

Vipassana Newsletter

In the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin,

as taught by S. N. Goenka

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WORDS OF DHAMMA

yo ca pubbe pamajjitv±, pacch± so nappamajjati; One who was heedless before and afterwards is not;
soma½ loka½ pabh±seti, abbh± muttova candim±. such a one illumines this world like the moon freed from clouds.

—Dhammapada 172

WHY VEDANĀ AND WHAT IS VEDANĀ

by S. N. Goenka

Dhamma eradicates suffering and gives happiness. Who gives this happiness? It is not the Buddha but the Dhamma, the knowledge of anicca (impermanence) within the body, which gives this happiness. That is why you must meditate and be aware of anicca continually.

—Sayagyi U Ba Khin

I remember the first time I met Sayagyi U Ba Khin. I had gone with great attachment to my beliefs and misgivings about the teaching of the Buddha. Sayagyi knew that I was a leader of the local Indian Hindu community. He asked me, "Do you Hindus have any objection to *s²la*—a life of morality, to *sam±dhi*—mastery over the mind and to *paññ±*—wisdom to purify the mind?" How could I object! How could anybody object! He continued, "Well, this is what the Buddha taught. This is all I am interested in and this is all that I am going to teach you." Sayagyi's interpretation of Dhamma was universal and non-sectarian. He had no problem in my being a Hindu.

My first Vipassana course introduced me to the teachings of the Buddha and transformed my life forever. I was pulled like a magnet to his logical, practical, pragmatic, universal and non-sectarian teaching. There was nothing objectionable in it. I had been hearing about and talking about the eradication of defilements and the purification of mind. When I started observing sensations, initially there were moments of doubt, "How is this going to help me?" But soon I realized that by observing sensations I am going to the root of the defilements. I was actually walking towards the goal of full liberation. Whatever Sayagyi taught me was not merely to develop faith or to satisfy the intellect, though both are important. He taught me the way to know the truth at the experiential level. If anybody had tried to convince me about the teachings of the Buddha by intellectual discussion, logic or argument I would not have been convinced as I was fully satisfied with my own beliefs. What convinced me and gave me here-and-now results was the experience of the truth through bodily sensations. This tangible tool gave me the confidence that I could indeed become *sthitaprajña* (*ñhitapañño*) which is the cherished goal of every Hindu.

The more I practised the more I was convinced that the Buddha was the foremost scientist of mind and matter; the foremost analyst of the truth about suffering and its eradication. And what makes him a peerless scientist is the discovery that *ta°h±* (*taññ±*, craving) arises in response to *vedan±*. I had studied the teachings of the Indian spiritual teachers before and after the Buddha who also accept *ta°h±* as the cause of misery, but for them *ta°h±* arises because of the sense objects only. They miss the most important link: not one of them discusses *vedan±* and its relation to *ta°h±*. They always pronounce sense objects to be the cause of *ta°h±*. *Ta°h±* is craving. Craving for continuing or acquiring that which is pleasant and craving to get rid of or repelling that which is unpleasant. Therefore *ta°h±* actually means both craving and aversion.

The discovery of the Buddha that the real cause of *ta°h±* lies in *vedan±* is the unparalleled gift of the Buddha to humanity. With this one discovery he gave us the key to open the door of liberation within ourselves. Others proclaimed *saññatana paccay± ta°h±*; the Buddha discovered and disclosed that *vedan± paccay± ta°h±*, which means that defilements arise at the level of *vedan±* and in response to *vedan±*. It is logical that if *ta°h±* arises in response to *vedan±*, any endeavour to reach the root of *ta°h±* and to eradicate *ta°h±* must include the understanding of *vedan±*, the experience of it and the knowledge of how it causes craving and aversion, and the wisdom to know how it can be used for the eradication of *ta°h±*.

Sam±hito sampaj±no, sato Buddhassa s±vako;
vedan± ca paj±n±ti, vedan±nañca sambhava½.
Yattha cet± nirujjhanti, maggañca khayag±mina½;
vedan±na½ khay± bhikkhu, nicch±to parinibbuto 'ti.¹

A follower of the Buddha, with concentration, awareness and constant thorough understanding of impermanence, knows with wisdom the sensations, their arising, their cessation and the path leading to their end.

A meditator who has reached the end (has experienced the entire range) of sensations (and has gone beyond) is freed from craving, is fully liberated.

This is why the Buddha practised and taught the meditation of awareness of mind and matter (*n±ma* and

r³pa). *R³pa* includes *k_±ya* (body); and *vedan_±* is felt on *k_±ya*. *N_±ma* includes *citta* (consciousness) and the *dhammas* (mental concomitants) arising on it. *Vedan_±* is also a *cetasika* (mental concomitant). When the Buddha says, *sabbe dhamm_± vedan_± samosara^o_±*, it means that the experience of all mental concomitants includes and is inseparable from *vedan_±*. Hence, according to my understanding of the teaching of the Buddha, not only do *k_±y_±nupassan_±* and *vedan_±nupassan_±* involve the awareness of *vedan_±* but *vedan_±* also forms an integral part of *dhamm_±nupassan_±* and *citt_±nupassan_±*. A meditator, whether practising *k_±y_±nupassan_±* or *vedan_±nupassan_±* or *citt_±nupassan_±* or *dhamm_±nupassan_±*, continues to be aware of *vedan_±*. He realizes the phenomenon of arising (*samudayadhamm_±nupass^ā*) and the phenomenon of passing away (*vayadhamm_±nupass^ā*) by maintaining awareness of *vedan_±* with the understanding of its impermanent nature. Thus, he does not allow *ta^oh_±* to arise in response to *vedan_±*: He responds neither with *ta^oh_±* of craving towards a pleasant sensation nor with *ta^oh_±* of aversion towards an unpleasant sensation. A meditator maintains *upekkh_±* (equanimity) based on understanding of *anicca* (impermanence).

My journey within clearly showed me that a behaviour pattern is formed in the darkness of ignorance where one keeps reacting with craving and aversion, knowingly or unknowingly, towards bodily sensations. Thus, one becomes a slave of one's behaviour pattern and keeps reacting to sensations at the deepest level. The *anusaya kilesa* are sleeping volcanos, the latent behaviour patterns, of blind reaction to sensations. The Buddha's discovery helps a meditator to come out of this blind behaviour pattern. Among the many meditation techniques of India and other parts of the world that I have come across or have heard about, there is none that goes to the root cause of the defilements of craving and aversion and eradicates them. In no other technique is the way to eradicate even the latent tendencies of craving, aversion and ignorance so clearly spelled out. "*Sukh_±ya, bhikkhave, vedan_±ya r_±g_±nusayo pah_±tabbo, dukkh_±ya vedan_±ya pajigh_±nusayo pah_±tabbo, adukkhamasukh_±ya vedan_±ya avijj_±nusayo pah_±tabbo.*"² Eradicate the latent tendency of craving using pleasant sensations (by equanimous observation of the pleasant sensations understanding their changing nature), eradicate latent tendency of aversion using unpleasant sensations and eradicate the latent tendency of ignorance using neutral sensations. I realized this to be a unique contribution of the Buddha to humanity.

The question that arises now is what do we call *vedan_±*? It is clear from the words of the Buddha that *vedan_±* is one of the four aggregates of *mind* (*saññ_±*, *sa^akh_±ra* and *viññ_±^oa* being the other three) and that it plays a vital role in liberation from misery. The Buddha gave importance to the *vedan_±* that one feels on the body. The *vedan_±* that one feels on the body is experienced by the *vedan_± khandha* (feeling aggregate) of *n_±ma*, rather, it is the *vedan_± khandha* of *n_±ma*. *R³pa* (matter) in itself cannot experience sensations arising on it. For the meditation of liberation from misery, bodily sensations are important. This does not mean that mental feeling (*somanassa* and *domanassa*) is to be ignored; it continues simultaneously.

The tradition in which I drank the nectar of benevolent Dhamma that liberates one from all misery is called the tradition of Ledi Sayadaw, which is actually the

tradition of the Buddha. This tradition gives all importance to the sensations that one feels on the body. When I took my first course at the feet of Sayagyi U Ba Khin, I was extremely attracted to this unique aspect of meditation. My first Vipassana course showed me that mere intellectual knowledge of the impermanent nature of mind and matter phenomenon can purify only the intellect to some extent. It does not change us at the depth of the mind where we remain slaves of our behaviour patterns and keep on reacting in utter ignorance.

I benefited so much from this technique of meditation that I started reading the words of the Buddha in accordance with my teacher's advice. I was also curious to find out why India lost this noble teaching. I had been told from childhood that the Buddha incorporated good points from our tradition in his teaching and then added delusion to it, and had not discovered anything new. My experience turned out to be contrary to this belief. I found the Buddha's teaching to be very beneficial. This led to a further exploration to find the truth about these statements. Reading the words of the Buddha (*Tipiṭṭaka*) gave me so much joy! How wrong my earlier information turned out to be! It showed how the Buddha's emphasis was on actual experience of the truth. How could a teaching so firmly grounded in reality lead to delusions? I could detect no trace of falsehood on this path. The words *bh_±vito bahul²kato*—know with your own experience and thus gain and multiply knowledge occurs many times in *Tipiṭṭaka*. The Buddha said again and again, "*j_±na, passa*"—know thyself, with your own experience. The actual experience of the truth, as it is, ensures that there are no illusions or delusions, no imagination or any blind beliefs on this path. The words of the Buddha also confirmed my experience that the physical, bodily sensations are of utmost importance to the art of liberation from all suffering.

While describing *dukkha* it is said, "*Katamañca, bhikkhave, dukkha^½? Ya^½ kho, bhikkhave, k_±yika^½ dukkha^½ k_±yika^½ as_±ta^½ k_±yasamphassaja^½ dukkha^½ as_±ta^½ vedayita^½, ida^½ vuccati, bhikkhave, dukkha^½.*"³

"What now, O monks, is pain? If there is, O monks, any kind of bodily pain, any kind of bodily unpleasantness or any kind of painful or unpleasant feeling as a result of bodily contact—this, O monks, is called pain."

And while describing *domanassa* it is said, "*Katamañca, bhikkhave, domanassa^½? Ya^½ kho, bhikkhave, cetasika^½ dukkha^½ cetasika^½ as_±ta^½ manosamphassaja^½ dukkha^½ as_±ta^½ vedayita^½, ida^½ vuccati, bhikkhave, domanassa^½.*"⁴

"What now, O monks, is grief? If there is, O monks, any kind of mental pain, any kind of mental unpleasantness or any kind of painful or unpleasant feeling as a result of mental contact—this, O monks, is called grief."

This again makes it clear that when the Buddha describes *dukkha vedan_±*, he is talking about bodily sensations.

The Buddha says in the *Satipaṭṭh_±na Sutta*: *¾t_±p² sampaj_±no satim_±*.

¾t_±p² and *satim_±* are simple to understand but I had to search for the meaning of *sampaj_±no*. I found that it was clearly defined: *Sampajañña* is continuous clear comprehension and thorough understanding of the impermanent nature of the physical and mental structure (particularly *vedan_±*). *Vedan_±* is felt on the body but it is part of the mind and its observation means the observation of the mind and matter phenomenon.

Kathaṇḍika, bhikkhave, bhikkhu sampaj±no hoti? Idha, bhikkhave, bhikkhuno vidit± vedan± uppajjanti, vidit± upajjhahanti, vidit± abbattha½ gacchanti. Vidit± vitakk± uppajjanti, vidit± upajjhahanti, vidit± abbattha½ gacchanti. Vidit± saññ± uppajjanti, vidit± upajjhahanti, vidit± abbattha½ gacchanti. Eva½ kho, bhikkhave, bhikkhu sampaj±no hoti. Sato, bhikkhave, bhikkhu vihareyya sampaj±no. Aya½ vo amh±ka½ anus±san²ti.⁵

And how, O monks, does a monk understand thoroughly? Here, monks, a monk knows sensations arising in him, knows their persisting, and knows their passing away; he knows each initial application of the mind on an object arising in him, knows its persisting and knows its passing away; he knows perceptions arising in him, knows their persisting, and knows their passing away. This, meditators, is how a meditator understands thoroughly. A monk should abide mindful and composed. This is our instruction to you.

The words of the Buddha also clarify that *vedan±* indicates sensations on the body:

Yath±pi v±t± ±k±se, v±yanti vividh± puth³; puratthim± pacchim± c±pi, uttar± atha dakkhi^o±. Saraj± araj± capi, s²t± u^oh± ca ekad±; adhimatt± paritt± ca, puth³ v±yanti m±lut±. Tathevimsami½ k±yasmi½, samuppajjanti vedan±; suhadukkhassamuppatti, adukkhamasukh± ca y±. Yato ca bhikkhu ±t±p², sampajañña½ na riñcati; tato so vedan± sabb±, pariññ±ti pa^oito. So vedan± pariññ±ya, dijjhe dhamme an±savo; k±yassa bhed± dhammajjho, sa^akhyā½ nopeti vedag³ti.⁶

Through the sky blow many different winds, from east and west, from north and south, dust-laden and dustless, cold as well as hot, fierce gales and gentle breezes—many winds blow. In the same way, in this body, sensations arise, pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral. When a *bhikkhu*, practising ardently, does not neglect his faculty of thorough understanding, then such a wise person fully comprehends all sensations. And having fully comprehended them, within this very life he becomes freed from all impurities. At his life's end, such a person, being established in Dhamma and understanding sensations perfectly, attains the indescribable stage.

Similarly emphasising the fact that *vedan±* manifests in the body, he said—

Seyyath±pi, bhikkhave, ±gantuk±g±ra½, tattha puratthim±yapi dis±ya... pacchim±yapi dis±ya... uttar±yapi dis±ya... dakkhi^o±yapi dis±ya ±gantv± v±sa½ kappenti. Khattiy±pi... br±hma^o±pi... vess±pi... sudd±pi ±gantv± v±sa½ kappenti. Evameva kho, bhikkhave, imasmi½ k±yasmi½ vividh± vedan± uppajjanti. Sukh±pi... dukkh±pi... adukkhamasukh±pi vedan± uppajjati. S±mis±pi sukh±... s±mis±pi dukkh±... s±mis±pi adukkhamasukh± vedan± uppajjati. Nir±mis±pi sukh±... nir±mis±pi dukkh±... nir±mis±pi adukkhamasukh± vedan± uppajjat²ti.⁷

Suppose, meditators, there is a public guest-house. People from the east, west, north, and south come and dwell there. People who are *Kshatriyas*, *Brahmins*, *Vaishya* and *Shudras* come and dwell there. In the same way, meditators, various sensations arise in this body, pleasant sensations, unpleasant sensations and neutral sensations arise. Pleasant sensations with attachment, unpleasant sensations with attachment, and neutral sensations with attachment arise. Likewise arise pleasant, unpleasant, and neutral sensations without attachment.

I needed no further proof that the Buddha was referring to the physical, bodily sensations when he described *vedan±*! Not only did these exhortations of the Buddha clear all my doubts, they also made me feel as if the Buddha himself was instructing me to give importance to the bodily sensations.

My revered teacher used to chant *Tikapajjh±na* regularly. I found it very inspiring. The study of *Tikapajjh±na* reveals the clear and explicit guidance from the Buddha that bodily sensations (*k±yika½ sukha½* and *k±yika½ dukkha½*) are the nearest strongly dependent relations to the attainment of *nibb±na*.

Pakat³panissayo—k±yika½ sukha½ k±yikassa sukhassa, k±yikassa dukkhassa, phalassam±pattiy± upanissayapaccayena paccayo. K±yika½ dukkha½ k±yikassa sukhassa, k±yikassa dukkhassa, phalassam±pattiy± upanissayapaccayena paccayo.⁸

Pleasant bodily sensation is the cause for the arising of pleasant sensation of the body, unpleasant sensation of the body, and attainment of fruition (*nibb±na*) in relation to the strong dependent condition. Unpleasant bodily sensation is the cause for the arising of pleasant sensation of the body, unpleasant sensation of the body, and attainment of fruition (*nibb±na*) in relation to the strong dependent condition.

And,

Pakat³panissayo—k±yika½ sukha½ upaniss±ya... vipassana½ upp±deti, magga½ upp±deti, abhiñña½ upp±deti, sam±patti½ upp±deti.⁹

Dependent on pleasant bodily sensations... Vipassana arises... Path arises... Knowledge arises... attainment of (*nibb±na*) arises.

Some of my friends insisted that *vedan±* is a part of *n±ma* and hence it has no relation to the bodily sensations. Differences of opinion may exist. But for me the entire *Tipiṭṭaka* bears testimony to the fact that the bodily sensations are as much part of *vedan±* as mental feelings; rather, bodily sensations are much more important in the Buddha's teaching. The *Pajjh±na* gave an added incontrovertible proof that bodily sensations are of utmost importance on the path of liberation. I have immensely benefited from this and I continue to teach Vipassana as I learnt it from my revered teacher, giving importance to bodily sensations.

Somanassa and *domanassa* are used for pleasant and unpleasant mental feelings respectively. *Sukha* and *dukkha* are used in the broader sense of happiness and misery but he also used them in the specific sense of bodily pleasant and unpleasant feelings.

Tisso im±, bhikkhave, vedan±. Katam± tisso? Sukh± vedan±, dukkh± vedan±, adukkhamasukh± vedan±. Im± kho, bhikkhave, tisso vedan±.¹⁰

There are these three types of bodily sensations. What are the three? Pleasant sensations, unpleasant sensations and sensations that are neutral (neither pleasant nor unpleasant).

The Buddha always enumerated three types of *vedan±* in the manner mentioned above. He included *somanassindriya½* and *domanassindriya½* only when he enumerated five types of *vedan±*. This indicates the primacy of bodily sensations over mental feelings in the Buddha's teaching.

Katam± ca, bhikkhave, tisso vedan±? Sukh± vedan±, dukkh± vedan±, adukkhamasukh± vedan±—im± vuccanti, bhikkhave, tisso vedan±. Katam± ca, bhikkhave, pañca

vedan±? *Sukhindriya½,* *dukkhindriya½,*
somanassindriya½, domanassindriya½, upekkhindriya½—
*im± vuccanti, bhikkhave, pañca vedan±.*¹¹

The Buddha has qualified *vedan±* by *sukha vedan±* and *dukkha vedan±* when he talks about the *satipajjh±nas* but never *somanassa vedan±* or *domanassa vedan±* in the context of *sampajañña* or *satipajjh±nas*. In the entire *Tiṭṭhaka* there are only about a dozen places where *vedan±* occurs together with *somanassa* but there are hundreds of places where *sukha* or *dukkha vedan±* is used, particularly in the context of meditation of *satipajjh±na*. Thus, it is clear that *vedan±* as a part of the *n±ma* that is firmly rooted in *k±ya* is what the Buddha wanted us to focus on when he talked about meditation to eradicate suffering.

This is also the reason why *brahmas* from *ar³pabrahmaloka* cannot practise Vipassana and why the Buddha could not give Dhamma to his past teachers of *ar³pa jh±n±s* (seventh and eighth *jh±n±s/dhy±nas*). In the fifth to eighth *jh±n±s* the mind is set free from the body and thus there is no experience of *vedan±*. Therefore, these *brahmas* lack *r³pa* and cannot experience body-sensations. Hence, the practice of the awareness of *vedan±* is not possible for them and they cannot walk on the path of liberation.

It is noteworthy that in practising *sam±dhi*, *somanassa* and *domanassa* disappear in the third *jh±na* but *sukh±* and *dukkh± vedan±* disappear only in the fourth *jh±na*. *Adukkhamasukh± vedan±* remains even in the fourth *jh±na*. From this, one may reasonably conclude that bodily sensations give us a stronger and more continuous hold on reality, and thus, on the root cause of *ta°h±*. One can clearly comprehend sensations and they offer a tangible tool to attain one's own salvation.

I learnt this from my own experience using the technique taught by my teacher. With this background, the words of the Buddha were so convincing and heartening. This path has given so much joy to me. On my teacher's injunction, I started sharing this technique with others, in India and around the world. When I share this technique of liberation with my students, I find that they also benefit by working with sensations and understanding their true nature. The clear, practical and result-oriented teaching of the Buddha inspires so much trust and confidence in me. It leaves no scope for any imagination or blind faith.

Every now and then, someone comes and argues with me as to why I give so much importance to bodily sensations. Very humbly I request him or her to come and

give a trial to Vipassana meditation, to experience and examine whether it is in accordance with the Buddha's teaching.

Let there be no doubt about the technique. I invite you: Let us all walk on the path shown to us by the Buddha, the greatest scientist of mind and matter, the greatest physician of mind the world has ever produced. Let our philosophical beliefs not become an obstacle for us. Let us make use of the Buddha's discovery that *vedan±* is the tool that will liberate us from our misery.

May all be happy, peaceful and liberated. ☺

Notes: (All references from VRI edition)

1. *Sa½yutta Nik±ya* 2.4.249. 2. *Sa½yutta Nik±ya* 2.4.251. 3. *D²gha Nik±ya* 2.393. 4. *D²gha Nik±ya* 2.394. 5. *Sa½yutta Nik±ya* 3.5.401. 6. *Sa½yutta Nik±ya* 2.4.260. 7. *Sa½yutta Nik±ya* 2.4.262. 8. *Pajjh±na* 1.1.423. 9. *Pajjh±na* 1.1.423. 10. *Sa½yutta Nik±ya* 2.4.250. 11. *Sa½yutta Nik±ya* 2.4.270.

SPECIAL VIPASSANA WORKSHOPS

There is increasing awareness among educationists all over the world that the modern education system is unable to respond to the most crucial purpose of education: character building through inculcation of universal human values. The Ministry of Human Resource Development, Government of India has recently initiated a number of concrete steps in this direction and is encouraging educational institutions to start suitable programmes to fulfil this need.

Vipassana meditation, a scientific technique of purification of mind through self-observation, is ideally suited for this purpose. It is non-dogmatic, free from all rites and rituals, is universally acceptable and shows results within a short period of practice. Last year, a workshop on "Value Inculcation through Vipassana" was organized at the Pune Vipassana Centre for school and college teachers. The feedback from the workshop was highly encouraging, and so, another such workshop is being planned this year from 8 June (10 a.m.) to 22 June (5 p.m.) at Logicstat farm, Cattarpur Mandir Road, Bhati Village, Radhaswami Satsang Phase 4, New Delhi-110 030. (Tel: 011-6452772, Fax: 6473528, e-mail: dhammasota@samparkonline.com)

This workshop is exclusively for school and college teachers. It will begin with a discussion on some of the key issues facing "Value Education". A brief introduction to Vipassana will be given and how it can help in actual value inculcation process will be theoretically explained. These discussions will be followed by a ten-day Vipassana meditation course from the evening of 8th June to the morning of 19th June to enable the teachers to experience for themselves the salutary effects of its practice. The discussions on the theoretical aspects of Value education will be resumed in the afternoon on 19th June. There will be regular meditation sessions and, sessions of serving joyfully along with discussion on how to integrate the practice in day-to-day life how to handle value conflicts, and common apprehensions about value education. A demonstration of how Anapana can be taught to children would be given on 22 June morning and the workshop would conclude by 5pm on 22 June.

Concurrently, a workshop will also be organized for Assistant Teachers of Vipassana from 19 June (10 a.m.) to 23 June (5 p.m.) to enable them to conduct such workshops independently in future so that more and more teachers of the country can be exposed to the possibility of integrating Vipassana in educational institutions.

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