

Foundation Series on Buddhist Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation (TWIM)
As taught by
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the Gift of Dhamma is Priceless!

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Title: FS-04 PART 1 - What is Bhavana?

Bhavana - PART 1-

Today it would be good to talk a little bit about the pali word **Bhavana**. Bhavana means **development**. Today people hear a lot about developing meditation. But “*development*” is not restricted just to meditation. Actually, in Buddhism, development refers to Generosity, Morality and Wisdom (dana, sila, and pa~n~na). Without generosity and morality established, Buddhist wisdom cannot successfully arise.

In Buddhism the word “*wisdom*” is not quite what you would expect either. The pali word for Wisdom is **pa~n~na**. This word becomes specific within Buddhist teaching. It operates as a code word in the texts. You can test this for yourself as we continue on with training. Discovering the Buddha’s meaning for ‘wisdom’ opens your mind to a much deeper understanding of the texts. It’s quite amazing. As we continue on with this training, occasionally, I will try to point out to you the variations of the meaning when it is used. In Buddhism, the word **wisdom** most often refers to the impersonal process of cognition that the Buddha taught us about. He called this the impersonal process of Dependent Origination. In our training we develop Dana, Sila and Pa~n~na. In the case of wisdom, it means developing the ability to see, understand and use the impersonal Process of Dependent Origination to relieve suffering.

Bhavana actually refers to all parts of the path leading to the cessation of suffering. The path slowly enlightens your understanding of universal law. So far, the installments have touched on the foundation work of Generosity (dana) and Morality (sila). It is important to establish a clear understanding of how these support the meditation practice and how they affect life in general.

Pa~n~na arises only through development of Buddhist practice. The practice I am referring to is Meditation. In this practice we are learning to personally observe HOW everything works when a human being experiences life. This is studying human cognition of the eye, ear, nose, tongue, body and mind. We cannot let go of something when we do not know precisely what it is first, can we? So we first must understand how suffering occurs through the sense doors and the precise root of this suffering.

Fear can stop development. How can we eliminate fear? Once we understand how things work, fear will no longer block our path. Think of those extreme sportsters in the Olympics who almost ski upside down when they hotdog! You know that they would never be able to defy gravity in the way they do unless they fully understood their equipment, knew the natural laws, and developed their skills to the fullest extent. They have abandoned fear! Meditation is no different. If you want to follow through to the point of liberation, it takes courage and determination to stick with the instructions completely and not just go part way or for only a very short time. This is a real challenge and it takes courage to commit to this so you can get to the really stunning results..

There is a great deal more to Buddhist meditation than just sitting and waiting to see what happens. The Buddha’s practice was not to rest attention on one object of meditation until all peripheral vision just disappears. It’s not a dead end practice like that. It had real and tangible results that completely changed people because of resulting understanding. Reaching a void without understanding is really empty of purpose. This practice is a skill training. The purpose of it is to develop expert observation skills so you can see how things really work. The Buddha figured out how to observe at very deep and fine levels. He refined what he learned into a system for teaching others to do the same thing. You have to

admit it must have been fascinating because he continued to teach for 45 years! His great gift to us was clearly defining to us how to achieve the Cessation of Suffering! This is what we are studying how to understand.

Q: Wasn't the full freedom from suffering true ONLY for an Arahant?

A: Perhaps that is true when we are talking about full and permanent freedom. But, actually, there are degrees of development that can be very useful in life that were taught by the Buddha.

One line of development was set up for the members of the lay community. It teaches the lay person the primary practice, without any secrets held back, and then shows them how to apply the practice in daily life. This leads them to a happier life. It is clear this form of gradual training was taught for the common man, woman and family or else 60,000,000 people would not have become Buddhist in the classical world!

Because of the results of this practice, also kings found the teaching so “priceless” that they decided to greatly support the Sangha and help preserve the training. They supplied the four requisites of shelter, food, medicine and clothing for the monastic community in the hopes that these monastics would then dedicate themselves to persistent practice, preservation and teaching of this Dhamma for future generations. The practice was valued greatly by a government who was overseeing a peaceful people.

Thousands found relief through this new clear knowledge. People began understanding the main causes of suffering and retraining themselves to manifest a better future world by changing their perspectives and actions. Those who took the practice into daily life, all the time, became more at peace and lived happier richer lives. It is this **Bhavana** that makes Buddhism come to full fruition.

As I said, ultimately, Buddhism is about change. Students **MUST** have courage and truly be willing to change for progress to happen. The meditation practice is the vehicle that carries a person to where they can see how things actually work. It changes our perspective. This new perspective purifies the mind along the way. With this pure mind, a person gradually learns ways to have more control over their life. This is simply because if you understand how things work or don't work, then you develop the opening to fix them and chart a new course. Without that information, you are flying blind with no hope of repair!

The Buddha devised a gradual system which taught people the needed skills to attain knowledge and vision and, eventually, wisdom. Within his system of training, everyone developed in the same way. Over the years he taught, the Buddha created clear developmental and progression charts to guide us along this path.

Q: You said there were two groups who learned the teaching. Who is the other group?

A: The Buddha also created a line of development for the fulltime monastic or serious practitioners from the lay community.

Monastics and the more serious practitioners used the same path to develop. The difference is that they put more time into their practice while living under the monastic code or spent extended time at monasteries doing temporary ordinations to make more progress. You might say ‘they decided to “go for the gold”!’ They were obedient and they followed directions very carefully. They spent extended periods of time on certain approaches of study to fully understand, internalize and use them. They would go into isolated areas for practice reaching deeper states of consciousness.

Lay people could also reach these states of consciousness, but had other responsibilities of the householder that tended to pull them out of their meditation before getting to the finer observations. This second group's clear pursuit was the goal of liberation and to experience the complete relief of Nibbana with understanding. They practiced in earnest to naturally raise up their level of compassion for a more peaceful world.

Q: What exactly are we developing as we practice this meditation?

A: We are opening the way for peaceful alternative ways of living in this and a future world.

This continual practice of right Effort by using the 6Rs specifically offers an experience that naturally alters our perspective and gently shifts us towards an impersonal unselfish protocol for life. Outward compassionate actions towards our fellowmen arise more easily. When we begin to live and act in this frame of mind, we are using the Buddha's doorway to PEACE. We now begin to understand why the Buddha was called a "**Peacemaker**".

Q: How can you make that kind of shift in today's world when everything seems so dark at times?

A: You have to give up fear, anxiety, panic, much of the cause of depression, let go of doubt by personally seeing how things really work and dare to embrace this option of change.

Most fear arises because we do not understand what's going on. **Life becomes overwhelming!** We **assume** everything is happening to us. ***In reality, nothing happens to us. Everything happens from us.*** We are actually responsible for our own destiny. However, if we don't understand this, then personal **assumptions** will feed fear, discouragement, anxiousness, doubt, disappointment, and the pre-occupation of trying to make things the way we want them to be. **That's a lot of struggle and stress!**

What is needed is knowledge. Without it we cannot get to the heart of how things actually work and how tension arises in our life. We need less tension and tightness in mind and body to be able to see clearly. All emotional states mentioned above start with tension. Tension leads to stress. Stress leads to the DIS-EASE of mind and body.

It is easy to become caught in a fog of misunderstanding, misinformation and the lack of truth about how these things happen. Because of this, we act in unbalanced ways. We continue to **RE-ACT** in the same ways all the time as frustration increases. At the front end of our training, we must embrace the fact that not one of us is at fault in this! We are not guilty of anything and should not carry a weight about this. We have seen this happening all around us since birth. No one has ever tried to tell us something different! So we should go lightly into this practice and be very forgiving of not knowing about this when we begin.

When we look around today at what is being taught in our schools, we don't find **helpful** information, methodology or any practice to help us see clearly what is really going on. As a result of the disinformation the average untrained mind receives, young people can come to the drastic conclusion that there is no hope of change. This is a tragic miscalculation and it just isn't so. ***When we cave into taking action based on assumption without having real information, this is the root of all conflict in this world.*** Because of this, we let go of new creative solutions, sometimes make a crash landing (a breakdown) and we really suffer. This prevents change.

Q: What can we do about this?

A: We must tread lightly here and begin to dig out the truth about universal laws. We need to see for ourselves how everything really is. Maybe there is a way out! Maybe it is in these teachings!

To understand how we experience our world and how we sometimes fall off-sides with our assumptions, the Buddha left us a system and a meditation practice to help us see the truth for ourselves. He believed that we could not be taught his teaching any other way but through "**knowledge and vision**" meaning "**knowing by seeing**". The Buddha shared this plan with as many people as he could before his life ended. This is what we are going to do now.

We are going to pursue the way to change our perspective and find new hope for the future.

End of Bhavana PART 1.

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