

Vipassana Newsletter

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

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Words of Dhamma

*Mātāpitā disā pubbā, ācariyā dakkhiṇā disā;
Puttadārā disā pacchā, mittāmaccā ca uttarā.
Dāsakammakarā heṭṭhā, uddham̐ samaṇabrāhmaṇā;
Etā disā namasseyya, alamatto kule gihī.*

– *Dīghanikāyo– 3.273, Sīṅgālasuttam̐*

Mother and father are the east, teachers the south, Spouse and family the west, friends and colleagues the north, Servants and workers below, ascetics and brahmins are above. These directions a true, capable householder should honor.

Interview with Mataji

(continued)...

Q. Can you tell us about your first meeting with Sayagyi?

Mrs. Goenka: After Goenkaji did his first course, I went to the centre and met Sayagyi. Sayagyi gave me Anapana at that time, and sometimes I would practise it, but I used to feel very heavy in the head, practising only Anapana. Sayagyi told Goenkaji that it was important that I also sit a course, that this was very important for Goenkaji's progress also.

How old were you when you first met Sayagyi? What kind of a Dhamma teacher was he?

– I was perhaps twenty-seven or twenty-eight years old when I first met him. I remember that I felt very peaceful whenever I was with Sayagyi, but I also felt something very overwhelming inside, which is difficult to put in words.

Can you tell us about your first course with Sayagyi?

– It was really quite a miracle! When I went to my first course I was very ill, I could not even climb the stairs leading up to the Dhamma hall: two people had to support me and help me climb them. I was so ill that I could not even eat anything when I went. But after being given Anapana and practising it for just the first evening, I felt well again—the next day I could walk around, and eat, and do whatever was necessary unaided. The meditation was very helpful! (Laughter)

How old were your little children when you did your first course?

– My youngest child, Jay Prakash, must have been four years old.

That's very young. Did you miss your children?

– It was not difficult for me, I didn't suffer much from a feeling of separation, because I didn't have too much bodily clinging to the children. Also, because of our joint family, I knew that there were people to look after the children properly at home, so I had nothing to worry about in that respect. Of course I remembered the children, but not with that much attachment.

Sayagyi spoke in Burmese and English, but you speak Hindi. How did you communicate? What were the discourses like?

– Sayagyi didn't talk much. By gestures he would ask and by gestures I could reply, and that was more than enough. He gave very short Dhamma discourses, of about fifteen to thirty minutes only. Goenkaji translated just a few lines to the Indian students. The main thing was that you had been shown the path, and how to work, and then you just worked!

This was four years after Goenkaji took his first course?

– Yes, three or four years later.

In those three or four years, did you notice any changes in Goenkaji?

– There was a great change! (Laughter)

Did you and Goenkaji take the children to Sayagyi's centre sometimes?

– In the first five or seven courses we didn't take the children, but later, when I went more often, the children used to go with me. They would sleep at the centre, and the next morning go to school from there.

How did Sayagyi respond to the children?

– He loved them; he treated them very affectionately. He explained Anapana to them. Whenever it was vacation time for the children, they would stay there all day, and Sayagyi taught them Vipassana as well as Anapana. So the children were also on the path.

At home, did you have a room where your family meditated?

– In the later years, there was a room for meditation on the terrace. The children also used to sit there, and they would recite the *Ratana Sutta* and *Maṅgala Sutta* with us. They would do a little bit of meditation, as much as they felt like, then go out quietly, to school or elsewhere, while the adults continued with their meditation.

And otherwise did you go to Sayagyi's centre for sitting sometimes?

Sometimes, but not daily. Before nationalization, we used to go maybe once a week. But after the new government came and the businesses were nationalized, there was more

time on hand, and we used to go thrice a week, sometimes in the morning, but not at fixed times.

During those years, did you know that your future would become completely devoted to spreading Dhamma?

Oh, no, I never knew anything!

Did Sayagyi talk about your spreading the Dhamma?

– Sayagyi would very often say to me, “You have to work very hard! You have to do a lot of work, you have to work so much!” I always understood that my life would be filled with domestic chores, so I wondered: why was Sayagyi telling me that I had to continue to do domestic chores throughout my life? (Laughter) I didn’t know what Sayagyi meant. He never mentioned to us that we would have Dhamma work to do. He was training us, giving us Dhamma training, but without telling us. We didn’t know!

– Sometimes Sayagyi would say, “Go and meet that student who is sitting on this course; see what you feel.” And other things like that. We were being trained to be sensitive, but we didn’t realize that this was part of the training, because he didn’t explain it to us. Now we realize that he was always training us.

After Goenkaji went to India to teach Dhamma, you stayed two and a half years. For Did you have any contact with Sayagyi at his centre during this time?

– I had much more contact than before, a great deal more. When I went to Sayagyi’s centre after Goenkaji had gone to India, he showed me so much love and affection. He would ask, “How are you?” just as if he was my father. He knew that I was separated from Goenkaji, and he was as concerned about me as any parent would be. He always asked about my welfare, and whether things were going well at home. I would go to his centre and meditate, and then sit and talk a little with Sayagyi, and then I would feel so much better, very relaxed. There was so much *mettā* (loving kindness) in him. I felt it at that time particularly; he was filled with so much *mettā*.

Did your own parents meet Sayagyi?

– Yes, both my mother and father did two ten-day courses with Sayagyi.

When you and Goenkaji became established in Dhamma, did your parents notice a big change in your life? Were they happy for you?

– When we started the Dhamma work, my parents felt a little taken aback at first, because they feared we might not be able to take care of the children, as we should, because of being absorbed in Dhamma work. But later on, when they saw that things were going well, when they saw the good results of Dhamma, and also that the children were on the right track, they also felt happy about our Dhamma work.

Was there a period when Goenkaji had just taken Dhamma, that your family felt concerned for his wellbeing—that he might be exploited?

– When Goenkaji went for his first course, everyone in the family was really worried. The fear was, that if he turned to Buddha Dhamma perhaps he would become a monk, and then what would happen to our family? Everyone in the family was discussing their worries, and this strengthened my own concerns in that direction.

– But then, gradually, as the changes in Goenkaji became

apparent, and then when I did the course—and later all the others in the family also—then all of that was washed away. After that, there were no fears, no apprehension, nothing like that.

Were you in Burma when Sayagyi died?

– Yes, I was.

Can you tell us about the ceremony after he died, how the people said goodbye to the body?

– After Sayagyi passed away, I felt so much emptiness inside, as though everything was finished. I went to the funeral, but I couldn’t make myself go and see everything; it was beyond me. There was an electric cremation, and I didn’t watch.

– After the funeral, we went home and sat for meditation. Then I felt peaceful, and much, much happier. Before that it had been terrible; I had felt very empty. Even going to the centre to meditate became too much. It was as if the purpose of the centre was gone when Sayagyi was not there. During one of my courses there, while I was sitting, I felt—if there is no Sayagyi, there is no centre, there is no use in my coming here. Then I had the feeling as if Sayagyi were standing near me; but when I opened my eyes, there was nothing. It was just a feeling inside, feeling his presence.

After that experience, did all your confidence in Dhamma come back?

– The confidence in Dhamma was always there. That wasn’t lost or shattered because of Sayagyi’s passing away. His passing was just the experience of when somebody very near and dear to you dies suddenly. If you lose such a person suddenly, what a traumatic experience it becomes. You feel so empty from deep inside. One feels bereft at the loss, but not because Dhamma is lost. And, with time all the wounds heal; then gradually, you become normal once again.

It must have been a big surprise when Sayagyi passed away so quickly. Did it shock everybody?

– It was a great shock, because he was ill for just two days. Nobody realized that he would die so quickly. When I came to know that, at three o’clock he had passed away, it was such a big shock. He was in hospital for one or two days, but one could never think that he would pass away.

If we go back to before Sayagyi’s passing, when Goenkaji was in India teaching, and you would go to the centre, did Sayagyi have any advice or guidance for you, about your return to India and teaching Dhamma? Did he talk about the role you would play?

– He never told me directly that I would also go to India and then around the world on the Dhamma mission with Goenkaji. But he always said that he was very pleased and happy that Goenkaji had gone to India and was spreading Dhamma.

Were you happy living in Burma?

– It was my country. I felt very happy living there because it was my country, I was born there.

Does it still feel like home?

– Now, for me, it is like this: wherever I go is my home and I feel happy.

In Burma, is Mandalay or Rangoon your favourite place?

– I spent my childhood in Mandalay, and afterwards when we came back to Burma, then we lived in Rangoon. I was

happy in both places. Rangoon was of course a bigger city than Mandalay, but I didn't give a thought about which was better. Wherever you live is good enough! Be happy!

What was it like for you to go back to Burma after being away for twenty-one years?

– I felt very happy, because the atmosphere there is charged with Dhamma vibrations. So it was a wonderful experience to go back.

In 1971, you left Burma and moved to India. What was it like to leave Burma, and settle in a new country?

– When we left the house in Rangoon, then of course I felt very sad, because our family house had been established there for so many years, and now I had to leave it. But when we came to Bombay, when I saw the house there—where all our family was living—I felt quite happy and very relaxed. Now it's a better place and I feel very good. Of course there was not so much tranquillity in this country as in Burma.

In those early days, when Goenkaji was teaching the “gypsy camps,” did you help teach the camps?

– Yes, I used to accompany Goenkaji to the Dhamma courses at the gypsy camps.

That must have been a big contrast from Sayagyi's centre where it was so peaceful, so established. In the gypsy camps everything was so unpredictable.

– Yes, it was difficult. But that was part of it, and with the strength of Dhamma, things would sort themselves out. Any upheaval which came would sort itself out, and settle down again without any problems.

In those days, the gypsy camps were quite demanding. You were travelling to different parts of India, and the foreigners who came on the courses could be somewhat wild. It seems like a huge undertaking. How did you find it?

– It was a very rewarding and happy experience for me. When I found a change coming in the Western students, it was of course very rewarding. Because then we could see how much Dhamma can do for them, to change their life pattern. That was a big reward.

And you were confident that your children were well looked-after in the joint family in Bombay?

– Yes. Dhamma takes care of everything.

As a loving and highly respected wife and mother and grandmother—and you are at the centre of a traditional extended Indian family—what value do you see in Vipassana for family life?

– It is very, very helpful for the joint family. If somebody asks for guidance, then one sees it from the Dhamma angle: one does not find fault with others, and gives the correct advice. On the other hand, if you are not asked for any guidance, then you are also happy. It is not as if you are boosting your ego, that everybody must come and ask you for everything. If somebody asks, you give your opinion; otherwise you are content and happy within yourself. Vipassana is very helpful.

Are Anapana and Vipassana good for children?

– Yes, they are a big help to children because they get the seed of Dhamma planted in their early years, and then anytime later it can grow and develop. It is good for them, very good.

We understand that it is the mother-in-law's role, when the daughter-in-law is having a baby, to be very supportive. What are your duties when your daughter-in-law is expecting a child?

– It is an important duty for the mother-in-law. I must take great care of my daughter-in-law at that time—giving her proper rest, and taking full care of her. This is essential.

For how long a period?

– After the child is born, for about a month or a month and a half.

How many grandchildren do you have?

– Eleven.

Did you go to the birth of each grandchild?

– No, for two grandchildren I wasn't there at the time of birth.

When you are present at the time of a birth, do you find that mettā helps your daughters-in-law?

– If the daughter-in-law also practises Vipassana, then the *mettā* will be very helpful to her. But if she is rolling in the pain, if her mind is absorbed in pain—of course only the daughter-in-law understands how much she is rolling in pain, and how much she is able to take in the *mettā*.

– But from my side of course I give *mettā*; I am always giving as much as I can. How can I say how much *mettā* I can give? (Much laughter)

Did your mother-in-law help you when you gave birth to your children?

– Oh yes, she took much better care of me than I take of my daughters-in-law! She worked so much harder than I work. Now we have so much help; how much do we do on our own, with our own hands? Whereas, they didn't have so much help, they did everything themselves. They took much better care of us.

What is the role of the grandmother to the grandchildren in the extended family?

– (Laughter: one sixteen year-old granddaughter is present.) We guide the children to walk on the proper path, and then it's up to them! How they take it and what they do is up to them. We just guide them onto the proper path. I feel happy because as of today the grandchildren are all on the right path. The responsibility lies on the shoulders of the elder grandchildren, because, if they walk on the right path, the rest will follow.

– About my children also—they are doing their jobs well, and they understand their responsibilities. This gives me satisfaction.

How has Dhamma helped you? And, as a Dhamma teacher, how have you seen the technique help others?

– I have peace of mind. I am happy, and I don't care for other things. For me, Dhamma is a benefit all around. It gives people peace of mind in all respects, and also helps them to carry out their duties in life. It is not money which brings happiness and contentment in the heart. If someone has no money, and has Dhamma, then such a person will feel “Oh, I am full.” One will feel so content, even if there is no money, because Dhamma is there.

How do you feel about travelling so frequently, especially to countries where you do not speak the language?

– The journeys are tiring. We get off the airplane and just

for a day or two it is very tiring. Because of travelling, and the different vibrations all around, we are unsettled a little for a day. Once we start the course, and get engrossed in it, then it is very peaceful and very nice.

– Although I do not understand the language, yet I feel very good within myself. The students ask questions, and although I don't understand them fully, it give me happiness to be there.

Many Westerners say that although you do not understand English, they feel that you do understand. They feel that you understand very well what they say.

– (Laughter: Mataji is smiling, indicating to all that she has understood this comment.)

– I don't speak much because I am very aware of the fact that nothing wrong, nothing which is not truth, should come from me. I am very aware of this fact. Even from my childhood it has been my nature to speak less about matters involving many people. It is better to watch, better to be watchful than to be actively participating, talking.

May we ask you, when Goenkaji is giving a Dhamma discourse, what are you doing?

You want to know what I do at that time? (Laughter) I meditate and keep giving *mettā* to everyone at that time.

Be happy.

Auspicious death

Prof. Shri Angraj Chaudhary, a Pali scholar, passed away peacefully at his Patna, Bihar, home on December 31, 2024. He was 90. He participated in a Vipassana course held at Nava Nalanda Mahavihara, Nalanda, where he taught Pali. Following his retirement, he moved from Patna to Igatpuri at Puja Guruji's invitation and began working with Vipassana Research Institute (VRI) on Pali literature. He translated and proof read a large number of books. He worked most diligently and remained deeply involved meditating and working on Pali literature till the very end. May he progress towards Nibbana on the path of Dhamma is the wish of his Dhamma family.

Central Reserve Police Force (CRPF) and Bank Officers Benefit from Dhamma

Recently sixty-five Central Reserve Police (CRPF) personnel, including the DIG took benefit of Dhamma during a camp of Anapana and an introductory session of Vipassana held in Muzaffarpur, Bihar at the CRPF Camp (GC CRPF Camp). After the Q and A session, the presiding AT provided them with a booklet on Vipassana and information on all the centres in Bihar. The impressed DIG wrote a letter to Dhammagiri requesting further details regarding Vipassana and also stated that in future their officers would be attending Vipassana courses.

Similarly, approximately 50 officers of Union Bank of India in Anand, Gujarat participated in an introductory session of Anapana and Vipassana. Here too the response was positive and a request was made to continue to hold such sessions in the future.

DHAMMA DOHAS

*Brahmadeśa guruvāra mile, jīnakā prabala pratāpa;
Jana-jana men jāge dharama, dūra honya bhavatāpa.*

I met my Teacher, strong and glorious, in the land of Burma; May Dhamma awaken in every one, freeing them from suffering.

*Aho bhāgya! sadguru mile, kaise santa sujāna!
Mārga dikhāyā muktī kā, śuddha jagāyā jñāna.*

To my good fortune I met my Teacher, oh such a saintly one; He showed me the path of liberation, awakening pure wisdom.

*Sadguru kī sangata milī, jāgā puṇya ananta;
Satya dharma kā patha milā, kare pāpa kā anta.*

I was blessed with my Teacher's association as countless merits arose; I received the path of true Dhamma which ends all impurity.

*Sadguru kī karuṇā jagī, diyā dharma kā sāra;
Saṃpradāya ke bojha kā, utarā sira se bhāra.*

Compassion arose as my Teacher gave me the essence of Dhamma; Removing the burden of sectarian belief from my head.

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