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WORDS OF DHAMMA

Taṇca kammam katam sādhu, jam katvā nānutappati, yassa patīto sumano, vipākam pamisevati.

Well done is that action of doing which one repents not later, and the fruit of which, one reaps with delight and happiness.

Dhammapada 5.68

FIRST CHILDREN'S COURSE IS A SPECIAL DAY

Courses of anapana meditation for children are offered, usually at Vipassana centers, around the world. This article first appeared in the Vipassana International Newsletter in June 2013.

Life is complicated, and potential problems are often lurking. Sometimes they are difficult to avoid, and unfortunately we fall prey to them. When we do: they lead to suffering. So it makes sense that if we know a way out of suffering, we'll want to make it available in our cities. This is what a courageous group of Vipassana meditators decided to do in their hometown of Newark, New Jersey. And that was why, on a hot Sunday in June, 2013, in a wood frame house in a Newark neighborhood, more than 20 children were sitting together with eyes closed, learning to focus on their breath.



This was the very first children's course in Newark. For the old students who organized it, it was a dream come true. It took a lot of planning, struggle and hard work, but nothing could stop their enthusiasm. On the day of the course, first came registration and an orientation talk. Then at last it was time to sit down and meditate. This is always a testing moment at any age. It's especially hard on a magnificent summery day when you could be outside. But all it takes to succeed is a sincere effort, and the children contributed that. As the day progressed, children who had been restless began to calm down. The atmosphere became quieter. When the last session came and everyone practiced Metta, it felt just right.

The children in the course were as young as age 8 and as old as 15, of African American, Chinese, Indian or European background. Every single participant was welcomed and made to feel at home. After all, the Dhamma is for everyone without distinction. One of the course teachers said: Since 1995, I have been serving young people as a sports instructor. I was thinking sport is just a temporary deterrent from what these young people find on the street, from unwholesome behavior patterns. They needed something more. When I was introduced to Vipassana, I realized this could be it. And after practicing for several years, I realized

this really was it. This was what my city needed. I had an opportunity to sit down with the principal of a Newark high school, a city councillor. He understood. He said, "You have to do it." I said okay. In a couple of months I was training to be a children's course teacher. A small group came together here in Newark. We put it together. It was one of the greatest days of my life to serve my community, to serve children from my neighborhood.

FROM BUNDLE OF MISERY TO A CLEAR MIND

Every Vipassana course includes discourses, recorded talks given by S.N. Goenka near the end of the day. Here, slightly edited, is the discourse that is heard on the first day of a standard 10-day course.

Every time an impurity rises in the mind, such as anger, hatred, passion, fear, etc., one becomes miserable. Whenever something unwanted happens, one becomes tense and starts tying knots inside. Whenever something wanted does not happen, again one generates tension within. Throughout life one repeats this process until the entire mental and physical structure is a bundle of knots. And one does not keep this tension limited to oneself, but instead distributes it to all with whom one comes in contact. Certainly this is not the right way to live.

To learn the art of living harmoniously, first one must find the cause of disharmony. The cause always lies within, and for this reason you have to explore the reality of oneself. This technique helps you do so, to examine your own mental and physical structure, towards which there is so much attachment, resulting only in tensions, in misery. At the experiential level one must understand one's own nature, mental and physical; only then can one experience whatever there might be beyond mind and matter. This is therefore a technique of truth-realization, self-realization, investigating the reality of what one calls "oneself."

Misery is a universal malady. The remedy for this melody cannot be sectarian; it also must be universal. Awareness of respiration meets this requirement. Breath is common to all: observing it will be acceptable to all. Every step on the path must be totally free from sectarianism. Breath is a tool with which to explore the truth within yourself. Actually, at the experiential level, you know very little about your body. You know only its external appearance, the parts and functions of it that you can consciously control.

On this path, whatever is unknown about yourself must become known to you. For this purpose respiration will help. It acts as a bridge from the known to the unknown, because respiration is one function of the body that can be either conscious or unconscious, intentional or automatic. One starts with conscious, intentional breathing, and proceeds to awareness of natural, normal breath. And from there you will advance to still subtler truths about yourself. Every step is a step with reality; every day you will penetrate further to discover subtler realities about yourself, about your mind and body. Today you were asked to observe only the physical function of respiration, but at the same time, each one of you was observing the mind, because the nature of the breath is strongly connected to one's mental state. As soon as any impurity, any defilement rises in the mind, the breath becomes abnormal – one starts breathing a little rapidly, a little heavily. When the defilement passes away, the breath again becomes soft. Thus, breath can help to explore the reality not only of the body, but also of the mind.

One reality of mind, would you began to experience today, is its habit of always wandering from one object to another. It does not want to stay on the breath, or on any single object of attention: instead it runs wild. And when it wanders, where does the mind go? By your practice, you have seen that it wanders either in the past or in the future. This is the habit pattern of the mind; it does not want to stay in the present moment. Actually, one has to live in the present moment. Whatever is past is gone beyond recall; whatever is future remains beyond one's reach, until it becomes present. Remembering the past and giving thought to the future are important, but only to the extent that they help one to deal with the present. Yet because of its ingrained habit, the mind constantly tries to escape from present reality into a past or future that is unattainable, and therefore this wild mind remains agitated, miserable. The technique that you are learning here is called the art of living, and life can really be lived only in the present. Therefore the first step is to learn how to live in the present moment, by keeping the mind on a present reality: the breath that is now entering or leaving the nostrils. This is a reality of this moment, although a superficial one.

When the mind wanders away – smilingly, without any tension, one accepts the fact that, because of its old habit pattern, it has wandered. As soon as one realizes that the mind has wandered, naturally, automatically, it will return to awareness of respiration. You easily recognized the tendency of the mind to roll in thoughts either of the past or of the future. Now of what type are these thoughts? Today you have seen for yourselves that at times thoughts arrive without any sequence, any head or tail. Even when there is a sequence to the thoughts, they have as their object

something that is either pleasant or unpleasant. If it is pleasant, one starts reacting with liking, which develops into craving, clinging. If it is unpleasant, one starts reacting with disliking, which develops into aversion, hatred. The goal of this technique is to purify the mind, to free it from misery by gradually eradicating the negativities within. It is an operation deep into one's own unconscious, performed in order to uncover and remove the complexes hidden there. Even the first step of this technique must purify the mind, and this is the case: by observing respiration, you have started not only to concentrate the mind, but also to purify it.



Perhaps during today there were only a few moments when your mind was fully concentrated on your breathing, but every such moment is very powerful in changing the habit pattern of the mind. In that moment, you are aware of the present reality, the breath entering or leaving the nostrils, without any illusion. And you cannot crave for more breath, or feel aversion towards your breathing: you simply observe, without reacting to it. This moment of purity at the conscious level has a strong impact on the old impurities accumulated in the unconscious.

When one faces such a situation, there is the danger of becoming agitated, and multiplying the difficulties. However, it would be wise to understand that what seems to be a problem is actually a sign of success in the meditation, an indication that in fact the technique has started to work. The operation into the unconscious has begun, and some of the pus hidden there has started to come out of the wound. Although the process is unpleasant, this is the only way to get rid of the pus, to remove the impurities.

Make use of the time, the opportunity, the technique, to liberate yourselves from the bondages of craving, aversion, delusion, and to enjoy real peace, real harmony, real happiness.

Real happiness to you all.

May all beings be happy!

TAKE TO MEDITATION WITH GOOD INTENTIONS

Sayagyi U Ba Khin (1899-1971) was a Vipassana teacher in Myanmar, a country east of India. It was he who first taught S.N. Goenka to meditate in this tradition, and who then guided Goenka to help spread Vipassana around the world. U Ba Khin was a famously wise person, and often could express his wisdom in short sayings. Here are some, reprinted from the January 2011 International Vipassana Newsletter.

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

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

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

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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.

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My approach is essentially practical, not theoretical. Vipassana meditation is so subtle and delicate that the less you talk about it, the more you can obtain good results.

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Dhamma eradicates suffering and gives happiness. Who gives this happiness? It is not the Buddha but the Dhamma, the knowledge of anicca (the changing sensations) within the body, which gives this happiness. That is why you must meditate and be aware of anicca continually.

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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.

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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 hearts 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.

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Anicca when properly developed will solve almost all your problems. It might not even be necessary for you to ask questions for answers. As the appreciation of anicca grows, so will the veil of ignorance fade away. When the way becomes clear for right understanding, doubts and fears will disappear automatically. You will then see things in the true perspective.

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For progress in Vipassana meditation, a student must keep knowing anicca as continuously as possible.... The last words of the Buddha just before he breathed his last and passed away 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.

