

# Vipassana Prison Newsletter

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## WORDS OF BUDDHA

Sukarāni asādhūni, attano ahitāni ca. Yam ve hitaṇca sādhuṇca, tam ve paramadukkaram.

Easy to do are things that are bad and harmful to oneself. But exceedingly difficult to do are things that are good and beneficial.

*Dhammapada 12.163*

## POSITIVE RESULTS HELP PRISON EMBRACE VIPASSANA

*The following is from a letter sent by two Vipassana meditators in Israel.*

Dear friends,

The latest Vipassana prison course in Israel ended with 16 participating inmates. It was the fourth Vipassana course in Hermon Prison, in the north of the country. The prison holds about 500 inmates who are considered good candidates for rehabilitation. It is a medium security prison; some of those serving time there have committed violent crimes.

The first Vipassana course was held in Hermon in December 2006, followed closely by a second one in April 2007. Participants successfully completed those courses, but unfortunately changing personnel and logistics put the program on hold. About a year ago, however, renewed interest in the rehabilitation potential of Vipassana in prison brought about another two courses—one in June 2017, and this most recent one.

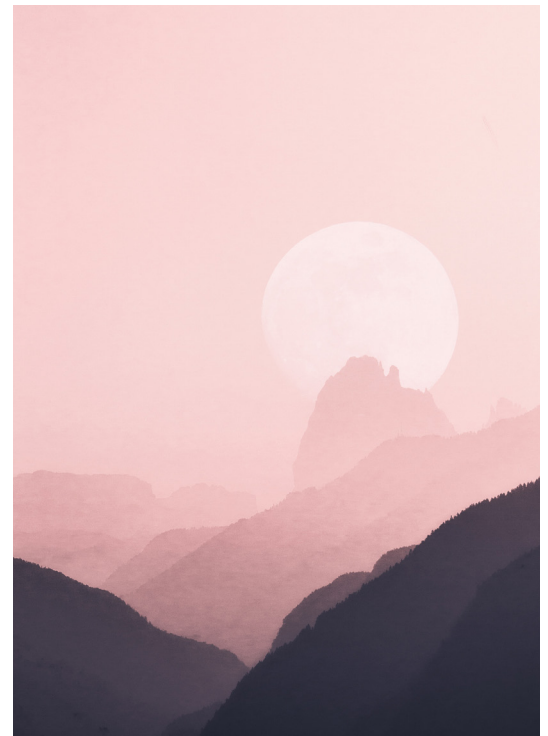
Attending the graduation on Metta Day brought back memories of attending graduations at the North Rehabilitation Facility in Seattle. Twenty Vipassana courses were (separately) offered to men and women there between 1997 and 2002. Those were the first courses in a U.S. corrections facility.

Metta Day gives inmate students an opportunity to share their experience of Vipassana with fellow inmates and with prison officials, some of whom are their counselors or security officers. We were amazed here in Israel how many times the inmate students ended their sharing with an enthusiastic call for fellow inmates to take a course.

Overall, we were inspired and filled with sympathetic joy at the enthusiasm and seriousness with which the Vipassana program is taken. The warden showed willingness to do everything possible to meet the needs of the organizers and servers. In a short meeting after the course, it was clear that she has fully embraced the program and intends for it to continue.

An old student has been coming to the prison to lead group sittings between courses. And prison officials have committed to doing everything they can to make sure that inmate old students have the opportunity to continue to meditate. They even talked about the possibility of holding one-day courses.

While the date for the next course is not yet set, it is clear that a regular Vipassana program in Hermon Prison is a real possibility and could serve many inmates in the future. May this and other Vipassana prison programs around the world continue to bear fruit and change lives.



## WHAT HAPPENS IF DURING MEDITATION I AM BORED?

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*These questions and answers are from the newsletter of the California Vipassana Center. All of the questions are from “old students,” people who have sat at least one 10-day meditation course. All of the answers are from assistant Vipassana teachers. They appeared in the California newsletter in February, March, and April 2022.*

**Question:** I am restarting meditating after a long time off. I am able to finish one scan from top to bottom and feel the sensations, but somehow can't go back up. It feels stuck and I can't move my mind back up. Why is this happening? Is it because I'm bored?

**Answer:** It's good that you are restarting your daily practice. But the old habit patterns of the mind are not thrilled with you starting meditating again. Some of what you may be experiencing are those “kicks from within” such as boredom, irritation, and feeling stuck. Don't worry. This is all part of the process. All things arise to pass away – these are just some of those things for you.

Here are some tips you might find helpful. When the mind wanders or doubts arise, and you become aware of that, bring the mind gently back to breath or sensations on the body. When you feel stuck you can use your breath to help move your awareness. For example, when you exhale move your awareness down the body. When you inhale you can move your attention up the body. Remember that we are observing sensations to develop awareness of their impermanence and to develop our equanimity.

When you are meditating, observe whatever is manifesting itself in the moment with as much equanimity – balance – as is available. Just keep trying, with patience. May you get the best fruits from your practice.

**Question:** I have a question about daily practice. Over the last two years, I have been consistent with doing 45 minutes to one hour per day of Vipassana. Lately, I find myself experiencing very strong vibrations over my entire body. Sometimes it feels like I am shaking. A few questions in connection with that:

1. When I'm experiencing strong vibrations, should I simply observe them like any other sensation?
2. Should I continue to scan the body, systematically from top to bottom, when experiencing these vibrations? Sometimes it feels like the same vibration is persisting across the entire body!
3. How quickly or slowly should I move my attention when experiencing these vibrations?

**Answer:** It is excellent that you have established a daily practice. And yes, your intuition is correct, any physical sensation is just to be observed, with equanimity. And this answer is yes as well: you should continue to scan the body from head to feet and then feet to head, alternating between working part by part and then working with a free flow or simultaneously (both sides of the body at the same time when possible). When you experience strong sensations you should observe them exactly as you would any other sensations – in order, not giving any one sensation more importance than another.



However, if you have a choice between two sensations, give importance to whichever is more subtle. To be clear, it doesn't matter if the sensations are the same everywhere, the instructions remain the same. Work in order. In terms of speed, work in a way that feels normal or natural for you. From time to time this may mean to work more slowly or more quickly, depending on your concentration and the kinds of sensations you are experiencing. As explained above, alternate between part by part and free flow regardless of the sensations you are experiencing.

Finally, try to work in a relaxed way. Don't force a particular posture. When you pass your attention through the body in order and become aware of areas that are tense, it's okay to intentionally relax them. Keep meditating!

**Question:** I completed a 10-day course two months ago, and have meditated for one hour in the morning and one hour in the evening every day since then. I'm experiencing many benefits from my practice, and while there are certainly some struggles I'm committed to continuing on the path of Vipassana. I have a question about the sensations I'm feeling on my body outside of my meditation sessions. During sessions, I always feel very intense sensations on my face. They are not painful, but they can be very, very intense. While meditating, I have gotten better at being equanimous about them and at ignoring them while focusing on more subtle sensations on the rest of my body.

But I often feel these sensations on my face throughout the day, sometimes intensely and sometimes not. At times they keep me awake at night they are so strong! At times when I'm relaxed I also feel sensations on other parts of my body and a spontaneous kind of flow starts happening if I focus on them. So my question is: how should I respond to these intense and subtle sensations during my everyday waking life? Should I ignore them, note them and move on with my day, or focus on them for a time?

**Answer:** It's so good that you have continued to meditate after your course. When you are meditating give all your attention to working within the framework of the body. In normal active daily life when you are not meditating, you should focus on the task at hand, and not worry so much about any sensations you might be feeling. At night if in a very relaxed way you feel your attention flowing, there's nothing wrong in just letting the mind observe whatever sensations are arising wherever it goes.

It is true that over time we can develop awareness of certain sensations in the body as a signal that we are losing equanimity. This can be very helpful as one can use a few breaths of Anapana to calm the mind and make proper decisions. This awareness is not a magic bullet, and we all struggle with the complexities of life. But having a Vipassana practice is a big help.



*The following three poems by Canadian Vipassana meditator Ian McCrorie are from his 2003 book "The Moon Appears When the Water is Still – Reflections of the Dhamma." The book is published by Pariyatti, where it remains one of that publisher's most popular titles.*



### **The End of Suffering**

We must first realize  
that life is quite unsatisfactory.  
Unhappy events linger forever,  
happy times vanish in the blink of an eye.

We must accept this condition.  
Life begins with the pain of birth  
and ends with the pain of death.  
And between the alpha and omega  
lives dis-ease.

Have faith that there is a way out  
which is to understand that  
the cause of this unsatisfactoriness is  
craving.

We want the happy times to linger forever  
and the unhappy events to vanish in the blink of  
an eye.

A life free of pain is not possible  
but a life free of craving for it to be otherwise  
is.

Once free of craving, though the pain remains,  
the suffering ceases.

### **The Visitors**

During intensive meditation  
many mind states arise:  
boredom, anger, jealousy,  
fear, loathing, craving.  
They all visit sooner or later.

But if one is patient,  
if one allows them some space,  
we notice that they will arise,  
stay a while  
and invariably pass on.

They are not so fearsome.  
They are only as powerful  
as we fear them to be.

By throwing sticks at barking dogs  
we excite them more.

Smile, let them do what dogs do,  
And their barking, let alone their bite,  
ceases.

### **Embrace and Share**

The Dhamma is closest to those with broken hearts.  
Only when your home has been burned to the ground can you  
see the stars.

Do not throw away your suffering; it is the fertile soil that  
grows the flowers of truth.

Embrace your pain and share your pleasure.  
Pain is the teaching, release is the graduation.

