

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!

Aug 16, 2010, Dhamma Sukha Meditation Center, Annapolis, MO

Training→ 2010-FS-12 “What is CRAVING?”

A: I think I told you that one of the things Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation (T.W.I.M.) training does is it tries to develop easier definitions for you to remember to help guide your meditation.

When you get to the cognitive link of CRAVING, this is an important link to remember.

The definition for CRAVING (*tanha*) goes like this.

“CRAVING always manifests as tension and tightness arising in Mind and in Body.”

Craving gives us the cue to LET GO and RELAX!

The student trains to recognize how their body and mind slightly change as CONTACT and FEELING arise. Something happens. As we train, mind calms down. It stops jumping around so much. Gradually, closer observation reveals a change in tension and tightness at the earliest possible moment and then the student proceeds to use the RELEASE and RELAX steps of the 6R’s cycle.

A: Remember the 6R’s?

Q: Yes. I try to keep them going now.

A: Good “Q”.

Ever how the meditation practice is a MIND yoga that is all about noticing HOW Mind’s attention moves from one object to another? This is very important to see. What happens first? What happens second? That is what holds the secret of heavy suffering.

As Mind’s attention moves, this gives the student a cue to Release and Relax first before flowing through all of the 6Rs.

Let’s go over the 6R’s one more time.

Q: OK.

A: How do they run?

Q: RECOGNIZE how mind’s attention moves off the object of meditation. RELEASE whatever is arising and just let it be there, and then RELAX any leftover tension in mind or body.

A: Right. DO this is one flowing motion.

Q: Then RE-SMILE to lighten up mind and sharpen awareness as you gently RETURN mind's attention back to the object of meditation and keep wholesome meditation going.

A: Right. REPEAT the cycle as needed.

Q: Got it!

A: SO the entire cycle should run through like rolling your Rs. <Grin>

The entire cycle runs like this.

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

This practice is the same as if you were keeping **Right Effort** going all the time; a **Harmonious Practice**.

Q: So what happens with the CRAVING?

A: CRAVING is like a tiny jerk as energy first kicks in and tension and tightness arise in the body and mind.

This tension and tightness is the hallmark of what needs to be let go of. You are attempting to investigate a state of no tension or tightness, remember?

In order to understand the importance of letting go here, we first have to understand what is going on. To do this, we have to stop and look at the BRAIN. The presence or absence of tension in the brain can be seen with equipment that monitors the brain.

Q: Time for Anatomy now?

A: Yes, just a bit.

Looking at the Brain, there are two lobes. The two lobes are surrounded by a thin membrane called the Meninges. As mind's attention is disturbed tension arises. The meninges tightens if the inner structure pressure arises and swells. This is a tightening you can be trained to notice. A person will indicate that this is happening by tightening their facial structure. You can see it.

As we perform the relax step to release the tension and tightness, the membrane loosens and eventually, the student can sense the slight separation between these lobes. One will notice this as it is occurring. When we take mind's attention back to the meditation object while in this relaxed state, mind will drop down a little deeper each time to do allow a deeper investigation.

On the night of His enlightenment perhaps this is what changed within the Buddha's practice. He was finally able to experience "aware jhana" states. This was different from his earlier experience in "absorption jhana states". This explains how the Buddha entered into the deeper states described in the texts with full awareness.

This 'aware jhana' allowed him to realize more information about each of these levels of understanding. Later he taught people how they could be useful in daily life to help reduce suffering. How useful they become for each person is determined by the degree that person sticks to the practice while following the meditation instructions.

Q: Can you tell me more about CRAVING?

A: Yes. CRAVING is the first point on the line of human cognition where personality enters in and the star of the show becomes “I”.

Our usual way of describing it is to say that it is the “I” like it or “I” don’t like it mind first obviously appearing. Immediately following this is the link of CLINGING which then proceeds to explain **WHY I LIKE IT** or **WHY I DON’T LIKE IT**.

Q: How?

A: Each time you run a story in your mind about all the ideas, concepts, opinions, assumptions, and imagination about WHY you like or dislike something, the tension and tightness increases more and more.

This moves us further along the line of cognition from FEELING into the emotional states. Emotional states are re-actions.

Q: Is this where my “Self” comes in?

A: Yes “Q”. THIS is where YOU come in! <grin>

This is where the EGO first arises. “I”, “MY”, “MINE” . the equivalent of ‘taking things very personally’ jumps in the way of seeing clearly what is actually going on.

This is where we mistakenly take the unessential as being the essential in a situation instead of only seeing the essential as the essential.

Q: Is this why CRAVING is at the root of suffering?

A: Yes.

If we can step back and observe what is happening, seeing it as it really is, we give ourselves the space to decide how to RESPOND to a situation correctly. But if we are taking the situation personally, we are likely to just RE-ACT to it based on the fact it feels very re-stimulating just like something else that once happened to us in the past.

Q: Sounds like this could be a problem for people in relationships and interactions in life.

A: Quite so.

But most people remain ignorant of how all this works. They are never informed about how this operates. Therefore, they cannot see how letting go, relaxing, and impersonally observing what is going on could help them to understand what’s really happening. This is what Ignorance is about. The root word here is IGNORE. What is being ignored? This impersonal process is being unconsciously ignored. No one ever told us about it!

You see, Ignorance means unintentionally ignoring and not understanding how the Four Noble Truths work and this impersonal process we are discussing which is how human cognition operates. Also, most people haven’t had the opportunity to have the Three Characteristics of Existence pointed out to them.

Q: What were the Three Characteristics again?

A: They are Impermanence (anicca), Suffering (dukkha), and the Impersonal nature of everything (anatta).

Q: I remember now.

The suffering or un-satisfactoriness is caused greatly by taking personally what is going on and the impermanent nature of everything increases the levels of tension, stress and even depression.

A: That's right. You got it! And CRAVING is the trigger point that sets this off.

The solution is to LET GO and RELAX!

Let whatever is arising just be there and smile through it. Let go of all tension and tightness and after emptying out precisely as the Buddha instructed and relax; then come back to the object of meditation and proceed onward with a lighter mind.

Life will get a lot lighter if you do this for a few days. Try it.

Metta and smiles to you all.

Rev. Sister Khema

P.S.

Next installment: **2010- FS-13: "What is CLINGING?"**

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