

Letters from Vipassana Course participants

Our gratitude to all the teachers of Dhamma from Sakyamuni Gotama the Buddha to Sayagyi U Ba Khin is boundless. Without the dissemination of the Dhamma by them and without their safeguarding it in its pristine purity for so many centuries, how could we have got this invaluable gem of Dhamma in our present life. We bow down to their memory to express our feelings of deep devotion and infinite gratitude.

___Dhamma Children of Sayagyi U Ba Khin

Justice Surendra Nath Bhargava
Chairperson Assam Human Rights Commission, Guwahati
Former Chief Justice of Sikkim High Court.
Former Justice of Rajasthan High Court.

When I was a judge of the Rajasthan High Court at Jaipur I had an occasion to hear the discourse of Respected Shri Satya Narayan Goenka . I was very much impressed by his simplicity, humility, devotion, dedication and depth and clarity of thoughts.

I decided that I must go for a course of Vipassana for ten days at the earliest. I was lucky to get the opportunity of doing the course at Jaipur in the presence of Shri Satya Narayan Goenka.

I was very much impressed by the discipline which was to be maintained in the course at Jaipur when one has to maintain silence for ten days continuously without having any excess to T. V., Radio, Newspaper, Telephone-call or even talking amongst the participants of the camp. We were given very healthy and nourishing food and I thoroughly enjoyed my camp. The daily routine in the camp was also very strict and everything punctual.

Initially I thought that I will not be able to complete the course and follow the strict discipline. But I am glad, I could complete the course and also observe the discipline strictly. It is unique experience and cannot be described in words. One will not believe unless he himself takes the course.

After completing the course I found myself very healthy not only physically but mentally as well. It gave me lot of peace of mind and also the occasion to know self. The whole method is very simple and one is introvert throughout the period without any disturbance from outside.

The boarding and lodging are all free during the camp and one can donate whatever he likes after completing the course. It gives lots of peace in mind and new thinking and

approach and develops the new way to life and feeling towards others. If every one goes through this training and course the whole society can be changed and the present ills in the society regarding hatred towards each other, fear, disrespect, distrust will all vanish. The cancerous growth of corruption everywhere will also be controlled automatically.

I wish this Vipassana is spread over all over the world for the benefit of the individual, society, Nation and humanity.

_____S.N. Bhargava

D.R.Dhanuka
Senior advocate, Supreme Court of India
Former Judge, High Court of Bombay

In May 1991, I was lucky to participate in the ten-day Vipassana course in Dhamma Giri, Igatpuri, with the help of my friend Shri Madhusudan More. I was much impressed by the doctrine of Vipassana and the principles underlying the same. Accordingly, I found observance of silence is effective and more powerful than speech. Meditation and concentration should become a way of life. I was benefited. I believe that it is highly useful and worthwhile to learn the Vipassana technique. We have to march ahead towards experiencing a good life under the guidance of Shri Goenkaji and his colleagues.

I am happy to record my view and impressions in brief. I shall be very willing to join the Vipassana course in future, whenever I get the chance.

_____D.L.Dhanuka

K.G.Shah
Retd. Judge, Bombay High Court

On the recommendation of my yoga Guru Dr. Dhananjay Gunde of Kolhapur, my wife and I attended the Vipassana meditation course at Dhamma Giri, Igatpuri, Maharashtra between January 17, 1997 and January 28, 1997.

Without any hesitation, I would say that the experience we both had during the course was invigorating and exhilarating. At the end of the course, we came out of the serene atmosphere of Dhamma Giri with almost ever lasting sense of well being. We really felt that we are changed persons, certainly not the same persons we were when we entered the course. There is perceptible change in us throughout in body, mind and spirit.

The management of the course under the able guidance and supervision of the moving spirit of Shri, Satyanarayan Goenkaji was flawless. The volunteers meticulously took care of the smallest needs of the participants of the course.

I am looking forward to attending such a course once again on an oppurtune occasion. I am sure Vipassana, which so far has helped thousands of people in mind, body and spirit will progress in this country and ameliorate the sufferings of many, many more people.

I would take this opportunity of thanking Shri. Satyanarayan Goenkaji for having started this movement in this country, as also the volunteers of the course, who untiring and ungrudgingly catered to the needs of the participants.

Of course, Guruji's lectures in person as also on the video cassettes and the guidance given by the assistant teachers during the course was of immense help to one and all who participated in the course in understanding what is Vipassana and putting it into practice.

R.B. Budhiraja
Principal Secretary (services)
Government of Maharashtra

I attended a ten-day programme of Vipassana Meditation at the Vipassana International Academy, Dhamma Giri, Igatpuri, District Nasik. I found this programme to be extremely useful and the meditation technique goes a long way in helping the participants get a better knowledge of the way their own mind functions. It is an art of living and can help one to eliminate tensions in every day life and develop positive creative energy. The beauty is that it can be availed of by all irrespective of their caste, creed or religion. It is totally and absolutely non-sectarian.

Realising the importance of Vipassana for its officers, the Government of Maharashtra issued a Resolution No. 2496 / 3 / SER-9 dated 15th May 1996, allowing officers of the rank of Deputy Secretary and above with a minimum age of 45 years to avail of 14 days commuted leave (with medical certificate) as also, to and fro passage. The facility can be availed of once in three years and for a maximum of six times during total service.

Besides, Vipassana has demonstrated positive results even in prisons. Recognising this, Government of Maharashtra has encouraged its jail administration to conduct regular programmes for inmates at Pune, Nagpur, Nasik, Kolhapur, etc. with very encouraging results.

_____ R.B. Budhiraja

S.M. Gavai
Director of Social Welfare
Maharashtra

My first brush with the philosophy of Vipassana was when an old acquaintance met me and urged me to undertake a 10-day Vipassana course at the Vipassana Centre at Igatpuri. At that time, I did not express more than a passing interest in the method. But I do believe that the seeds of my ultimate initiation into the technique were sown then.

More than half a decade later, I finally had the opportunity to undertake the course along with my brother. Even this time, in a manner of speaking, I went along with him to keep him company. Each individual life, however insignificant, has its milestones with birth and death as the most significant ones. Having completed the course last year, I have realized that there is an even more significant one- that of an individual's initiation into and final attainment of Vipassana.

Although I am but a novice, I am convinced that this is indeed the surest path to peace and salvation. The path that was untrodden for many millennia has been rediscovered in the land of its birth.

It is fitting indeed that the Pagoda of Peace will be located in this nation. The Pagoda will go a long way in establishing more solidly, the philosophy and traditions of this secular practice.

I, on my part am profoundly grateful to Vipassana International Academy for affording me in this lifetime, an opportunity to make a small beginning towards absolute liberty.

_____ S.M. Gavai

Vipassana - A Way to a Harmonious Life

Ramesh M. Ubale
Senior I.A.S. Officer

Due to over work and stress I started getting chest pain in the year 1984-85. I consulted various doctors, Dr. Dhananjay Gunde from Kolhapur introduced me to the Art of Vipassana and I attended my first course at Igatpuri in 1985, under the audacious guidance of Shri Satyanarayan Goenka. That was the turning point in my life. Initially I joined this course out of curiosity. After the completion of the course I realized that this is the only way of scientific meditation which will keep each and every one of us free from all complications of life and will bring harmony in our relations.

I am totally convinced that before going to any doctor for minor illness as well as psychosomatic disorders one should try this course which will definitely help to recover from such problems.

After 1985, I tried to convey this message to various groups of people. I was also practicing Vipassana in my daily life, but due to my preoccupied engagements I could not repeat the course till November '96. I attended this course at Igatpuri in November '97. I can assure any individual that this way of life does not propagate and challenge or any false promises. It is based on purely natural science, which helps a human being to "know thyself". It also helps to keep away diseases like blood pressure, diabetes, hypertension and heart problems. The persons who are engaged in all the sedentary work are advised to do this course atleast once to find out the truth of the life. I can also assure that one can practice Vipassana and at the same time be Hindu, Muslim or Christian or for that matter of any religion.

Human life of today is full of competition, stress and fatigue. Specially to cope up with this kind of life and to attend noble peace of mind one must attend this course and it does not interfere in the various religious life of the practicing student.

_____ Ramesh M. Ubale

D.R. Karthikeyan, I.p.s.
Special Director, Central Bureau of Investigation

I have undergone the ten days meditation course at Hyderabad Centre only recently. I should confess that I have not been strictly following the prescribed schedule of meditation every day, as I am constantly on the move, being in charge of three different full-time jobs with headquarters at Delhi, Hyderabad and Chennai.

Yet, one can say with certainty that the results are perceptible. One realizes the truism, life is not a problem but a reality to be experienced. We are prisoners of our behaviour patterns. The mind is the cause of misery and the individual is the key to transform the society.

Vipassana is a practical method for emotional and spiritual education on a non-sectarian basis. It reduces hostility and helplessness and enhances hope and a sense of well-being. While reducing stress, it fosters positive attitude. While instilling the right values, it purifies the mind, physical well-being becoming a valuable by-product.

The unique technique results in self-transformation by self-observation. It is healing by observation and in accordance with the universal law of nature.

When one realizes by experience, the concept of impermanence, the entire attitude towards life, day-to-day situations and relationships with others becomes more positive.

The Vipassana technique of meditation brings out all unnecessary and accumulated mental load that one carries all the time. One develops detachment and equanimity. We do become observers of ourselves. One is amazed to realize how our body and mind have become the storehouse of innumerable and unwanted impressions.

Even in the very short time that I have been exposed to Vipassana I am able to increasingly accept people as they are instead of trying to change them all the time, to fit them in my own standard 'frame'. To that extent life has become calmer, healthier, peaceful and positive.

My wife Kala who underwent the 10 days course at Hyderabad centre later than me also shares the same experience.

Madhukarrao Chaudhari
Former Speaker of Assembly, Maharashtra

Vipassana is of immense importance for the development of a human being. Lord Buddha received enlightenment by following the path of Vipassana. Acharya Goenka who is a living master of Vipassana, is endeavouring very hard to spread the message of this great art of life to. I am a humble practitioner of Vipassana and I have been immensely benefited in my life.

Mind Matters Most

S.N. Tandon
Teacher of Vipassana
Former Dy. Home Secretary, Rajasthan.

From earliest childhood, I was always a very timid person. On my way to school I would purposely avoid any route that would bring me into contact with dogs or unruly fellow pupils. In my studies at school, I always came near the top of the class and in Sanskrit, my favourite subject, I gained full marks. Still, when my teachers and family, wanted to give proper recognition to these achievements, I always found some pretext or another to avoid the glare of publicity. For, deep inside, I felt as if some huge error was being made by others when estimating my talents and that sooner or later this would be exposed.

This inferiority complex continued into my college and working life. Despite ample, and repeated, evidence of exceptional abilities, again and again I denied their existence, shrinking from the publicity I feared they would attract and thus failing to capitalize on them for my own and others' benefit. I have always been a natural student, who loves nothing better than to be surrounded by books. And so it was, during my married life in Delhi, when I was a junior civil servant. Any free time was always taken up in reading

and further study. During this period I had the opportunity on several occasions to apply for a post in the Indian Administrative Service, the country's elite cadre. Despite the recommendations of those who knew me and my capacities well, I staunchly refused to apply, thinking that I was intellectually and personally inadequate to a task, which so many others could perform with ease. In this way, a golden career chance passed me by. Sometime later, I almost repeated the same pattern when posts in the State Administrative Service of Rajasthan were advertised.

Had it not been for the personal intervention of my wife and close friends, who knew my problem and coaxed and cajoled me, I would never have applied for a post, nor would I have taken the entrance examination, nor appeared for the personal interviews. With their understanding and support, I was successful. I was appointed to the State Service, where I worked for 23 years, undertaking a range of challenging assignments in different departments. However, even in my work, I found that this tendency to low self-esteem made me reluctant to accept major responsibilities involving contact with the public, which my colleagues and superiors felt I was competent to tackle.

As a newcomer to the Administrative Service in Rajasthan, I had the good fortune to make the acquaintance of Shri Ram Singh. This marked the beginning of a close professional and personal relationship, which has brought untold benefits to me. Naturally, when Shri Ram Singh, who was State Home Secretary at the time, with myself as his immediate subordinate, took a Vipassana course with Goenkaji in 1974 and immediately felt much benefited, I also became curious. I took my first course in that same year and continued to practice Vipassana as best I could. However, pressure of work often meant that I was unable to sit daily as regularly as I would like and finding time to take further ten-day courses was also difficult. For some years, I felt that my progress in Dhamma was inadequate.

After a few years I had the rare opportunity to sit a long course for serious old students at Dhamma Giri. After just a few days of meditation in this deep atmosphere, the truth of my inferiority complex and how it had continuously dogged my life thus far, became clear in my mind. By the end of the course, through the practice of Vipassana, substantial layers of this profound *sankhara* had evaporated and I felt real progress had been made. And so it has proved, when applied in everyday life: not that this deep-rooted tendency has been completely eradicated, but certainly there is a major improvement which is good both for me and for others. This is evident from the fact that I have since then been able to address more than 30 audiences in India, USA, and U.K. with confidence. I have also conducted workshops for training assistant teachers in conducting Vipassana courses under instructions from Goenkaji, and have led one workshop to encourage study of the Pali language among Vipassana students.

When a student takes a Vipassana course, there should never be any expectation of particular experiences or outcomes. Rightly, we are told, to practise correctly and to leave the result to Dhamma. However, it is my personal experience, that if someone really wants to go to the depths of the mind to take out the most stubborn complexes, then one or more long courses, when the proper opportunity arises, is a real priority.

Srilata Swaminadhan

Rajasthan State Party Spokesperson of C.P.I. (M-L) and National President of the All India Progressive Women's Association (AIPWA)

I did my first ten-day course of Vipassana in 1995. Since then I have done two more ten-day courses and one Satipatthana course. I realize that that makes me a beginner with a very long way to go but even then the benefits and potential of Vipassana are apparent.

What I find most appealing about this technique is its simple, pure scientific rationality - no religiosity of any kind, no gods, no mumbo-jumbo, no false promises of a great here-after, no form of escapism into some blissful never-never-land ! Buddha's emphasis on practice and an ethical life and not just theorizing or intellectualizing make the whole method intensely practical and keeps one's feet solidly on the ground. In fact, Buddha's definition of Dharma, or religion, is the understanding of the laws of nature, understanding the world of mind and matter and then living according to those laws. Vipassana helps you to do just that.

Vipassana is a form of meditation which, more than anything else I have ever known or tried, helps you to understand yourself. As you go deeper and deeper into the practice, the more you understand and see how your mind and matter function, how they interact and influence each other, you are gradually able to observe the patterns of your own behaviour, your own reactions, your aversions and cravings - in other words you can see how you tick. It is a very good way of learning self-awareness and gaining self-knowledge, even of the deepest levels of one's sub-conscious mind.

You also learn how to re-programme yourself with total awareness and understanding. There is neither suppression or rejection of one's deepest and, often, ugliest drives. I had come across the word ``stitha pragya'' in the Gita and in many Upanishads as the way to come out of suffering but it is only Vipassana which teaches you, step by step, how you can actually achieve that, how to achieve the equanimity to become a ``stitha pragya''.

The other things which appeal to me are that you are constantly aware and in the present, in possession of all your faculties and not asked to surrender yourself or your mind to some great guru or teacher who will do your thinking for you. Instead, the technique constantly emphasizes how one is responsible for one's own life, one's own actions and their consequences. As one's present actions and behaviour will determine what one becomes in the future, I find it tremendously attractive that I can be in control and responsible for my own future. What more can one ask for !

The whole concept of Karma is shorn of all the superstition and rubbish that some religious sect has smothered it with and one is able to experience it and understand it as mere cause and effect, action and reaction. The universality of the method, its total lack of any kind of sectarianism makes it truly scientific and acceptable to any human being irrespective of caste, colour, creed or sex.

One anxiety that I did have for quite some time was would Vipassana make me want to leave the problems, tensions and frustrations of daily life and work and make me want to escape to a more peaceful and secluded world, would it make me go more and more inwards at the expense of my work? But what I am discovering is that the inward journey complements the outward life and, in fact, is helping my work.

Nothing has given me the hope and confidence that this technique has given me. To know that I can understand myself and then be able to change myself and that I do not have to rely on anything or anyone else except myself to achieve this, is at once the greatest gift and the greatest responsibility that I have been given. I am the scientist, I am the laboratory and I am the specimen ! A whole new universe, that I was totally oblivious of, has opened up to me and I am on a new and meaningful journey.

_____ Srilata Swaminadhan

Khursheed Merchant
Universal Vision of Learning

Though affected greatly by the ten-day course I did in 1984, sad to say, I did not pursue the practise. Fortunately in 95' Madhusudan More revived my enthusiasm. I attended a four-day course with Dr Asha Kapadia followed by another ten-day course. Needless to say I am benefitting immensely. I am a much quieter, wiser, and more fulfilled person.

In my coaching in the Empowerment Programmes, I lead here and abroad, I am far more effective as I am able to bring sharper distinctions of the mind in focus from the insights I've had in my Vipassana practise. I recommend it as a most fruitful practice in all my courses.

_____ Ms. Khursheed Merchant.

I am an industrialist and has lot of tension & work-load. In 1994 I was in great tension due to workers unrest. I was advised by Mr. Ravi Dewang to visit Dhamma Giri at Igatpuri. I have undergone ten days Vipassana and I was really relaxed and was recharged. I felt confident and got great boosting. Since then I do Vipassana and I sent my workers & officers regularly to Dhamma Giri at Igatpuri who are greatly benefited. I feel Vipassana is the need of today.

_____ Sarkar Rawal

I am very glad that I'll share with you my experience, maybe some other human beings will get out of the addiction misery.

I had addicted to use opium more than 20 years. I had given up at least ten times but it didn't last more than two or three months. Finally I think that according to my good karma I found out about Vipassana in 1995 and I participated in a ten-day course in November 1995 and it was my privilege that my teacher was the kind and dear Mr Goenkaji. Now after two years there is nothing about craving to use opium and more than that I've got too many more benefits out of this technique. I do my meditation every day morning and evening and I've sent my wife and my daughter to do this course for their benefits.

I want to thank again Guruji, Management, Assistants and the kind workers in the Igatpuri Vipassana centre.

May all beings be happy

_____ Mohd Reza Gharib

2nd Sept ,97

To Shri Ashok Kela
M.P. Vipassana Samiti, E-1/82, Arera Colony
Bhopal

Dear Shri Kelaji,

I would like to express my deep gratitude to you for the visit to our institution by respected Shri D Shukla and Shri Pandit on 1st Sept ,97. We had detailed discussions regarding the various activities of the Vipassana International Academy. In these modern times, the true wealth of a nation is gauged by the mental health of its people. Without improvement at the individual level, it is not possible to think of human development and individual development is possible only by purification of mind and its intelligence. This can be done only with concentration, discipline, devotion, dedication and faith as practiced by the Vipassana institute in its courses.

Just as in other states, the Madhya Pradesh government is also promoting the cause of human development. It is my strong belief that Vipassana is the correct method for

increasing the efficiency and working of policy makers, workers and other staff who are involved in economic planning of the government.

I hope that the Vipassana institute will think in this direction and make some efforts so that it becomes an important tool benefiting all economic planners.

_____D.P.Garg Principal

Agri.Coop. Staff Training Institute
(Undertaking of M.P.Rajya Sahakari Bank Maryadit)
4,Kotra Sultanabad, P&T Chouraha
Bhopal - 462003

Reducing Tension and Self improvement training programme (15-26 Feb 97)

Feedback and comments by the participants

1. The programme was very self improving and peaceful. However if the number of participants could be increased then many more could be benefited.
2. An advantage of participating in the programme was that a lot of my unanswered questions were clarified. If we can use this mental clarity in our area of responsibility successfully, then it will definitely go a long way in resolving a lot of our problems.
3. After undergoing this course there will be more, honesty and dedication towards our work.
4. I have learnt the art of living, its truth and advantages.
5. I have become free from various superstitions, religious beliefs and

_____D.D. Tripathi, (Police) Saver, Indore

In this entire programme one learns about oneself and develops dedication towards one's work.....

One learns to develop his inner strengths and gets confidence to live in today's tension filled world. One is cured of various internal illnesses automatically. Your inner energy and capacity for work increases. The entire programme is beneficial for administrators, govt. and public servants. In my opinion we should have more of such programs. By this not only will government officials be benefited but as a result the entire department will be benefited.

_____I K Bhalavi

Vipassana is an important tool for self development. It is not any particular religion, it is humanism which is the basis of every religion. It helps in self development and

awakens in you a feeling of good towards everyone. It increases one's capacity and efficiency at work. Every person should attend a Vipassana course. Let people from all religions take part in this camp together and be benefited. Let more such camps be organized in the future so that other officials may get the benefit.

_____N.P. Barkede

This course has been very good for reducing tension and self improvement and the mind becomes very peaceful as a result. It is a very complete and practical technique which no science had discovered till date. It inspires one to lead a pure life and one feels that it will increase one's dakshata. We are grateful those officials who arranged this programme so that we could end our mental tension. We hope there will be more such programs in the future.

_____Dr Dinesh Kumar Gupta, Ayurveda Treatment officer, Sahaya, Bhopal

In 1984, I was introduced to this immortal and highly beneficial technique. Since then I have been associated with it. In this camp I have had a few spiritual experiences. With the help of Anapana meditation my concentration has increased, the period of concentration also has increased.

By observing my bodily sensations with greater awareness, equanimity and continuity, I managed to remove my negativities to a deeper extent.

Apparent benefits

1. Concentration was increased
2. Proper awareness was established

_____Dr. N.K. Prasad, P. Kushiram Ayurvedic Institution, Bhopal

I was quite surprised when on reaching the Academy I was told that I would have to remain silent for 10 days and live within a limited area. I would have to observe silence quite diligently as the instructions mentioned about a stress course. So I followed the instructions of the academy having decided to undergo the course and observe all the rules .

I liked the Vipassana course very much, I feel it will change a person's nature. However it should be restricted to a few persons but should be conducted on a large scale. It should especially be conducted for those in high posts and important officials so that those below them will be inspired to join the course and improve their thoughts.

_____Uttam Singh Thakur. 16V

The program on reducing tensions and self improvement was very good. It is my good fortune that I got an opportunity to take part in the program, for this I am grateful to my department. This program will help me a lot in the future in improving myself. It

will definitely help me progress on the path to good. It will also help me be a better official.

The tensions which arise during executing our daily official duties will get reduced by this program and we can perform those duties in a better way. Initially for the first 3 days I was a bit upset and tense but as the course progressed, I found some inner strength. Now after doing the course I feel grateful for being sent here against my wishes. I hope I will get a chance to do a refresher course at least once a year. I am very grateful to my department for the apparent benefits I have got from this course. I am sure I will derive many more benefits in future from this course.

_____R.S.Gupta

I am at a loss for words to describe the benefits i have received from the Vipassana course held at the Academy of Administration, Bhopal from 15/2/97 to 26/2/97. From this course I learnt the true meaning of humanity. Apart from my personal improvement it will benefit my official duties by increasing tolerance, capacity for work, efficiency and equanimity.

The high officials of the department should participate in this course and get benefited. My diabetes has been controlled to a large extent by this course. If more such courses are organized then others will also get benefited. A refresher course should be organized at least once in a year.

_____ K.M.Dube, Homeguards, Gwalior

Comments on the Vipassana Course

The training programme organized by the Academy of Administration from 15/2/97 to 26/2/97 on Vipassana shivir appears to me very much useful for future working in the department. The course develops concentration of mind, self confidence and to take decision in the right direction. It will also increase the efficiency and discipline in day to day working with physical fitness.

_____A S Dighe, Chief Engineer (D) NVDA.

13/3/97

To
Shri M S Choudhary
E-1/94, Arera Colony
Bhopal

Sub :Vipassana Camp

With your kind help our Academy recently held for the first time, a 11 day Vipassana camp with the objective to "Reducing Tensions and Self Improvement" at the academy premises. Enclosed is a copy of the feedback received from the participants in this course. The Academy would like to conduct a similar camp in May 97. We request you to finalize the date to suit your convenience and inform us so that we may make the necessary arrangements.

_____K Kiyawat

Sub Administrator
Academy of Administration
Madhya Pradesh, Bhopal

Comments of the participants in the course on "Reducing Tension and Self Improvement" held at the Academy of Administration, Bhopal from 7/6/97 to 18/6/97.

Vipassana Meditation takes one who isIt puts an end to negativities and lets you experience equanimity. I recommend that every government official and politician should make it a point to attend at least one course in his life. I experienced an inner joy by attending this course.

_____Dr A N Rao, Deputy Collector, Betul, M.P.

By attending this Vipassana Course I got to learn this valuable Dharma knowledge of Vipassana . Through Vipassana I got to know myself and have found a new way to live my life. I have found the path of self improvement and in future I can realize my mistakes and work towards rectifying them.

_____ Kishan Singh Rathor, Company Commandant, Bhopal

It is a technique to identify truth and falsehood, a technique which prevents one from going astray so that he may proceed on the path to experience the Ultimate truth. It keeps one away from selfishness and towards humanity. Every person should undergo this technique in order to be a better human being.

_____Vivek Nema

In this 11 day Vipassana course, I have

- Understood True Dharma and the difference between Dharma and religion
 - Learnt the way to lead a peaceful life as a householder.
 - Practiced an easy and beautiful method by which one can be free from this cycle of birth and death
 - Freed myself from the long time enslavement of tobacco.
- Vipassana is truly priceless.

_____N.P. Panthi, Dept of social welfare and panchayat. M.P.

Vipassana: My Spiritual Pilgrimage

by Mohammed Arif Joiya

In 1976 I went to Arogya Mandir, a nature cure institute at Gorakhpur, and benefited greatly from my stay there. In those days I also read many spiritual books and entered into religious discussions with various colleagues. All this awakened me but did not quench my thirst. On the contrary, it made me more agitated and spurred me on to a further search. I was looking for a teacher who would really make me experience the truth. I wanted to realize within myself the esoteric expressions in the form of living peace and energy. Not being satisfied with entertaining discourses, I wanted to realize and experience the truth for myself.

Temples, mosques, pagodas, and *gurdwara* [Sikh temples] along with all the scriptures could not hold my mind. I was still overwhelmed by an empty, unsatisfied life. In such a wounded state, I opened myself and expressed my spiritual aspirations before Dr. Vithaldas Modi, founder of Arogya Mandir, and demanded a way out. He advised me to attend a Vipassana meditation course and sent me a small pamphlet and application form for Vipassana. I read and understood it, but was frightened: "Oh ! This is the religion of Buddhists, atheists. These Buddhists don't believe in Soul and God. What can they teach ? I am a Muslim. I cannot commit this crime." But my heart within again said that the advice of Dr Modi should be obeyed. "Why should he wish ill of me ? Whatever he advises is certainly for my benefit and welfare. Let me try and see." So I went to the Vipassana International Meditation Centre near Hyderabad in February 1978 to attend a Vipassana course.

I arrived late but was pleased to find the place very quiet and peaceful. Mr Bachubhai Shah, who was an organizer, received me with great love and hospitality. He said, "Arifbhai, you have missed a day but I am sure that Goenkaji will accept you on the course. Don't worry. You may take a bath and have breakfast while I go and speak to him about you." I was pleased with this pure, affectionate reception and reassurance from Mr Bachubhai.

While I was waiting I started looking around at the students observing Noble Silence. And I was experiencing a slight fever which I had been feeling from the moment I had

stepped onto this holy land. This was the fever of some unknown fear. I felt that my ego was going to be sacrificed, and I was ready for it.

Goenkaji sent for me. I went, bowed down and smiled. He and his wife were seated on chairs. He appeared to be a scientist, a doctor, or a literary person.

“Come and sit down.” I sat on the border of the carpet and smiled. “What is the nature of your work?” “I am a physical training teacher in Udasar, Sir.” “Hmmm... What is the problem?” “Stammering speech, Sir. A little difficulty.” “Okay. It will be alright. There will be instructions in the evening. Until then observe your breath and remain aware of it.” “Very good, Sir.” “Then go,” he said smilingly. I bowed down, paid respects, and smilingly came out of the hall.

I started thinking, “What sort of Guru have I got? He is a worldly person. Could there be a Guru like this? Married! Householder! No beard, no moustache, clean shaven? No marks on the forehead? No long hair? No ochre robes? He had on a terylene half-sleeved shirt, and colourful checked *lungi*. At least he should have been wearing *khadi* (home-spun) cloth. Absolutely modern, very ordinary. How can he teach meditation? Never mind, I have come, so let me try and see.”

After a short while when I, along with hundreds of meditators, started following the instructions of Goenkaji of observing and remaining aware of the breath and feeling its touch, a silent voice within me arose and whispered, “Oh! This is exactly what I was looking for. I’ve got it. I must work hard. I’m already one day late so I should not waste a single moment.” I started meditating with great enthusiasm.

In the evening the instructions were given. Goenkaji said: “Repeat what I say in Pali.” I repeated that for the duration of the meditation course I would abstain from killing, theft, sexual misconduct, speaking lies and taking intoxicants. I liked the five precepts. But along with them I had to repeat, “I take refuge in Buddha. I take refuge in Dhamma. I take refuge in Sangha.” At that moment I refrained, but later there was a little discontentment in the mind. “Look, Modiji trapped me. He put me in a whole new position as if a snake has swallowed a rat. Oh! Khan Saheb, these people have sunk your ship. Now go in your society as a Buddhist.”

At any rate, I recovered and started to observe the breath. Again the same train of thought came. But when the awareness of breath steadied a little, this problem automatically and gradually resolved itself. Now I didn’t want to think of these problems. I started progressing. During the rest period, even after finishing lunch, etc., I continued meditation. The fact that I was a day late and other meditators must be farther advanced inspired me more. I continued meditation without any other thought.

A television screen started shining before my closed eyes. I very clearly perceived the shaping of dormant impurities of the mind starting to arise and pass away. It was like the dirtiest, wildest film I had ever seen. Such obnoxious prejudices appeared which made

me feel like vomiting. But I understood at the same time that it was doing me good. Impurities were coming out. It was a good thing.

On the fourth day Vipassana was given. A new voice arose within my heart. "I have practised this technique some time in the past. It is very simple and familiar!" I continued to progress from the gross to the subtle.

By Day Seven I realized that this technique of meditation is so simple that any child or even an illiterate person can learn and effectively practise it. Just to observe the natural breath with closed eyes and continued awareness that it is coming in, going out, and it is touching somewhere. Continuing to observe the breath, the witnessing faculty of the mind establishes automatically. And then one has to observe objectively the sensations throughout the body from head to toe in a particular order. Sensations may be pleasant or painful. Both have to be observed with equanimity. By repeating the same process over and over again, quiet concentration of the mind and equanimity gradually increase.

As I slept that night, a terrible thing happened. It was almost midnight. I saw that a very ferocious demon had seized my neck with both hands and had started shaking my head around and around and said, "Oh evil soul! You have brought me here in this *ashram*! Just wait, I will show you." And with enormous force he threw my body on the ground. Along with it the very sweet voice of Goenkaji came to my ears, "Son, do not worry. Come near me. Come, do not be frightened." I awoke fearful and frightened, looked around with open eyes and saw the foreign meditators who were my room-mates fast asleep. Immediately I understood that it was a nightmare. It was a play of my mind. It was a trick to force me to leave the course by any means. Impurities were being eradicated. All the torture was due to that. I came out of the room; saw the lights on and the trees standing with their branches and leaves swinging and singing, as if some quiet festival was being celebrated. I started listening and then realized, "Oh! This is a conspiracy of the unconscious mind. I now understand. I am not leaving without completing the course." I relaxed, smilingly returned to bed, and meditating while lying down, eventually went to sleep.

Dawn broke. There was meditation in the hall. After lunch I was overwhelmed with another experience. I felt that my head and hands were swinging as though they belonged to someone else. I was in a very tranquil, detached, equanimous witnessing state. "Oh Gotama Buddha! How did you discover this unique meditation technique? You kept on teaching people this sacred art. And once again this art has become available for people's welfare. Salutations to you, my Lord. Again and again I prostrate before your compassionate feet. Endless prostrations." I now understood the meaning of "I take refuge in Buddha" as refuge in one's own *bodhi* or enlightenment, not the personality of Siddhartha Gotama. The meaning of "I take refuge in Dhamma" is that one has to be established in one's own true nature, not in any sectarian religion. The meaning of "I take refuge in Sangha" is to take refuge in those noble ones who have become well-established in Dhamma, whatever their race, colour or nationality. From this sacred moment onwards, the word death, full of theories and tears, just melted from the book of my life and flowed away like melted snow. Oh, no! No being dies. Death is impossible.

Everyone keeps on moving on the journey according to one's own actions. And the final destination of the journey is *nirvana*. Now I understood what one's own religion is and what the religion of others is. Without purifying the mind of impurities by Vipassana and realizing our own nature, life is lived in the religion of others. Living in one's own nature is *Svadharmā*, the true Dhamma.

On the ninth day a new meditation technique was taught -- the technique of *metta bhavana* whereby one shares one's own merits with beings all around. This meditation filled me with love and compassion and made me cry.

When I came out of the course I felt that I had no enemies. All were my relatives. My mind was filled with love, compassion and sympathetic joy towards everyone. I thought that I must have performed some good action in a past life, and as a consequence of that I was born in the lap of the affectionate and compassionate Mother-India: salutations to you, Mother-India. Now I really understood why India is designated as the "world teacher." A sort of pride arose in me to be an Indian. I felt one with all created beings of the earth.

Now the only religion for me is to help miserable people to be free of their miseries: may all beings walk on the path of pure Dhamma; may all be religious in the true sense of the term. By adopting the practice of Vipassana I have found the right direction in life and this has made life worthwhile. The path is long but it becomes straight and easy.

Vipassana has naturally helped me to come out of bad habits. It has given me the strength to smile in desperate situations. It has also given me the strength to discharge my responsibilities. I feel less nervous. Day by day I am gaining strength to address bigger and bigger audiences. My life was incomplete without Vipassana.

I would like to tell my young educated Muslims that they should really try Vipassana and see the results. It is a necessity today that people of all different walks of life unite. By escaping from harmful sectarianism they can help establish a really strong national unity. Vipassana is the only solution to all the problems of mankind, because it is universal and it gives such positive fruits.

I bow my head down to my teacher Shri Satya Narayan Goenka and assistant teacher Dr Vithaldas Modi.

Salutations to Dhamma !
Salutations to Buddha !
Salutations to Sangha !

A Catholic Priest on Vipassana
Fr. Peter Lourdes

In February 1986, I attended a ten-day course in Vipassana offered by S. N. Goenka at the Vipassana International Academy (VIA) at Igatpuri. Igatpuri is about three hours by train from Bombay.

With me was a group of 4 Catholic priests, 2 brothers and 28 sisters. A priest and two sisters from my staff also joined me. I programme and direct a six-month course for Formators (church personnel in charge of the training of future brothers, sisters and priests). The Unit on spirituality calls for an experience of other forms of spirituality respected in this part of the world. All of us were part of this experience.

I am a religious priest with a degree in psychology from Rome and Ph. D from Loyola University of Chicago. My doctoral thesis was ``The Implications of the Transcendental Meditation (TM) Programme for Counselling Psychology). In a course in Comparative Mysticism at Loyola, I was asked to present TM to the class. My background in psychotherapy, comparative mysticism, TM and my personal life in a religious order was a tremendous asset during my Vipassana days in VIA. I seem to have touched something I was looking for over the years. I returned to Pune and continued Vipassana together with a religious group whom I am Spiritual Director.

At Igatpuri I met Laurie Ross whose involvement in Vipassana impressed me. In the meditation hall one thing that struck me was the stillness with which she sat in an unchanged posture for hours. I could not do that much. She told me later that this was her thirteenth course in Vipassana.

People who know I am a priest sometimes wonder what a Catholic priest is doing in a Buddhist Centre! Roger Corless of Duke University reports that Thomas Merton remarked he felt more in tune with D. T. Suzuki (Zen Buddhist) than with the average Catholic mass-goer. I am no Merton, but I felt the same in Igatpuri and often feel so in my ministry. Spirituality has been a life-long quest for me. I have dared to search for it in waters outside the Bark of Peter.

How does that square with my Catholic affiliation ? I think Vipassana is one way of reaching the goals of the mystical spirituality of my Catholic tradition.

My Catholic tradition also has a theological side to it. That is the side, which is usually transmitted to us from conventional catechisms, church-going, family upbringing, preaching and so on. The theory (or theology if you will) of the Vipassana technique does not generally fit my Catholic theological world view. But I do not think that is very important.

The reason why I do not think it important is this: I consider my Christian theology just one way of interpreting and talking about transcendent experience. I think the experience is more important than the way of talking about it. In the experience, I feel closer to the mystics of our Christian tradition, to those of our Hindu, Muslim and Buddhist tradition, than to our theologians and mass-goers.

In my Christian tradition, I think, the "theological spirituality" was more dominant than the mystical one. I seem to find that in Goenka's variety of spirituality, the mystical is all. It reaches out so heart-warmingly to the really Real and will not settle for anything less.

Does not the Christian tradition have the same heart-warming thrust? I believe it does, but it does not seem to have a simple and clear-cut method like Vipassana. Whatever methods it had may have died with the monasteries.

Where I am at present in my spiritual journey, I feel hungry for the ineffable God of our humanity rather than the talked-about God of our theology and Sunday School.

Although I do not wish to be Messianic, I often feel sad I cannot make all my fellow Christians interested in the mystical dimensions of our common human thirst for the Beyond.

I invite all of you to join all human beings and me in an attempt to hear and march to a different drum right within the rank and file of our own religious groups or outside.