

Vipassana Newsletter

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

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WORDS OF DHAMMA

*Na cāhaṃ brāhmaṇaṃ brūmi,
yonijaṃ mattisambhavaṃ;
akiñcanaṃ anādānaṃ,
tamahaṃ brūmi brāhmaṇaṃ.*

I do not call him a brāhmaṇa merely because
He is born of a (Brahmin) womb.
One who is free from impediments and clinging—
Him, I call a brāhmaṇa.

—Sutta Nipāta 625, 9.27 Vasetṭhasutta

THE GLORIOUS CULTURE OF INDIA

S. N. Goenka

(The following is the translation of an article by Goenkaji published in the March 2006 issue of the Vipassana Patrikā. It has been adapted for the Newsletter.)

Recently, someone sent me a copy of *Srimadbhagavatagita hi aadi Manusmriti* by Shri Ashok Singhal, President of the Vishva Hindu Parishad (VHP). It gave me great joy to find out that in this book, he has rejected *Manusmriti*.

Truly, the book *Manusmriti* has caused bitter antagonism between the two main communities of India and led to immense harm to the nation. This is the reason why Bharat Ratna Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar took the right decision to burn this book publicly.

In response to Shri Singhalji's rejection of *Manusmriti*, I wrote a letter to the VHP office bearer who is a Vipassana meditator. The main points of the letter were as follows:

The inhuman, unethical and anti-Dhammic discrimination based on so-called high and low caste in *Manusmriti* has not been openly opposed by any leader of this community even though they understand that it is wrong. On the contrary, in a personal meeting, an important leader in India stated that the *Manusmriti* is a symbol of the sentiments of the people, thus wanting to prove that it is just and acceptable. I found this to be not only extremely inappropriate but also very sad. Shri Ashok Singhal has taken proper steps in this matter and by rejecting the present *Manusmriti*, he has done a service to the community.

According to *Manusmriti*, a person, however ignorant and depraved, is considered to be pious and of high status because he or she was born in a particular caste. Similarly, a person, however virtuous

and gifted, is considered to be inferior, of low status or even an untouchable because of birth in a particular caste. This viewpoint is a blot on the glorious humane civilization of India and is a cause of embarrassment to every true patriotic Indian. We Indians cannot hold our heads high without getting rid of this blot.

The upper caste people do not get defiled by touching or fondling animals such as dog, cat, cow, bullock or birds such as parrot or mynah. However they get defiled not only by the touch of a low-caste human being—however clean and morally upright he may be—but also by his shadow if it falls upon them! Our temples do not get defiled by the entry of animals or birds but they get defiled by the entry of a low-caste person! What kind of absurd and perverted mentality is this? As long as it exists, how can we take pride in our glorious culture!

The books composed by Goswami Tulsidas such as *Ram Carit Manas* and *Kavitavali* benefited a large section of society. The incomparable portrayal of various characters in these epics illustrate the ideal of the glorious ancient culture of India. The indelible impression that these books have left on the hearts of millions of people is also imprinted on my heart and will always be. But two incidents in the story of Lord Rama deeply distressed me.

The first incident is the heartless exile of the blameless and pregnant Sita alone without any attendant to the forest full of dangerous animals where there was no arrangement for her stay. I recall that when I first read this, being very sentimental by nature, I was very disturbed. Even the thought of this heartless incident made me shudder. I could not endure it. My revered teacher at that time pacified me

by telling me that this incident was not real and that it had been added to the story of Lord Rama later. I was somewhat reassured on hearing this but I could not understand how all the devotees of Rama could accept this false story.

The other thing that offended me was this stanza of Tulsidas:

Pūjehi vipra śīlaguṇabhīnā;

Tadapi na śūdra guṇajñāna pravīṇā.

A Brahmin is revered even if devoid of morality and virtue;

A Shudra (a low-caste person) is not worthy of reverence even if virtuous and very wise.

The teacher of my primary school used to make us recite a group prayer every day before he started teaching our lessons.

He prabho ānandadātā, jñāna hamako dījiye;

Śīghra sāre durguṇoṅ ko, dūra hams se kījiye.

Lījiye hamako śaraṇa meṅ, hama sadācārī baneṅ;

Brahmacārī dharmarakṣaka, vīra vratadhārī baneṅ.

O lord, source of happiness, impart knowledge to us; Help us to get rid of all our vices quickly.

Take us in your refuge, help us to become virtuous;

Help us to become righteous and brave protectors of Dharma.

He used to benevolently teach us that the true practice of Dharma is living a life of morality. I recited the above stanza during my daily morning prayer. Therefore, when I read that one can become revered even without being moral and may be disrespected even though moral and virtuous, I found it very illogical. However, my teacher resolved my doubt by stating that this stanza was not written by Tulsidas ji. It had been added by someone else in the *Ram Carit Manas* and should not be given any importance. My teacher himself was a Brahmin and was a very moral and virtuous person. I respected him, therefore, this stanza lost all importance for me in those days.

Later, as a youth, I made an intensive study of Hindi literature and read the critical book *Tulsidas* written by the famous Hindi author Shri Ramchandra Shukla. Then I learned that this viewpoint of caste being more important than character of a person was an established belief in society that has gained acceptance for a long time. He quoted this stanza from the *Chanakya Niti*:

Patito pi dvijaha śreṣṭhabaha, na ca śūdro jitendriyaha.

A depraved Brahmin is superior than a Shudra (a low-caste person) even if he is totally moral and restrained.

I read in Maharshi Dayanandji Saraswati's *Satyartha Prakash* that this stanza is given in *Parashar Smriti*. I also saw that *Manusmriti* is full of such anti-Dhamma statements. In addition, the same false viewpoint is

presented somewhere or the other in many *Puranas* and *Smriti* books. Then I felt that the revered national poet Maithilisharanji had rightly said:

Nara krit śāstroṅ ke sab bandhan,

haiṅ nāri hī ko lekar;

Apne liye sabhī suvidhāeṅ,

pahale se kar baithe nar.

All the bondages in the man-made scriptures

Are for women;

Men have already reserved

All privileges for themselves.

I felt that I should also say in the same note:

Vipra racit śāstroṅ ke bandhan,

haiṅ śudroṅ ko hī lekar;

Apne liye sabhī suvidhāeṅ,

pahale se niścīt lī kar.

All the bondages in the Brahmin-made scriptures

Are for low-caste people;

They have already reserved

All privileges for themselves.

I saw that this discrimination based on caste including the scourge of untouchability existed not only in the religious scriptures but also in everyday life in Indian society. Anguished by this social evil, I composed a poem, some lines of which are:

... Saba kūeṅ bāvādī apne haiṅ,

Sadakoṅ taka para calane nā deṅ;

Yadi vaśa cala jāye to unko,

Hama pṛithvi pavana na chūne deṅ.

All wells and lakes belong to us,

We do not even allow them to walk on the roads;

If it were within our power, we would

Not allow them to touch the earth or air.

Main pūcha rahā ākḥira yaha saba,

kisa nyāya-nīti ke bala para haiṅ?

Hama baneṅ dharmā ke karṇadhāra,

Para anācara main tatpara haiṅ.

I ask, for all this (bad behaviour towards fellow human beings),

How can there be any just basis?

We have become the (self-appointed) leaders of Dharma,

But are adept at misconduct.

Main socā kartā kabhī-kabhī,

Kyā parameśvara bhī mithyā hai?

Vaha mūka, badhir-sā rahe dekhataṅ,

Yahaṅ ho raha kyā-kyā hai?

Occasionally I ponder

Is God Almighty also false?

He is watching—deaf and dumb

Everything that is happening here.

*Hama itnā atyācāra karenī,
Nikale uskī āvāja nahin;
Dhartī na phaṭe, nabha nā tūṭe,
Giratī hama para kyon gāja nahin?*
Though we commit such atrocities,
He does not protest at all;
The earth does not tremble, the sky does not fall,
Why are we not struck by lightning?

*Vaha īśa nahin, jagadīśa nahin,
Vaha saccā dharma purāṇa nahin;
Jiske ādeśon main mānava ko,
Hai samatā kā sthāna nahin.*
He is not the lord, not God Almighty,
Nor are they True Scriptures,
In whose commandments there is no place
For equality among all human beings.

This feeling of outrage against the evil of casteism arose in my mind long before the age of 31 years at which I came in contact with the teaching of the Buddha. After learning the meditation of the Buddha, when I first read the words of the Buddha, I was overwhelmed:

*Na jaccā vasalo hoti,
Na jaccā hoti brāhmaṇo;
Kammunā vasalo hoti,
Kammunā hoti brāhmaṇo.*

It is not by birth that one becomes low-caste,
It is not by birth that one becomes a Brahmin;
It is by one's deeds that one becomes low-caste,
It is by one's deeds that one becomes a Brahmin.

On reading this, I got a vision of India's authentic ancient glorious culture.

India's religious scriptures are filled with lofty sentiments. But many of these also contain impurities at some places, which diminish their greatness. Some texts are filled with anti-Dhamma statements. I had long discussions with the late Shri Seshadri ji about this. He accepted that publication and distribution of the *Kalki Purana* should be prohibited. He also assured me that false criticism of the Buddha and his teaching in some of the religious scriptures would be acknowledged to be interpolations and removed.

Similarly, it would be in India's national interest to stop the publication and distribution of *Manusmriti* as well as to regard all references encouraging caste and untouchability in all religious scriptures as interpolations and to remove them. In addition, all indecent and immoral descriptions in the scriptures should be removed. If it is not possible to remove them, then it should be announced to everyone that these improper references in the scriptures are not acceptable. Shri Singhal ji has rightly stated that such scriptures were composed during and after the reign of Puṣyamitra Shung, which are totally against the glorious culture of India.

After reading Shri Singhalji's book, I was delighted that a prominent leader has taken the initiative to reject these false beliefs. I am fully aware that some fanatics will oppose him. Only a strong leader like Shri Singhal ji can withstand such opposition. It is essential to take many more such beneficial measures to strengthen the unity and integrity of society and the nation. This first important step that has been taken in this direction is truly praiseworthy. My best wishes for the success of this beneficent initiative.

May all beings be happy! ☺

UPDATE ON GOENKAJI'S HEALTH

Goenkaji underwent spinal surgery in November 2005. The procedure was successful but was followed by temporary cardio-pulmonary problems, which necessitated a few days' stay in intensive care. Since his discharge from the hospital, Goenkaji has been at his residence in Mumbai. He has been advised to rest. His doctors report that his general condition is stable and that there is no need for hospitalization. Goenkaji regrets that his advanced age, state of health and various responsibilities do not allow him to receive visitors.

Goenkaji has no public engagements in March except the one-day course at the Global Pagoda on March 19, where he will be present for the *mettā* session. In May, he plans to visit Sri Lanka.

ONE DAY COURSE AT GLOBAL PAGODA

The Global Vipassana Foundation invites all Vipassana meditators for the one-day course on 19 March 2006 from 11 am to 5 pm. Goenkaji will be present during the course. This course is the first one-day course to be held within the dome of the main pagoda.

All efforts are being made to complete the dome at the earliest. This will be the largest stone dome structure in the world without any supporting pillars. The dome will not be complete before 19 March but the construction will have progressed sufficiently for the meditator to get a feel of how it will be when the dome is completed.

Students/groups coming from outside Mumbai are kindly requested to inform the organizers in advance so that arrangements for bath and breakfast can be organized.

Contact: Mr. Derek Pegado, Tel: (022) 28452261, 28452111

Those who wish to serve the course may also contact the above. Please note that there are no facilities at the Global Pagoda for overnight stay. Those coming a day early will have to make their own arrangements.

DHAMMA SERVICE AT DHAMMA GIRI

There is a need for **graphic designers** or **visual artists** willing to work on directional and other types of signs at *Dhamma Giri*. They should have proficiency in Corel Draw and are required to visit Dhamma Giri at least once a month as per the requirements of the project. There is also a need for **landscape architects**, **horticulturists**, and **security advisers** at *Dhamma Giri*.

Vipassana meditators who have the ability to serve as any of the above at *Dhamma Giri* may contact Mr. Sudhir Pai. They may choose to serve as resident or non-resident Dhamma servers. Suitable honorarium, accommodation, meals and travelling expenses may be given as required.

CHILDREN'S COURSES IN MUMBAI

Residential Children's Course: 5 to 7 May 2006 at JNPT
Age group: (13-16 years). **Registration:** on 27 & 28 April.

Date	Venue	Age	Registration
19 Mar	Ghatkopar	13-16 years	16 & 17 March
26 Mar	JNPT	10-12 years	23 & 24 March
2 April	South Mumbai	10-12 years	30 & 31 March
9 April	Ulhasnagar	13-16 years	6 & 7 April
16 April	Ghatkopar	10-12 years	May be cancelled
30 April	Matunga	13-16 years	27 & 28 April
7 May	South Mumbai	13-16 years	4 & 5 May
14 May	Ulhasnagar	10-12 years	11 & 12 May
21 May	Ghatkopar	13-16 years	18 & 19 May

Course Timing: 8:30 am to 2:30 pm. **Registration:** 11 am to 1 pm.

Course Venues: **Andheri:** Dada Saheb Gaikwad Sansthan, Babasaheb Ambedkar Marg, RTO Corner, Four Bungalows, Andheri (W), Tel:2510-1096, 2516-2505 **Matunga:** Amulakh Amirchand High School, Rafi Ahmed Kidwai Road, New SNTD College, King's Circle, Matunga (CR), Tel: 2510-1096, 2516-2505. **Ulhasnagar:** Guru Nanak High School, Kurla Camp, Ulhasnagar-4. Tel: (0251) 252-2693. **JNPT Vipassana Center:** JNPT Township, Trainee Hostel Bldg, Sector 3, Sheva Taluka, Uran, Navi Mumbai. 98923-87145, 98218-08488, 2747-2554. **South Mumbai:** Times of India Bldg., Opp CST Station. For registration and information call Tel 23081622 **Ghatkopar:** SNTD School, New Building, Cama Lane, Ghatkopar West, opp Vidyut Society, Mumbai 400086, Tel: 25101096, 25162505 **Dhamma Saritā:** Jivan Sandhya Mangal Sansthan, near Khadavli station -Tel: 25101096, 25162505 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. To serve children's courses in Mumbai, call 98200-22990.

GOENKAJI'S DISCOURSES ON TELEVISION

India: A new series of Hindi discourses by Goenkaji is being telecast daily at about 9:40 am on Aastha TV channel.

USA: Aastha will be telecasting Goenkaji's discourses at 6 pm EST (Monday to Friday) on the WORLDDIRECT platform of DIRECTV on channel no. 2005.

Zee TV: Daily, 4:30 am (IST). Please confirm exact timings.

FIRST VIPASSANA COURSE IN NEW CALEDONIA

The first ten-day course was held in New Caledonia in the South Pacific from 18 to 29 January 2006. Seven old students organized and served the course. 41 registered and 38 new students (29 women and 9 men) successfully completed the course. All the students were new and French speaking. The course was held in a school located 20 minutes drive from Nouméa, the island's main city. The meditators here are very enthusiastic and plan to organize a ten-day course every year in addition to weekly group sittings and monthly one-day courses. There were 20 meditators at the first weekly group sitting after the course.

IN MEMORIAM

Mr. Satya Narayan Sharma, Assistant teacher of Vipassana from Ratlam, Madhya Pradesh, India passed away on 11 February 2006. He served Dhamma selflessly for twenty years and was liked by all. May he be happy, peaceful and liberated!

DHAMMA DOHAS

*Samaya badā anamola hai, samaya na hāta bikāya.
Tina loka sampada diye, bitā kṣaṇa na pāya.*

Time is so precious, time is not for sale in the market.
Even for the wealth of three worlds,
you can't buy back the moment past.

*Bīte kṣaṇa ko yāda kara, mata birathā akulāya.
Bitā dhana to mila sake, bitā kṣaṇa nahīn āya.*

Remembering past moments, don't uselessly be obsessed.
Past wealth can be recovered
but past moments can never return.

*With much metta,
A Vipassana meditator*

Bīte kṣaṇa to cala die, āne-vāle dūra.

Isa kṣaṇa meṅ jo bhī jīe, vo hī sādhaḥka sūra.

Past moments are gone, those to come are far away.
Whoever lives in this moment is a meditator of courage.

*Bhūtakāla vyākula kare, yā bhaviṣya bharamāya.
Vartamāna meṅ jo jīe, to jīnā ā jāya.*

Living in the past is agitating, living in the future is delusory.
If you live in the present, you have learnt how to live.

With best compliments from

MOTILAL BANARSIDASS

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