

# Vipassana Newsletter

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

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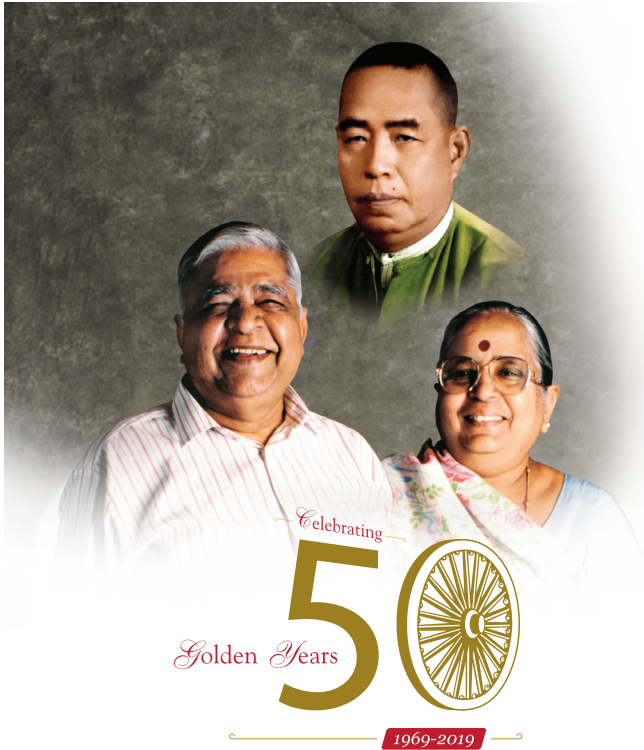
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## WORDS OF DHAMMA

*Uṭṭhātā kammadheyyesu, appamatto vidhānavā,  
 Samaṃ kappeti Jīvaka, sambhataṃ anurakkhati.*

– (Sadgrhastha ke Guṇa, Dhammavāṇī Saṅgraha Book)

– An ideal householder should work sincerely in his profession, working without procrastination, and should earn a livelihood with care and restraint utilising one's well earned money conscientiously.



## VIPASSANA MEDITATION

As taught by S.N. Goenka  
 in the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin

Having reached the completion of 50 years (1969 - 2019) since Respected Goenkaji first started teaching Vipassana in India in the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin, and also on the occasion of the death anniversaries of both Respected Mataji and Sayagyi U Ba Khin, a few inspiring excerpts are being presented from the book "Mettaviharini Mataji" and from the "Sayagyi U Ba Khin Journal", as well as episodes which have been taken from memoirs of those who knew Mataji closely, all of which give a glimpse into her life and character.

### Vignettes from Mataji's Life

#### Mataji—An Ideal Companion for a Great Man

The year was 1942 and the occasion was a wedding in a Hindu Marwari community who take their customs rather seriously and formally, especially those that have to do with the sanctity of weddings. The groom-to-be made a demand which took the bride's family by complete surprise. What was it? Did the groom ask for a

heavy dowry – a car or jewellery? On the contrary, the groom's firm demand was that the bride's face should not be covered by a veil when she came to the wedding podium, a serious departure from tradition in those days, or else he would not enter the wedding podium.

Those were the days when a bride would be completely covered in wedding finery, and not just her face, not even a nail could be seen. To bring her out in public without a veil was unheard of. But seeing the determined stand of the groom, the bride's family gave in and the wedding of Shri Satyanarayan Goenka and Shrimati Illaichidevi was solemnized.

Born on 3rd February, 1930, (Magha Shukla 5th, the fifth day of spring) in Mandalay, Illaichidevi was 6 years younger than her groom. Prior to the British Empire, Mandalay was the capital of King Mindon Min's kingdom. Mataji's maternal home happened to be near Goenkaji's residence and the two families had cordial relations and were supportive of each other.

She was married at the tender age of 12 years. In accordance with the customs of those days, after the engagement she had to discontinue her studies and was withdrawn from school. It was a matter of great regret for Goenkaji that his father, without asking for his approval, chose an uneducated bride for him. Goenkaji who was studious by temperament and very fond of books was deeply influenced by Swami Dayanand Saraswati (Founder of Arya Samaj – a reformist Hindu Movement) and never wanted to get married before 25 years of age. But he had to buckle under pressure from the family elders and was married when he was 18 years old. He complained to his two elder brothers whom he had close friendships with, but there was no way out.

In such situations, normally the target of frustrated anger would be the wife. But not with Goenkaji. He knew that his wife was not to be blamed, rather it was the social customs prevalent in those days which had pushed women behind veils, and away from education. But a resolute Goenkaji wanted to educate his child bride. He did not have sufficient time to personally tutor his wife within the formal atmosphere of the family, so he took help from the educated wife of his friend and family doctor Om Prakash. His cousin Chouthmal's wife who was educated, also supported this endeavour. Both women came and started teaching the womenfolk of the Goenka family. Gradually a tiny school of about 15 – 20 girls and women took shape at home.

Illaichidevi not only received an education, but she also touched the depths of Vipassana sadhana along with her husband. And when Goenkaji came to India and started teaching Vipassana, she soon joined him, walking with him every step of the way. In Vipassana camps and public programmes, she was there next to him. Whether it was checking time of women meditators during camps, question and answer time, looking after centres, discourse time or in giving guidance to a meditator, Illaichidevi's presence was ever there with Goenkaji, like a shadow. The occasions that she was not present due to family or some such matter, were few and far between. 1

When I got an opportunity to meet her, I asked, did you two ever fight?

No, she said. He was always very serious by temperament. Others could not approach him in a flippant manner. The atmosphere at home would turn serious as soon as he entered the house. Everyone was somewhat afraid of him. But he never used abusive language or fought with anyone. Of course, he would get angry and shout, but after practising Vipassana sadhana, he stopped shouting. He would express his displeasure in a sentence or two. Aggression was gone.

When I asked her if she had any particular interest, she answered that she enjoyed stitching and knitting cardigans. She made many hand held fans with new creative designs. But with the advent of electric fans, this occupation ended.

Mataji did not speak much but she touched heights in sadhana. With her generous, refined demeanour and calm poise, she was well liked amongst her extended family members who praised her generously.

Dedicated, straightforward, simple and immersed in sadhana, Illaichidevi walked every step of the way with her husband and made the phrase co-traveller on path of Dhamma a reality.

– Savitri Vyas –

### Dialogue between Mataji and Sayagi

Q: Please tell us something about your first meeting with Respected Sayagi U Ba Khin.

A: After Goenkaji's first camp of 10 days in Burma, I went to the centre and met Sayagi. Right away, he gave me Anapana and I started practising it occasionally. However, with this I felt some heaviness in my head. Sayagi then told Goenkaji that I should sit for a 10 day course, adding that this would be important and would give a major boost to his own progress.

Truly, after all these years, his words have proven to be so significant! By supporting Goenkaji's gigantic work of spreading the Dhamma throughout the world, like a foundation stone she brought alive the prophecy of his words. Just like a foundation stone remains unseen in a building that is built, Mataji's firm support to Goenkaji every step of the way was invaluable, commendable.

Respected Mataji would grasp a matter very quickly and make it a part of her life. The following illustrates this:

Q: Sayagi spoke in Burmese or in English, while you spoke Hindi. How did you then converse with him? How did you understand his discourses?

A: Sayagi did not talk much. He would enquire with simple Hindi and by gestures, while I would answer in Hindi which he would understand. His discourses used to be brief, just about 15–30 minutes. Goenkaji would also translate a few lines for the benefit of the Indian sadhaks. The fundamental point was that he had shown us the way, shown us how to work. After that, we just had to practise. Easy, isn't it? We must practise more than talk.

– Indira Brahmhatt –

### Her Abiding Love for the Nation

*(A letter written from Myanmar by Respected Mataji to Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru (the first Prime Minister of India) on his birthday 14th November, 1962 – written during the Sino-Indian conflict.)*

Respected Jawaharlalji,

Jai Hind (Salute to India)

With greetings for your birthday I am sending you a small gift. Do accept it and use it for our brave soldiers fighting for our priceless freedom. It would be my good luck if these jewels received as a wedding gift be of some help. Like most women, I too am fond of jewellery. But when the nation's horizons turn dark and danger is imminent, this fondness for jewels is less than a wisp compared to the desire to see my country free. I am a daughter of India and the example of my ancestor Bhamashah (an ancient heroic icon who gave his all to fight the enemy during the Mughal times) floats before my eyes. Oh, to be able to sacrifice

all for the nation like him!

The value of these jewels is very little (about 100 tolas), but believe me, the fervour in my heart is immeasurable. Please tell those warriors who are fighting on the border that they are not alone. Not just the Indians living in India but millions of Indians living all over the world are with them. May our loving, all embracing goodwill kindle fearlessness and awaken limitless strength in them. I am confident that under your leadership, the final victory will be ours. I eagerly await that day when every single enemy soldier will be removed from our sacred soil.

– Respectfully, a daughter of India, – Illaichidevi –

**Edit. Note:** On 12th Dec, a letter came from the Prime Minister's secretariat which mentioned: 'along with your letter of 5th Dec and on behalf of you we have received the jewellery, 2017.250 grams, on 11th Dec. The nation is grateful for this gesture....'

### Living with Ideal Parents

For 39 years of my life, I lived sheltered by Mataji and saw how she, with immense patience and motherly love, cared for our family as well as the larger Dhamma family. Even at the ripe old age of 86 years, she kept herself active, doing everything with dexterity and with loving care. She was never lazy, nor would she get tired. There was never any animosity nor would she ever indulge in malicious gossip.

Under her protective umbrella lived a large, thriving family of mother-in-law, sisters-in-law, brothers-in-law, sons and daughters-in-law, grandchildren and great grandchildren. She taught them all how to live together with loving cooperation. She took great care of her sisters-in-law. She especially extended a warm welcome to one of her widowed sisters-in-law and her son in her large household. After her younger sister-in-law passed away, she kept her brother-in-law within the fold. She maintained warm and cordial relations with the maternal families of her six daughters-in-law.

My birth parents nurtured me for 20 years. After I came to this house, my new parents welcomed me warmly. We were taught Vipassana in order to be able to live a harmonious life. I used to get very nervous. Vipassana helped me overcome this to a degree. Even then when I would get nervous, Mataji would help me with patience and love. I do not remember any time when she used harsh or angry words, or ever discriminated against anyone. For her the entire joint family was one well knit unit.

She inculcated in us six sisters-in-law (wives of her six sons) to live in loving harmony and to respect each other. She taught us never to use harsh words. If anything was brought home, it would come for all. Meals were cooked with everyone's tastes and health requirements in mind. Everyone would sit together at the dining table to eat. If anyone fell ill, everyone would pitch in to take care of them. She too would attend to us. Household tasks, maintaining family accounts etc. was well distributed amongst us daughters-in-law, so no one was burdened by domestic chores. She taught us to be ideal householders.

There was a constant stream of visitors in our house. Mother taught us how to be good hosts. 'Guest is god', goes an Indian maxim which she lived by all her life. She would say, it's a blessed house where guests come. She would also encourage us to give in charity. Any dispute in the house would be handled by her tactfully and smoothly. She always said, you will always find company in happier times, but those who are there with you in times of trouble are true companions.

She remained an ideal wife supporting Goenkaji in his gigantic work of the spread of Vipassana, with nary a frown. In father's old age, she took special care of his meals and medicines, and saw to all his needs, filled with loving metta. It was inspiring for us to witness this.

She displayed rare poise and fortitude in all situations. Even when she undertook a treacherous journey from Burma to India soon after her marriage, she did not get shaken. During the unexpected demise of her young grandson, and later, the demise



of a son, as well as when our father passed away, she remained poised, quiet and in control, generating metta.

It is to my good fortune that I was in close contact of such parents, was blessed to be of assistance in their last moments. I bow down to such parents.

– Naina Goenka, Daughter-In-Law –  
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## Mataji and Goenkaji's Fondness for Flowers and Plants

They were both very fond of gardening. Upon returning from the Hyderabad centre in 1976 and being impressed by the green foliage that they saw there, they decided to do the same at Igatpuri. A variety of seeds of sturdy trees were planted and experts from the forest department were invited to give guidance how to best care for the growing trees and plants. Soon, this Centre which previously had little more than some old mango trees, had turned lush green with trees and flowering plants. Trees that grew throughout the year without much need of care or water were favoured. Of course, along with greening the centre, other construction work had continued unimpeded.

Whenever someone plucked a flower and brought it to Goenkaji, he would gently reprimand them by saying, "this flower looked beautiful in the garden; it would have lived for a few more days on the branch, whereas here it will die soon. It was wrong to have plucked it. Do not do this again."

It was the practice of Goenkaji and Mataji to take a stroll in the gardens at Dhammagiri and inspect the plants to see how well they were doing. They would gaze at the flowers and plants outside their residence, and touch them giving metta. They would then walk and touch many trees giving metta to the seen and unseen beings. Goenkaji would say that many beings live there, hence cutting or damaging trees is very unwholesome. He would permit a tree to be moved only if it was very necessary to do so. If it became imperative to cut a tree, he would go and stand before it giving it metta; he would humbly request the unseen beings living there to go elsewhere and reside. Only then would he permit the woodcutter's axe to fall on the tree. Though these words were murmured softly by him, those standing behind could hear them. Countless devas, brahmas and other divine beings reside at and around the Dhamma hall and Pagoda; hence he would always encourage that a light be kept lit throughout the night on the Pagoda.

It is but appropriate here to mention Mataji's special fascination for gardening and caring for plants. She would water the plants, and fill pots with soil and fertilizer at her Juhu bungalow in Mumbai. She would walk around with the gardener, working alongside, taking personal care, giving instructions; on the boundary wall she had placed large pots and containers filling them with foliage, creepers, and flowering plants which drew the neighbours' attention seeing such pleasing greenery in the area. Subsequently, when the family shifted to the duplex flat on 13th-14th storey nearby, Mataji's terrace turned lush green with different varieties of plants.

## Blessing the Bihar Governor: Shri Ram Nath Kovind

In 2015, the current President of India was the governor of the state of Bihar. While visiting Mumbai on some official duty on 25th Dec. he decided to visit the Pagoda in Gorai. Upon reaching there, he received the news that Mataji was in hospital. Being a meditator, he immediately made plans to visit her. When he reached Lilavati hospital, Bandra, with his brother, she was already in serious condition in the ICU. She was not even opening her eyes. Her son Shri Prakashji whispered in her ears that Ram Nath Kovindji had come. Mataji raised her hand in a gesture of blessing without opening her eyes. He folded his hands once again, came out, sat for some time in the doctor's room discussing her condition with doctors and family members, and then he left.

## Her Last Moments

I had returned from Patna in Bihar, (where I was living doing some Dhamma work) to Igatpuri for a few days when the news came that Mataji was hospitalised in Mumbai. It was but for her love and grace that I received this opportunity to serve her. I

immediately shifted to Mumbai and began to attend to her.

Time passed, we looked for flickering signs of improvement and held on to the doctors' words of hope. For days on end, she did not open her eyes. A day before she was to leave her body, I went close and whispered in her ear, "Mataji, please accept Yadav's pranam (respects)." To my sheer surprise, Mataji opened her eyes, smiled, and accepted my salutation. Before this, no one had seen her smile during her stay in hospital. Indeed she would accept homoeopathic medicines from our hands etc. like an automaton, without any expression. Her smile and the look that day was an indication that she was fully alert, aware and indeed recognized all. Filled with joy, I was emboldened to further say to Mataji, "Now you will get well, just be strong, please." She stared at me for a few seconds, and then shaking her head ever so slowly, she said "No" and closed her eyes once again.

I used to sleep in the hospital every night, however that night one of her grandsons said, "I will stay here tonight. You may go home." So I returned to Goenkaji's residence. During that night she took a turn for the worse. At 1 am we rushed to hospital, but by then she had stabilised to her prior condition and we returned home.

By dawn, the doctors gave up on her. The internal organs were shutting down, but her demeanour was calm; there was no stress, no tension. Doctors too wondered how she could be so tranquil! How could they understand the pristine depth of her sadhana?

– Yadav –

## Mumbai Children course details will be printed next month.

### Additional Responsibilities

1. Mr. Janak Raj Adhikari, To assist CAT in AT training in Nepal

### New Responsibilities

### Senior Assistant Teachers

1. Mr. Ganashyam Gautam (U Soe Thu), Myanmar
2. U Tin Maung, Myanmar
3. U Tun Tun Oo, Myanmar
4. Win Myint, Myanmar
5. Mrs. Bishnu Maya Devi Aryal, Nepal
6. Lt.Gen. (Retd.) Durga Nath Aryal, Nepal
7. Ms. Sabita Bajracharya, Nepal
8. Ms. Phoolu Dangol, Nepal
9. Mr. Tikaram Lamsal, Nepal
10. Mr. Bekhaman Maharjan, Nepal
11. Mr. Gopal Dass Maharjan, Nepal
12. Mr. Kamal Prasad Pradhan, Nepal
13. Mr. Shankar Raj Shakya, Nepal
14. Mr. Tej Raj Shakya, Nepal
15. Mrs. Vidya Shakya, Nepal
16. Mr. Suresh Lal Shrestha, Nepal
17. Mrs. Sharmistha Udas, Nepal
18. Mrs. Gita Devi Pokharel, Nepal
19. Anagarika Sona, Nepal
20. Mrs. Poy-Twee Leow, Malaysia.

### Newly Appointed

### Assistant Teachers

1. Mrs. Mangala Meshrom, Nagpur.
2. Shri Ram Naresh Maurya,

Lucknow, U.P.

3. Miss Gita Regmi, Nepal
4. Ms. Sumitra Rajkarnikar, Nepal
5. Mr. Megharaj Gyanwali, Nepal
6. Mr. Sanu Raja Ranjitkar, Nepal
7. Mr. Subarna Man Bajracharya, Nepal
8. Mr. Suresh Shakya, Nepal
9. Daw Lay Sint, Myanmar
10. Daw Mya Win, Myanmar
11. U Maung Kaung, Myanmar
12. U Khin Saung Nyunt, Myanmar
13. U Kyi Ohn, Myanmar
14. Daw Nang Kham, Myanmar
15. Daw Khin Ohn Myint, Myanmar
16. Daw Nwe Nwe Aye, Myanmar
17. Daw Tin Tin Mya, Myanmar
18. Daw Yi Yi, Myanmar
19. Mr. Xiao Feng Liu, China
20. Mr. Jian Chuan Zhang, China
21. Mr. Zheng Yuxin, China
22. Mr. Ming Chen, China
23. Ms Lay-Jan Koh, Malaysia
24. Mr William Tham, Singapore

### Children course teachers

1. Mrs. Leeta Hazarika, Guwahati
2. Mrs. Geetanjali Lukhurakhan, Guwahati
3. Miss Lee Paolien, Taiwan
4. Mrs. Lin Chiehlin, Taiwan
5. Miss Ciara Bruton, Ireland

## In the Midst of Power, a Man of Virtue and implicitly

In Burma during Sayagyi's time, certain high government posts ensured comfort for the remainder of an appointee's life—not particularly due to the level of salary, but rather to the pervasive practice of padding all transactions with bribery. No one came out of these offices as a poor person. Sayagyi, however, entered his retirement with meagre life savings and no home of his own for his family, since they had lived in government housing all his career. Even though he had worked

in as many as four government departments simultaneously, he had accepted only one salary—and, of course, avoided all illegal gains.

Wanting to build a house for his children, he asked me to help him arrange for the construction. As work on the house proceeded, we found that 10,000 rupees were lacking for completion. Where was Sayagi to get this money? He would, of course, not ask for it. Since such a sum was so easy for me to give, I suggested this to him. But he refused, insisting that any money from a student is *dāna* (donation) and therefore to be put to proper Dhamma use. Trying a different angle, I offered to lend him the money, thinking that later I could just tell him to disregard repayment. He accepted my offer, and the house was completed.

However, each and every month thereafter, when his pension cheque arrived, he took not one paisa (penny) of it, but immediately passed the whole amount to me. This was so painful for me to accept. These 10,000 rupees meant so little to me, and here each month I had to receive my teacher's only income. Eventually 5,000 rupees remained to be paid.

During this time, my aunt (who had adopted me as her son and who had been a longtime student of Sayagi's) was dying. She had made great progress in her seven years of meditation with Sayagi, and he was quite fond of her. Now, it is a custom in the Eastern countries not only to care for one's parents during their lifetime, but also to remember them by making contributions in their name after death. So as I passed the last days with my adoptive mother, I asked her to tell me where she wished to give this *dāna*. She said, "Wherever you want," and I named several hospitals, charitable organizations, and so on. "And where else would you like to donate?" I asked. When she said that she wanted 5,000 rupees to go to Sayagi himself, I was delighted. Here was the chance to be relieved of this terrible position of having to receive money from my teacher. Surely, I thought, Sayagi would accept the *dāna* as a last wish of a devoted dying

student and then be able to use it for repayment of the loan.

As it happened, a few days later Sayagi was present at the time of her death; he knew that she had died peacefully and consciously, with awareness of *anicca* (impermanence) at the top of her head. He went around the centre telling everyone how her final minutes were filled with *paññā*, with *anicca*. When I informed him of her volition to give him the 5,000 rupees he was delighted. "Look," he said, "she has given these 5,000 rupees as *dāna*"—and he began distributing it to this Dhamma cause and that Dhamma cause! I was so surprised to see my hopes dashed.

Each month thereafter, as I received my teacher's pension cheque, until at last the final payment, I was reminded of the high principles of this person who was such an example of moral rectitude in public office.

Having passed through the corridors of power, which were rampant with corruption, where fortunes were often easily amassed, here was a singular man of modest means who died with the wealth of his integrity fully intact.

– S.N. Goenka – from Sayagi U Ba Khin Journal –

### One-day Mega courses and Daily One-day courses at Global Vipassana Pagoda for 2020

**Sunday 10th May, 2020 on Buddha Purnima;** One-day mega courses and **Daily One-day courses** at GVP start at 11am till 4 pm. Non-meditators may participate in the 3 pm discourse. Please come only with prior registration. ***Samaggānaṃ tapo sukho:*** Take advantage of the immense benefit of meditating in a large group. For registration Contact: 022-62427544, 022-28451170- Extn: 9, Mob. 8291894644 (Tel. booking: 11 am to 5 pm daily). Online registration: <http://oneday.globalpagoda.org/register>

### DHAMMA DOHA

*Kaisī sukhada suhāvanī, mān baramā kī goda;*

*Isa godī men hī milā, bodhi dharma kā moda.*

Oh, the lap of Mother Burma is so soothing, so nurturing!

In this very lap did I get the blissful joy of Bodhi Dharma.

*Kaisī sukhada suhāvanī, mān baramā kī goda;*

*Cāron phala upajen yahān, umaḍe mana men moda.*

Oh, the lap of Mother Burma is so soothing, so nurturing!

The heart is filled with joy seeing all four fruits ripening here.

*Jivana praphullita rahe, sadā basanta bahāra;*

*śīla sneha se jaba bhare, sadgrhashta parivāra.*

Life is filled with joy, it is like spring all the time; When a householder's family is filled with *śīla* and loving kindness.

*Isa dukhiyāre jagata meṃ, hove dharama prasāra;*

*Baira bhāva sabake miṭen, jage pyāra hī pyāra.*

May Dhamma spread in this world filled with suffering;

May enmity towards all dissolve! May hearts be filled with love for all!

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