



Vipassana Newsletter

In the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin, as taught by S. N. Goenka

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Words of Dhamma

Katame dve puggalā dullabhā lokasmiṃ?

Yo ca pubbakārī, yo ca kataññū katavedī.

– Puggalapaññatti Niddesa 2. Dukapuggalapaññatti

Which two persons are rare in this world? The one who serves others selflessly (without expecting anything in return). And the one who is grateful for a kindness done.

Forty Years of a New Life

by Principal Teacher S. N. Goenka

[Forty Years of a New Life was published in the autumn of 1995 in the Vipasyana Patrika to commemorate the fortieth anniversary of Respected S. N. Goenka's beginning of Vipassana practice. The original material has been translated and adapted for this article.]

The first ten days of September 1955 were the most precious of my life. Sitting at the feet of the supremely compassionate householder-saint, Sayagyi U Ba Khin, I learned the pristine art of observing the truth within. It was a great fortune, an exalted pāramī (wholesome deed) of some past life that had borne a priceless fruit. I could never have dreamed that these sacred moments would happen. It was a new birth.

My first birth had taken place thirty-two years earlier. Now I was truly twice-born. This second birth was indeed a worthy birth. Like a bird born of its mother encased in a shell, my first birth was shrouded in the darkness of deep ignorance. A bird's second birth is its true birth – when it breaks the eggshell and emerges into the light. Just as the little bird blinks its eyes when it emerges from its shell into the sunlight, so was I astounded when the dark layer of ignorance was penetrated for the first time and I glimpsed the rays of true understanding. Indeed, the darkness of ignorance is darker than the absence of light within an eggshell or the womb.

Up until now, I had not even remotely perceived the truth within. Yet how well I experienced it in those ten days. This perishable, material body, which had always seemed so solid and heavy – now its every atom trembled and came alive. Yet a still greater achievement was that I found a simple and scientific method of eradicating mental defilements. By realizing the true relationship between the body and mind, the shackles of those deep-rooted mental defilements now began to disintegrate. I had read or heard about the highly valued stages of meditation practice, and now I was experiencing them. My heart overflowed with gratitude toward my Teacher, Sayagyi U Ba Khin.

After returning home I practiced Vipassana every morning and evening without a break, despite the acute demands of my busy schedule. This brought about fundamental changes, and profound gratitude toward my revered Teacher deepened immensely.

Vipassana became a part of my life. The mind that had burned incessantly in the fires of passion, anger and ego now experienced a rare spiritual peace and calm. Where it had been

plagued by the constant tension of myriad domestic, business and social responsibilities, my mind was now enriched by happiness and health. Vipassana did not draw me away from my worldly responsibilities, rather it gave me renewed energy to dispassionately fulfil them. Consequently, my capacity for work increased significantly.

For years I had been immersed in serious scriptural studies and steeped in sentimental devotional practices, tremulously praying to the deities my family worshipped. Despite these practices, deep-seated defilements remained. But now they began to weaken due to this simple and natural process of meditation. My heart overflowed with thankfulness.

Since my childhood I had been conditioned by beliefs about our family deity. Although it was taught that Lord Buddha was the ninth and most evolved incarnation of the god Vishnu, his teachings were portrayed as oriented toward magic; they were considered unfit for true believers. These beliefs were stumbling blocks which caused me to hesitate to join my first course of Vipassana.

But I had also heard that the Buddha was deeply compassionate. As a child I had read the story in which his cousin Devadatta wounded a swan with an arrow and how young Gotama compassionately saved it. I had also observed that the people of Myanmar (Burma) were so straightforward and guileless. A question arose in my mind: If the Buddha's teachings were wrong, then how could his followers be such decent people?

Confounding my mind still further were blind beliefs that I had clung to since childhood. Some came from one of my uncles who held a high position in my father's firm. He was much older than me and a Sanskrit scholar. He had read the scriptures extensively and his frequent weapon in an argument was: "The scriptures say so." Immersed in rites and rituals, he prayed and worshiped for four or five hours every day. His daily chants were impressive; from a young age they inspired me to recite important scriptural passages for which I am grateful to him. I enjoyed these daily morning recitations; the words reverberated in my mind long afterwards. My entire family was deeply devoted to the gods Vishnu, Krishna and Shiva. My chants further strengthened this inherited devotion.

My uncle was extremely strict. Though he did not oppose Lord Buddha, he strongly opposed his teachings. I, on the other hand, often visited the famous Mahamuni (Buddhist) temple in Mandalay with my grandfather, and felt very peaceful there. My uncle often said to me, "The old man has become senile, but you are still young and should refrain from taking the wrong path."

But I continued to visit the temple even after my grandfather's death. The peace and cleanliness of Buddha's temples attracted me. I knew nothing about meditation then, but whenever I visited the Mahamuni temple I felt very calm.

I finally joined a Vipassana course after speaking with Sayagyi U Ba Khin. His explanations, given with deep compassion and loving-kindness, allowed me to understand how blemish-free this meditation practice is. In the very first course I realized how false and misleading was the centuries-old propaganda against the Buddha's teachings.

I now saw clearly: What can be wrong in practicing a meditation which is based on universal truth and can bring this wild, unruly mind to one-pointed concentration? What, indeed, can be wrong in establishing the mind in wisdom and knowledge based on one's own experience – a mind that hitherto had depended on somebody else's wisdom? Can anything be wrong in learning the art of leading a new life, the result of a mind cleansed and purified from defilements, and filled with mettā (loving kindness), karuṇa (compassion), muditā (sympathetic joy) and upekkhā (equanimity). I had read and heard about the importance of these subtler qualities since childhood. Now I felt: If someone teaches the experiential aspects of the eternal truth – which had only been described in empty rhetoric – then how can these teachings be considered false, illusory or magical? I found the Vipassana practice faultless.

I then decided to read the Buddha's words, thinking that perhaps I'd find something false or misleading lurking there. But as I read the scriptures I saw with increasing clarity that Dhamma was sublime and pure, beneficial to one and all.

In those days I used to come to India to visit established ashrams (centres for spiritual practice) and meet various religious leaders. I wanted to determine if I had, perhaps, started walking on a wrong path, if I had become entangled in a delusion. I also sought to learn: If Vipassana was a proper path, how could I progress beyond what I had already learned? Alas, after these explorations, I felt certain that India had become spiritually poorer since losing the sublime knowledge of the Buddha's teaching.

India's neighbour Myanmar is truly blessed to have preserved these priceless jewels in their pristine purity: not only Vipassana meditation but the original Buddhist scriptures which were lost due to our Indian ancestors' lack of wisdom. I now clearly understood the way in which misinformation had been propagated all over India, whereby Buddha was praised but his teachings were denounced. I was saddened and dismayed when I realized how the educated classes of India had been duped and so lost our country's ancient, timeless, priceless treasure. It was time for the country to awaken.

Besides my daily practice of meditation, I visited my revered Sayagyi at his centre in Yangon every Sunday morning at 7:00 for group meditation and I continued to go deeper in Vipassana paññā (experiential wisdom) by taking at least one ten-day course a year. At times I also undertook longer, more intensive retreats. Gradually I came to realize the true purpose for human existence. The reality of the senses at the mental and physical levels, their universal characteristics of anicca (impermanence), dukkha (suffering) and anattā (egolessness), became increasingly clear experientially. I could see the truth as obviously as a piece of fruit held in my hand.

The state of total dissolution that I had experienced so naturally and effortlessly in my first course had created the illusion that this was indeed the permanent, eternal, absolute state; whereas in reality, this dissolution was nothing but

physical and mental sensations, clearly within the realm of anicca (arising and passing away).

Subsequently, when I experienced even subtler realities and their concomitant states of deep peace and sublime bliss and joy, I realized the importance of experiencing these states with increased alertness. This is essential to prevent the seeker from getting stuck in this elevated but illusionary experience, which is still in the field of mind and matter. The meditator must clearly perceive whether this blissful state is one of heightened awareness of the senses, or the experience which transcends the senses. In this experience beyond the senses, the senses do not work; if this has not happened, then one is still in the field of mind and matter. With deepened awareness I experienced rising and falling in this profoundly subtle realm also. Without the awareness of anicca, this state would have trapped me with the illusionary thoughts of “me”, “my”, “mine,” and “permanent, eternal, absolute soul.” That is why it is vital to remain totally aware of the reality of this experience.

Through practicing constant awareness and experiencing the various stages on the path to total liberation, all doubts were gradually dissolving. At every step, the sublime purity and spiritually beneficent aspects of Dhamma manifested themselves. Naturally, my heart overflowed with feelings of gratitude, gratitude toward Gotama the Buddha, who, despite tremendous hardships, rediscovered the technique of Vipassana which had been lost for eons – the only technique that leads to mental purification and total liberation. Not only did he seek out the path and liberate himself, but with boundless compassion he shared it with one and all.

Deep gratitude flows toward the unbroken tradition of teacher-student, diligently maintained in India and thereafter in Myanmar, which preserved the basic tenants of this knowledge in total purity. Gratitude flows toward my Dhamma father, Sayagyi, who taught me Vipassana with such compassion, and firmly established me in the theoretical and practical aspects of pure Dhamma.

When I survey the last forty years of my new life on the path of Vipassana, my heart brims with deep satisfaction and joy. In the worldly sphere, during these forty years, there have been so many ascents and descents, so many springs and autumns, so many turns of the tide. But the daily practice of Vipassana never failed to help me to develop equanimity in all situations.

My life is fulfilled. From the abundant compassion of my respected Teacher, I have received incomparable sustenance, and I continue to receive it in such abundance. The rejuvenating medicine of Dhamma gives me confidence to move firmly on. It continues to benefit me so much and uplifts so many others also. Pondering this, a spark of gratitude toward my respected Teacher rekindles in my heart.

The river of Dhamma that started flowing 25 centuries ago through the efforts of the supremely compassionate Buddha – may it spring forth once again in the current era due to the efforts of my deeply revered Sayagyi. May it liberate all those who are enchained, who are tired and thirsty, who are in pain and sorrow. May it benefit all, may it uplift all – this wish of goodwill flows from my heart.

Having experienced and appreciated the Buddha's teaching, deep like the ocean, broad like the vast earth and high like the Himalayas, I feel very comfortable in accepting, practicing and passing it on in its pristine purity. There can be no question of practicing or teaching anything but this wonderful Dhamma. Dhamma is paripunṇa – it is complete, there is nothing to add. And it is parisuddha – so pure, that there is nothing to be removed.

[On the occasion of our Resp. Teacher's 10th death anniversary, we trust that this article, offered as a homage will help us get further established on the path of Dhamma. – Editor]

QUESTION AND ANSWERS

Q: You always condemn ritualism, but what is wrong with expressing our respect and gratitude?

Goenkaji: There is nothing wrong with that. Respect and gratitude are not rituals. Rituals are when you don't understand what you are doing, when you are doing something just because somebody asked you to. If deep inside you understand, "I am paying respect to my parents" or "I am paying respect to a particular god or goddess" – then, see: What are the qualities of that god? What are the qualities of that goddess? Am I giving real respect to that god and goddess by developing the same qualities within myself? Am I giving real respect to my parents by developing their good qualities? If the answer is yes, then you are doing these actions with understanding, and they are not rites or rituals. But if you perform something mechanically, then it becomes a rite or ritual.

Q: Can we get complete transformation and complete happiness through Vipassana?

Goenkaji: It is a progressive process. As you start working, you will find that you are experiencing more and more happiness, and eventually you will reach the stage which is total happiness. You become more and more transformed, and you will reach the stage which is total transformation. It is progressive.

Q: Why should we work with respiration?

Goenkaji: Respiration is the truth. Respiration is related to your mind and matter, and you are here to make an analytical study of mind and matter. So you start with respiration, and then go to a deeper level of mind and matter.

Q: Do you believe in rebirth?

Goenkaji: My believing or not believing will not help you. Meditate, and you will reach a stage where you can see your past, and you can see your future. Then only believe. Don't believe something just because your guru says so. Otherwise you will be under the clutches of a guru, which is against Dhamma.

Q: Are you an atheist?

Goenkaji: (Laughs.) If by "atheist" you mean one who does not believe in God, then no, I am not. I believe in God. But for me, God is not an imaginary person. For me, truth is God. The ultimate truth is ultimate God.

Q: To live a righteous life, don't we need God's power?

Goenkaji: God's power is Dhamma's power. Dhamma is God. Truth is God. When you are with truth, when you are with Dhamma, you are with God. Develop God's power within yourself, by purifying your mind.

Q: Have you seen your previous birth?

Goenkaji: Every moment I am dying, every moment I am taking a new birth. This process is going on, and I keep observing it.

Q: What is choiceless observation?

Goenkaji: It means to do nothing. Things are just happening, and you are observing. Don't impose this belief or that belief, this dogma, that cult, this philosophy. Don't impose anything, don't create anything; let things happen naturally. Whatever is happening within you naturally is the truth, and truth is God.

Q: Is meditation the only way to get liberated?

Goenkaji: Yes. Just accepting something with blind faith will not help. You have to work for your liberation. You have to find out where the bondage is, and then you have to come out of that bondage. This is Vipassana. Observe your bondage, observe your misery. Then you will find the real cause of the bondage, the real cause of misery and you will find how this cause starts getting eradicated, eradicated. Gradually you are coming out of it. So liberation comes by the practice of Vipassana.

[Q&A from the VRI publication: *The Gracious Flow of Dhamma*]

Additional Responsibility Children Course Teachers

- | | |
|---|---|
| 1. Shri Y. Shiv kumar, AT Bhilai, To assist CT for Dhamma Anchal, Ambikapur (Chhattisirh) | 1. Mr. Madduri Balaraju, Telangana |
| New Responsibility Teachers | 2. Mr. G Kalyan Ramana, Hyderabad |
| 1. Mr. Prem Narayan Sharma, Nagpur | 3. Mrs. Sajja Pushpa, Hyderabad, |
| 2. Mr. Waman Baingane, Nagpur | 4. Mr. Venkateswarlu Maddisetty, Secunderabad |
| Senior Asst. Teachers | 5. Mrs. Srilaxmi Siluveru, Hyderabad |
| 1. Mr. Hong-Eng Khoo, Malaysia | 6. Mrs. Aruna Pamin Patel, Modasa |
| New appointments Assistant Teachers | 7. Dr. Pamin Amrit Patel, Modasa |
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| 2. Mrs. Kala Rao, Dubai | 9. Mrs. Vimala Thakkar, Banaskantha |
| 3. Mr. Ajay Bhagdikar, Durg | 10. Mr. Herve Muneza, Mozambique, |
| 4. Ms. Mala Devidas Panjabi, Chennai | |

Dhammic Death

1. Smt. Surekha Ponkshe from Nagpur passed away peacefully on the 10th of August, 2023. Since being appointed as an AT in 2003, she has worked unremittingly for Dhamma. She also served on many long courses as she undertook responsibilities as a senior AT in 2008. Her contribution towards developing the Dhamma Nāga Vipassana Center was invaluable. May such a deeply committed sevika continue to progress on the path of Dhamma, are the heartfelt wishes of her Dhamma family.

2. Smt. Vimla Badani, Vipassana Teacher from Kolkata, breathed her last on 28th August, 2023 at 4.30 p.m. in Ahmedabad. A dedicated and a sincere Dhamma server, her dedication towards nurturing the Kolkata center, Dhamma Ganga was total as she worked tirelessly with heartfelt enthusiasm. Her Dhamma service was full of genuine desire to see people grow in Dhamma. May she be happy, peaceful and move towards liberation in her onward Dhamma journey.

Vipassana Research Institute (VRI) Project Pāla

On the occasion of Guru Purnima, Vipassana Research Institute is very happy to announce Project Pāla – Treasures of Dhamma.

As you are all aware, this precious Dhamma, which was taught to us by S.N. Goenkaji, in its pristine purity, which is being maintained through the pure tradition of Teachers, must be preserved, protected, and passed on for the benefit of many. This includes a vast collection of materials comprising manuscripts, rare books, pictures, palm leaves from Myanmar, artefacts, audio and video tapes, and Goenkaji's personal documents.

Treasures of Dhamma summary:

- Photos, over 2000 images & 8000 negatives.
- Letters, Documents & Transcript – over 210,000.
- Newsletters, Newspapers, Magazines – over 10000.
- Diaries & Notebooks – around 500.

- Printed books – over 12000.
- Palm leaf & Manuscripts – Approx 28.
- Audio & Video collection – over 3000 tapes.
- Paintings - over 130 large paintings on the Life of the Buddha.
- Course application forms – over 12 lakhs. (Some forms are from 1971!)

The word pāla means to preserve or secure Dhamma teachings. In order to protect these materials from the risk of damage due to environmental conditions, a 5000 sq ft state-of-the-art conservation and preservation facility is planned. The storage facility will have a temperature-controlled environment that is fire and water proof.

The project is estimated to cost around Rs 300 lakhs; hence, any contributions towards this noble cause for future generations would be of great merit to the donor.

Please click the YouTube link below to see a short video on Pāla - The Treasures of Dhamma: <https://youtu.be/eK-dJPWnOhs> Anyone can donate online through our website, mobile app, scan UPI QR Code, net banking or by sending a cheque to our address.

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One-Day Mega Courses at Global Vipassana Pagoda, Gorai, Mumbai

1. 1st Oct 2023, Sunday Sharad Purnima plus Puja Goenkaji's Death Anniversary.
2. 19th Nov 2023 Sunday Centenary year Mega course
3. 10th Dec 2023, Sunday Centenary year Mega course
4. 14th Jan 2024, Sunday Sangha dana and Mega Course
5. 4th Feb 2024, Sunday MEGA EVENT: Documentary Film on Puja Guruji & other events

In addition there are **Daily One-Day Courses** being held in the Pagoda for Vipassana Students. Please follow the link to join and take advantage of the immense benefit of meditating in a large group. **Contact:** 022 50427500 (Board Lines) Mob. +91 8291894644 (from 11 am to 5 pm).

Online registration: <http://oneday.globalpagoda.org/register> Email: oneday@globalpagoda.org (Pl. bring a bottle so you can fill it with drinking water at GVP.)

Dhammalaya Stay during Mega Courses:—Meditators can stay at Dhammalaya during mega courses and avail maximum benefit. Please **contact:** 022 50427599 or email-info.dhammalaya@globalpagoda.org

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DHAMMA DOHAS

*Jaya jaya jaya gurudevajī, jaya jaya kripānidhāna;
Dharama ratana aisā diyā, huā parama kalyāṇa.*

My teacher, may you be victorious; Compassionate one, may you be victorious. You gave me such a jewel of Dhamma, which has been so beneficial to me.

*Guruvara tuma milate nahīm, dharma gaṅga ke tīra;
To basa gaṅgā pūjatā, kabhī na pītā nīra.*

O revered teacher, had I not met you by the banks of the Ganges of Dhamma; I would have merely paid obeisance to the Ganges, never tasting its waters.

*Yadi guruvara milate nahīm, baramā deśa sudeśa;
Kāma krodha ke, aham ke, kaise miṭate kleśa?*

Had I not met my revered teacher in the good land of Burma, Then how would I ever have dissolved the miseries of sensuousness, anger and pride?

*Patha bhūlā digbhrama huā, bhaṭaka rahā akulāya;
Dhanya! dhanya! gurudeva ne, satpatha diyā dikhāya.*

Wandering around aimlessly, having lost the way; Blessed is my revered Guru, who showed me the right path.

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