

Vipassana Newsletter

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

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WORDS OF DHAMMA

*Patirūpadesavāso ca,
pubbe ca katapuññatā;
atta-sammāpaṇidhi ca—
etaṃ maṅgalamuttamaṃ.*

A suitable place of abode,
The merit of past good deeds,
Right aspirations for oneself—
This is the highest blessing.

—*Khuddaka pāṭha 5.4, Mangala Sutta*

The Universal Appeal of the Buddha Dhamma : A Personal Experience

S. N. Goenka

(The following is adapted from the lecture given by Goenkaji at the Fourth World Buddhist Summit, Yangon, Myanmar on 10 December 2004.)

Most Venerable Sangha and Dhamma friends:

Let me first thank the organizers of this conference for kindly inviting me. I would also like to congratulate the organizers for choosing Myanmar as the host for the Fourth World Buddhist Summit that aims at uniting the followers of the Buddha in order to spread the peaceful message of the Buddha all over the world. We unite and make a collective effort not to dominate the world, not to exploit the world, not to boost the supremacy of one religion over another but to help in a great conversion of humanity—conversion from bondage to liberation, from cruelty to compassion, from discord to concord, from misery to happiness. This is the Buddha's way. The Buddha spread the message of peace and harmony. Emperor Asoka helped to disseminate it further in many countries. And today, I am happy to see the World Buddhist Summit is working in the same direction for the benefit of many.

It may seem that there are many divisions of the followers of the Buddha but the differences are superficial. All these branches follow the same basic principles of the Four Noble Truths including the Noble Eightfold Path and the *Paṭiccasamuppāda*, the Chain of Conditioned Arising. I am very happy that this effort is getting a new impetus in this Summit in Myanmar.

Myanmar is my motherland. I was born here. In some families, as in my family, it was a tradition to bury the umbilical cord in the ground of the building

where one is born. My umbilical cord is buried here in the soil of Myanmar. A part of me will always remain in the soil of Myanmar. It is not my motherland just because a part of my physical being has become one with the soil of Myanmar—it is also my spiritual motherland. Myanmar gave me two births. The second birth is more important for me because I got Dhamma here. As the bird has got two births: one birth coming out of the mother's womb and the second birth coming out of the shell of the egg. So my mother gave me the first birth and Sayagyi U Ba Khin gave me the second birth—I received Dhamma, broke the shell of ignorance and a new Goenka came out of it.

This is such a powerful Dhamma land that it attracted me to the Saddhamma in spite of my upbringing, which was totally opposed to the Buddha's teaching. Throughout my childhood and early adulthood, it was drilled into me that one may worship the Buddha but one must stay away from his teaching. I was told that the Buddha's teaching was deceptive and leads to hell!

How could I come to Saddhamma in spite of such deep prejudices? What attracted me to the Buddha Dhamma?

I remember the first time I met my teacher Sayagyi U Ba Khin. I had great attachment to my beliefs. I had many 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 *sīla*—a life of morality, to *samādhi*—mastery over the mind and to *paññā*—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.” How can anyone have objection to *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*? Years later, when I started teaching Dhamma to those who came from diverse religious backgrounds, I used the same way as Sayagyi to explain Dhamma to them.

Sayagyi’s interpretation of Dhamma was universal and non-sectarian. He was not interested in converting me to “Buddhism”. He used to say, “For me, if someone follows *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*, for all practical purposes, he or she is a Buddhist”. And if a Buddhist doesn’t practice *sīla*, *samādhi* and *paññā*, I feel sorry for him or her!

My first Vipassana course introduced me to the teachings of the Buddha and transformed my life forever. His logical, practical, pragmatic, universal and non-sectarian teaching pulled me like a magnet. There was nothing objectionable in it. I had been hearing about and talking about the eradication of defilements and purification of mind. When I started observing sensations, initially there were moments of doubt, “How is this going to help me?” But very soon I realised that by observing sensations, I am working at the root of the problem. I was actually walking towards the goal of full liberation. Whatever Sayagyi taught me was not merely to develop devotion or to satisfy the intellect though both are important. He taught me the way to know the truth at the experiential level. What convinced me and gave me results here and now was the experience of the truth through bodily sensations. The Buddha’s teaching is *akālika*.

I feel very fortunate that I was born in this land of Dhamma. I feel very fortunate that I came in contact with Sayagyi U Ba Khin. Here was a person who had the technique in its pristine purity. Sayagyi was a saintly person who taught with great compassion without expecting anything in return.

Now the same teaching is attracting people from all over the world. Vipassana courses have been held in about 70 countries and people from more than 130 countries have participated in the courses. Why are people from all over the world getting attracted to the Buddha Dhamma?

The teaching of the Enlightened One is so simple and yet so deep. He has explained his teachings in a few words:

Sabbapāpassa akaraṇaṃ, kusalassa upasampadā;

Sacittapariyodapanam, etaṃ buddhāna sāsanaṃ.

(*Dīgha Nikāya, II, Mahāpadānāsutta*)

Etaṃ buddhāna sāsanaṃ. This is the teaching of all the Buddhas, not just that of Gotama the Buddha. Everyone who becomes the Buddha will teach nothing but only these three: *sabbapāpassa akaraṇaṃ*—abstain from all unwholesome actions, evil actions, sinful actions; *kusalassa upasampadā*—perform wholesome

actions, pious actions; and *sacittapariyodapanam*—keep on purifying your mind, keep on purifying the totality of your mind. That’s all. So simple and yet so deep, so profound.

At the surface level it looks so simple. Any religion worth the name will say: “Abstain from sinful action.” Every religion will say that. “Perform good actions.” Every religion will say that. “Purify your mind.” Every religion will say that. Then what was unique about the Buddha? Let us understand.

If it was just a question of giving sermons, then the Buddha stands on the same level as other religious teachers. But the Buddha does not merely give sermons. He gives us a way, a technique, a practice by which one can actualise those sermons to enable one to live the life of Dhamma.

To live the life of morality is acceptable by one and all at the intellectual level: “Yes, I must live a life of morality. I accept it.” Or one accepts it at the devotional level because the Buddha said so or the founder of this religion or that religion says so and: “I am from that particular sect, from that particular religion, from that particular tradition. Therefore, I must live a life of morality.” One accepts this at the devotional level. One accepts this at the intellectual level. “I must perform wholesome actions, good actions. I must purify my mind.”

But it is so difficult to accept it at the actual level, the experiential level. The experiential level is missing and if that is missing, everything is missing. When one becomes a Buddha, he teaches the experiential aspect of Dhamma.

Abstain from sinful actions. How to abstain? Perform good actions. How to perform good actions? Purify the mind. How to purify the mind in its totality? This is where the Buddha made a unique contribution to humanity. He discovered and showed the way to totally purify the mind.

The first part is *sīla*: abstain from sinful actions. Some religious teachers tell people that if they perform sinful actions, they will go to hell. If they abstain from sinful actions, they will go to heaven. Yes, it is true. But there are many who just laugh at it: “Who cares for the next life. Where is hell? Where is heaven? If I enjoy this life, it is good for me.”

Then another argument is given. A human being is a social being. One has to live in the society. One has to live with the members of the family. One has to live with others. Even a recluse or a monk or a nun remains in contact with the other members of the society. If one performs any action, which disturbs the peace and harmony of the society, how can one have peace and harmony within oneself? “Yes,” intellectually one starts understanding, “If I ignite fire all around me, I will have to suffer the heat of this fire around me. I will suffer from this heat that I have

generated all around.”

Yet another explanation is given, often to children:

“If someone comes to kill you or someone hits you do you like it?”

“No, I don’t like it.”

“Then if you hit somebody and try to kill somebody, that person won’t like it, will he?”

“No, that person won’t like it.”

“Then you should not do something which you don’t like others to do to you!”

“Yes, I should not kill. You are correct.”

Similar arguments are presented for all the moral precepts.

All these five *sīlas* are quite acceptable at the logical level, at the rational level, at the intellectual level. Yet people do not lead the life of *sīla*. They may understand: “I must live a life of *sīla*. *Sīla* is so important for me. A life of morality is so good for me, so good for others.” Yet, they do not live a moral life. Why? The Buddha understands it properly. Because one has no control over the mind. One is not the master of one’s own mind.

An addict of alcohol knows very well, “I should not take alcohol, alcohol is not good for me.” Yet, when the time comes, he succumbs. He can’t control himself. A gambler knows very well, “I should not gamble, gambling is not good for me.” Yet, when the time comes, he starts gambling. One keeps on performing evil deeds while understanding very well that these are not good for one. This is because one is not the master of one’s own mind. One has become a slave of one’s own unwholesome habit patterns.

Therefore, the Buddha teaches the second part of Dhamma: *samādhi*, mastery over the mind. Again the Buddha’s *samādhi* differs from that taught by other teachers. He teaches *sammā samādhi*.

All right, one has practised *samādhi*. One has developed mastery over the mind. One is living a life of *sīla* and is not performing any unwholesome action that will disturb the peace and harmony of other beings. One has developed *samādhi*. But if there are impurities in the depth of the mind, *anusaya kilesa* (sleeping volcanoes of impurities at the deepest level of the mind), one does not know when one of these sleeping volcanoes will erupt. One will again get overpowered by the impurity and will again start living a wrong life.

The Bodhisatta Gotama realised this. He practised all the eight *jhānas*, *lokiya-jhānas*. He realised that even after perfecting these *jhānas*, the impurities at a very deep level of the mind were still not eradicated. Unless these deep-rooted impurities are destroyed, one cannot be a liberated person.

So he worked for the third part of Dhamma: *paññā*, wisdom, insight, purification of the mind at the deepest level. We have a vast canvas with the spectrum

of the entire Indian spirituality and we see so many teachers announcing the same thing: “Come out of craving, come out of aversion. Don’t indulge in craving and aversion towards sensual objects.” But when we go deeper in this subject, we find that the Buddha’s contribution was unique. No other teacher could reach the depth that the Buddha reached. The path he showed takes everyone to that depth. ☸

(To be concluded)

FIRST VIPASSANA COURSE IN BANGLADESH

The first ten-day Vipassana course was successfully organized in Bangladesh at Modhupur near Dhaka at a Christian mission from 18 to 29 November, 2004. The total number of participants were 33 (16 men, 16 women and 1 monk).

This historic course was completed without any difficulties thanks to the support of all involved including the management of the Christian mission. On *metta* day, there was an open discussion with all the participants about future Vipassana courses in Bangladesh, including funding, possible venues and other requisites for conducting future Vipassana courses. Most of them were very enthusiastic about holding courses in the future. All participants were very happy about the pure non-sectarian nature of Vipassana. Contact: Mr. K. L. Mutsuddi, 50/7, West Hazipara (4th floor), Rampura, Dhaka 1219, Bangladesh. Tel: [88] (01) 8922-7876; Fax: [88] (2) 7281-405; Email: avcom@bol-online.com

FIRST VIPASSANA COURSE IN UKRAINE

82 persons (77 new students and 5 old students) completed the first ten-day Vipassana course to be held in Ukraine from 3 to 14 November 2004. The course was conducted in English and Russian with the support of 14 Dhamma servers. The course site, near the capital city of Kiev, was a large holiday camp for company workers and set in the forests on the outskirts of the city. The course was well organised and students worked very seriously. All needs were provided for and at a reasonable cost.

Most students were young, highly educated and with professional backgrounds. Nearly all had come through a common interest in Yoga, where they had first heard about Vipassana through the encouragement of their young Yoga teacher, who has sat five Vipassana courses and was single-minded in her determination to bring Dhamma to her home country. She is now full of enthusiasm for the next Vipassana course in Ukraine in the spring of 2005.

FIRST VIPASSANA COURSE IN LITHUANIA

The first Vipassana course in Lithuania was held from 11 to 22 August 2004. The course, which was held at a Catholic church not far from Vilnius, was very well organised. 33 new students benefited from this course. For more details, contact: Mr. Sigita Baltramaitis, Zygimantu 12-4, Vilnius Lithuania 01102, Tel: 370 5261 9590; Email: sbaltramaitis@yahoo.com

ONE-DAY CHILDREN'S COURSES IN MUMBAI

Every second Sunday at **Ulhasnagar**: Tel: (0251) 252-2693

Every second Sunday at **Andheri** (Gaikwad Hall): Tel: 2633-6671

Every third Sunday at **Ghatkopar**: Tel: 2510-1096, 2516-2505

Date	Venue	Age	Registration
2/01/05	Mulund	10-12 years	30th and 31st Dec
9/01/05	Ulhasnagar	13-16 years	6th and 7th Jan 05
13/02/05	Matunga	10-12 years	10th and 11th Feb 05
13/02/05	Ulhasnagar	13-16 years	10th and 11th Feb 05
13/03/05	Ulhasnagar	10-12 years	10th and 11th March 05

Course Timing: 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. **Registration Timings:** 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. **Course Venues:** **Andheri:** Dada Saheb Gaikwad Sansthan, Babasaheb Ambedkar Marg, RTO Corner, Four Bungalows, Andheri (W), Tel: 2633-6671. **Ulhasnagar:** Guru Nanak High School, Kurla Camp, Ulhasnagar-4. Tel: (0251) 252-2693. **Matunga:** Amulakh Amirchand High School, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai Road, New SNTD College, King's Circle, Matunga (CR), Tel: 2510-1096, 2516-2505. **Mulund:** Mulund College of Commerce, Sarojini Road, Near Mulund Court, Mulund (W). Tel: 5598-3338. [NB *Please bring cushion. *Please register on the specified phone numbers. If you are unable to attend after registration, please inform in advance. *Please arrive on time for the course.]

GOENKAJI'S INTERVIEW ON ZEE TV

Zee TV is telecasting a program called *Urja* featuring Goenkaji every Friday at 12:30 pm. In this program, Goenkaji answers questions about different aspects of Dhamma (Dharma). Meditators may inform their family and friends about the opportunity to hear Goenkaji expound on the universal Dhamma.

ADDITIONAL RESPONSIBILITIES:

Ācaryas:

Prof. Pyare Lal & Mrs. Sushila Dhar, *New Delhi*

To serve Delhi, Bhutan, Dhamma Tihar and Dhamma Rakabhaka, AT Training, Research for jail courses, police courses etc., and Co-ordinator: Adolescents' courses in India and Nepal

NEW RESPONSIBILITIES:

Senior Assistant Teachers:

1. Mr. Vasant Gosar, *Dhule*

2. Mr. Murari Sharma, *Haryana*

To assist the area teacher in serving Dhamma Kāruṇika, Karnal

3. & 4. Mr. German Cano & Mrs. Martha Molina, *Mexico*

To assist the area teacher in serving Dhamma Makaranda, Mexico

NEW APPOINTMENTS

Assistant Teachers:

1. Mr. Mohan Dewan, *Tripura* 2. Ms. Tara Dangol, *Nepal*

3. Ms. Kamaltara Tuladhar, *Nepal*

4. & 5. Dr. Manubhai & Dr. (Mrs.) Sudha Desai, *USA*

6. Mr. Daniel Dodd, *USA* 7. Ms. Victoria Robinson, *USA*

8. Mr. Adam & Mrs. Rebecca Shepard, *USA*

9. Mr. Daniel Adriazola, *Peru*

Children Course Teachers:

1. & 2. Mr. Barnaby and Mrs. Angela de Palma, *Australia*

3. Mr. Benjamin Nahmani, *Australia* 4. Mrs. Miliann Kang, *USA*

VIPASSANA NEWSLETTER ON THE WEBSITE

Current and past issues of the Hindi Vipassana Patrika and English Newsletter can be downloaded from the VRI website:

<http://www.vri.dhamma.org/NewslettersHindi/index.html>

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DHAMMA DOHAS

*Hindū ho yā Bauddha ho, Musalima ho yā Jaina;
Jaba jaba mana mailā kare, taba taba ho becaina.*

Hindu or Buddhist, Muslim or Jain,
Whenever you defile your mind, you become agitated.

*Gorā kālā gehuṇā, manuja manuja hī hoyā;
Jo jo mana mailā kare, so hī dukhiyā hoyā.*

White, black or brown, a man is still a man.
Whoever defiles his mind becomes miserable.

*With warm regards and metta,
A Vipassana meditator*

*Varna raṅga se mānavī, ūṅca nīca nā hoyā;
Kālī gorī gāya kā, dūdha eka sā hoyā.*

The color of a man's skin makes him neither high nor low.
Black or white, a cow gives milk all the same.

*Dharmavanta to hai vabī, sīlavanta jo hoyā;
Kāyā vāṇī citta ke, sīla na khaṇḍita hoṇya.*

To practice the Dhamma, one must practice sila;
Not by body, speech or mind should sila be broken.

*With warm regards and metta,
A Vipassana meditator*

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