



# Vipassana Prison Newsletter

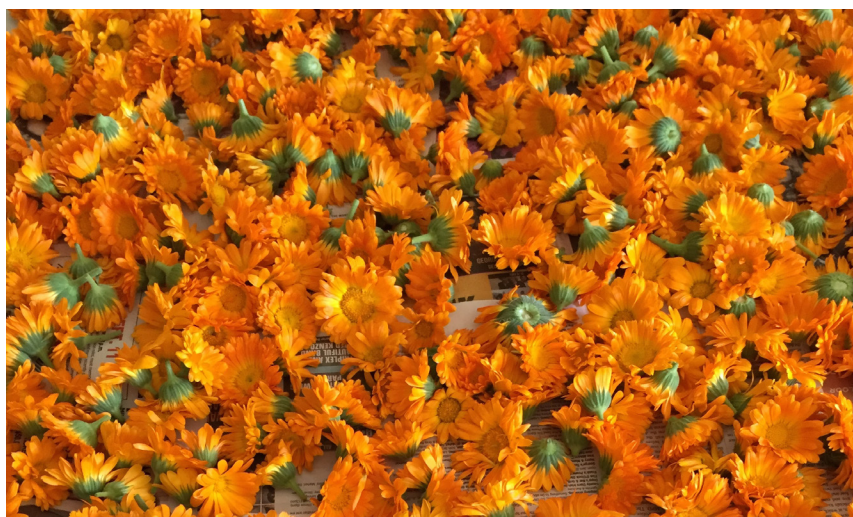
VOLUME X • OCTOBER 2016

## Words of Dhamma

*Wisdom springs from meditation;  
without meditation wisdom wanes.*

*Having known these two paths  
of progress and decline,  
let one so conduct oneself that one's  
wisdom may increase.*

*Dhammapada, 20.282*



## THE IMPORTANCE OF DAILY MEDITATION

*Excerpted from a discourse given by S.N. Goenka to about 5,000 practitioners in Nagpur, India, in 2000*

We do physical exercise – yoga, jogging or walking – to keep the body healthy and strong. Otherwise, the body becomes weak and diseased. In the same way, it is even more necessary to keep the mind healthy and strong. The mind is more important; one should not allow it to become weak. Vipassana is exercise of the mind. Meditating morning and evening makes the mind strong and healthy; it is not a waste of time. We live in a complex and stressful world. If the mind is not strong, we lose the balance of the mind and become miserable.

Those who do not know pure Dhamma, who have not learned this meditation, are unfortunate. But those who have received this benevolent teaching and are not using it are even more unfortunate. They have found such a priceless gem but have discarded it as if it is a useless pebble. What can be a greater misfortune? It is a matter of great fortune to be born as a human being. Only a human being can become introverted and eradicate mental defilements from the depth of the mind.

This work cannot be done by animals or birds or reptiles or insects or other lower beings. Even a human being cannot do this work if he does not know this technique. One gets a human birth, finds such a wonderful technique, learns to use it, benefits from it, and still just discontinues the practice. What a misfortune! A bankrupt person finds a treasure. And he discards it and becomes bankrupt again. A hungry person gets delicious food. And he discards it and becomes hungry again. A sick person finds medicine. And he discards it and becomes sick again. Very unfortunate, indeed! One should not make this mistake.

Sometimes meditators come to me and say: “I have stopped meditating. What to do, I am so busy.” It is a poor excuse. Do we not give food to the body three or four times a day? We do not say, “I am such a busy person, I don’t have time for food today.” This meditation that we do every morning and evening makes the mind strong. And a strong mind is more important than a strong body. If we forget this, we harm ourselves. We should never make this mistake. Even if there is too much work, we must do this exercise.

Sometimes it is not possible to meditate at the same place at a fixed time. Though desirable, it is not a must. What is important is to meditate twice in twenty-four hours. Without regular practice, the mind becomes weak. A weak mind makes us miserable, because it reverts to its old behavior pattern of generating craving and aversion. . . . Meditating morning and evening makes the mind strong and healthy.

## TWO WOLVES

---

An Elder, respected by his tribe for his wisdom, often sat and told his grandson stories and taught him the ways of their people. The grandson loved his grandfather and the stories he told. The grandson always listened and asked questions to be sure he understood and remembered what his grandfather said. One late afternoon in winter they sat by the stove and talked as they always did. Quietly, the grandfather said,

“I have a dream that comes to me many times. It is always the same.”

“Did I hear you say you have a dream?” said the grandson.

“Yes, the same one every night.”

“Please tell me about the dream and why it keeps coming to you,” said the grandson.



“Well, I think it is trying to tell me something. In the dream I live with two young strong wolves from a local pack of wolves. The first wolf always sees that the pack is safe and that all of the wolves get their fair share of food. He tries to keep everyone calm and working together and comfortable. He looks out for me. The second wolf only cares about himself; he wants to eat first and is always tense and makes trouble for the pack and himself,” said grandfather. “The second wolf makes me feel I need to be careful.”

“That’s not much of a dream,” said his grandson, disappointedly. “Is that it?”

“No, that is just how they are. The dream is troubling because they are always fighting, snarling and snapping at each other. They can’t get along because they have such different ways. And, the pack gets upset and doesn’t get much peace or rest. Every night the two strong young wolves come and fight in my dreams,” said grandfather. “Sometimes one seems stronger, some nights the other seems stronger,” he added.

“That’s an exciting dream,” said the grandson, “which one wins grandfather?” The grandfather thought for a moment and then answered, “The one I feed the most.”

---

## MASTERING THE MIND TO SHAPE THE PRESENT . . . AND FUTURE

*Excerpted from "The Art of Dying", by S.N. Goenka and others*

According to the Buddha, our present is the fruit of our past thoughts, words and deeds. Thus, moment by moment our future is shaped by the things we think, say, and do, in the present. The Buddha’s message is profound. Practicing seriously, we realize its unavoidable truth, facing it head-on in our meditations and as we carry out our daily lives. The fact that we are responsible for our future, and that by mastering our minds we can shape it, becomes very clear. Our understanding and acceptance of this law... is what brings us peace of mind and opens the door to our liberation.

The Buddha spent eons developing the qualities necessary to become fully enlightened – to learn the way out of suffering. Out of deep compassion he offered his discovery to all beings – the fearful, angry, greedy, helpless, discouraged, ill, old and dying – so that they too could free themselves from their suffering. It is a long and difficult path. It can seem so much easier to stick to our old familiar habits of mind, to prefer the pain and suffering of patterns we already know, than to face the discomforts of change that come with training the mind. Our lives are



difficult. There are many days when we feel exhausted and stressed. Rather than face the internal source of our misery, we crave distraction and pleasantness; and so we allow meditation to slip to the bottom of our priority list. Breaking the powerful old habit of craving the pleasant to avoid the unpleasant can seem impossible. But when we are ready to make the effort, the Buddha has provided the perfect tool to make fundamental change.

## FACING REALITY: Q & A WITH A PRISON-COURSE TEACHER

---

For a prison course to happen, an assistant teacher and two or more managers spend 10 days living in prison. They work with students, meditate, eat and sleep – all the time inside. One such teacher was asked about his experiences conducting more than half-a-dozen courses in U.S. prisons. Here are some of his comments.

*Q: What challenges do the inmate students face?*

Like any student taking a course at a meditation center, inmate students struggle with physical discomfort and noble silence. Inside prison, meditators face another problem: it's easy to leave, because they live just outside the limits of the course. So on impulse, quick as a flash, they could suddenly leave. Another challenge is the reality of being there, especially if they have a long sentence. When a student leaves and I ask the other students why, they almost always say: "reality." It can be tough to look at your situation clearly.

*Q: So why would any inmate want to take a course?*

Inmates go to a Vipassana information session out of curiosity. That, and because a course is a chance to get a break from the prison population. Mostly, though, they want to change. They realize the need to change. Many are trying to avoid the violence they are involved with in prison. They just don't want to do it anymore. So they have identified the source of their suffering, and want to eliminate it.

*Q: Is strong determination especially important for inmate students after a course?*

Yes, strong determination is crucially important. It's easy to be distracted from your meditation practice. It's easier to give up, and just give in to total inmate culture. Chow. TV. You can live the life of a prisoner. The inmate students who resist have to work at it hard and continuously. There are many temptations. People are constantly testing you. It's difficult to relax. Strong determination is a discipline to maintain not just your meditation practice, but a certain attitude. It takes constant strong determination to follow the precepts, to not stray from right behavior. Still, when you taste relief from suffering you want to maintain that relief. A big reason many people are in prison is because they mindlessly react. Strong determination gives you power – the power not to do that.

*Q: Do you see a difference in inmates who meditate?*

Some people in prison look awful; you see in their face a hopelessness. But the students who meditate are full of enthusiasm, are bright-eyed and cheerful. They have optimism. When we go back into a prison for another course, and reunite with students who know us, it's all hugs and handshakes. They are not pandering to us; they're self-contained people. They are being real, and they have a real life.





## DHAMMA CONTINUES TO FIND FERTILE GROUND AMONG OLD STUDENTS AT DONALDSON

Old students at Donaldson continue to make strong efforts in their practice of Vipassana. This was clear at a 3-day course this past August. Despite the intense summer heat, students stayed focused on their meditation, and reported that this was one of the quietest, most concentrated courses in memory. All sixteen of the students who began the course completed it. The students were able to undertake this serious course thanks to servers who helped convert the West Gym into a course site, and who served food and kept facilities clean. The course could not have happened without the support of Donaldson personnel.

On the afternoon of Day 3, after noble silence ended, students gathered in the dining area and spoke about their experiences. Several commented that they benefited enormously from the serious atmosphere of the course in which students quietly stayed focused on their practice of Anapana and Vipassana. A number of students expressed hope that there would soon be a sufficient number of old students eligible to take a Satipatthana course of eight days. Servers, meanwhile, spoke of the benefits of putting their practice into action by selflessly serving others.



### UPCOMING COURSES AND GROUP SITTINGS

#### Donaldson Course Schedule 2016 / 2017

**October 20 to 31**  
(10-day Course)

**February 23 to March 6**  
(10-day Course)

**May 5 to 15**  
(10-day Course)

**August 24 to 28**  
(3-day Course)

**October 19 to 30**  
(10-day Course)

#### Donaldson Weekly Group Sittings

**Monday & Thursday**  
*approximately* \* **12:00 noon**  
meet in the  
ABE (Adult Basic Education) Wing

*\*Time may vary, check with local staff*