Meditation Now

Inner Peace Through Inner Wisdom

S. N. Goenka

Vipassana Research Institute

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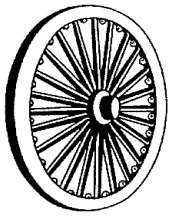
Inner Peace through Inner Wisdom

By S. N. Goenka

A collection Commemorating
Mr. Goenka's Tour of North America
April to August, 2002



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S. N. Goenka

A Teacher for the World

Mr. Satya Narayan Goenka, the foremost lay teacher of Vipassana meditation, was a student of the late Sayagyi U Ba Khin of Burma (Myanmar). The technique which Mr. Goenka teaches represents a tradition that is traced back to the Buddha. The Buddha never taught a sectarian religion; he taught Dhamma—the way to liberation—which is universal. In the same way, Mr. Goenka's approach is totally nonsectarian. For this reason his teaching has a profound appeal to people of all backgrounds, of every religion and no religion, from every part of the world.

From Businessman to Spiritual Teacher

Mr. Goenka was born in Mandalay, Myanmar, in 1924. He joined his family business in 1940 and rapidly became a pioneering industrialist, establishing several manufacturing corporations. He soon became a leading figure in Myanmar's large influential Indian community, and for many years headed such organizations as the Burma Marwari Chamber of Commerce and the Rangoon Chamber of Commerce & Industry. He often accompanied Union of Burma trade delegations on international tours as an advisor.

In 1956 Mr. Goenka took his first ten-day Vipassana course at the International Meditation Center in Rangoon, under the guidance of Sayagyi U Ba Khin. In 1964-1966 Mr. Goenka's businesses and industries were taken over when the newly installed military government of Myanmar nationalized all industry in the country. This gave him

an opportunity to spend more time with his teacher for meditation and in-depth training, all the while remaining a devoted family man and father of six sons. After fourteen years practicing with his teacher, he was appointed a teacher of Vipassana himself and devoted his life to spreading the technique for the benefit of all humanity. Shortly thereafter he came to India and conducted his first ten-day meditation course in 1969. In India, a country still sharply divided by caste and religion, Vipassana has been widely and easily accepted because of its nonsectarian nature.

The Vipassana International Academy (Dhamma Giri) was established in 1974 in Igatpuri, near Bombay, India. Courses of ten days duration and longer are held there continuously. In 1979 Mr. Goenka began traveling abroad to introduce Vipassana in other countries of the world. He has personally taught tens of thousands of people in more than 400 ten-day courses in Asia, North America, Europe and Australasia.

In response to an ever-growing demand, he started training assistant teachers to conduct these ten-day residential courses on his behalf. To date, he has trained more than 700 assistant teachers who have, with the help of thousands of volunteers, held Vipassana courses in more than 90 countries, including the People's Republic of China, Iran, Muscat, the United Arab Emirates, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mongolia, Russia, Serbia, Taiwan, Cambodia, Mexico and all the countries of South America. More than 80 centers devoted to the teaching of Vipassana have been established in 21 countries. Today more than 1,000 courses are held annually around the world. One of the unique aspects of these Vipassana courses is that they are offered free of any charge for board, lodging or tuition;

the expenses are completely met by voluntary donations. Neither Mr. Goenka nor his assistants receive any financial gain from these courses.

A prolific writer and poet, Mr. Goenka composes in English, Hindi and Rajasthani, and his works have been translated into many languages. He has been invited to lecture by institutes as diverse as the Dharma Drum Mountain Monastery (of Ven. Sheng Yen) in Taiwan; the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, and the Millennium World Peace Summit at the United Nations where he stressed for the assembled spiritual leaders the overreaching importance of inner peace to effect real world peace.

Teaching for All Sections of Society: From Prisoners to Government Officials

Vipassana meditation has been taught to prison inmates and staff in many parts of India as well as the United States, Britain, New Zealand, Taiwan and Nepal. There are permanent Vipassana centers in two Indian prisons. More than 10,000 inmates have attended ten-day Vipassana courses in jails and prisons. One thousand prisoners participated in a ground-breaking ten-day course conducted by Mr. Goenka in Tihar Jail, Delhi, in April, 1994. What started in a dramatic way in Tihar has now spread all over India. Convinced of its positive effects the Government of India has recommended that every prison in the country should organize ten-day Vipassana courses for inmates. As a result hundreds of prisoners continue to participate in Vipassana retreats every month. In addition, thousands of police officers have also attended Vipassana courses at the meditation center at the Police Academy, Delhi, and at other centers in India.

Men and women from all walks of life successfully practice Vipassana. They include the highly educated and the illiterate, the wealthy and the impoverished, aristocrats and slum-dwellers, devout followers of every religion and followers of none, the powerful and the powerless, the elderly and the young. Courses have been organized for people with disabilities, including the blind and leprosy patients. Other programs have focused on school children, drug addicts, homeless children, college students and business executives.

High level institutions in India, such as the governments of the states of Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh and Madhya Pradesh; large corporations such as the Oil and Natural Gas Commission; leading research institutes such as the Bhabha Atomic Research Institute; and national training institutes such as the Indian Institute of Taxation—all encourage their employees to attend Vipassana courses as part of their ongoing job training.

Commitment to Peace

Mr. Goenka believes and teaches that for peace outside (among nations, among different communities) there must be peace inside. Individuals must learn the "art of living" in order to live peaceful lives. This is the heart of his teaching to people from different backgrounds. One important consequence of his work in India has been a subtle but telling influence on interreligious harmony. Thousands of Catholic priests, Buddhist monks, Jain ascetics, Hindu sanyasis and other religious leaders have come, and continue to come, to Vipassana courses. The universality of Vipassana—the core of the Buddha's teaching—is providing a way whereby ideological differences can be bridged and people of diverse backgrounds can experience

deep benefits without fearing conversion.

Mr. Goenka recently made history in India when he and a leading Hindu leader, HH Shankaracharya of Kanchi, met and together exhorted Hindus and Buddhists alike to forget past differences and live in harmony. After this initial meeting Mr. Goenka also met HH Shankaracharya of Sringeri and many other top Hindu leaders in an effort to establish harmonious relations between Hindu and Buddhist communities.

Despite this positive development, mere exhortations alone cannot bring about the much desired reconciliation and cooperative spirit. Only when individuals undertake to remove from within themselves the blocks to peace and harmony can peace begin to flower outside and affect society. For this reason Mr. Goenka has always emphasized that the practical application of meditation is what will enable human beings to achieve inner as well as outer peace.

