



Vipassana Prison Newsletter

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WORDS OF DHAMMA

Look not to the faults of others, nor to their omissions and commissions.
But rather look to your own acts, to what you have done and left undone.

Dhammapada 4.50

KNOTS TIE US UP. MEDITATION CAN UNTIE KNOTS.

*This is a slightly edited excerpt from *A Meditator's Handbook – How to Untie Knots*, by Bill Crecelius. In this popular book, a meditator expresses insights into how meditation has changed his life. He also offers suggestions, to anyone interested in establishing a meditation practice, about how they might do so – and describes what benefits they might then enjoy. *A Meditator's Handbook* is published by Pariyatti Press of Seattle, a major publisher of Vipassana books and other helpful materials.*



You have now experienced the subtleties of mind and body that are available to you, through just one ten-day course in Vipassana meditation. Although you may have been working at a level that was somewhat superficial when you began, in just 10 days you were able to move the mind from a gross level to one that was far subtler. You experienced something else, too. By practicing strict rules of morality, you were able to settle the mind so that it would be able to probe deeper within.

It is with steady and correct practice that success in untying the knots of hate, greed and delusion, which make up so much of our being, will come about. Success cannot come about simply by being near a person that has attained higher levels of development. It cannot be attained by reading books, listening to discourses or chanting. Success can only come about by practice. The result will be equal to the amount of balanced effort made. When you start seeing things the way they are, you won't be dragged down by the negative, and you will become brighter and lighter. That's what it's all about, isn't it? When the darkness goes, there is only the light left.

The goal of sila (morality), samadhi (concentration), and panna (wisdom), is liberation. If they are not supporting each other, you won't be working in the way the Buddha taught us to work. Each one supports the other. Each is linked in a perfect way that helps the other. You will be working in the correct way toward a happier life when you are aiming for the correct goal.

Two things in particular will help you keep focused on the correct goal. Daily sittings and moral actions should be the base of your effort. Without them you will very quickly stop making effort, because you won't see the benefits accumulate in life. Stay strong and follow these two most basic elements of the path. The wonderful thing about this technique is that the benefits manifest themselves here and now. Each step of the way leads you closer to your goal and you can feel it as it manifests in your life. You have accomplished the most difficult part, and that is finding the path and taking the first step. Now you just need to apply yourself.

THERE IS A WAY TO COME OUT OF ANGER! ANGER!! ANGER!!!

This is the last of three addresses that Vipassana teacher S.N. Goenka gave at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, in 2000. It is taken from the book Meditation Now, published by the Vipassana Research Institute.

What happens when someone is angry? The law of nature is such that one who generates anger is its first victim. One is bound to become miserable as one generates anger, even though most of the time people do not realize that they are harming themselves by generating anger. Even if someone does realize this, the truth is that one is unable to keep oneself away from anger. Now let us see why one becomes angry. It is quite obvious that anger arises when something undesirable has happened, when someone has created an obstacle to the fulfilment of your desires, or when someone has insulted you. All such reasons make one flare up in anger, and are the apparent reasons for wanting to become angry.

Now, is it possible that someone can attain so much power that no one should say or do anything against him? This is certainly impossible. Even to the most powerful person in the world, undesirable things keep on happening – and he or she is helpless to prevent them. Even if we can stop one person from insulting us, or saying something against us, there is no guarantee that another person will not start doing the same thing. While we cannot change the whole world according to our wishes, we can certainly change ourselves to get rid of the misery one suffers by generating anger. For this, one has to seek a deeper reason for the anger.



Let us understand from the standpoint of Vipassana the real reason we experience anger within ourselves. If you learn the art of observing the reality within yourself, it will become clear, at the experiential level, that the real reason for anger lies within and not outside. As soon as one comes across some undesirable thing outside, there is a sensation in the body. And because the object is undesirable, the sensation is very unpleasant. It is only after feeling this unpleasant sensation that one reacts with anger.

If one learns how to observe bodily sensations equanimously, without reacting to them, one starts

coming out of the old habit of flaring up in anger – and harming oneself. The practice of Vipassana helps one to develop the ability to observe all the different sensations one experiences on different parts of the body from time to time – and remain equanimous by not reacting to them. The old habit had been that when you feel pleasant sensations you react with craving and clinging, and when you feel unpleasant ones you react with anger and hatred. Vipassana teaches you to observe every sensation, both pleasant and unpleasant, objectively. It also teaches you to remain equanimous, with the understanding that every sensation has the quality of arising and passing away. No sensation remains eternally.



By practicing the observation of sensation again and again, one changes the habit of instantly reacting to the sensations. Then, in daily life, whenever one comes in contact with something undesirable, one notices an unpleasant sensation arise in the body. One can start observing it – without flaring up in anger as before.

Of course, it takes time to reach a stage where one is fully liberated from anger. When one practises this more and more, one notices that the period of rolling in anger becomes shorter and shorter. Maybe after a few minutes one starts realizing that by blindly reacting with anger one makes unpleasant sensations even more intense, thereby making oneself even more miserable. As soon as one realizes this fact, one starts coming out of anger.

With the practice of Vipassana this period of realization – when one realizes the truth that one is causing harm to oneself by generating anger – becomes shorter and shorter. This is the only way to liberate oneself from this mad habit of reacting with anger. Of course, as soon as one realizes that one has generated anger, one may divert one's attention to some other object. This may make you feel that you are coming out of anger. But it is actually only the surface part of the mind that has come out of anger. Deep inside one keeps on boiling in anger, because you have not eradicated the anger, you have merely suppressed it.

Vipassana teaches you to not run away from the reality but, rather, to face the reality and start objectively observing the anger in the mind. By observing the reality of the unpleasant sensations in the body, you are not diverting your attention somewhere else. Nor are you suppressing your anger. As you keep on observing the sensations equanimously, you will notice that the anger becomes weaker and weaker, and naturally passes away.

The fact is that there is a barrier between the smaller part of the mind, i.e. the surface of the mind, and the larger part of the mind, the so-called subconscious mind. This larger part of the mind at the deepest level is constantly in touch with bodily sensations. Due to one reason or the other, there are different kinds of sensations throughout the body at every moment. If the sensation is pleasant, then the habit pattern is to react with clinging and craving. If it is unpleasant, the habit pattern is to react with aversion and hatred.

Because of the barrier between the small surface part of the mind and the rest of the mind, the surface part is totally unaware that this constant reaction is taking place at the deeper level. Meditation helps to break this barrier – and the entire mental structure becomes very conscious. It feels the sensations from moment to moment and, with the understanding of the law of impermanence, remains equanimous. It is easy to train the surface level of the mind to remain equanimous. When the barrier is broken by meditation, the entire mind keeps on understanding the law and permanence and the habit pattern of blind reaction at the deeper level starts changing. This is the best way to liberate yourself from the misery of anger.

SEND LOVING KINDNESS – AND IT AFFECTS YOU

*This is an excerpt, slightly edited, of an old student talk by Dr. Paul Fleischman, a Vipassana teacher living in Massachusetts. The talk, titled *Who We Are And Why We Are The Way We Are*, was first presented in October 2019.*

When we practice metta (loving kindness), we're trying to send our feelings of loving kindness into the universe. It's just a feeling of giving this out. Very frequently, students will say things like, "Oh, my meditation's agitated" or "I feel restless" or "Sometimes I feel anxious when I'm meditating. Does that mean I'm practicing improperly?" But what you feel when you meditate is not the way to assess your meditation. The feeling of metta is the measure of your practice.

The Beatles' great White Album ends with a Paul McCartney phrase that says: "...and in the end the love we take is equal to the love we make." Metta is our opportunity to explode. We just explode with one feeling state – and we don't have to worry whether it's having an effect or not. We're not doing it to get something or to produce something, we're doing it to do it. It's like a laser that we're sending out into the darkness.



I'm not a person who believes in the biological or physical effects of loving kindness. I don't believe it heals disease or that it influences other people. But metta does come with a guarantee – a biological, medical, psychological, guarantee – and that is, it influences the person who's sending it. Without sending metta we don't know whether we're practicing properly, because Vipassana teacher S.N. Goenka admonished us that the way to measure whether we're practicing properly is whether we are developing metta.

Who are we and why are we the way we are? We're practitioners of equanimity. The goal of our Vipassana practice is to develop equanimity with sensations. That's our birth as meditators, that's our safety, that's our focus, and that's what makes us who we are and why we are the way we are.

Vipassana is practiced in a difficult world of real suffering, a world that includes war and other social difficulties that we could allude to such as poverty, unfairness, and cruelty. And I was looking for a GPS, a way out of the world that I was thrust into. By giving Vipassana a try, day after day, for over 40 years, these are the answers I've come up with about what Vipassana is, who we are as a community, and why we are the way we are...

We look at the civilizing impact of the Buddha's teaching, we look at Goenka's eloquence, humor and the way he gives us exhortations that give us the courage to go forward in a difficult direction. We practice sila (morality) for no ulterior motive. The practice of sila is justified by the fact that we practice it. It keeps us in the direction we want and that's why we're practicing it. We practice twice daily sittings, or if we can't do that, we practice in a community of people who practice twice daily sittings, so that we can be forceful, independent people.

We take courses annually or if you can't take a course annually, we take courses sometimes. And the most important lesson we all get out of a course is this: man, I've got a long way to go. And that's the most important lesson – it keeps you on the path. So, you never become self-satisfied, you never become dull, you never become complacent.

We are people who practice friendship on the path. We do some kind of service to some other people. Maybe it's Dhamma service, maybe it's group sittings, and maybe our work or family life also can be considered forms of service. We practice the great heart uplift of metta, and we dip our feet into the ocean of equanimity.