

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!

April 30, 2010
 Annapolis, MO

TRAINING: FS-06- What is Meditation and What is Mindfulness?

I want you to think about something for a moment. What is Buddhist Meditation really for? We are going to begin to talk about Meditation and Mindfulness and their relationship to each other.

Do you ever wonder what is supposed to happen as a result of practicing meditation? It's a perfectly reasonable question, isn't it? I mean why should a person spend time practicing meditation unless it results in something useful for daily life? You might ask, will I see and understand something I don't normally learn about that will change my life?

During training, it's important that you ask these questions and receive understandable answers in balance with the Meditation development.

In the time of Buddha Gotama, meditation brought about a period of more peaceful living for millions of people. HOW did this happen?

Their attitude in life became lighter and clearer than others who did not practice in this way. What set them free was waking up to universal laws that had always been there and understanding how to use them. They uncovered really useful tools for living. They learned the true nature of everything and when old confusion fell away many fears in life disappeared. When you see the truth of life as it actually is, living it becomes easier.

Buddhist Meditation originally was the practice of observing the movements of mind's attention in order to see clearly the true nature of how things actually work and gain understanding of the 4 noble Truths and the impersonal process of Dependent Origination.

Q: Can you say this in a shorter form for me?

A: I think we can say Buddhist Meditation is Observing the movements of mind's attention in order to see and understand HOW things work and the true nature of everything.
 Is that better?

Q: Yes. What is the difference between seeing and understanding something?

A: You can see something while carefully observing it but not understand how it relates to the meditation practice or life.

It's like this. If I never saw a green onion, therefore I do not have proper information about what to look for when I go to a garden to dig for one. If I don't know what green onions look like, how can I bring them home to you? Someone has to show me a green onion.

In meditation, if the meditator is not taught the proper ingredients for the meditation to work, then we just keep sitting blindly. This is not what the Buddha did. He had a goal. He had a plan and a special kind of investigation practice to reach the goal. There is information in the suttas that can help us reach this goal. If we answer some questions it may make it easier when we begin to meditate.

What should be let go of?

What is important to pay attention to?

Why is this important?

What are we trying to discover?

What are we trying to develop?

How does Mindfulness help?

Q: What should be let go of?

A: Any arising formation that pulls mind's attention away from the object of meditation.

Arising thought formations that pull mind's attention away from the object of meditation should be seen as distractions to the practice. They are unwholesome because these formations are usually taken to be a part of your personal self. That is, this is "ME", this is "MINE", or this is "MYSELF". We are going to learn how to **RECOGNIZE** these unwholesome hindrances as they are arising and how to let go of them.

This means an arising thought, feeling, color, a formation of any kind, even sounds. All of these should be released the moment they are detected without thinking investigation. Just let them alone without mind's attention on them. Allow them to pass away as they will. After releasing and relaxing any hold on these distractions, you must put something into their place or they will arise again. This is because the universe abhors a vacuum!

After **RELEASING** Mind's attention on the unwholesome interruption, the meditator smoothly **RELAXES** all tension or tightness caused by that distraction. Then, in another flowing motion, the meditator **RE-SMILES** to lighten up mind and sharpen awareness as they **RETURN** to the object of meditation to continue on with this observation training.

The meditator **REPEATS** this cycle any time Mind's attention is pulled away.

RECOGNIZE, RELEASE-RELAX, RE-SMILE-RETURN, REPEAT

Q: What should be paid attention to during the meditation?

A: How is everything happening!

The goal of the meditation is to observe **HOW** formations arise, notice the nature of how everything works when they are there, and notice **HOW** they always pass away. The meditator observes what makes a formation get stronger and stay longer and, conversely, what allows arising thoughts or feelings to pass away. The meditator's main concern is to completely understand the true nature of **HOW** human beings experience their entire existence through the sense doors and arising formations.

As a being we experience life through six sense doors (bases). There are the 5 external bases which are the Eyes, Ears, Nose, Tongue, and the Body. Through these doors we make external contact with sense objects. The eyes see sights; the ears hear sounds; the nose smells odors; the tongue tastes flavors and the

body feels tangibles (or touch). The sixth internal sense door is MIND which experiences mind-objects (thoughts) that impersonally arise.

CONSCIOUSNESS cognizes and PERCEPTION perceives these respective sights, sounds, odors, tastes, tangibles and thought formations as they arise and pass away.

During a meditation session, our object of meditation is used as a re-centering point while we keep our meditation practice going. Our object of meditation is sending out the Metta (loving kindness) to a spiritual friend, following the Breath, or, practicing the Forgiveness meditation to open our heart for deeper work.

It doesn't matter what the object is as long as the meditator practices using only one of these objects. This is so mind does not get confused during training. Staying with one kind of meditation while initially in training is very important.

The purpose of the object is that it acts as a re-centering point for whenever something arises that pulls mind's attention away. It's there for you to smile and come back to so you can keep the meditation going and keep the cycle going.

The meditator's concern should be, whenever something arises that pulls mind's attention away from the object of meditation, you run the cycle. When you do these steps you begin to see HOW precisely everything happens.

That is the question. HOW does this work? Our job is to learn how to observe this process as non-judgmentally as possible. Stop watching and just watch. During this observation, certain things will become obvious. These things that we uncover are called "insights".

As we practice Right Effort/ Right Striving, the meditator realizes that when they RELEASE/RELAX just as they are RESMILING/RETURNING there is a blank spot! Nothing is happening in this spot. There are no thoughts arising there. This point has been called CLEAR MIND, STILL POINT or PURE MIND. Other traditions call this **emptiness**.

Q: What is so important about this point?

A: Learning to see this point actually proves to the meditator that a place with no tension can exist!

This point is an unusual state of mind. It has no craving in it, no clinging, no concepts or opinions in it at all. There is no tension, no tightness, no stress, no movement. This is usually a new experience for people. This is experiencing pure mind.

When you notice this spot, actually, you are witnessing a tiny nibbana-like state. This is not the larger Super-mundane nibbana. It is a very brief glimpse of the lesser, short-lived version called the 'mundane nibbana'. This state can last for a split second, a few moments, or longer before fading away. Then it passes away.

Just so you understand the word nibbana, let's take a look at how this word is put together. "Ni" in the Pali language means 'no or lack of' and 'bana' means 'heat or fire'! It is craving that is the cause of this heat or fire. Nibbana is the absence of craving or fire.

NOTHING is happening in this still point. This tiny spot allows you to witness Cessation of CRAVING. That's PURE MIND.

Q: When we practice what are we trying to discover?

A: That there is an underlying impersonal process the Buddha called Dependent Origination going on all the time.

What the meditator is trying to develop is a **non-judgmental observation power** so they can see very clearly HOW things work. Without any pre-shaped opinions or concepts the meditator can begin to examine the Four Noble Truths more closely to see how the impersonal process of Dependent Origination operates. When you watch this, you gradually discover that your entire experience in this existence is impersonal! You are glimpsing into what is called the Ultimate Reality.

You are practicing to see very quickly and clearly ONLY what is essential and not move beyond it. This is how we come to understand how everything is essentially working. We let go of unessential ideas, assumptions and opinions. This new knowledge we achieve is backed up our own **experiential** path that the Buddha taught.

Knowledge and Vision literally means **Knowing by Seeing**. We are taught not to believe anything we cannot see for ourselves.

In this reality the meditator learns how to examine each link that they can observe within the impersonal process of Dependent Origination within the framework of individual life events. To begin with we can learn to observe about 7 of the existing 12 linking steps of cognition.

Those 7 links are 1) **CONTACT**, 2) **FEELING**, 3) **CRAVING**, 4) **CLINGING**, 5) **HABITUAL TENDENCY to re-act**, 6) **BIRTH of actions**, and 7) **AGING and DEATH, SORROW, LAMENTATION, PAIN, GRIEF and DESPAIR**.

All suffering is caused by ignorance of this process which is inclusive of the Four noble Truths. Normally, people are in ignorance of this process.

The meditator uncovers the fact that no one is making life happen. There is no I, ME, MY, or MINE making formations arise. No one fabricates them! No one is running this process. The formations we experience impersonally arise and pass away.

Take a look here. When our EYES are open, I see a sight! When the EARS meet sound, then we hear sound! When the NOSE hits an odor, then we smell! When the TONGUE has flavors of hot sauce meet it, then there is a taste! When the BODY feels a tangible, I feel a touch. As a being, these five external sense doors operate in this way. there is no personal control of their operation. "I" do not MAKE them operate! They simply operate if they are in working order.

Internally MIND is a doorway to our experience. It operates in the same impersonal way. You can prove this for yourself. While driving home, you do not stop driving and decide to make a thought arise in your mind about remembering to buy the milk, do you? The thought impersonally arises.

This is the first part of what meditation is about. There is more. Gradually we take all of the sense doors and go step by step into HOW they operate. By experientially learning about these doors, testing them

out, seeing how they operate, the meditator begins to realize that it's true. There **is** an impersonal process going on here.

Q: What are we trying to develop?

A: We are trying to retrain Mind into more wholesome habitual tendencies by shifting our perspective.

The meditator is attempting to retrain Mind to give up very personal old unwholesome habitual tendencies that cause arising tension and tightness in MIND and in BODY. These tensions come from the grasping tendencies involved with **Greed, Hatred, and Delusion. These things are called the Three poisons leading to suffering.**

Delusion is where we mistake everything to be very personal and therefore, we believe that our entire experience is about us. This is why it feels like everything is happening to us instead of from us. This feels very heavy sometimes. It is why we begin to feel helpless.

Instead of this perspective, the meditator attempts to impersonally train mind into a new, more open and wholesome tendency of RELEASING and RELAXING all tension and tightness by realizing and using the impersonal perspective towards everything.

This moves us naturally in the direction of developing Generosity, Good Moral Living, Loving Kindness/Compassion, Altruistic Joy, and eventually firm Equanimity. During this development, the meditator is discovering a more peaceful co-existence with everyone and everything around him.

Daily interactions begin to change by uncovering new space for alternative solutions to arise. We begin to slow down some actions. You are gaining room to think and to solve situations now. People begin to respond to each other instead of reacting.

Q: How does Mindfulness fit in here?

A: Mindfulness means REMEMBERING to keep this observation practice called Right Effort/Striving going all the time!

When the meditator keeps the 6R's going, they are fulfilling Right Effort which is an important part of the 8-Fold Path. They naturally begin to examine life through a more impersonal perspective, figure out how much easier this is and let suffering go. Difficult upsets that once caused big trouble begin to pass away as we see more clearly what they are. Responses to interactions in life begin to happen in more wholesome ways.

This is truly how this Buddhist practice works. It can work today just like it did in the Buddha's time. it can shift many kinds of suffering into peaceful ways of co-existence.

ASSIGNMENT:

1. Please go to www.dhammasukha.org and listen to the Instructions for the METTA meditation during this training. It helps us if everyone does the same meditation during training. The **instructions for practicing METTA and WALKING meditations are found at <http://dhammasukha.org/Study/study.htm>**
2. While learning this meditation, please commit to sitting for a **minimum 1/2 hour each time**. No less. Read over the training information at the website and try to follow the instructions exactly.

3. **An EXERCISE:**

Treat yourself by taking a little walk outside to more closely notice your sense doors and how they are operating. Become more aware of how you see, hear, smell, taste, touch and how thoughts just come up on their own. While doing this, don't get serious! Keep mind light and enjoy a fun observation time. Smile as much as you can through everything you are doing during daily life! Lightening up is extremely important with the meditation working. I know this may be different for you if you practiced any other way before. But please try to do this so you can experience how different it feels when tension begins to arise in a space where there was very little before. This is a practice for body and mind.

Much metta and smiles to you all.

Rev. Sister Khema

Next installment: **Why practice Meditation?**

The Gift of Dhamma is Priceless !

Brought to you by

United International Buddha Dhamma Society (UIBDS)

Dhamma Sukha Meditation Center (DSMC), 8218 County Road 204, Annapolis, Missouri 63620

www.dhammasukha.org

W=2,317/2,392