

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

July 8,2010
 Annapolis, MO

TRAINING→ FS-08- What is TWIM?

Dhamma Greetings.

A question has been asked. What is TWIM and how is it different?

Q: Can you answer this?

A: I can.

TWIM is an abbreviation for Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation. It is a meditation approach taken directly out of the early Buddhist Pali texts. It specifically yokes together serenity (*samatha*) and Insight (*vipassana*) forming one practice. This approach differs from others because it seems to result in faster and easier understanding of the Dhamma, it is immediately and progressively effective in daily life, and invites further inspection by training the student how to follow the Buddha’s personal steps for deeper investigation into how suffering work and what the solution is.

During a practice session, when mind’s attention has moved away from the object of meditation, shifting interest towards an arising hindrance, one releases that hindrance, and then, immediately relaxes any remaining tension or tightness in mind or body before moving back to the object of meditation and continuing on. To distinctly relax any leftover tension or tightness after you have already released what arose is an additional step which allows us to experience pure mind leading to a deepest levels of observation.

Although most meditative approaches reach gradual levels of calm, this practice appears to move down into the level of tranquility more easily and it systematically sharpens the student’ observation skills. This leads onward to very clear insights.

Q: Isn’t all calm and stillness the same?

A: No. Tranquility has many graduated levels a meditator can pass through.

It’s like this. In the outside world there is a lot of “vibration”. When you first meditate you experience ‘*stillness*’, which is simply the absence of that high energy vibration. As you continue, you experience ‘*calmness/relief*’ (*pamojja*). Then you come upon a light ‘*joy*’ (*piti*). As this joy fades away, a deeper calm called ‘*tranquility*’ (*passadhi*) arises. As this **too** fades away, ‘*happiness*’ (*sukha*) remains which is a very warm, quiet contentment. As curiosity and interest grows, the practice moves into gradual levels of ‘*equanimity*’ (*upekkha*) which also have their own development culminating at the point of liberation of mind equivalent to ‘*imperturbability*’ (*a mind that cannot be disturbed*). These will be discussed later on.

Basically, what TWIM has done is to re-introduce the everyday practice of Right Effort pointing out an existing step in the instructions for the Buddhist meditation found in the texts which, for some time now,

has been left out. In the past, this step was often blended in with other parts of the instructions. It was no longer distinct. The result was different.

For me, what happened reminds me of my grandmother's angel cake recipe?

Q: How on earth does this resemble a cake?

A: Her cake recipe called for 11 eggs. The blending called for separating the eggs into whites and yolks. You were instructed to whip the cold egg-whites until they were stiff and then blend in the other ingredients gently and put it into a pan and bake it. The cake came out nearly 12 inches high and very light and fluffy!.

But, if you took those same 11 eggs and threw them into a bowl along with all the ingredients together, and whipped it up and put it into the oven, this would not come out the same. Although it contained the same ingredients, the cake would not be light and fluffy, it would only have similar sweetness, and be 2 inches high.

Q: Ah. I see what you mean. Not the same.

A: Right.

On the one hand it can take a long time to connect the teachings of the Buddha together and practice meditation in a temple. On the other hand, this approach trains the meditator how to observe and understand clearly the Four Noble Truths, the Impersonal Process of Dependent Origination and the Three Characteristics of Existence in a way that is immediately usable in daily life.

Q: Is anything else different?

A: This teaching approach applies many perfected exercises and drills that the Buddha Himself used during his 45 years of teaching. You are also introduced to refined versions of progress charts, analogies and advice the Buddha gave while teaching meditation. Also there are guides who are in training who are challenged to bring out how the Buddha taught by using his words directly from the texts. After all, the Buddha seems to have established a proven method in the beginning. It is interesting to look into what precisely this was at its earliest point in development.

You remember I spoke earlier to you about how the Four Noble Truths can be used?

Q: Yes, I do.

You said that they could actually be 1) used to summarize the teaching; 2) used as a 4-step pattern of investigation; 3) helpful in solving challenges in daily life and; 4) used as a proven teaching method for the Buddha Dhamma.

A: Excellent job "Q"! I'm impressed you remembered that!

Q: How does TWIM use the Four Noble Truths?

A: TWIM trains you how to use all four aspects of these Noble Truths.

Q: How?

A: The Four Noble Truths are:

- 1) *There is suffering*; TWIM RECOGNIZES the nature of suffering.
- 2) *There is a cause of suffering*; TWIM reveals Craving and Clinging very nicely as the cause of suffering and defines them so you can remember them.
- 3) *There is a cessation of suffering*; TWIM demonstrates the state of cessation by teaching the student how to observe relief from craving as it occurs during the practice cycle.

4) *There is a path to the cessation of suffering*; TWIM demonstrates each fold of the 8-Fold Path by showing 4 variations of it's use.

Q: How do these Noble Truths help the meditator progress?

A: Because TWIM practice follows them very closely to help reveal insights.

First the student is taught the nature of suffering at the gross level.

Second, they are taught how to see the suffering when it is present AND to notice the nature of it's cause as it is arising.

It's important to remember that a person cannot let go of something if they do not know what it is!

Therefore, we **must** intimately understand CRAVING and CLINGING.

Suffering must be seen and understood beginning with a gross level definition and proceeding deeper from there.

On the gross level, Suffering is best defined as "*un-satisfactoriness of how things are*". A being usually wants to keep things nice if they are nice. We may want to MAKE them stop or change if they are not nice.

Q: Yeah. I can see how that is.

A: To go just a little bit deeper, what do you think would be a principle 'symptom' of this un-satisfactoriness?

Q: I think there must be tension and tightness in mind and body.

A: That's right. Tension and tightness are symptoms of Suffering and stress is an outcropping of this. Today, in modern medicine, 'stress' is being identified as a chief cause for mental and physical dis-ease today.

Q: I heard that too. It might help if we had a way to notice these symptoms as they are happening. Then maybe we could do something about it.

A: Right. This is what the Buddha worked on. The Buddha did not ONLY explain about the complete end of suffering at death.

There was more. If a person received proper training and developed understanding He was also interested in all the gradual levels of relief a person could experience along the way of life. Gaining a better understanding of what is happening, step by step, helps people to reach the complete cessation of suffering. The Buddha discovered how teaching people the truth about what is really going on leads them to experiencing gradual levels of relief along the way.

Q: This sounds very hopeful.

A: Yes. There are many levels of relief a person can achieve through practice that turn out to be valuable in life.

Let's see how far we are right now "Q". I have presented you with how this practice is a little different. I gave you a brief picture of SUFFERING. **That is the First Noble Truth.**

Q: What's next?

A: What happens next is part of a process. Because it is an impersonal process WE do not control this.

When CONTACT happens, FEELING arises. With PAINFUL-FEELING as condition, CRAVING arises. If you look closely at CRAVING, you will notice that whenever a painful feeling arises, mind jerks a little into a personal not liking position. This link is actually not a personal link. Rather this is an automatic reaction to a painful feeling. This automatic reaction brings about a shift in perspective and changes the inclination of our mind.

As this gets revved up, it is true that personality enters in at this point. Desire or aversion causes arising tension and with it fear, which, in turn, generates more energy to turn the wheel of suffering. This is where the energy begins. Each time craving occurs, it triggers the arising of tension and tightness to spring forward into CLINGING which has a lot personal opinion in it.

Q: This is true when you say there is a tiny shift in tension when CRAVING begins and then a growing tension as CLINGING begins to happen. I can feel it.

A: Right. So, it stands to reason that personal concepts and opinions, like, “I like it because blah, blah, blah, and so forth” determine the degree of suffering a person goes through.

This is the **cause** of the birth of the tension that leads into suffering and this is **the Second Noble Truth**.

Q: So far we have suffering which is un-satisfactoriness showing itself by arising tension and tightness which increases or decreases depending on our personal opinions and involvement about this attachment or aversion. This is the heavy CLINGING?

A: That’s right. We will get into the deeper examination of these “LINKS” in this impersonal process as we continue on with training.

Q: Interesting. What about the Third Noble Truth?

A: Next we look at what life would be like if this tension and tightness were not involved.

How would it be if life just flowed along and there was no attempt to control it, no struggling? Without over concern and emotions, there would be space for creative solutions and responses to happen. There would be space for PEACE to happen. This is a description of the ideal cessation of suffering. **This is the Third Noble Truth.**

Q: OK. There would not be so much tension and tightness in mind and body anymore if things were not taken so personally and that would be better for the mental and physical health of the being?

A: Right. Cessation represents a state of living without suffering present anymore. This would be like someone not trying to control things but instead just allowing life to flow moment-by-moment. This would be leaving behind old opinions or habits from the past. In short, seeing just how something really is and then not re-acting anymore. Instead we could respond.

Q: It’s an interesting idea.

A: I thought so too and I wondered if that was really possible today in this fast moving world?

The Buddha figured out how a person could experience this kind of cessation, even if only for a few moments at first, so they could confirm for themselves that it was a real state. Then he managed to expand this state for longer periods of time and gained deeper understanding.

The result of all this was that he experienced a light, content, comfortable form of happiness without tension in it even while doing his daily routine living. This happened because he figured out a way to observe and study these states.

Q: TWIM ?

A: Exactly.

T.W.I.M.. The very name signals it's intention for it's outcome. **Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation. TWIM.**

“Tranquil” (**passadhi**) indicates the tranquilizing step of the 6R's practice cycle. An express degree of serenity is developed so you can fully attain “knowledge and vision” or “know by seeing” how things actually are”.

“Wisdom” (**pan-na**) indicates the person will realize how everything is working by understanding and then seeing how it happens, step-by-step, through an impersonal process the Buddha later called Dependent Origination. The person learns as directed in the texts, ‘from the voice of another who has seen and understands’. Then they have the direct experience of what can be done to relieve the suffering.

After practicing for a time, fears and anxiety melt away because the person knows what will happen next and what to do about it! Confidence grows because, there will be few surprises in the future.

“Insight” (**vipassana**) means that the meditator will attain clear understanding of universal laws that affect their perspective of life. Without these insights people struggle blindly and endlessly because they do not know what will happen next. Therefore they struggle to control everything when this is not necessary. Without understanding, they are caught in an unclear dream state.

“Meditation” (**bhavana**) is the vehicle used for mental development which allows a person to see for themselves what's going on. Buddhist Meditation teaches a person to use the Four Noble Truths for investigation to directly experience how the Impersonal Process of Dependent Origination affects their perception of life.

Armed with new information, life has no more secrets and it becomes easier for a person to smile and lovingly accept things just as they are.

Q: This sounds a little hard.

A: The Buddha's teaching was always ‘easy to understand and immediately effective. But, it isn't necessarily simple to carry it out and keep it going all the time when you first begin.

Q: Why is it so hard to keep it going?

A: Because people have old habits and a strong desire to personally control everything. Mind is no exception to this rule. Old tendencies cause reactions and so we find ourselves automatically ready for anger instead of responding to challenging interactions in life. This often leads us to war instead of peace.

I was 50 yrs. old when I began this practice and it took me some time to get it going with some understanding of how it could be used in life.

I would start out meditating on an object of meditation, like sending out METTA, and a thought would float up and pull mind's attention away.

Q: What did you do?

A: All was not lost because I could TWIM! <grin>

I now understood the importance of keeping the Right Effort going and what is needed to stay more focused. I practice the 6Rs to fulfill the 4 steps in Right Effort that were described by the Buddha.

- I **RECOGNIZE** how mind's attention gets pulled off my object of meditation (or whatever task I am focused on doing);
- Then I **RELEASE** the thought as being unimportant, just let it go and **RELAX** any remaining tension or tightness.
- Then I **RE-SMILE and RETURN attention over** to the object of meditation (or in life, whatever I am doing when this happened) and then I continue sending the Loving Kindness to my spiritual friend (or into whatever I am doing....)
- Finally, I **REPEAT** this cycle as I need to and continue to purify mind through this retraining process.

Q: Is this part of why TWIM is a different kind of practice?

A: Yes. TWIM does not get involved with arising phenomena and intentionally move mind's attention away from the meditation to examine it.

If it is ever pulled away, it runs the 6R's cycle and keeps going with the meditation. Also, TWIM can be taken into life VERY easily and kept going for a real life-changing experience.

There is no separation of Life and Meditation here. Meditation is Life!

You will notice how mind's attention moves on it's own. As this happens, you do not stop meditating to move the attention over to what is arising. Arising phenomena have no important information for us.

In this way a steady flow of meditation continues all the time instead of breaking off. What is important to see is **HOW does arising phenomena happens!**

Therefore, it's perfectly OK to just let arising thoughts or feelings be there and allow them to fade away on their own as they occur.

Q: But isn't it important to understand Impermanence (anicca)?

A: Certainly. **Impermanence (anicca) is the arising and passing away of all sense door phenomena.** In this practice, every time we run the 6Rs cycle, we witness impermanence. Each cycle sharpens our observation practice to eventually see how this happens.

We already have an idea of what **suffering (dukkha)** is. Continuing the practice, we will gain a full understanding of **the impersonal nature of everything (anatta)**. Each 6Rs cycle demonstrates that the impersonal harmonious perspective has less tension in it and how this can change our whole experience in life.

The point is that we don't have to step outside of the flow of the meditation by moving attention away to any arising phenomena and get involved with it. We can keep the flow of meditation going and just let things be while noticing how everything works in the same way each time it arises. After we notice something happening thousands of times in the exact same way, we kind of **KNOW** it always happens this way.

The running of the 6R's cycle includes an experiential examination of the Four Noble Truths, the Impersonal Process of Dependent Origination AND Three Characteristics of Existence. All of these become perfectly clear to us if we keep up our curiosity, energy and interest up as we watch..

Q: I am beginning to see the value of this practice now.

A: Also, the pattern of Right Effort which we call Harmonious Practice is completed within this 6R's cycle.

This approach to meditation helps the student realize how Dependent Origination is operating and how it can become useful in daily life.

Slowly the student is introduced to this impersonal process of cognition and all of the important pieces/links of it. There is no shortage of insights through using this practice. All of this is accomplished by sharpening your skill of non-judgmental, pure observation during the meditation. This skill turns out later to be very useful in daily life.

Q: Well it seems to be quite a good idea to try it. Thank you for answering these two questions. What is going on next time we meet?

A: We will go a little more deeply into what the Being is made up of and HOW the 5 aggregates interplay so he can experience existence in this life. We will walk through some of the links of cognition as they happen.

Metta and smiles.
Rev. Sister Khema

NEXT: 2010-FS-09 = "Five Aggregates, Six sense doors, Mind- Body operations"

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WdCt 3.088 / 3159