



# Vipassana Prison Newsletter

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## WORDS OF DHAMMA

*Diso disam yam tam kayirā, verī vā pana verinam; micchāpanihitam cittam pāpiyo nam tato kare.*

Whatever an enemy might do to an enemy, or a foe to a foe, the ill-directed mind can do to you even worse.

*Udāna 4.33*

## INSIGHT INTO THE TROUBLES WE FACE

From the Vipassana Research Institute Newsletter, June 2018

*In 1951, when S.N. Goenka's teacher Sayagyi U Ba Khin was the Accountant General of Burma, he was requested by a religious study group to lecture on Teachings of the Buddha. The study group was headed by the information officer and the economic and finance officer of the Special Technical and Economic Division of the U.S. Government. Sayagyi presented a series of three lectures in Rangoon, Burma, at the Methodist Church on Signal Pagoda Road. Here is an excerpt, from the Sayagyi U Ba Khin Journal.*

My dear Dhamma brothers and sisters!

Nowadays, there is dissatisfaction almost everywhere. Dissatisfaction creates ill feeling. Ill feeling creates hatred. Hatred creates enmity. Enmity creates war. War creates enemies. Enemies create war. War creates enemies, and so on.

It is now getting into a vicious cycle. Why? Certainly because there is lack of proper control over the mind.

What is man? Man is after all mental forces personified. What is matter? Matter is nothing but mental forces materialized, a result of the reaction of the moral (positive) and immoral (negative) forces.

Buddha said: "Cittena niyati loko" (the world is mind-made). Mind therefore predominates everything. Let us then study the mind and its peculiar characteristics and solve the problem that is now facing the world.

There is a great field of practical research in the Dhamma. Buddhists in Burma will always welcome whoever is anxious to have the benefit of their experience. Ladies and gentlemen, I have made an attempt to give you the best of what I know about the teachings of the Buddha. I shall be glad to give any interested person further explanation on any point that he may wish to discuss.

I am grateful to you for the kind attendance and the interest taken in my lectures. May I again thank the clergy of the church for the permission so kindly given for this series of lectures.

Peace to all beings.



## THE POWER OF A CONCENTRATED MIND

From the International Vipassana Newsletter, June 17, 2016

*Storytelling is an important feature of the one-day Anapana courses that the Vipassana Prison Trust offers for teens in correctional facilities. Participants especially like the story of Angulimala. The version they hear is much more detailed than the one found in Goenkaji's 10-day discourses.*

The story begins by telling how malicious rumors drove a youth to live as an outlaw in the jungle. In a deranged state of mind, he vowed to kill a thousand human beings. To keep track of the number of his victims, he took a finger from each and added it to a string around his neck. This is how he became known as Angulimala, or "Finger Garland." The story continues here...

Angulimala became the terror of the countryside. Everyone was afraid. The king heard about him and decided to capture him. When his mother heard this news, she went to the forest to save her son. By this time, Angulimala needed only one more finger to fulfill his vow. Now, the Buddha was staying nearby. He learned that Angulimala's mother was going to try to find him and save him. But there was a danger that the son would end up killing the mother. To prevent that, the Buddha himself went to the forest to find the young man.

Angulimala had not slept for days and was close to exhaustion. At the same time, he was very anxious to kill the thousandth person and complete his task. He made up his mind to kill the first person he met. Perched high on a mountain, hidden by trees, he saw a woman on the path below. He descended but then he saw it was his mother. At that moment, the Buddha appeared on the path. Angulimala decided to kill him instead. He charged after the Buddha with knife raised, but the Buddha kept moving ahead out of his reach. Angulimala could not catch up, no matter how much he tried.



Finally he shouted, "Stop! Stop!"

The Buddha replied, "I have stopped. It is you who have not stopped."

Angulimala didn't understand. He asked, "Why do you say that you have stopped while I have not?"

The Buddha replied, "I say that I have stopped because I have given up killing all beings. I have given up ill-treating or harming all living beings. I have cultivated love and patience through meditation. But you have not given up killing or ill-treating others, and you have not cultivated love and patience. Therefore, you are the one who has not stopped."

These words penetrated the fog of Angulimala's mind and calmed his rage. He thought, "This man is wise and brave. He must be the Buddha himself. He must have come here just to help me!" Angulimala threw away his weapons and asked the Buddha to teach him meditation and wisdom. The Buddha agreed.

When the king and his men came for Angulimala, they found him in the Buddha's forest meditation retreat. Since the outlaw had given up his evil ways, the king agreed to leave him alone. Angulimala sincerely and seriously practiced meditation and the training of moral conduct. Still, he had no peace of mind. He kept remembering what he had done in the past. He recalled the pathetic cries of his victims.

Whenever he went out in public, people recognized him and attacked him, leaving him bleeding and bruised. He felt guilty and thought that he was too horrible a person to ever be happy and peaceful, no matter how hard he tried.

The Buddha reminded him, “My son, you have stopped doing evil but are still suffering the consequences of your past actions. Have patience. Everyone can change for the better, no matter what they have done. It doesn’t matter whether people realize it or not. Keep practicing your meditation patiently.”

Angulimala lived peacefully after that. When people heard about the change in him, they asked the Buddha, “Can it be true? Can he really have a peaceful and balanced mind? Is it possible for him to live a good life after all he has done?” The Buddha answered, “Yes. He harmed so many people because his mind was overwhelmed with hurt and anger. He had been badly harmed himself. Later, he listened to good advice, he meditated, and his mind became strong and healthy.”

No matter what someone may have done in the past, developing concentration can help. It is a powerful tool for gaining real peace of mind, and for cultivating kindness and compassion for others.



## DOING MEDITATION ALWAYS HELPS. TALKING, NOT SO MUCH.

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From the Vipassana Research Institute Newsletter, May 2020.

*The following article by S.N. Goenka was first published in the June 1974 issue of the Hindi-language Vipashyana Patrika.*

My dear meditators! Come, let us understand and experience Dhamma. For this is where our true welfare lies. Discussing Dhamma may be beneficial, but at times it may not be beneficial and may even be harmful. Contemplating on Dhamma may be beneficial, but at times it may not be beneficial and may even be harmful. But directly experiencing Dhamma is certainly always beneficial.

Listening to and discussing Dhamma, we gain knowledge of Dhamma which may inspire us, indeed lead us on to directly experience Dhamma. In that case, it becomes beneficial for us. But, upon learning Dhamma, if we merely indulge in mental gymnastics, and if this intellectual knowledge of Dhamma becomes a cause for false pride and arrogance, then it is harmful to us.

Similarly, if contemplation of Dhamma remains limited to empty intellectual understanding giving rise to pride, then it becomes a cause for our harm. But if this same contemplative knowledge inspires us to practice Dhamma by clarifying the way, and if we do indeed experience it, then it becomes a cause for our welfare.

Therefore, meditators, come, let us live and practice Dhamma, awaken to Dhamma. Let us be filled with sila (morality), let us be immersed in samadhi (mastery of the mind), let us develop in panna (experiential wisdom). Let us be sutavass – those who have heard the Dhamma in the true sense of the word. This is where our true welfare lies.

## THE BODY NEEDS FOOD, THE MIND NEEDS MEDITATION

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From the Vipassana Research Institute Newsletter, January 2020

*S.N. Goenka answered thousands of questions during his more than 40 years as a Vipassana teacher. Here are excerpts from a Q&A in Pune, India, in 1993.*

Q: At present I have a number of projects in hand. But I am puzzled as to what to do.

A: This is where Vipassana will come to your help. There are so many responsibilities in the world. If your mind is confused, how can you fulfil your responsibilities? The mind should become calm, the mind should become concentrated, the mind should become free from agitation. Then, whatever you understand, it will be so clear. With this clear understanding, whatever you decide will be such a good decision, good for you and good for others. Therefore, Vipassana is very helpful for people who are busy in life.

Q: In these days of corruption, sometimes you have to tell lies. So what to do?

A: Come out of speaking lies. A lie is a lie.

Q: We have a lot of memories of past experiences and we have ambition for the future. Please explain.

A: I don't say cut yourself off totally from the past, or cut yourself off totally from the future. You make use of your past experiences; you plan for the future. But keep your legs on the present. All the time rolling in the past, or rolling in the future, your decisions always go wrong. By Vipassana you will find that you are in the present. You will find your decisions will be correct decisions and quick decisions.

Q: I have experienced good results from practising imagination; please comment on this.

A: Well, imagination is helpful for your worldly affairs. If you are a good writer you use imagination. If you are a good artist you use imagination. But not when you are practising Vipassana. With Vipassana you have to live always with the truth, as it is, as you experience it from moment to moment.



Q: I have sat a course, but find it very difficult to continue at home, due to the prevailing atmosphere. What is the solution?

A: The solution is that you must make a strong determination. As you are giving food daily to your body to keep it healthy, to keep it strong, so also the mind needs some food and Vipassana is the best food. So make a decision, "I have to keep my mind healthy and strong. I must sit; let anything happen, I must sit." If you continue for one year, then you will find it becomes very easy. It is in the initial year that people stop meditating.