

Vipassana Prison Newsletter

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Words of Dhamma

*Dunnigahassa lahuno, yatthakāmanipātino.
Cittassa damatho sādhu, cittam dantam sukhāvaham.*

*Wonderful it is to train the mind, so swiftly moving, seizing whatever it wants.
Good is it to have a well-trained mind, for a well-trained mind brings happiness.*

Damapada 3.35



ANGER AND PEACE BOTH START FROM WITHIN

The passages below come from a January 2000 talk by S. N. Goenka at the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland.

What happens when someone is angry? The law of nature is such that one who generates anger is its first victim. One is bound to become miserable as one generates anger even though most of the time people do not realize that they are harming themselves by generating anger. Even if someone realizes this, the truth is that one is unable to keep oneself away from anger; to keep oneself free from anger. Now let us see why one becomes angry.

It is quite obvious that anger arises when something undesirable has happened, when someone has created an obstacle in the fulfillment of your desires, when someone has insulted you or when someone has expressed derogatory remarks about you while backbiting. . . . If you learn the art of observing the reality within yourself it will become so clear at the experiential level that the real reason for anger lies within and not outside.

As soon as one comes across some undesirable thing outside there is a sensation in the body. And because the object was undesirable the sensation is very unpleasant. It is only after feeling this unpleasant sensation that one reacts with anger. If one learns how to observe bodily sensations equanimously without reacting to them one starts coming out of the old habit of flaring up in anger and harming oneself.

The practice of Vipassana helps one to develop the faculty of observing all the different kinds of sensations which one experiences on different parts of the body from time to time and remain equanimous by not reacting to them. . . . By practicing the observation of sensation equanimously again and again, one changes the habit pattern of instant blind reaction to these sensations. Thus, in daily life whenever one comes in contact with something undesirable one notices that an unpleasant sensation has arisen in the body and one starts observing it without flaring up in anger as before. . . .

Of course there is also a way that as soon as one realizes that one has generated anger one may divert one's attention to some other object and by this technique one may feel that one is coming out of anger. However, it is actually only the surface part of the mind that has come out of anger. Deep inside one keeps on boiling in anger because you have not eradicated the anger but merely suppressed it. Vipassana teaches you not to run away from the reality but, rather, to face the reality and start objectively observing the anger in the mind and the unpleasant sensation in the body. . . .

Due to one reason or the other there are different kinds of sensations throughout the body at every moment. If the sensation is pleasant then the habit pattern is to react with clinging and craving, and if it is unpleasant the habit pattern is to react with aversion and hatred. Because of the barrier between the small surface part of the mind and the rest of the mind the surface part is totally unaware of the fact that this constant reaction is taking place at the deeper level. Vipassana helps to break this barrier and the entire mental structure becomes very conscious. It feels the sensations from moment to moment and, with the understanding of the law of impermanence, remains equanimous. . . . This is the best way to liberate yourself from the misery of anger.

HOW TO MARK 50-YEAR ANNIVERSARY? MEDITATE.

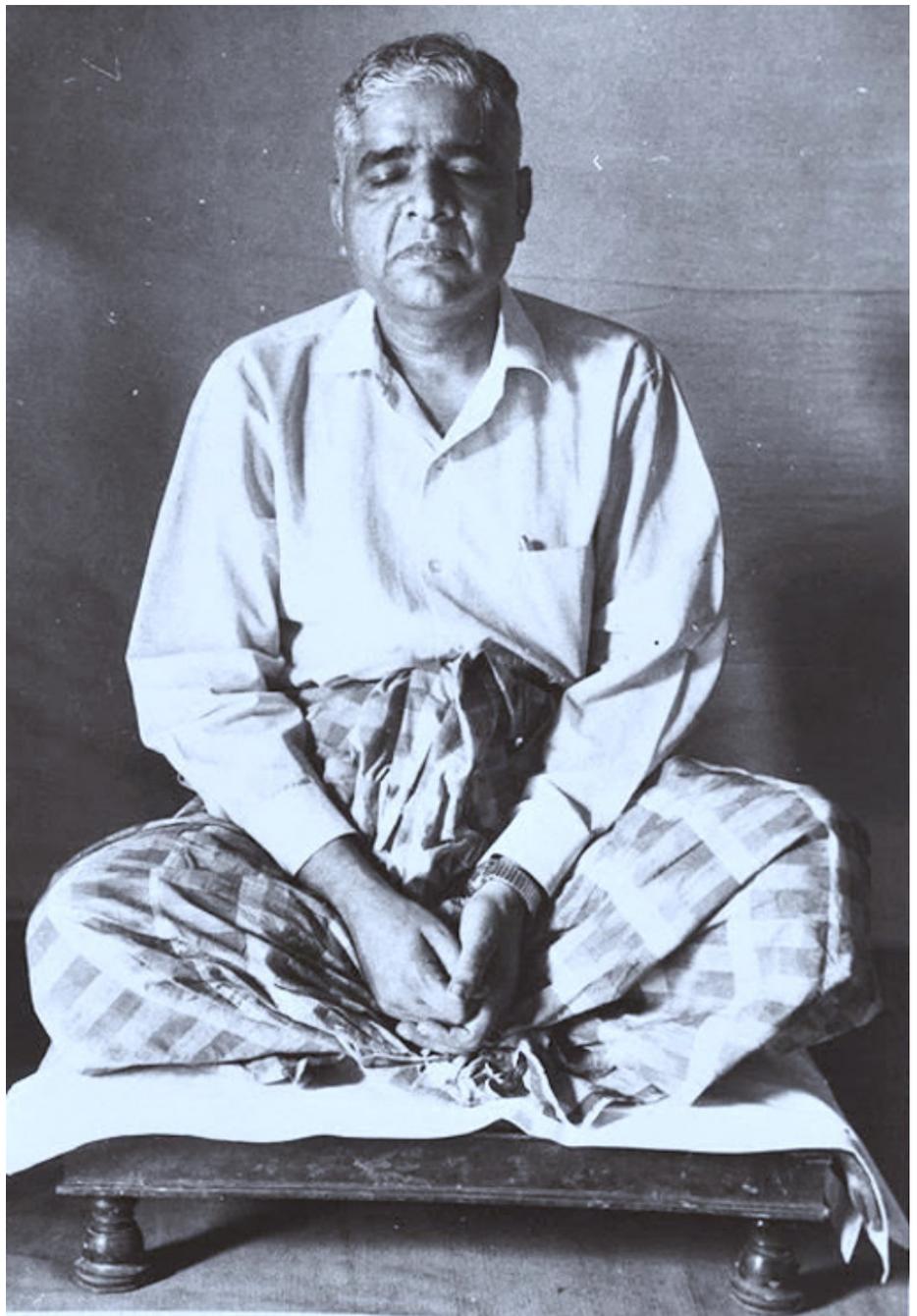
The following is adapted from a story in the Vipassana International Newsletter, Vol. 46, No. 1, April 2019.

Vipassana meditators around the world are celebrating an important anniversary. Fifty years ago S. N. Goenka brought Vipassana back to India, the land of its origin. From there he oversaw the spread of Vipassana to Europe and America, and then around the world.

On July 3, 1969, Goenkaji held his first international course in a guesthouse in Mumbai, one of India's major cities. Vipassana had disappeared from India hundreds of years before, but was preserved in neighboring Myanmar (formerly Burma). Although of Indian descent, Goenkaji was born and raised in Myanmar. In bringing Vipassana to other countries he fulfilled the wish of his teacher, Sayagyi U Ba Khin. Twenty-five centuries after the life of the Buddha, U Ba Khin said, the time had come for Vipassana to spread around the world.

In January, to mark the start of the anniversary year, some 2,000 meditators gathered at the Global Vipassana Pagoda in Mumbai for a one-day celebration. Throughout this entire year, Vipassana meditators are meditating daily at the Global Pagoda. And many meditation centers plan to commemorate the first half-century of Vipassana's resurgence in the world. Whatever else is planned, the most meaningful way of marking this 50th anniversary is by meditating. And we can always do this wherever we are.

As Goenkaji says at the end of a 10-day course: "The main purpose (of meditating) should always be clear in your mind: 'I am doing this exercise every morning and evening to change the habit pattern of my life. When I remain a slave of this habit pattern, I keep on generating craving and aversion, which is a big misery for me. I have to come out of my misery. And when I become miserable, I make others miserable. I should not become an instrument to make others miserable.' That point should be very clear to you: 'I am practicing this not as a rite or a ritual or a religious ceremony, not at all. This is a mental exercise. I do physical exercises to keep the body fit, sound, healthy and strong. This is a mental exercise to keep the mind healthy, strong and sound.' With this understanding, keep on practicing and get the best fruits of Dhamma. You have now got the wonderful Dhamma, a wonderful technique. Make use of it. And see that you do not only keep it but you multiply it. See that you grow in Dhamma, grow in Dhamma."



INMATES EXPRESS INSIGHTS, COMPASSION, AND CALM

Mongolia is introducing Vipassana courses throughout its prison system. In just a few years, 1,350 inmate students have taken courses. The first course was documented in a film, "Vipassana in Mongolian Prisons." In it, inmate students talk about their experiences. Here is some of what they had to say, printed with the permission of the filmmaker.

* Just after my arrival in prison, a monk by the name of Purevbat came to visit me. I was in shock, in solitary confinement, and in chains. He walked around and said to me that prison is a nice place for meditation. I was quite angry, because here I am in hell and this monk is telling me to meditate. Later I understood the meaning of it.

* I have been in different prisons for a long time, and am now 52 years old.... I have been too long in places like this, know the harshness of prison, and rough language has become a habit of mine. So I joined this course to really change my hardened criminal mind and behavior.

* At first I was scared to think I must meditate for 10-11 hours a day, from 4 a.m. till 9 p.m. I am a sleepy person, so thought I might not handle it. But when I started meditating, although I only slept 4-5 hours a night I was feeling lighter and calmer. This made me work more.

* During the first days of meditation many good and bad memories came to my mind. I asked the teacher why these old memories kept popping up, and he told me, "If you keep working seriously, old defilements come to the surface of the mind. This is a good thing. You must work without paying attention to them."

* Passing attention along my body I felt many different sensations: itchiness and others. I kept observing each one as it is. Then I had some pain in my back. When I observed it without reacting, the pain in my back went away. But pain in my knees remained, so I just observed that pain, and it also disappeared. I was happy that I could deal with pain in this way, and wanted to destroy more pain. But the teacher said, "Do not have any intentions or desires. Let things happen naturally." This was true.

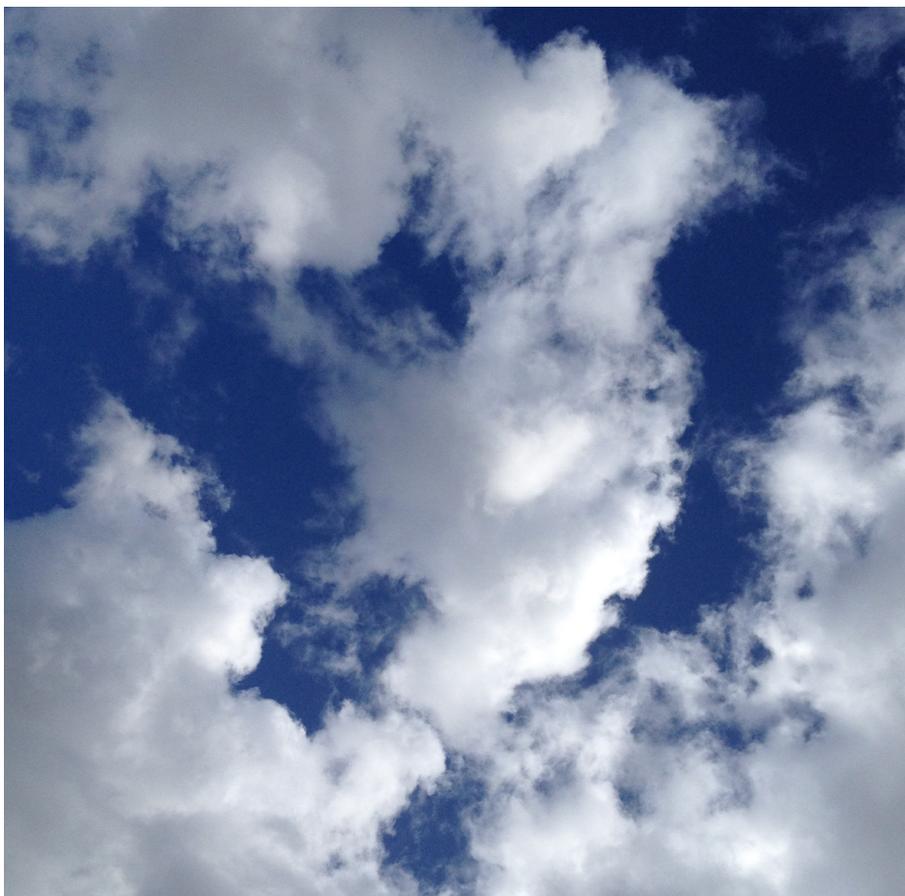
* I was a selfish, stubborn and angry person. Now I feel a big change in me. I have started having love and compassion for others.

* Sitting discomfort and other problems arise when we meditate. Because of discomforts we tend to move the body, and lose the calmness of the mind. If you keep working, these problems fade.

* When I started feeling happiness inside I understood that I had been living my life wrong. I was doing bad things, and the only reason for my suffering was me. Now I understand this.

* Just getting released from prison is not my priority. The important thing is to really change myself from inside.

* With bad intention, in a moment you do a crime. As a result, you pay with your precious days on Earth, one by one. Right now, you have a choice: to live your future precious days as days of rage and hatred, or to take a positive turn.





PRACTICING LOVINGKINDNESS HELPS OTHERS – AND OURSELVES

The following is an excerpt from A Meditator's Handbook: How to Untie Knots, a 2015 book by Vipassana teacher Bill Crecelius.

How can something you can't see, but only feel, help you and benefit all beings?

The power of metta will only become known to you when you use it and experience it. Every day at the end of your sittings it is wise to practice metta for a few minutes. This means filling the bodily sensations you are feeling with thoughts of loving kindness toward all beings, and towards beings that are near and dear to you. This could be your partner, your children, your friends or other family members. They are a good place to start because you already have good feelings towards them.

Sometimes in the hustle and bustle of the day we drop our awareness and may say or do something that might upset our loved ones or acquaintances. This situation may have happened in the distant past or just today, but practicing metta with these people in mind can produce amazing results. I have seen this in my own life and those of my friends. I've seen where troubled relations between husbands and wives have been healed, or where relations with family members that were distant or non-existent were soon made whole again. There is no underestimating this power of metta.

It is not only for use within your own family, but also with co-workers and those outside. Mrs. Jocelyn King, one of Sayagyi U Ba Khin's students, tells the story of U Ba Khin's situation: "Sayagyi had been asked to be a member of a certain government committee. The other members were very hostile to him when he first joined the group. Over time he completely turned the situation around." When Mrs. King asked him how he did it, he said, "with metta."

In this world, with all its negative forces, someone who has metta within becomes a force for good – and those around will know this. Goenkaji would never have been able to do the tremendous job he did of spreading the Dhamma around the world if it hadn't been for the strong metta vibrations that surrounded him all the time.

There are so many beings everywhere that are suffering. It is part of being born. When you practice metta be sure to share with all beings, whether you see them or not, and whether you know them or not. The forces of good in the world can only grow if more people practice metta.