

# Vipassana Newsletter

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

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## Words of Dhamma

Haṃsādiccapathe yanti, ākāse yanti iddhiyā;  
Nīyanti dhīrā lokamhā, jetvā māraṃ savāhiniṃ.

*Dhammapadapāḷi- 175, Lokavaggo.*

Swans travel on the path of the sun; those with power fly through space; the enlightened are led away from the world, having defeated the armies of Māra.

## Dhamma Pilgrimage 2001

Taking note of old students' earnest requests, Respected Goenkaji and Mataji decided to take a group of Vipassana meditators on a pilgrimage to Bihar in 2001. The group left on 17th Feb for a 14-day journey, returning on 2nd March. Group sittings were held in the moving train, with Dhamma chanting and instructions played throughout the coaches' loudspeakers as the journey progressed via trains, then buses, and cars. A Dhamma talk given by Goenkaji on 27th Feb in Dhamma Vimutti, Kushinagar, was published in the April and May 2017 newsletters. We reprint that discourse here after re-editing it. —Editor.

Today, we have gathered in a place where a very long journey—indeed, a very long journey—has come to an end for one who was a giant among men. Countless kappas (eons) ago, there lived a brahmin named Sumedha, who practiced as a tapas (renunciate) during the time of a fully enlightened one—Sammā Sambuddha Dīpankara.

Upon coming in contact with this Great One, an immensely powerful Dhamma volition arose in this tapasvi's heart: "If I too become fully self-enlightened, as Sammā Sambuddha Dīpankara did, then I too will be able to help so many others." There are many who, upon seeing a fully enlightened one, develop the inspiration to become like him and help the multitudes. With this potent thought arising, Sumedha approached Dīpankara Buddha and expressed his wish.

Sammā Sambuddha Dīpankara then looked with his inner eye of Dhamma to see whether or not this man was truly ripe for this extraordinary undertaking. If he found that a person was not ready, he would merely smile. But if the person was worthy of such an immense undertaking, he would then examine what manner of worthiness he possessed. Firstly, he would examine how deep the resolve of the one making the request was—whether he had a stable, unshakeable volition to serve others or whether it was merely a momentary outburst emanating from this present environment, which would quickly disappear once this situation changed. Secondly, he would examine the person's worthiness—whether he had fulfilled his pāramīs over innumerable lifetimes. He would also consider whether the person had fulfilled enough pāramīs to achieve final liberation and become an Arahant if the Buddha were to teach him Vipassana at that moment.

After analysing these factors, Dīpankara Buddha saw Sumedha's future: this man was capable of achieving liberation immediately, but he was requesting to become a Sammā Sambuddha, fully aware that this would require him to work over countless lifetimes, fulfilling the same pāramīs in infinitely larger volumes. Dīpankara Buddha had to determine whether this individual had this degree of sacrifice since he was aware that fulfilling pāramīs of this magnitude takes a very long time.

He who has reached this far knows fully well that he can achieve total liberation today by the Buddha's teachings, yet he rejects that potential Nibbāna, contemplating, 'What is the point of merely my own liberation?'

Just as this Enlightened one served so many over innumerable lifetimes as a Bodhisatta, thereby increasing his pāramīs, I too can work over many lifetimes multiplying my pāramīs, even if that means bearing immense difficulties, and finally reach that state where I too can become a Sammā Sambuddha."

## Incomparable Service to Humanity

This deep sense of sacrifice is manifest when one relinquishes Nibbāna, which is easily within reach, while expressing total readiness to bear immense hardships in order to help many suffering beings. Buddha Dīpankara could see that this brahmin was totally worthy. He then looked to his future to see how much time it would take for him to ripen to become a Sammā Sambuddha.

Then blessing Sumedha, he proclaimed that after so many kappas, Sumedha would be born from the womb of Queen Mahāmaya in the household of King Suddhodana in Kapilavatthu, bearing such-and-such a name, and he would become a Sammā Sambuddha.

From that time on, this man kept taking birth, life after life, from this womb to that one. The number of lifetimes required to draw the attention of those he encountered in that particular life towards Dhamma, or to ignite the inner flame and elevate his own level of pāramīs, is beyond calculation. In due course he was born by the name of Siddhattha Gotama. Those who saw the auspicious signs on his body proclaimed that when this child attained adulthood, if he were to remain a householder, then he would become a victorious emperor, but if he were to renounce the world, then he would become a Sammā Sambuddha.

The Bodhisatta achieved the final goal of full liberation sitting under the Bodhi Tree in Bodh Gaya. In the intervening lifetimes he had immersed himself in the unceasing service of others, and now, having left home at the age of 29, he became Buddha after six years. The subsequent 45 years were again dedicated to serving others, day and night. During one part of the night, he would lie down, fully aware and filled with wisdom, while dedicating the remainder of the time to serving others. He continued serving in this way with utmost compassion until his Mahāparinibbāna in this very place.

## Four Stages of Nibbāna

Nibbāna is that state where the senses cease to function. This state is achieved with the practice of Vipassana. The very first nibbanic state is experienced when all those defilements that lead us towards the lower levels of existence are dissolved. After experiencing this state, called Sotāpanna, the doors leading to the lower realms are forever closed. One will be born again seven times at the most, no more, though the number may be less. Then as one progresses, one becomes a Sakadagāmi. After experiencing this state, one will take only one more birth in the sensual world, either in the human realm or in a deva loka. Progressing further, one will become an Anāgāmi—now one will not return to the sensual world but be born in a brahmā loka—and then, moving forward, will become an Arahant, free from all lokas forever.

As Sammā Sambuddha, these four stages are achieved one after the other. Total liberation, or the final Nibbāna for the Sammā Sambuddha, still remains, and until then this state is called Saupādisesa-nibbāna – meaning upādhi: sankhāras persists, which will carry forward the burden of this body in order for the Sammā Sambuddha to live out this life, though these sankhāras are not enough to give him another birth. When this life ends, he will not take birth again. It is then Anupādisesa-nibbāna – there is no upādhi, no birth ever. It is the state of Parinibbāna, total liberation. Here is that place where this Enlightened One's Mahāparinibbāna took place.

How suffused with compassion he was. He was suffused with compassion in all preceding lives as a Bodhisatta, and even now in this final life also. How else could it have been possible for him to serve others so continuously? The time for his Mahāparinibbāna was drawing close. He had made an announcement three months earlier while in Vesālī that in the coming full moon night of the month of Vesākha, he would leave his body.

He walked all the way to this place, Kushinagar. On route, on the previous day, a householder by the name of Cunda gave dāna of a meal which contained mushrooms of a kind that was poisonous. Though the Buddha ate them himself, he prevented the bhikkhus from consuming them. He was now moving towards Parinibbāna, but compassion flowed in the heart for Cunda. "Others must not censure him after I am gone. They must not malign Cunda, asking him how he could give such a meal to the Compassionate One." He told Ānanda that after he was gone he must go to Cunda and explain to him that he had truly gained much merit.

The food that is offered to the Bodhisatta on the night prior to his becoming the Buddha is immensely meritorious. This merit belonged to Sujātā. The last meal, too, is equally meritorious. After moving from birth to birth through uncountable lifetimes, this wheel was now coming to an end. Cunda must not be struck by remorse. Further, he told Ananda to see that others too did not speak ill of Cunda. How much compassion the Bodhisatta had! How much indeed!

Moving towards a twin sal tree, he told Ānanda he would lie down there. He explained that as dawn came, the Tathāgata's Parinibbāna would take place. This place happened to be near the kingdom of the Mallās, and he realised that the Mallās would be distraught when they found out that the Buddha had come so close to their kingdom before his Mahāparinibbāna, wishing that they had at least had an opportunity to pay their last respects. Hence, he advised Ānanda to go and inform them. Ānanda went and made an announcement that Lord Buddha's Mahāparinibbāna would take place at the rise of dawn.

People began to flock to that place to pay their final respects. Upon seeing this, Ānanda requested they come, pay their respects and then move on, as there wasn't much time. Then came a recluse by the name of Subhadda. He said, "I have not come to merely pay my respects; I want to learn the teachings from him. Who knows whether you will be able to teach it to me properly afterwards." Ānanda replied, "This is his time of passing away; please do not trouble him. Let him go in peace."

But Subhadda was adamant, saying he must learn Dhamma from the Lord. Ānanda again responded, telling him that if he wanted to pay his respects, he could do so, but otherwise, let others come forward. The Lord listened to this exchange, thinking, "A thirsty one has come to the river Ganges, and another one is stopping him, saying he cannot drink water; he should just fold his hands and leave." Then the Ganges of compassion arose in him and started flowing – "Oh, Ānanda, do not stop him. He is a worthy one. Let me teach him Dhamma," and he taught him. Boundless compassion flowed from him to serve one more even as it was time to pass away. This is indeed the hallmark of such a rare one.

There were other events of importance that took place in Kushinagar. Someone once asked the Buddha, "Respected Sir, who will be your successor once you are gone?" The Tathāgata replied, "The Dhamma will. The Dhamma that I have taught you will be your teacher, your guru."

He further explained that if one person is made the successor, then a commercial priesthood will take over. Until the time that a person attains the higher states of meditation, he is likely to get drunk

on power once it comes into his hands, thinking, "Now I am presiding over the congregation of the Buddha, sitting on his seat, and I deserve to be venerated in the same manner." This power-filled intoxication becomes the cause of the downfall of Dhamma. Hence, there is no single person who will be the successor, but Dhamma alone will be the successor. Those who follow Dhamma will benefit themselves. If you have understood Dhamma well, what else do you need?

Another episode that occurred in those times was at the time of the Parinibbāna of the Buddha. His chief disciple, Mahā Kassapa, was on his way to Kushinagar with his 500 disciples. It was going to take another seven days for them to reach there, and until that time the Buddha's physical remains were to be preserved. Among Mahā Kassapa's disciples there was one by the name of Subhadda who was very old in age but very immature in Dhamma. When he heard of the Tathāgata's passing, he jumped with joy, exclaiming, "Oh wonderful, the old man is gone! He was so troublesome, so bothersome, with his rules stating, 'Do this, don't do that.' Now that he is gone, we are free to do what we want. No one can interfere." Hearing this, Mahā Kassapa became concerned, thinking, "Yes, certainly there are ripe, matured people in the saṅgha, but there are also foolish ones like Subhadda. Now that the Lord has passed away, such people will twist his words to suit their own purposes. They will claim the Buddha said something that he may not have said, or not talk about some things that he did say, thus contriving to put in his mouth what they desire. They will make efforts to remove what is undesirable to them by saying the Buddha did not say so. Such people will then be the cause of the Dhamma's downfall. What shall be done?" The wise old Mahā Kassapa mused and then concluded that all the spoken words of the Buddha must be gathered and compiled together.

After seven days, once Mahā Kassapa arrived, the cremation took place, and other rituals were performed.

Three months later, at the Sattapani cave in Rajgir, the very first Saṅgāyana took place. Five hundred Arahant bhikkhus who were very close to the Buddha gathered together, narrated and compiled the words of the Buddha with utmost care. The teachings regarding Vinaya, the rules and regulations for the bhikkhus, were well absorbed and digested by Upāli, a senior teacher of the bhikkhus, and he narrated the words that had come as guidance from the Buddha. This was accepted by all. The rest of the words and teachings were well known to Ānanda, which he recounted, and this too was accepted by everyone.

This event was a huge undertaking. In those days neither paper nor printing presses existed. This being such a large body of literature, it was not a small matter for people to memorize it in order to preserve it. And what's more, preserve it while carefully retaining its authenticity, the pristine purity of what was said, so there could be no argument regarding what was genuinely said.

So they came together on one common point of agreement, saying that these were the authentic, proven words of the Buddha, which no one should add anything to or remove anything from.

This was the first Saṅgāyana. It kept Dhamma alive, giving birth to the tradition whereby the second and then the third, fourth and fifth Saṅgāyana's were held. Then, 2500 years after the Buddha's time, the sixth Saṅgāyana was held in Burma. At this time, wherever in the world the words of the Buddha, the Tipiṭaka existed – and they existed only in the five countries of Burma, Sri Lanka, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos – 2500 scholarly bhikkhus were invited from these countries to review and recite together the Buddha's words. The opinions of all had to be one; this was important, in fact a necessary condition.

The teachings of Lord Buddha spread far and wide in his own time. However, approximately 250 to 275 years later, during the reign of Emperor Ashoka, his teacher Moggaliputta Tissa Thera organised the third Saṅgīti. After that, Arahants who had memorised the entire teachings and had a deep knowledge of Vipassana were sent as Dhamma envoys to many countries beyond the borders of India. Thus, the teachings of the Buddha reached far-off countries, including Burma (Myanmar), and were preserved.

It was India's great misfortune that after about 500 years, this

knowledge of Vipassana, as well as the words of the Buddha, vanished here in India due to internal friction and other reasons. We are deeply grateful to Emperor Ashoka and Moggaliputta Tissa, for had they not sent the teachings out of the country, they would have been destroyed forever and the world would have been deprived of them. Five nations out of the countries where they were sent preserved them in their pristine purity.

Then as time moved on, scholars of these countries gathered together to collaborate on preserving the teachings. Though the Pali language was the same in these various countries, their scripts differed. The pronunciations also differed, though only in a minor way; for example, in some particular words, some countries may have used a short 'i' sound while others may have used a long 'ī'. But these minor differences did not change the original meaning of the words. For centuries these teachings were preserved with utmost care, maintaining complete authenticity. As a result, this has generated confidence that these are indeed the true words of the Buddha. Had these scholars not worked sincerely to preserve them, how could we have received them now? Along with the words of the Buddha, the practical aspect, Vipassana meditation, had also spread widely, but eventually this was virtually lost. But pious meditators in Burma maintained this also in its purity. We are immensely grateful to Burma for this.

### Deep Gratitude

There has been a belief in India and in other countries, perhaps due to a prophecy made by a saint, that this priceless jewel of Dhamma, which had been sent to the golden land of Burma (named this due to its abundance of gold), would be preserved there, while it would be lost elsewhere. And that at the end of 2500 years, it would be returned to India, the land of its origin, and the people would accept it joyously. Then, after getting established in the land of its origin, it would spread all over the world, and there too, it would be accepted openheartedly.

And then again, it is worth considering how the followers preserved it, even for 500 years in India. It was their singular effort as a result of which many benefited in this country; how many benefited indeed! We have evidence to show how much the nation did benefit. Emperor Ashoka had these words inscribed in rock – Many kings and emperors prior to me also wished to see the flame of Dhamma arising amongst their people, wishing that people would live a life of peace and Dhamma, respect their elders, nurture youngsters with love, develop generosity, etc., but no king succeeded in this endeavour despite fervent resolve. Then he went on to say, 'But truly, I did succeed.' It's true; had he lied, the people would have smashed those carved edicts. But no, the rocks and edicts survived to prove his claim.

How did he succeed? He appointed Dhamma ministers. Those who could teach Dhamma were appointed by the state to travel from place to place teaching it and then would follow up to see whether people had understood what was taught or not to see if there was any difficulty that they faced in following it. This was but one of the reasons. Ashoka said, "Oh, this was but a very small reason. Who is really transformed from these teachings? Even if one gets influenced and changes, it is but momentarily. After a while, he or she goes back to being what they were. He stated, "The true reason for my success is that I taught people Vipassana meditation." It is astounding to think of how Vipassana was spread so extensively back then in this country of several million people. How so many people learned it.

The time has come again. Dhamma will find a way, and Vipassana will spread in the entire nation once again with so many benefiting immensely. It is truly inspiring for us to see that not only have the words of the Buddha survived, but Vipassana has survived unblemished as well. Though preserved in Burma, it did not survive in its pristine purity in the entire country but only in some pockets with the efforts of a few who preserved it with utmost sincerity through the guru-disciple tradition. We are immensely grateful to those few who preserved it. As for the others, they remained immersed in their rites and rituals, their philosophies and beliefs, as it happens elsewhere in the world. This is the way the wheel of existence continues to rotate.

### Time of Mahāparinibbāna

This place where we are today is important, as it was here

that the giant amongst men ended his long journey, a journey that spanned millions of lifetimes. As it came to an end, he said, 'Natthi dāni punabbhavo' – now there is no rebirth for me. But before passing on, he put in an immeasurable amount of work that continues to benefit millions even today and will continue also in the future. So this place is of great significance.

I had mentioned that the Buddha had announced that he would pass away after three months, at the end of the night of Vesākha Purnima, the night of the summer full moon. How did this come to pass? When Siddhārtha Gautama became Sammā Sambuddha, at that time Māra, the chief of the powers that oppose Dhamma by not wanting it to progress, tried hard to prevent him from becoming Sammā Sambuddha. Māra's wish is that beings should continue to remain in existence; if at all they seek to progress, then let them go to the deva-lokas, the celestial realms which are filled with many pleasures. People can follow specific methods which will give the fruit of rebirth in a deva-loka; they can revel in the pleasures in that realm and be happy there. If that does not suffice, then there is the brahma-loka. They can meditate in various ways to reach the brahma-loka, and still Māra is happy seeing people locked in this cycle of birth and death, from one realm to another. But Māra is unhappy to see anyone breaking out and going beyond, transcending existence.

Hence, when Siddhārtha Gautama became the Buddha, Māra told him, "Now that you are liberated, from this web of suffering. 'Why bother teaching others?' But the Buddha kept on teaching unceasingly. Again, at another time, Māra came and told him, "Now that many people have learnt and you have many disciples, why don't you pass on into Parinibbāna?" But the Buddha responded, "No, it is not yet time. There are four types of saṅghas: the bhikkhu saṅgha, the bhikkhuni saṅgha, the layperson saṅgha for householder men, and another for householder women. When these four saṅghas are not only well established in Dhamma themselves but also capable of teaching Dhamma to others, and when I am assured that they are indeed able to teach Dhamma to others, then I will pass away into Parinibbāna.

Māra later came to Vaishali three months prior to the time of the Buddha's Parinibbāna and said, "Lord, many of your people have now ripened. There are numerous bhikkhus who are well established and capable of teaching Dhamma to others, as well as many bhikkhunis who possess the same ability. Furthermore, there are a significant number of laymen who are well established and able to impart Dhamma, along with many laywomen followers who are also well established in their capacity to teach Dhamma to others. Then the Buddha said, "Yes, what you are saying is correct! Therefore, three months from now, I shall take Parinibbāna."

From this statement, it is clear that all the four saṅghas were ripened and well established. But it was a great misfortune that after some time some lay followers started to add some ritual or a fast, reducing the meditation, etc., as a result of which very few lay householder teachers remained.

Then around 100 years ago, our great-grandfather guru Ledi Sayadaw came, a man of great foresight. He saw that in 100 years, the first 2500 years of the Buddha Sasana would come to an end and that the time would come for this knowledge to return to India, get established there and then spread throughout the world. He went to India and, seeing the conditions then prevailing, realised that if a Buddhist (Bauddha) bhikkhu or a recluse came to India to teach the Buddha's teachings, the people would not accept it, thinking, "Oh, this is the Buddhist religion; it is of no use to us." He found they were totally beguiled by their own views and would not listen to, let alone follow, the Buddha's teaching."

Ledi Sayadaw realised that this needed to be re-established by a lay householder. A time would come when everyone would start teaching; however, a householder would need to take the first step. As there were no householder teachers, he realised that he must work on preparing some of them. Such was his intention around 100 to 125 years ago, when he began to encourage laymen to learn Vipassana, and a few came. We are deeply grateful to him for opening the doors for the householders. And from amongst those, one such householder teacher emerged – Saya Thet Gyi. Being an ideal teacher, he established a high

standard of what a householder teacher should be like. And then came his disciple, my Dhamma father – Sayagyi U Ba Khin, who was truly a saint; what a saint indeed!

India accepted this teaching, as it seemed to be a tradition that belonged to householders, though it is not to say that bhikkhus could not teach it. But looking at the Indian mindset, which is nurtured on innumerable beliefs, many of them misleading, it was best this way. I too had been similarly affected by misleading beliefs. When I received this teaching at the age of 31, I found that there was nothing false in it. It is so faultless, blemishless and so beneficent, yet there were many false statements made against it. Why was that so?

I studied Lord Buddha's teachings deeply and realised that either due to ignorance or because of disputes, false propaganda was spread in India against the teachings. The accusations that have been heaped on the Buddha have no basis whatsoever.

There is a saying amongst us that with continuous exaggeration, a mountain is made out of a molehill. Upon my research, I mused that as there was not even a molehill here, how did this mountain appear? It was our misfortune that we were deprived of the Buddha's teachings for so many years, but it is good that they have returned now and people have accepted them. There are those who are reluctant initially, but when they do come and practise Vipassana, they feel it is so pure. There is no place to put even a finger on any shortcoming.

### Fundamentals of Vipassana

One learns to follow sīla, morality, and then one learns samādhi, how to discipline the mind in order to be able to follow sīla. Who can object to that? And in order to learn to control the mind, the point of focus becomes one's own breath, which is the same for everyone; all can follow and practise it. Then the mind is not merely to be

controlled, but one has to go to its very depths and purify it at its roots. For this, paññā, wisdom, insight is taught. One learns how, with the interconnection between the mind and the body, negativities arise at the level of body sensations and how, on the basis of these very sensations, the negativities in the mind can be eradicated.

Everyone can accept this. Whether one is Hindu, Muslim, Jain, Sikh or Christian, it makes no difference. Whether Indian, Pakistani, English or American, it makes no difference. A human being is a human being, and everyone's nature is the same. How to change that nature in order to live a good life for the betterment of all is an idea acceptable to everyone. The Enlightened One taught nothing beyond these three points. Yet how many accusations have been falsely heaped on him, and why?

It is good that people are slowly beginning to understand that these are useless, baseless criticisms due to which the nation remained deprived of the teachings. It is good that they are now accepting his teachings.

Where we are now sitting is the place where a man called Subhadda came with the desire to get this wisdom from the incomparable one. Wonderful for him, for he benefited immensely. And then there was another Subhadda who said, "It is good that the old man has died; now we are free to do what we want!" It was due to him that this entire teaching was preserved, and it remained intact, pariyaṭṭi as well as paṭipatti – his words as well as the Vipassana practice both survived, to our immeasurable welfare. Hence, this place has a great significance. Let us meditate here, a place of vital importance, for our own welfare, our own benefit and the benefit of many!

Kalyanamitta, S.N. Goenka

(The appointments etc. in next NL)



## DHAMMA DOHAS

***Sammukha dīpaṅkara khare, jo samyaka sambuddha;  
Pāye vimala vipaśyanā, bane mukta ho śuddha.***

Dīpaṅkara stands before me, who is fully enlightened;  
Get the stainless Vipassana, become liberated and pure.

***Eka akelā main tarūṃ, yaha to anucita svārtha;  
Auron ko tāre binā, sadhe nahin paramārtha.***

If I alone gain freedom, this is unfair selfishness; Helping  
others to cross over, is the ultimate service.

***Sahaja prāpta hai mukti para, kara dūn isakā tyāga;  
Aura pāramī joṛa kara, banūn buddha baṛabhāga.***

Liberation is easily attained, but I will relinquish it; Multiplying  
pāramīs may I become a greatly meritorious Buddha.

***Hain isa bhava saṃsāra men, kitane prāṇī dīna;  
Inake bhī bandhana khulen, inake hon dukha kṣīṇa.***

There are so many miserable beings in this world; May  
their bonds be broken, and their suffering alleviated.

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