

Foundation Series on Buddhist Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation (TWIM)
As taught by
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Training→ FS-14- What is HABITUAL TENDENCIES (Bhava)?

(Sometimes the Pali word BHAVA is translated as ‘being’, ‘becoming’, or ‘experience’, but, for practical reasons, we call it habitual or emotional tendencies.)

A: Are you ready to continue?

Q: Yup. I think I am. Can I ask the question?

A: Sure.

Q: Then, What is Habitual Tendencies link (bhava) ?

A: OK. There’s not a lot to tell you about this link. However it "does significantly exist" and it does have a very clear purpose.

This link is a storage facility or library, if you will, where your emotional habits live. (This is the place that our negative and positive reactive emotions are stored.)

Do you have any emotional habits? Do you ever think, say or do anything that people point to and say you do this over and over again in similar situations and that disturbs other people?

Q: Well, yes. Don’t we all have something like that?

A: All of us do. Having habits is not unique. All human beings have emotional habits.

Some of the habits are wholesome and can help us in life. Others are unwholesome and cause us suffering.

If we look closely at this Habitual Tendencies link, it is our personal secret library of emotional tendencies based on past experiences in this life. Some of these tendencies may be trickling through from a previous life too.

These tendencies live in a more or less unconscious corner of our mind.

They are restimulated or triggered off by the CLINGING link and they then come up as emotional RE-ACTIONS.

In other words, we act the way we do when a similar stimulus arises. This can be a similar sight, sound, odour, taste, touch or mind-object. When re-stimulated, the tendency is born into action.

This is where the 6 Sense Base ties in.

These emotional tendencies can appear to be routine re-actions that pop up and are then played during personal inter-actions in life.

Afterwards though, sometimes, we don't even know why we thought them, said them or did them! In retrospect we may suffer guilt and remorse.

Q: What is an example?

A: OK. I bet you know someone who has talked with you along the way about, say, their girlfriend or boyfriend when they were having problems.

Q: Yeah. I do.

A: Perhaps they told you something like, "My girl seems to react the same way every time I try to talk to her about certain things. We never get to deciding things. She gets angry and then doesn't like to sit down and talk at all and there doesn't seem to be any reason for this to be happening!"

Or maybe you heard there was a mother-daughter relationship problem where every time the young person was asked to clean up their room they acted in an unreasonable way with the exact same behavior every time?

These are re-actions instead of responses that play over and over again. It is just like a recording on a loop setting. You say this; I say that! I give you a report at work; you respond negatively every time without discussion! It's like a broken record. It isn't fresh response happening in the situation.

Before an action takes place, it is re-stimulated by a memory card that pops up and then an action flows out as it is triggered .

If you will observe yourself for a few days, you will begin to notice your own particular fixed re-actions in thinking, speaking or physically doing things a particular way.

It's because of these reactive patterns that we are not truly alive in our present moments.

We appear to be here, but we are not at home! We are on automatic.

Adults are different in this way from little children because children don't have as large of a collection of recordings yet. Therefore children don't use up energy like adults do with this. Children are still full of bright curiosity, and offer what looks more like natural creative responses.

Q: Can we change this?

A: Yes. First we have to understand how this works. Knowledge of how this works is the first step to facilitating change.

Because of the unrealized existence of this link, it is actually a rare moment that most of us ever stop, pause, and give ourselves the space to see what is essentially going on in a present moment situation without ideas, opinions, comparisons or other such judgments jumping in.

This is why re-action happens so often.

The person gets consumed in what is unessential, which is CLINGING and from there. HABITUAL TENDENCY arises.

Q: This is interesting. I can see this. Could this be how anger situations work between people too?

A: Yes. On smaller or larger scales this can make the difference between War and Peace .

So let me give you a situation where having this knowledge can make a difference.

Take a situation where a woman works in an office:

Every Monday her boss arrives and walks to her desk and picks up a weekly report that she composed last Friday.

Upon reading it, he gets upset and behaves un-rationally towards her. He is angry and displeased.

At the same time, every Monday she makes the assumption that his anger is being directed at her and she takes it very personally.

She feels bad. She gets a headache and just wants to go home. She hates her job and works slowly all morning just trying to get through her time. People don't want to be around her anymore.

Then someone suggests to her to go and study meditation to help calm her mind.

She finds a monk or nun at a temple who knows about human cognition enough to explain it a little bit.

The teacher begins to share with her what a human being is actually composed of and how they experience their existence in this life. They talk about how everything works.

He gives her some information to take with her while she is learning the meditation. She begins to contemplate this and understand a little bit more.

The guiding monastic explains to her how the sense doors work.

He gives her the example of **CONTACT** happening, and then how a **FEELING** arises.

He explains how **CRAVING** arises which is the 'I' don't like it mind. This is not the emotional re-action to the situation, yet craving is simply the tightness in both mind and body which begins the process of emotional re-actions that follow.

He explains how **CLINGING** jumps in to run stories in the mind about why you personally don't like a painful feeling!

The guide explains to her how **HABITUAL (emotional) TENDENCY** causes a lot of problems because this is where many of us are stuck always behaving in the same uncreative ways.

The teacher then demonstrates how a person unconsciously pulls out a familiar **re-action** and plays it out without any sound reason.

So **HABITUAL TENDENCY** link is where these emotional reactions live. To be precise it's your personal library based on your previous experiences in life. It is there to feed reactive behavior.

This library can offer us wholesome responses too. But the fact is, these responses come from a well of previous experiences.

The heart of the matter is that it makes it so the person is not going to take time to see what is essential in a situation and then, respond in a new way.

Q: So would you say that identifying this link is a first step in gaining knowledge about it's operation?

A: Absolutely! Will you try something for me?

Q: sure.

EXPERIMENT:

A: So, I would like you to spend just a few days consciously noticing at the end of the day how things ran in your life that day.

Write down what you personally remember about your own emotional tendencies when dealing with other people or dealing with your own self when something difficult or challenging comes up. OK?

Keep a log. Be totally honest.

Write down what you see happening now that you have been alerted to the existence of this Habitual (emotional) Tendency link.

Let me know what you find by writing it onto the list or by writing me privately of your own adventure with this investigation.

Try to use the 4-step investigation the Buddha used.

1. What is this?
2. What was the cause/trigger of this?
3. What was the cessation of that?
4. How did I get to the cessation of it?

End personal experiment.

Q: Is that it?

A: That's it for now. This is enough for you to work with.

Now we have to move on to the next link to see what happened to the lady in the office when her bosses clinging came up and his habitual tendencies clicked in.

**Metta and smiles,
Rev. Sister Khema**

Next installment: 2010- FS- Training 15: "What is BIRTH OF ACTION?"

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