

# Vipassana Newsletter

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

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## WORDS OF DHAMMA

Assaddho akataññū ca,  
sandhicchedo ca yo naro,  
hatāvakāso vantāso,  
sa ve uttamaporiso.

One who is free of blind faith, who has realised nibbāna, who has cut off the links of the round of rebirths, who has destroyed all consequences of good and bad deeds, who has discarded all craving, is indeed the noblest of men.

— Dhammapada- 97, Arhantvaggo.

## The First Householder Vipassana Teacher – Saya Thet Gyi (1/2)

(1873 - 1945)

... “*Saya Thet Gyi established a Vipassana centre in Dalla a village across the Irrawaddy river from Rangoon (Yangon) and taught Vipassana to more than 1000 bhikkhus and householders; thus proving that a householder rich in pāramis, dhamma merits, can become a successful teacher of Vipassana*” ....

... “*May this ancient teaching of the land of Bharat (India) return to its motherland getting re-established all over the world once again, benefitting millions. May this Dhamma wish of my respected teacher Sayagyi U Ba Khin be fulfilled!*”

Kalyāṇ Mitta, S.N. Goenka

(The above excerpt has been taken from “*Vipassana Returns Home*”, “*Vipassana*” Hindi, Year 23, and Edition 8.)

(Keeping in mind the above words of Resp. Goenkaji, may we also determine to follow them scrupulously and pay our gratitude towards the chain of teachers on Goenkaji’s 4<sup>th</sup> death anniversary. -Editor)

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(The following account is partially based on a translation of the book *Saya Thetgyi* by Dhammācariya U Htay Hlaing, Myanmar.)

Saya Thetgyi (pronounced Saya taji in Burmese) was born in the farming village of Pyawbwegyi, eight miles south of Rangoon, on the other side of the Rangoon river. He was born on 27 June 1873 and was given the name Maung Pho Thet. He had two brothers and a sister, and his father died when he was about ten years old, leaving Maung Pho Thet’s mother to care for the four children.

His mother supported the family by selling vegetable fritters. The little boy was made to go around the village selling leftover fritters, but he often came home having sold none because he was too shy to advertise his wares by calling out. So his mother dispatched two children: Maung Pho Thet to carry the fritters on a tray on his head, and his younger sister to call out.

Because he was needed to help support the family, his formal education was minimal – only about six years. His parents did not own any land or paddy (rice) fields and used to collect the stalks of the paddy which were left over after harvesting. One day on the way home from the paddy fields, Maung Pho Thet found some little fish in a pond that was drying up. He caught them and brought them home so that he

could release them into the village pond. When his mother saw the fish, she was about to reprimand her son for catching them, but when he explained his intentions to her, she instead exclaimed, “*Sādhu, sādhu!*” (well-said, well-done). She was a kind, good-hearted woman who never nagged or scolded, but did not tolerate any *akusala* (unwholesome) deed.

When he was fourteen years old, Maung Pho Thet started working as a bullock driver of a cart carrying paddy. He gave his daily wages to his mother. He was so small at the time that he had to take along a special box: standing on it enabled him to get in and out of the cart.

The village of Pyawbwegyi is on a flat cultivated plain, fed by many tributaries which flow into the Rangoon river. When the rice fields are flooded, navigation is a problem, and one of the common means of travel is by sampan (long, flat-bottomed boats). Maung Pho Thet’s next job was as a sampan oarsman. The owner of a local rice mill observed this small boy, working so diligently, carrying loads of paddy, and hired him as a tally-man in the mill, at a wage of six rupees per month. At this time he lived by himself at the mill and ate very simple meals, such as a few split pea fritters and rice.

At first, he bought rice from the Indian watchman and other labourers. They told him he could help himself to the sweepings of milled rice which were kept for pig and chicken feed. Maung Pho Thet refused, saying that he did not want to take the rice without the mill owner’s knowledge. The mill owner found out about this and gave his permission. As it happened, Maung Pho Thet did not have to eat the rice debris for long. The sampan and cart owners gave rice to him because he was such a helpful and willing worker. Maung Pho Thet continued to collect the sweepings, however, giving them to poor villagers who could not afford to buy rice.

After one year, his salary was increased to ten rupees, and after two years, to fifteen. The mill owner offered him money to buy quality rice and allowed him free milling of one hundred baskets of paddy per month. His monthly salary increased to twenty-five rupees, which supported his mother quite well.

Maung Pho Thet married Ma Hmyin when he was about sixteen years old, as was customary. His wife was the youngest of three daughters of a well-to-do landowner and paddy merchant. The couple had two children, a daughter and a son. Following the Burmese custom, they lived in a joint family with Ma Hmyin’s parents and sisters. Ma Yin, the younger sister, remained single and managed a successful small business. She was later instrumental in supporting U Pho Thet in practising and teaching meditation.

Ma Hmyin's eldest sister Ma Khin married Ko Kaye and had a son, Maung Nyunt. Ko Kaye managed the family paddy fields and business. Maung Pho Thet, now called U Pho Thet or U Thet (Mr Thet), also prospered in the buying and selling of paddy.

As a child, U Thet had not had the opportunity to become a novice monk. (Ordination as a novice is a common and important practice in Burma). It was only when his nephew Maung Nyunt became a novice at twelve years of age that U Thet became a novice himself and later, for a time, an ordained bhikkhu (monk).

When he was around twenty-three, he began to practise meditation with a lay teacher, Saya Nyunt, from whom he learned Anapana. He practised Anapana for seven years.

U Thet and his wife had many friends and relatives living close by in the village. So, with many uncles, nephews, nieces, cousins and in-laws, they led an idyllic life of contentment in the warmth and harmony of family and friends.

This rustic peace and happiness was shattered when a cholera epidemic struck the village in 1903. Many villagers died, some within a few days. They included U Thet's son and young teenage daughter (who, it is said, died in his arms). His brother-in-law Ko Kaye and his wife also perished from the disease, as well as U Thet's niece (who was his daughter's playmate).

This calamity affected U Thet deeply, and he could not find refuge anywhere. He desperately wanted to find a way out of this misery. He asked permission from his wife and sister-in-law Ma Yin and other relatives to leave the village in search of "the deathless."

U Thet wandered all over Burma in his fervent search, visiting mountain retreats and forest monasteries, studying with different teachers, both monks and laymen. Finally, he followed the suggestion of his first teacher, Saya Nyunt, to go north to Monywa to practise with Venerable Ledi Sayadaw. U Thet was accompanied in his wanderings by a devoted companion and follower, U Nyo.

During these years of his spiritual searching, U Thet's wife and sister-in-law remained in Pyawbwegyi and managed the rice fields. In the first few years, he returned from time to time to see that all was well. But when he found that the family was prospering, he began to meditate more continuously. U Thet stayed with Ledi Sayadaw for seven years in all, during which time his wife and sister-in-law supported him by sending money each year from the harvest of the family farmland.

After seven years, accompanied by U Nyo, he returned to his village, but he did not return to his former householder's life. Ledi Sayadaw had advised him at the time of his departure to work diligently to develop his *samādhi* (concentration) and *paññā* (purifying wisdom) so that eventually he could begin to teach.

Accordingly, when U Thet and U Nyo reached Pyawbwegyi, they went straight to the *sālā* (rest-house) at the edge of the family farm, which they used as a Dhamma hall. Here they began to meditate continuously. They arranged for a woman who lived near the Dhamma hall to cook two meals a day while they continued their retreat.

U Thet continued in this way for one year. He made continued progress in his meditation, and at the end of the period, he felt the need for advice from his teacher. He could not speak to Ledi Sayadaw himself, but he knew that his teacher's books were in a cupboard at his home. So he went there to consult the manuals.

His wife and her sister had become quite angry with him for not returning to the house after such a long absence. His wife had even decided to divorce him. When the sisters saw U Pho Thet approaching the house, they agreed neither to greet nor welcome him. But, as soon as he came in the door, they found themselves welcoming him profusely. They talked for awhile, and U Thet asked for their forgiveness, which they freely granted.

They invited him for tea and a meal. He procured the books and explained to his wife that he was now living on eight precepts and would not be returning to the usual householder's life. From now on they would be as brother and sister.

His wife and sister-in-law invited him to come to the house each day for his morning meal and happily agreed to continue supporting him. He was extremely grateful for their generosity and told them that the only way he could repay them was to give them the Dhamma.

Other relatives including his wife's cousin, U Ba Soe, came to see and talk with him. After about two weeks, U Thet said that he was spending too much time coming and going for lunch, so Ma Hmyin and Ma Yin offered to send the noon meal to the *sālā*.

At first, the people in the village were reluctant to come to him for instruction. They misinterpreted U Thet's zeal, thinking that perhaps after the grief of his losses and his absence from the village, he had lost his senses. But slowly they realized from his speech and actions that he was indeed a transformed person, one who was living in accordance to Dhamma.

Some of U Thet's relatives and friends requested that he teach them meditation. U Ba Soe offered to take charge of the fields and household responsibilities. U Thet's sister and a niece took responsibility for preparing the meals.

U Thet started teaching Anapana to a group of about fifteen people in 1914 when he was forty-one years old. The students all stayed at the *sālā*, some of them going home from time to time. He gave discourses to his meditation students, as well as to interested people who were not practising meditation. His listeners found the talks so learned that they refused to believe that U Thet had very little theoretical knowledge of the Dhamma.

Due to his wife and sister-in-law's generous financial support, and the help of other family members, all the food and other necessities were provided for the meditators who came to U Thet's Dhamma hall – even to the extent, on one occasion, of compensating workers for wages lost while they took a Vipassana course.

After teaching for a year, in about 1915, U Thet took his wife and her sister and a few other family members to Monywa to pay respects to Ledi Sayadaw, who was about seventy years old at that time. When U Thet told his teacher about his meditation experiences and the courses he had been offering, Ledi Sayadaw was very pleased.

It was during this visit that Ledi Sayadaw gave his walking staff to U Thet, saying, "Here, my great pupil, take my staff and go. Keep it well. I do not give this to you to make you live long, but as a reward, so that there will be no mishaps in your life. You have been successful. From today onwards, you must teach the Dhamma of *nāma* and *rūpa* (mind and matter) to six thousand people. The Dhamma known by you is inexhaustible, so propagate the *sāsana* (the era of the Buddha's teaching). Pay homage to the *sāsana* in my stead."

The next day Ledi Sayadaw summoned all the bhikkhus of his monastery. He requested U Thet to stay on for ten or

fifteen days to instruct them. The Sayadaw told the gathering of bhikkhus, "Take note, all of you. This layperson is my great pupil U Pho Thet from lower Burma. He is capable of teaching meditation like me. Those of you who wish to practise meditation, follow him. Learn the technique from him and practise. You, *dāyaka* Thet (lay supporter of a monk who undertakes to supply his needs such as food, robes, medicine, etc.), hoist the victory banner of Dhamma in place of me, starting at my monastery."

U Thet then taught Vipassana meditation to about twenty-five monks learned in the scriptures. It was at this point that he became known as Saya Thetgyi (saya means "teacher;" gyi is a suffix denoting respect).

Ledi Sayadaw encouraged Saya Thetgyi to teach the Dhamma on his behalf, but his student was somewhat discouraged because of his lack of theoretical knowledge. Saya Thetgyi knew many of Ledi Sayadaw's prolific writings by heart and was able to expound on the Dhamma with references to the scriptures, in a way that most learned Sayadaws (monk teachers) could not find fault with. Nevertheless, Ledi Sayadaw's exhortation to him to teach Vipassana in his stead was a solemn responsibility, and Saya Thetgyi was apprehensive. Bowing to his teacher in deep respect, he said, "Among your pupils, I am the least learned in the scriptures. To dispense the *sāsana* by teaching Vipassana as decreed by you is a highly subtle, yet heavy duty to perform, sir. That is why I request that, if at any time I need to ask for clarification, you give me your help and guidance. Please be my support, and please admonish me whenever necessary."

Ledi Sayadaw reassured him by replying, "I will not forsake you, even at the time of my passing away."

*To be continued.... Next issue.*



#### Newly Appointed Senior Assistant Teachers

1. Mrs Rajinder Nagpal, Pune
2. Mr Mangesh Joshi, Nashik

#### New appointments

##### Assistant teachers

1. Mr. N.Prem kumar, Tamilnadu
2. Mr. Suresh Lanjewar, Nagpur
3. Ms. Sheela Sontakke, Nagpur
4. Mrs. Beeta Koswatta, Sri Lanka
5. Mr. Hung Sung Lin, Taiwan
6. Mr. Chiente Wu, Taiwan
7. Mr. Xiao Liu, China
8. Mr. Zengguang Ma and
9. Mrs. Li Bin, China
10. Mr Lingamurthy Palasu, Andhra Pradesh
11. Mr Bhisma Prasad Subedi, Kathmandu
12. Mr Gyan Darshan Udas, Kathmandu
13. Mrs Pushpa Lamsal, Kathmandu
14. Shri. Shivram Wagh, Bhusawal.
15. Mrs Vangisha Narawade, Aurangabad.
16. Mr Vinodkumar Watni, Aurangabad.
17. Mr Vinod Belkhede, Pune.
18. Mr Vilas Shinde, Pune.
19. Mr Ashok Singapore, Thane.

20. Mr Vallabhaneni Brahma Vara Prasad, Andhra Pradesh.
21. Mrs Nalini Meshram, Gondia.
22. Mr Jimide Bhaskar, Telangana.

##### Children course teachers

1. Dr. Ranjana Kantharia, Mumbai
2. Mr. Mukul Sharma Mumbai
3. Miss Mamta Lakum, Bhavnagar
4. Mrs. Mina Shah, Bhavnagar
5. Mrs. Pravinaben Solanki, Bhavnagar
- 6-7. Mr. Hardik Kumar and Mrs. Nikita Chauhan, Bhavnagar
8. Mr. Sebatien Rousset, Mauritius
9. Mrs Nirupa Rughoo, Mauritius
10. Ms. Isabelle Quintard, La Reunion
11. Mrs. Zhang Yiqing, China
12. Mr. Yu Dong, China
13. Ms. Xie Aihua, China
14. Ms. Sushma Pawar, Palghar
15. Mr Atul Wasnik, Bhandara
16. Mr Vijay Kaninde, Yeotmal
17. Mr Dhammadeep Dhakade, Gadchiroli
18. Mrs Priti Korde, Nagpur
19. Mrs Rekha Ramteke, Nagpur
20. Ms Shubra Kulshreshtha, Nagpur
21. Ms Jaya Gaidhane, Nagpur
22. Mrs Anjush Shende, Chandrapur
23. Ms Marie Christine Veeran, France
24. Mr Guy Mullens, Netherlands

## Facility for students at Pagoda site

Meditators who want to meditate in the vicinity of the Buddha Relics and the Bodhi Tree can avail themselves of rooms at Dhammalaya Guest House next to the Global Vipassana Pagoda, Mumbai and make the most of their meditation sessions. The splendour of the Pagoda at night is also a marvel worth witnessing. 34 twin occupancy rooms and 2 suites (all a/c) with breakfast, lunch, snacks and dinner included. For reservations and additional information please contact – Mr Mahesh Modi 022 62427599, 8291894645 email: info.dhammalaya@globalpagoda.org

Special concession of 50% in room charges at Dhammalaya Guest House for the period 13 January 2018 to 15 January 2018 on occasion of **one day Mega course** at Global Pagoda on 14 January 2018 in Gratitude of Resp. Mataji Illaichidevi and Resp. Sayagy U Ba Khin.



## Importance of Lighting a Pagoda

Respected Goenkaji always said that it is of special importance that any Pagoda where relics are kept be well lit throughout the night. This helps maintain the Dhamma atmosphere. Anyone wishing to donate for lighting of the Global Pagoda in the name of their near and dear ones may do so. The cost per night is Rs. 5000/-. For further information Contact: as above...



## Children's Meditation Courses in Mumbai

**Date:** 15-10, 19-11, 17-12; **Place:** Goregaon; (Age 10 to 16 Only)  
Registration before Course Thursday and Friday. **Other places as under:**

Date	Course site	Age (years)	Registration
First Sunday	Ulhasnagar	10-16	2 days before Course
First Sunday	Wadala	10-16	2 days before Course
First Sunday	Khar	10-16	2 days before Course
Second Sunday	Dombivili	10-16	2 days before Course
Second Sunday	Andheri	10-16	2 days before Course
Third Sunday	Ghatkopar	10-16	2 days before Course
Fourth Sunday	Airoli	10-16	2 days before Course
Fourth Sunday	Kalyan	10-16	2 days before Course

"Please call or send a text sms message with the name & age of the child two days in advance for registration"

**Course Timing:** 8:30 am to 2:30 pm. **Registration Timing:** 11 am to 1 pm on the specified numbers and dates for each location. **Course Venues:** **Goregaon:** Vipassana Counselling and Research Centre, Siddharth Municipal General Hospital, Goregaon (W), Mob. 98924-15803, Tel: 2624-2025. **Ulhasnagar:** A Block 703/1405, Gokul Nagar, Behind Netaji School, Near Mahesh Granite, Tel. 9970755130, **Wadala:** "BMC School – Sewri Wadala Estate Road No: 7A Behind Lijjat Papad Building **Contact:** Mobile: 98922-18186, 98201-50336, **Khar:** Mahabodhi Buddha Vihar, Baudha Smashan Bhumi, Carter Rd. Danda, Khar West, Mumbai-52, Mob. 9930962652, 9869281410, **Dombivili:** Tilak School, T<sup>11</sup>-<sup>17</sup> Nagar, Dombivili, Mob. 9029423540. **Andheri:** Mayfair Meridian Meditation Hall, Ceaser Road, Off S.V. Road, Amboli, Near St. Blaise Mob. 9967480865, 9967813478. **Ghatkopar:** SNTD School, New Building, Cama Lane, Ghatkopar (W), Opp Vidyut Society, Mumbai 400086. Tel: 25011096, 25162505. **Airoli:** Dnyandeep School, sector 2, Airoli, Mobile: 9969267720, 9969950901. **Kalyan:** Krishanrao Dhulup KDM school No. 4, Ram baug lane no 5, Near old Vani Vidyalay. Mob. 9987425633. -- Please call two days in advance for registration.

**NB:** \*Please bring cushion. \*Please register on the specified phone numbers. If unable to attend after registration, please \*Inform in advance. \*Please arrive on time for the course.

**Data Storage at Pagoda site**

A major project called 'Digital Archives Centre' will be established at the Global Pagoda, in which all available materials from the time Respected Goenkaji started teaching and spreading Vipassana until now, will be brought together at one place. This will include the entire collection of photos, documents, notes, letters, audio, and video of Resp. Goenkaji, plus the VRI research work, as well as Pagoda photos, drawings, documents, etc.

It will take at least two years to complete this project. In the first phase, computers, scanners, and storage hardware will be purchased. Also, salaries of the workers need to be planned for. The primary project cost for procuring equipment is approximately 25 lakh rupees and the salaries for 1 year approximately 15-20 lakh rupees. VRI is registered under section 35(1)(3) where donors will get 125% income tax exemption on their donations. **Contact:** 1. Mr. Derik Pegado, 9921227057. or 2.Sri Bipin Mehta, Mo. 9920052156, A/c. Office: 022-62427512/ 62427510 (9:30AM—5:30PM) **Email:** audits@globalpagoda.org; Bank Details of VRI-'Vipassana Research Institute', Axis Bank Ltd., Sonimur Apartments, Timber Estate, Malad (W), Mumbai - 400064, Branch - Malad (W). Bank A/c No. - 911010004132846; IFSC No.- UTIB0000062; Swift code: AXISINBB062.

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**Residential Accommodation in Global Pagoda for Dhamma Servers and Meditators**

One Day Mega Courses are held in Global Pagoda, Gorai, Mumbai every year. People at times come from far off places to participate but are inconvenienced as there are no residential quarters for overnight stay. Hence a 3-4 storey residential accommodation building is being planned where servers who are staying on premises and the meditators arriving in from far may stay in rooms/dormitories which will either be on sharing or single occupancy basis. This will help meditators rest well and begin their 1-day course meditation the next morning on a fresh note. Anyone wanting to participate in this

noble project may **Contact:** 1. Mr. Derik Pegado: 9921227057. or 2: Shri Bipin Mehta: 9920052156, **Email:** audits@globalpagoda.org

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**Pali - Hindi basic course**

**Date:** 7th April to 22nd May 2018; **Eligibility:** 3 ten-Day course and 1 STP, 12th Pass, AT recommendation required. **Venue:** Pariyatti Bhavan, Global Pagoda campus. **Application forms** are available on: <http://www.vridhamma.org/Theory-And-Practice-Courses>; **Contact:** 022- 62427560 (9:30AM to 5:30PM), Email: mumbai@vridhamma.org

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**Sangha-Dana on Occasion of Respected Sayaji U Ba Khin & Mataji's Death Anniversaries****And one-day Mega course**

On 14th January 2018 at 10 am mega Sangha Danas will be held on the occasion of Respected Mataji's Death Anniversary (5th Jan.) as well as respected Sayagi U Ba Khin's Death Anniversary (19th Jan.) followed by **one day mega course** at **GVP** 11 am - 4 pm. Non-meditators may participate in the 3 pm discourse. Taking benefit of this meritorious opportunity of DANA anyone wishing to contribute may **Contact:** Mr. Derik Pegado or Mr. Bipin Mehta, A/c office: 022-62427512/ 62427510 (9:30am to 5:30pm), **Email:** audits@globalpagoda.org

**For Mega course** please come only with prior registration. **Samaggānaṃ tapo sukho:** Avail of the immense benefit of meditating in large group. For registration **Contact:** 022-62427544, 022-28451170 Extn: 9 Mob. 8291894644 (Tel booking: 11 am to 5 pm daily).

**Online registration:**  
[www.oneday.globalpagoda.org](http://www.oneday.globalpagoda.org).

**DHAMMA DOHA**

*Āja namana kā divasa hai, antara bhārī umaṅga,  
Śraddhā aura kṛtajnatā, vimala bhakti kā raṅga.*

This day, today is the day to pay obeisance, being full of joy, Filled as one is with surrender & gratitude, suffused in faultless devotion.

*Gahana niśā vana bhaṭakate, huvā vikala gumarāha,  
Sahaḥja sikhāyā dharamapatha, guru ne pakaḍī bāṃha.*

(I was) lost in a deep, dark forest, anxious & full of agitation, Till the teacher held my hand & led me up the path of Dhamma.

*Dhanya bhāga! Guruvāra mile, karuṇā ke bhaṇḍāra,  
Andhe ko ānkheṃ milīm, satya dharama kā sāra.*

Deeply grateful to have found the respected teacher, so full of compassion (who gave), The essence of true Dhamma, like a blind man, suddenly being given the gift of sight.

*Nirmala nirmala dharmā kā, jo bhī pālaka hoyā,  
Namana kareṃ usa santa kā, kisī jāti kā hoyā.*

Whoever it be who is the protector of simple, straightforward & faultless Dhamma, I bow down to that saint, whichever caste or creed he may then belong to.

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