

FS-Training note-#3**June 23, 2010*****Dhamma Greetings to you all once again.*****A: Hey Q?****Q: Yes?****A: I am trying to get psyched up again for more writing now. How should I come back to this again?****Q: Think you could write a little bit about the history of TWIM and what's growing up at DSMC with this training now?****A: I can do that I think.****Q: This will be helpful because People have asked me several times, 'how did this practice approach called TWIM begin?****A: I can only tell you from my own perspective.****Q: Give it a try.****A: OK.**

TWIM is the meditation approach that is actively being researched and worked on at the Dhamma Sukha Meditation Center (DSMC) which is the home base center for the Buddhist American Forest Tradition. It didn't have this exact name until last year when it was finally donned as **Tranquil Wisdom Insight Meditation**. That's **TWIM** for short!

Q: Is it completely new?**A: NO. Not really when you look into this. It's actually a revival of the active practice of Right Effort that is defined by the Buddha in several places in the Majjhima Nikaya.****Q: How did this get started for you?****A: Well, as far as I am concerned, it seriously began on a ridge top in Lesterville, Missouri in 2002.**

Some of you already know that I came across a teacher in 2000 in Washington, D.C. who taught directly from the early pali texts. Before he was in Washington, he was on a 12 year spiritual journey in Asia. You can read about Venerable Bhante Vimalaramsi's journey over at the www.dhammasukha.org website. During that journey this honorable Mahathera monk was lucky enough to find elder teachers who encouraged this Westerner to ask questions upon questions. And he did! He asked many!

Because these elder monks knew he had very pure and sincere intention, they answered everything they could as deeply as they could, and then often times, they pointed him in a direction where he would find more answers. In this way they kind of directed his movement around Asia while he was there. He was able to study with many of elder master teachers before they passed away because of how he listened so well and practiced.

The "Bhivamsas" he studied with were U Pandita, U Lakkhana, U Silinanda, U Janaka, U Dhammananda, U

Dhammapia. He further studied with The Mingun Sayadaw, who had memorized the entire Tripitika, Sayadaw U Thatilla, who had a pure audiographic memory. Other teachers for long periods of time were K Sri Dhammananda, Venerable Punnaji, Ajahn Yanitra, Ajahn Buddhadasa, Ajahn Cha Lee, Ajahn Santititho, and many others in Thailand. Teachers at the Mahasi Center and outside also included U Pandita, U Silananda, Ajahn Chah, Ven. Punnaji, and many more who were willing to teach him at very deep levels.

Before coming back to his own country of the United States of America in 1998, Bhante Vimalaramsi had already decided that he would dedicate the rest of his life to teaching others what he had found during his time in Asia. "Bhante", as his students call him, simplified the Dhamma lessons taught by the Buddha, Sariputta, and others in the texts. He simplified current English translations. He did this by introducing simpler words until he found out what worked the best for his meditation students. Usually he changed larger scholarly wording to smaller simpler words. Basically he was relied on the workable translation by Venerable Bhikkhu Bodhi that came out in 1995. Simpler words were chosen so that the average person could read the discourses and delight in understanding how to try out some of their advice in daily life.

Bhante's approach is marvelous! It lightens up life and brings back our natural smiles. It offers a fresh kind of relief in today's Buddhist world which is largely dominated by academics, intellectuals and philosophers.

In general, if a person tries it in earnest, they appreciate the individual guidance given during a personal or group retreat. Even if you only study online with the center, you will discover his warmhearted accessibility and delightful sense of humor. His way of writing brings in answers just right for you. I challenge you to go and listen to some of the "**Joshua Tree Retreat 1, JT-3 or JT-5 Talks**" to hear how easy it is to understand when he teaches.

One of the things about it is how consistent the teaching turns out to be. The Dhamma, when taught in this way, doesn't trip over itself at all. This cuts out a lot of confusion. Bhante speaks slowly, allowing time for your mind to catch up with new information. Over the past 10 years he has carefully devised simple definitions for the most important parts of training that a student needs to remember. He encourages you to test out everything for yourself which is a wonderful exercise in itself.

Most of all, he wants YOU to keep asking questions all the time, just like he did, and not to silently suffer in confusion. What keeps people going with this approach is how it expands a person's knowledge and has the power to visibly change people's lives. This part is absolutely fascinating to witness.

The best way to learn Dhamma is to rely on the Buddha's own pattern of training. He is not here, but, his drills are still here and they are still very effective. Why should we ignore them or try to reinvent them when he tested them for 45 years? Therefore, during this training we are writing for you here, I hope to direct you to some Dhamma talks and to some of the drills found in the Majjhima Nikaya. Also I will try to demonstrate some supportive material left for us in the Samyutta Nikaya, the Digha Nikaya and even, on occasion, some stories found in the Vinaya as we go along.

When a subject is discussed, we will try to pass along which Dhamma talks to listen to at the website that support this subject. It is a joy to have the opportunity to study and encourage your practice in this way. AND it's fun!

I think it should be stressed that **this approach to practice is not an obscure new approach**. Rather, it is a reclaimed old approach that the monks were given by the Buddha found in the texts. So, we take some cues from

these early monks. They did not read all the time. So we, initially, stop reading so much. While training fulltime in the center, we don't read anything for one year! They very carefully gave ear to the teacher. So we listen carefully. The monks did not sit and think a lot. So we stop thinking so much. The monks followed the instructions carefully in order to succeed in the practice. So we do not argue or debate, but investigate as directed. We do not analyze during practice. We do not imagine or conceptualize. We stop internal speech. We talk over the Dhamma every day during an interview with the teacher and together learn how to monitor progress.

Those who succeed, find ways to immerse themselves in the practice and carry it into life. They begin to extend the practice into everything everywhere all the time. Life and the practice begin to interact. Following the guidance of MN-95 "With Canki", Canki Sutta, we follow *'the Buddha's advice on what supports the discovery of truth'*. As you begin to listen to the Dhamma talks, and carefully follow the directions given by Bhante, we hope you won't stop there.

In fact, I will challenge you to go out and test the practice! Integrate this practice into your life! Learn how to investigate properly and then test everything happening to you! Identify how it all is working.

Buddhism is really about Change. After 10 years of working in this way, things in my life have changed a lot. Understand, I am not finished. But, at this point, when any suffering arises, it fades away very quickly and, as I identify it, I can smile about what is really going on. If I don't catch the suffering instantly, at least I know how it works now and there is no mystery how I suffer or not anymore. This has given back control into my life. no longer as I caught not understanding what is happening. The practice tells me what to do with it! Now, finally, I have a choice to grab onto it and suffer if to I can Let go. Smile! See it for what is truly is! Afterwards, there usually is no residual weight pressing down onto me. There is only the next open present moments to live and this is real relief! I am now a believer that nothing is happening to me. Everything is happening from me. But I had to see this to attain this piece of knowledge.

As a student you will come to a point where you want to begin to memorize the design of this Dhamma Tapestry. Each time I am share parts of this with you, I learn once again how beautiful this weaving can be, how it can set a person free. One day, perhaps you will come to clearly understand it and then you may feel the urge to share this design with others too. Why? Because, it can change everything, it can set another person free, it can bring back smiles!

There is something very neat happening with this Buddhist training. It confirms the fact that Buddhism was no myth! It is no fairytale! Once you experience it for yourself, what is left of this teaching becomes a palpable usable tool to open the doorway to peace. You will discover this path is real! Can there be any better reason necessary for a person to continue working with such a practice of meditation in this world today?

Q:No. This is a good enough reason for sure. How did you begin teaching?

A: it was a slow road but, I am not in a hurry.

In 2003, while studying in an isolated situation in the forest, I began to work on the internet in an effort to find a cyber classroom where Dhamma questions could be discussed openly. I wanted to hear how this meditation might be

challenged by other people out there in the wide world. At first, I had hoped others would embrace this early Buddhist meditation practice, examine it and test it for themselves.

Open discussions brought more understanding about the results people were having from some other practices. So many opinions seemed fixed and there were very few who were willing to use critical analysis straight out to closely examine "operations and results". Most wouldn't consider anything other than what they were doing. However many of them did admit that was a good escape from life but not too easy to take into life. This was new to me after what we had found.

I attended online Buddhist lists in an effort to learn how to research and support the results that were happening. During this time I found one plaguing question of the day in meditation circles was about **how can we take the practice of meditation into life and experience real change?** It seemed to me if people would just go back to what happened in the beginning, to the teacher who taught this for 45 years, then, they would see how to do something that would lead to the results described.

In the beginning, 6 people from different backgrounds agreed to practice on a forest ridge top location in Missouri. It was a primitive site. 3 students lived in tents. 2 lived in a bunkhouse. I lived in a small trailer. After the first year, some continued and went much deeper than they thought possible. Remember this was simply about finding an answer to reduce modern day suffering, lightening the load of the average person, finding some identifiable relief.

Everyone who came there had suffering to wade through first before making general progress. But the progress came faster when we had the right tool: this approach to the practice.

Bhante was presenting a slightly different interpretation of the instructions for the meditation than others were hearing about. A small step had been overlooked. It is like tweaking an engine to run more smoothly or learning how to properly blend a cake precisely so it came out perfect.

This tiny step led us to deeper clearer insights and more consistent understanding of the Dhamma. A commitment was made by some of us to see how far this could actually go. Eventually, those who continued, chose to share the practice with others in various ways.

This approach to practice was considered to be on the fringe of Buddhism when it first turned up. Anything different would. We were not on the bandwagon, so to speak. We were the odd man out, as they say. But then again, I wasn't interested in being on any bandwagon. It never occurred to me. The trees in the forest didn't mind if I was odd at all!

I was only interested in reaching as many people as we could to help them feel happier. I understood the devastation of grief and depression and what it could do to your life. You all know there is a lot of controversial writing out there now about Buddhist Meditation. People can get really confused when trying to investigate Buddhism because there is no control on what people say about it. Someone can go to India for a vacation and come back claiming he can teach a meditation class! I have seen this happen to people. You have to be very careful about this.

So far, it's been determined that in order to succeed the best in this meditation, people have to empty their cup. Beginner's mind is best for success.

Make yourself a commitment to completely let go of comparing this to other practice approaches while attempting to follow these instructions. Just do it! Practice for awhile and non-judgmentally observe what happens. Know at the start that a beginner's mind turns out to be a key factor for success. Just follow the instructions and the guiding teachers job is to try to keep you on track.

I am telling you this at the start so you realize it was not so easy to revive this practice. It was a difficult road. A lot of criticism was out there to begin with, a lot of rejection. A lot of the comforts in life were given up without the privilege of ordination by those who first practiced this. There was a hard struggle to survive for some time. But there was genuine determination too and when you support the Dhamma, the Dhamma will support you.

Things are progressing differently now.

Outside of the center's work Bhante's main book has been translated into 9 languages by other people so far. Today, many traditional Buddhists from Buddhist countries approach and question this practice. They are taking notice of how clear and usable it is for life. People are seeing how it is changing laypeople's lives in a short period of time. Because of this, various countries are beginning to urge the work forward now. Alliances are openly offered and support is given by sending Scholar monks to help with investigation and research. They offer monastic students assistance as well. Some countries have invited Bhante to share the practice so it can become a main source of modern meditation in their country. Other larger meditation centers in Asia are beginning to take notice.

After thousands of students have practiced this way, we are beginning to understand that when a person gets stuck in this practice, if questioned sincerely and they answer truthfully, it usually turns out they did not follow the instructions precisely. Instead, they mixed up the ingredients differently or put something from another practice into the equation. Then, the cake did not rise! <grin>

Your degree of success is directly proportional to how well you follow the instructions & keep it going!

Your success depends too on your curiosity, persistence and determination to keep going and follow through with the full experiment. Results are something each person has to prove out for themselves.

Q: But do you teach yet?

A: Yes. I began teaching online in 2007 and in person in 2009. Some of you know I have been teaching online with supervision for a few years before that and moderating the students at online private support Yahoo Group list.

I still consult Bhante on subjects of controversy. I have some ideas for future retreats I would like to put together from the materials developed so far. We've been developing more videos to help and this yea, at the center, a program for SKYPE teaching or streaming will begin for training more people around the world. Some Asian countries have asked us to come in and teach. That feels like a full circle of Buddhism.

This year, Bhante and all monastics are needed more inside the center as we continue to build new buildings and residence areas on the property. The new ordination program welcomes both men and women. Ground was broken this spring for a future Dhamma Village on an adjacent property that spreads out over 52 acres. This project will eventually operate separately and help support alms rounds for future monastics.

Slowly, I am being asked from outside to teach face to face. It's a real challenge. Teaching more advanced students who already have the basics under their belt has always been easier for me. My favorite subject to teach is Dependent Origination in a fascinating fun format where you really learn how to use it for conflict resolution in life. Even children can learn this. The practice brings us to see clearly the 4 noble Truths and Dependent Origination and how they are intertwined.

Truthfully, I am open to doing whatever it takes to help the most people to learn and continue this practice. Energy comes from the results we see. The online training materials development program has a great potential for expanding peaceful living between peoples and also helping those who think about leading a group by using this training. We also encourage and welcome scholar monks to come here and help us with this modern approach to Buddhism because it is working so well.

Q: Do you have the next installment for the training for us now?

A: Yes Q. it's coming right up now. it's in edit right now. It's called "Why do Meditation?" Installment 7.

Q: I'm ready!

For more information send questions to sisterkhema@dhammasukha.org

Metta and smiles.

Rev. Sister Khema

www.Dhammasukha.org