



Vipassana Prison Newsletter

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WORDS OF DHAMMA

Kodham chetvā sukham seti, kodham chetvā na socati.
Kodhassa visamūlassa madhuraggassa brāhmana; vadham ariyā pasamsanti tañhi chetvā na socatī.

Slay anger and you will be happy, slay anger and you will not sorrow.
For the slaying of anger in all its forms with its poisoned root and sweet sting — that is the slaying
the nobles praise; With anger slain one weeps no more.

Samyutta Nikāya 1.187

FILM REVEALS THE JOYS OF SERVING A COURSE

From the Vipassana International Newsletter, March 2015



Imagine stepping behind the scenes at a Vipassana course to see the unpaid volunteers making it happen day after day, moment by moment. These people take 10 days out of their lives, sometimes to work harder than they have ever worked before. The experience is often an eye-opener for them. And it is an eye-opener to watch a new film on Dhamma service called *Dana: A Documentary on Generosity*.

The film follows a small team of servers during a 10-day course at Dhamma Neru in Spain. The focus is not on the teachers conducting the course or on the meditators. It is on a few people from different countries, languages and cultures, working in the confined and sometimes hectic kitchen and other servers' areas. They prepare meals, wash and wipe dishes, clean toilets, fold laundry, ring the gong, answer the telephone and rebind worn-out books. They relax when they can, chat during breaks and sometimes give way to irritation, stress or fatigue. Like the students sitting the course, the servers too have a serious purpose and are affected by the meditative atmosphere.

In unscripted conversations, they explain what Vipassana is and what they are trying to do. The insights they share include the joy of working together in silence; the need for mutual respect; the acceptance of differences; the importance of harmony; the value of every task when performed with attention and love; the meaning of selflessness; the trivial nature of worldly position and possessions; the common search for peace and happiness; the universal reality of change; and the profound benefit of introspection.

The film helps to convey these insights not only in dialogue but with revealing images. Clouds rolling across the sky. Water droplets sliding down a windowpane. Eyes intent on a task. Hands peeling vegetables. Ants crawling through the undergrowth. Buds bursting into bloom. Leaves trembling in the breeze. Faces rapt in meditation.

Sounds convey the same messages. We hear the early morning hush, birdsong and the buzzing of insects, the clatter of cutlery, the crunch of a knife through onions, a creaking door, milk being poured into a pot, the stillness of the meditation hall and the mellow tones of the gong. The servers are never named and yet the viewer ends up feeling they are all familiar. Their service is an act of generosity, and their generosity of spirit is deeply inspiring. The film has no real introduction or conclusion. It simply begins and ends, as life does. But like the gong we hear over and over, its messages continue to resonate.

A CHAT WITH MATAJI, WIFE OF S.N. GOENKA

From the Vipassana Research Institute newsletter, December 2020

Mrs. Ilaichi Devi Goenka was known to her family and students as Mataji (respected mother; a respectful form of address for elderly Indian women). She and S.N. Goenka raised six sons. To commemorate five years since Mataji's death, here is an interview with her from 1991.

Q: After Goenkaji went to India to teach Dhamma, you stayed in Burma for another two years?

A: For two and a half years.

Q: Did you have any contact with Sayagyi U Ba Khin, who taught Goenkaji Vipassana, during this time?

A: I had much more contact than before, a great deal more. When I went to Sayagyi's center after Goenkaji had gone to India, he showed me so much love and affection. He would ask, "How are you?" just as if he was my father. He knew that I was separated from Goenkaji, and he was as concerned about me as any parent would be. He always asked about my welfare, and whether things were going well at home. I would go to his center and meditate, and then sit and talk a little with Sayagyi, and then I would feel so much better, very relaxed. There was so much metta (loving kindness) in him. I felt it at that time particularly; he was filled with so much metta.

Q: When you and Goenkaji became established in Dhamma, did your parents notice a big change in your life? Were they happy for you?

A: When we started the Dhamma work, my parents felt a little taken aback at first, because they feared we might not be able to take care of the children, as we should, because of being absorbed in Dhamma work. But later on, when they saw that things were going well, when they saw the good results of Dhamma, and also that the children were on the right track, they also felt happy about our Dhamma work.

Q: Was there a period when Goenkaji had just taken Dhamma, that your family felt concerned for his wellbeing?

A: When Goenkaji went for his first course, everyone in the family was really worried. The fear was that if he turned to Buddha Dhamma perhaps he would become a monk, and then what would happen to our family? Everyone in the family was discussing their worries, and this strengthened my own concerns in that direction. But then, gradually, as the changes in Goenkaji became apparent, and then when I did the course – and later all the others in the family also – then all of that was washed away. After that, there were no fears, no apprehension, nothing like that.

Q: Were you in Burma when Sayagyi died?

A: Yes, I was.

Q: Can you tell us about the ceremony after he died, how the people said goodbye to the body?

A: After Sayagyi passed away, I felt so much emptiness inside, as though everything was finished. I went to the funeral, but I couldn't make myself go and see everything; it was beyond me. There was an electric cremation, and I didn't watch. After the funeral, we went home and sat for meditation. Then I felt peaceful, and much, much happier.

Before that it had been terrible; I had felt very empty. Even going to the center to meditate became too much. It was as if the purpose of the center was gone when Sayagyi was not there. During one of my courses there, while I was



sitting, I felt if there is no Sayagyi, there is no center, there is no use in my coming here. Then I had the feeling as if Sayagyi were standing near me; but when I opened my eyes, there was nothing. It was just a feeling inside, feeling his presence.

Q: After that experience, did all your confidence in Dhamma come back?

A: The confidence in Dhamma was always there. That wasn't lost or shattered because of Sayagyi's passing away. His passing was just the experience of when somebody very near and dear to you dies suddenly. If you lose such a person suddenly, what a traumatic experience it becomes. You feel so empty from deep inside. One feels bereft at the loss, but not because Dhamma is lost. And, with time all the wounds heal; then, gradually, you become normal once again.

Q: If we go back to before Sayagyi's passing, when Goenkaji was in India teaching, and you would go to the center, did Sayagyi have any advice or guidance for you? Did he talk about the role you would play?

A: He never told me directly that I would also go to India and then around the world on the Dhamma mission with Goenkaji. But he always said that he was very pleased and happy that Goenkaji had gone to India and was spreading Dhamma.

Q: In 1971, you left Burma and moved to India. What was it like to leave Burma, and settle in a new country?

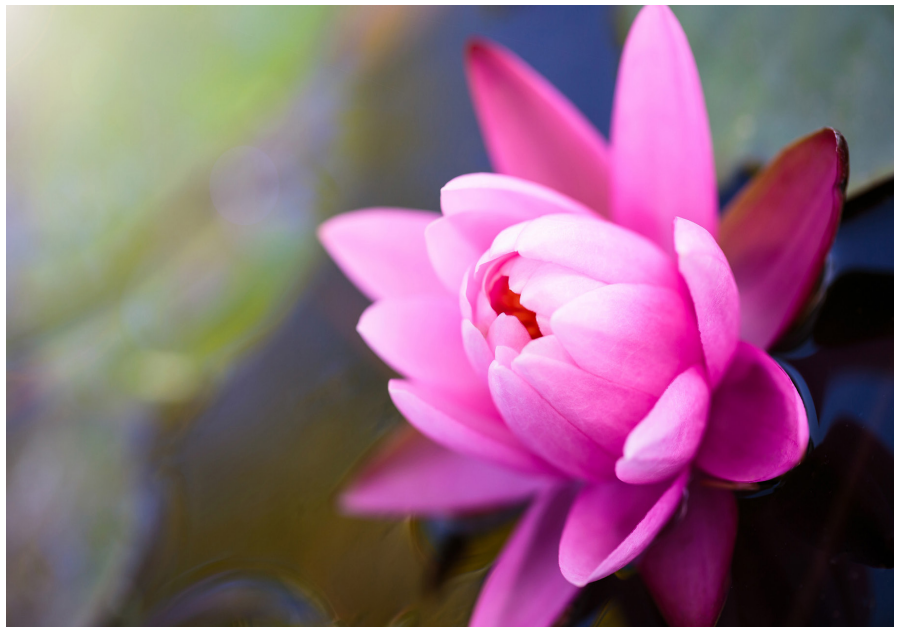
A: When we left the house in Rangoon, then of course I felt very sad, because our family house had been established there for so many years, and now I had to leave it. But when we came to Bombay, when I saw the house there – where all our family was living – I felt quite happy and very relaxed. Now it's a better place and I feel very good. Of course, there was not so much tranquility in India as in Burma.

Q: How has Dhamma helped you? And, as a Dhamma teacher, how have you seen the technique help others?

A: I have peace of mind. I am happy. For me, Dhamma is a benefit all around. It gives people peace of mind in all respects, and also helps them to carry out their duties in life. It is not money which brings happiness and contentment in the heart. If someone has no money, and has Dhamma, then such a person will feel "Oh, I am full." One will feel so content, even if there is no money, because Dhamma is there.

Q: How do you feel about travelling so frequently, especially to countries where you do not speak the language?

A: The journeys are tiring. We get off the airplane and just for a day or two it is very tiring. Because of travelling, and the different vibrations all around, we are unsettled a little for a day. Once we start the course, and get engrossed in it, then it is very peaceful and very nice. Although I do not understand the language, yet I feel very good within myself. The students ask questions, and although I don't understand them fully, it gives me happiness to be there.



Q: May we ask you, when Goenkaji is giving a Dhamma discourse, what are you doing?

A: You want to know what I do at that time? I meditate and keep giving metta to everyone.

Q: We've come to the end of our questions. **A:** Thank you. Be happy!

THIS MEDITATION CENTER COSTS TWO CENTS A YEAR

From the Vipassana International Newsletter, June 2014

Not many Vipassana centers are near a crowded bus station, in the middle of a major city. One of the few proudly standing in such a location is a remarkable center in the historic Indian city of Pune (pronounced poo-nay), population three million. It is in western India, near the major city of Mumbai (formerly Bombay). The first Vipassana course there was in 1971. In 1996 meditators acquired land about an hour's drive from the city, beside the Indrayani River. Goenkaji named it Dhammānanda ("The Bliss of Dhamma"). This, everyone thought, would be the one center for Vipassana in Pune.

Except in 2000 a new opportunity arose: three acres of land in the heart of the city. Property of the Pune Corporation, it had been vacant for years. The land was reserved for a public cause that would benefit the people of Pune. Vipassana, of course, meets this special purpose. The Vipassana Trust had to decide what to do. One center had already opened; did it make sense to have two? Would city noise near the new site disturb the meditators? After careful consideration, the Trust decided to accept the proposal. The first site would be the Pune Riverside Meditation Center; the new site would be the Pune City Meditation Center, named by Goenkaji Dhamma Punna ("Perfection of the Dhamma").

A joint project between the Pune Corporation and the Pune Vipassana Trust, the City center operates on a 90-year lease, to be renewed every 30 years. The rent: one Indian rupee per year, about two US cents. Garden maintenance and water are provided by the municipality, while the Trust is responsible for construction, electricity and routine maintenance. Today the center includes a meditation hall for 120 students, and residences that house 60 men and 56 women, all in twin rooms with attached toilets. Other facilities include a dining hall, rooms for assistant teachers, and staff quarters for families and single workers. Above the center office is a smaller hall with space for 80; Vipassana meditators visiting or living in Pune can come to sit there throughout the day or can join one-day courses organized in this location.



The center offers many 10-day courses, along with short courses and children's courses. Being on flat land, and in the city, has advantages. Older students, people with limited mobility or others with health issues can easily reach the site. The center is wheelchair-accessible and has held a 10-day course specifically for blind students.

Tall trees tower over Dhamma Punna, sheltering many types of birds. The lawns and gardens offer pleasant spots for relaxation. Today meditators in Pune are fortunate to have the nearby Riverside Meditation Center, where they can work in a quiet and secluded environment. And at the City Meditation Center, they have a facility where they can enter the world of Vipassana and find an oasis of peace, right in the midst of modern urban life.