

Foundation Series on Buddhist Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation (TWIM)
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Training→ FS-17- What is AGING AND DEATH (Marana) ?

Q: So how do we end this event with the woman and her boss in the office setting?

A: Oh you remember that story that began in Lesson 14, do you?

Q: I do.

A: Can you review it for me?

Q: Sure. In Lesson 14, there was this woman working in a difficult situation in her office.

Every Monday her boss arrived and walks to her desk and picks up a weekly report that she composed the previous 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 suggested to her that she should go and study meditation to help calm her mind.

She found a Buddhist monk or nun at a temple who knew about human cognition enough to explain it to her.

The teacher shared with her what a human being is actually composed of and how they experience their existence during their life. They talked about how everything actually works.

He gave her some information to take with her while she was learning the meditation. She began to run this through her mind a little bit.

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

He gave her an example of CONTACT happening, and then how a FEELING arises.

He explained how CRAVING arises which, in this cases, is the 'I' don't like it mind . This is not her emotional re-action to the situation. This CRAVING is simply the arising tightness and tension in both mind and body which begins the process of emotional re-actions that follow.

He explained how **CLINGING** jumps in very quickly to run stories in the mind about why you personally don't like a painful feeling when it comes up!

This guiding teacher explained to her how **HABITUAL (emotional) TENDENCIES** can cause a lot of problems because this is where many of us live life by **RE-ACTING** instead of **RESPONDING**.

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

So **HABITUAL TENDENCY** link is where these emotional re-actions live. To be more precise, it's your own personal library based on your previous life experiences. It feeds reactive behavior.

This library can offer us wholesome responses too, but, most of the time mind is not calm enough to come up with creative solutions.

The heart of the matter is that most people don't slow down enough to see what is really essential in a situation and so they can't respond in new ways.

Every Monday she had to hand over a report to her boss summarizing the work done the week before. Something about that report was making him really angry.

Each time he came in on Monday, he would come up to her desk to get that report and as she handed it to him, she could feel a storm coming up!

He would look at the report with his eyes, and then she could see his demeanor change as tension arose in him.

His face would get red, and he would look like he was in pain. Then, like a boiling pot, he would boil over the edges and say something awful to her.

No matter how she prepared for this, it always happened in the same way every Monday mornings. She felt dismayed.

He would speak badly to her and she was considering leaving her job because of this kind of pressure happening to her.

A: You remember this quite well **Q.** Then what happened about this in the lessons?

Q; Well, you reviewed with me how all of this actually worked. You talked about how her boss picked up the page and through his eyes he saw forms. You said that eye-consciousness arose, and we looked at how contact happened for him.

Next, we talked about how since contact was arising, a painful feeling arose in him and how Craving hit him when he thought "I" don't like this painful feeling.

Then, almost immediately, he got into his story in his mind about why he didn't like this. That was his Clinging that caused both of them a lot of suffering.

You explained how he was pulling out a little card from his personal file that told him how to re-act once more as the suffering hit him. That was one of his Habitual tendency cards!

A; Right.

Q: Then all of a sudden, he put forth the Birth of Action in this event by thinking angrily, saying something ugly to her and then making an angry bodily action!

I think we are now up to the last link in this event, Ageing and Death. So now what?

A: Now we have to stop and look at the last link in the process of cognition for this event.

It is called AGING AND DEATH and this link is what helps us to more intimately understand exactly what suffering is, how it manifests, and how it passes away.

It is the last part of the cycle of Dependent Origination within this event that we can see from our angle of observation.

The Pali Word for this link is ‘marana’ but this does not nearly explain to us the entire situation of what this link is.

Q: Besides the link name, what else should I understand?

A: This link is where we get to refine our understanding about what suffering is all about in more detail, as it is happening, and how it manifests..

We hear a lot about Aging and Death. But, we don’t hear about the rest of the phrase attached to these two words which usually label this link. This causes incomplete understanding about what actually happens in the event.

When you only say ‘Aging and Death’, actually, this name is like an abbreviation for this link.

To fully understand the link, we need all of the symptomatic components of it whether we are talking about the end of a human life or, as in this case, we are talking about on single life event like the arising of anger during an interaction between two people.

Therefore, we have to put on a stronger lens to see.

The entire phrase which identifies this link is Aging and Death, Sorrow, Lamentation, Pain, Grief, and Despair.

Q: OK. Is there a text in the canon we can consult to help us define each of these symptoms of this link?

A: Yes there is. I would like to introduce MN-141: sections 12-19 as a framework reference to help refine the definitions. We will use Bhikkhu Bodhi’s translation of the Majjhima nikaya by Wisdom Publications to help us do that.

Begin text from sutta here;

12] "And what, friends, is ageing? The ageing of beings in the various orders of beings, their old age, brokenness of teeth, grayness of hair, wrinkling of skin, decline of life, weakness of faculties—this is called ageing.

I am sure that many of us probably feel that we don't need to be reminded about this one. Any of us who are getting up in years can identify something that we cannot do this year as well as we did last year! So this hits home.

For example, our physical work capabilities begin to decline and this leads us to the big "I want back my strength syndrome". Some of us will likely go off to a surgeon and beg mercy concerning some parts of our bodies hoping it can make a difference. It might, for a time but impermanence will win out here. Our dis-satisfactoriness is showing up here.

13. "And what, friends, is death? The passing of beings out of the various orders of beings, their passing away, dissolution, disappearance, dying, completion of time, dissolution of aggregates, laying down of the body—this is called death."

As I mentioned to you earlier, the texts usually talk about this link in terms of a human life form. But for our investigation, shifting the order of beings, as we regard this one phenomenological event in life, we can still apply this component to this single event without too much imagination.

Likewise within the life of a single event, there occurs a birth, with clinging that encourages arising tension, and sometimes includes disturbing emotions leading to our strong re-actions. Then the emotions weaken, losing strength, they decline, and pass away.

In the meditation, through the use of skilled observation, the meditator can see that whatever formation arises in mind, whatever thought is arising, this too shall pass away.

Arisen thoughts always eventually dissolve, they disappear, die out and come up in similar shapes but never the same again. That thought has completed it's time while trying to get your attention, and in this scenario about the woman in the office, death signifies the end of this event. We witness the steps leading to this death during our meditation.

14] "And what, friends, is sorrow? The sorrow, sorrowing, sorrowfulness, inner sorrow, inner sorriness, of one who has encountered some misfortune or is affected by some painful state—this is called sorrow."

After we break a precept, at some point, we regret it in one way or another. And even if the sorrowfulness does not show on the outside, inner sorrow can eat us alive. Depression can consume us when we do not understand clearly HOW it can arise and how it can fade away.

But in this situation, we are serving the suffering and sorrow what this lady feels every time this event repeats itself in her office. Each time this happens, she takes the other person's actions very personally and blames herself for what is happening. Arising painful feeling then evolves into sadness which is emotion.

15] "And what, friends, is lamentation? The wail and lament, wailing and lamenting, bewailing and lamentation, of one who has encountered some misfortune or is affected by some painful state—this is called lamentation.'

In the case of this event, the lady laments what is going on before, during and after the event. Each time she holds onto the painful feeling and therefore the next present moment arises and goes by without her natural attention! She is caught. She talks to others about what is happening and laments over her job situation. .

16] "And what, friends, is pain? Bodily pain, bodily discomfort, painful, uncomfortable feeling born of bodily contact—this is called pain.'

In this situation, this woman has great pain arise. Mental discomfort shows up with her anxiety Bodily pain shows up as a headache. Her worries about the future moments bring about perspiration before the manager arrives to read the report. Afterwards, she can't sleep and she dreads every Monday morning. She is caught by uncomfortable thoughts and perhaps even tears arise because of this whole situation.

17] "And what, friends, is grief? Mental pain, mental discomfort, painful, uncomfortable feeling born of mental contact—this is called grief."

Each time the situation passes away, she feels grief and mental discomfort because she cannot see her way out of this happening. She grieves at the loss of a peaceful environment and the whole event takes a lot of energy out of her. The only way out is through knowledge, patience, forgiveness and understanding. Only then will a creative response arise. But this can only happen if she understands what is really going on first!

18] "And what, friends, is despair? The trouble and despair, the tribulation and desperation, of one who has encountered some misfortune or is affected by some painful state—this is called despair."

All I can tell you here is that if she was living in ignorance of how things work, she has no instructions to help her situation. Here mind is untrained and she will continue to fall into deeper despair and this will further feed depression that will only worsen without knowledge and vision in action.

19] "And what, friends, is 'not to obtain what one wants? This is suffering'. To beings subject to birth there comes the wish: 'Oh, that we were not subject to birth! That birth would not come to us!'

In this case she wishes that there will not be the birth of this event again next Monday morning!

"But this is not to be obtained by wishing, and not to obtain what one wants is suffering. To beings subject to ageing...subject to sickness...subject to death...subject to sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair, there comes the wish:

*'Oh, that we were not subject to sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair!
That sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief, and despair would not come to us!'*

But this is not to be obtained by wishing, and not to obtain what one wants is suffering."

-End sutta quotes-

SUFFERING is caused from 'not obtaining what one wants' OR by "obtaining what one does not want" as in the case of this situation

The woman in the office cannot seem to obtain peace of mind in her workplace. She wants desperately to stop this situation.

She wants to change how she feels.

But, when FEELING arises, it is here!

When the truth is here, this is the truth! How profound. Eh?

Q: Yes. We cannot change the truth. Does our discomfort always come from change or the lack of it?

A: Yes. Discomfort comes both from CHANGE or the lack of it.

We love to be in CONTROL and we do not internally understand that everything in the universe is always changing. We like to assume otherwise and so we struggle.

But, nothing is permanent.

At the same time, change is not our enemy!

The problem is not the change but how one deals with it. That is the problem.

This constant motion in the universe is normal. This is the nature of Impermanence in this universe.

Impermanence is a Universal Law.

So Suffering must be met with knowledge through the understanding of suffering's root cause which is CRAVING, or "I" personally don't like this or that!

Once we know what something is and HOW it manifests, only then can we consider how to let it go!

Q: Do we have to replace it?

A: Yes.

Q: Why do we have to replace it? Why not just let it go of the feeling and keep going.

A: Because that is not a solution. That is just a delay. That's only treating a symptom.

The solution happens ONLY when one releases the suffering and replaces it with something else;

The goal is tranquility and a calm acceptance of this present moment.

Q: Why does it work this way?

A: Because there is a universal law stating that "the Universe abhors a vacuum". This carries down to, if you have an unwholesome habit you cannot totally stop doing it unless you replace it with a new habit.

Q: And the solution the Buddha left for us turns out to be perfect?

A; Yup! It is called RIGHT EFFORT and sometimes RIGHT STRIVING.

This helps us to turn any situation into a more wholesome direction.

When we practice TWIM, using the 6Rs, they remind us continuously to keep RIGHT EFFORT going .

In each of the descriptions of the sub-components of AGEING AND DEATH, the toughest part is to realize that the real problem is the personal perspective or 'atta' which is the opposite of the impersonal perspective called 'anatta'. It is perspective that gets us into trouble.

'Anatta' perspective is when we commit to seeing things impersonally. Each time we take them impersonally, mind lightens up and this relieves tension and tightness.

It is best to try this for yourself to see what happens. Perhaps you can test this for a time, as an experiment, just to notice the difference it can make.

We have several ways in which we can relate an experience in our life as being "ME", "MINE", or "MY SELF".

But the heart of suffering involves our perspective. Suffering starts the moment we assume we should take everything personally.

Following that point we always find ourselves RE-ACTING instead of RESPONDING.

This causes arising tension and tightness in mind and in body. This is where conflict begins.

In the situation with the lady and her boss in the office, in past times, her boss always RE-ACTED..

At that time, she would fall into the sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair in that situation and suffer both mentally and physically.

But upon retraining her mind a little bit and beginning to understand what was actually happening, the secretary slowly eliminated her personal opinion of dislike of what was happening and she began watching more closely to see what was really happening.

As she witnessed her own repeated re-action each week, she began to identify the cause of her suffering and as she noticed arising tension and tightness she realized she could RELEASE this CRAVING and RELAX her mind and body.

When she stopped CRAVING , CLINGING did not arise; When CLINGING did not arise, further reactive HABITUAL TENDENCY did not arise; When HABITUAL TENDENCY did not arise, un-wholesome BIRTH OF RE-ACTIONS in the event no longer took place; and when the BIRTH OF ACTION does not happen like this, then SORROW, LAMENTATION, PAIN, GRIEF AND DESPAIR CEASE.

The texts then say, THUS IS THE END OF THIS WHOLE MASS OF SUFFERING.

This then, is the death of this one life EVENT.

Q: WOW! I thought we only saw this stuff in the texts.

A: Well, “Q” the texts are instructions for living life successfully aren’t they?

Q: Yes. And she really did succeed in changing the outcome didn’t she?

A: Yes, she did.

Q: You covered more than just HABITUAL TENDENCY here didn’t you?

A: Well, yes. It’s difficult to present HABITUAL TENDENCY by itself.

BIRTH OF ACTION has to be demonstrated to see what is really going on. Then, of course, the last part which describes the suffering clearly happens at lightning speed.

It often seems to the untaught mind, that the links happen together. But they don’t. This only seems true without the observation skill developed.

Once you have developed your observation skill, and you know what to look for, then, after awhile within a situation in life, they will make sense to you and eventually, you will be able to see the separation of these links we discussed.

Q: So, let me see if I can recap, ok?

A; Sure. Give it a try.

Q: Let's see. In this incident you covered

6] CONTACT

7] FEELING

8] CRAVING

9] AND A BIT OF CLINGING

10] HABITUAL TENDENCY,

11] BIRTH OF ACTION AND

12] AGING AND DEATH, SORROW , LAMENTATION, PAIN, GRIEF, AND, DESPAIR.

A: Right. Now do you begin to see how understanding this impersonal process of Dependent Origination can make a significant difference for your perception of a daily life experiences and how you can come to respond instead of re-acting?

Q: Yes. It really makes a difference to know what is going on. I can see how it becomes worthwhile to learn the links and then begin to watch them in everyday events. What do you call learning it in this way?

A: Do you remember one time we talked about how in Buddhism, most of the teaching can be studied microscopically, macroscopically, or by a middle path?

Q: Yes.

A: Watching individual phenomenological events, or more simply events in daily life is what I mean by using the middle path approach to Dependent Origination.

Once we have learned these links, then, by reviewing single events in life, like angry interactions, frustration, depression, anxiety or grief, a person can get a better handle on how these events took place.

Q: This takes away any of the mystery.

A: You're right! When we don't know what is going on this can lead to unreasonable re-actions based on assumptions instead of information.

Going over examples like this help us to know how the links come up and how the teaching gives us an immediately effective way of reducing suffering in everyday life.

This approach has been very successful for people. Conquering Ignorance helps them to quickly understand Craving and Clinging which are at the heart of the suffering.

Q: This is engaging Buddhism into life too.

A: Absolutely. Using the practice in this way raises the value of the Dhamma in modern times.

People begin to see how to live more peacefully by USING THE PRACTICE IN DAILY LIFE.

Q: Once again, Buddhism offers a priceless solution to stabilize and improve life.

A: This teaching is very badly needed in the heated world of today.

Q: I think we need to promote this to young people so they can embrace this technique in the future and move more strongly towards peace.

A: I think you're right.

Q: This cycle must go around very fast then?

A: You bet it does. It happens thousands of times within the click of your fingers!

Examples like this help us to understand the process is not impossible to see and apply within life situations. It is a priceless teaching!

Q: So, this was a good lesson. It makes me smile.

A: Me too. Let's keep on going now.

Q: What's next?

A; I deviated from the syllabus slightly. So, I want to take a moment and tie together how these links relate to kamma and how energy flows out of them to move the wheel of samsara.

Q: Right then. See you !

A: OK

**Next installment: 2011- FS- 18- TBA
Selective glossary summary or next topic....**

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