

VIPASSANA

ITS RELEVANCE TO THE PRESENT WORLD

an International Seminar

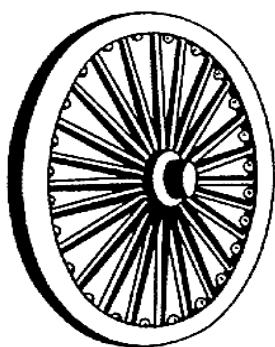
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Vipassana Research Institute

Vipassana: Its Relevance to the Present World

**An International Seminar
held at the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi
on 15-17 April 1994**



**Vipassana Research Institute
Dhamma Giri, Igatpuri**

Vipassana: Its Relevance to the Present World

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Introduction

Background

Vipassana is one of India's most ancient meditation techniques. It is a practical method which purifies the mind, eventually leading to the eradication of all suffering. Although it was lost in India, Vipassana was preserved through an unbroken chain of teachers and disciples in Myanmar (Burma), who kept the teaching in its pristine purity for many generations. In 1955, at the meditation centre of Sayagyi U Ba Khin, it was learnt by the present teacher, Mr. S.N. Goenka.

Vipassana was reintroduced to India in 1969 by Mr. Goenka as a non-sectarian teaching, and is rapidly spreading throughout the world. More than thirty Vipassana Meditation centres have been established or are being developed. About half of them are in India, and the rest are in Europe, the U.S., Australia, New Zealand and elsewhere in Asia. In 1993, 32,000 people from a wide range of social and religious backgrounds attended ten-day courses—an increase of about twenty-five per cent over the previous year.

International Seminar

“Vipassana—Its Relevance to the Present World” was the subject of an international seminar held at the Indian Institute of Technology in New Delhi on 15-17 April 1994. It was attended by over 300 delegates from India and abroad. The seminar was comprised of sessions on Education, Prison Reform, Management in Business and Government, Pāli Research, and Physical and Mental Health.

In the inaugural session the chairman, Prof. Subhash Chandra, deputy director of I.I.T. Delhi, welcomed this opportunity for the community to learn about the benefits of this scientific technique. He pointed out that as a premier national institute of technological education and research, I.I.T. Delhi encourages such activities which expose students and faculty to diverse streams of thought. Dr. L.M. Singhvi, the Indian High Commissioner to the U.K., gave a stimulating inaugural address. Mr. S.N. Goenka then explained in his keynote address the salient features of Vipassana and how, through its practice, society can be improved by changes in individuals.

The seminar session on Education, chaired by Mr. P.D. Thakur (Joint Secretary, Dept. of Education, Govt. of India), highlighted the success of children's courses held in India, where over 5,000 schoolchildren attended courses of up to three days duration in the past year. Feedback from parents and teachers indicated that the concentration and memory of students had improved. Similar courses are being organized in Western countries. There was discussion on how this could be integrated with the present education system. One of the papers highlighted the potential of Vipassana as a practical method for emotional and spiritual education. Another paper gave a social perspective, explaining that the courses also teach morality experientially on a non-sectarian basis. The chairmen, in his concluding remarks, while appreciating the role of Vipassana in education, cautioned against loading children of a very tender age with meditation as they are

already overburdened with curricular activities.

The session on Prison Reform, chaired by Mrs. Kiran Bedi, the Inspector General of Prisons, Delhi, evoked keen interest. Due to the success of a special meditation course conducted by Mr. and Mrs. Goenka in Tihar Jail in Delhi—one of the largest prison complexes in Asia, with about 9,000 inmates—a meditation centre offering continuous courses has been established within the prison walls. This landmark event occurred on the concluding day of the special course, immediately prior to the seminar. Over 1,000 inmates and some members of staff participated, and the event received local and international press coverage. The authorities have found Vipassana to be a unique transformative tool in jails. Discipline has improved and there is greater harmony between the inmates and staff. Amongst the papers presented was one on a psychological study of inmates by the Department of Psychiatry of the All India Institute of Medical Sciences. The study found that Vipassana reduces hostility and helplessness and leads to enhanced well-being and hope.

The session on “Better Management in Business and Government” was chaired by Professor U. Pareek. He focused on the changes in management culture, which include improved creativity and better ways to deal with stress, that are possible when Vipassana is introduced. He also noted the need to be scientific in evaluating these effects. Various case studies showed the benefits of increased motivation at the individual level and within companies, and how a more responsible attitude to society is fostered. Improvements in productivity of up to twenty per cent resulted from better communication and cooperation between management and

workers, after a majority of employees had learnt Vipassana.

The sessions on Pāli Tipiṭaka and Research were chaired by Prof. Mahesh Tiwary. There is a vast body of literature in Pāli, the language in which Gotama the Buddha taught. The first session discussed the publication programme launched by the Vipassana Research Institute (VRI) at Igatpuri, near Bombay. The entire Pāli Tipiṭaka and its commentaries, in 132 volumes, are being published in Devanāgarī script (the most common script in India). VRI is also publishing some Pāli texts in Roman script which are currently not available. On the second day papers were presented on the Pāli language and on the importance of the Tipiṭaka as a source of Vipassana.

The final session dealt with Physical and Mental Health, and was chaired by Dr. S.K. Kacker, Director AIIMS. He pointed out that scientific studies have established the efficacy of meditative techniques in controlling various psychosomatic disorders with reduced medication. Even in psychiatric disorders, meditation can help reduce patients' dependence on tranquillizers. The value system fostered by Vipassana is also likely to counter the ever-spreading “profit orientation” evident in almost all walks of life. Several of the papers presented show how Vipassana meditation is relevant to the work of professionals in the areas of traditional healing such as naturopathy, as well as humanistic psychology and psychiatry. However, it was emphasized that the aim of the technique is to purify the mind, and that improvements in physical health are merely a by-product of improved mental health. Papers were also presented on the consequences of the erosion of moral values in the areas of environmental pollution, and how our hope for the future lies with mental purification at the individual level.

The valedictory session of the seminar was chaired by Mr. O.P. Vaish. After the presentation of brief reports on each session, Mr. S.N. Goenka gave a concise exposition of the technique and advised all participants who had not taken a course, to do so in order to experience for themselves the benefits dis-

cussed by the various speakers. Mr. Goenka and the Ambassador of Myanmar then took part in the historic event of presenting sets of eleven Pāli volumes in Devanāgarī script to ambassadorial and other representatives from Thailand, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, and the very successful seminar came to a close. ❀

Please note: The articles given in this Seminar publication contain the views of the concerned authors.