

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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TRAINING → FS-05- PART 2- What is Bhavana and What are the 4 noble Truths?'

Q: What about today? Do we still have a chance to figure out this Buddhist Meditation and use this information today?

A: Yes. We do. It's still here.

The teaching just needs to be carefully pieced together again and activated. The best way to work with it is to have a guide who understands how it works, is using it, and can help you to stay on track on a regular basis while you are developing the practice.

Q: If it's mixed up now, can we still do that?

A: Yes. Here's why

Right now we live in what is called a Buddhist Dispensation. We are so incredibly lucky to live, as human beings, in this timeframe. At the front end of a Buddhist dispensation a Buddha brings the 4 Noble Truths to the surface. He learns them clearly, begins to use them and, if we are very lucky, he then teaches others. Then this is preserved by memorization and group repetition and eventually comes into written form. This is how the precise path was preserved 2,600 years later after Lord Gotama became the Buddha.

After the Truths come to the surface, after the Buddha's death, during the remaining existence of the dispensation, the Dhamma can rise and fall like the tides come and go on a ocean over vast periods of time. It falls down some but then it springs back up again because of the preservation work of the Monastic Sangha and some devote lay practitioners too. Some say that the Buddha's prophecies tell us that this dispensation will last for 5,000 years. By that projection, we are now perhaps on a last slowly rising tide before it starts down one more time and fades completely away. This is called the age of the Saints.

There are some rules about the existence of dispensations. Two Buddhas cannot exist within one dispensation period. That is another universal law. While the information of one dispensation is still on the surface, another Buddha cannot come forth. But with the remainderless fading away and cessation of Dhamma, and a gap in time happens, and then another Buddha can arise. Finally, this entire cycle can happen again on this or another world.

When there are great depths of suffering, which is sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair by beings, a fully awakened being comes forth bringing the light of the 4 Noble Truths into the world again. You

and I are very lucky to have access to the material of such a fully awakened being, a master teacher like Buddha Gotama.

Q: What does the end of a dispensation look like?

A: Try to picture what is meant by “the other end of a dispensation.”Imagine! **ALL** information has completely vanished . All monks and nuns of any tradition have disappeared or are wearing only tiny fragments of their robes as tokens of some long past teaching. No one has any idea about what the teaching means anymore. Only disconnected rituals may remain. It is then and only then that it is the end of this dispensation.

Q: So this time, right now is rare?

A: This treasure of the Dhamma is here right now for us to research, practice, make honest efforts to preserve and teach you. It is a Priceless gift! It is a great blessing for us all to cherish and yes, it is rare. This is why our lives as human beings are so special. As human beings we can learn the Dhamma and we can get free from Samsara, the wheel of suffering, and help others to do the same.

Q: What is the wheel of Samsara?

A: I promise we will hit upon this later on in this training more fully. Right now it’s time to take our first look at the 4 noble Truths.

Q: What actually were these Noble Truths that were unearthed by the Buddha?

A: The truths are much more than you would suspect. These 4 Noble Truths are very useful tools and this is not usually pointed out. It’s as if we have forgotten about that. These Truths have various uses. They can be used to

- 1) sum up the entire teaching in a nutshell;
- 2) give us a precise method for investigation into this teaching;
- 3) personally investigate countless things that happen in our daily lives;
- 4) and they give us a proven teaching method to copy when we begin to teach the Dhamma to others.

Q: What do you mean?

A: Each presentation gives us different depths of meaning and uses. Most times we hear these Noble Truths attempting to summarize the entire teaching.

In the beginning, here is how these truths were stated.

- 1) There is suffering;
- 2) There is a cause of suffering;
- 3) There is a Cessation of Suffering;
- 4) There is a Path to the Cessation of suffering.

This is a very pat simple summary of Buddhist teaching and **IF** they are **not semantically changed** then it’s pretty accurate, easy to understand and memorize.

From here people dive into more complex explanations.

In this first way these Truths were used to

1) summarize the teaching.

As you practice the meditation you are learning to see for yourself what suffering actually is in the deeper sense. On the surface this way, we see that this is a pattern of questioning.

A very practical traditional way of looking at the 4 Noble truths, which you can usually remember, is to consider them like a visit to the doctor.

The patient goes to the doctor because he is sick and suffering. To identify the sickness, the doctor asks him what his symptoms are. (*There is suffering*) Then the doctor examines the patient to discover the cause of the suffering. He must understand this cause before he can treat it. (*There is a cause of suffering.*) This doctor has studied anatomy and therefore he knows what a healthy person should look like. (*There is a cessation of suffering.*) Finally the doctor announces what is the cause of this suffering is and he advises the patient to follow a path back to good health. (*There is a path to the cessation of suffering.*)

If the patient takes good care of himself, if he eats well, gets exercise, gets proper rest, and takes his medicine, he will get pretty healthy, right? This is the same with the teaching of the Lord Buddha. Good development, (**bhavana**) depends on how well you follow the instructions. How well does the practice help you to carry through your development of **samatha** (serenity) and **vipassana** (insights).

Not everybody always gets entirely healthy. But everyone can experience levels of good health. Not every body will reach the level of nibbana. But every student can experience degrees of relief along the way through gaining more clear understanding. This, in turn, brings more happiness into their lives and helps their life immensely.

Q: So what did the Buddha do with these truths in regards to investigating suffering?

A: He showed us how to use the truths

2) set up a pattern of investigation

Q: How?

A: Like this.

First Noble Truth: We must learn about and fully understand the true nature of suffering, what it feels like; what signals come up as it begins to happen. We train to notice the changes in our meditation when suffering is present. What are the symptoms of this suffering?

Second Noble Truth: The Buddha examined very closely, and so must we, what the cause of suffering actually is at the deepest, smallest level. He did not trivialize this either. He spent a long time examining how it arises and how it passes away and what causes the symptoms that arise. This way he could see when the cause was or was not there. Only then was he able to see how purification of mind actually takes place during meditation practice.

Third Noble Truth: The Buddha examined how cessation of suffering exists. What does the cessation of suffering feel like? Surely it is beneficial for the common man to learn how to reduce the level of his suffering in daily life even though he may not fully reach nibbana. This is true. Therefore, thousands listened to The Buddha's teaching and learned to use his basic practice of Right Effort, which the 6R's practice re-amplifies, to reduce suffering and become happier and more grounded in lay life.

Fourth noble Truth: The Buddha designed a direct path showing how to see clearly the universal laws and understand how everything works. He taught how to reach the various levels of cessation of suffering. By revealing the way to see clearly the impersonal process of dependent arising, he re-emphasized the universal law of impermanence. The Buddha demonstrated how impermanence was tied in with suffering directly, and then he lifted the veil of **delusion**, which is **the idea of taking everything personally**. He showed us how we could see for ourselves the connection of these pieces by giving us his practice to repeat.

Once these two principles were practiced and understood through a system of drills, a student discovers there is an alternative impersonal perspective that will naturally embrace a more positive compassionate way of life. This impersonal perspective is a lighter and happier place to be in life. The Buddha then trained other people to free themselves from suffering. How far they got with this practice during their lifetime was entirely up to them.

The 4 Noble Truths were used as

3) find peaceful solutions for daily life difficulties:

If we take the investigative steps and go a little deeper, the texts reveal to us a third way the 4 noble Truths can be used as a systematic investigation of anything in life you have to deal with. Suppose there was a situation of anger between two people. What is this you might say? What is the cause of this? What is the most elegant solution to this? How can I carry out this solution?

These Truths give us the perfect map of how to investigate any part of the meditation and contemplation within the teaching. If you use them correctly, the Truths can take you deeply enough to uncover the impersonal process of dependent origination clearly. You can learn to do this in the same way the Buddha did. This way is described perfectly for us in the Samyutta Nikaya in the Book of Causation. You can approach many Buddhist practices and drills successfully by using the 4 noble Truths as the map for your investigation.

The 4 Noble Truths were used as

4) use as a proven method for teaching Dhamma.

The fourth way the 4 noble Truths are used is a tested method for teaching the Dhamma. You will see and hear many ways people think of reinventing how to teach the Dhamma today. But the Buddha used the 4 noble Truths to create an outline for all of his discourses (suttas), his Dhamma talks, his actual training program. It didn't matter what part he was teaching about. Of course he taught meditation. But he also gave discourses on the aspects of how a good and successful government should be run, how to solve

conflicts between two groups, how to study, work and plan your home life successfully. All of these situations use the same 4 steps.

Each discourse was built around 3 to 4 Noble Truths because they make things easier to remember and help put solutions into practice, step by step. Once these 4 Noble Truths are brought back into their simplest form, without semantically changing them, people will understand them again and there is no question that they will be used and found to be substantially valuable in today's world.

So, this was a little bit about the word **Bhavana** meaning **development** and about **the 4 noble truths** and their original use. We will meet them in further depth as we go on examining the practice. I promise.

Q; How did Buddhism affect the world in the time of the Buddha?

A: The outcome of Buddhist practice shifted the attitudes of entire societies.

Eventually it affected economic systems. Geographically, it shifted the demographics of wealth, changed justice systems, augmented marketplaces, and shifted the strategies of armies. As the teaching spread over vast kingdoms it even changed some forms of governments and brought forth early human rights for women and members of the lower levels in a caste society.

Eventually, Buddhism resulted in a more evenly grounded people who, because of their understanding of how things work, their lack of fear, and their shift in perspective, could get through nearly anything that happened structurally, economically, ecologically, or governmentally. In spite of tyrannies or dictatorships in that part of the world, people somehow found and continued to find the strength to lift up each other and to share during some very devastating situations. In this way the 4 noble Truths are a summary of the teachings.

Q: So what's up next?

A: The next installment will go begin to get more into the meditation explanation. In the meantime "Q" please smile.

Q: OK. I will try.

A: "Q". Keep it light! Go sit! Forgive yourself if you are not perfect. Forgive everything. "Smile", while you continue practicing the 6 R's

Metta and smiles,
Rev. Sister Khema

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