

Vipassana Meditation

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

Introduction to the Technique and Code of Discipline for Meditation Courses

May your meditation prove most beneficial to you. With best wishes for success, we offer you the following information. Please read it carefully before applying for a course.

Introduction to the Technique

Vipassana is one of India's most ancient meditation techniques. Long lost to humanity, it was rediscovered by Gotama the Buddha more than 2500 years ago. *Vipassanā* means seeing things as they really are. It is the process of self-purification by self-observation. One begins by observing the natural breath to concentrate the mind. With a sharpened awareness one proceeds to observe the changing nature of body and mind, and experiences the universal truths of impermanence, suffering and egolessness. This truth-realization by direct experience is the process of purification. The entire path (Dhamma) is a universal remedy for universal problems, and has nothing to do with any organized religion or sectarianism. For this reason, it can be practiced freely by everyone, at any time, in any place, without conflict due to race, community or religion, and it will prove equally beneficial to one and all.

What Vipassana is not:

- It is not a rite or ritual based on blind faith.
- It is neither an intellectual nor a philosophical entertainment.
- It is not a rest cure, a holiday, or an opportunity for socializing.
- It is not an escape from the trials and tribulations of everyday life.

What Vipassana is:

- It is a technique that will eradicate suffering.
- It is a method of mental purification which allows one to face life's tensions and problems in a calm, balanced way.
- It is an art of living that one can use to make positive contributions to society.

Vipassana meditation aims at the highest spiritual goals of total liberation and full enlightenment; its purpose is never simply to cure physical disease. However, as a by-product of mental purification, many psychosomatic diseases are eradicated. In fact, Vipassana eliminates the three causes of *all* unhappiness: craving, aversion and ignorance. With continued practice, the meditation releases the tensions developed in everyday life, opening the knots tied by the old habit of reacting in an unbalanced way to pleasant and unpleasant situations.

Although Vipassana was developed as a technique by the Buddha, its practice is not limited to Buddhists. There is absolutely no question of conversion. All human beings share the same fundamental problems, and a technique which can eradicate these problems will have a universal application. People from many religious denominations have experienced the benefits of Vipassana meditation, and have found no conflict with their profession of faith.

Meditation and Self-discipline

The process of self-purification by introspection is certainly never easy—students have to work very hard at it. By their own efforts students arrive at their own realizations; no one else can do this for them. Therefore, the meditation will suit only those willing to work seriously and observe the discipline, which is there for the benefit and protection of the meditators and is an integral part of the meditation practice.

Ten days is certainly a very short time in which to penetrate the deepest levels of the unconscious mind and learn how to eradicate the complexes lying there. Continuity of the practice in seclusion is the secret of this technique's success. Rules and regulations have been developed keeping this practical aspect in mind. They are not primarily for the benefit of the teacher or the course management, nor are they negative expressions of tradition, orthodoxy or blind faith in some organized religion. Rather, they are based on the practical experience of thousands of meditators over the years, and are both scientific and rational. Abiding by the rules creates a very conducive atmosphere for meditation; breaking them pollutes it.

Students will have to stay for the entire period of the course. The other rules should also be carefully read and considered. Only those who feel that they can honestly and scrupulously follow the discipline should apply for admission. Those not prepared to make a determined effort will waste their time and, moreover, will disturb others who wish to work seriously. A prospective student should also understand that it would be both disadvantageous and inadvisable to leave without finishing the course upon finding the discipline too difficult. Likewise, it would be most unfortunate if, in spite of repeated reminders, a student does not follow the rules and has to be asked to leave.

Serious Mental Disorders

People with serious mental disorders have occasionally come to Vipassana courses with the unrealistic expectation that the technique will cure or alleviate their mental problems. Unstable interpersonal relationships and a history of various treatments can be additional factors which make it difficult for such people to benefit from, or even complete, a ten-day course. Our capacity as a nonprofessional, volunteer organization makes it impossible for us to properly care for people with these backgrounds. Although Vipassana meditation is beneficial for most people, it is not a substitute for medical or psychiatric treatment and we do not recommend it for people with serious psychiatric disorders.

The Code of Discipline

The foundation of the practice is *sīla*—moral conduct. *Sīla* provides a basis for the development of *samādhi*—concentration of mind; and purification of the mind is achieved through *paññā*—the wisdom of insight.

The Precepts

All who attend a Vipassana course must conscientiously undertake the following Five Precepts for the duration of the course:

1. to abstain from killing any being,
2. to abstain from stealing,
3. to abstain from all sexual activity,
4. to abstain from telling lies,
5. to abstain from all intoxicants.

There are three additional precepts which old students (that is, those who have completed a course with S. N. Goenka or one of his assistant teachers) are expected to follow:

6. to abstain from eating after midday,
7. to abstain from sensual entertainment and bodily decoration,
8. to abstain from using high or luxurious beds.

Old students will observe the sixth precept by having only tea (without milk) or fruit juice during the 5 p.m. break, whereas new students may have tea with milk and some fruit. The teacher may excuse an old student from observing this precept for health reasons. The seventh and eighth precepts will be observed by all.

Acceptance of the Teacher and the Technique

Students must declare themselves willing to comply fully and for the duration of the course with the teacher's guidance and instructions; that is, to observe the discipline and to meditate exactly as the teacher asks, without ignoring any part of the instructions, nor adding anything to them. This acceptance should be one of discrimination and understanding, not blind submission. Only with an attitude of trust can a student work diligently and thoroughly. Such confidence in the teacher and the technique is essential for success in meditation.

Other Techniques, Rites, and Forms of Worship

During the course it is absolutely essential that all forms of prayer, worship, or religious ceremony—fasting, burning incense, counting beads, reciting mantras, singing and dancing, etc.—be discontinued. All other meditation techniques and healing or spiritual practices should also be suspended. This is not to condemn any other technique or practice, but to give a fair trial to the technique of Vipassana in its purity.

Students are strongly advised that deliberately mixing other techniques of meditation with Vipassana will impede and even reverse their progress. Despite repeated warnings by the teacher, there have been cases in the past where students have intentionally mixed this technique with a ritual or another practice, and have done themselves a great disservice. Any doubts or confusion which may arise should always be clarified by meeting with the teacher.

Interviews with the Teacher

The teacher is available to meet students privately between 12 noon and 1:00 p.m. Questions may also be asked in public between 9:00 and 9:30 p.m. in the meditation hall. The interview and question times are for clarifying the technique and for questions arising from the evening discourses.

Noble Silence

All students must observe Noble Silence from the beginning of the course until the morning of the last full day. Noble Silence means silence of body, speech, and mind. Any form of communication with fellow students, whether by gestures, sign language, written notes, etc., is prohibited.

Students may, however, speak with the teacher whenever necessary and they may approach the management with any problems related to food, accommodation, health, etc. But even these contacts should be kept to a minimum. Students should cultivate the feeling that they are working in isolation.

Separation of Men and Women

Complete separation of men and women is to be maintained. Couples, married or otherwise, should not contact each other in any way

during the course. The same applies to friends, members of the same family, etc.

Physical Contact

It is important that throughout the course students avoid any physical contact whatsoever with others of the same or opposite sex.

Yoga and Physical Exercise

Although physical yoga and other exercises are compatible with Vipassana, they should be suspended during the course because proper secluded facilities are not available at the course site. Jogging is also not permitted. Students may exercise during rest periods by walking in the areas designated for men or for women.

Religious Objects, Rosaries, Crystals, Talismans, etc.

No such items should be brought to the course. If brought inadvertently, they must be deposited with the management for the duration of the course.

Intoxicants and Drugs

No drugs, alcohol, or other intoxicants should be brought to the site; this also applies to tranquilizers, sleeping pills, and all other sedatives. Those taking medicines or drugs on a doctor's prescription should notify the teacher.

Tobacco

For the health and comfort of all students, smoking, chewing tobacco, and taking snuff are not permitted at the course.

Food

It is not possible to satisfy the special food preferences and requirements of individual meditators. Students are therefore kindly requested to make do with the simple vegetarian meals provided. The course management endeavors to prepare a wholesome, balanced menu suitable for meditation, without subscribing to any particular food philosophy. If any students have been prescribed a special diet because of ill-health, they should inform the management at the time of application. Fasting is not permitted.

Clothing

Dress should be simple, modest, and comfortable. Tight, transparent, revealing, or otherwise striking clothing (such as shorts, short skirts, tights and leggings, sleeveless or skimpy tops) should not be worn. Sunbathing and partial nudity are not permitted. An attitude of modesty prevails at all times. This is important in order to minimize distraction to others.

Laundry and Bathing

No washing machines or dryers are available, so students should bring sufficient clothing. Small items can be hand-washed. Bathing and laundry may be done only in the break periods and not during meditation hours.

Outside Contacts

Students must remain within the course boundaries throughout the course. They may leave only with the specific consent of the teacher. No outside communication is allowed before the course is completely over. This includes letters, phone calls and visitors. Cell phones, pagers, and other electronic devices must be deposited with the management until the course ends. In case of an emergency, a friend or relative may contact the management.

Music, Reading and Writing

The playing of musical instruments, radios, etc., is not permitted. No reading or writing materials should be brought to the course. Students should not distract themselves by taking notes. The restriction on reading and writing is to emphasize the strictly practical nature of this meditation.

Tape Recorders and Cameras

These may not be used except with the express permission of the teacher.

Course Finances

According to the tradition of pure Vipassana, courses are run solely on a donation basis. Donations are accepted only from those who have completed at least one ten-day course with S.N. Goenka or one of his assisting teachers. Someone taking the course for the first time may give a donation on the last day of the course or any time thereafter.

In this way, courses are supported by those who have realized for themselves the benefits of the practice. Wishing to share these benefits with others, one gives a donation according to one's means and volition.

Such donations are the only source of funding for courses in this tradition around the world. There is no wealthy foundation or individual sponsoring them. Neither the teachers nor the organizers receive any kind of payment for their service. Thus, the spread of Vipassana is carried out with purity of purpose, free from any commercialism.

Whether a donation is large or small, it should be given with the wish to help others: "The course I have taken has been paid for through the generosity of past students; now let me give something towards the cost of a future course, so that others may also benefit from this technique."

Summary

To clarify the spirit behind the discipline and rules, they may be summarized as follows:

Take great care that your actions do not disturb anyone. Take no notice of distractions caused by others.

It may be that a student cannot understand the practical reasons for one or several of the above rules. Rather than allow negativity and doubt to develop, immediate clarification should be sought from the teacher.

It is only by taking a disciplined approach and by making maximum effort that a student can fully grasp the practice and benefit from it. The emphasis during the course is on *work*. A golden rule is to meditate as if one were alone, with one's mind turned inward, ignoring any inconveniences and distractions that one may encounter.

Finally, students should note that their progress in Vipassana depends solely on their own good qualities and personal development, and on five factors: earnest efforts, confidence, sincerity, health and wisdom.

May the above information help you to obtain maximum benefit from your meditation course. We are happy to have the opportunity to serve, and wish you peace and harmony from your experience of Vipassana.

The Timetable

The following timetable for the course has been designed to maintain the continuity of practice. For best results, students are advised to follow it as closely as possible.

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| 4:00 a.m. | Morning wake-up bell |
| 4:30 — 6:30 a.m. | Meditate in the hall or in your room |
| 6:30 — 8:00 a.m. | Breakfast break |
| 8:00 — 9:00 a.m. | Group meditation in the hall |
| 9:00 — 11:00 a.m. | Meditate in the hall or in your room according to the teacher's instructions |
| 11:00—12 noon | Lunch break |
| 12:00—1:00 p.m. | Rest, and interviews with the teacher |
| 1:00 — 2:30 p.m. | Meditate in the hall or in your room |
| 2:30 — 3:30 p.m. | Group meditation in the hall |
| 3:30 — 5:00 p.m. | Meditate in the hall or in your room according to the teacher's instructions |
| 5:00 — 6:00 p.m. | Tea break |
| 6:00 — 7:00 p.m. | Group meditation in the hall |
| 7:00 — 8:15 p.m. | Teacher's discourse in the hall |
| 8:15 — 9:00 p.m. | Group meditation in the hall |
| 9:00 — 9:30 p.m. | Question time in the hall |
| 9:30 p.m. | Retire to your room; lights out |



Additional information about Vipassana meditation and worldwide course schedules may be obtained from the Vipassana website:

<http://www.dhamma.org>