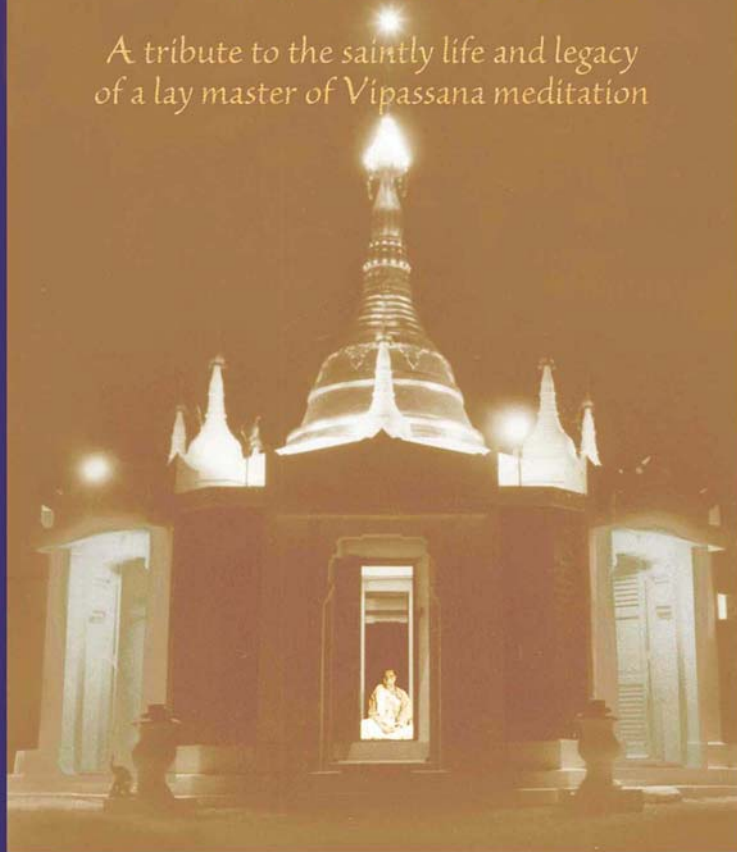


The Clock of Vipassana has Struck

*A tribute to the saintly life and legacy
of a lay master of Vipassana meditation*



Sayagyi U Ba Khin, 1899-1971

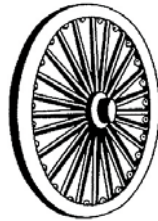
Vipassana Research Institute

The Clock of Vipassana Has Struck

*The Teachings and Writings of Sayagyi U Ba Khin
with Commentary by S. N. Goenka*



Compiled and edited by Pierluigi Confalonieri



Vipassana Research Institute
Dhamma Giri, Igatpuri

Dedication

I dedicate this collection to the teacher S. N. Goenka, living testimony of love, compassion and dedication to spreading the universal truths of the Dhamma through teaching the technique of Vipassana meditation in the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin. To him goes the merit of having inspired in me—with his enthusiasm and great feeling of gratitude toward his teacher Sayagyi U Ba Khin—the wish to develop this quality of gratefulness myself and to make this great human being known to others. As a man and as a teacher, U Ba Khin made an immense contribution to the dissemination of the technique of Vipassana meditation, the essence of the Buddha's teachings. The merit of S. N. Goenka lies not only in having related to us numerous episodes from the life of his teacher Sayagyi U Ba Khin and having explained his teachings in a simple and comprehensible manner, accompanying us throughout this book with answers and clarifications, but above all for continuing to spread throughout the world the seed of actual practice that U Ba Khin has planted.

Pierluigi Confalonieri, Editor



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Publisher's Preface

The Clock of Vipassana Has Struck first appeared in Italian, entitled *Il Tempo della Meditazione Vipassana é Arrivato*. It was published in Italy in 1993 by Ubaldini Editore, Rome. Pierluigi Confalonieri, who compiled and edited the material, is a longtime student of Vipassana who was appointed assistant teacher by S. N. Goenka in 1994. He is also the translator and author of two other books on Vipassana. *L'Arte di Vivere* (Biblioteca Universale Rizzoli, 1990) is the Italian translation of the *Art of Living*, by William Hart; and *La Saggezza che Libera* (Arnoldo Mondadori Editore, 1995) focuses on some of the important *suttas* of the Buddha.

The writings and discourses of Sayagyi U Ba Khin were originally all in English, as was the interview with Goenkaji that Mr. Confalonieri conducted for this book. So with this edition of *The Clock of Vipassana Has Struck* we are returning the majority of the text to the original language, and translating to English the portions written by Mr. Confalonieri.

During U Ba Khin's lifetime his country, Myanmar, was known as Burma. Throughout this book, in historical material from articles published before the name change, the nation is referred to as Burma. At times the adjective form "Burmese" will also be used to refer to the language and the people of Myanmar.

Acknowledgments

The material in this compilation is primarily derived from the *Sayagyi U Ba Khin Journal*, a commemorative edition produced by the Vipassana Research Institute (VRI) in 1994. We are grateful for all the work done by so many people in writing, editing, proofreading

and publishing that incomparable source. Additional material is from the *Vipassana Journal*, 1983; selected questions and answers from various interviews given by S. N. Goenka; and other articles published by VRI.

The editor also gratefully acknowledges the inspiration derived from: William Hart, *The Art of Living* (Harper San Francisco, 1987); Amadeo Solé-Leris, *Tranquillity and Insight* (BPS, 1992); Eric Lerner, *Journey of Insight Meditation* (Schocken Books, 1977); and the interview by Stephan Bodian that appeared in the *Yoga Journal* (Sept./Oct. 1988, No. 88).

The publishers of this English edition wish to thank Dr. Winston King for permission to use his reminiscence from *A Thousand Lives Away: Buddhism in Contemporary Burma* (Asian Humanities Press, 1964) and to gratefully acknowledge the organization and editing done by Shoshana Alexander and the translation work done by Eleanora Angelini.

Editor's Preface

*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.*

—Sayagyi U Ba Khin

Nearly three decades have elapsed since the death of the great meditation teacher, Sayagyi[†] U Ba Khin, from Myanmar (formerly Burma). U Ba Khin, whose life spanned the first seventy years of this century, was one of the outstanding figures of his time. His accomplishments, in two usually incompatible fields, were singular: he was a master meditation student and teacher as well as a government official of tireless devotion and impeccable conduct. His service to the country of Myanmar was noteworthy, but his example to the citizens of the world is no less remarkable; for in a time of increasingly complex global crises, his life demonstrates a simple, powerful truth—that an individual of pure mind exerts a positive, corrective influence on society. U Ba Khin's career was that of an ideal householder, combining unwavering dedication to Dhamma (the truth, the teaching) with unwearied commitment to public service.

Before he died on January 19, 1971, U Ba Khin was able to realize one of his most cherished dreams. He saw the ancient meditation technique of Vipassana, which had been preserved in his country for over two thousand years, returned to India, its land of origin. It was returned to its birthplace by U Ba Khin's devoted student, S.

[†]*Sayagyi* is a title in the Burmese language, meaning “respected teacher.”

N. Goenka. For the past two millennia, the sublime practice of Vipassana—the heart of the teaching of the Buddha—had been the province of only a small number of meditator monks and householders in a few Asian countries. Today, thousands of seekers have had the opportunity to receive the teaching and experience its benefits. These people come from scores of different countries, Eastern and Western, representing all religions, creeds, castes and communities.

Because of the pressing demands on his time, Sayagyi confined his teaching to a relatively small number of students who came to his meditation center in Yangon (formerly known as Rangoon). Now, in 1999, there are over fifty international centers—twenty-five in India, the remainder in fifteen other countries—which offer the technique of Vipassana taught by Sayagyi U Ba Khin, and carried on by his student, S. N. Goenka. (See the list of contact addresses at the end of this book.) In his teaching S. N. Goenka has always placed primary emphasis on the actual practice of Dhamma—what is called, in Pāli, the language of the Buddha, *paṭipatti*. It is only through practice that one can have the direct experience which will take one to the final goal of freedom from all suffering. In this approach, Goenkaji follows the example of his teacher, who always insisted that Dhamma must be applied if it is to have real meaning.

However, there is another important aspect of Dhamma: *pariyatti*—understanding at the theoretical, intellectual level. This is helpful to inspire one to undertake the actual practice of meditation, and to elucidate questions that may arise while one is practicing. Unfortunately, the amount of material in English which can provide a suitable theoretical foundation for a student of Vipassana has not kept pace with the growth in the availability of the practice of Dhamma. This collection of historical and theoretical research has been compiled to respond to this need and to shed light on various aspects of Vipassana meditation.

The Clock of Vipassana Has Struck is a tribute to Sayagyi U Ba Khin and, indeed, its contents are an outgrowth of his life's work.

This collection is offered primarily to inspire the practice of Dhamma, for those who have taken courses as well as those who have no experience in Vipassana meditation. It should not, however, be used as a teaching manual for the technique. Attending a ten-day course under the careful guidance of a qualified, authorized teacher is essential to properly establish oneself in the practice of Vipassana. Those who feel inspired by reading this book to try the technique of Vipassana as taught by S. N. Goenka in the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin can refer to the list of Vipassana centers at the end.

All of the work of Sayagyi and Goenkaji, all the present worldwide Dhamma activity, has only one purpose: to help people find the way out of suffering. The technique which provides this path was lost in India, and unknown in most of the rest of the world for many centuries. It is now available once again. Sayagyi believed in the ancient prophecy that 2,500 years after the time of the Buddha, Dhamma would arise anew and spread around the world. This belief is being verified. As he used to say, "The clock of Vipassana has struck."

Since the practice of Vipassana meditation is the essence of the Buddha's teachings and the most important contribution of U Ba Khin, with this collection we wish to accomplish two goals:

- 1) To describe the life and personality of U Ba Khin, as a man and as a teacher of meditation, by narrating episodes of his life and reminiscences from people who met him and to underline the importance of his contribution to the dissemination of this technique.
- 2) To delineate the essential characteristics of the practice of this technique of meditation by presenting U Ba Khin's writings, along with commentaries thereon.

The first part of the book recounts the most important details and some significant episodes from U Ba Khin's life, as narrated primarily by S. N. Goenka, his disciple, and the Vipassana Research

Institute (located adjacent to Dhammagiri, the meditation center in Igatpuri, India).

The second part of the book introduces Sayagyi's writings and includes an important section of questions and answers with S. N. Goenka, explaining the essential principles of the technique taught by him and his teacher.

The third part describes in detail how Vipassana meditation courses are organized, outlines how the technique is taught and gives information about where it is possible to learn it.

The book ends with a simple glossary of the most important *Pāli* words related to the practice of Vipassana.

A Note on the Use of Pāli

Pāli is the language in which the Buddha taught and in which his teachings (the Dhamma) have been preserved. As with Sanskrit and Latin, Pāli is not a contemporary spoken language but a so-called "dead language" that has been preserved and used as a monastic language, studied in the countries of the oldest *theravāda*[†] tradition, serving in this way to translate and explain a tradition that is still alive.

Pāli is unique in many ways. One of the meanings of the word *pāli* is "line" or "norm," and in this sense it is applicable to the language of the canonical or "normative" texts. Other basic meanings of the word *pāli* are: "series" or "sacred text." These definitions refer directly to the "lines" of verse and the "series" of texts of various lengths that make up the canonical text of the Pāli literature. Another meaning is "that which protects or preserves." Pāli preserves the words of the enlightened person, Gotama the Buddha. According to tradition, by expressing the sublime teaching which allows beings to be liberated from the rounds of suffering,

[†] *theravāda*: literally, "teaching of the elders." The teachings of the Buddha as they have been preserved in the countries of South and Southeast Asia (Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Thailand), generally recognized as the oldest, most direct transmission of the Buddha's teaching extant today.

Pāli also protects the people; it preserves the invaluable treasure of the Buddha's own words. Adherence to the language of the Buddha has been a profoundly significant part of the living tradition of teachings transmitted from generation to generation.

The question arises: if the Dhamma is universal, if it is the law of universal nature, non-sectarian and relevant to people from different nationalities and backgrounds, why then is Pāli used to transmit the teachings? The answer lies in the nature of language itself and of this particular language.

No language, no matter how rich it may be, can adequately convey the sophisticated, complete technical terminology with which the Buddha expressed himself in describing the different experiences of meditation. There are no equivalents for these concepts in other languages; words that attempt to be equivalents will only be approximations.

For example, the word "Dhamma" is a term which encompasses a wide spectrum and depth of meaning. It means the truth, the teaching, the law of nature. It also refers to the characteristics, or nature, of everything manifest in the world; hence it means "phenomenon," and "object of mind." To attempt to render such a term into an equivalent would not do justice to the depth of its meaning. The same is true of many words used by the Buddha to explain extremely subtle concepts.

For this reason in this book we convey the most important concepts of the teachings in their original language, explaining them by the context in which they are used. The glossary at the end of the book provides further assistance. At times we have translated the Pāli words with expressions that emphasize their meaning in light of the actual experience of meditation. The Pāli words spoken by the Buddha were always derived exclusively from the truth that he had realized by direct experience through meditation.