

“May all suffering people of the world understand what is Dhamma, may they practice Dhamma, may they apply Dhamma in their day-to-day life and come out of all the agonies of a defiled mind full of negativities. May all enjoy the peace and harmony of a pure mind, a mind full of compassionate love and goodwill towards other beings.”

- S.N. Goenka

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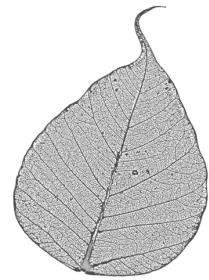
Questions of Self-reflection on Humility and Gratitude

- Am I more able to give constructive criticism with a caring mind, without negativity?
- Am I more able to hear criticism from others with less negativity and defensiveness?
- Am I less judgmental?
- Am I better able to be happy with successes of my friends and family?
- Am I able to speak without always trying to draw attention to myself?
- Am I able to accept more readily that my way is not always best?
- Even if my way seems best, does that really matter as much as the harmony of the group?
- Am I better at making a sincere apology with the desire and effort to change?
- Am I thankful towards the Dhamma because of the changes I see in me?
- Do I wish to help spread the Dhamma so others can benefit as I have?
- Do I have respect and gratitude towards those who are good models of the Dhamma?
- Do I have gratitude for my Dhamma friends and community?

Section 1

- Procedures -

Dhamma Service
Source Book



A Good Dhamma Server

In daily life, there are many ups and downs. To maintain equanimity and to generate love and compassion despite these vicissitudes is the training of Vipassanā. When Vipassanā meditators give Dhamma service, they learn in a healthy atmosphere how to apply Dhamma in life.

While giving service you come across different types of meditators. Some may be lazy, or talkative, or rude. Sometimes an immature Dhamma server reacts in kind and replies rudely or behaves like a jailer. But you are trained that, in spite of any mistakes made by the students, you must not become angry. Instead you must maintain a balanced mind filled with love and compassion. You may make mistakes and learn to correct yourself, and in this way, you learn how to face unwanted situations equanimously.

In the atmosphere of a Dhamma center or course, it is easier to learn how to face various situations, and then you can start to apply this wisdom in your daily life. This is a training ground for each server to learn how to live a good life.

The Buddha said that a good Dhamma person has two qualities: the quality of selflessly serving others and the quality of gratitude for help received. These two qualities are rare.

A Dhamma server has the opportunity to develop both qualities. You practice serving others without expecting anything in return, and you start to develop a feeling of gratitude towards the Buddha, who discovered this wonderful technique and gave it to the world, and towards the chain of teachers, right from the Buddha up to today, who maintained this technique in its pristine purity. One feels like repaying the debt of gratitude by serving others in order to fulfill the mission of the Teacher. One feels so happy and contented serving others and helping them to come out of their misery. Therefore Dhamma service works both ways: It helps others, and it helps the Dhamma server too.

May you all gain strength in Dhamma for your own benefit, and may you continue to serve others for the good and benefit of so many.

- S.N. Goenka

Dhamma Workers' Schedule

5:30 – 6:30 amPreparation and serving breakfast / Some preparation for lunch
6:30 – 7:00 amBreakfast
7:00 – 7:45 amClean-up
8:00 – 9:00 amGroup Meditation in the hall
9:15 – 11:00 amLunch preparation
11:20 – 11:45 a.m.Lunch for servers
11:45 – 1:00 p.m.Clean-up
1:00 – 2:15 p.m.Rest period
2:30 – 3:30 p.m.Group Meditation in the hall
3:45 – 5:00 p.m.Preparation of special meals and supper for staff
5:00 – 5:30 p.m.Supper
5:30 – 5:50 p.m.Clean up and breakfast layout
6:00 – 7:00 p.m.Group Meditation in the hall
7:00 – 8:15 p.m.Discourse or personal time - bathing, resting, reading, laundry, etc.
8:20 – 9:00 p.m.Final meditation in hall
9:00 – 9:30 p.m.Workers' *Mettā* followed by a short check-in with ATs

Every effort has been made in the scheduling and planning of menus so that all work can be finished in the kitchen by 6:00 p.m. This has been done to allow servers to have the evening for rest and meditation.

It is not mandatory to come to the evening discourse or final sitting with the students. Most servers enjoy the discourses and attend many of them. Some nights they decide to rest and read or do laundry or go for a walk.

We encourage all servers to attend the last meditation session from 8:20 – 9:00 p.m. with the students. After the students have left the hall at 9:00 p.m. the servers and Assistant Teachers practice *Mettā* together and then have a short meeting to review the activities of the day and discuss the next day.

It is good to go straight to bed after final *Mettā*. When servers attend the last meditation session, followed by worker's *Mettā* and then go straight to their rooms, they find they are more rested and their service is easier. If there is a need to go back to the kitchen, please mention it to the ATs at the evening *Mettā* session for servers.

May your service help you to advance on the path of Dhamma, of liberation, of freedom from all suffering, of real happiness.



Code of Conduct for Dhamma Servers

May Dhamma service prove most beneficial to you. With best wishes for success we offer the following information. Please read it carefully before coming to serve.

Selfless Service

Selfless service is an essential part of the path of Dhamma, an important step in the direction of liberation. The practice of Vipassana gradually eradicates mental impurities until inner peace and happiness are attained. At first, this liberation from misery may be only partial, but still it brings a deep sense of gratitude for having been given the wonderful teaching of Dhamma. With these feelings of love and

compassion, the wish naturally arises to help others come out of their misery. Serving on courses provides an opportunity to express this gratitude by helping people as they learn Dhamma, without expecting anything in return. In selflessly serving others we also serve ourselves by developing the ten *pāramī* and dissolving the habit of egotism.

Who is Qualified for Dhamma Service

Students who have successfully completed a ten-day Vipassana course with Goenkaji or one of his assistant teachers, and who have not practiced any other meditation technique since their last

Vipassana course, may give Dhamma service. Servers are also encouraged to be trying to maintain their daily practice at home.

The Code of Discipline

Unless otherwise stated here, Dhamma servers should, as far as possible, follow the rules in the *Code of Discipline for Meditation Courses*. Those rules also

apply to servers. In certain instances, however, relaxation of them is necessary and permitted.

The Five Precepts

The Five Precepts are the foundation of the Code of Discipline:

- to abstain from killing any being
- to abstain from stealing
- to abstain from sexual misconduct (meaning, at the meditation center, to abstain from all sexual activity whatsoever)

- to abstain from wrong speech
- to abstain from all intoxicants

These Five Precepts are mandatory for everyone at the center and must be observed scrupulously at all times. It is expected that those serving are also seriously trying to maintain the Five Precepts in their daily lives.

Accepting Guidance

Dhamma servers should follow the instructions of the Teachers, the assistant teachers, and the center administration and management committees, being amenable to the advice and guidance of those who are elder in meditation or in service. Changing established practices or initiating projects without authorization or against the directions of those responsible will cause confusion, duplication of efforts and be a waste of time and material. Insisting on working

independently of any direction is inconsistent with the spirit of cooperation and congeniality which pervades the Dhamma atmosphere. By following instructions servers learn to set aside personal preferences and prejudices and do what is needed for the good of the meditators and the efficient and harmonious running of courses and the center. Problems should be resolved openly and with humility. Positive suggestions are always welcome.

Relations with Meditators

In every situation Dhamma servers should defer to the welfare of the students who are sitting a course. Courses and centers are for meditators; they are the most important people, doing the most essential work. The job of a Dhamma server is simply to assist the meditators in whatever way possible. Students should therefore be given preference for accommodation and food. Unless they have pressing duties, Dhamma servers should not take

their food until after the students have been served, and they should not sit with students in the dining hall. Dhamma servers should use the bathrooms for bathing and laundry at times other than the students, and they should go to bed only after the students have done so, in case a problem should arise at that time. For all other facilities as well, students must be given preference, and servers should avoid disturbing them as much as possible.

Dealing with Students

Only course managers should interact directly with the students—female managers with female students, male managers with male students. They need

to be aware whether the students are following the discipline and timetable, and may have to speak with those who are not doing so. This task should always be done in

a friendly and compassionate manner, with the volition of encouraging the meditators to overcome their difficulties. Words should be phrased mindfully, in a positive way—never harshly. If one is unable to do so, a co-worker should deal with the situation. Managers must always take care to inquire about rather than assume the cause of some apparent misconduct.

All Dhamma servers should be respectful and polite, and available to help when approached. It is usually helpful to ask the student's name. Servers should try to refer

students to the proper person with a minimum of talking or distraction – either the assistant teacher or the course manager – depending on the nature of the problem. Dhamma servers should not attempt to answer students' questions pertaining to meditation, but should suggest that such questions be asked of the assistant teachers. Assistant teachers should be kept informed of any contact the management has with students. The private affairs of students should never be unnecessarily discussed with others serving in the kitchen or elsewhere.

Meditation Practice for Servers

Dhamma servers should serve conscientiously, without wasting time, giving full attention to their work; this is their training. At the same time, they must also maintain their meditation practice. Every server must meditate at least three hours daily; if possible, this should be during the group sittings at 8:00 a.m., 2:30 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. In addition, every evening that an assistant teacher is present, there is a short meditation session for servers in the Dhamma hall at 9:00 p.m. These meditation periods are essential for the well-being of the Dhamma servers. Servers on a course should practice Vipassana, using Anapana when needed. Dhamma servers may change their positions during group sittings if they wish.

At all times Dhamma servers have a responsibility to observe themselves. They should try to be equanimous in all circumstances and aware of their mental volition. If unable to do so because of tiredness or any other reason, they should meditate or rest more, no matter how pressing their work seems. Servers should not imagine themselves to be indispensable. One can only give proper Dhamma service when there is peace and harmony within. If the base is not positive, the work that is done will not be truly beneficial. Servers staying at the center for longer times must periodically sit a 10-day course, completely laying aside all work, and not expecting any special preference or privilege as a result of having given Dhamma service.

Meeting the Assistant Teachers

Servers should discuss any problems or difficulties with the Teachers or the assistant teachers. The proper time to raise

questions about serving or general matters is after the 9:00 p.m. evening meditation session for servers. Private interviews can

also be arranged. In the absence of assistant teachers, servers should bring

questions or difficulties to the center management.

Separation of Men and Women

This separation is always in effect, both during and between courses. While absolute separation of the sexes is not practical for the servers due to the close working conditions, this situation should

not be misunderstood as an opportunity for men and women to socialize beyond what is necessary to perform their Dhamma service. This rule is all the more important for couples.

Physical Contact

In order to maintain the pure meditative atmosphere and the introspective nature of the practice, and to set a good example for the students, all Dhamma servers must

avoid any physical contact with meditators and other servers of either sex. Both during and between courses, this rule is always to be followed.

Noble Speech

The Noble Silence of the meditators should be respected by the Dhamma servers. They should try to be silent within the meditation compound and speak only when necessary. Even if students are not within earshot or there is no course in progress, it is important not to disturb the silence needlessly.

When speaking, servers must practice Right Speech, refraining from:

- speaking lies or anything less than the truth;
- harsh language or rude words. Someone practicing Dhamma should always be polite and soft-spoken.
- slander or backbiting. There should be no criticism of others arising from one's own negative feelings. A problem should be brought to the attention of the person concerned or to the assistant teachers or center management.
- idle gossip, singing, whistling or humming

Noble Speech is, without a doubt, much more difficult than silence. It is therefore a very important training for anyone following the path of Dhamma.

Personal Appearance

In the eyes of others, Dhamma servers are representatives of the Teaching and the center. For this reason, the appearance of

the servers should always be neat and clean, and nothing should be worn which is tight, transparent, gaudy, revealing, or that might

attract undue attention (such as shorts, short skirts, tights and leggings, sleeveless or skimpy tops). Jewelry should be kept to

a minimum or not worn at all. This attitude of modesty prevails at all times.

Smoking

It is assumed that one who has accepted Dhamma is no longer involved in the use of intoxicants such as alcohol, hashish, marijuana, and so forth. The use of tobacco in any form is also totally

prohibited, indoors or outdoors, either within or outside of the meditation compound. Also, Dhamma servers should not leave the property to smoke.

Food

The Center provides simple, wholesome, vegetarian meals, without subscribing to any particular food philosophy. The Dhamma servers, like all students, are expected to accept what is offered in a spirit of renunciation.

Because meals prepared and served at courses are completely vegetarian, food containing alcohol or liqueur, eggs or food

containing eggs (some baked goods, mayonnaise, etc.), or cheese with animal rennet, may not be brought to the center. In general, any food from outside should be kept to an absolute minimum.

Servers observe Five Precepts and may therefore have a meal in the evening if they wish. Fasting is not permitted.

Reading

Servers who would like to keep abreast of current events may read newspapers or news magazines, but only in the rest areas set aside for Dhamma servers and out of sight of the students. Anyone wishing to read more than the daily news is invited to

choose books from those that appear on the recommended reading list or from the Dhamma Library at the Center. Novels or other books read for entertainment are not permitted.

Outside Contacts

Servers are not required to divorce themselves entirely from the outside world. While serving on a course, however, they should leave the site only on urgent business and with the

permission of the assistant teachers. Telephone calls should be kept to a necessary minimum. Private visitors may come to the Center only with the prior permission of the management.

Keeping the Center Clean

It is the duty of the Dhamma servers to help keep the Center neat and clean. Besides the kitchen and dining hall, the residences, meditation hall, bathrooms,

offices and other areas may need attention. Servers should also be prepared, if necessary, to do occasional chores unrelated to food preparation and cleaning.

Use of Center Property

Every student of *Vipassanā* undertakes to abstain from taking what is not given. Dhamma servers must therefore be careful not to appropriate Center property by

taking anything for their quarters or personal use without first obtaining permission from the management.

Staying at the Center for Extended Periods

With the agreement of an assistant teacher, serious students may stay at the Center for longer periods in order to become more established in the theory and practice of Dhamma. During this time

they will be able to meditate on some courses and serve on others, as decided in consultation with the teachers and management. *Please see the Long Term Server's Section for more details.*

Dāna

The Code of Discipline for meditators states that there are no charges at courses or centers, either for the Teaching, or for board, lodging, or other facilities provided to students. This applies to Dhamma servers as well.

The teaching of pure Dhamma is always given freely. Food, accommodation and other facilities are offered as gifts made possible by the donations of students of the past. Dhamma servers should recognize this and give their service making best use of the gifts received, so that the donors may receive maximum benefit from their *dāna*. Servers in turn can develop their own *dāna pāramī* by

giving donations according to their means, for the benefit of others. Courses and centers are able to operate only by the donations of grateful students.

No one may pay for him- or herself, either by giving money or in any other way. Every donation is for the benefit of others. Nor can Dhamma service be a form of payment for room and board. On the contrary, service is of benefit to the servers themselves; since it affords them further valuable Dhamma training. A course or center provides an opportunity to practice meditation and also to practice applying Dhamma by learning to serve and deal with others with compassion and humility.

Conclusion

Dhamma servers should serve following the guidance of the assistant teachers and management. They should do all they can to assist the meditators without disturbing them in any way. The conduct of the servers should inspire confidence in Dhamma in those who are doubtful and greater faith where it already exists. They should always bear in mind that the purpose of their service is to help others,

and in so doing help themselves to grow in Dhamma.

If these rules present any difficulties for you, please seek clarification immediately from the assistant teachers or the management.

May your service help you to advance on the path of Dhamma, of liberation, of freedom from all suffering, of real happiness.



Other Service at the Center

There are other quite rewarding times to serve at the Center. Many students enjoy coming up to stay at the Center between courses. Some come regularly once a month, some at the end of each course and some once in a while. They usually arrive on Sunday morning when a course ends and stay on until the next course starts four days later on Wednesday. Some just come up on just the Sunday and others for a couple of days.

There are usually not a lot of people at the Center during this period, so it is quite relaxed and peaceful.

It is the time to tidy up the Center and prepare it for the next course. We all cook for each other, sit together 3 times a day and appreciate the Dhamma company as we work to get the Center ready for the next group of students. Assistant teachers are available if you have questions about your practice.

Dhamma Service Periods

There are Dhamma Service Periods twice a year where we all get together to give the Center the detailed care we can't give it while courses are going on. We thoroughly clean all the buildings, wash all the cushion covers in the meditation hall and give it a good cleaning. Much work is done on the grounds, weeding flower beds, planting, pruning, raking leaves, cutting trees that need to come down, stacking wood, sorting out the work shop and much more. Again we all cook for each other, sit together and there are evening discourses and Dhamma films that we don't see when we take courses.

Long-term Dhamma Service

Long-term Dhamma service offers you the opportunity to strengthen your meditation practice by applying it in your daily life over an extended period of time. It is for those of you who have a strong volition to serve and wish to develop more in Dhamma by staying at the Center for an extended period. Long-term Dhamma service requires you to work hard in a surrendered, cooperative way, with an attitude of humility and renunciation. While difficulties can arise, the rewards are many as you grow and become more established in the Dhamma.

The length of your stay at the Center is determined on a course by course basis.

At the end of each course, whether you have sat or served, you meet with the assistant teacher to discuss how things are progressing. This gives you and the assistant teacher the opportunity to evaluate the situation and determine if continuing is beneficial for both you and the Center.

Our Off-Site Long Term Service program allows students to live in our long term servers' residences, committing to at least 3 months and 30 hours of service per week to V.M.C. There are a variety of jobs that this might include such as course management support,

registration, maintenance, grounds & garden, household, and contacting volunteers to serve directly on our courses. Meals are provided at the center and segregated lodging is provided on adjacent properties close by (a 3 - 4 bedroom house and a separately located 2 bedroom apartment both including a kitchen, 2 bathrooms, garden space, and a nearby stream). Servers are permitted to do paid work elsewhere in their remaining free time. Assistant Teachers will be available to discuss students' development in Dhamma and the integration of their practice. To be eligible to attend the Off-Site Long Term Service program, a student must have already completed a 2 - 3 month Sit-Serve residential program at V.M.C.

The Center is not a commune where you come to live a householder's life. It is not a place to come because you have nowhere else to go, or a place where you go for a rest or to recover from an illness. It is a place of renunciation and celibacy where you have the unique opportunity to grow in Dhamma by giving Dhamma service on an extended basis. For these reasons long-term Dhamma servers follow the regular Code of Conduct for Dhamma Workers. In addition, the following points should be clearly understood:

Five precepts - Long-term Dhamma servers must observe the five precepts for the duration of their stay, whether on or off the Center property

Daily meditation practice - They must attend the group sittings, and also evening *Metta* (when an assistant teacher is present). Lights out at 10:00 p.m.

Facilities - Long-term Dhamma servers will be given priority in the assignment of accommodations for Dhamma workers. Accommodations may be changed often, however, to meet the immediate needs of the course. There should be no sense of "entitlement" to better accommodations just because one has been at the Center for some time.

Meeting with assistant teachers - As mentioned above, all long-term Dhamma servers, whether sitting or serving, are required to meet with the assistant teacher after each course. They may also meet with the AT by arrangement to discuss any questions or problems they are experiencing or to ask questions about the meditation.

Sitting courses - Long-term Dhamma servers should alternate between serving and sitting courses. This is generally on a sit one, serve two basis, but this can vary depending on course needs.

Serving courses - While serving on a course, long-term Dhamma servers should put aside their daily routines and give their full attention to the course. As far as possible personal affairs, medical appointments, etc., should be attended to between courses. Unless they are given permission to leave by the assistant teachers, Dhamma workers should remain at the Center during courses.

Between courses - In addition to serving courses, there is a great deal of work to be done to keep the Center running smoothly. The Center manager will delegate Center tasks, and long-term Dhamma servers are encouraged to join one of the committees that oversee the Center on an ongoing basis. Long-term Dhamma servers may leave the Center between courses. They should notify the Center manager beforehand and inform him or her of the date when they will return. These breaks will be for rest or to conduct personal business. The Center should never be used as a base to go from one social affair to another. If a server feels a need for a longer break, then arrangements should be made to stay outside of the Center.

Segregation of the sexes - To protect the Dhamma atmosphere of the Center, segregation of the sexes should be maintained at all times, both during and between courses. There are separate accommodations for men and women, and separate dining areas as well. Dhamma workers must be very careful to treat those of the opposite sex as their Dhamma brothers or sisters. While Dhamma partnerships are not discouraged, the Center is not the place to develop them. Therefore, if two people find themselves attracted to one another, and want to pursue a relationship, they should immediately leave the Center.

Reading material - Dhamma workers may use the small Center Library of Dhamma books. Newspapers may be read in the office or in the staff areas only. Other reading material is not appropriate at the Center.

Telephone and email - During a course telephone use should be limited to only necessary or urgent calls. The local library has internet access for checking email. This should be limited to between courses only.

Use of Center property - As a Dhamma server, one lives the life of renunciation. The Center will provide the basic requirements of food and shelter; other expenses are the responsibility of the servers themselves. As everything at the Center is there as the result of *Dāna* by other students, Dhamma

workers should take care not to appropriate Center property for their own use without permission.

From time to time Long term Dhamma servers should, according to their means, not miss the opportunity to give monetary donation to the Center.

Off-site Long-term Servers Guidelines

Overall guidelines:

- Primary commitment is to serve at the center and to develop their own practice
- Only for students who are fully committed to this practice
- The long term servers' quarters is considered part of the center
- All normal center guidelines are in effect there, with some exceptions per below

Sitting:

- Long term servers will sit one course every 4 months scheduled and determined with the center staff
- Long term servers are to sit at least 2 hours a day, one hour sitting per day at V.M.C. except on days off

Time Commitment:

- A minimum of 30 hours/week of service
- A minimum of 3 months commitment with a month-to-month evaluation by management committee
- Each long term server should feel they are part of the program on a month to month basis
- A maximum of 1 year, although could be extended
- Long term servers' specific days on and days off will be worked out by center staff
- The center relies on accountable service from those participating in the program; so days off, sitting courses, vacations, etc. will be coordinated with the staff

Money:

- This is not a stipend position
- No health insurance provided
- Heat & electric & basic phone service paid by the center
- Long distance charges paid by the server (they can get a phone card)
- Okay for the server to have a part-time job; no more than 10 hrs/week

Food:

- Long term servers can eat at the center while serving and can take some food from the center for days off, dinners at home
- The bulk of food taken should be left-overs

- Some items are very expensive and only ordered in small quantities, please don't take these in bulk
- Food staples will be provided by center
- Long term servers should coordinate with person doing kitchen-ordering, so the food they take does not impact the courses
- Long term servers should not eat or prepare meat, fish or poultry at the long term servers' quarters; eggs are okay

Other:

- Common areas of Long-term Servers' residences will be furnished by V.M.C.
- Twin bed mattresses are provided
- Long-term servers may furnish own bedroom
- No TV in the common room
- Servers may watch movies on their own media player in their own room
- No overnight visits
- No pets

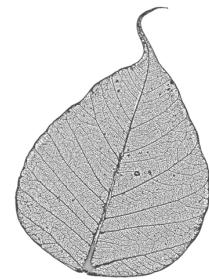
If you would like to give long-term service, please complete a course application for the first course you wish to sit and a Dhamma server's application. Please attach a letter indicating how long you would like to stay at the Center. Your application will be reviewed and we may contact you to see if you have any questions about giving service and staying at the Center.

Dhamma service has enormous benefits for those who give it, as well as for those who receive. May more and more people share these benefits and be free of their suffering.

Section 2

- Inspirational -

Dhamma Service
Source Book



Selfless Service - A Rare Quality

During the summer of 1984, I served in the kitchen for one of Goenkaji's ten-day courses at V.M.C. in Shelburne. The experience was such a positive one and was positive in such unexpected ways that I would like to share it.

First, let me say that it was very hard work. I was physically tired every afternoon and by the end of the course, I was tired in the mornings as well.

I volunteered to serve the course only because I had been served in eight or nine courses and figured it was my turn. I had no idea what was in store.

One of my life problems is trying to bring the meditation together with my ordinary life. It is much easier for me to remember compassion in the loving silence of a course than it is in the turmoil of my ongoing job and ongoing relationships. It is much easier to remember Goenkaji saying that 100 per cent of my troubles are of my own making when I am sitting day and night and walking with my eyes downcast. So my life comes in two shapes: peaceful courses and back-home chaos. I have a hard time bridging the gap, bringing the courses home.

To my considerable surprise, the experience of serving turned out to be a bit of a bridge across the gap. The context was clearly that of the course. I sat at least three sittings a day and attended about half of the discourses. I was surrounded by the atmosphere of the course and by the silent meditators. But I was also at work and in interaction and often under pressure. The kitchen wasn't large enough for the number of workers. There wasn't enough equipment, and there was never enough time. There were, in other words, all the conditions for the chaos I knew so well back home.

But the context was that of the course. My fellow workers were marvelous. They negotiated the crowded kitchen and the other pressures with grace and good humor. The people in charge never once lost their patience and cheerfulness, even under the most difficult provocations. And all of them were continually concerned about the well-being of the meditators. Slowly I came to realize in a way I had never before known that the work and the interactions were touched with *Mettā*. The course surrounded us with it. My fellow workers gave it to me generously, and gradually I began to feel it in myself. I began to realize, at an unprecedented depth, that 100 percent of my troubles were of my own making. Even though I was talking and hustling and wondering if perhaps *anicca* does not apply to oatmeal burned in the bottom of a pot - in spite of all that, I found bit-by-bit that the atmosphere of the course and the *Mettā* of my fellow workers were keeping me peaceful and compassionate. I had found a tiny fragment of a bridge across the gulf between the course and the world. Afterwards I sat a course, and then I came home to my regular life. And I have discovered that I have brought home with me a little bit - at least a touch - of equanimity. I am grateful for the opportunity to serve the course. ☩

- A Dhamma server

Letters from Vipassanā Students

Sitting my first *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* course was a big turning point in my practice. Previously, I often felt waves of gratitude arise: what incredible good fortune I had to come in contact with the Dhamma; how this had changed my life so radically; and how invaluable the practice was for me in coping and flowing along with life's changes.

What was different about this course, it seemed, was feeling a direct link to the Buddha and his teaching. As the days passed in serious meditation, and the progression of the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* unfolded through Goenkaji's discourses, my intellect and whole being finally seemed able to grasp that what I had been taught to practice daily was exactly what the Buddha himself had taught. Gone were the doubts and resistances. Gratitude overflowed with this deeper understanding, and the feeling of surrender was sweet and complete.

Of course, things keep changing. The mind has a bottomless store of defilements that keep spewing out and clouding the light, but through all the ups and downs, that deep base of gratitude, along with the accompanying devotion and willing surrender, has given me such energy to face the obstacles, such confidence and enthusiasm to keep taking more steps. I know this is the Path, and there is nothing else to do other than keep walking on it.

It's so simple and yet so amazing how profound the Buddha's teaching is, and how compassionately and tirelessly Goenkaji transmits this in its pure form. The faith and surrender that grows from my experience - at times in little or steady incremental drops, at times with flashes of insight or revelations (like for me with the *Satipaṭṭhāna Sutta* course) - are truly precious friends. With them I feel so secure that my mind settles down, becoming more peaceful, balanced and one-pointed, allowing deeper knots to begin to unravel as I continue to practice. And as the wholesome fruits of loving kindness, sympathetic joy, compassion, and equanimity develop in gradually increasing quantities, the benefits spill over into all aspects of my life. ☩

In the beginning of my practice, I was drawn to the pristine clarity of the Buddha's analysis of how the mind functions. When I took refuge, I took refuge primarily in the Dhamma, in the teachings. That taking of refuge was one of seeking protection in my growth and understanding, like putting on a secure cloak against winter's cold. Over time, there was a subtle shift in my attitude as I took refuge. Feeling protected, I began to take off ego's heavy defenses, to actively surrender to that process. "I" surrendered "my." With this shift came a tremendous softening, internally and in my interactions with others.

After a number of years, I had the opportunity to sit my first course with Goenkaji. I felt a complete sense of familiarity, of coming home, and of trust. Interwoven in surrendering to the Teachings was surrender to the Teacher. I felt such deep gratitude for the extraordinary opportunity of meeting a person whose actions were totally congruent with his words, whose active purpose in life was guiding people to alter the deepest level of their minds so they

could experience peace. Over time, Goenkaji has become interwoven in my mind with the long line of teachers whose lives have had the same intent. To them all, to purity, I now surrender. With a sense of awe, I give thanks. ☩

After my first course, it was obvious that I had found something that would help me in my life, something valuable. But I had reservations about certain aspects of it that appeared too devotional. I was asked to take refuge in the qualities of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the *Sangha* the opening night of the course. How could I take refuge in someone else's qualities? How could they protect me? I watched the old students bowing after group sittings and discourses, but when I tried it felt awkward, like bowing to a television set. I was afraid of being drawn into a cult. I felt very defensive. At times during the course, these doubts became a real hindrance to my meditation; but at other times, they faded and my mind became concentrated. Then I felt ready to take another course and tell everyone I knew about this wonderful technique.

After the course, I continued to practice at home and slowly it all began to make sense. I took more courses and served courses as well. I began to move more easily with the ups and downs of life. As I experienced the benefits of the practice in my daily life, my dedication to the Dhamma became stronger and stronger. I was determined to develop as much awareness and equanimity as possible, because I saw they were the causes of positive changes in my life. I realized that as the qualities of the Dhamma gradually developed within me, they became my protection.

From my own experience, I now know how difficult it is to train the mind. When I am tired, frustrated, doubtful, or discouraged, I think about those who have gone before me, walked the path and faced the storms with strength, determination, and patience. Now with respect and gratitude I can bow to the Buddha, to his teaching and to all those who have attained the first stage of liberation and beyond. ☩

The Joy of Service

Upon jubilantly completing my last course, I decided that I wanted to make *Vipassanā* a larger part of my life, but I was not ready to return for another 105 hours of pain. I chose to serve a course, and it was a far more expansive experience than I had ever expected.

I knew that serving would be an excellent way to give *Dāna* and help others experience the wonders of *Vipassanā*, yet I had no idea how much it would expand my practice. Serving changed my conception of *Vipassanā* from an intense personal experience on the cushion, to a community experience more easily integrated into my life.

After sitting a course, it is difficult for me to incorporate the practice into daily life. Familiar surroundings and interactions at home quickly distract me, and the old habit

patterns of my mind come streaming forth. While serving, the novel setting and emphasis on awareness allowed me to utilize the practice throughout the day. Each day I became more conscious of my sensations outside the Dhamma hall.

Within the Center, I was able to bring the immediate chaos of “normal” life into the hall. One sensitive morning another server compassionately suggested that I sit an extra hour that day. Having others tell me I need to sit more is one of my larger pushable buttons, and the sensations within my body took a quick turn. Fortunately, this was just prior to a group meditation, and I sat with the experience of anger for an hour. That interval allowed me to drop a portion of my resistance towards the experience and befriend the anger as a teacher.

When sitting a course I find myself working with the subtler constructs of my reality. Serving was different in that my interactions with others brought forth very obvious issues that I frequently face in life. Confronting those limiting patterns, while still sitting three hours a day and living within a supportive atmosphere, gave me a better understanding of how not to react to, but rather grow from, those difficulties.

Spending ten days alongside similarly motivated individuals was surprisingly inspiring. Having shared their experiences both on and off the cushion, I now feel part of a supportive community. I know from direct interaction that I am not the only one out there who finds this practice extremely difficult and wonderfully beautiful. It makes each step down this path a little easier, each stride a little longer.

I cannot explain the joy I experienced seeing 91 meditators complete the course. I guess that is the power of *dāna*. It was wonderful to see so many smiling faces, to hear of their paths and newfound liberation. It is amazing how powerful it is to share the most precious part of my life.

Looking back at the end of the course, I was surprised by the depth and breadth of experience those ten days provided. No one told me I would grow and expand my practice in such directions. I hope that your life will offer you the opportunity to have this experience and to deepen your practice. May you be happy. ☩

- A Dhamma server

Communication

As Dhamma workers, because we have been developing *pāramī* over lifetimes, we have the desire to help others receive the Dhamma and hopefully grow in the Dhamma. To do this we need to be exemplary as models of the Dhamma, models of sincere humility. This humility must be evident in our communications with others. We need to cultivate a feeling of responsibility rather than a feeling of authority. *As soon as we feel a sense of authority, ego has arisen, and we hurt the Dhamma and hurt ourselves.* Our roles need to be ones of

coordinators, facilitators, guides, models; not bosses, managers, supervisors, or authority figures.

In every interaction with each person, we need to try and develop a sense of compassion and *Mettā*. To do this we need to practice our meditation diligently morning and night. This helps us to become more aware each moment in our day to even subtle sensations in our bodies. This, in turn, becomes our early warning system about the rise of negativity, ego, judging mind, attachment to personal perspectives – all the unwholesome mind sets that interfere with *Mettā* and compassion and good communications.

In one talk, Goenkaji gave about amity in Dhamma he said:

“The organization is growing. But as it grows, it is quite possible that differences of opinion will come, personality clashes might happen, there may be attachment to personal opinions. We have to be very careful. This is like fire; don’t allow the fire to start. But if it has begun, see that it is extinguished immediately. Don’t allow it to spread. Always remember Buddha’s words.

**Vivādam bhayato disvā,
avivādan ca khemato,
samaggā sakhilā hotha,
esa buddhānusāsani.*

Seeing danger in dispute,
security in concord,
dwell together in amity
-this is the teaching of the Enlightened One.

If you find a fault in somebody, certainly you should go and tell him or her, humbly, with *Mettā* and compassion, “Well, I feel this action of yours is not according to Dhamma.” Try to convince them, but if they are not convinced, don’t generate negativity; instead, generate more compassion. Try again, and if again this person doesn’t understand, then inform an elder, let the elder try. If this is not successful, have compassion for this person.

If you have anger and hatred, how can you help someone? You have not even helped yourself. Be careful. Remember, **Vivādam bhayato disvā*, it is a frightening situation when you create animosity or controversy. This is a family, and a member of the family has become weak. The entire family should help to make this person strong. Don’t condemn them or try to push them out. This person requires our compassion, not our hatred.”

In an answer to an assistant teacher about ill-will, Goenkaji proclaims in no uncertain terms the danger of our egos and our judging mind.

“As long as a person sees the shortcomings of others this person will never be able to teach Dhamma. This person will destroy the whole Center. The vibrations of this type of criticism will certainly destroy the Center. May only love and compassion arise in the mind. This habit of seeing the defects of others is very dangerous in the field of Dhamma. We should come out of this habit. Ill-will develops because of this and for no other reason. Everyone should examine themselves - whether a junior or a senior. A junior should also examine whether he or she has respect for his or her senior.”

The *Sakya* princes went to the Buddha and said to him, “*Upāli* should be ordained as a monk before us.”

“Why?” the Buddha asked.

“Because we have a lot of ego in us. We belong to the *Sakya* clan and we are great personages, but he is just a barber. If he is ordained before us, we must bow before him and our egos may melt.”

If we have to find fault, we should find fault with ourselves. If we have to see merit, we should see it in others. There will be harmony automatically if we see virtue in others. There will be no ill-will.

Although there are many books about communication that are very good, in the Dhamma, meditation, awareness of sensations, compassion and *Mettā* are at the base of all good communication. With this base then all other communication skills will truly be a benefit. ☩

What is the purpose of Dhamma service ?

Certainly not to receive board and lodging, nor to pass the time in a comfortable environment, nor to escape from the responsibilities of daily life. Dhamma servers know this well.

Such persons have practiced *Vipassanā* and realized by direct experience the benefits it offers. They have seen the selfless service of the teachers, management and Dhamma servers - service that enabled them to taste the incomparable flavor of Dhamma. They have begun to take steps on the Noble Path, and naturally have started to develop the rare quality of gratitude, the wish to repay this debt for all that they have received.

Of course, the teacher, management and Dhamma servers gave their service without expecting anything in return, nor will they accept any material remuneration. The only way to pay back the debt to them is by helping to keep the Wheel of Dhamma rotating, to give to others the same selfless service. This is the noble volition with which to give Dhamma service.

As *Vipassanā* meditators progress on the path, they emerge from the old habit pattern of self-centeredness and start to concern themselves with others. They notice how everywhere people are suffering: young or old, men or women, black or white, wealthy or poor, all are suffering. Meditators realize that they themselves were miserable until they encountered the Dhamma. They know that, like themselves, others have started to enjoy real happiness and peace by following the Path. Seeing this change stimulates a feeling of sympathetic joy, and strengthens the wish to help suffering people come out of their misery with *Vipassanā*. Compassion overflows, and with it the volition to help others find relief from their suffering. ☩

Harmony

In order to share the benefits of the Dhamma with others we need to be an example of Dhamma in our daily lives. This is often how others measure the real benefit of Dhamma. Repeatedly we have all heard from new students that they came to a course because of the great changes they saw in a friend or relative.

Goenkaji exhorts us all to continue to grow in the Dhamma and bring the joy of the Dhamma to others.

A group working together harmoniously becomes a shining example to others of the Dhamma working. To work in harmony and become an example of Dhamma we need to meditate twice daily and sit and serve courses. As we do this our egos diminish and harmony grows within us. Gradually, humility and gratitude develop in us as by-products of our effort and signs of our progress.

It is important to reflect on whether we are really progressing on the path or not. The Buddha asked the *Sangha*, the monks and nuns, to evaluate regularly their shortcomings and constantly make efforts to change, for their own benefit and for the benefit of others. ☸

The Blade of Dhamma

- by S.N. Goenka

The following is the opening address given by Goenkaji at the Meeting on the Spread of Dhamma, held at Dhamma Giri, March 1 - 4, 1988.

Companions on the path of Dhamma,

We have assembled here again this year to discuss how best the Dhamma can be disseminated, so that more and more suffering people can benefit from it.

The work is growing speedily and satisfactorily. Many assistant teachers have been appointed; many Dhamma workers are giving their service for the spread of Dhamma; many meditation centers have been established. There will be still more in the future. As the work increases, it becomes essential now to organize it properly, so that divisive tendencies may not weaken the Dhamma in the future. But organization brings problems with it. In fact, we stand now at a crossroads. One wrong step and the movement will proceed toward its downfall, harming humankind. One right step and the movement will develop for the good and benefit of many. Organization is needed for the Dhamma to spread widely, but the danger is that this will turn Dhamma into an organized religion, a sect. If so, the essence of Dhamma will disappear, and instead of helping, it will start causing harm.

The situation, therefore, is very delicate. On the one hand, order and organization are necessary for the proper spread of Dhamma. But creating a hierarchy, from Teacher to

assistant and on down, all working in a regimented way with rigid rules - this is how sects are established. Once there is a hierarchy, ego rears its head: "I am placed in this position. All who are junior must obey and pay respects to me. My word is final. I am so important! Certainly, Dhamma must spread to help suffering people. But where do I stand in the organization? What is my position, my status? Is my service appreciated? Look, I have left the comforts of home. I have left my work, my family, and have given my whole life. I don't want money; I don't want people to bow before me, but there must be some appreciation of all I've done!"

From this madness starts the cult of personality; from here, sectarianism starts. We must remember that Dhamma is important, nothing else. The attitude of each of us should be: "Whatever part I play in the spread of Dhamma, I do so because I am asked to, and perhaps because of some special skill I have. Tomorrow if I am asked to do something else instead, I'll be happy with that. What does this 'I' matter? Dhamma is important. Service is important. Giving benefit to others - that is important. The happiness of more and more people - that is important. Nothing else. Nothing else." This is the proper volition with which to serve.

Only you can know whether truly you have this volition, and so you must examine repeatedly whether you are really working without ego, without expecting anything in return. You must judge for yourself. One way to do so is by checking to what extent you have developed sympathetic joy and compassion, *muditā* and *karunā*. The stronger these two pure mental qualities develop in you, the weaker your egotism has become. Keep applying this yardstick to yourself.

Suppose a comrade is given a particular position in the organization. Suppose a fellow worker receives praise for his service. What happens in my mind then? Do I rejoice in their success? Do I feel happy that my comrades are doing wonderful work that people appreciate? Or have I started developing jealousy and envy, thinking, "How about me? If he surpasses me, what will happen?" Such a mad attitude shows that one has not understood Dhamma. If somebody is progressing on the path, there will be joy to see another person also progress; there will be joy at seeing another person serve Dhamma well, helping others. If there is a trace of jealousy, then understand: "In spite of all my attempts to delude myself and others, I am far from the path of Dhamma. Look, there is no sympathetic joy in me at all."

Or suppose somebody has made a mistake. Maybe it is a real error on that person's part, or maybe my colored glasses, my own prejudices make me see it as such. In either case, what happens in my mind? Do I generate hatred and aversion toward this person? If so, I am far away from Dhamma. I ought instead to feel compassion: "Look, my companion has slipped, has become weak. What should I do to support him, to give him strength so that he may come out of this weakness?" Here a big delusion can arise. One may say: "I have no hatred towards this person who blundered." But inside there will be a pleasant feeling; one rejoices to see a comrade falling down. One thinks, "Now people will know what a mad, ego-centered fellow this person is. Now all his reputation will go away. Now the Teacher

will know that this fellow is useless, and he will be toppled!” Is this kind of feeling in your mind? Examine yourself; no one else can do it. If you find any such thought within you, understand that you are far away from the path.

First, establish yourself in Dhamma. Only then can you serve others. A blind person cannot show the way to another blind person. A lame person cannot support another who is lame. And to establish yourself in Dhamma, you must dissolve your ego. If at every opportunity you put yourself forward, so others may know that “Here is an important person,” then you are far away from Dhamma. Are you projecting your ego in the name of serving selflessly? If so, whether you are a teacher, organizer or Dhamma worker, your service will spoil the Dhamma. You will not really be serving anybody because you are not serving yourself. Serve yourself in Dhamma, and keep examining that your ego is dissolving little by little. Only then will you be fit to serve in the organization.

Five centuries ago in India there was a saint named *Kabirā* whose words are very appropriate on this occasion. He said,

*Kabirā khadhā bajāra
men liyā gandhāsā hātha,
'Sīsa utāre bhuin dhare
cale hamāre sātha!'*

In the marketplace *Kabirā* offered an axe and cried: “Chop off and cast away your head if you’d walk by my side!”

Today the same clarion call is made again. The axe offered is the fine blade of Dhamma. Use it to cut off your head - your ego - and throw it in the dustbin. Then you are fit to accompany me.

I know many of you will accept this call. Many of you have accompanied me in the past for long years. Many of you, I know, will accompany me for all of this life, and perhaps in future lives as well. But do so having cut off your heads; dissolve your egos. Then the Dhamma will remain Dhamma; it will not become a sect. The Buddha started teaching the Dhamma in its pure form, and for generations it spread without losing that purity. Now the time has come for it to arise and spread again. See that it starts flowing in its original, pure form, so that for at least a few centuries it may continue. And in order that this may happen, those who really want to serve must serve themselves first. Those who want to spread the teaching of purification must first purify themselves. Come out of ego. Come out of ego. It has no place on the path of Dhamma.

In the next days, you are going to have important discussions as you prepare codes of discipline for assistant teachers, for organizers, for the Dhamma workers, for centers. This is an historic gathering taking historic steps. One wrong step, and future generations will not receive the Dhamma in its purity. For this reason, in all that you do, that you decide, that you codify, Dhamma should remain most important, not any particular person. If now you start giving importance to an individual, you give an opportunity for ego to enter. This is

running in the opposite direction from the Dhamma. Remember, one's position in the organization does not matter at all. Do not be concerned with projecting your own image; otherwise Dhamma will become lost in the background, and that means that everything good in the practice is also lost in the background. Instead, project the Dhamma. All importance should be given to Dhamma; the focus should be on Dhamma, the applied Dhamma. People may come and go, but the Dhamma must remain so that many can benefit from it.

Whatever decisions you make, therefore, whatever discipline you codify, see that those who make the code follow it. The one and only aim must be **bahujana hitāya, bahujana sukhāya* - that is, the good and happiness of many. The one and only volition must be **lokānukampāya* - compassion for all beings. More and more people must benefit from Dhamma, must come out of their misery, must start enjoying real peace, real harmony.

May your efforts meet with overflowing success. I see the future very bright ahead. May all of you shine with Dhamma in this brightness so that people become attracted toward you - that is, toward the Dhamma in you. Attract them as examples of the Dhamma, as representatives of the Dhamma, as servants of the Dhamma.

Work in Dhamma to help suffering people everywhere. May all of you be successful.

May all beings be happy. May all beings be peaceful. May all beings be liberated! ☸

Developing the Ten Pāramī while Serving

The ten *pāramī* are qualities that must be developed in order to reach the final goal of full enlightenment, *Nibbāna*. In his discourse on day nine, Goenkaji explains how you develop the ten *pāramī* while sitting a course but he also says that you develop these very same *pāramī* while serving courses as well. How does this happen?

Old students come to serve on courses because they are grateful for the Dhamma they have received. The motivation is: "Others served me when I took my course, now let me help others have the same opportunity I had."

Serving on courses is rewarding and fulfilling but servers are sometimes surprised to find it can be as difficult as sitting a course, although in different ways. When you are a student on a course, you are confronted with your own difficulties and conditioned mental reactions (*sankhāra*) but these are generally contained to yourself because you are not interacting with others. However, when you serve on a course, you work closely with a group of other servers whom you may have just met for the first time. While such close work may lead to lasting friendships, it can sometimes result in tensions as your *sankhāra* bump into those of others. The challenges that occur give you an opportunity to apply the practice in a supportive Dhamma atmosphere.

Serving provides a powerful opportunity to practice applying Dhamma in your daily life. When you serve on a course you meditate for at least three full hours a day, developing your

equanimity, and the rest of the day you use what you have learned with your *Vipassanā* to serve in a very practical way in the kitchen.

As servers, you all come together from different backgrounds, worldviews and values with the common volition to serve others so that they can benefit from *Vipassanā* meditation and learn about Dhamma. From this beginning, you learn to work together. You begin to develop your *pāramī* as you slowly relinquish the idea of “I, me, mine”. These ten *pāramī* are like ten chisels that carve away the ego. In its place, compromise and cooperation develop as you learn how to work with others in a Dhamma atmosphere. A true sense of harmony and camaraderie develops as you serve together because it is more than just work that you are doing together. More importantly, you are developing your ten *pāramī* and meditating together.

The following are examples of how *pāramī* develop while serving a course.

Nekkhamma - renunciation:

Serving on a course gives you the opportunity to temporarily renounce the householder’s life and develop your *pāramī* of renunciation. When you come to a course you leave behind your everyday life and the comforts, privacy and pleasures of home. You willingly leave TV, music, computers, and cell phones so that there is the least amount of distractions from the very difficult job of observing yourself with the practice of *Vipassanā*. While serving on a course, you accept the food that is given, the menus that you are to work with, the roles you are assigned, and the accommodations you are to stay in. You do this willingly, for yourself, but also for the benefit of others.

In addition, when you come to serve a course, you don’t just give up material things. At a deeper level you are also renouncing your attachment to your opinions about the way you think things should be done. This is crucial during Dhamma service. For example, if you are working in the kitchen you may find that someone does something in a different way than you would do it. Are you prepared to renounce your views or do you insist that things should be done your way?

Sīla - morality:

Sīla is the foundation of the practice of *Vipassanā*. In the same way that students on a course follow the five precepts, servers also follow them. You abstain from killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct and taking intoxicants. For students on a course this is fairly easy because there is really no opportunity for them to break their *sīla*. However, for servers it can be a bit more challenging. Usually stealing isn’t an issue nor is taking intoxicants but when serving you may not be as alert as you are when sitting a course and you may mindlessly swat a mosquito, for example. It is important to be mindful that even the smallest being’s life should be preserved when at a course.

Another challenge in maintaining *sīla* may be wrong speech. This can be a problem for servers. Trying to maintain noble speech is very difficult yet it is a very important part of *sīla*, especially while serving. All of your speech should lend to the meditative atmosphere, not detract from it. The Buddha said that one who practices right speech, "...is steadfast in truthfulness, trustworthy, dependable, straightforward with others. He reconciles the quarreling and encourages the united. He delights in harmony, seeks after harmony, rejoices in harmony, and creates harmony by his words. His speech is gentle, pleasing to the ear, kindly, heartwarming, courteous, agreeable, and enjoyable to many. He speaks at the proper time, according to the facts, according to what is helpful, according to Dhamma and the Code of Conduct. His words are worth remembering, timely, well-chosen, and constructive."

This does not mean that you need to keep absolute silence in the kitchen, but talk should be restrained and relevant to the work at hand. A quiet kitchen is a peaceful kitchen. A good exercise for servers is to reflect each day whether your speech was helpful or harmful for the course and your fellow Dhamma workers. Are your words kind and supportive? Or did you say something rude to a co-worker today? Did you speak behind anyone's back? Do you really listen when someone else is speaking to you? Or do you think of what you will reply while the other person is speaking? Did you discuss other techniques or therapies and confuse yourself or others? Did you exaggerate or twist the truth in some way? Make a strong determination to speak truthfully, with words that inspire and promote harmony. Make the determination to avoid spreading rumors or using words that cause discord. Instead, make all effort to resolve conflict, however small.

Another important *sīla* is to abstain from sexual misconduct. While at a course or center, this means no sexual activity at all. This is important to keep the atmosphere as calm and conducive for meditation as possible. When you are engaged in any kind of sexual activity the mind is agitated, not peaceful. Even simple flirting is to be avoided when serving on a course because this agitates you as well as others. While serving there are many situations when you have to work in close proximity to someone of the opposite sex. This is the time to remember that you are all part of the Dhamma family and that you are working with your sisters and brothers. Even couples should have this attitude when serving a course together.

Viriya - effort:

When you practice *Vipassanā* you make the effort to keep the mind focused on observing the sensations while striving to be equanimous. You strive to develop positive qualities of mind and help them to grow. You also try to eradicate the more unwholesome qualities of mind and keep them from multiplying. Sometimes when you have been working hard all day, day after day, either in the kitchen or office or outdoor work, it can be easy to let the mind slip into negative patterns. This doesn't help you or the atmosphere around you. It takes a lot of effort and energy to catch the mind as it veers toward negativity and bring it back to a positive frame of mind. When you find yourself slipping this way, try to catch

yourself and bring yourself to observing sensations and equanimity. Another helpful practice is to start remembering the good qualities you have or the good qualities you see in your fellow Dhamma workers. This will calm down the mind and you will be able to work again with enthusiasm.

Khanti - patience and tolerance:

Khanti pāramī is essential to develop while serving. You share the same room with other Dhamma servers, and you work together all day so being in close proximity so much of the time may cause some negativity to arise. For example, if one of the servers snores at night, or talks too much in the kitchen, these or other petty annoyances give you a great opportunity to learn tolerance for others along with all their foibles. In addition, you learn not only to have patience with your fellow Dhamma workers but also yourself. While you do your best to purify your mind, you strive to have the utmost patience with yourself and your impurities. You aren't perfect yet but you are trying your best. This goes toward strengthening your *khanti pāramī*.

Paññā - wisdom:

The wisdom you have developed while sitting your courses will come to your aid again and again during the time you are serving. Sometimes during a course a server may get negative and project this negativity onto others. This is the time for wisdom to arise. Rather than throwing more fuel on his or her fire, try to see the reality of the situation, and find a way to resolve it with wisdom. This may mean taking the server aside and discussing the problem, or advising the server to take a break or to go sit or talk to the teacher. Or it may mean that you take more time to practice some *Mettā* for this server who is suffering. You will learn to remain calm in a storm and understand the changing nature of all situations.

When you sit courses you try to develop your understanding of *anicca*, remembering that any difficult situation is bound to change. This is helpful at an intellectual level, but when you practice *Vipassanā* during the three group sittings you will have an opportunity to observe your sensations and remember *anicca* at the experiential level.

Sacca - truthfulness:

The practice of *Vipassanā* is based on observing the truth of the mind-matter phenomenon, as it is. You learn to stay with the truth that is manifesting from moment to moment within the mind and body. When serving together with others, you strive to see the truth of situations and remain steadfast in protecting the atmosphere, and the Dhamma. Staying with the truth helps you to keep working in the right way despite all the difficulties. It is helpful to remember: "I am here to serve others and deepen my understanding and

practice of *Vipassanā*. This is my task and I resolve that I will not lose sight of this truth.” Observing the truth also means facing your own defects and yet not being overwhelmed by them. You learn how to admit your own mistakes without trying to hide them. This helps you more easily accept others for their own defects and see the truth of their good qualities.

Adhitthāna - strong determination:

While serving you have the opportunity to develop the *adhitthāna pāramī* in many ways. Just like a student, a server needs the determination to stay for the entire course, no matter how many difficulties arise. Sometimes a mental storm might arise when you are serving and you will feel like running away from the course. “Why am I staying here? No one appreciates me and all the work I am doing! I don’t feel like my skills are being used properly. I don’t like the other servers (or they don’t like me).” All these thoughts and more might arise. Use this *pāramī* of *adhitthāna* to help you to keep serving. You make a strong determination to work in harmony with the other servers. Sometimes this means making a strong determination to keep your mouth closed and just observe your own sensations without reacting to a situation as it arises. It won’t always be easy but if this effort is made it will be immensely rewarding and your service will become easier and easier.

Mettā - loving kindness:

At the end of the ten-day courses, Goenkaji teaches how to develop the important *Mettā pāramī*. *Mettā* doesn’t come automatically at first - it really needs to be practiced. That is why you are instructed to practice *Mettā* for five to ten minutes at the end of each sitting. When serving a course, you should also practice it at the end of each sitting. Tensions may develop while serving and those few moments of sharing your merits and developing *Mettā* for your fellow servers will be very helpful during the course. You will notice that because of your *Mettā* practice, any tension with others begins to slowly dissipate and that your interactions become more cordial. As you keep practicing, the *Mettā* you develop while serving will contribute to a more conducive atmosphere for meditation, benefiting all those meditating on the course. Serving others gives you such joy, which in turn makes you feel stronger and stronger loving kindness and compassion for all.

Upakkhā - equanimity:

Serving is a wonderful way to test whether you are really developing in equanimity, while working in a supportive Dhamma atmosphere. There will be ample opportunities to develop equanimity during your service at the Center. Living with others in close quarters, and working together even more closely, you will be tested again and again. During group sittings as you practice *Vipassanā* you will have the opportunity to observe your sensations and develop equanimity with both the pleasant and unpleasant ones that arise, and

sometimes these will be connected to incidences that happen while serving. If you do find that negativity arises, see how quickly you can come back to a more balanced mind with sensations as your base. Service really gives you the opportunity to observe the reacting mind and use the practice to not feed it.

Dāna - generosity:

Dhamma dāna is the highest form of *dāna*. When you serve on a course, your efforts are to give others the opportunity to learn Dhamma, and thus is the highest form of giving.

It is always helpful to remind yourself why you are serving. Very often you may get lost in the chopping, washing, cleaning and cooking and forget the reason why you are here, that is, to help others get a taste of the Dhamma. This understanding brings such joy to service. Goenkaji says that your *pāramī* of *dāna* grows when you donate money for a course, but it grows so much more when you serve for ten days. When you serve you do so without expecting anything in return. Everyone on a course gives monetary donations according to their means but as a server you have the additional advantage of giving of yourself for ten days, all day, every day. This is a continuous giving of *dāna* and you will find that this is not only beneficial for the course and students, but even more so for you.

All these ten *pāramī* are the means to get enlightened. They can be developed by one and all, sitter and server alike. Get established in the practice and grow in Dhamma! ☸

Questions & Answers

Student: What is the value of Dhamma service?

Goenkaji: Understand that you are learning how to apply Dhamma in day-to-day life. After all, Dhamma is not an escape from daily responsibilities. By learning to act according to Dhamma in dealing with students and situations here in the little world of a meditation course or center, you train yourself to act in the same way in the world outside. Despite the unwanted behavior of another person, you practice trying to keep the balance of your mind, and to generate love and compassion in response. This is the lesson you are trying to master here. You are a student as much as those who are sitting in the course. Keep learning while humbly serving others. Keep thinking, “I am here in training, to practice serving without expecting anything in return. I am working so that others may benefit from Dhamma. Let me help them by setting a good example, and in doing so, help myself as well.”

Student: What should we do when we are giving Dhamma service and a conflict arises with another Dhamma worker?

Goenkaji: When you are involved in some kind of conflict with others, confrontation with others, then retire from service; don’t serve. When you cannot keep your mind calm and

quiet, full of love and compassion for others, and when you find that there is negativity coming in the mind for one reason or the other, then understand: "I am not fit to serve now; this is not the proper time - I had better meditate." Retire from service; sit and meditate. You can't serve people when you are generating negativity, because you will be distributing this vibration of negativity to others.

You may say, "The fault is not mine; the fault is the other person's." Whatever the apparent cause may be, your mistake is that you have started generating negativity.

If you find that there is some fault with those who are working with you, then very politely and very humbly you can point it out: "To me, it looks like this is not correct, this is not in accord with Dhamma." Perhaps the other person will not understand, so again after some time, very politely, very humbly, explain. Still the other person may not agree. You have given all your reasons; without making your mind unbalanced, with a very calm mind, you have explained your point of view.

Suppose this doesn't work. I would say that to explain your view twice is enough. In very rare cases you can do it a third time, but not more than that, never! Otherwise, no matter how correct your view may be, it shows that you have developed a tremendous amount of attachment to it. You want things to happen according to your understanding, your view, and that is not helpful. When pointing something out to your brother, your sister, who has made a mistake, you can mention it once, twice, at the utmost, thrice. If that doesn't help, then, without backbiting, tell him, tell her, politely: "Well, this is my understanding. Perhaps our elders can explain it to you better than I can."

Before putting the case to anybody else, first talk with the person with whom you have a difference of opinion. Only then inform the elders, senior students, assistant teachers or, in rare instances, the Teacher. You can go and inform them, but first you have to speak with the person concerned. Then there is no unwholesome speech. Otherwise you are backbiting; you are breaking your *sīla*, which is wrong.

Still, if nothing has worked and this person is not improving, then don't have aversion, have more compassion. You always have to be aware - even when you want something very right to be done and it is not being done - whether you feel agitated because of that. If so, it means that your ego is strong; your own attachment to your ego, your attachment to your views - this is predominant, and this is not Dhamma. Try to correct yourself before trying to correct others. ☩

The Practice of Mettā Bhāvanā in Vipassanā Meditation

This article was presented as a paper to the Seminar on Vipassanā Meditation held at Dhamma Giri in December 1986.

The practice of *Mettā-bhāvanā* (meditation of loving kindness) is an important adjunct to the technique of *Vipassanā* meditation - indeed, its logical outcome. It is a technique whereby we radiate loving kindness and good will toward all beings, deliberately charging the atmosphere around us with the calming, positive vibrations of pure and compassionate love. The Buddha instructed his followers to develop *Mettā* so as to lead more peaceful and harmonious lives and to help others do so as well. Students of *Vipassanā* should follow that instruction because *Mettā* gives us a way to share with all others the peace and harmony we are developing.

The commentaries state: *Mijjati siniyhati'ti Mettā* - "That which inclines one to a friendly disposition is *Mettā*." It is a sincere wish for the good and welfare of all, devoid of ill will. *Adoso'ti Mettā* - "Non-aversion is *Mettā*." The chief characteristic of *Mettā* is a benevolent attitude. It culminates in the identification of oneself with all beings, recognition of the fellowship of all life.

To grasp this concept at least intellectually is easy enough, but it is far harder to develop such an attitude in oneself. To do so some practice is needed, and so we have the technique of *Mettā-bhāvanā*, the systematic cultivation of good will toward others. To be really effective though, *Mettā* meditation must be practiced along with *Vipassanā* meditation. So long as negativities such as aversion dominate the mind, it is futile to formulate conscious thoughts of good will, and doing so would be a ritual devoid of inner meaning. However, when negativities are removed by the practice of *Vipassanā*, good will naturally wells up in the mind; and emerging from the prison of self-obsession, we begin to concern ourselves with the welfare of others.

For this reason, the technique of *Mettā-bhāvanā* is introduced only at the end of a *Vipassanā* course, after the participants have passed through the process of purification. At such a time meditators often feel a deep wish for the well-being of others, making their practice of *Mettā* truly effective. Though limited time is devoted to it in a course, *Mettā* may be regarded as the culmination of the practice of *Vipassanā*.

Nibbāna can be experienced only by those whose minds are filled with loving kindness and compassion for all beings. Simply wishing for that state is not enough: we must purify our minds to attain it. We do so by *Vipassanā* meditation; hence the emphasis on this technique during a course.

As we practice, we become aware that the underlying reality of the world and of ourselves consists of arising and passing away every moment. We realize that the process of change continues without our control and regardless of our wishes. Gradually we understand that any attachment to what is ephemeral and insubstantial produces suffering for us. We learn to be detached and to keep the balance of our minds in the face of any experience. Then we begin to experience what real happiness is: not the satisfaction of desire or the forestalling of fears but rather liberation from the cycle of desire and fear. As inner serenity develops, we clearly see how others are enmeshed in suffering, and naturally this wish

arises, “May they find what we have found: the way out of misery, the path of peace”. This is the proper volition for the practice of *Mettā-bhāvanā*.

Mettā is not prayer; nor is it the hope that an outside agency will help. On the contrary, it is a dynamic process producing a supportive atmosphere where others can act to help themselves. *Mettā* can be omni-directional or directed toward a particular person. The realization that *Mettā* is not produced by us makes its transmission truly selfless.

In order to conduct *Mettā*, the mind must be calm, balanced and free from negativity. This is the type of mind developed in the practice of *Vipassanā*. A meditator knows by experience how anger, antipathy, or ill will destroy peace and frustrate any efforts to help others. Only as hatred is removed and equanimity is developed can we be happy and wish happiness for others. The words “May all beings be happy” have great force only when uttered from a pure mind. Backed by this purity, they will certainly be effective in fostering the happiness of others.

We must therefore examine ourselves before practicing *Mettā-bhāvanā* to check whether we are really capable of transmitting *Mettā*. If we find even a tinge of hatred or aversion in our minds, we should refrain at that time. Otherwise we would transmit that negativity, causing harm to others. However, if mind and body are filled with serenity and well-being, it is natural and appropriate to share this happiness with others: “May you be happy, may you be liberated from the defilements that are the causes of suffering, may all beings be peaceful.”

This loving attitude enables us to deal far more skillfully with the vicissitudes of life. Suppose, for example, one encounters a person who is acting out of deliberate ill will to harm others. The common response - to react with fear and hatred - is self-centered, does nothing to improve the situation and, in fact, magnifies the negativity. It would be far more helpful to remain calm and balanced, with a feeling of good will even for the person who is acting wrongly. This must not be merely an intellectual stance, a veneer over unresolved negativity. *Mettā* works only when it is the spontaneous overflow of a purified mind.

The serenity gained in *Vipassanā* meditation naturally gives rise to feelings of *Mettā*, and throughout the day this will continue to affect us and our environment in a positive way. Thus *Vipassanā* ultimately has a dual function: to bring us happiness by purifying our minds, and to help us foster the happiness of others by preparing us to practice *Mettā*. What, after all, is the purpose of freeing ourselves of negativity and egotism unless we share these benefits with others? In a retreat we cut ourselves off from the world temporarily in order to return and share with others what we have gained in solitude. These two aspects of the practice of *Vipassanā* are inseparable.

In these times of violent unrest, widespread malaise and suffering, the need for such a practice as *Mettā-bhāvanā* is clear. If peace and harmony are to reign throughout the world, they must first be established in the minds of all the inhabitants of the world. ☸

Questions on Mettā

Student: If I am not able to experience subtle sensation in the body, how can I practice *Mettā*?

Goenkaji: It is true that if you practice *Mettā* with these subtle sensations, it is very strong, very effective, because then you are working with the deepest level of your mind. If you are experiencing a gross sensation, that means only the surface level of your mind is working and the *Mettā* is not that effective. But it doesn't matter. In this case just keep thinking at the intellectual, conscious level, "May all beings be happy. May all beings be happy." And keep on working. When you reach the stage where there are subtle vibrations, you will work at a deeper level and the *Mettā* will be more effective.

Student: Will *Mettā* get stronger as *samādhi* (concentration) gets stronger?

Goenkaji: Without *samādhi* the *Mettā* is really no *Mettā*. When *samādhi* is weak the mind is very agitated, and it is agitated only when it is generating some impurity, some type of craving or aversion. With these impurities, you cannot expect to generate good qualities, vibrations of *Mettā*, of *kāruna* (compassion). It isn't possible.

At the vocal level, you may keep on saying "Be happy, be happy," but it doesn't work. If you have *samādhi* then your mind is calm and quiet, at least for that moment. It is not necessary that all the impurities have gone away; but at least for that moment when you are going to give *Mettā*, your mind is quiet, calm, and not generating any impurity. Then whatever *Mettā* you give is strong, fruitful, beneficial.

Student: Is the generation of *Mettā* a natural consequence of the purity of mind or is it something that must be actively developed? Are there progressive stages in *Mettā*?

Goenkaji: Both are true. According to the law of nature - the law of Dhamma - as the mind is purified, the quality of *Mettā* develops naturally. On the other hand, you must work to develop it by practicing *Mettā-bhāvanā*. It is only at a very high stage of mental purity that *Mettā* is generated naturally, and nothing has to be done, no training has to be given. Until one reaches that stage, one has to practice.

Also, people who don't practice *Vipassanā* can practice *Mettā-bhāvanā*. In such countries as Burma, Sri Lanka and Thailand, *Mettā-bhāvanā* is very common in every household. However, the practice usually is confined to mentally reciting, "May all beings be happy, be peaceful". This certainly gives some peace of mind to the person who is practicing it. To some extent good vibrations enter the atmosphere, but they are not strong.

With this base of purity, your practice of *Mettā* naturally becomes stronger. Then you won't need to repeat these good wishes aloud. A stage will come when every fiber of the body keeps on feeling good for others, generating good will for others.

Student: How does *Metta* help in the development of *muditā* (sympathetic joy) and *kāruna* (compassion)?

Goenkaji: *Muditā* and *kāruna* naturally follow as one develops *Metta*. *Metta* is love for all beings. *Metta* takes away the traces of aversion, animosity and hatred toward others. It takes away the traces of jealousy and envy toward others.

What is *muditā*? When you see other people progressing, becoming happier, if your mind is not pure, you will generate jealousy toward this person. “Why did they get this, and not I? I’m a more deserving person. Why are they given such a position of power, or status? Why not I? Why have they earned so much money? Why not I?” This kind of jealousy is the manifestation of an impure mind.

As your mind gets purer by *Vipassanā* and your *Metta* gets stronger, you will feel happy when seeing others happy. “All around there is misery. Look, at least one person is happy. May he be happy and contented. May he progress in Dhamma, progress in worldly ways.” This is *muditā*, sympathetic happiness. It will come.

Similarly, when you find somebody suffering, *kāruna* automatically arises if your mind is pure. If you are an ego-centered person, full of impurities, without the proper practice of *Vipassanā*, without *Metta*, then seeing someone in trouble doesn’t affect you. You don’t care; you are indifferent. You try to delude yourself saying, “Oh, this fellow is suffering because of his own karma. How can I do anything about it?” Such thoughts show that the mind is not yet pure. If the mind becomes pure and *Metta* develops, hardness of heart cannot stay; it starts melting. You see people suffering and your heart goes out to them. You don’t start crying; that’s another extreme. Rather, you feel like helping such people. If it is within your means, you give some tangible help. Otherwise, at least you help with your vibrations: “May you be happy. May you come out of your misery.” Even if you have no material means to help somebody, you always have this spiritual means.

Questions on the Practice

Student: Why is it important to sit two full hours every day?

Goenkaji: It is essential that you give material food to your body at least twice every day, to keep it healthy and strong. Similarly you have to give some food to the mind to keep it healthy and strong. And with these two hours of sitting, you are doing that.

Student: What is the value of attending group sittings?

Goenkaji: Whenever a few people sit together, whatever they generate in their minds permeates the atmosphere. If five, ten, twenty, or fifty people meditate together, the vibrations of one or two among them might be good vibrations and this may help the others meditate better in that atmosphere.

Student: Our residence is in the midst of a crowded city which makes it difficult to meditate. Is there any way to keep outside disturbances away from our meditation?

Goenkaji: Either you change your residence, run away from the noises of society, or you become so powerful that you can stop all the noises around you. Both are not possible. You have to live in society and you may have to live in the same circumstances where you had been living before. Therefore, you have to strengthen yourself and learn how to ignore all these disturbances. Just as a lotus flower growing in a pond is not affected by the water, in the same way, all these disturbances can be ignored. We are now talking and a bird is chirping outside. The bird does not disturb us. We are busy with our discussion. In the same way, we are busy with our meditation. Let the noises be there. One has to train oneself. One has to live in the world full of disturbances, and, in spite of that, have peace and harmony.

Student: When thoughts and emotional upsurges come, how can I observe them equanimously?

Goenkaji: It is not necessary to observe thoughts and emotions. Just accept the fact that now there is some chattering going on in the mind; good enough. No thought or emotion can arise in the mind without a sensation on the body. When you are working with sensations you are working at the root level of your mind. You are purifying your mind at the root level. So stay with the sensations, and just accept the fact that some chattering is going on or some emotion has arisen, that's all. Don't go into the details of it.

Student: For a period after each course I can meditate okay. Then it becomes harder, so that I cannot even pass my attention through the body. What should I do?

Goenkaji: Continue to work. Keep on fighting your battle. When you come to a Dhamma environment like this, the entire atmosphere is charged with vibrations which are anti-craving, anti-aversion, anti-ignorance. In this atmosphere you can work better, and you gain strength by your practice here.

With that strength you have to face the world outside. After all, you have to live in the world. You can't live in a meditation center all the time.

You go to a hospital to gain health, not to live there. So gain strength here and then live in the world. After some time you may find that your meditation is again becoming weaker. Understand the reason: the whole atmosphere outside is charged with the vibrations of craving and aversion, and you are doing something which is anti-craving, anti-aversion. The outside atmosphere starts overpowering you and you become weaker. You have to keep on fighting.

Whenever you find you have become so weak that you can't work with the body and bodily sensations, come back to *anāpāna*. Breath is something which you can intentionally make harder. If you work with it and you can't feel your breath, make it a little harder. You can intentionally make this object a little more gross. Work with that; the mind becomes calm and you will reach a stage where you can again start working on the body.

Student: My mind still remains immersed in sexual desire and as a result I am unable to maintain the continuity of practice. What can I do?

Goenkaji: Fight this battle. Lust is something which keeps following you life after life and it is a very deep *saṅkhāra*. Whenever sexual desire arises in the mind don't focus on the object of the lust. Just accept the fact of lust as lust. "At this moment my mind is full of lust." Accept this, and see what sensation you have. At that moment start observing whatever sensation predominates anywhere in the body, and keep understanding, "*Anicca, anicca*". This is not permanent, this is not permanent. This lust that has come is also not permanent; let me see how long it lasts." In this way the sexual desire becomes weaker and weaker and passes away.

Student: I feel like my meditation has become really sloppy, and I'm not sure why. I want to see what I'm doing wrong. Today it has just not felt right.

Goenkaji: No, no, nothing is wrong. What you call a good meditation is actually a good operation. Every time you meditate - being very attentive, aware, equanimous - then an operation of the mind starts. Some storm comes up; the pus of the wound starts to come out. When this happens, you will feel as if your meditation has become weak. But this storm has to arise. If it continues to lie deep inside, you will not be relieved of it.

When at sea, if there's a big storm you stop sailing; you put down your anchor and wait until the storm is over. Here, your anchor is *ānāpana*. Forget about *Vipassanā* when a storm is present. Work with *ānāpana*, slightly hard breathing. Then your mind will start to calm down, and you can return to *Vipassanā*. A storm is not a regression. It is part of the technique. It happens. Don't worry.

Student: Why do you give so much importance to the observation of normal respiration?

Goenkaji: Because the Buddha wanted you to. He is very clear that one must observe the breath as it is - *yathābhūta*. If it is long, you are aware, "it is long"; if it is short, you are aware, "it is short". *Yathābhūta*. If you make your respiration unnatural, artificial, you will give more attention to changing the respiration according to your wishes. Your attention will not be with the reality as it is, but with something that you have created. Therefore we emphasize it must be always natural breath - as it comes in naturally, as it goes out naturally. If it is long, just be aware that it is long. Don't try to make it short. If it is short, just be aware that it is short. Don't try to make it long. If it is going through the right nostril, then observe that it is going through the right nostril. If it is going through the left nostril, then observe it going through the left nostril. When it passes through both the nostrils, observe the flow through both the nostrils.

Then you are working according to the instructions of the Enlightened One. Don't try to interfere with the natural flow of the breath. And if you find that the mind is wandering too much and you cannot feel the natural breath, then you may take a few - only a few - intentional breaths, slightly hard breaths, so that you can bring your mind back to the observation of the breath. You have to keep in mind that your aim is to feel the natural breath. However soft it is, however subtle it is, you must be able to feel it. That is the aim.

Student: I find that I am very quick to belittle other people. What is the best way to work with this problem?

Goenkaji: Work with it by meditating. If the ego is strong, one will try to belittle others, to lower their importance and increase one's own. But this technique will naturally dissolve the ego. When it dissolves, you can no longer do anything to hurt another. Work and the problem will automatically be solved.

Student: I still get a lot of pain, even when I meditate at home. What should I do?

Goenkaji: Meditate; what else is there to do? You have a wonderful object on which you can meditate to help eradicate your old habit pattern of aversion. When you feel something unpleasant, the old habit of the mind is to react with aversion. You must face these unpleasant sensations to change this habit pattern. The whole purpose of *Vipassanā* is to change the habit pattern of the mind; neither have craving towards pleasant sensations nor have aversion towards unpleasant sensations. You can come out of craving when you have pleasant sensations by observing them without attachment or reaction, understanding they are *anicca*. Similarly, you can come out of your habit pattern of aversion only when there are unpleasant sensations. It is good; unpleasant sensations have come; make use of them.

Student: Should we try to identify which sensation is associated with which impurity?

Goenkaji: That would be a meaningless waste of energy. It is as if someone washing a dirty cloth stops to check what caused each stain in the cloth.

This will not help him to do his job, which is only to clean the cloth. For this purpose, the important thing is to have a piece of laundry soap with which to clean the cloth, and then to use it in a proper way. If one washes the cloth properly, all the dirt will automatically be removed. In the same way, you have received the soap of *Vipassanā*. Now make use of it to remove all impurities. If you search for the cause of particular sensations, you are playing an intellectual game and you forget about *anicca* (impermanence), about *anattā* (egolessness). This intellectualizing cannot help you to come out of suffering.

Student: What is true compassion?

Goenkaji: It is the wish to serve someone, to help him come out of suffering. But it must be without attachment. If you start crying over the suffering of another, you have no real compassion for that person, you only make yourself unhappy. This is not the path of Dhamma. If you have true compassion, then with all love you try to help others to the best of your ability. If you fail, you smile and try another way to help. You serve without worrying about the results of your service. This is real compassion, proceeding from a balanced mind.

Student: You yourself say that people can have wonderful meditation experiences without maintaining the precepts. Isn't it then dogmatic and inflexible to put so much stress on morality?

Goenkaji: I have seen from the case of a number of students that people who give no importance to *sīla* (moral conduct) cannot make any progress on the path. For years such people may come to courses and have wonderful experiences in meditation, but in their daily lives there is no change. They remain agitated and miserable because they are only playing a game with *Vipassanā* as they have played so many other games. Such people are real losers. Those who really want to use Dhamma in order to change their lives for better must practice *sīla* as carefully as possible.

Student: What is your feeling about teaching Dhamma to children?

Goenkaji: The best time for that is before birth. During pregnancy the mother should practice *Vipassanā*, so that the child also receives it and is born a Dhamma child. But if you already have children, you can still share your Dhamma with them. For example, at the conclusion of your practice of *Vipassanā* you have learned the technique of *Mettā-bhāvanā* sharing your peace and harmony with others. If your child is very young, direct your *Mettā* to him after every meditation and at his bed-time; in this way the child also benefits from your practice of Dhamma. And when the child is older, explain a little about Dhamma to him in a way that he can understand and accept. If he can understand a little more, then teach him to practice *ānāpana* for a few minutes. Don't pressure the child in any way. Just let him sit with you, observe breath for a few minutes, and then go and play. The meditation will be like play for him, he will enjoy doing it. And most important is that you must live a healthy Dhamma life yourself, you must set a good example for the child. In your home you must establish a peaceful and harmonious atmosphere which will help the child grow into a healthy and happy person. This is the best thing you can do for your child.

Student: What role do you see for *Vipassanā* meditators in the area of social action, such as helping others in the world - the poor, hungry, homeless or sick?

Goenkaji: Helping others is absolutely essential for every Dhamma person. For one who is meditating, of course, the main aim is to purify the mind. But one indication that the mind is becoming purified is that the volition arises to help others. A pure mind will always be full of love and compassion. One cannot see people suffering all around and say, "I don't care. I am working for my own liberation". That sort of attitude shows a lack of development in Dhamma. If one is developing in Dhamma, then naturally, in whichever capacity, with whatever abilities one has, in whichever field one can serve - one should serve. But when you are serving people in different social fields, in a school or a hospital or some other institute, you can develop this madness: "Now that I have really purified my mind and am giving all of my time for serving people, the purification process will continue by itself. I should stop my morning and evening sittings because I am doing so much work now. I am doing such a big social service." That is a serious mistake.

With real purity of mind, whatever service you give will be strong, effective, fruitful. Keep on purifying your mind, keep on examining whether your mind is really becoming purified, and keep on serving people without expecting anything. ☩

There is so much misery all around. If we can wipe the tears of even a few people who are suffering, we have paid back a little of our debt of gratitude to the Buddha and to the Sangha, the chain of teachers who have maintained the tradition from ancient times.

May all of you develop Dhamma strength. May you all keep growing in Dhamma, and help others to grow in Dhamma. May more and more people benefit from your service.

May the wheel of Dhamma keep rotating. May the light of Dhamma spread throughout the world. May the darkness of ignorance be dispelled. May more and more people come out of their misery. May all beings be happy, be peaceful, be liberated!

- S.N. Goenka



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