

Vipassana Prison Newsletter

Volume VIII – October 2015

WORDS OF DHAMMA

*Sabbe sankhara anicca'tiyada paññaya
passatiatha nibbindati dukkheesa maggo
visuddhiya.*

*Sabbe sankhara dukkha'tiyada paññaya
passatiatha nibbindati dukkheesa maggo
visuddhiya.*

*Sabbe dhamma anatta'tiyada paññaya
passatiatha nibbindati dukkheesa maggo
visuddhiya.*

All conditioned things are impermanent.
When one sees this with insight,
one turns away from suffering.
This is the path of purification.

All conditioned things are unsatisfying.
When one sees this with insight,
one turns away from suffering.
This is the path of purification.

All phenomena are without self.
When one sees this with insight,
one turns away from suffering.
This is the path of purification.

Dhammapada, 277–79

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The Practice of Metta-Bhavana

The following has been adapted from an article in the August 2008 Dhamma Giri English newsletter.

The practice of metta-bhavana (meditation of loving kindness) is the closing part of the technique of Vipassana meditation. We practice mettā by radiating loving kindness and goodwill towards all beings. The practice of mettā gives us a way to share with all others the peace and harmony that we are developing.

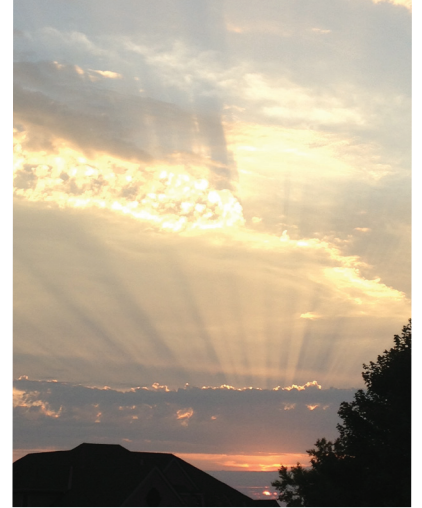
Mettā is a sincere wish for the good and welfare of all, without a trace of ill will. When negativity is removed by the practice of Vipassana, goodwill naturally wells up in the mind; and emerging from the prison of self-obsession, we begin to concern ourselves with the welfare of others. For this reason, the technique of mettā-bhāvanā is introduced only at the end of a Vipassana course. At such a time, meditators often feel a deep wish for the wellbeing of others, making their practice of mettā truly effective.

To practice mettā, the mind must be calm, balanced and free from negativity. This is the type of mind developed by the practice of Vipassana. A meditator knows by experience how anger and ill will destroy peace and frustrate any efforts to help others. Only when hatred is removed and equanimity is developed can we be happy and wish happiness for others.

We must, therefore, examine ourselves before practicing mettā-bhāvanā to check whether we are really capable of practicing it. If the mind and body are filled with serenity and wellbeing, it is natural and appropriate to share this happiness with others: “May you be happy, may you be liberated from the defilements that are the causes of suffering. May all beings be peaceful! May all beings be happy! May all beings come out of their misery!”

This loving attitude enables us to deal far more skillfully with the challenges of life. Suppose, for example, one encounters a person who is acting out of deliberate ill will to harm others. The common response—to react with fear and hatred—is an expression of self-centeredness. It does nothing to improve the situation and, in fact, magnifies the negativity. It would be far more helpful to remain calm and balanced, with a feeling of goodwill for the person who is acting wrongly. This must be sincere and not be merely an intellectual stance, a façade masking unresolved negativity.

The serenity gained in Vipassana meditation naturally gives rise to feelings of mettā, and throughout the day this will continue to affect us and our environment in a positive way—bringing more happiness to ourselves and to others around us.



Canadian Juvenile Detention Center Hosts Anapana Course

In a juvenile detention center in Canada, a group of incarcerated young men, ages 15 to 18, began practicing Anapana meditation about a year ago. The young inmates were sitting for 10 minutes a day with their teacher, an old student of Vipassana. The 10-minute sessions were going very well, and the teacher and some of the young men felt they wanted to practice more. Responding to an invitation from the Canadian juvenile detention center where the young men resided, the Vipassana Prison Trust (VPT) agreed to present a one-day meditation workshop.



In July 2015, a meditation teacher from the VPT and two assistants arrived at the juvenile detention center, and spent a day with center staff setting up a classroom for the course. Some old students of Vipassana had sent foam cushions with dark blue covers they had sewn, and a local meditator built a collapsible wooden Dhamma seat that could be easily stored for future courses. The young residents moved furniture and rearranged the classroom, which looked like a real meditation hall by the time they were done. The next day, the young men meditated with the VPT teacher and assistants. In a six-hour program, they practiced the five precepts; Anapana meditation; and mettā. During the day, they also heard stories and watched the documentary film *“Doing Time, Doing Vipassana.”* The students practiced noble silence during one of the breaks and shared a vegetarian lunch of mac and cheese, coleslaw, milk and fresh watermelon.

While the students found the meditation workshop challenging, all felt it was worth the effort. By the end of the day the meditation hall felt quiet and peaceful. Every new meditation student was given a folder with some of the stories from the course so that they could re-read them later. Many commented that they especially liked the Angulimala story (see page 3). But the best gift was invisible, and something they could always keep with them: the ability to calm and concentrate their minds, no matter where they are. Here are some responses from the young meditators, in their own words:

“I find meditation helps me be calm before stuff like going to court, so I am very thankful for that. If you ever came back I wouldn’t have a second thought to come out of my room. I would come right away because it was a great experience.”

“Thanks for showing up at the Youth Centre for us. It helped a lot of us become calmer.”

“I sometimes use it (the meditation) to calm me down when I am angry at staff or other residents, or after a bad phone call. I can sleep better if I meditate before going to bed.”

Legacy of Service: Security Officer Helped Support Vipassana Students in Jail



In the mid-1990s Charlie Brown was a security officer at the North Rehabilitation Facility (NRF), a satellite jail in the King County Correctional System in Washington State. Charlie was known as an easygoing officer, firm but fair. During the first 10-day Vipassana course held at NRF, in 1997, Charlie approached one of the volunteer servers and asked if this was Vipassana as taught by S.N. Goenka. He told the servers he had taken a course in India in the early 1970s, but had had no contact with the practice since. Charlie was delighted that the practice that he had encountered in India decades before was making an appearance at the very U.S. jail where he was working. The Vipassana organizers were equally delighted that an old student of Vipassana was on staff at NRF.

On that first NRF course no other old students or security staff had taken a course. There was a lot of skepticism among the staff: Many were so sure the course would be a failure that they placed bets on how long certain students would last. Charlie was supportive and confident that at least some students would succeed. In the end, most of them did. After that first NRF course Charlie took another course at the local Vipassana meditation center and started sitting again. He became the security officer for all the subsequent men’s courses at NRF, giving up his home life for ten days at a time to serve courses. As more courses were given and more students succeeded both in completing the course and continuing their practice, the staff saw what a beneficial program it was for the inmates and the facility. More than 20 courses were offered at NRF before the facility closed in 2002. Charlie Brown passed away in December 2014. He continues to be remembered

The Story of Angulimala

In India, in ancient days, an intelligent, hardworking boy named Ahimsaka, was sent by his parents to study with a teacher in another city. The teacher did not charge the parents money, because they were poor. The teacher liked this boy very much. He was the teacher's favorite. The other boys were jealous and made up terrible lies about Ahimsaka.

At first his teacher didn't believe them. Then the jealous boys said Ahimsaka planned to kill the teacher and his wife. Finally the teacher believed this was true, and was afraid. He said to Ahimsaka, "Go out and kill 1,000 human beings and bring the right thumb of each to me, as payment for my teaching. You owe it because I taught you for free." Ahimsaka would not think of doing this, so was banished from the teacher's house.

When his father learned that Ahimsaka had been expelled he became furious and would not listen to his son's explanations. He ordered him to leave and never return. Ahimsaka went to his mother, but she did not go against the will of her husband. Ahimsaka became overwhelmed with anger, fear and despair. No one would believe him—and he was telling the truth! His suffering mind could remember only one thing—the teacher's order to collect 1,000 human thumbs. And so he started killing, and wearing the thumbs on a chain around his neck to track the number. He became known as Angulimala. ("Anguli" means fingers and "mala" garland).

He became the terror of the countryside. Everyone was afraid. The king himself heard about Angulimala and decided to capture him. When his mother heard this she went to the forest to save her son. By then the chain around his neck had 999 fingers, just one short of 1,000. The Buddha was staying nearby. He heard the story and was afraid that Angulimala would kill his mother. So the Buddha went to the forest to stop him.

Angulimala was perched up on a hilltop, hidden by trees, and saw a woman on the road below. Approaching her, he saw it was his mother. At the same time the Buddha came near. Angulimala decided to kill the man instead of his mother. He set out after the Buddha with his knife raised, but the Buddha kept moving ahead. Angulimala just could not catch up. He tried and tried but the Buddha kept moving ahead. Finally he cried, "Stop! Stop!" And the Buddha replied, "I have stopped. It is you who

Angulimala was confused. Buddha said, "I have stopped because I have given up killing all beings. I have given up ill-treating or harming all living beings. I have established myself in love and patience and meditation. But you—you have not given up killing or ill-treating others and you are not established in love and patience. Therefore, you are the one who has not stopped."

On hearing these words Angulimala's mind, which had been so crazed, came back to reality. He thought, "This

man is so very wise and brave. He must be the Buddha himself. He must have come here just to help me." And so he threw away his weapons and asked the Buddha to become his teacher. The Buddha agreed.

When the king and his men came to capture Angulimala they found him in the forest meditation retreat of the Buddha. The king decided to leave him alone. Angulimala was sincerely and seriously practicing meditation and keeping the five precepts: abstaining from killing, stealing, speaking lies, committing

sexual misconduct, and taking intoxicants. But he had no peace of mind.

He would remember what he had done, and the cries of his victims. He felt he was too horrible a person to ever be happy and peaceful. Buddha would kindly remind him, "My son, you have stopped doing evil. You are suffering the consequences of your past actions. Have patience. Everyone, no matter what they have done, can change for the better. No one is too bad to change and you have changed. It doesn't matter whether people realize that or not. Keep practicing your meditation patiently."

One morning, outside of the meditation retreat, Angulimala heard someone crying out in pain. It was a pregnant woman having labor pains and difficulty delivering the baby. He stopped and thought to himself, "All human beings suffer." He began to have deep compassion for the woman, for all of the people he had harmed—and also for himself. He began to have deep compassion for all living beings. This compassion and kindness helped him develop better concentration and patience, which, in turn, helped him develop even more love and compassion. He devoted himself to helping others as much as he could. Angulimala lived peacefully after that.



Questions and Answers from Goenkaji

Q: Why do you give so much importance to morality and maintaining the five precepts of sila, in Vipassana courses?

I have seen from a number of students that people who give no importance to sila, or morality, cannot make any progress on the path. Sila is the foundation of Dhamma. When the foundation is weak, the whole structure will collapse. For years such people may come to courses and have wonderful experiences in meditation, but in their daily lives there is no change. They remain agitated and miserable because they are only playing a game with Vipassana, as they have played so many games. Those who really want to use Dhamma in order to change their lives for better must practice sila as carefully as possible.

Q: Is it wrong to desire material things to make life more comfortable?

No. Nothing wrong provided you're not attached to it. Whatever is a real requirement—for example, you are thirsty, you want water and a desire arises for water—there is nothing wrong in that. But once this very desire becomes a craving, once it becomes a mental desire, if you start losing the balance of your mind—"Oh, why don't I have water!"—then this is dangerous. You need water, you work to get water and quench your thirst; that is perfectly all right. Similarly, in worldly life, you work to get whatever is necessary for you. But don't get attached to it. If you don't get it, smile. You have worked but you didn't get what you wanted; doesn't matter. Suppose you have got it; you enjoy it but without attachment.

Q: How can a person come out of inferiority or superiority complexes?

This is what Vipassana does. Every complex is an impurity of the mind. As that impurity comes to the surface, you observe it at the level of body sensations. It passes away. It arises again. Again you observe. Again it passes away. Like this, these complexes weaken and ultimately do not rise again. Just observe. Suppression or expression is harmful. Vipassana helps one come out of all complexes.



Group Sitzings and Upcoming Courses

Donaldson Course Schedule 2015

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

Donaldson Weekly Group Sitzings

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