

VIPASSANA, the path to a harmonious way of life.....



S.N. Goenka (30 January 1924-29 September 2013)

As mentioned in my previous paper, and preparation for this 10-day Vipassana Training, I was ready to accept whatever hardship would come my way; keeping noble silence, sharing my sleeping quarters, no smoking, confronting whatever trials I would need to face in order to “come clean” at the end of this voluntary confinement.

This gives a good impression what our waking day looked like:

4 am	Morning wake-up bell
4:30-6:30 am	Meditate in the hall or own quarters
6:30-8:00 am	Breakfast
9:00-11 am	GROUP MEDITATION and Instructions in the Hall
11:00-12:00	Lunch
12:00-1:00 pm	Rest and interviews with the teacher
1:00-2:30 pm	Meditate in the Hall or own quarters
2:30-3:30 pm	GROUP MEDITATION in the Hall
3:30-5:00 pm	Meditate in the Hall or own quarters
5:00-6:00 pm	Tea break (fruit)
6:00-7:00 pm	GROUP MEDITATION in the Hall
7:00-8:15 pm	Teacher’s Discourse (S.N. Goenka video recordings)
8:15-9:00 pm	GROUP MEDITATION in the Hall
9:00-9:30 pm	Question time in the Hall
09:30 pm	Retire and lights out

This would add up to almost 10 hours of meditation per day, in which the technique was explained and practiced, in gradual steps and by the master himself. The first three days focuses on a “tool” technique that trains the sensitivity of physical awareness called “Anapanna”, after which the actual meditation technique of Vipassana commences. The brief introduction to the various aspects and elements of Buddhism are explained, but at every stage it is emphasized that the technique is not part of a religion, or a sect of a cult for that matter. It enables the practitioner to lead a life that will walk along the same path (Dhamma)¹, that would for any human being that values compassion and care for themselves and others. The principle of this is very simple: *“People who cause their own suffering through craving, aversion and ignorance, will not only persist in their own unhappiness, but cause the suffering and unhappiness of others”*.

¹ <http://akke-myrielle.tumblr.com/post/84511505661/buddhism-and-modern-psychology-princeton-university>

The Universal Code, the Sila, hold precepts that do not conflict any given moral code in any given religion:

- To abstain from killing any being
- To abstain from stealing
- To abstain from sexual misconduct
- To abstain from wrong speech/telling lies
- To abstain from all intoxicants

Five Precepts², not the Ten (commandments) that are equally or doubly difficult to keep to and are broken practically every step of the way. For the entire stay those Five Precepts are to be observed; not to kill any being, also includes insects.... (!), abstain from stealing should be seen in a broader context; for example, old students are allowed only lemon water during the teabreak (the new student are allowed fruit and milk). It happened on several occasions that the new students – possibly because they hadn't read the sign that the lemon water was for the old students only – liberally helped themselves to the lemon water. Men and Women are strictly separated during the course; keeping not only to their own quarters, but also to their own walking and dining areas. The Noble Silence is maintained throughout the first 9 days of the course, as the temptation to speak untruth is brought back to a minimum. No drugs (obviously), alcohol and cigarettes are allowed.

It is very much like entering solitary confinement, and on three occasions the question is specifically asked to be sure that this is what you choose voluntary, and commit to finalizing the course. There has never been a doubt in my mind that I would complete the course, but I was not prepared for the enormous non-relenting avalanche of thoughts, memories, recollections, fragments of occurrences from my past, as early as kindergarten age. Some of these appeared out of nowhere and presented themselves in images and stills, but the most painful incidents came in full scenarios and scenes, bringing home fully fledged emotional scales and subsequent feelings of embarrassment and humiliations. Emotional scar tissue is gradually unraveled during this process and Sankharas (mental conditioning/reactions persisting in suffering), can be identified in: abandonment, deception, betrayal, anxieties etc.. Some of my memories are so absurd that I found them impossible to categorise and simply decided to store them in a separate bin, called "delusions", and gradually through this stampede of wild, galloping horses that swamped my mind, I put some structure in my thoughts and found some answers to the major questions I had carried with me throughout my life.

What most people will probably notice and have already remarked upon since my return home and to the office, is the fact that I don't smoke. The way I look at this and keep it in its perspective is to see this as an opportunity to "test" my control over my own craving and practice Vipassana on a day to day basis, or rather from moment to moment and exercise Anicca, the awareness that things arise and then they go; a constant movement of change and impermanence. So, when I catch myself thinking: "mmmm, wouldn't mind a cigarette now...", I tell myself... "this craving is here now, but it will go in a moment...", funnily it does. I also define it by a way of postponing taking my first cigarette, so that I cannot create my own pitfall by telling myself that I will NEVER smoke again, and building a pressure loop that I will find myself failing, if I do succumb. Reason behind this, is if I can exercise this with such an ingrained behavioural patterns, surely I can teach myself to view my most negative emotions in this observant way, and control the instant reaction of breaking someone's nose, for instance.....

The budding awareness of how to turn one's negative thoughts into objective ones, and to remain alert of the impulses to seek satisfaction and continue craving and attachment, is not a change within someone's reactions that can be achieved overnight, but takes practice..., a lot of practice. I am on the right path, I feel. It was certainly the most incredible experience I have had in terms of self-

² <http://akke-myrielle.tumblr.com/post/81879903671/buddhism-in-modern-psychology-princeton-university>

reflection, and hope that through persistent efforts, I will be able to develop this self-awareness and succeed in being a better, happier person, bringing compassion and mindfulness to those around me.

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