

THE DISCOURSE SUMMARIES



S. N. GOENKA

VIPASSANA RESEARCH INSTITUTE

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THE DISCOURSE
SUMMARIES

talks from a ten-day course
in Vipassana Meditation

condensed by
William Hart



Vipassana Research Institute
Dhamma Giri, Igatpuri

The Discourse Summaries

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FOREWORD

“Liberation can be gained only by practice, never by mere discussion,” S. N. Goenka has said. A course in Vipassana meditation is an opportunity to take concrete steps towards liberation. In such a course the participant learns how to free the mind of the tensions and prejudices that disturb the flow of daily life. By doing so one begins to discover how to live each moment peacefully, productively, happily. At the same time one starts progressing towards the highest goal to which mankind can aspire: purity of mind, freedom from all suffering, full enlightenment.

None of this can be attained just by thinking about it or wishing for it. One must take steps to reach the goal. For this reason, in a Vipassana course the emphasis is always on actual practice. No philosophical debates are permitted, no theoretical arguments, no questions that are unrelated to one’s own experience. As far as possible, meditators are encouraged to find the answers to their questions within themselves. The teacher provides whatever guidance is needed in the practice, but it is up to each person to implement these guidelines: one has to fight one’s own battle, work out one’s own salvation.

Given this emphasis, still some explanation is necessary to provide a context for the practice. Therefore every evening of a course Goenkaji gives a “Dhamma talk”, in order to put into perspective the experiences of that day, and to clarify various aspects of the technique. These discourses, he warns, are not intended as intellectual or emotional entertainment. Their purpose is simply to help meditators understand what to do and why, so that they will work in the proper way and will achieve the proper results.

It is these talks that are presented here in condensed form.

The eleven discourses provide a broad overview of the teaching of the Buddha. The approach to this subject, however, is not scholarly or analytical. Instead the teaching is presented in the way that it unfolds to a meditator: as a dynamic, coherent whole. All its different facets are seen to reveal an underlying unity: the experience of meditation. This experience is the inner fire that gives true life and brilliance to the jewel of the Dhamma.

Without this experience one cannot grasp the full significance of what is said in the discourses, or indeed of the teaching of the Buddha. But this does not mean that there is no place for an intellectual appreciation of the teaching. Intellectual understanding is valuable as a support to meditative practice, even though meditation itself is a process that goes beyond the limits of the intellect.

For this reason these summaries have been prepared, giving in brief the essential points of each discourse. They are intended mainly to offer inspiration and guidance to those who practice Vipassana meditation as taught by S. N. Goenka. To others who happen to read them, it is hoped that they will provide encouragement to participate in a Vipassana course and to experience what is here described.

The summaries should not be treated as a do-it-yourself manual for learning Vipassana, a substitute for a ten-day course. Meditation is a serious matter, especially the Vipassana technique, which deals with the depths of the mind. It should never be approached lightly or casually. The proper way to learn Vipassana is only by joining a formal course, where there is a suitable environment to support the meditator, and a trained guide. If someone chooses to disregard this warning and tries to teach himself the technique only from reading about it, he proceeds entirely at his own risk.

Fortunately courses in Vipassana meditation as taught by S. N. Goenka are now held regularly in many parts of the world. Schedules may be obtained by writing to any of the centres listed in the back of this book.

The summaries are based primarily on discourses given by Goenkaji at the Vipassana Meditation Centre, Massachusetts, U.S.A. during August 1983. An exception is the Day Ten Summary, which is based on a discourse given at the Centre in August 1984.

While Goenkaji has looked through this material and approved it for publication, he has not had time to check the text closely. As a result, the reader may find some errors and discrepancies. These are the responsibility not of the teacher, nor of the teaching, but of myself. Criticism will be very welcome that might help to correct such flaws in the text.

May this work help many in their practice of Dhamma.

May all beings be happy.

William Hart

NOTE ON THE TEXT

Sayings of the Buddha and his disciples that are quoted by Goenkaji are taken from the Collections of Discipline (*Vinaya-piṭaka*) and of Discourses (*Sutta-piṭaka*) of the Pāli canon. (A number of quotations appear in both Collections, although in such cases only the Sutta references are given here.) There are also a few quotations from post-canonical Pāli literature. In his talks, Goenkaji explains these passages more often by paraphrase than by word-for-word translation from the Pāli. The intention is to give the essence of each passage in ordinary language, stressing its relevance to the practice of Vipassana meditation.

Where a Pāli passage appears in the summary, the explanation given is that of Goenkaji in the discourse on which the summary is based. At the back of this book, in the section of Pāli with English translation, an attempt has been made to give more exact renderings of the passages quoted, still emphasizing the point of view of a meditator.

In the text of the summaries, the use of Pāli words has been kept to the necessary minimum. Where such words are used, for the sake of consistency their plurals are given in Pāli form; for example, the plural of *saṅkhāra* is *saṅkhārā*, that of *kalāpa* is *kalāpā*, that of *pārami* is *pāramī*.

