* methods and has been rewarded by their practice and does not want to “change horses in mid-stream?” At a public talk given at the University of Peradeniya in Sri Lanka in 2014, I heard Bhante tell a large audience of mostly experienced meditators who were hearing about TWIM for likely the first time, “Go ahead and do whatever meditation it is that you are doing. Just try adding that relax step, and see what happens. And if you can, smile!” So, meditators who feel the need for more relaxation and openness in their meditation need not embrace the whole TWIM approach but may benefit greatly by merely adding the step of relaxing before returning to the object of meditation. But as the *Bojjhaṅgasamyutta* (see previous quote from SN 46.51) reminds us, such relaxation of body and mind need to be done frequently in order to achieve the desired result.

## **Giving up the attempt to control body and mind**

We can surmise that young Gotama was not trying to control anything. Controlling the mind and body is the hallmark of most non-Buddhist forms of meditation in India, and Gotama the seeker tried and failed to control the mind in his study of the *jhānas* with the two teachers and in his severe asceticism. Under the rose apple tree, he was free from the need to control, which is based in ego.

Bhante Vimalaramsi warns us of the tendency of the mind to try to control our meditation. This attempt at control can lead to one-pointed concentration and eventually to absorption. In TWIM, the meditator lets go of the desire to control the outcome. In a dhamma talk, Bhante explains,

Do you know what's going to happen in five minutes? Then why try to plan it? Let go of the idea that you're supposed to know. When you have that beginner's mind, you haven't got a clue what's going to be happening next. It's all an adventure. So, you let go of the concepts. You let go of the opinions. You let go of the desire to control the outcome, you let go of thinking this is the way I think it's supposed to be.

That's why you have so much trouble with restlessness, because of a longing for a particular outcome. This is a subtle kind of desire, that you want things to happen the way you think they should. Ok? So, you have to start searching a little bit, and forgive yourself for doing that. See what I mean? That will make your meditation even more and more calm.<sup>391</sup>

Any effort of such forceful suppression of the hindrance would be an example of the “I like it; I don't like it” mind at work. This is not a pure mind, but rather a mind exhibiting craving and grasping. Such forceful repression is a judgmental non-acceptance of what arises. For the hindrance that arises repeatedly, over and over again, Bhante Vimalaramsi advises some special strategies. For instance, Bhante recommends investigation in such a case of repeated arising. He teaches,

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<sup>391</sup> <http://talks.dhammasukha.org/uploads/1/2/8/6/12865490/mn-018-a07-070818-et.pdf>, accessed October 2017.

If a hindrance (repeatedly) arises, ask yourself, “What is the cause and condition for this hindrance to arise. What is the cause and condition of not staying on the object of meditation?” Just ask the question once and go back to the object of meditation. When the time is right, you will recognize the cause.<sup>392</sup>

When mind is very relaxed, light, open, and mindfulness is sharp, it becomes apparent how these hindrances are arising. How the mind works to bring us our load of suffering becomes visible and transparent. The links of Dependent Origination are revealed to us. It is unskillful for mind to give up its lightness and openness for the tightness of analysis. Investigation of experience can happen within the context of the method of the 6Rs.

### **When fear arises in meditation**

What about instances when fear arises, perhaps repeatedly and with intensity? The TWIM meditator would first notice it as a distraction and 6R it. However, if it returns over and over again with an intensity that disturbs the meditation and perhaps the normal life of the meditator, Bhante Vimalaramsi has used a special approach. When fear arises, it can usually be felt somewhere specific in the body, perhaps in more than one place. Bhante’s advice is to first, recognize (Recognize is the first of the 6Rs) that fear has arisen. Secondly, scan through the body and observe where the fear is felt. Thirdly, to relax the body and mind. The fear is released and in accordance with the practice of the 6Rs, a wholesome mind is brought up by smiling and returning the mind to the object of meditation. If the fear returns, the same process is repeated.

Experience has shown that when the meditator gets used to seeing the fear it becomes less intense and is not so overwhelming. Similar approaches can be taken with other persistent hindrances. It

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<sup>392</sup> <http://dhammasukha.org/uploads/1/2/8/6/12865490/mn-128-ws-110131.mp3>, dhamma talk on MN 128, *Upakilesa Sutta*, winter series 31 January 2011. Accessed October 2017.



is to be noticed that the meditator neither goes into deeply looking at the hindrance, nor to analyze it. The meditator continues with the 6R process.

## **Forgiveness meditation**

Sometimes people have a strong hindrance stemming from past traumatic experience such as being the victim or perpetrator of abuse. In this case the person may not be able to actuate the first steps of Loving Kindness meditation (sending *mettā* to oneself) or of *ānāpānasati* meditation (opening and relaxing with the in-breath and out-breath). In this case, Forgiveness Meditation is usually indicated as the place to start. Not only TWIM, but many other *vipassanā* centers in the west, such as Insight Meditation Society (IMS) in Barre, Massachusetts, USA, have begun to use such a meditation.<sup>393</sup>

Bhante Vimalaramsi in his book *Guide to Forgiveness Meditation* explains the role of forgiveness meditation when there is a blockage in the *mettā* practice due to a past trauma or some other cause. He writes,

Apparently, in some cases, if we get into trouble, we can clear the runway for our Mindfulness of Loving Kindness to take off by first learning to use Mindfulness of Forgiveness meditation. This is an extremely powerful and cleansing practice. Forgiveness is a form of loving kindness that really clears our mind of negative and unwholesome states. The reason this book came into being is because of the many questions teachers are asked about “Why doesn’t my *mettā* arise easily?” It is because we need to forgive ourselves before we can send out pure love to others.<sup>394</sup>

The TWIM version of Mindfulness of Forgiveness Meditation is explained in the aforementioned book and also from the Dhamma

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<sup>393</sup> <http://www.dharma.org/news/sangha-news>. Accessed October 2017.

<sup>394</sup> Vimalaramsi, *Guide to Forgiveness Meditation*, (Annapolis, Dhamma Sukha, 2015), p. 9.

Sukha Meditation Center website. The very short version taken from their website ([www.dhammasukha.org](http://www.dhammasukha.org)) is as follows:

Step one: First you begin by saying- I forgive myself for not understanding. Then, when that phrase is empty, then you can use other phrases like for forgetting things, making mistakes, causing yourself or another pain, not understanding things clearly, breaking any precept, overtalking, overeating, etc..... (using only one phrase at a time until it is empty)

Step two: When a memory comes up about anyone else, find the person in your mind, bring them up, see them as clearly as you can, then look them in the eye and say, “I forgive you for not understanding”. Forgive the situation for what happened and for how it happened. Stay with the person until they forgive you and you will feel a sense of relief.

Step three: You continue working with that person until they complete the full circle of forgiveness meditation by forgiving you.

Step four: Keep it going, relax into it, and gently smile as practice proceeds.<sup>395</sup>

Of significance is the emphasis upon sincerely meaning that you do forgive the person; genuinely feeling the forgiveness, and the relief. It is the depth of the feeling that makes this Forgiveness Meditation effective. The person need not actually be there. They are only a subjective experience, a memory. The subjective experience is causing pain and suffering. It can be favorably modified. For this to take place, depth of feeling is a crucial element.

Once the Forgiveness Meditation is successfully accomplished, and the old trauma or hurt completely dried up, then the meditator can move on to the Loving Kindness Meditation. This usage of the

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<sup>395</sup> <http://www.dhammasukha.org/brief-forgiveness-instructions.html>, accessed October 2017.

Mindfulness of Forgiveness Meditation is a variation on the Loving Kindness practice and its worth has been proven through actual use.

Forgiveness and Loving Kindness works nicely within an openness meditation format. It is difficult to fit it into an absorption meditation scheme. What is needed in the Loving Kindness and Forgiveness meditations is not depth of concentration but rather depth of feeling. That is probably why time for *mettā* meditation is often set aside at the beginning or at the end of other practice within the absorption methods. It is sequenced due to the difficulty of integrating it. It is a legitimate approach, but TWIM opts to fully integrate *mettā* into a framework of *samatha-vipassanā* by using the method of the 6Rs.

TWIM is going against the flow of the river by stepping away from absorption concentration and into tranquil insight meditation. In the TWIM view, this is not a new direction at all, but one that was previously given by Gotama Buddha himself. But over the centuries we have slipped into another mode of attention and mindfulness. For those who are happy with their present meditation, Bhante Vimalaramsi encourages them to continue, but to incorporate the relaxation step, and then to see if their progress and insight is enhanced.

For those who are interested in meditation but hesitant to try due to its perceived difficulty or even severity of pain, Bhante offers an accessible path leading to a mind which is light, peaceful and happy. It is a path which can be easily and fruitfully integrated into everyday affairs. And Bhante emphasizes that for the dedicated student, *Nibbāna* can be attained in this very life.



**Part Two**

**The Experience of  
TWIM Practitioners**

## **Chapter X**

### **TWIM Practitioners Share Their Experiences**

Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation is a workable and successful practice for most people who try it. Testimonies from those who have experience with TWIM indicate that most people who engage in it gain some measure of progress soon after initiating practice. For those who are persistent and are able to do at least one retreat, their progress can be quite rapid and rewarding to themselves and beneficial those around them. This makes TWIM a very accessible practice for not only the specialist in meditation, but also for the average person. It is possible that TWIM could play a key role in helping to create the transformation of consciousness that human beings and human society need so badly in these dangerous times.

A unique opportunity in TWIM is that there are on-line retreats offered. That means that anyone who is beginning practice has the opportunity to learn the meditation with the help of a guide who monitors progress through daily on-line reports. Participants in these retreats take refuge and precepts, maintain a daily schedule of sitting and walking meditation, listen each evening to one of Bhante Vimalaramsi's dhamma talks via the internet, and write the answers to five simple questions each day to send by email to the guide. There are also on-line support groups for people with an ongoing practice who do not have a sangha nearby.

It is most advantageous for people to attend at least one retreat and to have the living presence of Bhante Vimalaramsi or one of the other guides in the TWIM tradition. But not everyone can do this. For those who are motivated to practice in their own homes, and to carry on their practice in daily life, on-line support can be most helpful and encouraging.

The TWIM practice center in North America, Dhamma Sukha Meditation Center (DSMC) has a well-developed website with a

wide range of materials including dhamma talks on numerous suttas and meditation instructions. There are materials in many languages. The website is [www.dhammasukha.org](http://www.dhammasukha.org).

### **Testimonials and reports from TWIM meditators as posted on the Dhamma Sukha Meditation Center (DSMC) website**

By going to the DSMC website, it is possible to read reports and testimonials from TWIM meditators. What is posted is changed with some frequency, but here we will offer a sampling of the reports as posted in October of 2017 (In the following testimonials, most names are withheld for privacy, so in most cases only the initials of the names and the place where the person lives are given):

L.W. of New York:

*"In my second sitting with the six directions I had an amazing experience. During the first sitting I was having trouble keeping my Metta up, but in the second sitting it seemed to be spontaneously arising after I got it started. When I started to direct the Metta downward, it was like igniting a rocket. All of a sudden, I had this extraordinary sense of lightness as if I was about to levitate. My arms felt like they were about to lift off my thighs. I tried the Relax Step to make sure that it was not an experience of wanting such and such to happen, but this was simply occurring on its own. When I switched to radiating the Metta above it was like I got blasted into space with my whole body, light as a feather and when I switched to all directions I was simply radiating serenity to everywhere with no thought of doing so, no doing at all."*

P.H. of St. Louis on the third day of his retreat:

*"For the first time I am happy! I can't believe it!" "Is it really this easy?"*

An unnamed meditator reports to Bhante during a retreat:

*"This morning's sit: Settled well, established that warm feeling in the chest and watched it grown in waves. Joy arose quite strongly within 10 minutes of commencing, but quickly settled into a warm and balanced contented feeling that stayed for around five minutes before a more intense expression of joyfulness arose that took much longer to settle into a feeling of calmness and quite strong contentedness. At this point, mind was stable and balanced. I recall that I 6R'd one disturbance that arose, and it subsided very quickly...*

*"At some point, I noticed that the feeling of joy had gone completely and that I was going deeper. I became aware that no sensations were being given off by my legs, arms and abdomen although I knew those body parts were still there! At some point, my head -- or at least the sense of that part of the body, started tingling and I noted that my chest area had become "cooler." From this point I sent Metta to my spiritual friend from my head. Everything felt "just right", relaxed, balanced and unshakeable. This state got deeper, mind became quieter and sort of "opened up" to reveal a "night sky" display. At this point, I think I mismanaged the energy, because the mind got pretty busy - movement, lights and swirling colored objects. I 6R'd these and things settled down and the mind became again settled and quiet. But I felt I was lost. Not afraid or upset - just lost. Like "Where am I? Should I be here?"*

Note from DSMC in response to the above report on meditation: That thought simply then is to be 6Red and let go and then the state would go deeper.

## **Testimonials and reports from on-line retreatants**

Here are some of the testimonials from on-line retreatants, with a few of my comments and observations included.

J. G. of Michigan, USA writes,

*"I felt a lot of relief during this meditation. There was a moment where everything became a little bit lighter... It felt very healing and*



*I thought I was going to breakthrough if that word makes sense... At that point I started to tear up, but not out of sadness, maybe more out of relief or joy."*

This feeling of relief is a tangible result of TWIM meditation from early on in the process, and gets stronger as one goes deeper. The relief comes from letting go of the tightness, tension and the suffering that is the load we carry. This process is very healing, and brings joy. The mind and body can feel refreshed and revitalized. The hindrances can arise and knock one out of *jhāna* but with the 6R process, the mind and body can again be relaxed and opened and again the sense of relief can be felt. This can be very powerful, and can be compared to the Buddha's description of the disappearance of the five hindrances in *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*,

As long, sire, as a monk does not perceive the disappearance of the five hindrances in himself, he feels as if in debt, in sickness, in bonds, in slavery, on a desert journey. But when he perceives the disappearance of the five hindrances in himself, it is as if he were freed from debt, from sickness, from bonds, from slavery, from the perils of the desert.<sup>396</sup>

<sup>397</sup>

S. S. of Indianapolis, Indiana, USA writes,

*"At the start of the sit it was more of a calm, quiet happiness and it progressed to an overflowing, very strong joy towards the middle of the sit (probably about 20 minutes in, I would guess). This was when I was already partially into the portion where I was wishing happiness towards my spiritual friend. I could feel the joy suffused throughout my whole body, not just in my heart. My visual field also*

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<sup>396</sup> Walshe, **The Long Discourses of the Buddha**. DN 2:74 [PTS i 73], p.102.

<sup>397</sup> *Evameva kho mahārāja bhikkhu yathā guṇaṃ yathā rogaṃ yathā bandhanāgāraṃ yathā dāsabyaṃ yathā kantāraddhānamaggaṃ evaṃ ime pañca nīvaraṇe appahīṇe attani samanupassati. Seyyathāpi mahārāja ānaṇyaṃ yathā ārogyaṃ yathā bandhanā mokkhaṃ yathā bhujissaṃ yathā khemantabhūmiṃ evameva kho mahārāja bhikkhu ime pañca nīvaraṇe pahīṇe attani samanupassati.* DN 2:74, PTS i 73, CS edition.

*turned into a vibrant neon violet color, with rainbow patterns. By this point it seemed like my smile was basically floating in midair, without much sense of the rest of my body. Lots of fun! This is potent stuff.”*

The practice of sending loving kindness first to oneself, then to a respected person of the same gender (here the ‘spiritual friend’) is primarily a feeling meditation. When one begins TWIM by using this practice, there will be some sub-vocal use of words to make the wish, but it is the feeling that gives energy to the practice. Eventually the wording of the wishes is dropped altogether and only the feeling remains, often experienced as a radiance. When the power of the feeling of loving kindness builds, it can have dramatic results, with one’s own body suffused by good feeling and being radiantly shared with others.

We can compare this with the following account in *Sāmaññaphala Sutta*, as follows,

And when he knows that these five hindrances have left him, gladness arises in him, from gladness comes delight, from the delight in his mind his body is tranquilized, with a tranquil body he feels joy, and with joy his mind is concentrated. Being thus detached from sense desires, detached from unwholesome states, he enters and remains in the first jhāna, which is with thinking and pondering, born of detachment, filled with delight and joy. And with this delight and joy born of detachment, he so suffuses, fills, and irradiates his body that there is no spot in his entire body that is untouched by this delight and joy born of detachment.<sup>398 399</sup>

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<sup>398</sup> Walshe, **The Long Discourses of the Buddha**. DN 2:75 [PTS i 73], p.102.

<sup>399</sup> *Tassime pañca nīvaraṇe pahīṇe attani samanupassato pāmojjaṃ jāyati. Pamuditassa pīti jāyati. Pīṭimanassa kāyo passambhati. Passaddhakāyo sukhaṃ vedeti. Sukhino cittaṃ samādhiyati.*

M.R. of Japan writes,

*"After the infinite space dissipated I relaxed again and I began to see objects like lights streak across my view. I relaxed again and a bubble of pure joy enveloped me. Inside this bubble was dark and featureless. The joy was the most complete and intense I have experienced. Then it faded and I came out of the meditative state."*

This is seemingly an account of moving deeper into *jhāna*. Such experiences as infinite space can be quite pleasant and intriguing, but the instructions in TWIM are to never hold onto these experiences, but rather to let go of them one by one as they occur, continuing to relax and open. Then the meditator proceeds deeper into the succeeding stage.

An anonymous practitioner writes,

*"Today I woke up with this incredible loving-kindness feeling in my heart. During the morning meditation this feeling was very intense, even though I had difficulties sending lovingkindness to my spiritual friend at times, (I picked Jackie Chan because I could not find anybody else), so I just sent lovingkindness to every being that crossed my mind."*

*Anyway, the feeling was with me almost all day, and I was deeply happy. I was able to 6 R almost every unwholesome thing that showed up and even though I am very tired now, because I had to drive almost all day long, this feeling is still with me. It was especially strong during my last meditation and during Bhante's talk."*

The suttas talk of being suffused with a wonderful feeling of loving-kindness and sharing it with others. Bhante asks loving-kindness meditators to make a determination just before going to sleep to wake up with a smile and the feeling of loving-kindness. This person has done just that and is feeling wonderful happiness as

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*So vivicca kāmehi vivicca akusalehi dhammehi savitakkaṃ savicāraṃ vivekaṃ pītisukhaṃ paṭhamaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati. So imameva kāyaṃ vivekajena pītisukhena abhisantetiṃ parisanneti paripūreti parippharati. Nāssa kiñci sabbāvato kāyassa vivekajena pītisukhena apphuṭaṃ hoti. DN 2:75, PTS i 73, CS edition.*

a result. Sending loving-kindness to the spiritual friend is one of the beginning stages of TWIM meditation. So, this person has reaped such a marvelous result from meditation after not a long time of practice. When done as a feeling meditation, loving-kindness is very powerful and works quickly to transform the consciousness of the individual.

E.M. of California writes,

*"I was able to generate loving-kindness and radiate the feeling to my spiritual friend. Within a few seconds I felt an overwhelming wave of joy. It was like my spiritual friend was radiating mettā back to me; I cried out of joy.... Again, I returned to my meditation object (spiritual friend) but again I felt the wave of joy, and this time I just felt tremendously grateful."*

Such waves of joy and gratitude, sometimes accompanied by happy tears, are not unusual when the load of suffering is let go of and the mind is uplifted. For the aware person, this is a real moment of insight into how we create our own suffering and have the capacity to transform mind into something wholesome and beneficial for ourselves and others. Many are the tears of gratitude and happiness that have been shed at such a moment of feeling the mind turning from enslavement to freedom. This is a profound moment. The mind is not yet completely liberated. There is yet much to do. But such a moment in the light of love and wisdom then becomes the guiding beacon for one's life.

D.L. of Michigan writes,

*"Other times I am immersed in the equanimity and I lose spatial awareness of vastness -- spatial perception becomes minimized."*

As mind relaxes and opens, equanimity is gained. Actually, from the first sometimes clumsy efforts at doing the 6Rs, when tension, tightness and the associated craving are released, at that moment some amount of equanimity appears. By the attainment of the fourth *jhāna*, equanimity becomes quite firm and deep. With this equanimity, the

mind is ready to open and relax further and the way we normally hold our world together through selective perception based on craving and grasping at an 'I' begins to slip away. The world we thought was so real and solid turns out to be a hallucination caused by a deeply entrenched misperception. One by one, the props of that dream world we have constructed begin to drop away.

F.L. writes,

*"I have noticed also that smiling helps a lot to maintain wholesome state. I am getting attached to the feeling of happiness, so when I have an unwholesome thought or a beginning of unwholesome state of mind, I notice it quicker than before. And I give up spontaneously the unwholesome for a smiling state."*

Many people who come to TWIM retreats bring serious, sometimes dour faces. Some people have difficulty understanding the importance of smiling and how it helps the meditation. Or they may believe that meditators should not have smiling or happy faces. If they are experienced meditators, they may have developed a habit of having a rather serious face. The best way for people to understand the effectiveness of smiling is to have them actually practice it.

Most retreatants quickly learn the advantages of smiling, which we will discuss later in our chapter on science and meditation. For the meditator, these things do not need to be *researched* but only *searched*, that is, understood by direct experience. They are discovered through the Buddha's direct personal approach of knowledge and vision, meaning knowing by seeing. When any attachment arises, the tightness and tension often interrupt the smile. If the meditator is aware of the loss of the smile, it makes it easier to detect the coming of an unwholesome state of mind, and then easier to remedy. The person above discovered that smiling helps maintain a wholesome state, and it helps one to be aware of the rising of an unwholesome state of mind so it can be let go of and a wholesome mind brought up. That is Right Effort. The smile is an integral part of practicing Right Effort in TWIM.

Another big advantage of smiling is that it is an aspect of practice that is easy to take from formal meditation into daily life. Numerous TWIM meditators report feeling the positive transformative power of smiling in social situations such as family, work, while using public transportation, or while shopping in stores. The applications are endless and the effect is real. It is a way to develop generosity, to share a smiling face while radiating mettā.

### **Testimonials and reports from on-line support groups**

L.H. of Pasadena, California writes,

*“I have been practicing TWIM on and off since 2007. I have attended 3 retreats in 2007, 2008, and 2009 with Bhante. Although I continue to struggle with making TWIM a daily practice, TWIM has helped me with daily living. One of the biggest breakthroughs was learning the 6Rs and applying it during my sits and in everyday life. It made it easier to sit for longer periods of time. During my daily life, sometimes, when I remember to do so, I apply the 6Rs. At times, though not always, it releases tension from my head. It reminds me to not take things personally and to smile. I sometimes use it when I can’t sleep at night. It is a priceless “tool”.*

*In my TWIM practice, I do the Forgiveness Meditation. It has changed my life. The two most important persons to forgive were me and my mother. I no longer beat myself up for making mistakes. It was such a load off my shoulders. I am also a part-time caregiver to my elderly feeble mother. It is challenging, emotionally and physically draining. It is much more difficult when there is anger and resentment. With the forgiveness meditation, I have forgiven my mother for “not understanding”. It has made my job much easier. At times, I even enjoy caring for her!! My mother was the biggest challenge of my life, and I was able to overcome this challenge with my TWIM Practice. I am truly grateful for Bhante Vimalaramsi!”*

The Forgiveness Meditation is a powerful tool to bring healing to difficult relationships and bring a wholesome mind into every relationship, no matter the past. We forgive ourselves and bring that forgiveness to others. In the above account, L.H. relates what a great relief it has been to let go of such a load of suffering. As we let go of the burden of the past, everything proceeds in a much more positive and productive way.

Brenda ie-Mcrae, CCHT, PLRt, LBLt), of Jakarta, Indonesia writes,

*“I had been meditating with breath almost all my life so changing that habit was so hard [Brenda is referring to remembering to insert the “relax” and “smile” steps into the meditation as opposed to the habit of merely returning directly to the object of meditation].*

*Before we went back to Indonesia, we went to Joshua retreat in 2009 and within a week of retreat, Scott had a very major infection which had to be treated in a hospital. I used to panic easily but at the time, my mind was just so balanced, that I was really calm facing it and it intrigued me as to how my perspective had changed. It really surprised me. Then I followed up with a 12-day retreat in Dhamma Sukha Center in Missouri.*

*Life has been so fruitful, with no anger, no anxiety, no lust, no fear and people around me can see the change in me.*

*Thanks to TWIM practice and 6Rs which helped me a lot, I changed from a spitfire to no-fire, ha ha ha!”*

Many people have panic or anxiety attacks on a regular basis. There is also a generalized anxiety that stays with many people constantly. This makes life so difficult. People who experience episodes of acute anxiety or panic are sometimes unable to live a normal life and may spend a lot of money on anxiety management therapy and workshops. After one TWIM meditation retreat, Brenda was free of her tendency towards panic, and found balance and calm to face a medical emergency with her husband’s illness. The source of anxiety and panic is

uncontrolled proliferation of thought and emotion. In Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation, Brenda found the key to allaying this unhelpful mental activity.

Sheetal Damodare, M.D., of Nagpur, Maharashtra, India writes,

*“The journey with TWIM has been exceptionally rewarding as Bhante Vimalaramsi, in a truly innovative way, proves every time, Dhamma is 'akāliko' meaning immediately effective, unconditioned by Time, that is Timeless! 'sandhiṭṭhiko' because (T) Tranquility and (IM) Insight Meditation builds (W) Wisdom.*

*As in MN43 Mahāvedalla Sutta, Ven. Sāriputta's exuberant explanation to Mahākoṭṭhita WISDOM IS TO BE DEVELOPED, finds its expression in the practice. Bhante Vimalaramsi inculcates extraordinary understanding of two Wisdom factors of The Noble Eightfold Path Sammādiṭṭhi (Harmonious Perspective) and Sammāsaṃkappo (Harmonious Imaging) just with SMILE and RELAX step which are basic of TWIM from the very beginning!*

*As for me Bhante Vimalaramsi turned me into a very Loving and Smiling Mother. I was the mother of a child then 3 years old when I first started practicing TWIM. He made me understand "Mother's Love". As it goes in Karaṇīya Mettā Sutta, "Matā yathā niyaṃ puttāṃ āyusā ek puttāṃ manurakkhe evampi sabba bhūtesu mānasambhāvaye aparimānaṃ". Irreplaceable purity of Mother-Child Love stream which can be used and cultivated to develop an All-Pervading Infinite Love!*

*So, in short it is not only Wisdom that is developing but also the Brahmavihāras are experienced and understood to their finest levels, just with "Aware Jhānas " (Sammāsamādhi/Harmonious Collectedness) and used in day to day activities to combat Hate, Lust, and Delusion, within and without! "*

Through developing her *mettā* and insight wisdom through cultivating the ‘smile’ and ‘relax’ steps of the 6Rs, Sheetal (she wanted us to use her name) went deeply into her practice and became a smiling, loving mother. There is no separation here between meditation and the



every-day life of being a mother. One of Bhante Vimalaramsi's books is titled *Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life*, and in Sheetal's case we could say "Motherhood is Meditation-Meditation is Motherhood". Sheetal is also an M.D. pediatrician. How wonderful to go to a doctor who is full of Loving Kindness!

*J.T. of Seattle, Washington, USA writes,*

*"I've practiced TWIM for many years and it's done me a world of good. Every day I sit and I wouldn't want life without it, to an extent where I contemplate to have much more time to sit, maybe join Dave at DSMC. The peace of a quiet mind is quite something.*

*I've also volunteered at a rehab (<http://www.netaddictionrecovery.com/>) since they opened in 2009. I go there twice a week for leading a two-hour meditation session. Some clients pick up the practice really well and are able to sit quietly after a few weeks, a few go into 1st or even 2nd jhāna. Once or twice I had clients go deeper. Many seem to just enjoy some slower quiet time, and every so often a client boycotts the sessions.*

*In addition to that, those clients who pick up the practice and build a greater self-awareness benefit from this in their therapy sessions as well. The CCO is aware of the practice and increasingly values it, and we work actively on better integrating TWIM into therapy."*

Many methods of *samatha-vipassanā* have shown promise for helping people get out of the clutches of various addictions, and TWIM has special promise in this regard as the TWIM practice is easily sustainable in everyday life. In the case of J.T. of Seattle, Washington, the clients he is working with have an addiction to the internet. He is having success with helping these people through TWIM practice and his rehab center is taking notice and incorporating the TWIM practice into other aspects of therapy.

There is no doubt that TWIM can also be effective with other types of addiction, in addition to the addictions to the various technologies

that are now abundant in or modern world. People are addicted to the internet, to computer games, to their mobile (cell) phones. They also resort to alcohol, drugs, pornography and a host of other addictive behaviors.

What is an addiction? How would TWIM help people escape an addiction?

In brief, we can observe that people have a strong inclination to maximize pleasant feelings and to push away or escape the unpleasant. All else will be ignored as irrelevant to their quest for happiness through experiencing sensation. This is due to craving and self-grasping. The permanent “I” that we imagine needs constant gratification to believe it exists. It is in an on-going battle with life to control the quality of experience. This is a fight that ego cannot win. But it will certainly try.

Whatever gives us pleasant sensation will be grasped at and we design our lives in such a way as to maximize those pleasant sensations. Again, and again we revisit those experiences that give us such pleasure. This is psychological addiction. If we are consuming addictive substances such as alcohol or opiates, we also develop a physical dependency.

TWIM helps to create internal spaciousness, where we do not immediately react to a painful or pleasant feeling, but can allow it without grasping at it. This gives freedom. In addition, with regular practice, we find internal happiness that is not dependent upon external circumstances and does not need to be alleviated by a particular substance or behavior. Our body and mind can be experienced as very blissful in a much more powerful way than what any substance, behavior, or experience can give us. *Nibbāna* is *mahāsukha*, the great bliss. From attainment of the first *jhāna*, we experience some level of that great bliss, which is refined and enhanced as practice deepens.

We also now have a well-received book of his personal journey of awakening by Doug Kraft, a Unitarian Universalist minister who is an avid meditator in the TWIM tradition. In his book *Buddha's Map*,

which we have cited a number of times in previous chapters, Doug relates his experiences in TWIM from the beginning stage of learning the 6Rs to entering the jhānas and gaining insight and liberating wisdom. I will relate two sections, the first relating his experience of beginning to understand and apply the instructions for applying the 6Rs, and the second, his experience of moving from the first to second jhānas with his practice of Loving Kindness Meditation. Doug writes,

*I was beginning to absorb Bhante's instructions. When the mind wandered off, I was to recognize where my attention had gone and release the object that awareness had grabbed onto. Then I was to relax and smile before going back to the primary object of meditation.*

*The effect of this simple relaxing and smiling was remarkable, as I had discovered in John's retreat months earlier. When the mind-heart was distracted, there was some tension. By relaxing, the tension was released (or at least some part of it). By smiling or at least allowing a lightness to flow into the mind-heart, the quality of attention brought back to the object of meditation was both relaxed and light.*

*As my body and mind relaxed, I found myself sitting in meditation for three hours or more for the first time in my life. As the mind-heart lightened and brightened, it became clearer and suffused with joy and equanimity. Then it went into deeper states of peacefulness, spaciousness, and silence.*

*...and it's all there in the Buddha's instructions. I wondered how I had missed it all those years. (p.23)*

*As I experienced the practice working, I did develop more confidence in it and in myself. Some effort was needed to remember to pay attention and relax. But strain wasn't needed or helpful. The mind continued to wander, but I felt more patient with it-trusting that with gentle practice it would come around on its own.*

*Confidence and the accompanying patience are subtle signs of the second jhāna. Another sign is we find ourselves smiling more, both on and off the meditation cushion.*

*The most obvious sign of the second jhāna may be a change in attitude toward the mettā phrases: “May you be happy.” “May you have ease.” “May you be healthy.”*

*At first the phrases help the mind stay with sending mettā—they support the process and make it easier. But as the process deepens, the mettā flows more easily and freely on its own. The phrases begin to feel clumsy. Repeating them becomes more of a distraction than a support of meditation. The words feel awkward compared to the refinement of the feeling and the energy.*

*When I confessed to Bhante that the phrases were feeling thick and bulky, he smiled and said, Good. Stop using them. Just send the mettā out silently.” I felt relieved. He continued, “And you don’t need to send mettā to yourself unless you need it. The flow is strong enough that you can just send it silently to your spiritual friend. You are entering the noble silence.*

*When the Buddha spoke of the noble silence he wasn’t referring to not speaking during retreats. It’s fine to talk during training as long as you only speak about the dhamma and practice. Students can learn a lot from each other if their speech is simple, mindful, and helpful. Noble Silence refers to a naturally arising inner silence. Inner speech fades away. So, continue to send out the feeling of mettā from your heart. But don’t weigh it down with phrases.<sup>400</sup>*

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<sup>400</sup> Kraft, **Buddha’s Map**, p. 176.

## **Accounts of meditators related by TWIM teacher Ven. Sister Khema**

We are fortunate to have a contribution by one of the TWIM teachers, Ven. Sister Khanti Khema, who kept a record of a woman, D.R., who did an online retreat with Ven. Khema and had great success with the practice. Online retreat means the person must take refuge, keep precepts and keep a regular meditation schedule while at home. Each evening the participant watches a dhamma talk by Bhante Vimalaramsi and sends in a report. The person gets advice from the guide. This is a record of three of the exchanges between D.R and Ven. Khema, plus a few comments directed to me (Mark Johnson):

The D.R. LOG- OCTOBER 16, 2010

I love miracles. These letters are nothing short of one for me to watch happening!

### **Letter 1-**

Hello Sister Khema,

I have a question for you and ask for your assistance with clarification on the meaning to my current experience.

I just started the course and a well of enthusiasm like never before has flooded through along with a boost of renewed energy. This is good, but I can't get grounded. I feel as if I am barely tethered to the ground and am having extreme difficulties with concentrating on anything. I haven't slept in about 5 days and have already taken 2 days off from work. I just lie there in bed and cannot get my mind to stop. My body is tired, but my mind won't shut down. I am a social worker for the disabled and can't afford to get behind. I feel as if I'm growing at an accelerated rate and am starting to see some really strange things actually occurring in my environment on how everything is interconnected and on the simultaneous nature of my causes and seeing their effects manifesting immediately. - so much

to the point that I feel like I'm losing my mind. I am seeing, feeling, sensing, and knowing things that before, were only basically conceptual but now I am experiencing them. I sense this is also good, but am starting to worry about how much longer this should last and what I should now do at this point. Any kind of explanation as to why this is happening and what I can do about it, I would surely appreciate. I was not going to e-mail you for the first time with this type of question but my inner promptings kept tugging at me to do so.

Thank you kindly,

D.R.

The ADVICE sent was to FORGIVE everything! From the moment you wake up until you go to Sleep at night, this is your exercise.

Metta and smiles.

Sister Khema

### **Letter 2- about three days later.....**

Hello Sister Khema,

Today is a brand-new day and I feel I finally broke through. When I awoke, I made the determination that I would stop trying so hard and just SMILE. I smiled as I prepared my breakfast, smiled as I took a shower, smiled as I drove to work- also sending out warm wishes to all the cars on the other side of the road, smiled upon entering the door to work, smiled as I prepared my first case for the day, etc. Within that short period of time, I noticed how my life condition got more peaceful as I went on and by the time I got to work, I felt the first inner stirrings of that warm glow of Metta in my heart. I then changed my object of meditation to the feeling of Metta, using it as my anchor, 6-Ring anything else that came up.

I went to my first client's house in the morning which was an Inter county transfer from another county. For the first time in a long time, I really felt in the moment. The whole time I was talking to my client

and performing her assessment, I NOT ONCE felt like I wanted to be somewhere else or thought about all the other things I had to do during the day. I never once looked at the clock to gauge how long I'd been there and how much longer I should be there. And I was able to consciously sent out Love to her the whole time. Her three-year-old little girl kept clinging to me and kept bringing her toys to me so much to the point that her mother was astonished and remarked that she never acts this way around strangers.

The best part about this whole experience was when I had to tell her that her hours were going to be drastically reduced (since my County is the strictest in the state) and usually at this point, I'm met with anger and even hostility. You could tell at first, she didn't really like that idea but as I proceeded to calmly and lovingly explain things to her, sending her Metta the whole time, she began to understand, and even THANKED me at the end. I have to remember to always use this approach! ha ha.

I just wanted to update you on my progress. I feel like tonight, I will finally get some real deep sleep...

As always, thank you so kindly,

D. R.

*[Ven. Sister Khema's comment: Concerning this Mark, I must tell you that tears came to my eyes! This is why I keep teaching this way. D.R. is going to survive now. I know it and so does she. She is reclaiming her balance in life.]*

Ven. Sister Khema continues,

### **Letter 3- About 3 weeks later**

I call this "the ripple effect", which is what happens when you throw a small rock into the still water of a pond. Ripples go out in all directions.

*[Ven. Sister Khema's comment: Mark, very sincerely I believe that THIS is why Buddhist practice was used so widely in its golden*

*age. Because it makes sense. Not everyone became a Buddhist but everyone seemed to use the practice in one way or another.]*

Hello Sister Khema!

Thank you for your kind words and loving support.

In regards to your proposal, I really like that idea and know it will grow naturally in direct proportion to my own growth. I am making progress on sharing the guidance to people in the workplace and my own friends. I have already introduced your way of teaching to another social worker in the office who is dealing with some heavy health issues and she stated to me she has already found some relief. Another friend of mine in the office is the Supervisor for Child Protective Services. She has found immediate relief within two days and has even taught this to her 6-year-old daughter (who is highly spiritual with innate understanding). She also stated to me she might even contact you in the future. Her name is Debbie Greenwood. With her being a supervisor, she would know how far I could extend this without too much controversy, as the county has all kinds of restrictive policies regarding spreading religion (even though the 6Rs is not a religion but rather a practical methodology) and use of the internet during county time, etc. I would like to know what your thoughts are on the matter and what you had in mind? Or Perhaps its best to just continue on one by one like I'm doing?

I also have a strong desire to bring Bhante's teachings into the Lay Sangha that I started last year which is currently in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh. It's just a small group of 6 people and since they are all Unitarians, they are extremely open minded and we actually draw upon whatever teaching is necessary to get the point across. I have already introduced to them a couple of Bhante's talks and they seem to be very receptive. Isn't the Foundation class going to be used to develop a lay leader's training manual? We could use this sangha as a kind of pilot project if it would help in any way with what you



guys are trying to accomplish. I'm really good at Sangha building and gathering up support and enthusiasm within the members.

In closing I would just like to say once again from the bottom of my heart, how much I appreciate your guiding support. I really feel a strong karmic connective bond to you and look forward to meeting you in person. First, I know I will be going to Anaheim and then Joshua Tree. Then, I would like to come out to

DSMC afterwards. May or June? Would that be a good time? If not, when?

Eternally Bowing,

D.R. Los Angeles, California

*[Ven. Sister Khema's comment: D.R. did come to Anaheim, California, for a retreat with Bhante and later to Joshua Tree, California. Many people learned about the practice through her own experience of using it and the Ripples kept on growing from the effects the practice had on others.]*

With TWIM *mettā* meditation, the 'Ripple Effect' is very real. Not only one's own life, but the lives of those around us are transformed in a wholesome and tangible way.

Ven. Sister Khema shared three more stories which we will include here. They demonstrate the power of the Buddha's meditation to change lives in a very wholesome way. The first is a story of a Russian man.

Vladimir of Vladivostok, Russia:

It happened while I was repairing a resistant, broken Rototiller outside in a wet garden where it was clogged with stones. In the heat of the mid-day sun, someone came to tell me I had a phone call and Ven. Vimalaramsi had said to take the calls. I had no idea how he knew it would be so important. I never got phone calls during the day like that, but, here it was from a student they told me.

I wiped the grease off my hands and climbed onto a picnic table to sit in the shade of a large Poplar tree and began to listen to a call

from a man in Vladivostok, Russia that would change my view permanently about the effectiveness of this ‘recovered’ meditation method that Bhante Vimalaramsi had recovered from the suttas. Try to imagine hearing a thick heavy Russian Accent at the other end of a phone that I was holding while deep in the forest of Missouri, USA.

“Hello”, I said, a bit weak sounding, I think. And on the other end was a deep male voice.

“Hello! I am Vladimir of Vladivostok, Russia.”

I sat up straighter then for sure.

“Really? From Russia? And how can I help you there.”

“Yes. Russia. I want you to tell me if you can teach me how to meditate and fly.”

That made me pause. I paused in order to listen inside of me to hear what he really wanted. Somehow, I knew it wasn’t about flying. This person was hurting inside.

“Are you a meditator now?” I asked him. “Why do you want to fly.”

“I read something you wrote and I knew I needed to get lighter and I heard about some people teaching about flying, and I wanted you and Venerable to teach me how. Can you do that?”

“Well, flying can take many years to learn, but first you must become very light in the heart”, I said with a smile at my end of the very long-distance phone conversation.

There was then what felt like a heavy pause. Then he continued on.

“I don’t think I can do that. You see I am not a happy person.”

“And you are so far away I said, “that, it would be very hard for me to follow your practice to help you get to a high point of meditation where maybe you would be able to train that way. Would you follow my instructions no matter what I asked you to do when you are so far away?”

I had been asked to learn to be stronger with students, to be firmer, and not a pushover and I was trying to be a little tough here.

“I can do that. I can do that. Sure.” He said and I felt the energy rise at the other end of the phone.

“Will you try something for me as a test before we go into more meditation training?”

“I can do that. I can do that”, he said, I can try what you say and call back in a week and report.”

“OK then. I am willing to start you with a simple form of meditation. We will see how far that will go. I want you to forgive everything and SMILE. Your job will be to smile into everything that is happening in your life. Can you do this all the time?”

“Yes. I can do it. I can do it I can follow instructions well.”

“Good then,” I said. “If anything gets in your way, just laugh at it. Life is crazy sometimes and you are to laugh at it. Just laugh at it for coming up, let it go out of your mind and smile at it, and forgive it and then keep going with a smile into whatever you are doing. OK?”

“OK,” he said. “and I will call you in one week to see what we do next, yes?”

“Yes. That’s good. Keep track of what is happening in your life and let me know how you feel the next time you call, OK?”

“Yes. Right. I can call you back around the same time of day, right?”

“Yes. This is a good time to get me and I will be still working in this area and answer. OK.”

“OK. Thank you so much. I got it. I’ll do it.”

“See you then. Good bye.”

The call cut off and it was gone.

I went back to work. I didn't get a lot out of him, at first when we talked, but I did feel there was a heaviness inside him and Bhante Vimalaramsi said I did the right thing. Then, we waited. I was still building the garden in that area, but he did not call back after a week's time. I began to move past the call in my mind until a week after that when something happened. He DID call back.

"Hello!" I said. "I thought you forgot us. I thought you would not call back. It is good to hear your voice.

"I know, I know. But here I am. And I have to tell you something. "This stuff is like a miracle. It's just great!"

I was listening to what sounded like a completely different person. I was trying to figure out what he meant at first. I mean, I thought I had *only* asked him to forgive everything and smile. Why was he so excited?

"Tell me what happened," I said and then he went on.

"Well, first, I need to tell you something. I wasn't really honest with you when I called you last time. I wanted to fly because I wanted to leave and I thought, before I end everything, I would like to fly. It seemed like it would feel so free."

Well, this kind of set me back. I climbed onto the picnic table under the tree again and waited to hear what came next.

"You see, I was not a happy man because I had a workman's injury and it was pretty bad. After many months in the hospital, I find that I cannot be left alone anymore. I must have an attendant at all times with me. I cannot sleep through the night without someone to help me turn over every 30 minutes into another position. It isn't easy to get sleep like this. If they don't turn me there is a high possibility that I could become permanently paralyzed for good. So, I live in a simple flat and have a companion to help me. My family is gone from me now. When I called you, I had reached my limit of life and

thought it best to leave before I read what you wrote and listened to a talk by your teacher.”

“I am sorry for your pain,” I said. I wish I could help you more.”

“No, no.” He said then with a totally jovial sound in his voice like a little child almost, “You have already helped more than you could know. This stuff is wonderful. This smile. This forgiveness and smile. It really helps people and it’s easy to share.”

“But, how are you? Did it help you?”

“Oh my, yes. It brought me back with something great. You see after you and I talked, I decided to go and see my friend and I had to take a train to do that. My companion and I walked slowly towards the train station and on the way, there was a homeless woman living on the street side looking very sad. I did something then.”

“What did you do?”

“I smiled. I forgave the world that put her there and I smiled directly into her eyes. And then she tried to smile back and she did, and her eyes got brighter.”

“Then what happened?” I asked I think like a little child would ask to hear the end of this story.

“It was beautiful. I touched someone else with the smile. She felt it. WE smiled as I passed by and went on to the train station. Then I saw there was a big line. People in front were not being nice to a young woman who was the only ticket agent there. But, when I went up to the window, I smiled at her and forgave them around us, and told her what a big job she had to do and she was doing it well too and I thought I was glad to have her for a ticket agent. And she gave me my ticket for less than she should have, with a smile.”

I was smiling while I was listening now too. And he went on.

“Then I visited my friend and during that trip I found out that this practice is worth a lot but the most important part of it is that I figured

out that I finally found something that I could give back to this world and I don't have to leave it. And I am going to share this.”

Well, at that point as you can guess, I had tears in my eyes that TWIM could help someone so fast and turn them around from intending to exit this world, to giving their smile and forgiveness practice to others, to help them out of their sad position. It was like seeing the Lotus of Compassion blooming open in front of my eyes.

“What are you going to do now?” I asked.

“Well, I don't need to fly to do this! I will help others find what I found and we will help each other together maybe.”

The last I heard about Vladimir was that he was helping others through support groups who would allow him to explain what happened to him that day.

To sum up about Vladimir, a great deal of his suffering was because he felt he had nothing to give the world anymore after his family left him. He never blamed them. He was in the hospital for a long time. But the difficulties of his physical condition enveloped his life and he felt he had nothing to give anyone and giving used to make him happy. By discovering the feeling of his heart opening again, a new clarity of mind and hope opened the way to new possibilities also. This simple easy to understand little practice, had reopened the heart of Vladimir and now he had something to share. That was all it took to take his mind off of his body and give him a new hold on life again, the reopening of his heart and smile.

Here is a story of an Australian doctor, told by Ven Sister Khema:

P.P-B in Canberra, Australia:

P.B. was a surgeon in Canberra, AU who lost 2/3 of his liver through Cancer. He had some bitterness about the whole situation as he had been a very hardy and masculine ocean paddling guy for most of his life. Two things were going on. One was his son had gotten extremely angry with him because he got cancer and it was likely terminal. The

other was that he had to go through the experience of his best friend dying of the same disease who was also a doctor and paddler. Now, he knew that a liver, if you catch it early and cut part out, can grow back again. The trick is, did you catch it early enough to have a second chance. That's difficult to know. PB began with an online retreat and ran his forgiveness practice for over a year or more before beginning work on the *Brahmavihāra* track. He forgave himself, his son, his staff at the hospital. Loads of old stuff came up, and everything began to lighten up and change for him. When he forgave his son, somehow this affected his son too and eventually they had one the best holiday times in their life together as a family. He helped his friend learn how to forgive his body before he died too and anything he shared really helped a lot.

Ven. Sister Khema relates another story of R.M. in Canada:

R. M. in Alberta, Canada

The other story is about a maestro who conducted symphonies in Canada and he grew up as a perfectionist. He began TWIM with an online retreat. He began with METTA but he hit a wall (could not go further) and we stepped over into forgiveness. He was raised to be a perfectionist beyond belief. I am still coaching him and he has made remarkable progress with a phrase saying, "I forgive myself for not allowing myself to ever JUST BE." With this he has made remarkable progress sitting sometimes up to 3-4 hours. Now that we know this is the deep-seeded early issue, he is laughing much more. He has become capable of detecting arising craving that occurs with agitation, frustration, craving of any kind. For instance, he had always been an avid 'play to win' serious tennis player. Now he plays to have fun! A remarkable change has taken place for him. He is kinder with his wife, more balanced and patient with his mother's patterns, more supportive with his children, and patient and smiling with his grandchildren. He tells me great stories about his equanimity such as the most recent one where his favorite coffee mug he loved

so much from his daughter just smashed onto the floor into a thousand pieces right in front of him, while he, only looked on INTO the IMPERMANENCE of this cup and had no reaction at all but to smile and accept it. Previous to this, such an equanimous reaction would have been unheard of in his house and he was (pleasantly) surprised at himself. There are other things he had happen like that too.

Both of these students (P.B. and R.M.) prefer to stay in touch with me through weekly or monthly reports and I get to monitor the longer-term effects that build confidence in this approach (TWIM) and which results in more and more continued practice. Some students have told me that something ‘turns on’ inside of them that they can’t explain, and begins to move in a forward wholesome direction that continues to open the blossom of patience, forgiveness, loving kindness, and compassion. It is like you have been given permission to move in this direction for the first time since you entered your adult life.

Venerable Khanti Khema

March 13, 2016

### **Poetry written as a response to the experience of TWIM meditation**

TWIM meditator E.M.V. of Vermont, USA has written some lovely and powerful poetry of her inner journey.

#### *I Died Today*

I died today just like I die every day, but today I saw it.

I watched my own death. Impersonal self fading away.

Opening and allowing persona to change, even letting go of my name. I cried out in grief and laughed with relief.

Gladness and happiness poured forth from my being.

It felt liberated to be insane.



Please don't send flowers or sympathy cards because  
for once in my life,  
life is alive.

And one more poem from E.M.V. concerning her meditation  
experience:

*Excuse Me*

Excuse me,  
are you hiding from behind yourself?  
Please come out from behind yourself.  
Are you afraid of being exposed?  
Take my hand.  
I will help you move from behind your illusions.  
Yes, it may be painful.  
No, I cannot stay with you because I am just one of your illusions.  
But I will point the way.

It is not far, nor is it near, it's in this moment where there is no fear.  
Let go of yourself, there is nowhere to hide.  
Come on out and I'll show you the path that leads inside.

If you will stop running away from yourself, then life can live  
through you, and you'll no longer need to be untruthful.

Is it truth that you refuse to accept?

Well, truth, always walks hand-in-hand with love, so now it is time  
for you to take that first step.



**Part three**

**TWIM and the Findings  
of Science**

## **Chapter XI**

# **TWIM Meditation, Neuroscience and Physiology**

On December 10<sup>th</sup> 1996, an event occurred which had a significant impact on our understanding of the human brain and eventually on our understanding of how meditation affects the human body and brain in subtle but powerful ways. On that day, brain scientist Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor had a stroke which nearly killed her.

The rare form of stroke in the left hemisphere of her brain disabled her ability to walk, talk, read, write, or recall any of her life. It also resulted in a major change of personality. The parts of her brain that were responsible for giving her a sense of a separate self apart from others, the parts that were responsible for conceptualizing, judging, and analyzing experience, were disabled. It took years for these areas to rebuild themselves and for these functions to return.

Amazingly, Jill Bolte Taylor, Ph.D., a trained and recognized authority on the brain and its structure and function, was able to stay conscious through her experience of nearly dying. She was able to watch the process of her brain losing its functioning abilities. She observed how she was steadily losing the parts of the brain in the left hemisphere that essentially gave her a perception-based ego, with boundaries of self and other, and the sense of a body apart from other bodies and objects in the world. She was also able to observe her recovery, the restoration of functioning to those areas of the brain responsible for language, concept and perception of a separate self, and to observe how those areas attempted to reassert control over her life and personality.

## **Jill Bolte Taylor's stroke disabled the parts of the brain involved in perception and conceptualization**

In the absence of this control by these perceptual parts of the brain, Jill experienced the most profound sense of peace, happiness and harmony of her entire life as a result of those centers being disabled. Due to the absence of domination by the disabled centers in the left hemisphere of her brain, a whole different part of her brain, mind, and sense of being emerged. Most of the areas of this newly emerging personality were centered in the left hemisphere of her brain.

All of this is written about in her bestselling book *My Stroke of Insight*, first published in 2006.<sup>401</sup> This book was widely read and influenced both the lay public and the world of brain scientists, many of whom were colleagues of hers. Jill has also talked in an eloquent way about her experience on public television, and these can be viewed on the internet.

It is no mistake that Jill's book is titled *My Stroke of Insight*, as the use of the word 'insight' is intentional and she has likened her experiences to a kind of *nirvāna*. Whether her experience matches that of those who attain *nirvāna* by following the path of the Buddha is beyond our scope. But a reading of the descriptions of her experience, leaves no doubt that Jill lost parts of her brain that Buddhist meditators also tranquilize while abiding in *jhāna*. We will give an account of some of those similarities.

The centers of the brain responsible for much of what early Buddhism terms 'perception' or 'conceptual thought' (*saññā*) were disabled in Jill's stroke. The language centers in her brain were disabled. She was unable to do simple math. Her brain lost the ability to conceptualize in ways that enabled these functions. Jill lost her memory.

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<sup>401</sup> Taylor, Jill Bolte, **My Stroke of Insight**. (New York, Penguin Group, 2009). Her website is: [www.drjilltaylor.com](http://www.drjilltaylor.com) and one of her talks about her stroke can be viewed at [www.ted.com/talks/jill\\_bolte\\_taylor\\_s\\_powerful\\_stroke\\_of\\_insight](http://www.ted.com/talks/jill_bolte_taylor_s_powerful_stroke_of_insight).

She had no sense of her past. She had no concept of a future. She could not sense a boundary between her body and the remainder of the world. She lost her internal chatter. Her mind went silent. Her self-criticism and internal negative thought patterns were gone. She had no sense of a separate self, and had no fear of death or of losing that self. She could not judge, critically analyze, calculate, theorize, rationalize, memorize, think sequentially, identify patterns, or plan.

These functions are vital to the functioning of a human being, and without them, Jill was reliant upon care from her mother and others, until she was able to resume normal life. Eventually, after intensive therapy and sufficient rest and recuperation, these abilities returned. However, she did not allow them to again exert the dominance they had once had over her personality. During their absence she felt a wonderful perspective on life that she did not want to lose to a domineering, concept-based self that tried to reassert itself. Instead, as she regained these functions, she decided to use them to her benefit, rather than having them rule tyrannically over her life.

As Jill's stroke was occurring and parts of her brain were being disabled, she watched the process unfold. While Jill was in the shower, having her stroke, parts of her brain were disabled. As the activity and conscious functioning related to those parts of her brain faded and went dead, she did not. She remained conscious and present. She writes,

The harder I tried to concentrate, the more fleeting my ideas seemed to be. Instead of finding answers and information, I met a growing sense of peace. In place of the constant chatter that had attached me to the details of my life, I felt enfolded by a blanket of tranquil euphoria. How fortunate it was that the portion of my brain that registered fear, my amygdala, had not reacted with alarm to these unusual circumstances and shifted me into a state of panic. As the language centers in my left hemisphere grew increasingly silent and I

became detached from the memories of my life, I was comforted by an expanding sense of grace. In this void of higher cognition and details pertaining to my normal life, my consciousness soared into an all-knowingness, a ‘being at one’ with the universe, if you will. In a compelling sort of way, it felt like the good road home, and I liked it.

By this point, I had lost touch with much of the physical three-dimensional reality that surrounded me. My body was propped up against the shower wall and I found it odd that I could no longer clearly discern the physical boundaries of where I began and where I ended. I sensed the composition of my being as that of a fluid rather than that of a solid. I no longer perceived myself as a whole object separate from everything. Instead, I now blended in with the space and flow around me.<sup>402</sup>

For anyone familiar with Buddhist meditation and the experience of the *jhānas*, there is much that is familiar here. We will not attempt a step by step comparison, but rather examine a few outstanding points of similarity, such as the breaking down of the barriers, experiencing a mind with no boundary, the breaking down of a sense of personal self apart from others, altered sense of space, sense of intense joy, to name a few. Jill likened her experience to a kind of *nirvāna*. As she relates it,

In the absence of my left hemisphere’s analytical judgement, I was completely entranced by feelings of tranquility, safety, blessedness, euphoria, and omniscience. A piece of me yearned to be released completely from the captivity of this physical form, which throbbed with pain.<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>402</sup> Ibid, p. 41.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid, p. 51.

Most human beings are constantly accompanied by an endless stream of sub-vocal chatter in the mind. This is thought that constantly judges, interprets, analyzes, interprets, and separates what we are experiencing. All of these functions are important for the normal life of a human being living among his or her family and society. However, they have come to dominate us rather than to serve us. In the process, they bring us much pain, suffering, stress, and disease. Jill relates the experience of having this aspect of her mind, primarily located in the left hemisphere of the brain, drop away to reveal a kind of *nirvāna*.

As the hemorrhaging blood interrupted the normal functioning of my left mind, my perception was released from its attachment to categorization and detail. As the dominating fibers of my left hemisphere shut down, they no longer inhibited my right hemisphere, and my perception was free to shift such that my consciousness could embody the tranquility of my right mind. Swathed in an enfolding sense of liberation and transformation, the essence of my consciousness shifted into a state that felt amazingly similar to my experience in Theta Ville. I'm no authority, but I think the Buddhists would say I entered the mode of existence they call Nirvana.<sup>404</sup>

Like many people who lead a normal life, they may not know how much of a load they are carrying until something in their life forces them to put it down. By 'load', I mean all of the effort, stress, difficulty, need to constantly solve problems, the need to define a self and keep it alive, even to defend it in some way.

Some people come to understand suffering and dissatisfaction through being overwhelmed by sadness, tragedy, depression, illness, the death of a loved one, or any of innumerable difficulties that may arise in life. However, Jill was in her prime as a successful scientist who loved her family and friends, enjoyed her work, and found life

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<sup>404</sup> Ibid, pp. 50-51.



to be quite good. But when the stroke disabled the centers of her brain that put all of that together and kept it going, she felt a huge sense of relief and stepped into a mode of being that was profoundly more satisfying. Until she lost the life she had created, she did not really know how much suffering it was bringing her.

This stroke of insight taught Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor the first three of the Noble Truths taught by the Buddha. She first realized the Third Noble Truth, of the cessation of suffering. As she began her journey to recovery of her full functioning, which took a number of years, she began to realize the First and Second Noble Truths, namely that she had been suffering in her regular life, and that there had been a cause of that suffering. In her own way, she found a way to practice the Fourth Noble Truth, the Path to End Suffering. During her recovery, Jill was very introspective and aware of her mind and she made conscious choices to let go of unwholesome mind states and to cultivate and perpetuate wholesome mind states. She was performing Right Effort, or Harmonious Practice (*sammā vāyāma*).

As Jill describes it, her stroke was a wonderful gift that revealed to her a completely different perspective and way of living. However, as she began to recover, her old patterns (*saṅkhāra* in Buddhist psychology) began to try to reassert themselves. She was very aware of this process and describes it clearly,

The number one question I am most frequently asked is, “How long did it take you to recover?” My standard response, and I don’t mean to be trite, is “Recover what?” If we define recovery as regaining access to old programs, then I am only partially recovered. I have been very fussy this time around about which emotional programs I am interested in retaining and which I have no interest in giving voice to again (impatience, criticism, unkindness). What a wonderful gift this stroke has been in permitting me to pick and choose who and how I want to be in the

world. Before the stroke, I believed I was a product of this brain and that I had minimal say about how I felt or what I thought. Since the hemorrhage, my eyes have been opened to how much choice I actually have about what goes on between my ears.<sup>405</sup>

She realized how she had been creating her own suffering and was determined not to let the old patterns reassert themselves. She did this through paying attention to her mind. She describes her process,

One of the greatest lessons I learned was how to feel the physical component of emotion. Joy was a feeling in my body. Peace was a feeling in my body. I thought it was interesting that I could feel when a new emotion was triggered. I could feel new emotions flood through me and then release me. I had to learn new words to label these ‘feeling’ experiences, and most remarkably, I learned that I had the power to choose whether to hook into a feeling and prolong its presence in my body, or just let it quickly flow right out of me.

I made my decisions based upon how things felt inside. There were certain emotions like anger, frustration, or fear that felt uncomfortable when they surged through my body. So, I told my brain that I didn’t like that feeling and didn’t want to hook into those neural loops. I learned that I could use my left mind, through language, to talk directly to my brain and tell it what I wanted and what I didn’t want. Upon this realization, I knew I would never return to the personality I had been before. I suddenly had much more say about how I felt, and for how long, and I

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<sup>405</sup> Ibid, p. 128.

was adamantly opposed to reactivating old painful emotional circuits.<sup>406</sup>

This is a vital step to wellbeing; when we realize that we are creating our own experience, whether distressful or blissful, and that we have a choice. Life circumstances may be favorable or unfavorable, but how we react is up to us. We have no one to blame for our unhappiness other than ourselves. In this light, Jill adds,

Emotional healing was a tediously slow process but well worth the effort. As my left brain became stronger, it seemed natural for me to want to “blame” other people or external events for my feelings or circumstances. But realistically, I knew that no one had the power to make me feel anything, except for me and my brain. Nothing external to me had the power to take away my peace of heart and mind. That was completely up to me. I may not be in total control of what happens to my life, but I am certainly in charge of how I choose to perceive my experience.<sup>407</sup>

### **Meditation can achieve the positive effects of Jill’s stroke without the physical damage**

We are fortunate to have Jill’s account of her stroke that brought her so much insight. No one would wish to go through the nearly deadly events that transformed her life, so we must find another way to calm (relax, tranquilize) those centers of the brain that create the distress and suffering that is the load we carry due to dominance by those parts of our brain and mind that create a nearly continuous grasping after a separate and independent self.

By calming those ego-enhancing centers of the brain, we too can experience a change of perspective and a transformation of consciousness and of personality. *Samatha-vipassanā* meditation seems an excellent way to calm those troublesome parts of the brain

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<sup>406</sup> Ibid, pp. 126-7.

<sup>407</sup> Ibid, p. 127.

and personality as well as have the insight to understand the dynamic of our mind and to choose the wholesome over the unwholesome.

In calming those troublesome areas of the brain, both absorption concentration and tranquil aware meditation can be used. I believe Jill's experience demonstrates some advantages to the tranquil aware method such as used in TWIM. When the TWIM practitioner relaxes, opens, and expands the mind and gives up the craving and self-grasping through the practice of the 6Rs, a great depth of relaxation is reached in the body, brain, and mind. Because the method is not based on suppression, the change in outlook that is experienced by the practitioner is easily integrated into daily life. The old patterns are allowed to arise but then let go of, which eventually results in their disappearance. Because the negative patterns are not fed with attention, they eventually wither away and fade out.

This method of practice calms those troublesome centers of the brain and takes away their role as 'the captain of the ship of self'. Instead of being captain, they find a useful occupation as a crew member. Functions such as language, discriminatory thought, thinking in terms of past, present, and future, sequencing events, personal memory and the like are incredibly valuable to us as human beings, and without them we would either die or be a burden to those around us. However, they weave a story or narrative by which we live our lives and at the same time incur great suffering. The art of skillful living is to use these functions without being dominated by them, as Jill Bolte Taylor learned to do.

This is similar to the Buddha's statement in the *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta* to the elephant trainer Citta, about how the Buddha used language without misusing it or being used by it. He explains,

But, Citta, these are merely names, expressions, turns of speech, designations in common use in the world, which the Tathāgata uses without misapprehending them.<sup>408 409</sup>

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<sup>408</sup> Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*. DN 9:53 [PTS i 202], p. 169.

<sup>409</sup> *Imā kho citta lokasamaññā lokaniruttiyo lokavohārā lokapaññattiyo yāhi tathāgato voharati aparāmasanti*. DN 9:53, PTS i 202, CS edition.

When we practice absorption concentration meditation, the reentry to everyday life can be overwhelming and difficult to integrate with our peaceful, calm mind that we have been experiencing. The fully absorbed person is not wholly in the everyday world. With reentry, it may be very difficult to integrate practice with daily life. Some people are very successful at doing so, especially after some years of training, but others find it quite difficult or are unable to effectively integrate the two modes of being. It is one reason why many people quit practicing absorption concentration methods.

With TWIM practice, there is not the rigid separation of meditation from daily life. While in TWIM practice, the affairs of the world are allowed space to arise in the mind of the meditator, and when they arise they are not suppressed, but rather starved of attention. This means that in the first and second *jhāna*, the TWIM practitioner will be pulled out of *jhāna* by distractions relating to personal life on a rather regular basis, until the old patterns begin to lose their force and coherence. In effect, this is what Jill did when during the recovery from her stroke, the old patterns began to once more arise. She saw them as they arose and let go of them. They never regained their former dominance in Jill's life.

This is similar to the experience of the TWIM meditator who experiences the purity of mind while practicing the 6Rs, Harmonious Practice, and then has distractions arise and is pulled out of *jhāna*. If the distraction is not fed with personal attention and is 6Rd, it will lose its dominance and eventually will fade out altogether. As equanimity becomes stronger in the third and fourth *jhānas*, there are fewer distractions, but they will continue to occur. It is a process of gradual purification and transformation of consciousness. Over time, the person develops a personality based on non-attachment rather than the old one based on attachment.

This gradual letting go of the old patterns happens in formal meditation but also while TWIM practice is carried into the daily life and affairs of the meditator. This is one of the great advantages to

TWIM practice, the seamless transition from of formal meditation to daily life.

### **The sciences are now documenting what has been known among meditators for millennia**

Much has been learned since Jill's near fatal stroke in 1996, and it generally confirms both her experience and the experiences of meditators. We now understand that the human mind has a profound effect upon the physiology of the body, from the brain down to the tips of the toes. Every emotion, every thought has its impact.

This new understanding and perspective is from the standpoint of the sciences, revolutionary. It may come as less of a surprise to those who have been practicing the meditation as taught by the Buddha or other great sages. Buddhism and other branches of the tree of Indian religions have been developing a sort of "inner technology" for the past 2,500 years or more. If we look back to the likely origins of meditation to the Indus Valley Civilization, we can expand that figure to nearly 4,500 years. By comparison, the scientific method, which began in the west but is now a worldwide human endeavor, is about 500 years old.

### **The impact of thought on the internal chemistry of the body and how anger creates a biochemical storm**

This understanding is revolutionary because much of what is now being discovered as being scientifically valid would have been laughed at and dismissed as ridiculous by most research scientists and medical doctors only a few decades ago. Let us take the example of the impact of thought. Daniel G. Amen, M.D. informs us of the negative impact of random thinking on a person's deep limbic system in the brain and general, even cellular, physiology. In his book *Change Your Brain, Change Your Life*, he writes,

Healing the deep limbic system requires healing moment-to-moment thought patterns. Unfortunately,

there is no formal place where we are taught to think much about our thoughts or to challenge the notions that go through our head, even though our thoughts are always with us. Most people do not understand how important thoughts are and leave the development of thought patterns to chance. Did you know that every thought you have sends electrical signals throughout your brain? Thoughts have actual physical properties. They are real! They have significant influence on every cell in your body. When your mind is burdened with many negative thoughts, it affects your deep limbic system and causes deep limbic problems (irritability, moodiness, depression, etc.).<sup>410</sup>

Dr. Amen has mentioned here the profound effects of thought on the deep limbic system which in turn profoundly affects our moods. He has even shown us the connection of thoughts with even the working of the billions of tiny cells in our body. These cells are keeping our body running smoothly, replicating our DNA, and fighting infections and cancer. Any disruption in their functioning is harmful and potentially very serious. How do the signals in the brain affect the remainder of the body? Dr. Amen explains the impact of negative thought,

Every time you have an angry thought, an unkind thought, a sad thought, or a cranky thought, your brain releases chemicals that make your body feel bad and activate your deep limbic system). Think about the last time you were mad. How did your body feel? When most people are angry, their muscles become tense, their hearts beat faster, their hands start to sweat, and they may even begin to feel a little dizzy. Your body reacts to every negative thought you have.

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<sup>410</sup> Amen, Daniel G., MD, **Change Your Brain, Change Your Life**. New York, Random Hill, 1998, p.57.

<sup>411</sup> Ibid, p. 57.

These are the obvious symptoms of anger which nearly anyone can feel for themselves, but they are the tip of the iceberg in terms of the negative effects the body experiences at a very subtle level.

In his book *Overcoming Psychological Stress*, Dr. D.B. Nugegoda explains that not only the negative explosive episodes of anger but also merely the daily grind of less dramatic annoyances and frustrations of daily life can be very debilitating when they occur regularly on a long-term basis. An episode of anger produces a flood of stress hormones that enter the bloodstream and affect change to every body system. The body goes into what is commonly called the “Flight or Fight Response (FFR). When the level of stress hormones in the blood is graphed, there is a sudden peak, and then it fades out as calm returns. If this occurs again and again, this “roller coaster” of stress hormones produces negative effects on one’s health.

As opposed to these dramatic episodes, minor but chronic irritation and stress produces a series of smaller ups and downs, which when graphed out look similar to the teeth on a saw blade. Dr. Nugegoda calls this the “saw tooth” response. It actually has a much more deleterious effect on health over time than does the occasional outburst of anger. He explains,

Anger is a common destructive emotion, faced by many of us on an almost daily basis. One may think that if one rarely explodes in anger, one would not have the roller coaster response to the release of stress hormones and hence think that one is not subjected to stress. However, research has shown that is the small hassles one encounters daily such as anger, annoyance, and frustration, resulting perhaps from slow-moving traffic, waiting in long queues [lines], etc., which counts for most of us. Here, small doses of the “poisonous” stress hormones are released on a regular and long-term basis, which can be referred to as the “saw-toothed” response.



Changes in various organs in the body, brought on during the FFR are also produced during stress. Such changes during stress, though less sudden and intense in nature than FFR, are longer lasting and could go on for months or even years. This causes more wear and tear in most organs in the body, leading to various diseases. Stress also makes people more prone to accidents and drives them towards the use of addictive drugs such as sedatives, tranquillizers, etc., and even on to habits such as alcohol consumption and smoking.

Further, as the ruffled surface of a pool of water distorts the image falling on its surface the turbulent mind of a person with stress will reflect a disfigured version of reality. Hence in this condition the actions taken by the person under stress in response to various sensory inputs could be erroneous.<sup>412</sup>

Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor informs us that the good news is if we can catch ourselves becoming angry and find a way to calm the mind and body, the chemical “storm” that courses through the body as a result of the anger will clear up in about 90 seconds.<sup>413</sup> The body will clean itself of those chemicals and begin to break them down for elimination. But if we fail to calm the anger and it becomes a frequent or chronic state of mind, the negative impact on the body and mind is greatly magnified. This is true not only of anger but also of other emotions such as anxiety or fear. Dr. Amen emphasizes that every thought has its impact. He explains,

...your body reacts to every thought you have, whether about work, friends, family, or anything else...thoughts are very powerful. They can make your mind and your body feel good, or they can make you feel bad. Every cell in your body is affected by every

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<sup>412</sup> Nugegoda, Dr. D.B., **Overcoming Psychological Stress**. (Rajarata University Faculty of Medicine and Allied Sciences, 2010), pp. 8-9.

<sup>413</sup><http://consciousgloballeadership.com/2013/02/dr-jill-bolte-taylors-latest-ted-talk/> referenced October 2017.

thought that you have. That is why when people get emotionally upset, they frequently develop physical symptoms, such as headaches or stomachaches. Some physicians think that people who have a lot of negative thoughts are more likely to get cancer. If you can think about good things, you will feel better.

A negative thought is like pollution to your system. Just as pollution in the Los Angeles Basin [a geographical area in southern California, USA] affects everyone who goes outside [their house], so, too, do negative thoughts pollute your deep limbic system, your mind, and your body.<sup>414</sup>

## **Positive thoughts produce healthy biochemicals in the body**

Positive thoughts likewise have a beneficial effect on the mind and body. Dr. Amen explains,

Every time you have a good thought, a happy thought, a hopeful thought, or a kind thought, your brain releases chemicals that make your body feel good (and cool down your deep limbic system). Think about the last time you had a happy thought. How did your body feel? When most people are happy, their muscles relax, their hearts beat more slowly, their hands become dry, and they breath more slowly. Your body also reacts to good thoughts.<sup>415</sup>

Dr. Amen is listing the most obvious signs that can be experienced by the average person. The effect of positive thoughts even extends to the microscopic level in the body and have profound beneficial effects.<sup>416</sup> In his previous quote he was bemoaning the fact that there are not ways to teach people how to not have negative thoughts and how to

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<sup>414</sup> Amen, Op. cit., p. 58-9.

<sup>415</sup> Ibid, p.58.

<sup>416</sup> Nugegoda, Op. cit., p. 87

have positive thoughts. In fact, meditation can do just that, and TWIM is particularly well suited to uplift the negative mind and bring a wholesome mind of well-being.

### **The health benefits of happiness**

Dr. Nugegoda points out that research has proven the health benefits of happiness. He writes,

Happiness heals. People who are happy tend to be healthier and stress free. In happiness there is self-worth, self-confidence and contentment. It is claimed that older people are more consistently satisfied with their lives and hence happier than youth, as the expectations from life in the former group are less compared to those of youth.

During happiness, the mind becomes calm, affectionate and compassionate. Like in other forms of relaxation, when a person is happy, there is more electrical activity in the area of the brain connected with happiness (left prefrontal lobe).<sup>417</sup>

To briefly review, the stressful responses in the body are termed the FFR, or Fight or Flight Response. The healthy alternative to this is the RR, or Relaxation Response. In medical terminology, practices that lead to stress-reduction are called “mind body interventions that elicit the Relaxation Response. Meditation is not the only practice, or ‘intervention’, that can lead to a favorable RR, but it is a prominent and well-researched intervention that is gaining wide acceptance in the medical community. An example would be from a short article *Stress Reducing Mind/Body Interventions Can Improve Health* in the prestigious newsletter *Mind, Mood & Memory* (Vol.12, Number 1, Jan. 2016) which is a publication of Massachusetts General Hospital.

New research conducted by MGH has linked regular practice of mind/body interventions that elicit

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<sup>417</sup> Ibid, p. 39.

the *Relaxation Response* (RR) with a dramatic reduction in the need for healthcare services. The RR- the physiologic opposite of the fight-or-flight response- is a state of deep calm produced in response to meditation, deep breathing, and similar practices. Through its ability to positively affect physiologic factors such as blood pressure, heart rate, and oxygen consumption, it has been shown to be helpful in the treatment of stress-related disorders ranging from anxiety to hypertension. Researchers analyzed the healthcare records of a large group of individuals who took part in a program at Benson-Henry Institute (BHI) for Mind Body Medicine that combined RR training with social support, cognitive skills training and positive psychology, and compared them with data on a similar group who did not receive RR training. Reports published Oct. 13, 2015, in the journal *Plus One* revealed that participants with RR training had an average decline of 43 percent in their use of healthcare services, including visits to doctors, lab tests, and medical procedures, in the year after their training. In contrast, participants in the control group experienced no significant change. The most notable reduction in healthcare needs was seen in participants with gastrointestinal, cardiovascular, musculoskeletal, and neurological issues. The study authors suggested that incorporating RR into routine medical care might substantially reduce healthcare expenditures.<sup>418</sup>

Any government that might save 43% on healthcare costs will be taking notice of such studies. The effectiveness for human health and the potential for substantial healthcare savings explains much of the enthusiasm for RR trainings among the medical establishment. Not

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<sup>418</sup> “Stress Reducing Mind/Body Interventions Can Improve Health” in the journal **Mind, Mood & Memory**. (Vol.12, Number 1, Jan. 2016). No author of the article is named.

only the health of the body but also the health and happiness of the mind are potential positive outcomes.

**TWIM practice produces these positive biochemical results very quickly, especially for those who are practicing mindfulness of mettā meditation**

The practice of happiness would seem to be the logical practice of Buddhism, but it is often treated as a fruit of practice and not a part of the path itself. In TWIM it is definitely emphasized from the beginning, and whether the object of meditation is *ānāpānasati* or *mettā*, the smile and the resultant good feeling become a natural part of the meditator's personality. For those who are practicing *mettā*, the radiance of Loving Kindness brings great joy and happiness. Dr. Nugegoda explains some of the aspects of how that works,

Love, compassion and empathy towards all living beings are very powerful antidotes against stress and ill health. Buddhism is a religion which advocates the practice of loving kindness towards all living beings. In this context it is relevant to recall what the first great mathematician Pythagoras said, “for as long as men massacre animals, they will kill each other. Indeed, he who sows the seeds of murder and pain cannot reap joy and love.”

Among practitioners of loving kindness, as in other forms of relaxation, there is more electrical activity in the left pre-frontal areas of their brains compared to the right, with all its associated benefits such as release of endorphins etc., and importantly, strengthening of their immune systems and generating the healing fires within themselves.<sup>419</sup>

When people first learn *mettā* meditation in TWIM, they bring up a happy feeling usually by remembering a past happy event. Dr. Amen speaks to the effectiveness of this technique even though he

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<sup>419</sup> Nugegoda, Op. cit., p. 49.

likely knew nothing of TWIM when he published his book in 1998. He writes,

Whenever you remember a particular event, your brain releases chemicals similar to those released when you originally input impressions of the event. Consequently, remembering brings back a similar mood and feelings. By calling up pleasant memories, they can tune into mental states that are healthier. The brain then takes on the same chemical patterns that were inputted at the time the healthy event occurred.

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### **The TWIM method of Forgiveness Meditation skillfully uses the brain**

The particular way the brain builds memory can be skillfully used in meditation, and the TWIM method of forgiveness meditation and the initial stages of Loving Kindness Meditation sometimes termed “breaking down the barriers” skillfully uses this aspect of the brain.

To understand how this works, we will follow the explanation given by neuropsychologist Dr. Rich Hansen and Richard Mendius, M.D. in their book *Buddha’s Brain*. They write,

When a memory—whether implicit or explicit—is made, only its key features are stored, not every single detail. Otherwise your brain would be so crowded that it wouldn’t have space to learn anything new. When your brain retrieves a memory, it does not do it like a computer does, which calls up a complete record of what’s on its hard drive (e.g., document, picture, song). Your brain rebuilds implicit and explicit memories from their key features, drawing on its simulating capacities to fill in missing details. While this is more work, it’s also more efficient use of neural real estate—this way complete records don’t need to be

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<sup>420</sup> Amen, Op. cit., p. 76.

stored. And your brain is so fast you don't notice the regeneration of each memory.<sup>421</sup>

In other words, when we remember something, most of what we remember is being made up by our brain. We remember the main points; the brain fills in the remainder in a creative way. This may sound a bit surprising, and it certainly explains how we get into a lot of trouble not remembering things correctly, but it also provides us with an amazing opportunity to heal ourselves of past hurtful memories. Dr. Hansen and Dr. Mendius continue to show us how this can be done,

This rebuilding process gives you the opportunity, right down in the micro-circuitry of your brain, to gradually shift the emotional shadings of your interior landscape. When a memory is activated, a large-scale assembly of neurons and synapses forms an emergent pattern. If things are in your mind at the same time—and particularly if they're strongly pleasant or unpleasant—your amygdala and hippocampus will automatically associate them with that neural pattern (Pare, Collins, and Pelletier 2002). Then, when the memory leaves awareness, it will be reconsolidated in storage *along with these other associations*.

The next time the memory is activated, it will tend to bring those associations with it. Thus, if you repeatedly bring to mind negative feelings and thoughts while a memory is active, then that memory will be increasingly shaded in a negative direction. For example, recalling an old failure while simultaneously lambasting yourself will make that failure seem increasingly awful. On the other hand, if you call up positive emotions and perspectives while implicit or explicit memories are active, these

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<sup>421</sup> Hansen, Rich, MD, and Mendius, Richard, MD, **Buddha's Brain**. (Oakland, New Harbinger, 2009), p. 70.

wholesome influences will slowly be woven into the fabric of those memories.

Every time you do this- every time you sift positive feelings and views into painful, limiting states of mind- you build a little bit of neural structure. Over time, the accumulating impact of this positive material will literally, synapse by synapse, change your brain.<sup>422</sup>

This is exactly what the TWIM practitioner is doing by radiating forgiveness when remembering old painful wounds, or by radiating loving kindness to people with whom you share old and unpleasant memories. These negative images from the past are totally unreal, being only a thought, but when we experience them they can have a telling effect on our mind and body. We have the power to reshape them and bring the radiance of forgiveness and loving kindness into the formerly dark corners of our mind. For the person who is weighted down by unwholesome images of the past, this can be tremendously liberating.

### **The importance of feeling the mettā**

In light of our new understanding of how the brain creates memory, we can understand the TWIM emphasis on *feeling* the forgiveness or the loving kindness. A simple recitation of a *mettā* prayer is unlikely to have much impact, unless accompanied by intensely felt *mettā*. Bhante Vimalaramsi instructs the meditator that he or she practice until clearly hearing the person say “I forgive you.” Or in the case of loving kindness to an enemy or troublesome person, you practice until you can *see* the person smile at you. You share that smile and that feeling. This will happen once, twice, as often as is necessary.

At some point the meditator knows the healing has happened, the barrier has been broken down, and it is time to move on. This can be

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<sup>422</sup> Ibid, pp. 70-1.



reapplied as necessary, whenever necessary if the old memory again manages to emerge. This is a very powerful and effective meditation. It can transform lives. With the advances in neuroscience, we now can understand how it works.

In the past few decades many of these chemicals internal to the body have been identified and the connections with thinking, emotion and mood are being established. In their book *Super Brain*, Deepak Chopra, M.D. and Rudolf E. Tanzi, PhD explain how the field of medicine has been profoundly changed by these new discoveries. Deepak Chopra is a well-known Medical Doctor and Rudolf Tanzi is the Joseph P. and Rose F. Kennedy Professor of neurology at Harvard Medical School. They write,

By the late 1970s such a pathway began to emerge with the discovery of messenger molecules, a class of chemicals that turn moods, stress, and disorders like depression into something physical. The public began to hear about brain cells in detail as biologists named the neuropeptides and neurotransmitters that leap across the synapses, the gaps between neurons [nerve cells]. Serotonin and dopamine became household terms, with links to chemical imbalances in the brain (for example, too much serotonin or too little dopamine). A great era of discovery was at hand, and the decisive step was when it was found that these chemicals not only leap across the synapse, but course through the bloodstream. Every cell in the body contains receptors that are like keyholes, and the brain's chemical messengers are the keys that perfectly fit the hole. To simplify a complex model, the brain was telling the entire body about its thoughts, sensations, moods, and general health. The link between psyche and soma, between mind and body, had been made at last.<sup>423</sup>

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<sup>423</sup> Chopra, Deepak, and Tanzi, Rudolf, **Super Brain**. (New York, Random House, 2009), p. 196.

Our understanding of how this works has deepened since the initial discoveries, and it is beyond question that the state of mind profoundly affects the condition of the body and vice versa. The old split in western philosophy between mind and body is no longer tenable.

### **The effect of mental factors upon heart health or disease**

The number one killer of people worldwide is cardio-vascular disease. Now the effect of the mind upon the heart and circulatory system is being revealed to the astonishment of the previously-prevailing medical paradigms, which have been thoroughly revised in the light of new evidence. Dr. Chopra and Dr. Tanzi summarize the current picture of how heart health is an example of how the body can react with disease or with well-being depending in large part on our mental outlook. They write,

It's now generally accepted that psychological factors contribute to the risk of developing heart disease. The list of factors includes: depression, anxiety, personality traits, Type A behavior, hostility, social isolation, chronic stress, acute stress. Your heart participates in mental distress and can react with clogged arteries-an amazing finding compared with what was medically acceptable several decades ago. Instead of focusing merely on disease prevention, health experts began to speak of something more positive, far-reaching, and holistic: well-being. The brain became the centerpiece of a chemical symphony orchestra with hundreds of billions of cells joining in, and when they were in total harmony, the result was increased well-being; meanwhile chemical disharmony led to higher risk for disease, early aging, depression, and decreased immune function, as well as all the lifestyle disorders-the list keeps growing beyond heart

attacks and strokes to include obesity, type 2 diabetes, and probably many if not most cancers.<sup>424</sup>

### **The profound wholesome effect of the practice of TWIM mindfulness of mettā**

When the beginning TWIM meditator accesses a happy, peaceful memory, the chemicals in the body change, and there is a sense of well-being. This is the key to beginning *mettā* practice, and the feeling must be *felt* in order to be effective in the meditation. At the beginning, it may be felt only a little, and perhaps sporadically. With practice the feeling becomes stronger and more consistent. Eventually, there is no need to bring up a memory to stimulate the feeling. One's own mind and heart become the source of this happy, peaceful, generous feeling of Loving Kindness.

If we may pause and consider for a moment the profound effect this practice has on the meditator, we can understand the Buddha's confidence in his meditation as being 'immediately effective'. These random thoughts, many of which were negative, are no longer allowed to fill the head. Rather, they are recognized and released, and a wholesome mind accompanied by positive feelings and thoughts begin to take root. Eventually, this transforms into wonderful states of compassion, joy, and equanimity. The effect on the deep limbic system is very great. Depression and chronic anxiety can be let go of. The entire body feels the positive effects. The bloodstream is flooded with beneficial chemicals that signal well-being to every one of the billions of cells.

These wholesome effects are not limited to the individual. Our moods, emotions, thoughts, minds are very interconnected as we are social beings. Dr. Amen (1998) points out how our moods and thoughts affect each other,

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<sup>424</sup> Ibid, pp. 196-7.

It cannot be overemphasized how contagious the attitudes of others are and how much hidden influence they can exert...when you spend a lot of time with people, you bond with them in certain ways, and as I mentioned earlier, the moods and thoughts of others directly affect your deep limbic system.<sup>425</sup>

Any strength of mind developed by *samatha-vipassanā* practice can help insulate us against the negative influences of other people. With practice, our minds need not be carried away by negative thoughts or emotions from other people. Especially if we are practicing Loving Kindness, we can let go of any negative thoughts passed on by others and bring up a wholesome mind. In fact, by practicing *mettā* meditation with great depth of feeling, we can be of benefit to everyone with whom we come in contact. If we radiate *mettā*, it will affect the deep limbic system, body, and mind of those around us.

### **The “*mettā* frequency”**

The power of *mettā* is not imaginary in the sense of being purely a mental phenomenon, but is very real in how it impacts the world of materiality as well as mind. This power is now being scientifically verified. As an object of meditation, not only *mettā* can produce positive results. All suitable objects of meditation, if adhered to, can produce positive benefits on body and mind. However, according to scientific research, *mettā* meditation (or meditation on any of the Brahmavihāras), has an extra profound effect that is not realized by

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<sup>425</sup> Amen, Op. cit., p. 68.

breath meditation. Many researchers are now nicknaming this effect the “*mettā* frequency”.<sup>426 427 428 429</sup>

In our chapter on personal experiences of TWIM meditators, we relate accounts of people who have personally experienced the amazing wholesome benefits of radiating loving kindness, compassion or any of the Brahmavihāras. *Mettā* has the potential to be ‘contagious’ in a very positive way, uplifting the mood, thoughts, emotions of groups of people who have contact with each other. Let us describe something of this phenomenon of the ‘*mettā* frequency’, which could also be called ‘*mettā* waves’, or the ‘*mettā* vibration’.

In a public lecture at the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka, Dr. Ravindra Wijesiriwardena described some of his own research into the effects of meditation on the human being as well as giving an overview of current research in the field. In that lecture he described the *mettā* frequency as being in the Alpha wave band of the EEG (7-15 Hz mean value around 7.8Hz) and its harmonics, particular wavelengths that are now being observed to be vital to life on earth. In addition, these frequencies can be seen in the acoustic resonators such as Temple bells.<sup>430</sup>

Among other effects, neighborhood of 7-8 Hz wavelengths is the frequencies at which DNA strands communicate, which is vital for

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<sup>426</sup> R. Wijesiriwardana “Meditation and Physiology” SISHIVA Invited Lecture University of Peradeniya Sri Lanka, December 2015

<sup>427</sup> R. Wijesiriwardana “Acoustic Resonators Used in Buddhist Practices” International Buddhist conference Dec 2015 Anuradhapura Sri Lanka.

<sup>428</sup> R. Wijesiriwardana and GTF Silva "Looking at Stupas from an Electrical Engineering Perspective and Possible Functioning of Ruvanweli Maha Seya as an Alpha Wave Resonator to Harmonize the Nature and the Living Beings“, Anuradhapura Sri Lanka, BUSL International conference of evolution of Stupa Nov 22<sup>nd</sup> 2014.

<sup>429</sup> <http://www.onbeing.org/program/investigating-healthy-minds-richard-davidson/251>. Accessed October 2017.

<sup>430</sup> R. Wijesiriwardana “Meditation and Physiology” SISHIVA Invited Lecture University of Peradeniya Sri Lanka December 2015.

the DNA replication.<sup>431</sup> In other words, the very passing on of the genetic inheritance from generation to generation depends upon this frequency. Further study by Professor David Richardson has demonstrated 33.-40Hz frequencies being active in the Gamma wave band of the EEG spectrum during the *Mettā* Meditation.<sup>432</sup>

With regard to the earth harmonics, earth is a living organism like the lives she sustains. The person who has found the “earth breathing” in modern science is Professor Schumann.<sup>433</sup> This is a 7.83 Hz frequency fundamental frequency and its harmonics of 14.3, 20.8, 27.3 and 33.8 Hz are operating in similar frequency bands to those generated during *mettā* meditation in the EEG spectrum. These frequencies are vital for the living beings on the planet. All the manned space vessels and space stations are equipped with synthesizers for creating these frequencies as scientists have found that the life cannot be sustained without these frequencies. Many scientists now call them the “*mettā* frequencies”.

Not much information on this research can be found on the public domain as the research into ULF and VLF frequencies need to be carried out with lot of care as they are having harmful effects to health if used carelessly as well.<sup>434</sup> We will have to wait for further scientific publication as the information becomes available.

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<sup>431</sup> L Montagnier, J. Aissa, E Del Giudice, C. Lavalley, A. Tedeschi, and G. Vitiello, DNA Waves and Water Journal of Physics: Conference Series 306 (2011) 012007.

<sup>432</sup> <http://www.onbeing.org/program/investigating-healthy-minds-richard-davidson/251>. Accessed October 2017.

<sup>433</sup> [http://www.nasa.gov/mission\\_pages/sunearth/news/gallery/schumann-resonance.html](http://www.nasa.gov/mission_pages/sunearth/news/gallery/schumann-resonance.html). Accessed October 2017.

<sup>434</sup> <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2203969/>, accessed October 2017.

## **Mettā meditation harmonizes with the “Schumann Resonance”**

The “Schumann Resonance” in Earth’s atmosphere, discovered by Professor Schumann can be directly viewed via an animation produced by NASA/Goddard Space Flight Center. This animation is in the public domain and is put out by National Aeronautics and Space Administration (USA)/Goddard Space Flight Center. The link is listed in the footnote.<sup>435</sup>

The implications of this are profound. By doing Loving Kindness meditation, a person is producing a vibration or wave pattern in the brain which harmonizes the body systems internally down to the cellular level where DNA duplication is taking place. In fact, there is mounting evidence that such effects are happening at the molecular level.<sup>436</sup> The meditator is also harmonizing with the frequency of Mother Earth.<sup>437 438 439 440</sup>

## **Studies suggest that the sending of mettā has measurable impact at a distance**

Even as television signals can be broadcast through seemingly empty space, *mettā* energy can be sent across distances. Dr. Chopra and Dr. Tanzi relate a study that was done in Hawaii by Dr. Jeanne Achterberg, a physiologist devoted to studying the mind-body connection. Dr. Achterberg’s research study was enabled by the new

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<sup>435</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Schumann\\_resonance\\_animation.ogv](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Schumann_resonance_animation.ogv), accessed October 2017.

<sup>436</sup> R. Wijesiriwardana “Meditation and Physiology” SISHIVa Invited Lecture, University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka December 2015

<sup>437</sup> *ibid*

<sup>438</sup> R. Wijesiriwardana “Acoustic Resonators Used in Buddhist Practices” International Buddhist Conference Dec. 2015 Anuradhapura Sri Lanka.

<sup>439</sup> R. Wijesiriwardana and GTF Silva " Looking at Stupas from an Electrical Engineering Perspective and Possible Functioning of Ruvanweli Maha Seya as an Alpha Wave Resonator to Harmonize the Nature and the Living Beings“, Anuradhapura Sri Lanka, BUSL International conference of evolution of Stupa Nov 22<sup>nd</sup> 2014.

<sup>440</sup><http://www.onbeing.org/program/investigating-healthy-minds-richard-davidson/251>. Accessed October 2017.

technology (new in 2005) of the fMRI, which is able to scan the brain and see which parts are ‘lit up’, which indicates activity in that part of the brain.

Dr. Achterberg and her colleagues worked with eleven experienced native Hawaiian healers known as Kahunas. Each kahuna selected a person to whom they would send healing energy. They variously described their method of sending the healing energy as praying, sending energy, sending good intentions or wishes for their well-being, wishing for the highest good of that person. The receiver of the energy was isolated from the healer and asked to send their ‘distant intentionality’ (DI) randomly every two minutes. The timing of the sending of the (DI) was recorded. Meanwhile, the brains of the receivers were scanned by fMRI for activity. The receivers had no way of knowing when the DI would be sent their way.

However, their brains registered significant activity at the times the DI was sent their way. The chances that this could have occurred by chance were calculated at less than one in ten thousand. Through the use of the fMRI scanning, it became obvious that compassion (loving kindness etc.) being sent by one person can measurably affect physical effects on another person at a distance. (Chopra and Tanzi, 2012, p.285). This is not news to people who have been practicing such healing for hundreds or thousands of years, but now we are gathering scientific evidence that may be convincing to even the most skeptical. Certainly, in the field of medicine, there are few skeptics left who still hold the view of a split between mind and body, or who still maintain that compassion cannot have a role in healing.

As a result of this experiment, we now have evidence of the power of directed kind, compassionate thought to heal others even at a distance. This is a wonderful incentive for people to be careful about the quality of their thoughts and to cultivate wholesome mind states, which can be shared in a beneficial way. Healing at a distance is wonderful but there are many advantages to close physical



proximity in sharing Loving Kindness, one of which is the role of mirror neurons.

### **Smiling in TWIM meditation utilizes the mirror neurons in the brain to produce wholesome internal chemistry**

Mirror neurons are one of the most important discoveries in the last decade of neuroscience. These are a variety of visuospatial neurons which are fundamentally important in human social interaction. Essentially, mirror neurons respond to actions that we observe in others.<sup>441</sup> As humans are social beings who spend early years in the close care of the mother, mirror neurons help us learn through imitation of the mother's face. We also quickly learn the patterns of emotion that are expressed in the mother's face.

One important expression that is quickly learned by human babies is smiling. When the mother is smiling, this gives the baby a sense of love, comfort, safety and sense of well-being. The smiling face of the mother creates a happy mood in the baby which creates a harmonious inner biochemistry tending towards health, happiness, and proper mental and physical development.<sup>442</sup> Smiling in babies occurs within the first few months after birth and is an important milestone in their social development.<sup>443</sup>

Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor discovered that after her stroke when her personality underwent profound change to a right brain personality, that smiling came easily to her, as her 'serious' mind was disabled. She relates,

My two hemispheric personalities not only think about things differently but they process emotions and carry my body in easily distinguishable ways. At this point [this is written after the return of her left-

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<sup>441</sup> [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mirror\\_neuron](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mirror_neuron), accessed October 2017.

<sup>442</sup> <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3510904/>, accessed October 2017.

<sup>443</sup> <http://www.webmd.com/parenting/baby/babys-first-social-smile>, accessed October 2017.

brain functioning] even my friends are capable of recognizing who's walking into the room by how I'm holding my shoulders and what's going on with that furrow in my brow. My right hemisphere is about *right here, right now*. It bounces around with unbridled enthusiasm and does not have a care in the world. It smiles a lot and is extremely friendly.<sup>444</sup>

Jill contrasts this friendly, smiling, fun-loving person with how she is when dominated by her left-brain centers.

In contrast, my left hemisphere is preoccupied with details and runs my life on a tight schedule. It is my more serious side. It clenches my jaw and makes decisions based upon what it learned in the past. It defines boundaries and judges everything as right/wrong or good/bad. And, oh yes, it does that thing with my brow.<sup>445</sup>

### **By smiling, much tension and tightness is released**

Most people approach meditation as a very serious endeavor. They have an idea of what they want to get out of it, of how it will enhance their lives. Even *nibbāna* can be imagined as some kind of an achievement to be gained for oneself.

Perhaps much of this is natural for beginners, and it is beneficial to be “serious” about practice in the sense of being earnest and dedicated. We must have a goal for practice, such as *nibbāna*, even though we have only a conceptual idea of what *nibbāna* might be. So, the serious attitude and setting up of a goal may help motivate one to practice at the beginning, but as long as it is rooted in ambition or other self-enhancing attitudes, it can eventually pose a real obstacle to progress. To borrow from Jill Bolte Taylor's experience, we can say that an overly serious or overly ambitious meditation

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<sup>444</sup> Taylor, Op. cit., p. 146.

<sup>445</sup> Ibid, p. 146.

practice done with a somber face is a left-brain approach. With such an attitude the meditator is carrying a lot of tension and tightness.

Bhante Vimalaramsi encourages people to quickly dispense with such impediments to practice. By practicing the 6Rs, and with the encouragement of Bhante Vimalaramsi or another of the TWIM instructors, the somber face is soon let go of and a smiling, wholesome face is brought up. This smiling face has an immediate, beneficial result on the mind of the meditator.

Bhante Vimalaramsi is convinced that the progress of the meditator is greatly enhanced by regular smiling, even while sitting on the meditation cushion or chair, and is important for rapid progress at retreats. The somber face is discouraged.

In emphasizing a smiling, uplifted face, Bhante's recommendations are in accordance with the accounts we have of the monks who lived and practiced with the Buddha. Evidence in the suttas indicates that the demeanor of the monks was smiling and congenial while practicing the dhamma and attending to activities of everyday life.

### **The Buddha and his disciples were well-known for their radiant, smiling faces and cheerful demeanor**

For instance, it is recorded in the *Dhammacetiya Sutta*, that when King Pasenadi of Kosala visited the Buddha in Medaḷumpa in the Sakyan country where the Buddha and his disciples were residing, he was very impressed and remarked,

But here I see bhikkhus smiling and cheerful, sincerely joyful, plainly delighting, their faculties fresh, living at ease, unruffled, subsisting on what others give, abiding with mind [as aloof] as a wild deer's.<sup>446 447</sup>

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<sup>446</sup> Bodhi, *The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha*. MN 89:12 [PTS ii 121], p.730.

<sup>447</sup> *Idha panāhaṃ bhante, bhikkhū passāmi haṭṭhapahaṭṭhā udagguḍaggā abhiratarūpā pīṇitindriyā appossukkā pannalomā paradavuttā migabhūtena cetasā viharanti tassa mayhaṃ bhante evaṃ hoti*. MN 89:12, PTS ii 121, CS edition.

Bhante Vimalaramsi talks of studies of smiling that show how effective it can be in all situations both in daily life and in formal meditation. Below, we will look at some scientific research that is affirming Bhante's emphasis on smiling as part of practice. Bhante points out that the smile elevates the mind, positively affects mood, and improves sharpness of mindfulness. In instructing his meditation students, he writes,

This is a smiling meditation. While you are sitting and radiating love to your spiritual friend (or to yourself), smile with your mind. Even though your eyes are closed during the meditation, smile with your eyes. This helps to let go of tension in the face. Put a little smile on your lips and in your heart. <sup>448</sup>

Here, Bhante gives the four places within the body that are most important to carry the smile. He then explains the importance of the practice, and touches on some of the science behind it, as well as what personal experience has taught about the efficacy and importance of smiling.

Smiling is nice and most helpful to practice all of the time, but especially when you are sitting in meditation. The more we can learn to smile, the happier mind becomes. It may sound a little silly, but scientists have discovered that the corners of our mouths are very important; the position of the lips corresponds to different mental states. When the corners of your lips turn down, your thoughts tend to become heavy and unwholesome. When the corners of your lips go up, mind becomes more uplifted and clear, so joy can arise more often. This is important to remember because a smile can help you to change your perspective about all kinds of feelings and thoughts. Please try to remember to smile into everything that arises and everything that you direct

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<sup>448</sup> Vimalaramsi, **Life is Meditation-Meditation is Life**, p. 147.

your mind's attention to. In other words, smile as much as you can into everything all day long.<sup>449</sup>

This simple act of smiling, in Bhante's view, can uplift the mind and positively change the perspective of the meditator about all kinds of feelings, thoughts, situations. Can such a claim be substantiated? Let us here have a look at the science of smiling to get an idea of why Bhante feels it is so important.

### **Scientific research points to effects of smiling upon clarity of thinking**

As far as the effect of smiling on improving mindfulness, there seems to be no specific scientific research in that area. But research cited below shows that smiling improves clarity of thinking. Thinking and mindfulness are not exactly the same function, but both depend on a certain sharpness of mental functioning, so it seems reasonable to grant that smiling can positively affect both qualities of thinking and mindfulness.

Studies of the psychological effects of smiling are now numerous and consistent in their findings. In the Association for Psychological Science online newsletter *Observer*, Eric Jaffe writes,

A smile begins in our sensory corridors. The ear collects a whispered word. The eyes spot an old friend on the station platform. The hand feels the pressure of another hand. This emotional data funnels to the brain, exciting the left anterior temporal region in particular, then smolders to the surface of the face, where two muscles, standing at attention, are roused into action: The zygomatic major, which resides in the cheek, tugs the lips upward, and the orbicularis oculi, which encircles the eye socket, squeezes the outside corners into the shape of a crow's foot. The entire event is short — typically lasting from two-thirds of a second to four

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<sup>449</sup> Ibid, p. 148.

seconds — and those who witness it often respond by mirroring the action, and smiling back.<sup>450</sup>

Interestingly, the two muscles involved in a genuine smile affect both the eyes and the corners of the mouth. Bhante instructs his students who are beginning the practice of smiling to smile in four places, the mind, the eyes, the corners of the mouth, and the heart. Of these four places two are inner, and two are external, the eyes and the corners of the mouth. So Bhante is having people pay attention to the correct muscles, even though they may not know their technical Latin names.

### **Smiling is contagious and uplifts peoples' minds and moods**

Another important point made in the above quote is that a smile is contagious. In fact, Bhante's students relate numerous instances of such real-life smile contagion, whether in the home, an office setting, or a bus or train. Such instances relate how the meditator enters the situation radiating Loving kindness and beaming a smile. The whole situation changes for the better, with the smile spreading and the mood lifting. This is not an isolated, but a common phenomenon among Bhante's students, and Bhante himself has many stories of his own life to illustrate the point.

Advances in neuroscience and biology are affirming the wisdom of the smile. We are coming to accept that such things as thoughts or strong emotions can change the body. But the opposite is now being shown to also be true, that is, the body influences the thoughts and emotions of the person. In the book *How the Body Knows Its Mind*, Sian Beilock writes,

It may seem odd to think that the expressions we produce outwardly can affect our internal state. After

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<sup>450</sup> Jaffe, Eric, "The Psychological Study of Smiling", **APS Online Journal**. <http://www.psychologicalscience.org/index.php/publications/observer/2010/december-10/the-psychological-study-of-smiling.html>. Accessed October 2017.

all, we tend to assume that it's the mind that controls the body, not the other way around. But there are direct connections running from the body to the mind. For example, when people are asked to hold a golf tee between their eyebrows in such a way that they have to furrow their brow, they report being in a bad mood. People also judge stories, pictures, and cartoons to be less funny when they are asked to hold a pencil between pursed lips so that their face makes a frown. The opposite is also true: when you hold a pencil in your teeth so that you are smiling, you feel happier. And it's not just facial expressions that send feedback to our brain about our feelings and emotions. When you sit in a slumped position (as opposed to straight, with shoulders back), you don't feel as good about your accomplishments, such as how you just performed on a test or in a presentation. Simply assuming a happy or sad bodily posture, a confident or anxious mien, conveys to our brain what emotional state we are in.<sup>451</sup>

Proper meditation posture, with the body held upright and well-supported would certainly qualify as good posture, with resultant positive effects on the mind and emotions. That is, unless the body is subjected to constant pain due to the sitting posture and lack of sufficient compensatory exercise and rest.

### **Smiling counteracts the effects of stress and lessens pain**

Research on the effects of smiling has yielded clear results. A smile helps the mind think more clearly, lifts the emotions, and has a positive effect on such difficulties as physical pain. Beilock continues,

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<sup>451</sup> Beilock, Sian, **How the Body Knows Its Mind**. (New York, Atria Books, 2015), pp. 14-15.

Our facial expressions also affect how we react to stress. Smiling while submerging your hand in ice water for several minutes lessens stress and leads to a quicker recovery from the painful incident than if you don't smile. There really is something to the old adage, "Grin and bear it." Of course, there is also a catch: this smile technique works best if you don't know you are doing it- if you form an unconscious smile rather than smile intentionally. In the latter case, the brain seems to catch on and doesn't interpret the bodily expression as happiness. But even faking a smile is better than nothing, because our neural circuitry doesn't always make a clear distinction between what is fake and what is real. Even if you "smile while your heart is breaking", as the ballad suggests, at some level your brain can't help but interpret your smiling as a sign that everything is okay.<sup>452</sup>

It is especially significant that smiling affects the reaction to stress. It can be fairly said that there is no stressful situation, but only a stressful reaction to a situation. The common person, who sees him or herself as a victim of circumstance, constantly blames the outer world for his or her mental state. "He *made* me angry", "I am tired of the stress on my job", etc. are common statements and beliefs. But given the exact same situation, even the same person may have widely divergent reactions on different days. Different people will also have very different reactions to the same situation. One person may find a lecture incredibly boring, while the other may be completely engrossed by the same lecture.

### **Smiling can change our outlook and uplift our mind and the minds of others**

Meditation shows us the falsity of blaming the world for our mental states. But, however much insight we may have about it, we cannot directly control the quality of our thinking or our resultant

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<sup>452</sup> Ibid, p. 15.



moods. After years of meditation practice, we may still experience negative thinking and resultant unhappy moods. This simple practice of smiling can positively affect the quality of thinking and mood tone. In addition, there is a spiral effect, so that the more positive our thoughts are, the better our mood, and the lighter our mind, this will in turn create more positive thoughts, better moods, and a lightness of mind.

All this as a result of a smile, or at least of a continual series of smiles? The science says yes, unequivocally. Bhante's experience with his own practice and in guiding others in their practice also answers affirmatively. In the field of mediation, there will be many who will not believe in the benefits of smiling, and will perhaps consider it unbecoming or inappropriate for a meditator, at least while engaging in meditation or participating in a retreat. It is not unusual to find a smile on the faces of Buddhist monks during their free time or in social situations, but in meditation and in retreat, the style tends to be very somber. The same can be said of lay meditators. If you enter any meditation hall and observe the faces of the meditators, many, if not most of the faces will be very serious. One can often spot the more experienced meditators as they are usually applying energy in a more even way, and their faces do not show as much strain or stress. Their faces are often radiant and shining.

### **TWIM meditation retreats are full of smiling, happy people**

At TWIM retreats, it takes about a day for most people to transition from the busy mind of everyday life to the quiet of retreat. In observing people as they arrive and get started in the retreat, it is easy to spot those who have had previous experience with TWIM. They have a glow. They are smiling. As for the new people, it usually takes them one or two days to catch the smile. They usually expect a meditation retreat to be difficult, hard work. Most of them expect the mood to be somber and serious.

For many, it is a bit of a shock to get the initial instructions to smile. There is usually some disbelief about that, until they observe other people who really are smiling, in sitting and walking practice as well as at meals, at dhamma talks, going to the toilet, and all other activities. By day two and especially day three, the newcomers are smiling as well. Once they directly experience the benefits on their mind and practice, this gives confidence and energy to the practice of smiling.

Bhante Vimalaramsi also encourages people to have a good chuckle, seeing the foolishness of the mind and its ability to consistently takes things very personally and to incur a lot of suffering in the process. While being respectful of the silence at TWIM retreats, one can still have a bit of a laugh when it becomes apparent how consistently the mind is trying to become happy through running the same old failed patterns over and over again. Having a chuckle over this foolishness that we all get caught up in helps to change perspective, to help release the old, stuck, foolish patterns. At the least, one can smile about one's own foolishness as part of the process of letting it go.

The sculptors of ancient Mathura and Gandhara gave the world the first lovely images of the Buddha. And they reminded us of the Blessed One's smile. Since that ancient time, the image of the Buddha's softly smiling face has traveled around the world. Even better than having an image of the blessed one on an altar is to have it enshrined in one's heart, with a radiant, smiling face to share with all those around us. It is among the highest of blessings.

### **The skillfulness of the “relax step” in TWIM is being confirmed by research which shows how it develops equanimity**

The smile during meditation and daily life practice is a characteristic of TWIM that modern science has a lot to say about in a supportive way. Another unique aspect of TWIM is its emphasis

upon the ‘relax step’ which has been described in previous chapters. Nearly all forms of meditation value relaxation and tranquility, but few methods give it the emphasis that we find in TWIM, where it is given a central role in practice. As soon as the meditator begins the practice of the 6Rs, he or she begins to develop relaxation and tranquility, which leads to equanimity. It so happens that scientific research has been able to shed some light on how this function of equanimity develops.

Dr. Rick Hansen and Dr. Richard Mendius first define equanimity and then describe how it functions in the brain. They give a definition that fits TWIM very nicely and dispels some of the misconception of equanimity that has clouded clear understanding of what it is and how it works. They write,

Equanimity is neither apathy nor indifference; you are warmly engaged with the world but not troubled by it. Through its non-reactivity it creates great space for compassion, loving kindness, and joy at the good fortune of others....

When you are equanimous, you don’t grasp after enjoyable experiences or push against disagreeable ones. Rather, you have a kind of space around experiences—a buffer between you and the feeling tones. This state of being is not based on standard prefrontal control of emotions, in which there is inhibition and direction of limbic activity. Instead, with equanimity, the limbic system can fire however it “wants”. The primary point of equanimity is not to reduce or channel that activation, but *simply not to respond to it*. This is very unusual behavior for the brain, which is designed by evolution to respond to limbic signals, particularly to pulses of pleasant and unpleasant feeling tones.<sup>453</sup>

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<sup>453</sup> Hansen and Mendius, Op. cit., pp. 110-112.

By looking at this explanation of how the brain develops equanimity we can see the wisdom of the practice of the 6Rs. In TWIM there is never any suppression of the activity of the brain. There is no effort at control. Nothing is pushed away. Rather, such states are allowed to arise and allowed to be but not engaged in. There is no push or pull. Any tension or tightness is relaxed.

Through this kind of continual practice, as a result of the repetitious relaxation steps in the TWIM cycle, the brain naturally develops to reach a level of firm equanimity. When the equanimity becomes strong enough, and understanding of Dependent Origination deepens, the third and then the fourth jhānas are attained. The fourth *jhāna* is the gateway to the arūpa jhānas, and it is no mistake that Dr. Hansen and Dr. Mendius write of “a kind of space around experiences”, which is the characteristic of the first *arūpa jhāna*, which is the base of infinite space, (*ākāsānañcāyatana*).

It is also notable that in connection with this deepening sense of equanimity and opening of spaciousness, they mention Loving Kindness, Compassion, and Sympathetic Joy, which in turn takes one into the third and fourth *rūpa jhānas*, the base of infinite space and base of infinite consciousness (*viññāṇañcāyatana*).<sup>454</sup>

## How equanimity works in the brain

The two doctors explain in some detail which parts of the brain are involved in equanimity and how it works,

Understanding and intention are both grounded in the prefrontal cortex. The intention to remain equanimous relies in particular on the anterior cingulate cortex (ACC) hub in the neuroaxis.

Equanimity also involves remaining aware of the passing stream without letting any bit of it hook into

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<sup>454</sup> For the outline of the tranquil aware jhānas and how they fit with the sequence of Brahmavihāras see Kraft, **Buddha’s Map**, Section III Path, p.127 and Johnson, David C., **The Path to Nibbāna**, p. 164.

you. This entails anterior cingulate oversight, especially in the beginning stages of equanimity. As equanimity deepens, meditators report an effortless continuity of mindfulness, which presumably correlates with reduced ACC activity and self-organizing stability in the neural substrates of awareness.<sup>455</sup>

The prefrontal cortex is usually handed the job to quiet down the deep limbic system, which can produce stress and other disturbances. But when the meditator becomes adept at equanimity, a different system is activated in the brain. This is to remain calm by activating the ACC hub. Then with continued deepening of equanimity, even this ACC hub can quiet its activity as a self-organizing stability takes over.

This quieting brings very beneficial results, and is not something accessible to the untrained person. It comes through developing equanimity through meditation. All of this dampens the stress-response system of the body. Use of the stress-response system is useful in emergencies, but deleterious to physical and mental health when stimulated with regularity, as is the case in the stresses of modern life. We have listed above some of the myriad problems which ensue due to constant activation of the Stress Response System. The doctors explain this dynamic,

The limbic, HPA and sympathetic nervous systems react to each other in circular ways. For example, if something frightening occurs, your body will tend to become activated (e.g., increased heart rate, sweaty palms); those body changes will be interpreted as evidence of a threat, which will trigger more fear reactions in a vicious cycle. Through activating the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS), you prevent the stress-response system from reacting

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<sup>455</sup> Hansen and Mendius, *Op. cit.*, p. 112.

to its own reactions. This is one reason why the training for equanimity in contemplative settings involves considerable relaxation and tranquility.<sup>456</sup>

Here the authors are showing a cascading of physical events inside the body that precipitate a kind of biochemical storm and flood. This is paralleled on the mental level by an uncontrolled proliferation of thoughts (*papañca*) which we have explored in the chapter on Dependent Origination. Doctors Hansen and Mendius are showing us how to calm the flood so we can find our way through safely to the other side. As mind and body are in unison and only separable on the level of concept, equanimity involves the tranquilization of both mind and body, as set out in the *Ānāpānasati Sutta*.<sup>457</sup> Dr. Hansen and Dr. Mendius are here emphasizing the key role of “considerable relaxation and tranquility”.

### **Relaxing, tranquilizing, and smiling is vital to TWIM practice and harmonizes with scientific findings on well-being**

As we have discussed, one of the strengths of TWIM meditation is how the practice of the 6Rs brings relaxation and tranquilization of the body and mind. If you are not relaxing, tranquilizing, and smiling, you are not practicing TWIM. In view of this emphasis on the relax step in TWIM practice, it is no mistake that avid TWIM meditators easily access the states of mind based on equanimity. This is part of the public record and open to anyone to “come and see” if the practice of the 6Rs, the TWIM version of the Four Right Strivings, can indeed bring one to equanimity and beyond.

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<sup>456</sup> Ibid, p. 113.

<sup>457</sup> See Vimalaramsi, **Moving Dhamma, Vol. 1**, pp. 32-33 for the TWIM relaxation practice based on *Ānāpānasati Sutta*.

## **Bhante Vimalaramsi emphasizes the importance of the “relax step”**

In talking of Ven. Sāriputta’s attainment of equanimity and finally how he attained “mastery and perfection in deliverance”<sup>458</sup>, Bhante Vimalaramsi emphasizes that the key role played by the relax step. By doing Harmonious Practice (*sammā-vāyāma*) including the relax step, Bhante assures the practitioners that they too can see what Ven. Sāriputta saw. He says in a dhamma talk on the *Anupada Sutta* (MN 111),

This particular *sutta* exactly shows that *vipassanā* and *samatha* are strung together, they’re yoked together like two oxen that are pulling a cart. They will take the cart wherever you want it to go. We need to practice them not singly, but together, as Sāriputta showed in his experience of the meditation. What I’m showing you is that slight difference in the meditation about letting go of the distraction, and relaxing; that one extra step of relaxing put into your practice changes the entire practice, so you’ll be able to see everything that Sāriputta saw.

You can, and it does happen, I promise! And one of the things that’s really amazing is, I’ve run across too many monks that have this idea that it’s impossible to attain *Nibbāna* in this lifetime, so why even try? I’m here to tell you, it is attainable. Follow the simple instructions: let go of any distraction, relax, and come back to your object of meditation. Too simple. We like things to be complicated.<sup>459</sup>

The method of TWIM demonstrates that the simple can be profound.

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<sup>458</sup> *Anupada Sutta*, MN 111:21.

<sup>459</sup> <http://talks.dhammasukha.org/uploads/1/2/8/6/12865490/mn-111-jt7-120318-et.pdf>, accessed October 2017.

## Summary

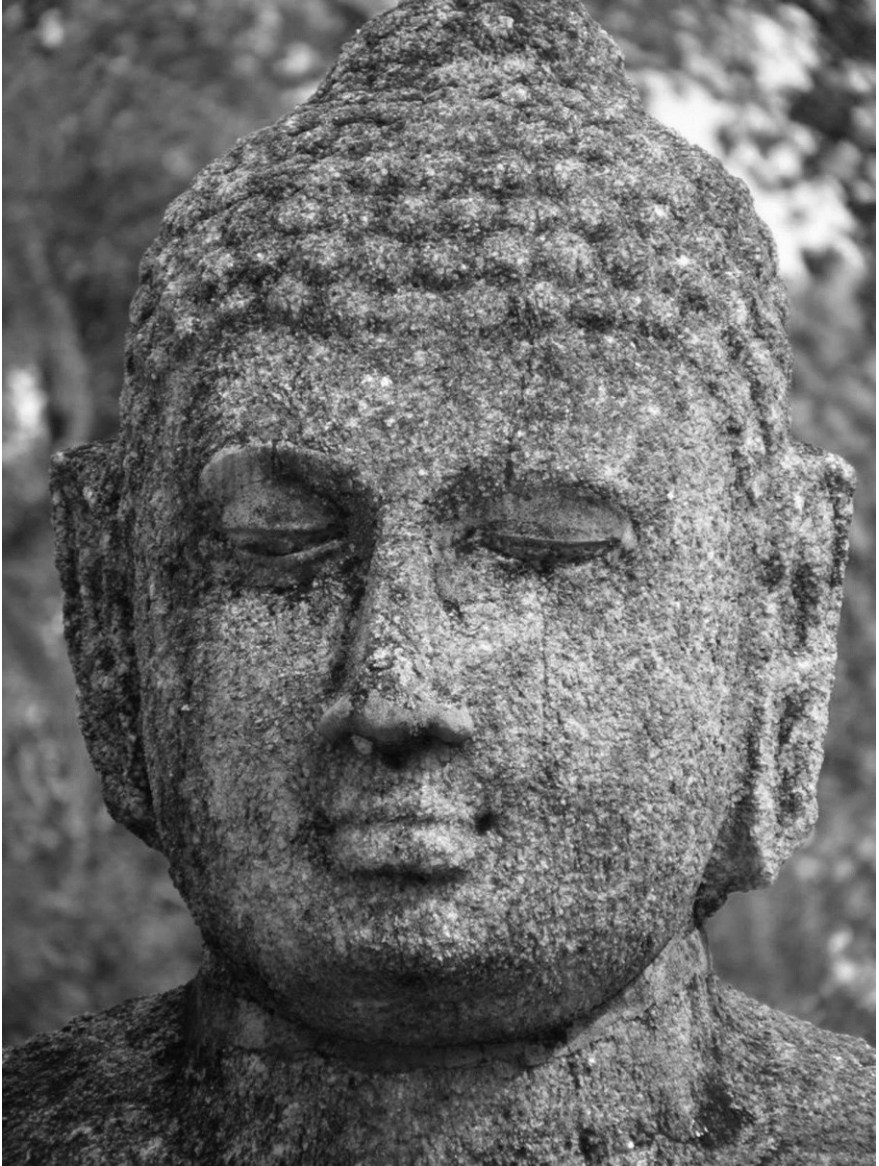
Modern science is confirming the ability of meditation to allay suffering and creating happiness. Dr. Jill Bolte Taylor's stroke demonstrated how tranquilizing certain parts of the brain can remove the overly-serious ego-centered persona from control and thereby enhancing a sense of happiness and well-being. The effect produced by her stroke can be performed by the TWIM meditator who is practicing the 6Rs, without the devastation of the actual degeneration of the brain which occurs in stroke.

From the various steps in TWIM meditation of letting go to smiling and bringing up a good feeling, the structure of TWIM meditation is now well-explained by science to be efficacious in bringing about greatly enhanced physical and mental health.



# Smiling Buddha of Polonnaruwa, Sri Lanka

Photo by the author



## Conclusion

This study suggests that an effective meditation system can be formed by bypassing the *Visuddhimagga* and relying upon the *sutta-piṭaka* for instructions. This is what Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation (TWIM) has done. When the original instructions in the suttas are examined, they suggest a method much more like TWIM than of the *Visuddhimagga*-based methods current in the contemporary world of *vipassanā*.

By relying directly on a wide variety of suttas for meditation instructions, TWIM offers a method that combines *samatha* and *vipassanā* into one harmonious practice, in which the meditator enters the jhānas wherein he or she practices the satipaṭṭhānas. This provides depth of calmness and tranquility and provides the basis for the arising of insight wisdom and the understanding of the Four Noble Truths, Dependent Origination, and the Three Characteristic Marks of Existence. Thereby, the TWIM meditator penetrates deeply into the jhānas with some practitioners attaining *Nibbāna*.

As the suttas lend themselves to a variety of interpretations, it is impossible to demonstrate that TWIM is the only, or the best way to follow the original instructions of the Buddha. However, the prior chapters do suggest that TWIM is a plausible interpretation of the *sutta* instructions and the testimony of TWIM meditators demonstrate that TWIM is a very effective method in helping very average people in making great progress in allaying suffering and attaining a new perspective that brings great happiness to the meditator as well as having a wholesome impact on those with whom he or she interacts.

Our study shows that TWIM bases its method on the *sutta-piṭaka*, with only the method of “breaking down the barriers” traceable to the *Visuddhimagga*. However, even in the case of this practice, the practice of Loving Kindness is set within the context of the 6Rs,

which makes it a *samatha-vipassanā* practice, unlike the version in the *Visuddhimagga*. TWIM uses the *Visuddhimagga* and commentaries as references when helpful, but looks directly to the suttas as the authority on how to practice.

TWIM is a very simple practice in which all of the main aspects of Buddhist meditation that have been analyzed and separated out by the commentaries are harmonized into one practice that leads directly to the goal of *Nibbāna*. The straightforward practice of the 6Rs is applied to whatever object of meditation is used, whether it is mindfulness of breathing, mindfulness of loving kindness, or, in the deepest stages of *jhāna*, mindfulness of clear mind.

This simplicity of practice takes TWIM meditation out of the arena of the arcane, and into the lives of very common, ordinary people, who can experience great success with TWIM and a transformation of their perspective on life. TWIM is proving to be a very accessible practice that has the potential to make a great contribution to an emerging “culture of awakening”.

Our day and age presents special challenges and opportunities. As P.D. Premasiri wrote in the introduction, the outcome of human actions when not informed by insight and wisdom is destructive, and the power of that destruction is being multiplied due to our technology. People are suffering and the planet is groaning under the burden of globalization.

On the other hand, we also have Tibetan and Sri Lankan monks demonstrating the powers of meditation in laboratories filled with equipment sensitive enough to finally demonstrate the positive potential of the “inner technology” that has been developed for more than two millennia.

These discoveries are not ending up forgotten in a scientific journal. They are being readily applied to by the healing professions to alleviate human suffering and to change the human potential.

Science itself is changing from a value neutral to a value positive standpoint because science does not stand apart from scientists themselves, and these men and women are beginning to see that all human endeavor, to be valid, must aim towards creating that which is wholesome and beneficial.

We are yet in the early stages of these kinds of positive developments, but the world has the capacity to change in a wholesome direction very quickly if conditions are right for such a change. At present, the foundation is being laid for the arising of a culture of awakening, if humans will choose such a wholesome course.

For the full development of the human potential and a transformation of consciousness to uplift individuals, societies, and international relations, there can be no avoiding the need for individual people to cultivate the higher life within themselves. For this to happen, we need accessible and effective tools for individual transformation.

The traditional forms of meditation have proven their worth and will continue to help small groups of dedicated practitioners, but to reach larger groups of people such practice modes as Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation are needed to give people success and hope for personal change and development of wholesome qualities. TWIM may have a key role to play in this endeavor of uplifting the minds of common people around the world.

In his wisdom and skill in means, the Buddha devised modes of practice that were immediately effective for people and directly visible in their positive results. TWIM is a contemporary adaptation of the Buddha's teaching that is true to the original instructions and is a method that works for people both in the setting of formal meditation and in everyday life. TWIM's adaptability to the regular life of family and work makes it a very suitable form of practice for both ordained and lay practitioners.

## Conclusion

TWIM is similar to other methods of Buddhist practice in many ways, but also has its unique approaches that inform its practice. Its use of the simple and easy to learn method of the 6R's gives practitioners confidence and success early in their practice. The emphasis on the "relax step" means that the mind and body open and relax while giving up tension, tightness and craving. As craving manifests as tension and tightness in mind and body, the TWIM emphasis on relaxing this tension and tightness leads directly to the allaying of the causes of suffering.

It is this intentional and consistent tranquilization of mind and body that is perhaps the single most distinctive feature of TWIM and is perhaps the main reason for the success of the technique. Intentional relaxation produces deep calm, which then allows for clear seeing and insight, which in turn, creates deeper levels of calm, and so on. Thus, *samatha* and *vipassanā* are constantly supportive of each other in TWIM practice, which fits the description of meditation in the suttas very nicely.

The use of Loving Kindness as the object of meditation (which is the case for the majority of TWIM meditators) brings rapid results and is easy to adapt to everyday life, especially as the TWIM practice is a *feeling* meditation that generates powerful loving energy. Mindfulness of breath is also a common practice in TWIM, but the TWIM approach carefully avoids any use of this meditation to go into absorption concentration. Instead, it is used to relax and open the mind.

TWIM is distinctive in how it creates the conditions for a calm, quiet mind to arise without the use of suppression. Rather than suppressing the hindrances, the mind is always open, relaxed, and alert, and hindrances are dealt with one by one as they occur. Deeper levels of *jhāna* are entered through the allaying of craving, not by its suppression. There is no suppression whatever in TWIM. Whatever

arises is the truth of the moment. It is neither to be grasped nor pushed away.

TWIM meditation can be understood as a way to practice the Four Right Strivings. Essentially, the practice of the 6Rs is a modern rendition of the Four Right Strivings, a way to let go of the unwholesome and cultivate the wholesome. The mind is freed of its weight of craving and attached suffering. It is then naturally uplifted.

With a smile.

## Appendix I

### The Authenticity of the *Anupada Sutta*

The *Anupada Sutta* (MN 111) may be puzzling to those who view or experience *jhāna* only through the method of absorption concentration, and there are claims that the *Anupada Sutta* represents not the original teaching of the Buddha, but an add-on from a later time. In other words, it is held by some scholars and practitioners as not being an authentic teaching of the Buddha, and that its characterization of the *jhānas* as being levels of understanding and states of mind in which the meditator is open and aware are not a teaching of the Buddha or of Ven. Sāriputta.

Ven. Bhikkhu Sujato and Ven. Bhikkhu Brahmali in their book *The Authenticity of the Early Buddhist Texts* question the authenticity of the *Anupada Sutta*. Their book is an excellent defense of the authenticity of the bulk of the *sutta piṭaka* and they are formidable scholars whose opinion warrants consideration. They discuss *Anupada Sutta* in their chapter *Later Texts Are Obvious* and use it as an example of the texts that are *not* to be attributed directly to the Buddha. They give five reasons:

1. No known parallels in non-Pali EBTs [Early Buddhist Texts];
2. Extravagant praise of Sāriputta, not found elsewhere in the EBTs and akin to flowery and exaggerated language of other Buddhist texts;
3. Textual duplication and redundancy, such as *upekkhā* being mentioned twice as a *jhāna* factor for both the third and the fourth *jhāna*;
4. *Abhidhamma* type vocabulary, not found elsewhere in the EBTs, such as *anupadavavaṭṭhita*;

5. Juxtaposition of different literary styles, specifically on *sutta*-style lists of *jhāna* factors connected with “*ca*” and on *Abhidhamma* style list of factors without “*ca*”.

Although, in our view, the *Anupada Sutta* is an authentic and important teaching of the Buddha, it is worth considering the argument of these two notable scholar monks. It is certainly possible that in the light of the above evidence Ven. Bhikkhu Sujato and Ven. Bhikkhu Brahmali are correct, and that this *sutta* is a later addition. I find their case to be unpersuasive and will consider their arguments point by point below.

Using criterion such as the above is how scholars attempt the very difficult job of determining what is early and what is late in the collections of suttas. It is amazing that we even still have either the Pali suttas or their Chinese *Āgama* counterparts, after nearly 2600 years have passed from the time of the Buddha. This represents an enormous amount of time, and so little is still preserved of such an ancient time.

The Pali suttas were passed on through centuries of oral tradition and then written down on palm leaves in Sri Lanka, whereupon they were faithfully and diligently copied and recopied in order to preserve them from the ravages of humidity, insects, and war. After the oral tradition was committed to writing, the monks did their best to preserve these treasured words of the Buddha and his disciples.

The *Āgamas*, which are the Chinese versions of these early suttas were transmitted to China across dangerous seas, rugged mountains, and parched deserts from India to China. Some of the texts may have gone through several translations, including into Sanskrit, Khotanese, and other languages by the time they reached China.

In China, they were translated and preserved through tenuous times in that country. At one point all the wood block prints were burned along with their temples by an anti-Buddhist emperor and the



sutras had to be retrieved from Korea once conditions were again peaceful. So, the existence of the sutras in Chinese is also a remarkable aspect of history. They could have been lost forever.

The suttas as we have them are the product of more than two millennia of transmission, which speaks to the dedication of those who understood the preciousness of these teachings. Lacking original manuscripts or reliable dating systems, scholars must piece together what tenuous clues they have into a viable picture of how this transmission took place. Of course, any such picture is controversial, and Venerables Sujato and Brahmali have written their book largely to answer those who present a case that we can't really know what the Buddha did or didn't say, and that what we have in the suttas and Āgamas is largely the product of later generations. They have written their book in response to this skepticism of the suttas.

Let us consider their arguments considering *Anupada Sutta*. As a reminder of their position, they are asserting the authenticity of most of the suttas, but are claiming that this *sutta*, among a handful of others, is an add-on from a later age rather than being an authentic teaching of the Buddha.

Their point number one (one of five, listed above) is that there is no equivalent *sutta* to *Anupada Sutta* in the Chinese. If there were such an equivalent *sutta*, it would be a validation of the authenticity according to their criteria. They assert that any suttas that appear in both the Pali and the Chinese is part of an original “core” of material, traceable to the Buddha.

However, the Chinese equivalent of the *Anupada Sutta* is lacking. As far as creating doubt about the authenticity of the *Anupada Sutta*, this seems the most telling of the five points listed, but caution is needed before rejecting the authenticity of a *sutta* on this account.

The lack of an equivalent *sutta* in Chinese is not unusual, as there is a considerable amount of material in the Pali Suttas that does not

appear in the Chinese Āgama literature. There are six suttas in the Pali *Majjhima Nikāya* for which no direct equivalents can be found in the Chinese, and others for whom the equivalents are not exact or considerable amounts of material are missing.<sup>460</sup> In addition, many of the suttas for which equivalents can be found in the Chinese show inconsistency of material between the Chinese and the Pali, including sections of the suttas that appear on one but not the other, or if they do appear in both, the form is considerably altered.

Considering the difficulties of the transmission of this material over the centuries, it is very possible for authentic material to be in one tradition but not the other. There is also the possibility of sectarianism having affected what we find in the various collections. Therefore, point number one does not disqualify *Anupada Sutta*. But if the other evidence in points two through five appears to be against the authenticity of the *sutta*, the weight of point number one becomes more considerable.

In criticism number two the authors are claiming the praise of Sāriputta is exaggerated in the *Anupada Sutta*, and contains language more characteristic of later times than of the time of the Buddha. However, we must keep in mind that even the suttas which are widely attributed to the Buddha do show a change in language and styles. For instance, sections of the *Sutta Nipāta* use a more archaic form of Pali, and may be traceable to very early in the teaching career of the Buddha. The language of the suttas changed even during the time the Buddha was still alive, and it is difficult to use the presence of only one or two words to give a definite date to a *sutta* as early or late.

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<sup>460</sup> <https://suttacentral.net/mn>. Accessed October 2017. The other five suttas in *Majjhima Nikāya* that have no equivalent in the Chinese are: MN 48 *Kosambīya Sutta*, MN 53 *Sekha Sutta*, MN 71 *Tevijjavacchagota Sutta*, MN 103 *Kinti Sutta*, MN 110 *Cūḷapaṇṇama Sutta*. These suttas appear to be authentic teachings of the Buddha. It is unclear as to why they do not appear in the Chinese Āgamas.

As far as the presumed “extravagant praise of Sāriputta”, let us quote that section,

Bhikkhus, Sāriputta is wise; Sāriputta has great wisdom; Sāriputta has joyous wisdom; Sāriputta has quick wisdom; Sāriputta has keen wisdom; Sāriputta has penetrative wisdom; During half a month, bhikkhus, Sāriputta gained insight into states one by one as they occurred.<sup>461 462</sup>

My disagreement with the skepticism of the authors on this point is twofold. First, the Buddha’s admiration for his great disciple Sāriputta is well known and such language of praise is not out of place, especially considering that the Buddha was using this occasion to tell of Ven. Sariputta’s attainment of arahantship and to use the narrative to clarify some important points regarding the union of *jhāna* and *vipassanā* practice. We find praise of Sāriputta and of other accomplished monks and nuns throughout the suttas.

In fact, Sāriputta was known for his wisdom as his dhamma brother Moggallāna was known for his miraculous power. It is precisely this attribute of wisdom that is here being praised by the Buddha. His wisdom is described variously as “great”, “joyous”, “quick”, “keen”, and “penetrative”. This appears to be neither repetitive nor flowery, but rather descriptive in the kind of way we find the Buddha bringing out various facets of a subject. All of these are useful attributes to have with reference to wisdom leading to *nibbāna*.

Ven. Sāriputta was one of a handful of monks and nuns who were trusted by the Buddha to give teachings in his stead. For instance, we have in the *Sangīti Sutta* of the *Digha Nikāya*, an instance where the

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<sup>461</sup> Bodhi, **The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha**. MN 111:2 [PTS iii 25], p. 899.

<sup>462</sup> *Paṇḍito bhikkhave, sāriputto, mahāpaṇḍito bhikkhave, sāriputto puthupaṇḍito bhikkhave sāriputto, hāsupaṇḍito bhikkhave sāriputto, javanapaṇḍito bhikkhave sāriputto, tikkhapaṇḍito bhikkhave sāriputto, nibbedhikapaṇḍito bhikkhave sāriputto. Sāriputto bhikkhave, addhamāsaṃ anupadadhammavipassanaṃ vipassati.* MN 111:2, PTS iii 25, CS edition

Buddha had a backache and told Sāriputta, “The monks are free from sloth and torpor, Sāriputta. You think of a discourse on dhamma and give it to them. My back aches and I want to stretch it.”<sup>463 464</sup>

And at the end of the same discourse,

And when the Lord had stood up, he said to the Venerable Sāriputta: ‘Good, good, Sariputta! Well indeed have you proclaimed the way of chanting together for the monks!’ These things were said by the Venerable Sāriputta, and the teacher confirmed them. The monks were delighted and rejoiced at the Venerable Sāriputta’s words.<sup>465 466</sup>

An instance of elaborate praise being heaped on Ven. Sāriputta occurs in *Rathavinīta Sutta* of *Majjhima Nikāya*. In this *sutta*, Ven. Puṇṇa Mantāṇiputta is discussing *dhamma* with Ven. Sāriputta, not knowing the identity of his fellow monk. Upon discovering with whom he has been talking, he says,

Indeed, friend, we did not know that we were talking with the Venerable Sāriputta, the disciple who is like the teacher himself. If we had known this was the Venerable Sāriputta, we should not have said so much. It is wonderful, friend, it is marvelous! Each profound question has been posed, point by point, by the Venerable Sāriputta as a learned disciple who understands the Teacher’s Dispensation correctly. It is a gain for his companions in the holy life, it is a great gain for them that they have the opportunity to see and

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<sup>463</sup> Walshe, **The Long Discourses of the Buddha**. DN 33.1.5 [PTS iii 211], p. 480.

<sup>464</sup> *viḡatathinamidḡho kho sārīputta bhikkhusaṅgho. Paṭībhātu taṃ sārīputta bhikkhūnaṃ dhammi kathā. Piṭṭhi me āgilāyati, tamahaṃ āyamissāmi*. DN 33.1.5, PTS iii 211, CS edition.

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid*, DN 33.3.4 [PTS iii 271], p. 520.

<sup>466</sup> *Atha kho bhagavā vuṭṭhahitvā āyasmantaṃ sārīputtaṃ āmantesi: "sādhū sādhu sārīputta, sādhu kho tvaṃ sārīputta, bhikkhunaṃ saṅgītipariyāyaṃ abhāsī"ti*. DN 33.3.4, PTS iii 271, CS edition.

honor the Venerable Sāriputta. Even if it were by carrying the Venerable Sāriputta about on a cushion on their heads that his companions in the holy life would get the opportunity to see and honor him, it would be a gain for them, a great gain for them. And it is a gain for us that we have the opportunity to see and honor the great Sāriputta.<sup>467 468</sup>

This praise from a fellow monk is not only “flowery”, but also very descriptive in that the Ven. Sāriputta is being acknowledged as a teacher such as the Buddha himself. That this praise is coming from a monk points out the reputation held by Ven. Sāriputta within the *saṅgha*. Such reputation could only rest on the attainment of great wisdom by Ven. Sāriputta and praise to that effect by the Blessed One himself, in the presence of the *saṅgha*. It is only natural that the Buddha would publicly praise a disciple who was acting as a teacher with the Buddha’s approval.

Other instances of the Buddha praising his prominent disciples are too numerous to list but here is another pertinent passage for comparison from the *Saccavibhanga Sutta*,

Cultivate the friendship of Sāriputta and Moggallāna, bhikkhus, associate with Sāriputta and Moggallāna. They are wise and helpful to their companions in the holy life. Sāriputta is like a mother; Moggallāna is like a nurse. Sāriputta trains others for

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<sup>467</sup> Bodhi, **The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha**. MN 24:17 [PTS i 151], p. 245.

<sup>468</sup> *Sathukappena vata kira bho sāvakena saddhiṃ mantayamānā na jānimha 'āyasmā sāriputto'ti. Sace hi mayaṃ jāneyyāma 'āyasmā sāriputto'ti ettakampi no nappaṭibhāseyya. Acchariyaṃ āvuso, abbhutaṃ āvuso, yathā taṃ sutavatā sāvakena sammadeva satthusāsanāṃ ājānantena, evamevaṃ āyasmatā sāriputtēna gambhīrā gambhīrā pañhā anumāssa anumāssa pucchitā. Lābhā sabrahmacārīnaṃ, suladdhalābhā sabrahmacārīnaṃ, ye āyasmantaṃ sāriputtaṃ labhanti dassanāya. Labhanti payirupāsanāya. Celaṇḍukena cepiḥ sabrahmacārī āyasmantaṃ sāriputtaṃ muddhanā pariharantā labheyyuṃ dassanāya, labheyyuṃ payirupāsanāya, tesampi lābhā, tesampi suladdhaṃ. Amhākampi lābhā, amhākampi suladdhaṃ, ye mayaṃ āyasmantaṃ sāriputtaṃ labhāma dassanāya. Labhāma payirupāsanāya.* MN 24:17, PTS i 151, CS edition.

the fruit of stream-entry, Moggallāna for the supreme goal. Sāriputta, bhikkhus, is able to announce, teach, describe, establish, reveal, expound, and exhibit the Four Noble Truths.<sup>469 470</sup>

Notice that another impressive list of attributes is given by the Buddha to describe his great disciple. The previous list is similar to this one. The assertion that this kind of language does not occur elsewhere in the EBTs seems inaccurate.

Bhante Vimalaramsi points out the significance of the Buddha using so many descriptions of wisdom as a description of Ven. Sāriputta in one of his dhamma talks. Quoting the *sutta* and then commenting on it, he points out,

“Monks, Sāriputta is wise; Sāriputta has great wisdom; Sāriputta has wide wisdom; Sāriputta has joyous wisdom; Sāriputta has quick wisdom; Sāriputta has keen wisdom; Sāriputta has penetrative wisdom. ...

BV: All of these different qualities that he’s talking about for Sāriputta, who was his first chief disciple, he was second to the Buddha in wisdom. If you’ll remember last night, I said anytime you hear about ‘wisdom’ in the suttas, it’s talking about seeing, knowing, and understanding dependent origination, and you will be able to see that at the end of this *sutta* also.<sup>471</sup>

Therefore, we conclude that point number two, criticism based on presumed “unusually flowery language that does not occur

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<sup>469</sup> Bodhi, **The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha**. MN 141:5 [PTS iii 248], p.1097. Also at SN 17:23

<sup>470</sup> *Sevetha bhikkhave, sāriputtamoggallāne. Bhajatha bhikkhave, sāriputtamoggallāne. Paṇḍitā bhikkhū anuggāhakā sabrahmacārīnaṃ. Seyyathāpi bhikkhave, janetti evaṃ sāriputto. Seyyathāpi jātassa āpādetā evaṃ kho moggallāno. Sāriputto bhikkhave, sotāpattiphale vineti. Moggallāno uttamathe. Sāriputto bhikkhave, pahoti cattāri ariyasaccāni vitthārena ācikkhituṃ desetuṃ paññāpetuṃ paṭṭhapetuṃ vivarituṃ vibhajituṃ uttānikātunti.* MN 141:5, PTS iii 248, CS edition.

<sup>471</sup> Dhamma talk, 4 March 08, <http://talks.dhammasukha.org/mn-111-jt3-080304.html>, accessed October 2017.

elsewhere in the EBTs” (Early Buddhist Texts), is not a persuasive criticism of *Anupada Sutta* and not grounds for rejecting its authenticity.

In raising point number three, the authors feel that redundancy in language is grounds for dismissal of this sutta as being an Early Buddhist Text (EBT). They point out that the word *upekkhā* (equanimity), is mentioned twice in each of the third and fourth *jhānas*. The authors point to this as a case of textual redundancy and duplication.

Let us quote the Buddha’s account of Ven. Sāriputta’s experiences in the fourth *jhāna* as an example.

Again, bhikkhus, with the abandoning of pleasure and pain, and with the previous disappearance of joy and grief, Sāriputta entered upon and abided in the fourth *jhāna*, which has neither-pain-nor-pleasure and the purity of mindfulness due to equanimity.

And the states in the fourth *jhāna*- the equanimity, the neither-painful-nor-pleasant feeling, the mental unconcern due to tranquility, the purity of mindfulness, and the unification of mind; the contact, feeling, perception, volition, and mind; the zeal, decision, energy, mindfulness, equanimity and attention- those states were defined by him one by one as they occurred; known to him those states arose, known they were present, known they disappeared. He understood thus: ‘So, indeed, these states, not having been, came into being; having been, they vanish.’ Regarding those states, he abided unattracted, unrepelled, independent, detached, free, dissociated, with a mind rid of barriers. He understood: “There is an escape beyond,” and with

the cultivation of that [attainment], he confirmed that there is.<sup>472 473</sup>

The Buddha's teaching as related in the suttas, often uses duplication and redundancy. There are numerous cases in which he lists all of the salient factors, even more than once, as necessary. This particular *sutta* has a profound teaching that justifies the usage of the lists of factors as they occur. As the Buddha is demonstrating how tranquil aware *jhāna* works, he is using the language in a way to enhance his illustration of this point.

It is important to understand that in tranquil aware *jhāna* the meditator can see the five aggregates, the four foundations and the *jhāna* factors as they occur. The *sutta* is listing what was seen by Ven. Sariputta, "one by one as they occurred". It is also listing the factors in addition to the usual list of *jhāna* factors that are helping Ven. Sāriputta to be deep enough in meditation and sharp enough with mindfulness to see these things occur one by one. There is a good reason for the listing and for any redundancy. This is a teaching *sutta*, and the Buddha is being very thorough.

The fourth point made by the authors as criticism of the *sutta* is that there is *abhidhamma* type vocabulary not found elsewhere in the EBTs. The specific word referred to is *anupadavavattitha*. They claim this as a word not belonging to the time period in which the authentic suttas were composed, that the use of this word indicates language

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<sup>472</sup> Bodhi, **The Middle Length Discourses of the Buddha**. MN 111:9-10[ PTS iii 27], p.900.

<sup>473</sup> *Puna ca paraṃ bhikkhave, sāriputto sukhasa ca pahānā dukkhassa ca pahānā pubbeva somanassadomanassānaṃ atthaṅgamā adukkhaṃ asukhaṃ upekkhāsati pārisuddhiṃ catutthaṃ jhānaṃ upasampajja viharati, ye ca catutthe jhāne dhammā upekkhā adukkhamasukhā vedanā passaddhattā cetaso anābhogo satipārisuddhi cित्तेkaggatā ca phasso vedanā saññā cetanā cittaṃ chando adhimokkko viriyaṃ sati upekkhā manasikāro. Tyāssa dhammā anupadavavattithā honti. Tyāssa dhammā viditā uppajjanti, viditā upaṭṭhahanti, viditā abbatthaṃ gacchanti. So evaṃ pajānāti: 'evaṃ kira me dhammā ahutvā sambhonti. Hutvā paṭivenī'ti. So tesu dhammesu anupayo anapāyo anissito appaṭibaddho vippamutto viṣaṃyutto vimariyādīkatena cetasā viharati. So atthi uttariṃ nissaraṇa'nti pajānāti. Tabbahulīkāra atthitvevassa hoti.* MN 111:9-10, PTS iii 27, CS edition.



from a later time period. Hence, in their view, the *sutta* is a product of later times.

It is agreed that the *Anupada Sutta* displays some qualities of what was later known as *Abhidhamma*, that is, analysis and the use of sometimes extensive lists. We would agree that the *sutta* is displaying *Abhidhamma* type language, or perhaps proto-*Abhidhamma* language. This would suggest the *sutta* dates from the middle or late part of the teaching career of Gotama Buddha, at a time when there was some systematizing of the teachings occurring.

In this particular *sutta*, we can see the reasons for the Buddha using the lists. It does not appear to be a matter of a monk of a later generation compiling a list and then attributing it to the Buddha, as this list has a clear purpose in the context of the teaching that the Buddha is giving, namely how *vipassanā* is carried out while in *jhāna*.

The word they characterize as being unlikely for the Buddha to have used is a compound word composed of *anupada* and *vavatthita*. *Anupada* appears three times in the beginning of the *sutta*, as the title, as part of the compound word *anupadadhammavipassanā* in verse two, and as part of the compound word *anupadavavatthita* in verse three.

Let us have a look at these words. First, the title of the *sutta* is *Anupada Sutta*. *Anu* is a prefix which is commonly used. Some of the compound words formed by using *anu* can be quite long and complex, and are found in numerous places in the *suttas*, for instance, the prefix *anu* begins the compound word *anupubbābhisaññānirodhasampajānasamāpatti*, which is found in the *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta* and is translated by Maurice Walshe as “proceeds from stage to stage till reaching the limit of perception”.<sup>474</sup>

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<sup>474</sup> Walshe, *The Long Discourses of the Buddha*. DN 9:17 [PTS I 184], p.162.

This word gives us a clue as to how *anu* is often used to give the idea of going from one thing to the next thing, or step by step.

When combined with *pada*, step, we have *anupada*, with the meaning of “step by step” or “one by one”.

This is a very appropriate title for this *sutta* as it is about letting go of mental states one by one as they occur, and the connection with *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta* is interesting, as we also have a complex compound word using the prefix *anu* in that *sutta* denoting how the illusory “I” is let go of at every stage (“one by one”) until it ceases altogether. Therefore, we have two examples of the Buddha giving teachings and construction compound words including the prefix *anu* to get his meaning across. These teachings both have the “one thing at a time” aspect and the Buddha employs the prefix *anu* in both cases to get a similar but slightly different meaning across.

In the second verse of the *Anupada Sutta*, *anu* is again used in the compound word *anupada* and in this case combined with two other very common Pali words to give a unique meaning. The word is *anupadadhammavipassanā*, and here we can consider *anupada* to mean at every step, continuous, repeated, uninterrupted. The next word, *dhamma* means phenomena or in this case “mental states”. The next word is *vipassanā*, insight. The compound word *anupadadhammavipassanā* is followed by an active verb, *vipassati*, which is related to *vipassanā* and means to “have insight”. Putting the components together with the active verb that follows, we have “insight into states in a continuous, uninterrupted manner”. Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi translates this as “insight into states one by one as they occurred”.

That brings us to the next passage, where we again find usage of *anupada* in a compound word, and this is the particular Pali word, *anupadavavatthita*, that the authors are referring to. Here, *anupada* is combined with *vavatthita* which can mean, “alternatively arranged”, “fixed”, “determined” or “separated”. It is a past participle, indicating

something that has been done. It conveys the idea of having sorted things out.

If we put it all together, we get a word which means something like “having defined or sorted out things in a continuous manner”. Ven. Bhikkhu Bodhi translates it as [these states] “were defined by him one by one as they occurred”.

As far as I know, these particular compound words are unique to the *Anupada Sutta*. Does this mean the *sutta* is not an authentic teaching of the Buddha? I think that is an unwarranted assumption. Similar to *Poṭṭhapāda Sutta* and many other suttas, we have a teaching here that is not without parallel in other suttas, but that contains enough unique elements to warrant some creative use of vocabulary and compound words befitting the particular emphasis of the teaching.

There is also the chance the word was grafted onto the *sutta* by a later generation, but this explanation seems unnecessary.

Whether the word *anupadavavatthita* is an original word used by the Buddha in this *sutta*, or this word dates from a later time period, it communicates exactly what Buddhist practice is all about. That is, whatever arises, the practitioner must let it go. One by one as they occur, whatever mental states that arise, they are let go. In the process, the practitioner sees how they have arisen, and how they disappear, and through direct observation and experience understands how to escape them. If the meditator continues doing this, the practice brings insight wisdom. For Ven. Sāriputta, it resulted in his rapid attainment of *Nibbāna*.

Next comes the final point the authors raise in objection to the discourse being included in the EBTs. This has to do with how the lists are tied together with or without linking words.

The authors believe the use of “*ca*” (translated as “and” in English) in one series and no use of “*ca*” in the next shows inconsistency. This would be akin in English to saying “We ate with

plates and bowls and spoons, but then we had to clean up the plates, bowls, spoons.” The authors believe to use the “ca” in one list and not in the following list indicates a different source for the two lists. They are saying, the use of “ca” is characteristic of *sutta*, and a list without “ca” indicates a later period of time.

This point may be generally true, but is not always the case. In reading works that were composed after the passing of the Buddha, such as *Paṭisambhidāmagga*, a proto-abhidhammic work in the *Khuddaka Nikāya*, it is true that the lists rely less on the usage of “ca” and more on mere listing. However, “ca” does occur in some of the lists in that work, so the division between *sutta* and later works is not so strict in that regard. The word “ca” can also be found with some regularity in later post-canonical literature such as the *Visuddhimagga*.<sup>475</sup>

Turning to the suttas, we can also find lists that do not use ‘ca’. *Anupada Sutta* is not the only instance of this. For instance, in the *Sāmaññaphala Sutta* (DN 2.14), in speaking with the Buddha, King Ajātasattu compiles the following list of occupations,

Lord, just as there are these various craftsmen, such as elephant-drivers, horse-drivers, chariot-fighters, archers, standard-bearers, adjutants, army caterers, champions and senior officers, scouts, heroes, brave fighters, cuirassiers, slaves’ sons, cooks, barbers, bathmen, bakers, garland-makers, bleachers, weavers, basket-makers, potters, calculators and accountants- and whatever other skills there are: they enjoy here and now the visible fruits of their skills, they themselves are delighted and pleased with this, as are their parents, children and colleagues and friends, they maintain and support ascetics and brahmins, thus assuring for

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<sup>475</sup> For instance, see Vsm. VI.5, PTS 179, CS edition: *itoca ettoca vividā kārena soṇasigālādihi khāyitanti vikkhāyitaṃ, vikkhāyitameva vikkhāyitakaṃ*.

themselves a heavenly, happy reward tending towards paradise.

I give the Pali here, so even the person unfamiliar with Pali can see that there is no use of “ca” in the list, but the list is compiled in much the same way as in *Anupada Sutta*.

Yathā nu kho imāni bhante puthusippāyatanāni seyyathīdaṃ: hatthārohā assārohā rathikā dhanuggahā celakā calakā piṇḍadāyakaṃ uggā rājaputtā pakkhandino mahānāgā sūrā cammayodhino dāsakaputtā ālārikā kappakā nahāpakā sūdā mālākārā rajakā pesakārā naḷakārā kumbhakārā gaṇakā muddikā, yāni vā panaññāni'pi evaṃgatikāni puthusippāyatanāni, te diṭṭheva dhamme sandiṭṭhikaṃ sippaphalaṃ upajīvanti. Te tena attānaṃ sukhenti pīnenti. Mātāpitaro sukhenti pīnenti. Puttadāraṃ sukhenti pīnenti. Mittāmacce sukhenti pīnenti. Samaṇesu brāhmaṇesu uddhaggikaṃ dakkhiṇaṃ patiṭṭhāpentī sovaggikaṃ sukhavipākaṃ saggasaṃvattanikaṃ. Sakkā nu kho bhante evameva diṭṭheva dhamme sandiṭṭhikaṃ sāmaññaphalaṃ paññāpetunti".

Other examples can be found. A famous one, which occurs at *Kāyagatāsati Sutta* (MN 119) and *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* (MN 10.10) is the list of body parts used in meditation on the impermanence of the body. Here are the lists in translation and in the Pali. No “ca” is to be found.

“Again bhikkhus, a Bhikkhu reviews this same body up from the soles of the feet and down from the top of the hair, bounded by skin, as full of many kinds of impurity thus: ‘In this body there are head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, , lungs, intestines, mesentery, contents of the stomach, feces, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, spittle, snot, oil of the joints, and urine.’ Just as though

there were a bag with an opening at both ends full of many sorts of grain, such as hill-rice, this is red rice, these are beans, these are peas, this is millet, this is white rice', so, too, a bhikkhu reviews this same body as full of many kinds of impurity thus: 'In this body there are head-hairs, body-hairs, nails, teeth, skin, flesh, sinews, bones, bone-marrow, kidneys, heart, liver, diaphragm, spleen, , lungs, intestines, mesentery, contents of the stomach, feces, bile, phlegm, pus, blood, sweat, fat, tears, grease, spittle, snot, oil of the joints, and urine.' ..."

Puna ca paraṃ bhikkhave, bhikkhu imameva kāyaṃ uddhaṃ pādatalā adho kesamatthakā tacapariyaṃtāṃ pūraṃ nānappaḅārassa asucino paccavekkhaṭṭi: atthi imasmiṃ kāye kesā lomā nakhā dantā taco maṃsaṃ nahāru aṭṭhi aṭṭhimiṅṅāḷ vakkhaṃ hadayaṃ yakaṇaṃ kilomakaṃ pihakaṃ papphāsaṃ antaṃ antagaṇaṃ udariyaṃ karīsaṃ pittaṃ semahaṃ pubbo lohitaṃ sedo medo assu vasā kheḷo siṅghāṇikā lasikā mutta'nti.

Seyyathāpi bhikkhave, ubhato mukhā mūtoḷi pūrā nānāvihitassa dhañṇassa. Seyyathīdaṃ: sālīnaṃ vīhīnaṃ mūggānaṃ māsānaṃ tilānaṃ taṇḍulānaṃ, tamenāṃ cakkhumā puriso muṅcivā paccavekkheyya: ime sālī, ime vihī, ime muggā, ime māsā, ime tilā, ime taṇḍulā'ti. Evameva kho bhikkhave, bhikkhu imameva kāyaṃ uddhaṃ pādatalā adho kesamatthakā tacapariyaṃtāṃ pūraṃ nānappaḅārassa asucino paccavekkhaṭṭi: atthi imasmiṃ kāye kesā lomā nakhā dantā taco maṃsaṃ nahāru aṭṭhi aṭṭhimiṅṅāḷ vakkhaṃ hadayaṃ yakaṇaṃ kilomakaṃ pihakaṃ papphāsaṃ antaṃ antagaṇaṃ udariyaṃ karīsaṃ pittaṃ semhaṃ pubbo lohitaṃ sedo medo assu vasā kheḷo siṅghāṇikā lasikā mutta'nti.

These are just a few examples.

It may be that compilation of lists without ‘ca’ represents the use of ‘later’ language, but ‘later’ need not refer to centuries after the passing of the Buddha. It may mean later in the lifetime of the Buddha, as systematization of his teachings was beginning to occur.

To return to Anupada Sutta, I think there is a very good reason for using “ca” in the list of *jhāna* factors, and dropping it in the latter list. The Buddha (or the reciters) gave the usual *jhāna* factors as a series linked with “ca”. In *jhāna*, these factors are co-dependent and synergistic. The word “ca” can denote things that are linked together in time and space. It is a good word to indicate factors that arise simultaneously. The latter list has a different purpose. It is designed to indicate sequence, not simultaneity. By listing factors without “ca” the effect of communicating a sequence (rather than simultaneity) is enhanced. Hence the title of the *Anupada Sutta*, with the idea of sequence of mental states being one of the main points being taught. They occurred one by one in sequence, not at the same time.

Therefore, I would not consider *Anupada Sutta* to be inauthentic due to “ca” not being used in both lists. Rather, this seems a skillful use of language, and can explain any redundancy of factors in the lists.

Rather than focusing on such small details which do not seem to be very persuasive in any case, it is worth reading the *sutta* as a whole. When read in this way the *Anupada Sutta* does not have any of the feel of a work composed by later generations and attributed posthumously to the Buddha.

I find the *Anupada Sutta* to be as authentic as other suttas in the Nikāyas, and will take it as such. Certainly, in the case of claiming a *sutta* to not be authentic, the burden of proof is on the authors. There is some slight evidence, but no convincing argument against the *sutta*.

For those interested in further pursuing this topic, I refer them to Ven. Bhikkhu Sujato and Ven. Bhikkhu Brahmali's book *The Authenticity of the Early Buddhist Texts*. Although I am in disagreement with them on this particular point, their book is a valuable, well-researched, and well-reasoned contribution to the study of the Early Buddhist Texts.



## **A short spiritual autobiography of Mark Edsel Johnson**

Once we become grounded in the teachings of the Buddha, we realize that our personal story, the ‘story of me’, is an illusion that we hold onto until death or, hopefully, enlightenment. I seldom think about my past and don’t take it seriously, but for the benefit of readers who may wish to know a bit more about me, I have composed the following short spiritual autobiography.

I was born in the town of Fullerton, State of California, in the USA on 1 September, 1951. I grew up in a devoted Christian family but upon reading the Bible at an early age, I realized the profundity of the teachings of Jesus and the huge gap between the narrowness and tightness of institutional Christianity and Jesus’ teachings and open heart of universal love and compassion.

At age 14 I had my first glimpse of the higher reality offered by Buddhist teachings when I saw an exhibit of Chinese, Korean and Japanese sumie (ink brush painting) masterpieces at the Los Angeles Museum of Art. I was amazed at the vision of these paintings and realized they showed a higher dimension of consciousness. I decided then and there to someday journey to East Asia.

My chance to journey to Asia came while at Claremont McKenna College, when I was able to join a one-year program at Waseda University in Japan. While in Japan, I studied Aikido at the university, learned to play the (Zen) shakuhachi bamboo flute, and hitch hiked all around the four main islands of Japan.

At the end of the studies in Japan, rather than returning directly to the USA, I decided, along with two other adventurous friends, to go to Afghanistan. With little money, we began the journey by taking the passenger boat From Tokyo to Nakhodka, USSR. From there we took the train to Khabarovsk, on to Irkutsk, then Tashkent, and from

there to Kabul Afghanistan. At that time, in 1972, Afghanistan was still peaceful and ruled by the Shah.

While in Afghanistan, we managed to make our way up to the timeless Bamiyan Valley, where we beheld the giant cliffside Buddhas later destroyed by the Taliban. These Buddhas made a deep impression on me and due to the vision they imparted, I decided to drop all other concerns and return to Asia in search of enlightenment upon completion of my undergraduate studies.

During my final year of undergraduate studies, I was fortunate to meet Rinzai Zen Roshi Fukushima Keido who was a visiting fellow at Claremont Graduate School. (A Roshi is a Zen master). The Roshi had a small group of students and at his place I first learned to sit zazen in Rinzai style and listened to his teachings. The Roshi invited me to visit his temple in Japan for further studies.

After graduating in 1973 with a BA in Asian Studies, I returned to Japan and taught English while pursuing my studies and continuing to play shakuhachi. Eventually, I quit my job and began my first earnest practice of Zen. I moved to Kyoto near the small but energetic Soto Zen temple of Antaiji. The Roshi of that temple, Uchiyama Kōshō, was very welcoming to lay disciples and the temple was full of Japanese monks and Japanese and foreign laypeople sitting zazen for seemingly endless hours. The method was shikan-taza, just sitting in choiceless awareness.

Antaiji was where I first sat Zen sesshin, or Zen week, of 14 hours of zazen a day with short breaks for walking meditation and simple meals. I was not prepared for the rigor of this sesshin and experienced intense physical discomfort and deep boredom.

After five days of seeming torture, something shifted and I felt the greatest peace and openness of heart that he had ever experienced. It was a lesson that real happiness in life is not gained by external activity or possessions, but by looking within and finding the

presence of simple being. From that time on I was dedicated to cultivating the inner life.

While continuing to live in Japan, I was invited by Fukushima Keido Roshi (whom I had met in California) to live as a lay Zen student at Hofukuji Temple. Living the life of the temple, I understood that the expression of Buddha Mind is not only in formal meditation posture but in simple everyday acts such as sweeping the floors, washing dishes, or pulling weeds in the Zen garden.

Being a lover of mountain vistas, I undertook a trip to Nepal in 1976. In addition to time in the Himalaya, I participated in a one-month Lam Rim retreat at Kopan Monastery, the temple of Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa. This was my first experience of Vajrayāna Buddhism, with its rich tapestry of sacred images, stark contrast to the severely simple style of Japanese Zen.

Upon returning to the USA in the late 1970s, I relocated to Vermont State. There were no Zen teachers in Vermont at that time, but the Sunray Mediation Society hosted Tibetan lamas every summer and I attended teachings and took up Vajrayāna practice in earnest. Some decades later, my wife Elaine Marie and I did volunteer teaching at Lho Ontul Rimpoche's temple, Wogmin Thupten Shedrupling, in the Indian Himalaya. Ontul Rimpoche is a Dzogchen master, and Elaine Marie and I were given teachings in that tradition. I was also able to receive Mahāmūdra teachings from the head Lama of Drikung Kagyu, His Holiness Kyabgon Chetsang Rimpoche.

After reading Ven. Vimalaramsi's book on Ānāpānasati, I decided to take up the TWIM practice, which I found to be very compatible with Zen and Dzogchen, and resolved on traveling to Sri Lanka to learn to read the original words of the Buddha in the ancient Pali language. The post-graduate Buddhist Studies program at Sri Lanka International Buddhist Academy (SIBA) seemed a perfect place for studying the original words of the Buddha, and I entered that program, eventually earning an MA and then a PhD.

More important than the academic studies, I was able to receive direct instruction in the TWIM method from Ven. Sister Khanti Khema, who was living in Sri Lanka at the time. In addition, Ven. Bhante Vimalaramsi came to Sri Lanka and Elaine Marie and I were able to do our first 10-day TWIM retreat with Bhante.

Elaine Marie and I have returned to live full-time in our home in rural Vermont where we observe the five lay precepts and practice TWIM in everyday life. I also continue to play the shakuhachi bamboo flute, which is very popular with the birds and the deer.

With some experience of Buddhist meditation, we realize that such biographical details are only memories and thoughts, with no reality or substance. Rather than focusing on this hallucination of a psychologically created self which lives primarily in the imagined past and future, we abide in the now, which is unborn, undying, self-radiant, and needs no support or philosophical justification. Memories or personal stories are material for a good laugh. Hah hah! Through practicing the Noble Eightfold Path we trade in this little personal story of “me” and in return get the whole universe. But nobody is there to get it or to have it. Yet, isn’t it beautiful?

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