



# Vipassana Prison Newsletter

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## Words of Dhamma

*Look not to the faults of others, nor to  
their omissions and commissions.*

*But rather look to your own acts,  
to what you have done  
and left undone.*

*Dhammapada 4.50*



## WE MEDITATE TO FREE OURSELVES FROM IGNORANCE

*Excerpted from: The Art of Living – Vipassana Meditation as taught by S.N. Goenka, by William Hart*

The only way to experience truth directly is to look within, to observe oneself. All our lives we have been accustomed to looking outward. We have always been interested in what is happening outside, what others are doing. We have rarely if ever tried to examine ourselves, our own mental and physical structure, our own actions, our own reality.

Therefore, we remain unknown to ourselves. We do not realize how harmful this ignorance is, how much we remain the slaves of forces within ourselves, of which we are unaware.

We must gain insight into our own nature in order to understand the nature of existence. Therefore, the path that the Buddha showed is a path of introspection, of self-observation... The entire universe and the laws of nature by which it works are to be experienced within oneself. They can only be experienced within oneself.

The path is investigating the truth about ourselves, not out of idle intellectual curiosity but rather with a definite purpose. By observing ourselves we become aware, for the first time – of the conditioned reactions, the prejudices that cloud our mental vision, that hide reality from us, and produce suffering. We recognize the accumulated inner tensions that keep us agitated, miserable, and we realize they can be removed. Gradually we learn how to allow them to dissolve, and our minds become pure, peaceful, and happy.



## MEDITATING IN PRISON TAKES COURAGE AND THE DESIRE TO CHANGE

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*The following is from a conversation with a meditation teacher who has extensive experience with courses in prison.*

***What is the biggest challenge for students sitting a 10-day prison course?*** That's easy: following the rules, especially noble silence. Students talking at night is a problem; it disturbs others. One student said to me after a course, "it can seem like rules are made to put us down. But now I see that these rules are made to help us." I like that, because it's true. The rules help you stay focused, and with a quieter mind you can go deeper in meditation. If you don't keep silent, you can't do that. For prisoners, especially, resisting rules can be a way of life. So to accept the rules of the course and obey them is a challenge.

***What can students do to connect with positive energy, energy that will encourage them to continue to practice?*** They need to support each other. They need to sit courses, volunteer at orientations, read the newsletters. They need to support each other and create a dhamma community. It also helps to read books. If you don't have any dhamma books ask the appropriate staff person to contact the VPT, and we will make this happen.

***Why is meditation boring?*** (Laughs.) Meditation is not boring; our minds are boring. Boredom is just craving, manifested in a different way. It's the mind wanting constant excitement. And craving constantly reinforces itself. This in turn reinforces negative mind states: being violent, angry, and reactive. If you never deal with the root of these, you are not in control of your mind. Instead, your reactions are controlling you. And reacting is often what lands someone in prison in the first place. Sometimes it can be hard to remember the point of meditation. People who come to these meditation courses seem to generally fall into two groups. Either they are coming just for better food, a quieter atmosphere, and a change from usual prison life. Having only these types of motivations will probably not be helpful in the long run, and they often don't make it to the end of the course. The second group are those that really want to change something in their lives. When they look at their mind they realize they don't like what they see; something needs to change. And what they really want is peace of mind. If you don't want to change, that's your choice. But if you want to change, this is the way to do it.

***If meditation is so great, why isn't it more popular?*** It's uncomfortable. It's difficult. Craving and ignorance – we are addicted to these mind states. And anyone who has ever dealt with an addiction knows how hard it is to break. So instead of meditating, some people give in to their old addictions: craving and ignorance. Doing so is like scratching a mosquito bite. It feels good at first, but then it feels worse.

***We are told to love, but what if I feel I have to hate to survive?*** People can't go into the general population of the prison with the openness they have at the end of a course – I understand that. But ultimately we are talking about



how, day-to-day-to-day, to be less reactive. If you are in a difficult situation in prison, you want to act in a way that works for you. If you get angry, hit somebody, and get thrown in isolation for a long time – is that benefiting you? As you develop in dhamma you will find that you are more likely not to react. Instead you can act in a way that is strong and better for you.

***Is there anything else you would like to say?*** Yes. I am so impressed by the dedication of the 'old' students (students who have taken a course) and the courage of the new students. These courses held here are much harder than those conducted at established meditation centers. Here students must sleep on the floor, use makeshift toilets, and yet students stick with it, hour after hour. And then you talk to some of the inmates who have made meditation a lifelong practice. Few people inside or out can compare with their thoughtfulness, dedication to dhamma, and dedication to others.



S.N. Goenka answered thousands of questions during nearly 50 years of teaching Vipassana. His answers reveal his deep understanding of the mind/life relationship, and his compassion for all.

*Q: I heard a famous person speak recently, someone who is obviously very insightful, very wise, very intelligent, very brilliant – but also, to my perception, very egoistic, in a way that seemed potentially dangerous to that person and to others. How do you recommend responding to a person like that?*

A: You see, if you simply say to that person, “Look, you are a very wise person, but to me it seems that you are also an egoistic person,” that won’t help. This person will become more egoistic: “What do you know? You are a mad fellow. You don’t know that I am free from ego.” That’s what this person will say.

The best thing is to try to examine oneself first. With a calm mind, whatever you say will be very effective. When the words come from a pious-minded person, even this full-of-ego person will start thinking, “Yes, perhaps this is correct. Now let me examine this. There must be something wrong in me.”

But when you say, with any kind of anger or hatred, “Oh, this fellow talks as if he is a very wise person, but he’s really a mad fellow” – when even the volition carries some hatred – the words will carry no meaning. No purpose will be served, because anger or hatred will go with them. When you have hatred, that will touch this person and he will become agitated; he won’t like it. But if love goes with the same words, you will find a big change happening.

Everyone who wants to help others to come out of misery, or come out of their defects, must first come out of that particular defect oneself. A lame person cannot support another lame person. A blind person cannot show the path to another blind person. Vipassana helps you first become a healthy person yourself, and then automatically you will start helping others to become healthy.

*Q: Is meditation the only way to that purity?*

A: Well, what do you mean by the “only way”? We have no attachment to the word “Vipassana”. What we say is, the only way to become a healthy person is to change the habit pattern of one’s mind at the root level. And the root level of the mind is such that it remains constantly in contact with body sensations, day and night. What we call the “unconscious mind” is day and night feeling sensations in the body and reacting to these sensations. If it feels a pleasant sensation, it will start craving, clinging. If it feels an unpleasant sensation, it will start hating, it will have aversion. This has become our mental habit pattern.

People say that we change our mind by this technique or that technique. And, to a certain extent, these techniques do work. But if these techniques ignore the sensations on the body, that means they are not going to the depth of the mind. So you don’t have to call it Vipassana – we have no attachment to this name. But people who work with the bodily sensations, training the mind not to react to the sensations, are working at the root level. This is the science, the law of nature I have been speaking about.





In the boundless sky, different winds arise, blow, and pass away. At times, warm winds or cool ones; at times, dust-laden winds or winds free from dust; winds at times foul or fragrant; at times stormy gusts or gentle breezes. Whatever they may be, the sky is not affected by them. Winds come and may prevail for a time, but sooner or later they all pass away...

In the same way, different sensations arise within the body. They appear and stay for a time, but sooner or later they pass away. They do not arise to stay forever. Yet we allow ourselves to be affected by them – we react to them with craving or aversion.

Why is this so? The reason is that our faculty of perception evaluates these sensations wrongly. It labels one type as pleasant, another as unpleasant, still another as neutral. And having assigned these labels, the mind now treats the sensations accordingly. It begins liking a sensation labeled pleasant, and develops craving for it. It begins disliking a sensation labeled unpleasant, and develops aversion towards it.

This habit of reacting has become our second nature. Encountering pleasant sensations, we seek to prolong them. When encountering unpleasant sensations, we seek to drive them away. Encountering neutral ones, we become bored and seek to replace them, actually developing aversion towards them, and begin craving for something else.

If our evaluation of these sensations changes to wisdom – insight – then the mind will stop making these mistaken evaluations... The evaluation given by insight is: whatever sensation arises – pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral, gross, or subtle – it is impermanent, changing, passing away at every moment, dependent on the law of cause and effect. It has arisen in the body as a wind arises in the sky, having come only to pass away.

We have no mastery over these sensations, no possession of them. If we seek a particular sensation, it escapes us. If we try to avoid a particular sensation, we fail. If we try to rid ourselves of a sensation, it stays. Everything happens not as we “will” it, but in accordance with the laws of nature...

This evaluation given by wisdom is the right evaluation, which establishes equanimity in the meditator, and points the way out of all misery. This is Vipassana.

Let us immerse ourselves in the dhamma to find liberation from all suffering, to attain real peace, real happiness.

### COURSES AND GROUP SITTINGS

Donaldson Course Schedule 2017	Donaldson Weekly Group Sitzings
<b>May 4 to 15</b> (10-day Course)	<b>Monday &amp; Thursday</b> <b>After Lunch</b> meet in the ABE Classroom
<b>August 24 to 28</b> (3-day Course)	
<b>October 19 to 30</b> (10-day Course)	