

Vipassana Newsletter

In the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin,

as taught by S. N. Goenka

Vol. 11, No. 12: 30 November 2001

Vipassana Research

Institute

Published every month

Dhamma Giri, Igatpuri-422 403, Maharashtra

WORDS OF DHAMMA

The Buddha expressed his appreciation to Anāthapiṇḍika for the donation of the Jetavana monastery in the following verses:

...leṇatthañca sukhatthañca,
jhāyituñca vipassitum.
Vihāradānaṃ saṅghassa,
aggam buddhena vaṇṇitaṃ;
tasmā hi paṇḍito poso,
sampassaṃ atthamattano.
Vihāre kāraye ramme,
vāsayettha bahussute...

Sheltering and conducive
to concentration and insight,
a place of meditation is praised by the Buddha
as the greatest gift to the Saṅgha.
Therefore, a wise man, considering his own welfare,
should have pleasant dwellings built,
in which those who have heard much
about the Dhamma, may stay (and practise it).

—Cūlavagga (Vinayapiṭake) 315

DHAMMA GIRI: SILVER JUBILEE COMMEMORATION

This autumn marks the twenty-fifth anniversary of the first ten-day course at *Dhamma Giri*. The gates of the Vipassana International Academy were opened to the public in 1976. Goenkaji conducted the first ten-day course at *Dhamma Giri* from 27 October to 7 November 1976. Eighty-nine students, 38 old and 51 new students, participated in that course. The opening of *Dhamma Giri* marked an important step in the spread of Dhamma. Since 1969, Goenkaji had conducted courses in temples, churches, mosques, pilgrims' resthouses, monasteries, schools, and hotels. These "gypsy camps" (non-centre camps) were invaluable in the spread of Dhamma, but obviously it would be still more valuable to have a place specifically for the practice of Vipassana meditation. The importance of establishing a centre was stressed by Sayagyi U Ba Khin when, in the early seventies, he was visited by the first of Goenkaji's students in Myanmar.

There were, however, formidable obstacles, not all of them financial. One was that while the Buddha is held in high respect in India, Buddhism is widely regarded with suspicion. If a centre was founded to spread the teaching of the Buddha, it might be regarded as a sectarian institution, in which case its appeal would be limited only to the small minority of Buddhists in India. Aware of this danger, Goenkaji emphasized strongly the non-sectarian, universal nature of Vipassana meditation. He made it clear that *Dhamma Giri* was not to be the property of any group, but was for the benefit of all who sought a way out of suffering.

Another problem was that Indians were unfamiliar with the system of pure *dāna* (donation). At the non-centre camps, students paid for their own room and board. There was nothing wrong in such a system, but Goenkaji felt that a Dhamma centre should not operate on this basis. He

recalled his Teacher's own policy. Sayagyi had written, "There is no admission or subscription fee or fixed donation payable by my disciples.... We accept aid only from disciples who have purified themselves with Vipassana meditation.... If one can help the people to enjoy the fruits of meditation and if they know that the results obtained are for their well-being, tangible, here-and-now, and concrete, you cannot prevent them from doing their mite to give better facilities for the promotion of the Dhamma."

The starting of a centre was thus not just a matter of finding the right piece of land and the money to pay for it. There must be the proper foundation: the wish to experience and share with all others the benefits of Vipassana meditation.

However, Goenkaji was confident that the Dhamma would overcome these obstacles. He worked tirelessly to realize his Teacher's goal of establishing a centre from which the Dhamma could spread not only in India but around the world.

Many Vipassana meditators have been involved in the development of this great project. Thousands of them have come to *Dhamma Giri* to meditate and give their help in establishing the centre.

May all be happy. May all be peaceful. May all be liberated. 🙏

*Dharamagiri to Dharama ki, Gaṅga pravāhita hoyā;
jana-jana ka hove bhalā, jana-jana maṅgala hoyā.*

May the Ganges of Dhamma flow from *Dhamma Giri*,
bringing happiness to all, bringing blessings to all.

Hindi *doha* by Goenkaji

PURCHASE OF THE FIRST PIECE OF LAND

In December 1973, I attended my first Vipassana course at Deolali, near my home in Igatpuri. I found the course hard but rewarding. On the last day, I learned by chance that Goenkaji had been looking for a site for a meditation center near Bombay. The thought came to me that Igatpuri was the most suitable location for such a center. I was eager for the inexhaustible spring of Dhamma to well forth from the town where I lived. I went to Goenkaji and invited him to stop for tea at my house on his way back to Bombay after the course. I assured him that he would not be delayed more than five minutes, since my home stood by the side of the road that he must travel from Deolali to Bombay. My plan was, once he was in my home, to broach the subject of a site for a center.

At first, Goenkaji's reply was not encouraging. "If I stop at every house where I am invited along the way, how will I ever reach my home?" he asked. But in response to my urgent requests, he kindly accepted my invitation, only warning me, "See that the five minutes do not turn into five hours!"

I was filled with joy that my plan had worked so far, but also apprehensive that it might yet fail. In my anxiety, I wanted to set out at once for my home, lest Goenkaji should pass me on the way. He would be travelling by car, while I would have to take the bus or train, which were naturally much slower. It was now lunchtime. I went to the dining room to say goodbye to Mr Rangil Mehta, a fellow meditator who had given me a lift to the course. Hearing of my plan, he offered his assistance. "Let us have our lunch," he said. "Then we shall all go together in my car, and reach Igatpuri in no time."

All went as I had hoped. We were in plenty of time to welcome Goenkaji when his car arrived at Igatpuri. As we were drinking tea in my home, I requested that if he could spare the time now, I might show him a few possible sites for a meditation center near my town. He gave his consent, and with Mr Mehta, we set off to look at the properties.

The first one or two sites that I showed Goenkaji obviously did not meet with his approval. I asked for clearer guidelines about the kind of place that he had in mind. He told me, "I would like a site that is not in the midst of the town but not too remote either, where connections could easily be arranged for water, electricity, and telephone, and where access would not be too difficult." I immediately thought of showing him the land where *Dhamma Giri* now stands.

At that time, there was no proper road into the property, but Mr Mehta did not hesitate to risk his car on the rough, uneven track. We went as far as the car could take us, and then got out. Goenkaji looked closely all about him, and within just a few minutes, he decided that this was what he had been looking for. After millennia, the priceless jewel of Dhamma had found a casket in the land of its origin.

At that moment, someone pointed out a cremation taking place at the foot of the hill on which we stood. I was worried that the proximity of a cremation ground would make Goenkaji change his mind about the site. But he said with a smile, "Good! This will continually implant the awareness of *anicca* (impermanence) in the minds of meditators."

Then and there, Mr Mehta offered to purchase the property and donate it to the Trust. Before we left, he had

noted all the details in order to conclude the transaction speedily.

All of this took five hours—a long time for a cup of tea! Goenkaji was well justified in his suspicion that stopping at my house would take much more than five minutes.

That day, 16 December 1973, was the happiest day of my life. Since then I have practiced Vipassana faithfully and given whatever free time I have to serve the Dhamma so that many may experience the happiness of liberation. ❁

—Bhojraj Sancheti, Igatpuri

FIRST COURSE AT DHAMMA GIRI

Seventy-six old students attended the historic first course of four days at the Vipassana International Academy to make every particle of the land vibrate in Dhamma.

In a very short time the Vipassana International Academy was extensively repaired and all necessary facilities such as lighting, temporary meditation hall, dining tent and bathrooms were installed.

Naturally, there were numerous initial difficulties, which were quickly overcome. A tube-well was drilled, but at the last moment, it was found to be dry. Water for the course was brought by tankers.

The course, in severe heat, proved to be a gruelling but wonderful experience. Goenkaji meditated almost the whole time in the meditation hall with the meditators.

Goenkaji sent special *mettā* to all the creatures living on the land the night the first group *mettā* session was held. He announced that no creature, from now on, need fear for its life on this Dhamma land. No one would kill them or give orders for them to be killed.

During the course, Goenkaji carefully checked all sections of the land and selected the site for the first new buildings, which would house a kitchen and a large hall.

To make it clear that the Dhamma is a priceless gift, Goenkaji also announced a new arrangement for covering the cost of food and accommodation at the Academy. In future, students would not have to pay for their food and other expenses, but would donate according to their means and volition for the benefit of future students who would follow them at the Academy. In this way, their happiness at receiving the Dhamma will be shared with others, and the wheel of Dhamma will keep rolling for the benefit of all. The intention of this decision is to eliminate any trace of commercialism from Vipassana meditation centres. ❁

DHAMMA GIRI IN THE FIRST YEAR

"I arrived at *Dhamma Giri* in October 1976, a few days after its official opening. The first ten-day course was in progress and I was asked to help until the next course began. My first jobs were scraping whitewash off the tiles in the new bathroom and clearing a walking path around the Plateau of Peace. I was surprised by the place. I had thought I was coming to a centre that was fully, if newly, built. Instead, it seemed to me a raw, unfinished building site. Some structures were incomplete; all were surrounded by rubble and debris. Only a few trees and gardens had yet been planted.

"Still, the centre had a stark beauty. In the evening, while Goenkaji was giving the Hindi discourse in the

meditation hall (then located beside the dining room), I would sit outside and watch the shadows deepen on the surrounding hills. This was the first course at *Dhamma Giri*, and many people from the town wanted to come at least to hear the discourses. There was no room for them in the hall. So a loudspeaker was set up outside and carpets were put down near the mango tree in front of the gate. Each evening, fifty to a hundred people would come and sit there. They were simple people of all ages, in traditional Indian dress. They listened intently to Goenkaji's words as their ancestors had listened to the Buddha speak. Then they gathered up their sleeping children and in the darkness they hurried home.

...June brought the onset of monsoon. Courses stopped and only a handful of people remained at *Dhamma Giri*. Within a few days, the land was carpeted in fresh green, and on every side, the Hill of Dhamma was surrounded by flowing streams. At that time, it seemed to me a true island of peace, wrapped in mist and cut off from the world. Those of us who stayed took turns serving and doing self-courses. With Goenkaji's encouragement, we began to learn Pali. It was inspiring at last to understand the meaning of the chants that we had heard so often during courses. Every weekend Goenkaji would come to visit *Dhamma Giri* and attend our class. He seemed as delighted with our progress as we were. For hours he would explain Dhamma to us or tell us stories of his experiences in Myanmar.

Those early days at *Dhamma Giri* remain unforgettable to me. In them so many seeds were planted that were to come to fruition in later years.

When I return each year to V.I.A., it is the trees that convey most vividly the change in the place. I remember one morning during the monsoon of 1977, when a hundred silver oak seedlings lay in a little pile under the mango tree outside the office. Today those seedlings are each twenty feet tall and form the border of the Plateau of Peace. I remember when the trees along the drive from the gate to the old bungalows barely reached my shoulder. I remember when I first came, that the Burmese Bodhi tree in the central garden between the men's dormitories was so weak that it drooped from a stake. Now its trunk is thick and straight, its roots deep, its branches thick, giving pleasant shade—a visible symbol of the growth of *Dhamma Giri*. ❁

—Bill Hart, Canada

THE GROWTH OF DHAMMA GIRI

Once the newly opened Academy was functioning smoothly, it was possible to think of further expansion. The first priority was to improve the meditation facilities by providing cells where students could work in seclusion. Accordingly, construction of a meditation pagoda began on the Plateau of Peace in 1978. Dozens of meditators from the west came to *Dhamma Giri* specifically to participate in this project. They worked alongside Indians as carpenters, masons, electricians, and general labourers, often under difficult conditions. With their help, the first stage of the pagoda was inaugurated in March 1979.

Initially meditators often had to share cells, since in its first stage the pagoda contained only thirty-two. Sometimes as many as six or seven people sat together in one cell.

Each year more cells were added. In 1980, a large meditation hall was built next to the pagoda. At the same time the residential facilities were expanded and improved. After a few years, a second meditation hall was added and extensive tree planting was undertaken to create a green zone around the perimeter of *Dhamma Giri*. The original hall has been expanded and six more rings of cells have been added to the cell complex. In the early 1990's, an outer ring of thirty-two cells was built on the upper level. This served as a base for a larger hollow pagoda, within which the original pagoda remains intact. This magnificent Myanmar-style structure rises sixty feet above the second level of cells. At present, there are more than 350 cells in the pagoda, comfortable accommodation for more than 700 students, living quarters for Dhamma servers and kitchen staff in addition to a bookstore, carpentry and maintenance offices etc. There are separate meditation halls for males and females on a ten-day course or for two different types of courses held simultaneously. A large kitchen complex, which was originally run by a couple of cooks with a few pots and pans, now uses modern appliances and caters to over 900 people daily.

Continuous gardening, landscaping and tree planting have transformed the site. Thousands of trees and shrubs have been planted, and more are being planted all the time. What began as a dry, barren, scrubby hill has now become a lush garden of trees and flowering shrubs, which gives food and shelter to numerous birds as well as shade, delight and protection to the meditators.

Adjoining the meditation centre is the Vipassana Research Institute, which was established in 1986 to conduct research into the *pariyatti* (theory) and *paṭipatti* (practice) of the Buddha's teaching.

On the adjacent land to the east of *Dhamma Giri*, Sayagi U Ba Khin village is quickly taking shape, where meditators will be able to live in a conducive Dhammic atmosphere.

Dhamma Tapovana, to the west of *Dhamma Giri*, is the first centre built exclusively for long courses. The second phase of construction has now been completed with 100 single accommodation units ready for use. Work on cells was recently completed, and expansion of the dining hall and toilet blocks has been completed. The new units were recently used in a 20-day course; the first combined male and female long course at *Dhamma Tapovana*. A 45-day course, the first outside *Dhamma Giri*, was held there in July and August 2001. The first ever 60-day course conducted by Goenkaji will be held in *Dhamma Tapovana* from 2 January 2002. The course is open to teachers and senior assistant teachers who have sat two 45-day courses.

But, the most important development has not been in bricks and mortar. Year by year, the meditation atmosphere has strengthened at *Dhamma Giri*. As soon as it was possible to provide students with the facilities to live and meditate in seclusion, Goenkaji began to conduct thirty-day courses at *Dhamma Giri*. Those who come here have the opportunity to practise seriously and intensively in a highly supportive environment, and so, to take further steps along the path to liberation.

Today, this centre is a wonderful example of what can be done with hard work and with Dhamma. To meditators around the world, it gives support and inspiration for the practice of Vipassana meditation. ❁

CHILDREN COURSE IN MUMBAI

A one-day Anapana course for children has been arranged in Mumbai from 8:30 a.m. to 3:00 p.m. on 23 December 2001 at Seth Moti Pachan Rashtriya School, Near Lion's Club and Vaze School, Vithalbhai Patel Road, Mulund (West), Mumbai 400080. **Eligibility:** XIII, IX and X class students. **Registration:** on 20 and 21 December on Tel: (022) 8324820, 8071335 or 2812416. (Please do not come for the courses without registration. Please bring your own cushion.)

FIRST VIPASSANA COURSE IN SOLAPUR

The first ten-day Vipassana course was successfully organised at Suyash Gurukul, Solapur from 18 to 29 October 2001. Fifty-three students, 29 male and 24 female students, completed the course. The organisers plan to conduct at least one ten-day course every year besides organising group sittings and children's courses. For more details, contact: Mr Keshav Shinde, Tel: Off. 300801; Res. 316262.

GOENKAJI'S DISCOURSES ON TELEVISION

Goenkaji's discourses in Hindi are being broadcast on Aastha TV channel daily at 5:00 p.m.

DHAMMA GIRI WEBSITE

This website <www.vri.dhamma.org> contains information about Vipassana, *Dhamma Giri*, VRI, Goenkaji's Itinerary, Latest Developments in spread of Dhamma, Vipassana Centres in India, Questions & Answers, VRI English Newsletters, Dhamma Discourses, Information about *Chaittha Saṅgāyana* CD-ROM, Vipassana Seminars, VRI Publications, Updated schedule of courses including one day courses and group sittings in India as well as centre addresses, and updated information on *Dhamma Pattana*, *Dhamma Tapovana*, and Sayagi U Ba Khin Vipassana Village.

NEW RESPONSIBILITIES

Ācāryas: Mr Daryush Nowzohour: *To serve Iran*

Senior Assistant Teachers

1. Mr Ashok & Mrs Vaishali Ghirnikar
2. Mr Laxminarayan Khemka
3. Mr N Y Lokhande
4. Mrs Sudha Tyagi
5. Dr Maung Maung
6. Mr Klaus & Mrs Edith Nothnagel
7. Mr Steve Rann
8. Dr Gerhard Scholz
9. Mr Mien Tan
10. Ms Mona Mylne

NEW APPOINTMENTS

Assistant Teachers

1. Mrs Urmila Devi Airon, *Ajmer*
2. Mr Shankar Doraiswamy, *Goa*
3. Mr Hari Prasad Gupta, *Kota*
4. Mrs Renu Khanna, *Jaipur*
5. Mrs Krishna Kumari Kurup, *Chennai*
6. Mrs Geeta Maheshwari, *Jaipur*
7. Mr Sudhir Pai, *Dhamma Giri*
8. Dr (Ms) Shantuben Patel, *Bhuj*
9. Mr Satyanarayan Sharma, *Ratlam*
10. Mr Sita Ram Sharma, *Jaipur*
11. Mr George Hsiao, *Taiwan*
12. Ms Maria Pilar de Castro, *Spain*

Children Course Teachers

1. Mr Sudesh Leal, *Dhamma Giri*
2. Dr S. Surya Chandra Rao, *Dhamma Giri*
3. Mr Anand Kulkarni, *Dhamma Giri*
4. Mr Abhay Shah, *Pune*
5. Mrs Vinod Chadda, *Pune*
6. Mrs Rekha Machindra Kolpe, *Kolpewadi*
7. Dr Sangram Jondhale, *Nanded*
8. Mr Ashok Dattatray Patel, *Dhule*
9. Mr Uttam Jagan Gangurde, *Manmad*
10. Mr Diksharth Ahire, *Manmad*
11. Mrs Vidya Diksharth Ahire, *Manmad*
12. Ms Apurwa Yagnik, *Jaipur*
13. Mrs Geeta Maheshwari, *Jaipur*
14. Mr Jagdish Lal Gupta, *Tonk, Rajasthan*
15. Mr Madan Mohan Gautam, *Mathura*
16. Mr Anil Kumar Maurya, *Bhadoli (U.P)*
17. Ms Geeta Singh, *Lucknow*
18. Mr Vijay Jethani, *Indore*
19. Mrs Laxmi Vijay Jethani, *Indore*
20. Mr Pralhad N. Choudhary, *Indore*
21. Mrs Sangeeta Pralhad Choudhary, *Indore*
22. Mr Avadhut G. Gokhale, *Indore*
23. Mr Pradeepkumar N. Vaja, *Mandvi*
24. Ms Kashmira Soni, *Mandvi*
25. Mr K Subramaniam, *Coimbatore*
26. Mr A. Subramanian, *Kalpakkam*
27. Mr Jay Prakash Goenka, *Dubai*
28. Mrs Renu J. Goenka, *Dubai*
29. Mr Hittatiye L. Wimalasiri Premratne, *Sultanate of Oman*
30. Mr Jitendra N. Dave, *Sultanate of Oman*
31. Mrs Juliet Hardiker, *U.K.*
32. Mrs Shu Xiang Quintero, *USA*
33. Ms Anita Comelo, *USA*
34. Mr Roy Menezes, *USA*
35. Ms Suleka Puswella, *USA*

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Edited and published by R. P. Yadav for VRI, Igatpuri 422 403 and printed at Akshar Chitra Press, 69B-Road, Satpur, Nashik 422007.

30 November 2001

Posted at Igatpuri, Dist. Nashik

Posting Day: *Purnima* of every month

POSTAL CLAUSE NO. 232 REG. NO. 49916/90
LICENSED TO POST WITHOUT PREPAYMENT OF POSTAGE
POSTAL REG. NO. AR/NSK 39/2001

PRINTED MATTER

If undelivered, please return to:
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Dist. Nashik, Maharashtra, India.
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