

*Foundation Series on Buddhist Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation (TWIM)  
As taught by  
Sister Khema and overseen by Most Venerable “Bhante” Vimalaramsi Maha Thera  
the Gift of Dhamma is Priceless!*

## **Training→ FS- 01- What is Buddhism?’**

### **I- What is Buddhism?**

Please listen to the dhamma talk called “What is Buddhism?” posted at <http://dhammasukha.org/Study/basic.htm>

Dhamma Greetings Everyone.

What is asked most often about Buddhism is whether it is a Religion or a Philosophy? Philosophy has lots of thinking and books which end up being ‘words without action’. On the other hand, Religion requires a higher source taking responsibility for what happens in your life. In Buddhism , the person takes full responsibility for their perspective and actions.

### **The Precepts**

Buddhism follows Universal Truths. The basic moral code consists of 5 Precepts. These are no killing or harming living beings on purpose, no stealing, no wrong sexual activity, no lying, cursing, gossip or slander, and, no alcohol or drugs. These precepts support you living in a happy life. If kept, they lead to happiness. When broken, they lead to difficulties and these are identified as 5 Hindrances. The hindrances are 1) Lust and Greed, 2) Hatred and Delusion, 3) Sloth and Torpor, 4) Restlessness, and 5) Doubt. These can make life very difficult. The fifth precept was added later on to avoid the enticement to break the other four.

### **Meditation**

In the West, some people think that Buddhist meditation is about sitting still. That’s not it. Buddhist meditation allows you to observe precisely what suffering is, how it arises, what the cessation of suffering is like, and how to reach that state. Your practice is composed of three parts: Sila, Samadhi and Panna. Sila or morality is an operational support for the meditation to succeed. Samadhi or tranquil wisdom insight meditation is the vehicle that allows you to develop your observation skill so you can observe the deepest levels of operation of mind. And panna or wisdom is a deep clear knowledge only attained through seeing the impersonal process of cognition that goes on all the time. The meditation shows you how to let go of stress and suffering and open the mind for creative responsive actions in life.

### **What is Generosity?**

The Pali word Dana means Generosity practice which prepares us for successful meditation. Pure acts of generosity soften and open a person's heart. The purest Dana given expects nothing in return and is the most valuable act for preparing the mind and heart for the meditation training.

There are three kinds of generosity. Generosity of mind means thinking kind thoughts. Generosity of deeds means helping people to make things better where needed. Generosity of speech is offering kind words in situations where others have nothing to say. To better understand Generosity of Speech, please go to UTUBE and look up the short film called "VALIDATION" at <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cbk980jV7Ao> . This is a wonderful example of generosity.

As you begin to practice the precepts in earnest, you will find new solutions in life and experience fewer difficulties. Gradually, you see things in a better light.

### **The impact of Dana and the Precepts in life.**

The precepts are a form of protection. They are not only for retreats, but for all the time. If a meditator only keeps them at a retreat, things will build up inside and the gateway to reaching a pure mind and ultimate peace will be blocked. The meditator will get delayed while dumping the trash before making any real progress in their meditation. Keeping the precepts all the time leads to a mind that responds instead of reacting. The precepts will make you more confident and at ease in life. Therefore they can never be overstated. They keep us fully operational for meditation training.

### **Where is the training supposed to lead?**

In Majjhima Nikaya 21- the Simile of the Saw—Kukacupama Sutta is an example of generosity and keeping the precepts. The Buddha tells us there are 5 kinds of speech that others may use when they address you.

***"... their speech may be timely or untimely, true or untrue, gentle or harsh, connected with good or connected with harm, and spoken with a mind with loving-kindness or with hatred. "***

This is what sometimes happens in life.

***The Buddha instructs us that "...you should train thus: 'Our minds will remain unaffected, and we shall utter no evil words; we shall abide compassionate for their welfare, with a mind of loving-kindness, without inner hate. We shall abide pervading that person with a mind imbued with loving-kindness; and starting with him, we shall abide pervading the all-encompassing world with a mind abundant, exalted, immeasurable, without hostility and without ill will. That is how we should train.'***

The key to the doorway to peace lies in proper meditation training and clear teaching of the Dhamma. This training develops a more stable mind rooted in equanimity and calmness. This is the natural

inclination of a well developed mind. Consider for a moment what a person could accomplish with this kind of a clear mind in everyday life.

Take Death, for instance, which touches all of us at one time or another. When a loved one is nearing death what can you do? The answer is you can radiate loving-kindness to that person, to the person's family, to all people involved including the nurses and doctors. You are not helpless. You do not have to indulge in a personal dislike of any situation. It is not necessary for you to become engulfed in feelings of helplessness. Rather, you can counteract this by smiling inwardly while sending out positive vibrations. Radiate loving-kindness the whole time and you will see a different kind of end result.

Years back when the Tsunami happened in the Pacific, so many people around the world felt totally helpless. On the internet, you could see how miserable they were. Many people indulging in the helplessness and dissatisfaction of the situation became depressed. At our suggestion, they started sending loving-kindness to the people at the heart of the disaster. Later we found indications that some of the victims felt it. Not only that. Those who practiced in this way felt better too. They were sending out Compassion.

The Buddhist teaching is unique and once you understand the real meaning of certain words, the clarity of it's genius becomes obvious. The goal of the training is to lovingly accept the present moment just as it is; to accept things as they are. The system trains us to reduce craving and if you keep the practice going, it can lead to the permanent cessation of suffering by eventually ending it altogether.

Craving is the arising of the 'I' like it or the 'I' don't like it mind. The problem is we then cling to the idea that we can control the truth with our desire to make the present moment different than it actually is. If a meditator examines this very closely, they will notice how there is tension in this desire for change. The impermanence of life brings about our dis-satisfaction. Everything in this world and universe is in a constant state of flux and generally speaking, we don't like this! Thus, there is suffering.

Through persistent training, the meditator learns that it is possible to be aware of the arising tension in craving and they learn how to let it go. If you look now, you probably won't notice this tension. But when you begin to use the harmonious practice resulting in just the right effort that the Buddha left us, you can see and release it. When the tension falls away mind becomes clear. As the fog lifts, the open space allows us to check our course and work on creative solutions for life instead of just re-acting to it.

The shortest explanation of Buddhism I have ever heard was put forth by the late Most Venerable . K. Sri Dhammananda. He called the teaching **"THE NOBLE TRUTH"**. **"Total balance", he said, "Harmony with the world."**

What the Buddha taught was for all people to take and use even if they were not Buddhist. There are many positive ways that Buddhism has affected the world. Some of them are in one of Ven. K Sri Dhammananda's book called **'What Buddhists Believe'**.

‘Buddhism is the religion of humanity, whose founder was a man who sought no divine revelation or intervention...’

‘Today, Buddhism appeals to the West because it has no dogmas, and it satisfies both reason and the heart alike. It insists on self-reliance coupled with tolerance of others. It embraces modern scientific discoveries if they are for constructive purposes. **Buddhism points to man alone as the creator of his present life and as the sole designer of his own destiny.** Such is the nature of Buddhism.’

‘Buddhism tells us exactly and objectively what we are and what the world around us is, and shows us the way to perfect freedom, peace, tranquility and happiness.’

‘... Buddhism has awakened the self-respect and feeling of self-responsibility of countless people and it stirs up the energy of many a nation....’

‘... Buddhism is religious beliefs and practices turned into a rational, scientific and practical religious way of life for spiritual development ....’

‘... The Buddha gave to the world real Universal Truth...’

‘Therefore, the real definition of Buddhism is NOBLE TRUTH.’

(Other than theories) The Buddha taught from a practical standpoint based on His understanding, enlightenment, and his Knowledge and Vision of the Truth.’

### **What was the real gift to us from the Buddha?**

The Buddha’s gift was showing us clearly what suffering really is, at its heart, and giving us ‘a direct path’ to the Cessation of that suffering. The degree that people are able to reduce their suffering depends on how well they follow the instructions. One thing that is quite remarkable is that you will not be asked to believe anything in Buddhism until you see it for yourself. You will be challenged to gain ‘knowledge and vision’ which means ‘knowing by seeing’ in the same way the Buddha observed things. By learning to carefully observe how everything works, the meditator will automatically see how all things change, the true nature of suffering, and the impersonal nature of everything.

We should take careful note of the Buddha’s way of teaching because he spent 45 years refining and perfecting it. There were no sacrifices, rites or rituals involved. We do not worship the Buddha but, rather, we respect him for what he did. His original group of monks took up the same spiritual quest supervised by him and later taught other beginners. It is absolutely real that this training can still produce the same relief today. This is not imaginary.

First and foremost we should remember the Buddha as the Master meditation teacher. You can’t help wondering something here. If he was a Master teacher for so long, the question is, what would happen if we used the same lessons and practice drills out of the original manual for training today? What would the result be if that same practice was followed without putting other things into the mix? This is what I would like you to investigate while you follow this training.

Remember that the Dhamma is a gradual teaching. This translates to a gradual learning. Do not become impatient! The teaching was simple to understand and immediately effective for a person in the Buddha's time and it's the same today. Just keep it going. As you practice, put your faith in what the Buddha taught and stick to the instructions the guiding teachers provide. Their job is to guide you to perfect this new kind of observation skill. Let us know how you are doing. In other words, just do it. Why? Because it works.

**A simile for you:**

One student said it reminds them of a new garden plot. New garden locations **need the soil prepared before planting**. You till the ground **to open up the soil**. Then you **calm the ground and let it rest**. Next you **fertilize it**. You **consider the spacing of the crops and plant the seeds**. You **water and nurture it**. Every so often **pluck out the weeds**. With discipline and patience **you hoe the ground**. Sometimes you **ask for guidance**. At harvest time, **advice is asked about how to store the food**. You must retain **the seeds for the next harvest**.

Consider that the preparation of the soil is the same as when you prepare the mind for practice. Loosening the soil is opening your heart. Letting the ground rest is when you first settle down. The basic instructions fertilize the soil. Spacing the crops and planting the seeds is when you set up a meditation space and start practicing. Watering and nurturing is keeping the Precepts. Keeping out the weeds is abandoning the hindrances. Hoeing the rows is supporting the practice. The advice is from the guiding teacher. Harvesting and storing the seeds is retaining the knowledge and continuing the practice in daily life.

Just like your vegetable garden, the results are determined by how well you nurture it and stick with it. There you are. Now, it's your garden. Let's grow it!

We have touched enough briefly on what Buddhism is for now.

Let me hear your comments and questions and then we can continue onto Installment 2 with the next topic more in depth-- **What is Dana?**

Metta and smiles to you all.  
Samaneri Sister Khema

*The Gift of Dhamma is Priceless !*  
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