

DHARMA

Its True Nature

AN INTERNATIONAL SEMINAR

May 1995, Dhamma Giri, Igatpuri



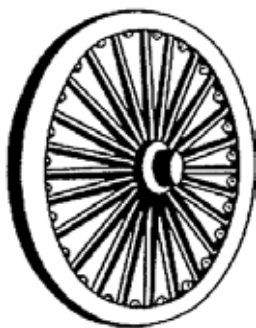
Vipassana Research Institute

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6-7 May 1995

Dhamma Giri, Igatpuri



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Contents

	Page
Introduction	1
Opening Talk Mr S.N. Goenka.....	4
Dharma—Its Definition	
and Universal Application Mr S.N. Tandon.....	9
<i>Discussion Extracts</i>	21
Dharma—Its Role	
in Current Social Problems Mrs Sally McDonald	26
<i>Discussion Extracts</i>	31
Dharma and Science Professor P.L. Dhar	37
<i>Discussion Extracts</i>	47
Vipassana—a Practical Solution Mr Ian Hetherington.....	48
<i>Discussion Extracts</i>	52
Seminar Overview Mr N. Vaghul	57
Excerpts from Closing Talk Mr S.N. Goenka.....	61
Dharma and Sectarianism A Public Talk by S. N. Goenka ..	67
Vipassana Meditation Centres	81



Introduction

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Background

The history of the evolution of civilisation is an incessant quest for social order based on justice, equality, peace, harmony and happiness. Men of wisdom in every country of the east, west, north and south have engaged in this quest.

India's contribution has been significant. It gave to the world a concept of Dhamma/Dharma, which embodies all the essentials of an ideal social order and is universally applicable without any distinction based on sex, caste, creed, sect, religion or nationality. It ensures freedom to the individual to shape his destiny in a manner of his own choosing, which is conducive to his personal development and happiness, and that of society as a whole, in the fields material as well as spiritual.

The Vipassana Research Institute is engaged in the scientific research on the theory and practice of Vipassana meditation: a technique of exploration and observation of mind-body phenomena leading to the purification of mind. The technique can bring about a major change in the attitude and behavioral pattern of the individual. The technique has a unique potential as an instrument to bring about change and improvement in the fields of Education, Health, Management in Government and Business, and Social Systems—strengthening the concept of secularism, national integration and international understanding.

The Institute has been organising annual seminars, national and international, dealing

with various aspects of the above areas. In April 1994, the international seminar, organised at New Delhi, dealt with the subject “Vipassana Meditation—its Relevance to the Modern World”.

This 1995 seminar was an outcome of the April 1994 event. The Institute feels that the Indian society, or for that matter the world society, is today at a crossroads in history. It is overwhelmed by the growth and advancement of science and technology—computers, genetics, electronics, media—on one side and on the other, gradual and sustained erosion of human values in all spheres of life. Communal, religious, ethnic, and caste conflicts, so rampant today, are stark manifestations of this reality.

Wisdom lies in understanding this phenomenon and taking corrective measures. This is part of man's eternal quest and in consonance with the great heritage of India. Accordingly the Institute selected the theme “Dharma—Its True Nature” for the 1995 seminar.

The objective of the seminar was very limited, yet very specific. The Institute had no wish to get involved in any controversy related to philosophical speculations and ideological differences and standpoints. The goal was to have a free and objective deliberation on different aspects of this important theme. A principal outcome would be a statement to create awareness of the problems and possible solutions and suggest an action plan to redeem society from this all-pervasive evil of ignorance of the essence of Dhamma.

International Seminar

The seminar was held at the Vipassana Research Institute, Igatpuri over the weekend of 6–7 May 1995. It was attended by leading persons from India and abroad. The 500 attendees came from diverse fields, such as cricketer Mr Bishen Bedi, educationist Mr Anil Bordia, and many prominent people in science, business, social work and politics, too numerous to mention. About forty foreign guests were present, from Europe, USA, Australia, Iran and neighbouring Asian countries.

The seminar was introduced by Shri S.N. Goenka, well-known and respected teacher of Vipassana meditation, who emphasized that Dharma is universal. He said pure dharma is not sectarian; we should not speak of Hindu dharma or Jain dharma, or Muslim or Christian dharma, but universal Dharma. It is a pure, harmonious and wholesome way of life, a life of morality.

The first working session included a scholarly talk on The Definition of Dharma by S.N. Tandon, who compared life to a game of snakes and ladders. When we are bitten by the snakes of our mental impurities or “unwholesome dharmas”, we are dragged down to the snake pit, and when we develop good mental qualities, we climb a ladder towards enlightenment.

The second session covered The Role of Dharma in Current Social Problems. An international perspective was given by Mrs Sally McDonald from Australia, who discussed the stressful effects of modern life: population pressures, complex technology, mass media advertising and rapid rates of change. The role of Dharma, when defined as a path of self-introspection, is to eliminate the mental defilements that cause us to do wrong,

to help us bear the stress of modern life, and to give us strength to serve and improve society.

Mr Bedi gave an entertaining talk on the “Dharma of Cricket” i.e., fair play, and more serious dissertations on economic and political aspects were given by speakers such as Mr Vidyadhar Gokhale and Mr Mohan Patel, ex-Sheriff of Bombay.

On Sunday morning a very stimulating talk on the complementary aspects of Dharma and Science was presented by Prof. P.L. Dhar of the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi. He suggested that the ancient wisdom of Dharma, the fundamental insights of impermanence and constant change, were consistent with the emerging New World View of particle physics and molecular biology. He said both science and Dharma enunciate the laws of nature, and an understanding of both is needed to channel the power of modern developments for the very survival of humanity.

This was followed by a brief explanation of Vipassana meditation as a practical solution to so many of our personal and social problems, by Mr Ian Hetherington from the UK and Mr Ram Singh. Courses in Vipassana are attended by about 35,000 people worldwide each year. The technique involves the practice of morality, control over the mind, and a gradual but total purification of mind by examining one’s own true nature.

The concluding session, led by eminent financier Mr N. Vaghul, drew up an action plan to incorporate the principles and teachings of pure Dharma into school education (11,000 schoolchildren are already attending introductory meditation courses each year) and into business corporations, government, etc. It was proposed that this

will enhance the productivity and prosperity of nations at the same time as developing a sound ethical base for our society.

The closing address of the seminar was given by Mr S.N. Goenka. He welcomed the conclusion that practical steps are necessary to alleviate the miseries in modern society. For this we have to look to changing the mind of Man, a massive task. However, modest beginnings have already been made, and there

is a precedent for what Vipassana can achieve on a mass scale in Emperor Aśoka's inspiring reign. To understand what Dharma is and the true meaning of the Buddha's words, it is essential to practise Vipassana and apply it in daily life. The technique provides a universal way out of suffering and is completely non-sectarian. He urged all participants at the seminar to move beyond discussion and taste the benefits of Dharma for themselves.