



WORDS OF DHAMMA

*Abhivādanasilissa, niccaṃvuddhāpacāyino;
cattārodhammā vadḍhanti, āyuvaṇṇo sukhaṃ balaṃ.*

— Dhammapada 109, Sahassavaggo.

For one who always respects and honours those who are older and more virtuous, four benefits will increase: long life, beauty, happiness and strength.

Dhamma Messenger of Compassion and Peace - Mataji Illaichidevi Goenka

The world teacher of Vipassana, most respected Mataji, Mrs. Illaichidevi S. Goenka bade farewell to us on 5th Jan 2016 at 11.15 am at the age of 86 years in total awareness and calmness. A life filled with Dhamma came to an end. She was an unfaltering pillar of strength to respected Goenkaji as she gave unflinching support to him in all his work and activities related to Vipassana, while continuing to progress on path of Dhamma. After his demise in September 2013 she continued to execute her responsibilities with total commitment.

She was born in Mandalay into a Marwari family on 18th January 1929. As per the customs of those times, she was married to Satyanarayan Goenkaji on Wednesday, 21st January 1942. Shri Goenkaji was strongly against this early marriage, but had to bow to the wishes of his elders in both of the families.

Shortly after their marriage, Japan invaded Burma and war with the British started. Amidst severe bombarding many members of the family left Burma and travelled overland on foot to India through treacherous mountain terrain led by Goenkaji. After much difficulty they reached the plains of India, and by train continued on to Churu, a district in Rajasthan (Western part of India). They were lucky to have survived this journey as many people died along the way. They settled in their ancestral house in Churu for some time. Mataji in the meantime had gone to Sultana village in Rajasthan with her parents returning after 4-5 months to Churu.

While in Churu, two sons were born to them – Girdharilal and Banwarilal. Goenkaji continued to reside there for a few years with his adoptive mother, his elder brother Shri Babulalji, Mataji and both the sons while conducting business.

Subsequently, Goenkaji travelled southwards to Cannanore in Kerala alongwith his mother, Mataji and children for trading. Not finding the place congenial he then shifted base to Chennai where he stayed for a while before returning to Myanmar (Burma) once again.

The Family Life and Forebearance

After five years in India the family returned to Burma as the conditions there had improved and Mataji settled



Principal Teachers (Pramukh Ācārya) Smt. Illaichidevi S. Goenka, 18th Jan. 1929—5th Jan. 2016

into her marital home to live in a large 25 – 30 member family. Among other family members there were seven sisters of Goenkaji and seven sisters of Radheshyamji Goenka, some of whom were married. Mataji proved to be a considerate daughter-in-law winning over her in-laws with her service, patience and forbearance. Not only in serving her father-in-law and mother-in-law, but also in serving other family members she undertook her responsibilities conscientiously, which she continued throughout her life. She handled life's many tribulations tactfully and skillfully.

Goenkaji was a member of various business and social organizations. Often there were occasions when he attended meetings which went on until late in the evening, and he would then arrive home with friends and associates asking for a meal to be served for an additional five or six people. Though the rest of the family would have retired for the night, but Mataji unfazed would welcome them, put together a hot meal and see to it that enough food reached the table. She was adept at acting swiftly and carefully to deal with the situation at hand.

With success and a high level of work pressure Goenkaji succumbed to stress, and as a result he started suffering from severe migraine headaches. After seeing a positive change in him as a result of practicing Vipassana meditation, Mataji too was inspired to walk the path of Dhamma.

When she went to Sayagyi U Ba Khin's International Meditation Centre in Rangoon to receive Goenkaji at the end of his first Vipassana course, Sayagyi U Ba Khin taught her Anapana. Soon after this she sat for a Vipassana course under his guidance and continued to make steady progress on the Dhamma path. Thereafter she sat many courses under Sayagyi U Ba Khin and benefitted greatly. But she never turned away from her familial duties and in fact became more alert and adept at dealing with her household responsibilities.

Mataji was thrifty and was very careful in budgeting for the household expenses. She looked after everyone's requirements including clothing, and took care of household expenses remaining careful never to go beyond her budget. No wastage was permitted. She would thus be able to save a little from the money given to her to manage the expenses of such a large household. If need arose, she would stitch or repair clothing at home and encourage others to do the same.

Training Under Sayagyi U Ba Khin

Sayagyi would often tell her, "Daughter, you have a lot of work to do, a lot of work to do!" She was neither a Vipassana teacher then, nor did she harbour any such aspirations to become one. Hence Sayagyi's often repeated words confused her. She would think, "I am already very busy taking care of such a large family. So why does Sayagyi tell me that I have a lot of work to do in the future? What more do I need to do and how indeed will I be able to do it?" She would remember his words years later when she came to India and started teaching Vipassana, which she had never dreamt of doing.

Goenkaji returned to India in June 1969, but Mataji was only able to come later. In the meantime her daily sittings continued, and nearly every day she would visit Sayagyi's Centre and meditate. When the car was not available she would go, accompanied by someone, to the Centre by bus. If due to any reason she could not go to there, then she would sit in the meditation room on the upper floor of their house. Goenkaji, in his letters to her, always encouraged her to go to the Centre for meditation.

Strengthened and supported by regular meditation, she was not disturbed much by her not being able to go to India with Goenkaji, or by other matters, but instead she remained calm. Whenever she visited the Centre, Sayagyi would give her Metta and would explain to her the finer

points of Dhamma. He would also train her in how to check and guide meditators during their meditation practice. Sometimes he would tell her to go and open the doors of the meditation cells and see if the meditators were working properly. Once Mataji came and reported that a student was deep in slumber, to which Sayagyi said, "Let him sleep; he has been sleep deprived not just for years, but for lifetimes!"

Correspondence

There was regular communication between Mataji and Goenkaji while she was in Rangoon. Once, Shri Ramji Taparia and his wife Suman Taparia, having learned Vipassana in India from Goenkaji, reached Burma after travelling through Thailand and other countries. Mataji welcomed them warmly. Afterwards, this is what she wrote to Goenkaji: "I was very happy to meet Shri Tapariaji and his wife who visited here. I felt as if someone from my family had come. Seeing their devotion towards Vipassana, Sayagyi as well as all of us were very pleased. For four days they stayed meditating at the Centre, deepening their practice. Before returning home they asked Sayagyi if there was anything they could do in India. Sayagyi responded to them to assist in creating a Vipassana Centre in India." Narrating all this Mataji further wrote: "I don't want to stay here much longer ..."

Goenkaji wrote back to Mataji that Suman was praising her a lot. He further said, "Many village women from near Pratapgarh have recently benefitted greatly from a Vipassana camp which was held there. Had you been there, they would have been able to speak freely with you and have a better understanding of Dhamma. I too wish that you could come to India as soon as possible."

In October 1969 Goenkaji gave *dāna* of food and a few other items to eight bhikkhus at the end of a course in Calcutta on behalf of Mataji. This pleased Mataji greatly. In the previous month as well Goenkaji had organized a *Saṅgha-dāna* at the end of a course in Sarnath (Varanasi). In those days, there were usually a few bhikkhus in attendance on most meditation camps, and at the end of the course *Saṅgha-dāna* was organized by Goenkaji and other meditators. Goenkaji would offer the merits thus generated to Mataji as well as other family members. After having meditated and purified their minds to some degree, these bhikkhus would certainly become worthy recipients (*punyakhetta*) for *dāna*. The news would reach Mataji through letters, pleasing her immensely. Goenkaji always gave her assurance that either he would return to Burma, or she would be able to come to India soon and help him in the profound work of spreading the Dhamma.

Arrival in India

Finally, in 1971 Mataji arrived in India. After only a few months she handed over the household family responsibilities to other family members and started assisting Goenkaji at Vipassana camps. Goenkaji often said that had Mataji not been there, many Dhamma daughters would possibly have hesitated in coming to him to learn Dhamma. With her presence at the camps, innumerable women could unhesitatingly come and take courses. "She sits with me always giving Metta, hence you all are able to sit comfortably in the courses," he would say. "Otherwise, perhaps many of you would have run away". Goenkaji has said this has been Mataji's major contribution. "I too am tremendously supported in my endeavors by her powerful Metta."

Establishment of Vipassana Centres

In the initial days many difficult situations were made smooth by Mataji at the Vipassana camps. She contributed greatly in establishment of the first Vipassana Centre in Dhammagiri. When she went to see the Centre land at Igapuri for the first time she had to climb with Goenkaji across rocky, uneven ground up the hill, carefully skirting rocks and stones all the way from the present Myanmar Gate, as the car could not negotiate the rough path (indeed for years there was no motorable road up the Dhamma hill.) Despite its wild condition, when she saw the land she concurred with Goenkaji's approval to purchase it. In the future, too, whenever an opportunity arose to build a new Centre, Goenkaji always consulted with her before giving his final approval.

At the beginning in Dhammagiri, she had to deal with many difficulties. There were only four dormitories and a dining hall etc. then. The Teacher's Residence was built but the contractor had not been paid, hence Goenkaji decided not to use it and made his residence in 'D' dormitory. The first camp was held with them residing there, though there was no attached bath or toilet. For the shower, an area behind the dorm was covered with reed mats or *chatai* and a bucket of water would be brought up. Goenkaji and Mataji would walk down the steps to use communal toilets uncomplainingly. Mataji underwent similar difficulties with Goenkaji smilingly when other Centres too were being built. Of course the gypsy camps in those days also had problems – more difficult ones.

Dhamma Dispensation Overseas

Establishing Centres overseas brought its own challenges. At one time in the early days of gypsy camps in America, Goenkaji and Mataji conducted a course which was held at a very desolate, undeveloped place with a bare minimum of facilities for a very large gathering of students. The main meditation tent was not yet set up when the meditators started arriving. Somehow things got organized and the opening Anapana session began, going late into the night. Meditators were many and there were hardly any assistants. It seemed that every meditator had some question or the other. The unending stream of questions started from the early morning of the next day. At noon their lunch was not ready and they had to go for meditators' questions without taking meals. Interviews continued until 2 pm; only then could they finally sit down for lunch. Their evening tea was delayed as well. Not only did Goenkaji face many such hardships with steadfast determination in the initial days of camps, but Mataji also showed much patience and forbearance. How else could so many camps have been held with such success!

In all the camps in India and abroad, Mataji faithfully accompanied Goenkaji taking care of all his needs. A great degree of credit certainly belongs to Mataji for the success of the meditation camps and Vipassana Centres. With the passage of time, her support at every step only grew, strengthening and encouraging Goenkaji.

Her Invaluable Suggestions

Mataji was not just a very capable housewife, but a veritable organizational unit within herself. In all planning related matters her contributions were invaluable. Organising the kitchen, and meeting with cooks and workers, she would try to solve their problems regarding what fruits and other materials should be used as per the season and how to use and store these; she would go to the kitchen and show them how to make pickles etc. She would also explain to other volunteers

how to work efficiently. She always said, "*Dāna* that comes in is someone's hard earned money and is given with deep devotion. We must ensure it is not wasted but used properly and with gratitude. Be satisfied with what is given, do not ask for more." Once, someone said that curtains in a certain area were dirty and needed to be changed to which she said, "Have them washed if they are dirty. Why do we need to change them? Every penny given in *dāna* must be well utilized." Mataji had sewing machines installed at Dhammagiri and being adept at sewing showed the Dhamma server's ways to make the required items.

From selecting assistant teachers to gardening at the Centres, all matters big and small received her keen attention.

Organising Centres Globally

After Goenkaji's demise, Mataji carried out her duties as an experienced teacher efficiently. Remaining active she worked towards resolving matters related to the Centres or the teachers. Periodically she would ask for accounts from various Centres and give her guidance while inspecting the work going on at pagodas or elsewhere. Many projects found completion under her supervision. She was often asked to formally inaugurate a completed project.

In A.T. meetings she expressed herself succinctly always emphasizing the fact that we must walk on the path shown by Goenkaji and work towards realizing his Dhamma vision. The ATs assured her that they will work towards that end to the best of their abilities; they will make serious efforts to follow all his advice in order to pass on the baton of Dhamma in its pristine purity, to keep the Dhamma alive for centuries to come, as Goenkaji always exhorted.

After Goenkaji

On Goenkaji's final night she had served dinner to him personally. When he went to his room soon after the meal, Mataji sensed that something was not right. Finishing her dinner quickly she came to the room, and found Goenkaji breathing heavily. She called out to her son Shri Prakashji and the family gathered around. She then realized that these were Goenkaji's final moments, but she remained calm and composed. Keeping control of herself firmly, she accepted this as the law of Dhamma.

She who had always followed Goenkaji like a shadow, smiling, sweet spoken, always expressing motherly concern for others' welfare, bade farewell to her lifelong companion smilingly. Her remaining days were spent in furthering the cause of Dhamma.

When elders in a family pass away, it is said that the roof that shields the family has flown off from over their heads. With the passing away of Goenkaji, this protective shield had already gone. Now, the one who walked with him too has left us. But the Dhamma that they taught will forever remain with us, giving protection, shielding us, supporting us. This is the time to become an island unto oneself. *Atta dīpo bhava* – be a light unto oneself. Farewell Mother!

Her Final Days

Mataji was admitted to hospital for gall bladder stones on 5th Dec. The stones were surgically removed but some infection remained, and it slowly spread in the body. Consequently, complications in her condition arose creating alternating periods of hope and despair amongst her anxious family members. She continued to be able to respond to them with Metta.

Being firmly established in Dhamma she remained calm and aware despite much pain and discomfort. On 25th December the governor of Bihar, Shri Ramnath Kovind, a meditator, came to visit the Global Pagoda in Mumbai. When he heard that Mataji was in hospital he went to visit her the following afternoon. He was pleased when Mataji raised her hand in blessings upon seeing him. He later sent a condolence message when he heard of her demise.

At 7 a.m. on 4th January, seeing her resting with closed eyes, I greeted her giving my name, “Pranam from Yadav, Mataji”. She opened her eyes; looked at me smilingly and accepting my greetings she blessed me. Destiny was moving to its conclusion and that night her pain increased. There was a call from hospital at midnight saying her BP had fallen very low. Instantly Shri Prakashji Goenka reached hospital with his wife Nainaji. By then her blood pressure had stabilized and they returned home by 1 a.m.

During the last eight years Shri Prakashji and Nainaji had been with Goenkaji and Mataji, sitting together for morning meditation followed by lengthy Dhamma discussions. They took care of Goenkaji and Mataji’s comforts; hence it was but natural that there was a special bond between them. Mataji would not have her dinner without Shri Prakashji. No matter how late he was returning home from work, Mataji always waited for him.

She remained conscious despite pain and discomfort in the I.C.U. Whenever Shri Prakashji spoke to her, she responded by opening her eyes or by gesturing. Finally, early

in the morning by 5 a.m. the doctors gave up. They said that her body was not responding, but they were surprised that there was no stress or tension in her body or on her face. Of course how could the doctors comprehend the level of *sādhana* that Mataji had achieved!

They said, “Let her go with this peace and calm. You may continue to support her with your prayers or meditation.” It was 11.15 am. Mataji’s three sons who reside in Mumbai, daughters-in-law, grandchildren and their families were all present to bid her farewell.

My memory will always hold the vision of Mataji’s final smile to me. A hundred salutations to you Mother! May all be Happy!

----- For other Information Please See Page 3....

One-day Mega course schedule at Global Vipassana Pagoda for 2016

Sunday 22nd May, Buddha Purnima (21st May); Sunday 17th July, Guru-Purnima (19th); Sunday 2nd Oct. in Gratitude of Respected S.N. Goenka (29th Sept.) & Sharad Purnima.

One-day mega courses will be held at GVP Time: 11 am to 4 pm. Non meditators may participate in the 3 pm discourse. Please come only with prior registration. **Samaggana Taposukho:** Avail of the immense benefit of meditating in large group. For registration **Contact:** 022 28451170 // 022 337475-01 / 43 / 44 – Extn.: 9. (Tel booking: 11 am to 5 pm daily). **Online registration:** www.oneday.globalpagoda.org.

DHAMMA DOHAS

*Āo bāṇṭeṃ jagat ko, vipaśyanā kā dhyāna,
Jana-jana kā maṅgala sadhe, pāyeṃ dharama kā dāna.
Come, let us together spread Vipassana meditation
throughout the world; May all beings be benefitted by
it, may all receive this invaluable Dhammadāna.
Dharamasevakom meṃ yadī, ahaṃ bhāva jaga jāy,
To sevā kaluṣita bane, phala dūṣita ho jāy.
If arrogance awakens in Dhamma servers; Then their
service becomes sullied, and the result impure.*

*Binā svārtha sevā kareṃ, aise birale koy,
Yād rakheṃ upakāra ko, ve bhī birale hoṃy.
Rare is the one who serves selflessly; Rare is the one
who remembers with gratitude those who helped him.
Śīla dharama pālana kareṃ, dūra hoṃy dukha śoka,
Śīla dharama se sudharate, loka aur paraloka.
Misery and unhappiness evaporate when one is
virtuous; This life and the afterlife too improve with
the Dhammaofsīla.*

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