

Vipassana- Addictions & Health

A Seminar

December 1989, Dhamma Giri, Igatpuri



Vipassana Research Institute

Vipassana – Addictions & Health

28 November to 9 December, 1989



Vipassana Research Institute

Dhamma Giri, Igatpuri 422 403

Preface

A Seminar on Vipassana Meditation was held from 28 November to 9 December, 1989, under the sponsorship of the Vipassana Research Institute. Its twin objectives were: to study and explore the application in life of Vipassana as a technique for improving health; and to look into its use as a rehabilitative instrument for those using, or addicted to substances such as alcohol, drugs, etc.

Participating in the Seminar were distinguished scholars, Government officers, members of the medical, legal and other professions, social workers and Vipassana meditators. 300 participants and guests attended the Inaugural Function and Scientific Session, of which nearly 250 of them continued on for a ten day Vipassana Course conducted by Mr. S.N. Goenka. After experiencing the effects of Vipassana for themselves, within themselves, the participants engaged in a discussion of its various aspects and made recommendations.

The Chief Guest was Dr. V.N. Bagadia, Emeritus Professor of Psychiatry, Seth G.S. Medical College & K.E.M. Hospital, Bombay, and Honorary Psychiatrist, Bombay Hospital & Research Centre. He discussed Vipassana as an important psychological treatment method, and mentioned that though its beneficial effects are seen clinically, research needs to be conducted with a rigorous scientific methodology.

The Scientific Session was inaugurated by Dr. Yusuf A. Merchant, President, the Drug Abuse Information, Rehabilitation & Research Centre, Bombay, and Member, The Central Advisory Board for Drug Prevention & Control, New Delhi. Dr. Merchant spoke on the threat posed by drug abuse to the world at large and India in particular; he further expressed confidence that Vipassana can play a vital role in the rehabilitation of addicts.

The Principal Vipassana Teacher, Mr. S. N. Goenka, gave the closing address, in which he explained how Vipassana enables one to be free from not merely addiction to drugs or alcohol, but also the strongest and deepest conditioned mental reactions which are the root cause of misery. He called Vipassana a non-sectarian art of living in harmony with the universal Dhamma—the Law of Nature, whereby freedom from suffering may be attained.

The present volume has been prepared to stimulate interest and a scientific pursuit in this ancient yet new meditation technique. Therefore, in addition to the papers presented at the Seminar, other relevant articles have also been included.

Vipassana Research Institute

Index to Authors

- V. B. Athavale** Consulting Paediatrician, Professor & Head of Department of Paediatrics at Lokmanya Tilak Municipal Medical College, Bombay and Editor of "Paediatrics Clinics of India".
- K. S. Ayyar** Consulting Psychiatrist & Psychotherapist, Assistant Honorary Psychiatrist at the Bhagwati Municipal Hospital, Borivli and Editor of the Bombay Psychiatric Bulletin.
- R.M. Chokhani** Consulting Psychiatrist & Counsellor, Sunflower Hospital Bombay, Medical Director—Healing Harmony Health Services, Bombay.
- John Cregan** Administrator—Western Australian Council on Addictions, Co-ordinator—Vipassana Foundation, Western Australia
- Jyoti M. Doshi** Clinical Psychologist & Honorary Counsellor at the Children's Observation Home at Umerkhadi, Bapnu Ghar & Shashi Mangalyam School for Children in Need of Special Care, Bombay.
- K. N. Dwivedi** Consulting Psychiatrist, from the Institute of Medical Sciences, Benares Hindu University, Varanasi; presently working in the United Kingdom.
- P. R. Fleischman** Private practice of Psychiatry, Asst. Clinical Professor of Psychiatry—Yale University, Psychiatric consultant to McCleans Hospital, Massachusetts, U.S.A.
- Richard Hammersley** Council on Addiction, Co-ordinator— Vipassana Foundation Western Australia.
- Raman Khosla** Psychiatrist from N.I.M.H.A.N.S., Bangalore, working with the Department of Psychiatry, B. J. Medical College, Pune.
- J. N. Nichani** Consulting Physician & Cardiologist and Honorary consultant at the Hinduja, Ramakrishna & Inlaks Hospitals, Bombay.
- Praveen Ramakrishnan** An ex-addict, Vipassana meditator and entrepreneur.
- Gerhard Scholz** Social Scientist & Research Scholar at V.R.I. on a joint fellowship from the West German and Indian Governments.
- Sridhar** An ex-addict, Vipassana Meditator and a white-collar worker.

Contents

Vipassana Meditation—an Introduction	1
Theme paper	5
Vipassana and Psychotherapy	7
The Experience of Impermanence through Vipassana Meditation and the Maturation of Personality.....	11
Vipassana Meditation and Health	18
My ten days with Vipassana—Personal experiences during the 1986 Conference	20
Vipassana and Psychiatry	22
The Value of Anapana and Vipassana in psychological and psychosomatic illnesses.....	26
Vipassana Meditation—A Clinical Model.....	31
Vipassana Meditation and Drug Addiction.....	35
The Cyrenian House Programme	44
Problems with Current Therapeutic Approaches for Alcohol-Drug Abusers and How Vipassana Helps Them	47
Vipassana in the War against Drugs	52
How Vipassana helped me get rid of Drugs.....	54
A Personal Communication	56
Heroin Experience Overcome Through Vipassana Meditation.....	58
Seminar Conclusions.....	60
Closing Address	62
Vipassana Meditation—A Bibliography	70
List of VRI Publications	73
Vipassana Meditation Centres.....	75

Theme Paper

Vipassana Research Institute

Considerable data is available indicating the various mental and physical benefits accruing from the practice of Vipassana meditation. However, one point must be made clear from the outset and that is: alleviation of disease is not the final goal of this technique, it is only a by-product.

Vipassana aims at the total eradication of mental impurities and the resultant highest happiness of full liberation. Healing, not merely the curing of diseases, but the essential healing of human suffering, is the purpose of Vipassana meditation.

Vipassana is a technique of self-exploration, a system of self-transformation by self-observation. It focuses on the absolute interconnection between mind and body, that can be experienced directly by disciplined attention to the physical sensations that form the life of the body, and that continuously interconnect and condition the life of the mind. It is this observation-based, self-exploratory journey to the common root of mind and body that shatters dualism and evokes in the individual meditator a revolutionary vision of his or her unconscious mind. The scientific laws that operate upon one's thoughts, feelings, judgements and sensations become clear. With simple clarity, the nature of how one grows or regresses, how one produces suffering or frees oneself from suffering, is elucidated. Life becomes characterised by increased awareness, reality-orientation, non-delusion, self-control and peace.

Thus Vipassana is a practical way to examine the reality of one's own body and mind, to uncover and solve whatever problems lie hidden there, to develop unused potential, and to channel it for one's own good and the good of others. "Know thyself," all wise persons have advised. "*Atta dīpo bhava*—Develop the light (of wisdom) within," exhorted the Buddha. We must begin by knowing our own nature, otherwise we can never solve our own problems or the problems of the world.

One of the major problems which the present world is facing is: substance use disorder (chemical abuse and dependence or addiction). Chemical addiction is actually an addiction to sensations in the body. Initially a person may start taking chemicals for a number of reasons, such as an unhappy financial situation or an unhappy relationship. But eventually, when a person becomes a true addict, it is the craving for the pleasant body sensations induced by the intake of chemicals; or putting it differently, the aversion towards the unpleasant body sensations

manifesting because of the withdrawal from the chemicals, that makes an addict continue to use chemicals. The addict is thus caught in the web of craving and aversion. Vipassana teaches one to develop equanimity towards sensations, and this capacity to observe sensations without reaction enables the addict to escape the web of craving and aversion and stop using chemicals.

It was more than 2500 years ago that the Buddha, by practising Vipassana—this science of introspection—understood how the various body sensations (*vedanā*) arise with a concomitant and specific biochemical underflow (*āsava*), and how this holds true for everybody, whether one is a chemical dependent addict or not. And recently modern science, with its sophisticated instruments, has also started discovering biochemicals specifically associated with certain emotional and behavioural phenomena.

The addict, by virtue of practising meditation, becomes free to live for higher values and richer goals: loving-kindness, sympathetic joy, compassion and equanimity, and realises that he or she has other choices than using chemicals. In addition, continuing practice of the technique provides assistance in times of stress which might have led to relapse in the past.

Vipassana meditation, therefore, is a human potential development method par excellence and an art of living that enables one to live a happy and harmonious life free from all addictions.