
THE ART OF LIVING

VIPASSANA MEDITATION AS TAUGHT BY S.N. GOENKA



William Hart
with **S.N. Goenka**

The scanning, uploading, and distribution of this book via the Internet or by any other means without the permission of the publisher violates the copyright.

You support Pariyatti in its mission by honoring the copyright and by not sharing this e-book broadly with others who might otherwise purchase it. By encouraging others to purchase e-books, you will be helping Pariyatti to continue to bring future books such as this one to a broader audience.

Please purchase only authorized electronic editions and do not participate in or encourage electronic piracy of copyrighted materials. Thank you for your support.

Vipassana Research Publications
an imprint of

Pariyatti Publishing
867 Larmon Road, Onalaska, WA 98570

www.pariyatti.org

Grateful acknowledgement is made for permission to adapt from “Pure Mind: Exploring the path of Enlightenment,” interview with S.N. Goenka conducted by Steve Minkin, copyright © 1982 by East West Journal, reprinted by permission of the publisher.

THE ART OF LIVING. Copyright © 1987 by William Hart. All rights reserved. First published in the United States of America by Harper & Row, 1987.

ISBN: 978-1-928706-73-1 E-book PDF

Wisdom is the principal thing;
therefore get wisdom:
and with all thy getting
get understanding.

Proverbs, iv. 7. (KJV)

CONTENTS

Foreword by S. N. Goenka	iv
Preface	1
Introduction	5
<i>Story: Swimology</i>	10
1. The Search	13
<i>Story: To Walk on the Path</i>	22
2. The Starting Point	25
<i>Story: The Buddha and the Scientist</i>	32
3. The Immediate Cause	34
<i>Story: Seed and Fruit</i>	41
4. The Root of the Problem	42
<i>Story: The Pebbles and the Ghee</i>	52
5. The Training of Moral Conduct	54
<i>Story: The Doctor's Prescription</i>	65
6. The Training of Concentration	67
<i>Story: The Crooked Milk Pudding</i>	79
7. The Training of Wisdom	81
<i>Story: The Two Rings</i>	98
8. Awareness and Equanimity	100
<i>Story: Nothing But Seeing</i>	111
9. The Goal	113
<i>Story: Filling the Bottle of Oil</i>	125
10. The Art of Living	126
<i>Story: The Striking of the Clock</i>	134
Appendix A: The Importance of <i>Vedanā</i> in the Teaching of the Buddha	139
Appendix B: Passages on <i>Vedanā</i> from the <i>Suttas</i>	146
Glossary	148
Notes	154

FOREWORD

I am forever grateful for the change that Vipassana meditation has wrought in my life. When I first learned this technique I felt as though I had been wandering in a maze of blind alleys and now at last had found the royal road. In the years since then I have kept following this road, and with every step the goal has become clearer: liberation from all suffering, full enlightenment. I cannot claim to have reached the final goal, but I have no doubt that this way leads directly there.

For showing me this way I am always indebted to Sayagyi U Ba Khin and to the chain of teachers who kept the technique alive through millennia from the time of the Buddha. On behalf of them all I encourage others to take this road, so that they also may find the way out of suffering.

Although many thousands of people from Western countries have learned it, up to now no book has appeared that accurately describes this form of Vipassana at length. I am pleased that at last a serious meditator has undertaken to fill this gap.

May this book deepen the understanding of those who practice Vipassana meditation, and may it encourage others to try this technique so that they too may experience the happiness of liberation. May every reader learn the art of living in order to find peace and harmony within and to generate peace and harmony for others.

May all beings be happy!

S. N. GOENKA

*Bombay:
April 1986*

PREFACE

Among the various types of meditation in the world today, the Vipassana method taught by S. N. Goenka is unique. This technique is a simple, logical way to achieve real peace of mind and to lead a happy, useful life. Long preserved within the Buddhist community in Burma, Vipassana itself contains nothing of a sectarian nature, and can be accepted and applied by people of any background.

S. N. Goenka is a retired industrialist, and a former leader of the Indian community in Burma. Born into a conservative Hindu family, he suffered from youth onward from severe migraine headaches. His search for a cure brought him into contact in 1955 with Sayagyi U Ba Khin, who combined the public role of a senior civil servant with the private role of a teacher of meditation. In learning Vipassana from U Ba Khin, Mr. Goenka found a discipline that went far beyond alleviating the symptoms of physical disease and transcended cultural and religious barriers. Vipassana gradually transformed his life in the ensuing years of practice and study under the guidance of his teacher.

In 1969 Mr. Goenka was authorized as a teacher of Vipassana meditation by U Ba Khin. In that year he came to India and began teaching Vipassana there, reintroducing this technique into the land of its origin. In a country still sharply divided by caste and religion, Mr. Goenka's courses have attracted thousands of people of every background. Thousands of Westerners have also participated in Vipassana courses, attracted by the practical nature of the technique.

The qualities of Vipassana are exemplified by Mr. Goenka himself. He is a pragmatic person, in touch with the ordinary realities of life and able to deal with them incisively, but in every situation he maintains an extraordinary calmness of mind. Along with that calmness is a deep compassion for others, an ability to empathize with virtually any human being. There is, however, nothing solemn about him. He has an engaging sense of humor which he exercises in his teaching. Course participants long

remember his smile, his laughter, and his often-repeated motto, “Be happy!” Clearly Vipassana has brought him happiness, and he is eager to share that happiness with others by showing them the technique that has worked so well for him.

Despite his magnetic presence, Mr. Goenka has no wish to be a guru who turns his disciples into automatons. Instead he teaches self-responsibility. The real test of Vipassana, he says, is applying it in life. He encourages meditators not to sit at his feet, but to go out and live happily in the world. He shuns all expressions of devotion to him, instead directing his students to be devoted to the technique, to the truth that they find within themselves.

In Burma it has traditionally been the prerogative of Buddhist monks to teach meditation. Like his teacher, however, Mr. Goenka is a layman and is the head of a large family. Nevertheless, the clarity of his teaching and the efficacy of the technique itself have won the approval of senior monks in Burma, India, and Sri Lanka, a number of whom have taken courses under his guidance.

To maintain its purity, Mr. Goenka insists, meditation must never become a business. Courses and centers operating under his direction are all run on a totally nonprofit basis. He himself receives no remuneration for his work directly or indirectly, nor do the assistant teachers whom he has authorized to teach courses as his representatives. He distributes the technique of Vipassana purely as a service to humanity, to help those who are in need of help.

S. N. Goenka is one of the few Indian spiritual leaders as highly respected in India as in the West. However, he has never sought publicity, preferring to rely on word of mouth to spread interest in Vipassana; and he has always emphasized the importance of actual meditation practice over mere writings about meditation. For these reasons he is less widely known than he deserves to be. This book is the first full-length study of his teaching prepared under his guidance and with his approval.

The principal source materials for this work are the discourses given by Mr. Goenka during a ten-day Vipassana course and, to a lesser extent, his written articles in English. I have used these materials freely, borrowing not only lines of argument and organization of specific points, but also examples given in the discourses, and frequently exact wording, even entire sentences. To

those who have participated in Vipassana meditation courses as taught by him, much of this book will certainly be familiar, and they may even be able to identify the particular discourse or article that has been used at a certain point in the text.

During a course, the explanations of the teacher are accompanied step by step by the experience of the participants in meditation. Here the material has been reorganized for the benefit of a different audience, people who are merely reading about meditation without necessarily having practised it. For such readers an attempt has been made to present the teaching as it is actually experienced: a logical progression flowing unbroken from the first step to the final goal. That organic wholeness is most easily apparent to the meditator, but this work tries to provide non-meditators with a glimpse of the teaching as it unfolds to one who practises it.

Certain sections deliberately preserve the tone of the spoken word in order to convey a more vivid impression of the way in which Mr. Goenka teaches. These sections are the stories set between the chapters and the questions and answers that conclude each chapter, dialogues taken from actual discussions with students during a course or in private interviews. Some of the stories are drawn from events in the life of the Buddha, others from the rich Indian heritage of folk tales, and others still from the personal experiences of Mr. Goenka. All are narrated in his own words, not with the intention of improving on the originals but simply to present the stories in a fresh way, emphasizing their relevance to the practice of meditation. These stories lighten the serious atmosphere of a Vipassana course and offer inspiration by illustrating central points of the teaching in memorable form. Of the many such stories told in a ten-day course, only a small selection has been included here.

Quotations are from the oldest and most widely accepted record of the Buddha's words, the *Discourse Collection (Sutta Piṭaka)*, as it has been preserved in the ancient Pāli language in Theravadin Buddhist countries. To maintain a uniform tone throughout the book, I have attempted to translate afresh all the passages quoted here. In doing so I have taken guidance from the work of leading modern translators. However, since this is not a scholarly work, I have not striven to achieve word-for-word accuracy in translating the Pāli. Instead I have tried to convey in straightforward language

the sense of each passage as it appears to a Vipassana meditator in the light of his meditation experience. Perhaps the rendering of certain words or passages may seem unorthodox, but in matters of substance, I hope, the English follows the most literal meaning of the original texts.

For the sake of consistency and precision, Buddhist terms used in the text have been given in their Pāli forms even though in some cases the Sanskrit may be more familiar to readers of English. For example, the Pāli **dhamma** is used in place of the Sanskrit *dharma*, **kamma** instead of *karma*, **nibbāna** instead of *nirvāṇa*, **saṅkhāra** instead of *saṃskāra*. To make the text easier to understand, Pāli words have been pluralized in English style, by adding *s*. In general, Pāli words in the text have been kept to a minimum to avoid unnecessary obscurity. However, they often offer a convenient shorthand for certain concepts unfamiliar to Western thought which cannot easily be expressed in a single word in English. For this reason, at points it has seemed preferable to use the Pāli rather than a longer English phrase. All Pāli forms printed in boldface type are defined in the glossary at the back of this book.

The technique of Vipassana offers equal benefits to all who practice it, without any discrimination on the basis of race, class, or sex. In order to remain faithful to this universal approach, I have tried to avoid using sexually exclusive language in the text. At points, however, I have used the pronoun “he” to refer to a meditator of unspecified gender. Readers are asked to consider the usage as sexually indeterminate. There is no intention of excluding women or giving undue prominence to men, since such a partiality would be contrary to the basic teaching and spirit of Vipassana.

I am grateful to the many who helped on this project. In particular, I wish to express my deep gratitude to S. N. Goenka for taking time from his busy schedule to look over the work as it developed, and even more for guiding me to take a few beginning steps on the path described here.

In a deeper sense, the true author of this work is S. N. Goenka, since my purpose is simply to present his transmission of the teaching of the Buddha. The merits of this work belong to him. Whatever defects exist are my own responsibility.

INTRODUCTION

Suppose you had the opportunity to free yourself of all worldly responsibilities for ten days, with a quiet, secluded place in which to live, protected from disturbances. In this place the basic physical requirements of room and board would be provided for you, and helpers would be on hand to see that you were reasonably comfortable. In return you would be expected only to avoid contact with others and, apart from essential activities, to spend all your waking hours with eyes closed, keeping your mind on a chosen object of attention. Would you accept the offer?

Suppose you had simply heard that such an opportunity existed, and that people like yourself were not only willing but eager to spend their free time in this way. How would you describe their activity? Navel-gazing, you might say, or contemplation; escapism or spiritual retreat; self-intoxication or self-searching; introversion or introspection. Whether the connotation is negative or positive, the common impression of meditation is that it is a withdrawal from the world. Of course there are techniques that function in this way. But meditation need not be an escape. It can also be a means to encounter the world in order to understand it and ourselves.

Every human being is conditioned to assume that the real world is outside, that the way to live life is by contact with an external reality, by seeking input, physical and mental, from without. Most of us have never considered severing outward contacts in order to see what happens inside. The idea of doing so probably sounds like choosing to spend hours staring at the test pattern on a television screen. We would rather explore the far side of the moon or the bottom of the ocean than the hidden depths within ourselves.

But in fact the universe exists for each of us only when we experience it with body and mind. It is never elsewhere, it is always here and now. By exploring the here-and-now of ourselves we can explore the world. Unless we investigate the world within we can never know reality—we will only know our beliefs about it, or our intellectual conceptions of it. By observing ourselves, however, we

can come to know reality directly and can learn to deal with it in a positive, creative way.

One method of exploring the inner world is Vipassana meditation as taught by S. N. Goenka. This is a practical way to examine the reality of one's own body and mind, to uncover and solve whatever problems lie hidden there, to develop unused potential, and to channel it for one's own good and the good of others.

Vipassanā means “insight” in the ancient Pāli language of India. It is the essence of the teaching of the Buddha, the actual experience of the truths of which he spoke. The Buddha himself attained that experience by the practice of meditation, and therefore meditation is what he primarily taught. His words are records of his experiences in meditation, as well as detailed instructions on how to practice in order to reach the goal he had attained, the experience of truth.

This much is widely accepted, but the problem remains of how to understand and follow the instructions given by the Buddha. While his words have been preserved in texts of recognized authenticity, the interpretation of the Buddha’s meditation instructions is difficult without the context of a living practice.

But if a technique exists that has been maintained for unknown generations, that offers the very results described by the Buddha, and if it conforms precisely to his instructions and elucidates points in them that have long seemed obscure, then that technique is surely worth investigating. Vipassana is such a method. It is a technique extraordinary in its simplicity, its lack of all dogma, and above all in the results it offers.

Vipassana meditation is taught in courses of ten days, open to anyone who sincerely wishes to learn the technique and who is fit to do so physically and mentally. During the ten days, participants remain within the area of the course site, having no contact with the outside world. They refrain from reading and writing, and suspend any religious or other practices, working exactly according to the instructions given. For the entire period of the course they follow a basic code of morality which includes celibacy and abstention from all intoxicants. They also maintain silence among themselves for the first nine days of the course, although they are free to discuss meditation problems with the teacher and material problems with the management.

During the first three and a half days the participants practice an exercise of mental concentration. This is preparatory to the technique of Vipassana proper, which is introduced on the fourth day of the course. Further steps within the practice are introduced each day, so that by the end of the course the entire technique has been presented in outline. On the tenth day silence ends, and meditators make the transition back to a more extroverted way of life. The course concludes on the morning of the eleventh day.

The experience of ten days is likely to contain a number of surprises for the meditator. The first is that meditation is hard work! The popular idea that it is a kind of inactivity or relaxation is soon found to be a misconception. Continual application is needed to direct the mental processes consciously in a particular way. The instructions are to work with full effort yet without any tension, but until one learns how to do this, the exercise can be frustrating or even exhausting.

Another surprise is that, to begin with, the insights gained by self-observation are not likely to be all pleasant and blissful. Normally we are very selective in our view of ourselves. When we look into a mirror we are careful to strike the most flattering pose, the most pleasing expression. In the same way we each have a mental image of ourselves which emphasizes admirable qualities, minimizes defects, and omits some sides of our character altogether. We see the image that we wish to see, not the reality. But Vipassana meditation is a technique for observing reality from every angle. Instead of a carefully edited self-image, the meditator confronts the whole uncensored truth. Certain aspects of it are bound to be hard to accept.

At times it may seem that instead of finding inner peace one has found nothing but agitation by meditating. Everything about the course may seem unworkable, unacceptable: the heavy timetable, the facilities, the discipline, the instructions and advice of the teacher, the technique itself.

Another surprise, however, is that the difficulties pass away. At a certain point meditators learn to make effortless efforts, to maintain a relaxed alertness, a detached involvement. Instead of struggling, they become engrossed in the practice. Now inadequacies of the facilities seem unimportant, the discipline becomes a helpful

support, the hours pass quickly, unnoticed. The mind becomes as calm as a mountain lake at dawn, perfectly mirroring its surroundings and at the same time revealing its depths to those who look more closely. When this clarity comes, every moment is full of affirmation, beauty, and peace.

Thus the meditator discovers that the technique actually works. Each step in turn may seem an enormous leap, and yet one finds one can do it. At the end of ten days it becomes clear how long a journey it has been from the beginning of the course. The meditator has undergone a process analogous to a surgical operation, to lancing a pus-filled wound. Cutting open the lesion and pressing on it to remove the pus is painful, but unless this is done the wound can never heal. Once the pus is removed, one is free of it and of the suffering it caused, and can regain full health. Similarly, by passing through a ten-day course, the meditator relieves the mind of some of its tensions, and enjoys greater mental health. The process of Vipassana has worked deep changes within, changes that persist after the end of the course. The meditator finds that whatever mental strength was gained during the course, whatever was learned, can be applied in daily life for one's own benefit and for the good of others. Life becomes more harmonious, fruitful, and happy.

The technique taught by S. N. Goenka is that which he learned from his teacher, the late Sayagyi U Ba Khin of Burma, who was taught Vipassana by Saya U Thet, a well-known teacher of meditation in Burma in the first half of this century. In turn, Saya U Thet was a pupil of Ledi Sayadaw, a famous Burmese scholar-monk of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Further back there is no record of the names of the teachers of this technique, but it is believed by those who practise it that Ledi Sayadaw learned Vipassana meditation from traditional teachers who had preserved it through generations since ancient times, when the teaching of the Buddha was first introduced into Burma.

Certainly the technique agrees with the instructions of the Buddha on meditation, with the simplest, most literal meaning of his words. And most important, it provides results that are good, personal, tangible, and immediate.

This book is not a do-it-yourself manual for the practice of Vipassana meditation, and people who use it this way proceed

entirely at their own risk. The technique should be learned only in a course where there is a proper environment to support the meditator and a properly trained guide. Meditation is a serious matter, especially the Vipassana technique, which deals with the depths of the mind. It should never be approached lightly or casually. If reading this book inspires you to try Vipassana, you can contact the addresses listed at the back to find out when and where courses are given.

The purpose here is merely to give an outline of the Vipassana method as it is taught by S. N. Goenka, in the hope that this will widen the understanding of the Buddha's teachings and of the meditation technique that is their essence.

Swimology

Once a young professor was making a sea voyage. He was a highly educated man with a long tail of letters after his name, but he had little experience of life. In the crew of the ship on which he was travelling was an illiterate old sailor. Every evening the sailor would visit the cabin of the young professor to listen to him hold forth on many different subjects. He was very impressed with the learning of the young man.

One evening as the sailor was about to leave the cabin after several hours of conversation, the professor asked, "Old man, have you studied geology?"

"What is that, sir?"

"The science of the earth."

"No, sir, I have never been to any school or college. I have never studied anything."

"Old man, you have wasted a quarter of your life."

With a long face the old sailor went away. "If such a learned person says so, certainly it must be true," he thought. "I have wasted a quarter of my life!"

Next evening again as the sailor was about to leave the cabin, the professor asked him, "Old man, have you studied oceanography?"

"What is that, sir?"

"The science of the sea."

"No, sir, I have never studied anything."

"Old man, you have wasted half your life."

With a still longer face the sailor went away: "I have wasted half my life; this learned man says so."

Next evening once again the young professor questioned the old sailor: "Old man, have you studied meteorology?"

"What is that, sir? I have never even heard of it."

"Why, the science of the wind, the rain, the weather."

"No, sir. As I told you, I have never been to any school. I have never studied anything."

"You have not studied the science of the earth on which you live; you have not studied the science of the sea on which you earn your

livelihood; you have not studied the science of the weather which you encounter every day? Old man, you have wasted three quarters of your life.”

The old sailor was very unhappy: “This learned man says that I have wasted three quarters of my life! Certainly I must have wasted three quarters of my life.”

The next day it was the turn of the old sailor. He came running to the cabin of the young man and cried, “Professor sir, have you studied swimology?”

“Swimology? What do you mean?”

“Can you swim, sir?”

“No, I don't know how to swim.”

“Professor sir, you have wasted all your life! The ship has struck a rock and is sinking. Those who can swim may reach the nearby shore, but those who cannot swim will drown. I am so sorry, professor sir, you have surely lost your life.”

You may study all the “ologies” of the world, but if you do not learn swimology, all your studies are useless. You may read and write books on swimming, you may debate on its subtle theoretical aspects, but how will that help you if you refuse to enter the water yourself? You must learn how to swim.

Chapter 1

THE SEARCH

All of us seek peace and harmony, because this is what we lack in our lives. We all want to be happy; we regard it as our right. Yet happiness is a goal we strive toward more often than attain. At times we all experience dissatisfaction in life—agitation, irritation, disharmony, suffering. Even if at this moment we are free from such dissatisfactions, we can all remember a time when they afflicted us and can foresee a time when they may recur. Eventually we all must face the suffering of death.

Nor do our personal dissatisfactions remain limited to ourselves; instead, we keep sharing our suffering with others. The atmosphere around each unhappy person becomes charged with agitation, so that all who enter that environment may also feel agitated and unhappy. In this way individual tensions combine to create the tensions of society.

This is the basic problem of life: its unsatisfactory nature. Things happen that we do not want; things that we want do not happen. And we are ignorant of how or why this process works, just as we are each ignorant of our own beginning and end.

Twenty-five centuries ago in northern India, a man decided to investigate this problem, the problem of human suffering. After years of searching and trying various methods, he discovered a way to gain insight into the reality of his own nature and to experience true freedom from suffering. Having reached the highest goal of liberation, of release from misery and conflict, he devoted the rest of his life to helping others do as he had done, showing them the way to liberate themselves.

This person—**Siddhattha Gotama**, known as the Buddha, “the enlightened one”—never claimed to be anything other than a man. Like all great teachers he became the subject of legends, but no matter what marvelous stories were told of his past existences or his miraculous powers, still all accounts agree that he never claimed to be divine or to be divinely inspired. Whatever special qualities he

had were pre-eminently human qualities that he had brought to perfection. Therefore, whatever he achieved is within the grasp of any human being who works as he did.

The Buddha did not teach any religion or philosophy or system of belief. He called his teaching **Dhamma**, that is, “law,” the law of nature. He had no interest in dogma or idle speculation. Instead he offered a universal, practical solution for a universal problem. “Now as before,” he said, “I teach about suffering and the eradication of suffering.”¹ He refused even to discuss anything which did not lead to liberation from misery.

This teaching, he insisted, was not something that he had invented or that was divinely revealed to him.. It was simply the truth, reality, which by his own efforts he had succeeded in discovering, as many people before him had done, as many people after him would do. He claimed no monopoly on the truth.

Nor did he assert any special authority for his teaching—neither because of the faith that people had in him, nor because of the apparently logical nature of what he taught. On the contrary, he stated that it is proper to doubt and to test whatever is beyond one's experience:

Do not simply believe whatever you are told, or whatever has been handed down from past generations, or what is common opinion, or whatever the scriptures say. Do not accept something as true merely by deduction or inference, or by considering outward appearances, or by partiality for a certain view, or because of its plausibility, or because your teacher tells you it is so. But when you yourselves directly know, “These principles are unwholesome, blameworthy, condemned by the wise; when adopted and carried out they lead to harm and suffering,” then you should abandon them. And when you yourselves directly know, “These principles are wholesome, blameless, praised by the wise; when adopted and carried out they lead to welfare and happiness,” then you should accept and practise them.²

The highest authority is one's own experience of truth. Nothing should be accepted on faith alone; we have to examine to see whether it is logical, practical, beneficial. Nor having examined a

teaching by means of our reason is it sufficient to accept it as true intellectually. If we are to benefit from the truth, we have to experience it directly. Only then can we know that it is really true. The Buddha always emphasized that he taught only what he had experienced by direct knowledge, and he encouraged others to develop such knowledge themselves, to become their own authorities: "Each of you, make yourself an island, make yourself your refuge; there is no other refuge. Make truth your island, make truth your refuge; there is no other refuge."³

The only real refuge in life, the only solid ground on which to take a stand, the only authority that can give proper guidance and protection is truth, Dhamma, the law of nature, experienced and verified by oneself. Therefore in his teaching the Buddha always gave highest importance to the direct experience of truth. What he had experienced he explained as clearly as possible so that others might have guidelines with which to work toward their own realization of truth. He said, "The teaching I have presented does not have separate outward and inward versions. Nothing has been kept hidden in the fist of the teacher."⁴ He had no esoteric doctrine for a chosen few. On the contrary, he wished to make the law of nature known as plainly and as widely as possible, so that as many people as possible might benefit from it.

Neither was he interested in establishing a sect or a personality cult with himself as its center. The personality of the one who teaches, he maintained, is of minor importance compared to the teaching. His purpose was to show others how to liberate themselves, not to turn them into blind devotees. To a follower who showed excessive veneration for him he said, "What do you gain by seeing this body, which is subject to corruption? He who sees the Dhamma sees me; he who sees me sees the Dhamma."⁵

Devotion toward another person, no matter how saintly, is not sufficient to liberate anyone; there can be no liberation or salvation without direct experience of reality. Therefore truth has primacy, not the one who speaks it. All respect is due to whoever teaches the truth, but the best way to show that respect is by working to realize the truth oneself. When extravagant honors were paid to him near the end of his life, the Buddha commented, "This is not how an enlightened one is properly honored, or shown respect, or revered,

or revered, or venerated. Rather it is the monk or nun, the lay male or female follower who steadfastly walks on the path of Dhamma from the first steps to the final goal, who practises Dhamma working in the right way, that honors, respects, reveres, reverences and venerates the enlightened one with the highest respect.”⁶

What the Buddha taught was a way that each human being can follow. He called this path the Noble Eightfold Path, meaning a practice of eight interrelated parts. It is noble in the sense that anyone who walks on the path is bound to become a noble-hearted, saintly person, freed from suffering.

It is a path of insight into the nature of reality, a path of truth-realization. In order to solve our problems, we have to see our situation as it really is. We must learn to recognize superficial, apparent reality, and also to penetrate beyond appearances so as to perceive subtler truths, then ultimate truth, and finally to experience the truth of freedom from suffering. Whatever name we choose to give this truth of liberation, whether **nibbāna**, “heaven,” or anything else, is unimportant. The important thing is to experience it.

The only way to experience truth directly is to look within, to observe oneself. All our lives we have been accustomed to look outward. We have always been interested in what is happening outside, what others are doing. We have rarely, if ever, tried to examine ourselves, our own mental and physical structure, our own actions, our own reality. Therefore we remain unknown to ourselves. We do not realize how harmful this ignorance is, how much we remain the slaves of forces within ourselves of which we are unaware.

This inner darkness must be dispelled to apprehend the truth. We must gain insight into our own nature in order to understand the nature of existence. Therefore the path that the Buddha showed is a path of introspection, of self-observation. He said, “Within this very fathom-long body containing the mind with its perceptions, I make known the universe, its origin, its cessation, and the way leading to its cessation.”⁷ The entire universe and the laws of nature by which it works are to be experienced within oneself. They can *only* be experienced within oneself.

The path is also a path of purification. We investigate the truth about ourselves not out of idle intellectual curiosity but rather with a definite purpose. By observing ourselves we become aware for the first time of the conditioned reactions, the prejudices that cloud our mental vision, that hide reality from us and produce suffering. We recognize the accumulated inner tensions that keep us agitated, miserable, and we realize they can be removed. Gradually we learn how to allow them to dissolve, and our minds become pure, peaceful, and happy.

The path is a process requiring continual application. Sudden breakthroughs may come, but they are the result of sustained efforts. It is necessary to work step by step; with every step, however, the benefits are immediate. We do not follow the path in the hope of accruing benefits to be enjoyed only in the future, of attaining after death a heaven that is known here only by conjecture. The benefits must be concrete, vivid, personal, experienced here and now.

Above all, it is a teaching to be practised. Simply having faith in the Buddha or his teachings will not help to free us from suffering; neither will a merely intellectual understanding of the path. Both of these are of value only if they inspire us to put the teachings into practice. Only the actual practice of what the Buddha taught will give concrete results and change our lives for the better. The Buddha said,

Someone may recite much of the texts, but if he does not practise them, such a heedless person is like a herdsman who only counts the cows of others; he does not enjoy the rewards of the life of a truth-seeker.

Another may be able to recite only a few words from the texts, but if he lives the life of Dhamma, taking steps on the path from its beginning to the goal, then he enjoys the rewards of the life of a truth-seeker.⁸

The path must be followed, the teaching must be implemented; otherwise it is a meaningless exercise.

It is not necessary to call oneself a Buddhist in order to practise this teaching. Labels are irrelevant. Suffering makes no distinctions, but is common to all; therefore the remedy, to be useful, must be equally applicable to all. Neither is the practice reserved only for

recluses who are divorced from ordinary life. Certainly a period must be given in which to devote oneself exclusively to the task of learning how to practise, but having done so one must apply the teaching in daily life. Someone who forsakes home and worldly responsibilities in order to follow the path has the opportunity to work more intensively, to assimilate the teaching more deeply, and therefore to progress more quickly. On the other hand, someone involved in worldly life, juggling the claims of many different responsibilities, can give only limited time to the practice. But whether homeless or householder, one must apply Dhamma.

It is only applied Dhamma that gives results. If this is truly a way from suffering to peace, then as we progress in the practice we should become more happy in our daily lives, more harmonious, more at peace with ourselves. At the same time our relations with others should become more peaceful and harmonious. Instead of adding to the tensions of society, we should be able to make a positive contribution that will increase the happiness and welfare of all. To follow the path we must live the life of Dhamma, of truth, of purity. This is the proper way to implement the teaching. Dhamma, practised correctly, is the art of living.

Questions and Answers

QUESTION: *You keep referring to the Buddha. Are you teaching Buddhism?*

S.N. GOENKA: I am not concerned with “isms.” I teach Dhamma, that is, what the Buddha taught. He never taught any “ism” or sectarian doctrine. He taught something from which people of every background can benefit: an art of living. Remaining in ignorance is harmful for everyone; developing wisdom is good for everyone. So anyone can practise this technique and find benefit. A Christian will become a good Christian, a Jew will become a good Jew, a Muslim will become a good Muslim, a Hindu will become a good Hindu, a Buddhist will become a good Buddhist. One must become a good human being; otherwise one can never be a good Christian, a good Jew, a good Muslim, a good Hindu, a good Buddhist. How to become a good human being—that is most important.

You talk about conditioning. Isn't this training really a kind of conditioning of the mind, even if a positive one?

On the contrary, it is a process of de-conditioning. Instead of imposing anything on the mind, it automatically removes unwholesome qualities so that only wholesome, positive ones remain. By eliminating negativities, it uncovers the positivity which is the basic nature of a pure mind.

But over a period of time, to sit in a particular posture and direct the attention in a certain way is a form of conditioning.

If you do it as a game or mechanical ritual, then yes—you condition the mind. But that is a misuse of Vipassana. When it is practised correctly, it enables you to experience truth directly, for yourself. And from this experience, naturally understanding develops, which destroys all previous conditioning.

Isn't it selfish to forget about the world and just to sit and meditate all day?

It would be if this were an end in itself, but it is a means to an end that is not at all selfish: a healthy mind. When your body is sick, you enter a hospital to recover health. You don't go there for your whole life, but simply to regain health, which you will then use in ordinary life. In the same way you come to a meditation course to gain mental health, which you will then use in ordinary life for your good and for the good of others.

To remain happy and peaceful even when confronted by the suffering of others—isn't that sheer insensitivity?

Being sensitive to the suffering of others does not mean that you must become sad yourself. Instead you should remain calm and balanced, so that you can act to alleviate their suffering. If you also become sad, you increase the unhappiness around you; you do not help others, you do not help yourself.

Why don't we live in a state of peace?

Because wisdom is lacking. A life without wisdom is a life of illusion, which is a state of agitation, of misery. Our first responsibility is to live a healthy, harmonious life, good for

- [Fighter Wing: A Guided Tour of an Air Force Combat Wing online](#)
- [read Sir Francis Walsingham: Courtier in an Age of Terror](#)
- [read The Sources of Social Power Volume 1, A History of Power from the Beginning to AD 1760, \(2nd edition\) pdf, azw \(kindle\), epub, doc, mobi](#)
- [download online High-Speed Circuit Board Signal Integrity \(Artech House Microwave Library\)](#)
- [download Homesick pdf, azw \(kindle\), epub](#)
- [The Mental Floss History of the World: An Irreverent Romp through Civilization's Best Bits *here*](#)

- <http://kamallubana.com/?library/Children-of-the-Day.pdf>
- <http://crackingscience.org/?library/Aircraft-Design--A-Systems-Engineering-Approach--Aerospace-Series-.pdf>
- <http://honareavalmusic.com/?books/The-Sources-of-Social-Power-Volume-1--A-History-of-Power-from-the-Beginning-to-AD-1760---2nd-edition-.pdf>
- <http://creativebeard.ru/freebooks/High-Speed-Circuit-Board-Signal-Integrity--Artech-House-Microwave-Library-.pdf>
- <http://test1.batsinbelfries.com/ebooks/Empires-of-Ancient-Mesopotamia--Great-Empires-of-the-Past-.pdf>
- <http://aircon.servicessingaporecompany.com/?lib/The-Mental-Floss-History-of-the-World--An-Irreverent-Romp-through-Civilization-s-Best-Bits.pdf>