



Vipassana Prison Newsletter

Volume III – March 2013

WORDS OF DHAMMA

*Yo panam natipateti
musavadam na bhasati
loke adinnam nadiyati
paradaram na gacchati.*

*Suramerayapanañ ca
yo naro nanuyuñjati
pahaya pañca verani
silava iti vuccati.*

*Not harming living beings,
not speaking lies, taking
nothing in all the world
unasked, nor committing
sexual misconduct. And
never drinking intoxicants:*

*One who gives up these
five harmful acts and
does not engage in them
is truly called a virtuous
man.*

~ Anguttara Nikaya, III, 205, 206

INSIDE THIS ISSUE

First Canada Prison Course	p2
A Moral Dilemma	p2
Meditation in the Deep South	p3
SN Goenka: Q and A	p4
Crossword Puzzle	p4

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A Bridge across the River

The following is an excerpt from the Day 1 discourse of a 10-day course. The text has been edited for publication.

The Enlightened One found a tool that helps you start experiencing the reality within the framework of the body: what is happening. This tool is the breath.

For example, someone living on this bank of the river more or less knows about the reality of this bank of the river – this person has lived here, is living here. Someone else crosses the river, goes to the other bank, and returns and speaks very highly of it: “Oh wonderful, wonderful.”

And one feels like enjoying the other bank too, witnessing it. But one sits at this bank of the river with folded hands, moist eyes and choking voice, and starts praying, craving, crying, “Oh other bank, please come here. I want to witness you. I want to enjoy you. I won’t come to you. You come here.”

For the whole life, this person may keep on crying – but it doesn’t happen. It can’t happen.

The only way for someone to witness the truth of the other bank is to leave this bank, cross the river, and reach the other bank. It is so simple. You require a bridge that connects this bank to the other bank, so you can enjoy and witness the other bank.

Your breath works like a bridge. The breath connects the known field of your physical structure to the unknown field, and things just happen naturally.

First Vipassana Prison Course in Canada

History was made north of the border in November 2011, when the first Vipassana course was held in a prison in Canada. Sixteen inmates participated. All 16 finished the full 10-day course.

“It was an amazing experience,” said Sheldon Klein, one of the course volunteers. “The men worked very hard and it was a struggle for all of them, but they all kept with it and finished.”

The course took place at a minimum-security facility in Dorchester, New Brunswick (the Canadian province north of Maine). Westmorland houses 228 inmates; nearly one quarter are serving life sentences.

Klein, who has also served Vipassana courses in U.S. prisons, says that this first Canadian course was, in some ways, a different kind of experience.

“Because it was minimum-security... the men actually had to give up a lot of their freedom and comforts. So everyone was there to work and to experience what this was about.”

Following the course all 16 participants and a few prison officials met for a brief closing ceremony. Meditator after meditator reported how he dealt with issues that arose during the 10 days—including anger, fear, and unhappy memories.

Somehow all 16 found the strength to observe the sensations arising with painful thoughts. This brought rewards. Many revealed that at the end of the course they felt lighter, less tense, and more optimistic.

In August 2012 a one-day course was held at Westmorland. “I felt so moved by what the men had gone through and their expressions of it,” Klein said. “For me it was a privilege to be able to serve in this way.”

There were many requests for more courses. The Vipassana program currently is suspended, because of a change in the prison administration, but the inmate students have made it clear that they look forward to the day when Vipassana courses return to their prison. In the meantime, old students are trying their best to continue their own meditation practices.

A Dhamma Decision, by S.N. Goenka

This story shows Goenkaji facing a personal challenge, negotiating two subtle issues: honesty and deception.

Shri Yadu Kumar Siddhi of Nepal participated in a number of early Vipassana courses in Bodh Gaya, India. He benefited greatly, and so did his friends and family members. Soon they began requesting that I conduct a course in Nepal, either in Birganj or Kathmandu. But visiting Nepal was not possible. The Myanmar government had very kindly given me a passport, but I could legally travel only to India.

I conducted a course in September 1972 on the Indian side of the Indo-Nepal border. After this course the people of Birganj strongly insisted that I conduct a course on the Nepalese side. I told them my difficulties. “You are of Indian origin, sir. You would have no difficulty crossing the border by wearing dhoti and kurta (traditional Indian clothes),” they replied. “Indians and Nepalese can visit one another’s country freely without any visa.”

But this suggestion was totally unacceptable. I had the noble example of my teacher Sayagyi U Ba Khin before me.

I remember being present when U Win Pe, the Cabinet Secretary of the government of Myanmar, came to see Sayagyi at the International Meditation Centre. U Win Pe suggested Sayagyi get a letter of employment from one of his students abroad. That suggestion was not based on truth, and therefore was unacceptable to Sayagyi.

How could he teach pure Dhamma when the first step was taken against sila? How could the Dhamma journey be really successful? Keeping in mind this basic principle of teaching Dhamma, I could not accept the Birganj people’s proposal.

A rich Nepali industrialist then suggested I enter his country in his car. No immigration official would question whether or not I was an Indian. In this way I could save myself from telling lies. But how could I accept? After all, untruth was untruth and deception was deception. So I could not go to Nepal, and kept giving courses only in India.

Time passed. Thousands of students from around the world started coming to India to take Vipassana courses. They began pleading that I go to their countries to conduct courses. Therefore, I applied to the Myanmar embassy in New Delhi. They forwarded my application to the Myanmar government in Yangon. My application was rejected.



More time passed. Pressure from foreign students increased. So I wrote to my friend U Thi Han, Myanmar's former Foreign Minister. Now retired, he offered to recommend my case to Col. Maung Maung Kha, then Prime Minister.

Col. Maung Maung Kha was a good friend of mine. But I received no answer. Although he was happy and proud of the work to spread Dhamma, it seemed he too was unable to change the strict government policy. He too was helpless.

In one of the courses a high official from Nepal had participated, and he assured me he would arrange my visit. But obviously I could not accept. I felt strongly that, being a citizen of Myanmar, unless the Myanmar government gave me permission I should not go to any other country beyond India, however noble the cause, however safe the journey.

It was a question of moral responsibility. If I was to go to Nepal to give a course of pure Dhamma, I could not do this with the base of a wrong, illegal decision. Today I feel a sense of great satisfaction in Dhamma: my decision was correct. If I had broken rules, ignored the moral issue, then the purity

of serving Dhamma would have become tainted. And this would have been piercing me like an arrow throughout my life. When the time ripened, I could visit Nepal for Dhamma work without deception. And Dhamma spread as my teacher predicted. Therefore the decision at that time was a good decision, a Dhamma decision.

Meditation in the Deep South: A Study of the Effects of Vipassana Meditation on those who are Prisoners

Is Vipassana helpful? "YES!" Ask almost anyone, anywhere in the world, in or out of prison, who has completed at least one 10-day Vipassana course.

To understand more specifically how Vipassana helps prisoners, the University of Alabama and the Alabama Department of Corrections recently completed a study of students, both immediately after a course and throughout the following year. The inmate/students were in maximum-security Donaldson Correctional Facility.

The results were very positive, and promise future benefits.

"Even with the chaos and stressors that permeate many prisons," the study authors say, "the introduction to Vipassana meditation may begin a turning point for renewed well-being, even within a prison environment..."

This was the second major study on the effects of 10-day Vipassana meditation courses on prisoners. A 2003 University of Washington study at the minimum-security North Rehabilitation Facility in Seattle, Washington, revealed important findings. After a Vipassana course those who left jail reported significantly less drug and alcohol use. Psychiatric symptoms also went down, while optimism went up. A prior internal study showed a significant reduction in recidivism (re-incarceration) among inmates who completed a Vipassana course compared to a similar group of inmates who did not.

Who was involved in the Alabama study?

Sixty-seven inmates from Donaldson who had completed at least one Vipassana course. Participants ranged in age from 21 to 63. Education ranged from three years of elementary school to a four-year college degree; most had completed 11 years of school. Most were violent offenders and most had no prior convictions.

They were compared to a similar group of incarcerated men at Donaldson Prison who did not do Vipassana mediation.

In what ways did Vipassana benefit prisoners?

Prison infractions, segregation time and health visits were recorded. Anger, emotional intelligence, mindfulness and mood states were also considered. The Vipassana meditators did better in all of these areas.

How does it work?

The focus is on living with a code of ethics, improving concentration and bringing awareness to the present moment. Feeling as fully as possible one's bodily sensations allows a non-judgmental acceptance of thoughts and emotions.

What did the research study recommend?

More Vipassana retreats at Donaldson Correctional Facility, more studies of the benefits, and perhaps the creation of a Vipassana Dorm to give inmate students a better opportunity to practice meditation together.

Questions and Answers

(The following questions were posed to Goenkaji.)

Question: Is a strong desire the same as craving?

Goenkaji: There is a difference. Whether there is craving or not, will be judged by whatever you desire. If you don't get it, and you feel depressed, then it was craving. If you don't get it, and you just smile, then it was just a desire. It didn't turn into craving. Whenever there is a craving and clinging and you don't get something, you are bound to become miserable. If you are becoming miserable, then there was some craving.

Question: If craving and aversion are to be avoided, what are they replaced with?

Goenkaji: They are replaced with love, compassion, goodwill. Whenever the mind is impure, it becomes more and more impure as you start generating craving and aversion. This is a habit pattern going back far into the past. Before, you kept on generating craving and aversion; and now again you generate craving and aversion. You are becoming more and more miserable.

By this technique, the habit pattern changes and the mind becomes purer and purer, free from craving, free

from aversion. A pure mind by nature is full of love, full of compassion. You don't harm yourself; you don't harm others. Just eradicate the impurities in the mind and the love and compassion is a natural result.

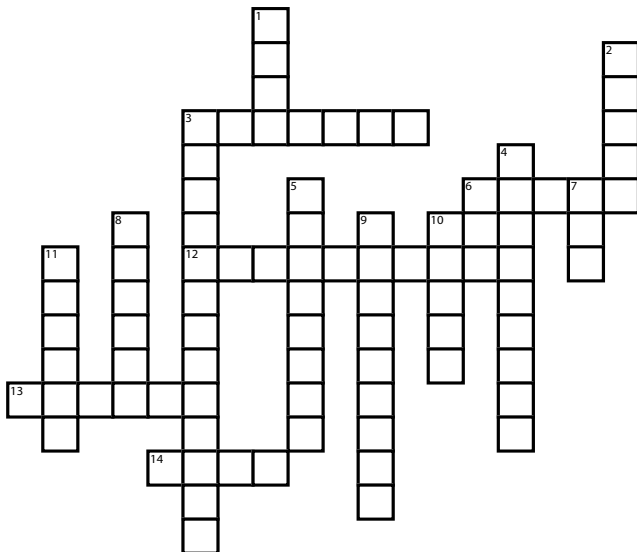
Question: Isn't this technique self-centered? How can we become active and help others?

Goenkaji: First, you have to be self-centered; you have to help yourself. Unless you help yourself, you cannot help others. A weak person cannot help another weak person. You have to become strong yourself, and then use this strength to help others and make others strong also. Vipassana helps you develop this strength to help others.

Question: How does Vipassana solve the problems of society?

Goenkaji: Society is after all, nothing but a group of individuals. To solve the problems of society, the problems of the individual must first be solved. We want peace in the world, yet we do nothing for the peace of the individual. How is this possible? Vipassana makes it possible for the individual to experience peace and harmony. Vipassana helps to solve the individual's problems. This is how society begins experiencing peace and harmony. This is how the problems of the society begin to be solved.

Crossword Puzzle



**Buddha five concentration wisdom Eightfold craving Dhamma mett
sensation Noble sīla ten paññā equanimous reaction**

Across

3. One of the five enemies
6. Loving-kindness
12. Feel the sensation and be ____.
13. Truth, the Law
14. How many precepts for new students

Down

1. The practice of morality
2. sīla, samādhi, ____
3. Ānāpāna develops ____.
4. Vedanā
5. saṅkhāra
7. Number of pāramī
8. Vipassana develops ____.
9. Noble ____ Path
10. Four ____ Truths
11. Enlightened One

Group Sitzings and Upcoming Courses

Donaldson Course Schedule 2013

April 26 – May 27 (10-day)

August 30 - Sept 3
(3-day Old Student Course)

October 11 - 22 (10-Day)

Donaldson Weekly Group Sitzings

Thursdays 8:45 to 10:30 am

Westmorland Weekly Group Sitzings

Every night from 7 to 8 pm