

Vipassana Prison Newsletter

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WORDS OF DHAMMA

Na jaccā vasalo hoti na jaccā hoti brāhmano. Kammunā vasalo hoti, kammunā hoti brāhmano.

One is not low because of birth nor does birth make one holy. Deeds alone make one low, deeds alone make one holy.

Sutta Nipata 1.136

VIPASSANA IS SPREADING AROUND THE WORLD. HERE'S WHY.

From the Vipassana International Newsletter, March 2013.

The following is based on a public talk given by Goenkaji on December 22, 2012, during a visit to Yangon, Myanmar.

For me, the spread of Vipassana is the main purpose of life. And it is spreading. Already there are over 160 centers around the world and more than a thousand teachers. I am often asked how it is that Vipassana is spreading so rapidly, attracting large numbers of people. One reason is that we don't teach any religion. The Buddha never taught any religion. He taught Dhamma and we also teach Dhamma. People find that it is universal, good for everyone. That is why leaders and followers of every religion have joined courses and found Vipassana so useful.

Another reason is that the teaching is free. We never charge anything for teaching the Dhamma. The Buddha never charged anything for teaching the Dhamma. The tradition never charged anything for teaching the Dhamma. Another reason is that we do not seek to convert people from one religion to another. You may call yourself by any name, whether Hindu, Buddhist, Christian, Muslim or anything else; it makes no difference. If you practice Vipassana, you are practicing the Dhamma, which is free of all religious rites, blind beliefs, dogmas or cults. That encourages people to join a course. And when they practice, they benefit here and now. They experience the results. The whole technique is result-oriented and non-commercial. The whole technique is universal. Anybody and everybody can take advantage of it. And that is how it is spreading around the world.



What is Vipassana? Vipassana is living a moral life. Which religion will oppose this? And to live a moral life, you must have a strong mind. Which religion will contradict this? And then you must have a pure mind. So sila, samadhi, panna – morality, concentration, purifying insight – nobody has any objection to that. Everyone can accept it.

I often tell how after one course I stopped suffering from migraine headaches and no longer needed morphine. But that was not the greatest benefit I experienced. Instead, my mind became clearer, my life became more peaceful and harmonious. The cure of my disease was just a by-product. Treatment of physical disease is not the main purpose of Vipassana. Vipassana will make you a healthy person at the mental level. Your mind will be more calm and quiet. You will live a prosperous, harmonious life, enjoying good relations with members of your family and others. Vipassana is a way of life. It teaches how to live peacefully and harmoniously. May Dhamma spread. May more and more people benefit from Vipassana to live a happy and harmonious life, good for them and good for others.

PEOPLE OF ALL RELIGIONS MEDITATE – AND ARE GRATEFUL FOR IT

From the Vipassana Research Institute newsletter, March 2021.

S.N. Goenka answered thousands of questions about Vipassana during his long life, from both students and journalists. Here are excerpts from an interview with a journalist in the Asian country of Sri Lanka in 2006.

Q: You have said that Vipassana is for people of all religions?

A: Yes, people from every religion can practice it and are practising it now. There is no religion in the world whose followers are not attending Vipassana Meditation courses. Because Buddha's teaching is so non-sectarian, it is so universal, so result-oriented. There is no blind faith involved; you practice, you experience the truth and then only you believe in it. This is the teaching of Buddha. It gives results, so people accept it easily.

In Vipassana centers people come from different religions and participate. Not only the followers of different religions, but also their teachers, their masters come to the courses. And they are so happy with it. Because the teaching is morality. Now which religion in the world is against morality? Every religion wants people to live a moral life. And I believe for a moral life you must be master of your own mind, you must be able to control your own mind. And this is what the technique teaches, how to control the mind. And in a very scientific way, not a sectarian way, you observe your respiration.

Respiration is respiration. You can't give any label to it. You can't say that this is Buddhist respiration or Hindu respiration or Christian respiration. Breath coming in, breath going out, you just observe it. No verbalisation, no visualisation. Just breath, mere breath; people accept it. And then you continue to observe yourself, the body and the sensations arising on the body which are related to the mind, the mental impurities. You start experiencing this, and you find you feel so miserable because of the impurity. And you start coming out of that impurity and start living a better life, happier life, peaceful life. The same result is there for everybody.

Q: My sister went for the ten-day course. She said that in the first few days there was so much pain in the body.

A: Naturally. The sensations that you experience are manifestations of the impurities that you have accumulated. So if the impurity is such that it starts manifesting itself as pain, or pleasure, or happiness, or hatred, you feel it, you observe it – understanding that this is not permanent, it's not eternal, and you keep on observing it with equanimity, with a balanced mind. And it becomes weaker, weaker, weaker, and it passes away. You are free from it. It is good that these come up to the surface to pass away.

Q: Yes, she said that at the end of the course she felt very good.

A: That is good. When the impurities leave you feel very good. When the impurities are coming out, naturally it is unpleasant. But it passes away, and you are free from it. Then you are a happy person.



Q: You have spoken at the United Nations World Peace Summit. In your opinion, what is the best solution to the problems that we face in Sri Lanka in relation to establishing peace?

A: For everyone, Vipassana is the best solution. For everybody, in every situation. If your mind is agitated, if you are miserable yourself, how can you find a solution for a problem? However, if the mind becomes calm, tranquil, pure, then whatever decision you make will be a good decision, a healthy decision, right decision. But the mind must be calm and pure. This is what Vipassana teaches.

Q: Before you took to Vipassana, it is said that you were short-tempered, egoistic and that you made yourself and others around you miserable.

A: Yes, a short-tempered person is always miserable. How can he be happy? So I was a very miserable person. Then I got Dhamma. Not that in ten days all my misery went away. But it started diminishing, diminishing, diminishing. The negativity became less, less, less. I am a happier person now.

Q: Then it wasn't a difficult decision to leave that life?

A: I still carried on my responsibility as a householder. I looked after my family, I looked after my business. And yet I kept on progressing in Dhamma. A time came when my teacher found that I was fit to teach others and he appointed me a teacher. And so I came to India and started teaching. By then I was out of business. One hundred per cent of my time has been given only to the spread of Vipassana.

Q: How would you describe yourself now?

A: I describe myself as Goenka. A good human being, a good human being. I am happy and make others happy.

Q: Is there a tendency for people to "run away" when a course gets too difficult?

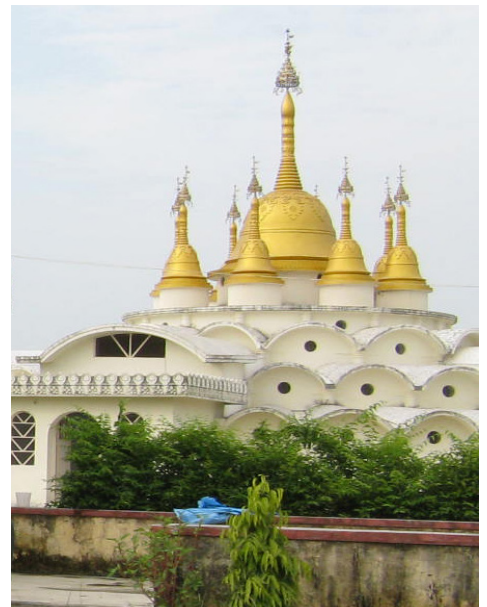
A: Well, we can't help that. If someone wants to go then we let them. But there are few, very few. Take a ten-day course. You have taken so much of my time. So you must give some time to me! (laughing)

THIS MEDITATION CENTER STANDS WHERE THE BUDDHA SAT

From the Vipassana International Newsletter, March 2013.

In the Indian state of Bihar, the town of Bodhgaya marks the spot where 2,500 years ago Siddhattha Gotama, the Buddha, reached enlightenment. That event continues to reverberate around the world, and nowhere more strongly than here where it happened. As Goenkaji has remarked, "In a place like this, where an enlightened person meditated and realized the Truth, the atmosphere was charged with the vibrations of his love and compassion. These vibrations continue...."

Goenkaji gave many courses in Bodhgaya in the early 1970s, soon after he left Myanmar for India. Now it is home to a flourishing center for the practice of Vipassana meditation, a center named Dhamma Bodhi ("Dhamma enlightenment"). Meditators purchased the land for Dhamma Bodhi in 1994. It is a quiet property of 18 acres, with rice fields on one side and the campus of Magadh University on another. The town of Bodhgaya itself is only 2.5 miles away by road and much closer by the walking paths that lead through the fields.



The first course at Dhamma Bodhi was in November 1995, with 65 participants. Today the center can house about 90 students in single-and double-occupancy rooms. The two meditation halls are air-conditioned, and there is a pagoda with space for 70 meditators to sit quietly. Year-round, the center offers 10-day courses as well as courses only for old students. Over the years, Dhamma Bodhi has developed into an ideal facility for deep meditation.

"I NEEDED TO... BECOME A BETTER HUMAN BEING."

From the Vipassana International Newsletter, May 2013.

In some ways, each person's experience of Vipassana is unique. At the same time, hearing how others came to a path of helpful meditation can be inspiring. Here is a reminiscence from an assistant teacher in Canada.

I sat a course with Goenkaji in February 1981, at Dhamma Giri, the Vipassana center in Igatpuri, India. I remember the conditions were very basic. There were no beds, just mattresses on the floor almost touching each other. And at first there were no mosquito nets. Still, I was very happy. I felt I had been on my way to a place like this for years. But now I had someone who could guide me, and I could go deeper. I was not afraid; I felt secure because of my confidence in the teacher.

When that first course was over, I stayed behind in the Dhamma hall. I didn't want to leave, I just wanted to stay there. I was filled with joy. I cannot even say it was joy – more a feeling of immense good fortune and a strong urge to share it with others. What amazed me was the potential to explore inside. This was what I wanted to do with my life. I felt, "I have a goal now, I have a chance to be in touch with this wonderful technique. I should not waste my time. I should help myself and also try to help others as much as I can."



At first I intended to devote one or two years to meditating seriously. But soon I realized that Dhamma is not a short-term job. It's a way to understand life, a way to behave and a way to live. I needed to work continuously to become a better human being, a Dhamma human being. When you meditate, do courses and keep practicing daily, you really find the Dhamma. Whatever you do, you have a sense of respect – respect for all life, respect for others, willingness to help, to do your best, and to do it with joy and love and compassion. And when life is demanding or difficult, the Dhamma teaches how to remain balanced. Even if things are not going well, you are not lost because you know you can face the problems and things will change. The Dhamma is so precious because it gives you a framework on how to proceed. It takes time, but it's possible.

When Goenkaji asked me to start my training as an assistant teacher, it felt natural. I was not really looking for the job, my intention was only to serve as much as I could. If Goenkaji wanted me to serve in this way, I said to myself, I will try to do my best. Being an assistant teacher means giving others a chance to experience what I have experienced myself. For me, there is nothing better, nothing that can beat this feeling of helping others. And I also understand that the people I help will one day be able to serve others themselves. This is how the Dhamma will long endure.

If you discover a valuable tool but cannot use it, something is missing. But when you learn and are serious about learning, and can help others while learning; when you can prepare the field for them, can help them develop, what more could you want? When you help them, you don't want to turn back. You just want to go on.