



Vipassana Prison Newsletter

Volume VII – February 2015

WORDS OF DHAMMA

*One is not low because of birth
nor does birth make one holy.*

*Deeds alone make one low,
deeds alone make one holy.*

*Na jacca vasalo hoti
na jacca hoti brahmano.*

*Kammuna vasalo hoti,
kammuna hoti brahmano*

Sutta Nipata 1.136

From: *Gemstones of the Good Dhamma*, compiled
and translated by Ven. S. Dhammika

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The Value of Noble Silence

On Vipassana courses students are asked to maintain “noble silence” for the first nine days. What is noble silence and why is it important? Why is it “noble”? Noble silence helps students to fully experience how the Vipassana technique works and how it can help them.



In the past the word “noble” often referred to a privileged social class: the aristocracy. Nowadays, noble most often means outstanding personal qualities or characteristics such as honesty and courage. Anyone who has tried to maintain noble silence on a meditation course knows that it requires much honesty and courage, as well as inner strength and determination.

Noble silence requires sincerity, determination and willingness to avoid communication with fellow meditators. That includes all gestures, signals, and even eye contact. It means moving quietly, even when no one is watching. It also means being attentive and alert and aware of oneself as much as possible. Of course, students are welcome and encouraged to talk with their Teacher on a Vipassana course. Otherwise they work in silence.

Silence is helpful to a meditator on a course because, when all students maintain noble silence, it provides an outer atmosphere of peace, calm and quiet. This, in turn, helps students maintain an inner silence that supports their adherence to the moral code of ethics. Meditating in silence also helps develop concentration essential for practicing self-awareness and self-observation. Avoiding outer distractions helps students be in closer touch with what is happening at the depth of their minds.

Noble silence, then, is not simply a matter of obeying an outside rule. It is “noble” because it is for the student and from the student. It is very different from simply “not talking.” Serious meditators choose to keep silence; they make the choice over and over again, day after day, because they know it is good for them.

Students gradually realize that the more they put into their meditation practice, the more they benefit. Maintaining noble silence for nine days certainly takes effort. But it is worth it, because that effort results in greater peace and happiness.

A Dhamma Life of Happiness

A tribute to S.N. Goenka on the first anniversary of his death, from his wife and principal Vipassana teacher Ilaichidevi Satyanarayan Goenka (Mataji).

29th September 2014 marks the first anniversary of Goenkaji's passing away. This is as significant as the 30th January—the anniversary of his day of birth in 1924.

Once someone is born, they become a part of society. During their lifespan, they perform various actions. Their wholesome and unwholesome actions not only affect themselves, but also the rest of the society, influencing it in new directions.

When the actions performed by someone bring welfare to many, that person comes to be revered, to be venerated. Goenkaji was one such person. He gave the world the gift of Vipassana, the universal Dhamma path rediscovered by the Buddha to liberate mankind from all miseries.

As a result of this gift, so many persons have gained benefit by walking on the path shown by him, and will continue to do so in the future. This first death anniversary of Goenkaji should not only remind us of all the good works done by him throughout his life, but also inspire us to develop in Dhamma, and to preserve and maintain the Dhamma taught by him.

As his wife, I had the opportunity to be close to Goenkaji for nearly seventy-two years. Today, even though he is no longer with me physically, my closeness to him remains. My mind fills with so much happiness when I think of all who have benefitted from practicing pure Dhamma. This came about as the result of his good efforts. Now we must follow in his footsteps. He served dutifully, as his teacher Sayagyi U Ba Khin instructed him to, and now we should commit ourselves to move forward in the same way.

Goenkaji always used to say that Dhamma should manifest in our actions. Dhamma in its pure form must be realized in our everyday lives. Let us be inspired by his life and death, and be virtuous and righteous by following the path lovingly shown by him.

With blessings and metta,
Ilaichidevi Satyanarayan Goenka (*wife of S.N. Goenka*)

Sayings of Sayagyi

Sayagyi U Ba Khin (1899-1971) was the first Accountant General of Burma and a notable teacher of Vipassana meditation. One of his most prominent students was S.N. Goenka. Here is a selection of Sayagyi U Ba Khin's quotes.

"A balanced mind is necessary to balance the unbalanced mind of others."

"Just as the light of a candle has the power to dispel darkness in a room, so also the light developed in one man can help dispel darkness in several others."

"To imagine that good can be done by the means of evil is an illusion, a nightmare."

"Only those who take to meditation with good intentions can be assured of success. With the development of the purity and the power of the mind backed by the insight into the ultimate truth of nature, one may be able to do a lot of things in the right direction for the benefit of mankind."



How to Maintain Practice After a Course



Vipassana students often ask the assistant teacher for advice on how to continue meditating once they return to the general population. First of all, a Vipassana course is truly valuable only if it makes a positive change in your life. This change will only come if you keep practicing the technique. Progress comes gradually, so be patient and persistent. Difficulties are bound to come up. Learn from those difficulties instead of becoming discouraged. Smile and start again!

When you can, meditate together with your Dhamma brothers. You will support each other and your meditation will be stronger. Try to meditate twice a day for an hour, once when you get up, and once later in your day. If you can't do that much, just do what you can. It will all help. Don't be surprised if you experience drowsiness, agitation, mind-wandering or other difficulties while meditating. When this happens don't give up. Keep trying and you will be successful!

How to meditate in daily practice:

Anapana: To practice Anapana, keep your attention focused on the area below the nostrils and above the upper lip. Remain aware of each breath as it enters or leaves. If your mind is very dull or very agitated, breathe slightly harder for some time and then let the breath come naturally. Use Anapana when it is difficult to feel

sensations or difficult not to react to them. You can begin with Anapana meditation and then switch to Vipassana once your mind calms down. Or, if needed, continue observing the breath for the entire hour.

Vipassana: Move your attention from head to feet and from feet to head, observing, in order, each and every part of the body by feeling the sensations that you come across. Whatever sensations you experience, whether pleasant, unpleasant or neutral, keep your attention moving and the mind balanced and steady (equanimous). Don't stay more than a few minutes at any one place. And try not to allow the practice to become mechanical.

Areas of the body having different gross sensations should be observed separately by moving the attention from head to feet (or feet to head), observing every area, part by part. Symmetrical parts, such as both arms or both legs, having similar subtle sensations, may be observed at the same time. Then go through the entire body again, part by part. If you experience subtle sensations throughout your body, you may at times sweep the entire body, and then work again part by part.

Metta: At the end of every meditation session, relax and then focus your attention for a few minutes on subtle or pleasant sensations in the body. Fill your mind and body with thoughts and feelings of goodwill toward yourself and others. May all beings be happy!

“The more one is attached to self, the greater is the suffering.”

“What is happiness? For all that science has achieved in the field of materialism, are the peoples of the world happy? They may find sensual pleasures off and on, but in their heart of hearts, they are not happy when they realize what has happened, and what may happen next. Why? This is because while man has mastery over matter, he is still lacking in mastery over his mind.”

“For progress in Vipassana meditation, a student must keep knowing anicca as continuously as possible. . . . Continuous awareness of anicca, and so of dukkha and anatta, is the secret of success. The last words of the Buddha just before he breathed his last and passed away into mahaparinibbāna were: “Decay (or anicca) is inherent in all component things. Work out your own salvation with diligence.” This is, in fact, the essence of all his teachings during the 45 years of his ministry. If you will keep up the awareness of the anicca that is inherent in all component things, you are sure to reach the goal in the course of time.”

Smiling All the Way To Death

Based on passages from The Art of Dying, by Virginia Hamilton, et al.

Goenkaji has said: “Vipassana teaches the art of dying—how to die peacefully, harmoniously. And one learns the art of dying by learning the art of living—how to become master of the present moment.” Longtime meditator Rodney Bernier exhibited calm in life and in the face of death.

Rodney was born in Canada in 1944. His parents’ relationship collapsed and he was put in an orphanage, where he was given little to eat, and often bullied. As a teenager he left the orphanage, illiterate and with few skills. He became a laborer. Soon he was battling drug addiction, which he fought and overcame. Despite his harsh childhood, Rodney had a delightful sense of humor and a kind-hearted nature. He also liked to travel. In 1973 he went to



India and signed up for his first Vipassana meditation course with Goenkaji. It had a powerful effect. Vipassana and the teachings of the Buddha became the cornerstone of his life.

Rodney then moved back to Canada, where he began tree planting. During the next two and a half decades, he planted over one million trees. In mid-life, he decided to go back to school so he could learn to read. All the while, he sat and served many courses and hosted weekly group meditations for more than 20 years. Later this was extended to daily group meditations. In 2009 Rodney was diagnosed with metastasized liver cancer. But the news didn’t appear to faze him. He recalled a conversation with his doctor.

“I walked in and we shook hands and he seemed a little bit perturbed. . . He started off saying, ‘It’s too late. It’s too late.’” “Too late? Too late for what?” “It’s too late. I can’t even do chemo on you. Your cancer is all over the place.”

Rodney told him, “It’s okay.” At that moment he realized: “Hey, I’m having no reaction. In fact, the only thing that is freaking me out is that this guy is freaking out!”

In his final days Rodney experienced moments of quiet. “Sometimes I sit very quietly,” he explained. “I can feel my whole body just dissipating, the pain getting quiet and my mind being quiet. The pain can be pretty intense sometimes. But pain is pain. It all depends on your state of mind at the time.” Three months after the initial diagnosis, he died with his friends around him. The hospital room was peaceful. A friend commented that Rodney was the poorest of his friends in terms of material possessions, but seemed to be the happiest. His death was just a continuation of his life: he was grateful and happy with what he had, and who he was.

Group Sitzings and Upcoming Courses

Donaldson Course Schedule 2015

February 12 to 23
(10-day Course)

April 23 to May 4
(10-day Course)

August 27 to 31
(3-day Course for Old Students)

Oct. 22 to Nov. 2
(10-day Course)

Donaldson Weekly Group Sitzings

Mondays & Thursdays
12:00 to 2:00 p.m.