Inside-out:
A study of *Vipassanā* meditation as taught by S.N. Goenka and its social contribution

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Abstract/Résumé

This thesis explores the relationship between S.N. Goenka's technique of *Vipassanā* meditation, an approach inspired by the Buddha designed for the liberation of human suffering, and constructive social engagement. The first chapter introduces the general field of Theravāda Buddhist meditation practices to demonstrate how Goenka's approach conforms to and differs from traditional Theravāda meditation. The second chapter provides an overview of Goenka's reformist movement, while the third chapter investigates his methods of dissemination and the supporting theories behind them in light of traditional Pali canonical sources. The final chapter examines the notion that social reparation depends on the alleviation of individual afflictive mental states. This claim is analysed through reports concerning the therapeutic effects of *Vipassanā* on the practitioner, and through case-studies regarding the integration of the technique into the curriculums of various social institutions in the fields of health, corrections, and education.

Cette thèse explore la relation entre la technique de méditation *Vipassanā* telle qu'enseignée par S.N. Goenka et l'engagement sociale. Inspirée par le Bouddha, la technique qui a pour but final la libération de la souffrance humaine. Le premier chapitre introduit la méditation Theravāda en général pour démontrer ensuite en quoi l'approche de Goenka est conforme à la tradition et où elle diffère. Le deuxième chapitre explique les grandes lignes du mouvement réformiste de Goenka, tandis que le troisième explore ses méthodes de propogation de la technique ainsi que les théories qui les supportent selon les textes traditionnels Pali. Le dernier chapitre examine l' idée que l'amélioration sociale dépend de l'allègement des états mentaux négatifs chez chaque individu. L'analyse porte sur l'étude des effects thérapeutiques de *Vipassanā* sur le méditant et sur l'intégration de la technique dans diverses institutions sociales telles que les domaines de la santé, des prisons, et de l'éducation.

Acknowledgements

A research study is never the product of one person's work, but reflects a process of many people's efforts over time. Nonetheless, it is the author's responsibility to present the gathered information without deviating from the intentions of the original sources. This has been my objective; if any misconstructions arise in the interpretation of the project's sources, I alone am accountable.

I would like to dedicate this thesis to all the contributors involved directly or indirectly with this venture. Unfortunately, I lack sufficient words to express my gratitude to the following whom I am deeply indebted to:

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Introduction

In recent decades a trend of movements has emerged from diverse spiritual backgrounds, especially amongst Buddhists, with the intent of re-integrating spiritual values with social engagement. One of these movements is led by S.N. Goenka, a retired Indian industrialist born and raised in Burma and disciple of the famous Buddhist meditation teacher Sayagyi U Ba Khin. During the last thirty years, Goenka's mission has been to lessen the suffering of the world through the dissemination of *Vipassanā* meditation. When Eastern spirituality first became of interest to the West, most scholars and critics depicted meditation as an escape from society; however many contemporary meditation teachers in general (the Dalai Lama, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Sivaraksa, among others) and *Vipassanā* meditation teachers in particular (Goenka, Hart, and Fleischman) argue that meditation is not a refuge for evading society, but an instrument that facilitates harmonious and responsible living within society.

The Pali word *vipassanā* is often translated as insight (Hart 1987; Gunaratana 1985), or seeing things clearly in their true nature (Thanissaro Bhikkhu 1996; Hart 1987). According to the Buddha's teachings in the Pali canon, there are a number of different introspective methods of meditation prescribed to develop this insight. This thesis, however, assigns primary importance to the method suggested by Goenka (1998, 1994, 1987), which he labels *Vipassanā* meditation[1]. He proposes that *Vipassanā* is a universal, simple, and direct approach of observing the interaction of mind and matter for the purpose of acquiring insight and mitigating human suffering. According to Goenka, *Vipassanā* is a gradual process of mental purification that leads the practitioner to the realization that all inner and outer experiences are impermanent, unsatisfactory, and

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[1] For the purpose of clarity, when *Vipassanā* is written with a capital 'V' it refers to Goenka's lineage's meditation practice, and when *vipassanā* is written with a miniscule 'v' it refers to the traditional Theravāda definition.

impersonal. With this realization, the causes of unhappiness: namely craving, aversion, and ignorance- become eradicated. Then in a calm and balanced manner, the meditator can encounter the trials and tribulations of daily life, and use this realization constructively for serving others.

The agenda of this thesis is to explore Goenka's tradition's understanding of the social relevance of *Vipassanā* meditation *viz.* the assessment of: 1) Goenka's technique of *Vipassanā* meditation, 2) the effects on the individual practitioner, and 3) how these effects contribute to an active and sincere participation in human society. To this end, the thesis is divided into four chapters beginning with a broad discussion concerning classical Buddhist meditation, followed by an examination of Goenka's movement and practice. The first three chapters provide a background for the last, which examines the notion that social welfare depends on the alleviation of individual afflictive mental states. This claim is analysed through reports concerning the therapeutic effects of *Vipassanā* on the meditator, and through case-studies regarding the integration of the technique into the curriculums of various social institutions in the fields of health, corrections, and education.

The first chapter presents an overview of classical Theravāda meditation which comprises three interrelated aspects of training: morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). Theravāda, literally meaning "teaching of the elders", is a tradition that bases itself upon the Pali canonical texts and its commentaries. This tradition is generally considered the oldest expression of the Buddha's teachings, and has been preserved primarily in the South Asian countries of Burma, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Laos. The purpose of this chapter is to enable the reader to acquire a clear notion of how Goenka interprets the Buddha's teaching (which will be explained in chapter three), and how he conforms to and differs from classical Theravāda perspectives regarding meditation practice.

Chapter two reviews the historical evolution of Goenka's modernist reform movement of disseminating meditation practice to the general lay population, beginning with brief biographical accounts of the lives of the founding teachers: Ledi Sayadaw, Saya Thetgyi, U Ba Khin, and Goenka. Next, the discussion details how Goenka brought the teaching of *Vipassanā* meditation to India from Burma, and how it gradually coalesced into a world-wide movement that flourishes to this day. Then, a concise comparative analysis is presented of Goenka's modern *Vipassanā* movement and the late nineteenth century Sri Lankan 'Protestant Buddhist' movement initiated by Anagarika Dharmapala in opposition to the dominant hierarchical Buddhist Sangha.

Chapter three examines Goenka's innovative methods of teaching meditation through ten-day residential courses, including an analysis concerning the theoretical foundation of the exercises in light of Pali canonical sources. Following is a discussion of how this practice contributes to the alleviation of suffering through self-purification, and how this process alters the meditator's perception towards the social environment through the development of loving-kindness, compassion, equanimity, and sympathetic joy towards all beings.

The concluding chapter looks at the *Vipassanā* movement's claims that social reparation depends on curing afflictive states of mind. After a discussion concerning mental health and the general therapeutic effects on the individual that accompany the practice of *Vipassana*, an elaboration regarding the movement's relationship to constructive social engagement will focus on two aspects: 1) the movement's activities within its centres, and 2) the movement's outreach activities.

Goenka (1991, 1987) has asserted that the Buddha was the greatest social activist of his time. After his enlightenment, the Buddha spent the remaining forty-five years of his

life spreading the teaching of liberation, also known as the *dhamma*[2], for the benefit of humankind. This section examines how the international *Vipassanā* centres adhere to this example of teaching the *dhamma* through their free ten-day residential silent retreats. The centres are accessible to all socio-economic classes, which reflects their social service to humanity. It is said that those who come to the centres acquire tools for developing morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*). Goenka and other Theravāda teachers find support for this triad in the Pali canon, and suggest that its cultivation is essential not only for a healthy person, but for a healthy society. Moreover, they explain that the Buddha attributed social harmony to the individual's morality rather than to any inherent virtue of the overall social system itself (Hart 1988; Saddhatissa 1970).

The final part of this chapter reviews the movement's engagement with society. Rather than remaining restricted to secluded meditation centres, the movement has reached out to different social institutions. An analysis of what these programs are, how they are implemented, what the impacts have been, and how they contribute to social improvement, is presented through case-studies regarding the integration of *Vipassanā* with the fields of 1) *health* such as the Nature Care Centre in India (Sanghvi 1994; Savla 1994), Start Again in Switzerland (Scholz & Studer 1999; Studer 1999), and the Cyrenian House in Australia; 2) *corrections* such as Tihar, Jaipur, and Baroda jails in India (Khurana & Dhar 2000; Chandiramani et al. 1995, 1994; Dhar 1994b; Vora 1994; Singh,R.1994; Shah 1977), and the North Rehabilitation Facility in the U.S.A. (Meijer 1999); and 3) *education* in terms of incorporating meditation into a school curriculum (Dhar 1994a; Adaviyappa 1994; Shah & Katakam1994).

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[2] *Dhamma* is a word with many connotations, but most notably "truth, doctrine, moral quality, phenomena, mental object, natural law of the universe...path." The word derives from the root *dhṛ*, which means "to hold, support, that which forms a foundation and upholds" (PTS 1921).

A Methodological Concern

In this thesis, I explore the teachings of S.N. Goenka and his proponents from within the tradition. A concern I had while reviewing the scientific data in chapter four was that the information had not come from independent social scientists. The researchers, all of whom are *Vipassanā* meditators, may have already had the results of their tests in mind. Nonetheless, whether this is true or not, I feel that it is still worth examining how the movement understands itself, and why they feel that this practice is effective for social reform.

It is worth noting the difficulty in studying such a complex practice at an intellectual level without having any direct experience of it. This issue has been debated among Religious Studies academics for many years. Is it best to study a religion from within its own tradition? Or, is it best for an outside observer to study the religion? A problem with the former usually results in a lack of objectivity in discussing the subject matter. In the latter case, the researcher undoubtedly misses out on the experiential aspect, thus preventing a proper comprehension of the subject.

I do not propose an answer to this dilemma here. However, I do feel the need to acknowledge that the issue exists, and that the reader should keep this point in mind. With that said, let us proceed.

Chapter One: The Essentials of the Buddha's Teaching on Meditation

"To abstain from harmful actions; to perform wholesome actions; to purify the mind: this is the teaching of the Buddha" (Dhammapada).

During its 2500 year history, the Buddha's teachings have manifested in a multitude of different forms, adapting themselves to the various cultural and historical environments in which they arose. But at the heart of all these expressions lies the threefold division of meditative practice: morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*), that the Buddha is said to have taught and exemplified himself. These divisions in their most developed forms constitute the basis for the Buddha's Eightfold Noble Path[3]: Right Speech, Right Action, and Right Livelihood compose *sīla*; Right Effort, Right Mindfulness, and Right Concentration compose *samādhi*; and Right Understanding and Right Thoughts compose *paññā*.

It is believed by certain Buddhist traditions that only through direct meditative experience can a person arrest the speed of the afflicted mind, and see the world objectively with clarity and insight, resulting in the transcendence of suffering. It is held that without meditation, one can only increase one's confusion and ignorantly perpetuate one's clinging to cyclical existence (*saṃsāra*)[4].

During his lifetime as a teacher, the Buddha is reputed to have delivered some eighty-two thousand sermons[5]. Many of these discourses dealt with both morality and meditative practice. The original record of these teachings, according to Theravāda schools, is found in the Pali canon. Just as Sanskrit is the orthodox language of Hinduism, Hebrew of Judaism, and Latin of Catholicism, Pali is the language in which the Theravāda

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[3] For a detailed description of the Eightfold Noble Path, see Ledi Sayadaw's (1999) The Manuals of Dhamma and Hart's (1988) The Art of Living.

[4] In traditional Buddhism, *saṃsāra* represents a conditioned world of suffering that is terminated with the eradication of all afflictive mental states (*nibbāna*).

[5] This exagerated number is a standard Indian way of saying 'a large amount'.

teachings have been preserved. As with Sanskrit and Latin, Pali is not a contemporary language, but serves as a medium for the conveyance and illumination of the Buddha's tradition that flourishes to this day.

1) Theravāda Approaches to Meditation

The Pali scriptures refer to two interrelated meditative approaches: *samatha-bhāvanā* and *vipassanā-bhāvanā*, or the development of serenity and the development of insight. Typically, the standard understanding of *samādhi* is associated with the practices of *samatha-bhāvanā*, and *paññā* is to the practices of *vipassanā*. Much of the reviewed literature (especially in Goenka's tradition) uses these terms interchangeably.

The metaphor of a camera is sometimes given by modern meditation teachers to explain these two methods. The former is likened to a zoom lens that focuses on a narrow restricted segment of the particular object being photographed. The latter is likened to a wide angle lens that focuses on a broad area that captures the entire object. It is held that both approaches are essential for the transcendence of suffering. Gunaratana (1985, 3), a Theravāda Buddhist scholar, monk, and meditation teacher, says that according to the canon, it is *vipassanā-bhāvanā* that is responsible for the attainment of liberation: "the direct antidote to the ignorance underlying bondage and suffering." Goenka (1991c, 105-6) explains that this is so because *samatha-bhāvanā* merely tranquillizes the mind at the conscious level, suppressing the impurities into the deeper levels of the unconsciousness where they "continue to generate and multiply." He writes: "At the surface level of the mind there is peace and harmony, but in the depths of the mind is a sleeping volcano of suppressed negativity, which keeps erupting in violent explosions." However, because the development of insight does require a certain amount of concentration, *samatha-bhāvanā* cannot be ignored. Gunaratana (1985, 3) writes: "Together the two types of meditation work to make the mind a fit instrument for enlightenment."

a) The Route of Concentrated Serenity

Samatha-bhāvanā techniques aim at concentrating the mind. In these practices "the meditator's attentional strategy is to fix his focus on a single percept, constantly bringing his wandering mind to this object" (Goleman 1988, 105). Concentration meditations are numerous in kind. The Buddha taught over forty different varieties such as the practice of staring at the ten *kasiṇas* (coloured discs); observing the ten *asubhas* (decaying corpses); the ten reflections on the Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, peace, one's own purity, one's own liberation, one's divine qualities, the inevitability of death, the thirty-two parts of the body, and breathing; the four sublime states of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity; the four formless contemplations of infinite space, infinite consciousness, the realm of nothingness, and the realm of 'neither perception nor non-perception; and the contemplations of the four physical elements of earth, air, fire, and water as abstract forces[6]. The Buddha taught whichever method was suitable to the individual meditator's temperament at a particular time. Daniel Goleman (1988, 8), psychologist and meditation teacher, explains that each of these subjects of meditation, though different in nature, depth, and outcome, are suitable for developing concentration.

Samatha-bhāvanā meditations can also be found in several other spiritual traditions such as Hindu *Japa*, *Siddha yoga* and *Samadhi*; Christian *Prayer of the Heart*; Jewish *Kavvanah*; and Sufi *Zikr*. These techniques generally involve some sort of breath control, visualisation of images, verbalisation of a mantra or prayer, or intellectual contemplation (Goleman 1988, 105-6).

Gunaratana (1985) describes two types of concentration fostered in the Buddha's system of serenity meditations: *jhāna* and *khaṇika*. *Jhāna*, or absorption, is defined as a state of "deep mental unification characterised by a total immersion of the mind in its

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[6] For a description of these practices, see Buddhaghosa's *Visuddhimaga*

object" (Gunaratana 1985, 4). In this state, the mind gradually becomes focused in nine stages[7], culminating in an unperturbed concentration entailing the complete cessation of all discursive mental activity, suppression of the five hindrances (*nīvaranas*)[8], and perfect equanimity. All of the above mentioned subjects of meditation with the exception of the first nine of the ten reflections and the contemplation of the four material elements are considered suitable for developing at least the first level of *jhāna*.

Khaṇika, or momentary concentration on the other hand, is a "concentration existing concurrently with itself....coming into being through the fixity with which the mind attends to changing phenomena" (Gunaratana 1985, 45). Gunaratana explains that this fluid type of mental collectedness does not have the force of the *jhāna*, but is sufficient in preventing any of the five hindrances from disturbing *vipassanā-bhāvanā* practices as described below.

A well-concentrated mind is said to be beneficial for the pursuit of *vipassanā-bhāvanā*, as it prevents the overshadowing of wandering thoughts. According to most traditions, *vipassanā* is best practised with *upacāra-jhāna*, or access concentration, the lowest level of the *jhāna*s. This is because the mindfulness practices for developing *vipassanā* are propositional in nature and applied to normal consciousness. After the first level of *jhāna*, the mind's normal processes cannot occur as its constant stream of thoughts, memories, and yearnings come to a halt. However, some traditions employ the method of "bare insight", beginning *vipassanā-bhāvanā* without any previous successes or attempts at *jhāna*. In these instances, momentary (*khaṇika*) concentration is developed during the practice of mindfulness itself. During the initial stages of "bare insight", the meditator's mind is usually interrupted by numerous ideas, fantasies, and memories between moments of mindful observation. Nonetheless, with increased effort and

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[7] For detailed description of the levels of *jhāna*, see Gunaratana's (1985) The Path of Serenity and Insight.
[8] The five hindrances are sensual desire, ill will, laziness, agitation, and doubt.

determination, the momentary concentration gradually strengthens, eventually reaching a point of access concentration (Goleman 1988; Gunaratana 1985).

b) The Route of Insight

In his book Theravada Meditation, Buddhist scholar Winston King (1980, 94) defines *vipassanā* as "the total, supersaturated, existentializing of the Theravāda worldview that all existence in personal and individual modes of being, intrinsically and ineradicably embodies impermanence, pain, and impersonality." Thus *vipassanā* is a quality of mind - the ability to see these clearly embodied in the present moment. Goleman (1988, 105) writes that mindfulness meditations for *vipassanā-bhāvanā* "entail continuous full watchfulness of each successive moment, a global vigilance to the meditator's chain of awareness." This description refers to any practice coupled with *samatha* that leads to insight through the non-reactive awareness of the natural, unaltered psycho-physical continuum.

The *Mahāsatipaṭṭāna sutta*, or the Great Discourse on the Establishing of Awareness, is the primary text that Theravāda Buddhist teachers use as their guide for mindfulness meditations that have the aim of arousing insight. The Buddha proposed four foundations of mindfulness for the contemplation of the mental and physical phenomena:

> ...the fourfold establishing of awareness. Which four? Here, meditators, a meditator dwells ardent with awareness and constant thorough understanding of impermanence, observing body in body, having removed craving and aversion towards the world [of mind and matter];...observing sensations in sensations;...observing mind in mind;...observing mental contents in mental contents... (VRI 1996, 3).

In the component of awareness of the body (*kāya*), the meditator is instructed to reflect with detachment upon the body's method of respiration, its different postures and movements, its repulsive nature, and the elements that it is composed of. In the second

component dealing with the awareness of sensations (*vedanā*), the meditator is supposed to focus objectively on whatever sensations arise with the understanding of their transient nature. The practitioner disregards whether they are pleasant or unpleasant, as well as whatever the causes of the sensations may be. While developing the third aspect, awareness of mind (*cittā*), the meditator simply registers whatever mental state - moods, thoughts, emotions, etc. arises, without attaching any importance to it. The last foundation, awareness of mental contents (*dhamma*), is an extension of the third foundation. Here the meditator notes the psychological state occupied by the attentional object in terms of the detailed classificatory schema outlined by the Buddha such as the five hindrances, five aggregates, six sense spheres, seven factors of enlightenment, and the 'Four Noble Truths'[9].

The Buddha acknowledged in this *sutta* that meditating upon these foundations with proper concentration and awareness is "the only way that leads to the purification of beings, to the overcoming of sorrow and lamentation, to the ending of pain and grief, to the achievement of the right path and the realization of *nibbāna*." In his Living Buddhist Masters, Jack Kornfield (1977), psychologist and Buddhist meditation teacher, shows how various Theravāda meditative traditions employ different methods for observation of these foundations. In spite of these differences, each tradition claims that if practised with proper effort and determination, the meditator will be able to calm, focus, and examine the mind accordingly. This is said to occur through a process that separates the person from the conditioned reactions to the constant flow of mental events. The meditator eventually gains insight into the three existential marks (*lakkhaṇas*): impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and selflessness (*anattā*). As the mind becomes concentrated and

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[9] For an explanation of these schemes, see Ledi Sayadaw's (1999) The Manuals of Dhamma, Goenka's (1998) Satipatthana Sutta Discourses, Thanissaro Bhikku's (1996) The Wings to Awakening, and U Silananda's (1990) The Four Foundations of Mindfulness.

observant, the transiency of all physical and psychological phenomena is understood, and any attachment to them becomes undesirable in so far as they ultimately lead to some form of suffering. Subsequently, the meditator sees all these events as an empty process that arises and passes away according to the laws of cause and effect. In addition, the practitioner sees that there is no real substance behind this process. According to the Buddha's teachings, it is the illusions of permanence, satisfaction, and self-hood that bind the individual to the dualistic misperceptions of reality that are the ultimate causes of suffering.

c) The Route of Morality

The program for cultivating *samādhi* and *paññā*, in turn, requires the support of a moral discipline (*sīla*) as well. Gunaratana (1985, 15-16) states that:

> ...a moral foundation is needed for meditation follows from an understanding of the purpose of concentration. Concentration, in the Buddhist discipline, aims at providing a base for wisdom by cleansing the mind of the dispersive influence of the defilements. But in order for the concentrative exercises to effectively combat the defilements, the coarser expressions of the latter through the instruments of bodily and verbal action have to be checked. Moral transgressions being invariably motivated by defilements - by greed, hatred, and delusion - when a person acts in violation of the precepts of morality he excites and reinforces the very same mental factors his practice of meditation is intended to eliminate.

Hence, the Buddha preached ethical principles consisting of an abstinence from harmful mental, vocal, and physical actions in order to promote peace within oneself and in one's relations with others. His code of moral discipline was divided into different groupings such as the five precepts for lay followers (abstinence from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, false speech, and intoxicants); and the eight precepts practised during meditation retreats and holy days (the first five precepts plus abstinence from food after noon, sensual entertainment, and using luxurious seats and beds). These minimal obligations enable the practitioner to progress in basic meditation practice. However, if

higher levels of attainment are aspired towards, then meditators are encouraged to follow a more complete discipline pertaining to renunciation as explained in the *Vinaya-piṭaka*, or the collection of rules for monks[10] (Gunaratana 1985; Saddhatissa 1970).

It should be understood that these precepts are considered to be self-imposed guidelines that are conducive to the subtle work of meditative practice. Moral development in the Buddha's teaching evolves from an initially prescribed behavioural code to one that is a natural act. At first one follows the precepts out of self-interest as they are beneficial for personal liberation, but as the meditator progresses on the path of purification, following them becomes an effortless second nature.

A salient feature of the Buddha's moral teaching is the absence of an inherent concept of sin such as that found in the Judeo-Christian traditions. Actions are seen as skilful or unskilful in so far as they perpetuate mental suffering, and hence constitute a barrier on the path of enlightenment. By the tolerance of shortcomings, the determination to overcome them is made easier. In his In Hope of Nibbana, King (1964, 77) writes that "the accommodation of absolute standards and distinctions to relative situations is not admitted surreptitiously through a side door in the religious edifice...but the principle of accommodation to human weakness is welcomed at the front door as an honoured and beloved guest." An interesting expression of this accommodation is the Theravāda *uposatha* ritual whereby monks and nuns gather every fifteen days to admit their transgressions of the code of discipline in front of the elders. By confronting their mistakes and meditating to develop equanimity, the underlying motivations of these aberrations gradually dissolve.

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[10] For a detailed presentation of this topic, see Nanamoli's (1969) translation The *Patimokkha*: 227 Fundamental Rules of a *Bhikkhu*.

Thus, the scheme of meditative training in the Theravāda tradition consists of the three interrelated aspects of *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*. This threefold system, as seen in the Pali canon, leads to *vimutti*, or final release from suffering (Hart 1988).

In his survey of the various Theravāda Buddhist meditative traditions, Kornfield (1977) presents a wide spectrum of approaches for the attainment of *vimutti*. Some traditions are strict and teach their students to strive hard and vigorously, not wasting a moment; while other traditions preach working slowly and naturally, letting go of goal-oriented notions. Some say that the student does not need to have prior intellectual knowledge; while others claim that it is essential. Some say that the meditator needs to first develop the *jhānas* before *vipassanā*; while others say that *khaṇika* is sufficient. Some encourage the cultivation of loving-kindness (*mettā-bhāvanā*) before engaging in other trainings; while others practice it later on in collaboration with *vipassanā*.

Kornfield acknowledges that these practices, even though appearing contradictory, all stem from the same underlying realization that leads to the freedom from human suffering by seeing things clearly in their true nature without preconception or attachment. Choosing an approach is a matter of personal preference and inclination. He explains that it is not really a question of which practice is better, but rather which is the most natural and best suited to bring about balance and harmony within the individual. Kornfield (1977, 30) writes: "Purity does not exist within a tradition, nor within a method, or within a religion. There is only one basic purity that was taught by the Buddha, the purity which liberates, and that is purity of mind, freedom from greed, hatred, and delusion."

Chapter Two: Historical Overview of the *Vipassanā* Meditation Movement

1) The Chain of Teachers

After the Buddha's death[11], generations of monks orally transmitted his teachings. In the third century BCE, the Buddhist emperor Asoka inscribed many of the Buddha's teachings onto rock edicts, which he disseminated widely around India to promote peace and social harmony. Asoka also dispatched missions of fully liberated monks (*arahants*) to different areas in Asia such as Burma, Thailand, and Sri Lanka in order to promulgate the Buddha's ennobling message. These small missions produced almost a half-million monks and millions of lay-disciples in these countries today. The *arahants* Sona and Uttara Theras were sent to Suvanna Bhumi (modern day Burma) for this task (VRI 1988, 21-3).

According to Goenka (1987), approximately five-hundred years after the Buddha's death, India and her neighbouring countries lost the technique of *Vipassanā* meditation. However, he claims that through the millennia, the technique was preserved in Burma in its pure form by a small number of monks who transmitted it in an unbroken chain from teacher to disciple[12]. When Ledi Sayadaw, the venerable monk who flaunted the monastic restriction by disseminating the technique to householders, the links of the chain expanded dramatically in number.

Although there is no actual record of who taught Ledi Sayadaw the technique of *Vipassana* meditation as it is known today, it is believed by Goenka's tradition that he learned the practice from traditional teachers who had preserved it through generations from the time when Sona and Uttara first came to Burma. Then Ledi Sayadaw passed the technique to the farmer Saya Thetgyi, who in turn taught it to Goenka's teacher, Sayagyi U Ba Khin (Hart 1988, 8; VRI 1988, 39).

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[11] There has been a great deal of disagreement about the Buddha's exact dates of birth and death. It is agreed upon by most scholars that he lived roughly around the fourth and fifth centuries BCE.
[12] There is no solid evidence for these claims. They are based on faith in Goenka's tradition.

a) Ledi Sayadaw (1846-1923)

Ledi Sayadaw[13] was born as Tat Khaung in the Dipeyin township of northern Burma. At the early age of eight, he attended the traditional monastery school where he learned to read, write, and recite Pali texts from the local monks (*bhikkhus*). At the age of fifteen he became a novice monk (*samanera*), specialising in the study of the *Abhidhamma* texts, and at the age of twenty he embarked on higher ordination and became a *bhikkhu* under the name Nyanadhaja (VRI 1999, iii-iv; VRI 1991b, 75-6).

After travelling around the country and studying with different teachers, Nyanadhaja resided in the town of Monywa in1882 where he taught Pali and the Buddhist canonical texts. After teaching all day, he would spend his evenings practising *Vipassanā* meditation at a small monastery in the jungle (*ledi*). Followers of his tradition suggest that in 1886 he first learned *Vipassanā* and was first referred to as Ledi Sayadaw (VRI 1991b, 76-7).

After eight years of a sedentary lifestyle, Ledi Sayadaw travelled throughout the country establishing monasteries where people could learn both meditation and the scriptures. It was during these travels that he wrote most of his books on the *dhamma* in both the Pali and Burmese languages. Although most of his works were of a scholarly fashion, he also published books geared towards a lay audience, employing a simple language that the common person could understand (VRI 1999, v-vii; VRI 1991b, 77).

Besides his books on the *dhamma*, his written commentaries on social issues lamented the killing of animals for food while advocating a vegetarian diet. In his manuals on sanitation, he described how people could protect themselves from prevalent diseases in Burma such as cholera and the plague (VRI 1999, v-vii; VRI 1991b, 77).

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[13] The title *Sayadaw* translates as "venerable teacher" and is bestowed on all highly respected monks.

In the final years of Ledi Sayadaw's life, his eyesight had completely failed him, likely attributable to years of intense reading and writing under inadequate illumination. He dedicated the remainder of his life exclusively to teaching and practising *Vipassanā* meditation (VRI 1991b, 77-8). Among his chief disciples, Saya Thetgyi, had a profound influence in spreading his teachings.

b) Saya Thetgyi (1873-1945)

Saya Thetgyi was born as Maung Thet in the farming village of Pyawbwegyi, just south of Rangoon. Throughout most of his early life in that region, he cultivated rice paddies and enjoyed an idyllic life of rustic contentment with his family and friends. This happiness was shattered in 1903 when a cholera epidemic rampaged through Thet's village, killing many friends and family members, including two of his children (Hlaing 1991, 80-1).

This horrific incident forced him to ponder the nature of suffering, which he vowed to transcend. With permission from his wife and remaining family members, Thet departed his home in search of liberation. After visiting many monasteries and retreat centers, in 1907 he encountered Ledi Sayadaw at the monastery in Monywa, and recognised that his search for a suitable teacher had come to fruition. Over the next seven years, Thet studied and practised meditation with Ledi Sayadaw. During this time, Thet's family supported him with profits from their harvests (Ibid., 82).

When Thet returned home to his village, he continued his practice and taught some meditation to family members and friends. In 1915 during a visit to Ledi Sayadaw, Thet was asked by his teacher to start teaching *Vipassanā* meditation regularly on his teacher's behalf. Thet's first job as meditation instructor was to teach a group of twenty-five monks

who were learned in the scriptures. It was at this point that he became known as Saya Thetgyi[14] (VRI 1999, viii; Hlaing 1991, 82-3).

Saya Thetgyi then returned to his village and began teaching *Vipassanā* courses in an old resthouse that he converted into a meditation hall. He began by teaching meditation to some of his workers who had a reputation for being rowdy. His instructions had a profound effect on them. As the rest of the villagers saw a genuine transformation in these people, they became curious and attended Saya Thetgyi's courses as well. His reputation as a meditation instructor began to spread throughout the region, and he was visited by all sorts of people such as farmers and labourers, as well as government employees from Rangoon (Goenka 1991b, 85; Hlaing 1991, 83-4). One of these employees was U Ba Khin, who was next to continue this legacy of lay meditation masters. In 1945, after Saya Thetgyi's wife passed away, he moved to Rangoon to be closer to his students and to treat his own deteriorating health. For the short remainder of his life he meditated with his students everyday, providing support and inspiration to all those who were around him (Hlaing 1991, 84).

c) Sayagyi U Ba Khin (1899-1971)

Sayagyi U Ba Khin was born in the Burmese capital of Rangoon. Upon completing his high school education, Ba Khin found a job working as an accounts clerk in the office of the Accountant General of Burma. In 1937 when Burma separated from India, Ba Khin rose to the post of Special Office Superintendent (VRI 1991a, 8).

That very same year Ba Khin participated in his first *Vipassanā* meditation course with Saya Thetgyi. For thousands of meditators today, this event marks the beginning of an era. Four years later, Ba Khin met Webu Sayadaw, the well-respected monk considered

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[14] *Saya* translates as "teacher", and *gyi* is a suffix denoting respect.

to be an *arahant*. He was so impressed with Ba Khin's meditative attainments that he tried to persuade him to start teaching meditation immediately. Around this time, Ba Khin's teacher Saya Thetgyi, also began to urge him to teach. However, Ba Khin's situation in life at the time did not permit him to do so as his government position and family of wife and six children were very demanding (Ibid., 9).

In 1948 when Burma gained independence from the British, Ba Khin was appointed Accountant General, a post which he held until his retirement in 1967. Ba Khin also served many other posts such as Director of Commercial Audit, Chairman of the State Agricultural Marketing Board, and head of the State Institute of Government Accounts and Audit (Ba Khin 1991c, 58-9).

In 1950, a decade after his meeting with the legendary Webu Sayadaw, Ba Khin established the 'Vipassana Association of the Accountant General's Office' where he taught *Vipassanā* meditation to government employees working under him. It was known at the time that Ba Khin's offices were always the most honest and efficient - free from corruption, bribery, and favouritism, which were prevalent characteristics in most Burmese governmental departments of the time (Goenka 1991a, 14-18). In her paper Buddhist Meditation in Burma, Nottingham (c.f. Ba Khin 1991c, 58) comments that meditation "creates a reservoir of calm and balanced energy to be used for the building of a welfare state and as a bulwark against corruption in public life."

In 1952 Ba Khin founded the International Meditation Centre (IMC), where he guided both monks and lay people alike in the practice of *Vipassanā* meditation. However, due to his demanding schedule, Ba Khin was only able to instruct a small number of students at the time. It was only after 1967 when Ba Khin retired from government that he devoted his entire attention to teaching *Vipassanā* at the IMC. Goenka writes that Ba Khin exerted much energy for his students. There were times when he conducted courses for a small number of students, and put just as much effort into the course as if it were a

large group. The last course that Ba Khin taught took place three days before his demise in 1971 (Goenka 1991a, 18-9; VRI 1991a, 1-10).

After much research and experimentation with *Vipassanā* meditation, Ba Khin, without deviating from the essence of his lineage's teaching, developed a new set of systematic meditation instructions that he believed were more in tune with the pressing demands of the modern era. Ba Khin, one of the first Eastern meditation teachers for Westerners, broke a cultural and linguistic barrier that had been upheld for centuries. He designed a course specifically for lay people of all religions and nationalities, rather than strictly for Buddhist renunciates who had given up the worldly life. His courses, though made for a householder, still maintained a strict discipline that produced satisfactory results in a relatively short period of time if practised properly (Goenka 1991h, 169; Ko Lay 1991, 24).

In 1969, two years before his death, one of Ba Khin's most cherished dreams came true. This dream was to see the technique of *Vipassanā* meditation return to India - its country of origin, to assist in emancipating her from the manifold problems that she faced, and from there spread to the rest of the world. This dream was realized by his devoted student S.N. Goenka.

d) Satya Narayana Goenka (1924-)

S.N. Goenka, a retired industrialist of Indian descent born in Burma, first learned *Vipassanā* meditation from Sayagyi U Ba Khin in 1955 at the International Meditation Centre in Rangoon. Little did he know what impact this course would have on his life. Born in 1924 into a staunchly conservative Indian family that had settled in Burma just two generations earlier, he was taught all the elaborate rites and rituals of conservative Hinduism. As a young adult, he was groomed as a businessman, and eventually became

one of the leading textile industrialists in Burma, as well as one of the leaders of the Indian community (Bodian 1991, 155; Hart 1988, 1).

However, all the pressures and tensions that accompanied his success led to the development of severe migraine headaches, for which the only relief was found in morphine. After several failed attempts to find a cure to his case of migraine headaches and his developing morphine habit, Goenka stumbled upon *Vipassanā* meditation through the suggestion of a friend. When approached about a course to cure an ailment, U Ba Khin refused Goenka, explaining that *Vipassanā* is a spiritual path for complete liberation and purification of the mind, and cannot be de-valued as a mere treatment for some psychosomatic disorder. He made clear to him that these diseases may dissolve in the process but their eradication cannot be the focus of the practice. Highly impressed with the energetic and well mannered Ba Khin, as well as the peaceful atmosphere of the meditation centre, Goenka decided to try a course for the proper reasons that U Ba Khin had explained, regardless of what impact it had on his migraines (Goenka 1991f, 127; Bodian 1991, 155; Hart 1988, 141-3; Goenka 1987).

In a discussion about his first course, Goenka said "it gave me relief for my migraine, but the biggest relief was that the stress and strain and tension that I used to build up because of my ego all got released." He explained that his life amongst his family and peers had altered dramatically for the better, as meditation had taught him the "art of living peacefully and harmoniously within oneself and of generating nothing but peace and harmony for others." For the next fourteen years, Goenka practised on a regular basis under the guidance of his teacher, using all his free time from the responsibilities of business and family to develop his meditation (Bodian 1991, 156).

2) The Rise of a Movement

In 1969 after Ba Khin appointed Goenka as an instructor of meditation, Goenka returned to his ancestral India to teach *Vipassanā* to his ageing parents and some family friends. Due to the popularity of this first course, a demand grew for a second, and then a third, until Goenka found himself constantly travelling around India conducting meditation courses at scattered sites such as temples, churches, mosques, schools, resthouses, and so forth. In 1976 this phenomenon eventually led to the creation of the first permanent *Vipassanā* centres in India such as the Vipassana International Academy in Igatpuri and the Vipassana International Meditation Centre in Hyderabad, followed shortly thereafter in 1977 by the Vipassana Centre in Jaipur. These centres led to the establishment of other centres, which today number about forty in India, and eighty world-wide. These centres commonly teach ten-day beginner courses, as well as twenty, thirty, and forty-five day courses for advanced students (Goenka 1991g, 148-52).

Goenka has trained and appointed over four-hundred assistant-teachers in India and abroad to help him conduct courses at these centres and in other places. Goenka personally has conducted over four-hundred courses around the world, while the courses conducted by assistant-teachers number in the tens of thousands.

Vipassanā meditation has been gradually making its way into mainstream contemporary Western culture. It began in the late sixties and early seventies when many young disillusioned Westerners flocked to Asia seeking an alternative to the consumeristic "American Dream". Some came through organizations such as the Peace Corps, others came to escape the haunts of the Vietnam war, some for the cheap drugs and living expenses, and some on a spiritual search. Some of these seekers found *Vipassanā*, and remained in countries like India, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and Burma for a long time studying and practising the ways of the Buddhists. As a result, over seventy *Vipassanā* centres from

various traditions can be found in North America alone, seven of which are in Goenka's tradition.

Besides the flourishing centres, Goenka has also helped to establish the Vipassana Research Institute at Igatpuri, India. The goal of the institute is to conduct research on the Pali texts, and to make the theoretical teachings of the Buddha available to the public in all languages. In addition the institute is presently exploring references to *vipassanā* in various ancient texts, and is also conducting scientific research on the applications of *Vipassanā* meditation in relation to various areas of human development.

3) Protesting Buddhism: Dharmapala and Goenka

Goenka's movement can be likened to what Buddhist-scholar Richard Gombrich (1988, 174) calls 'Protestant Buddhism', a movement that arose in the late nineteenth century in Sri Lanka as a protest against both Christian missionaries and the hierarchy of the Buddhist Sangha. A primary feature of both movements is the attention they assign to the public laity and the reduction of importance to the private *Saṅgha*, or community of Buddhist monks. Gombrich explains that just as the Buddha's teachings were in opposition to the dominant *Brahmin* priestly class, this revolution of protesting Buddhists in Sri Lanka arose in reaction to the emergence of a bourgeoisie that consisted of Buddhist monks.

In the late 1800's Anagarika Dharmapala, the founder of the Maha Bodhi Society[15] and innovator of the 'Protestant Buddhist' movement, wrote many books for a lay audience concerning Buddhism and meditation. Based on the Buddha's discourses concerning the laity such as *Advice to Sigala*, Dharmapala wrote about the role of the

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[15] The Maha Bodhi Society is a Buddhist organization dedicated to the promulgation of the Buddha's teaching through various social welfare programs, meditation courses, and the publication of lay-oriented Buddhist literature.

Buddhist layperson, not as mere supporter of the Buddhist clergy, but as an independent, ethical, non-superstitious, and active member of society. Gombrich (1988, 194) writes that for Dharmapala "Gods and priests, the stuff of communal religion, could have no place in the lives of good Buddhists." Goenka (1987), like Dharmapala, constantly emphasizes that practising the Buddha's teaching should neither be an escape from society, nor should it be used as a mechanical rite; but should be used as a practical method to face the daily vicissitudes in a calm, collected, and unperturbed manner.

The Protestant view of religion shared by Goenka and Dharmapala guides their belief that the Buddha's soteriological doctrine and activity is universally applicable. They both therefore place(d) a heavy emphasis on teaching the cultivation of *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā* to the public[16]. They also both claim that the Buddha did not teach any religious system of belief; rather, he taught the *dhamma* (Gombrich 1988; Goenka 1987). Goenka maintains that by offering a universally applicable remedy to a universal dilemma, and only discussing matters that led to liberation from suffering, the Buddha steered away from dogma and idle speculation. In the *Anuradha Sutta* the Buddha says: "I teach about suffering and the eradication of suffering" (PTS xliv.x.2; c.f. Hart 1988, 2). Followers of

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[16] This notion that the Buddha's teaching of *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā* is universally acceptable is peculiarly sectarian in nature, as not all people can accept this claim. Firstly, the agenda of *sīla* may not be agreed upon by all people, as it is a practice grounded in Buddhist faith. Buddhist scholar Stephen Batchelor (1996, 244-5) explains that one may justify one's convictions of what is right or wrong by appealing to the Buddha's moral code; however, "such an appeal is...an act of faith in something (such as conscience) that I can neither prove nor observe." This notion can be exemplified in the layman's precept of sexual misconduct, which entails that the individual must be committed to only one partner. However, many indigenous cultures around the world engage in polygamous marriages for a variety of social, economic, and religious reasons. These people would not find the Buddha's description of *sīla* acceptable.

Secondly, *paññā* according to the Buddha, is not wisdom in a generic sense, but specifically entails the realization of impermanence, suffering, and selflessness. A devout Jew, Christian, or Muslim cannot subscribe to this Buddhist worldview. Their belief systems neither see God or the soul as impermanent; nor do they see suffering as a result of craving, aversion, and ignorance, but as due to the wrath of God's punishment for disobedience. Therefore we see that to claim that the teaching is universal entails uncritically accepting a fundamental Buddhist dogma. Perhaps it is for these reasons that Goenka places so much emphasis on the meditation practice itself, and does not ask his students to accept any part of the theoretical teaching unless it is part of their own experience (see Goenka 1987).

Goenka's movement argue that although *Vipassanā* meditation has been preserved in a Buddhist tradition, it was initially conceived without a sectarian makeup, and that its universal approach facilitates acceptance and application by people of diverse backgrounds throughout the world (Hart 1988, 14-18).

So we see that what once was the province of a handful of monks, has now been introduced to thousands of people representing all cultures, religions, and economic backgrounds. Business executives, blue collar workers, students, and artisans from all over the world find Goenka's adaptation of the Buddha's teaching a useful tool in their lives. Leaders and practitioners from different religions such as Buddhist monks, Jain *munis*, Christian priests, and Hindu *sannyasis* learn *Vipassanā* meditation from Goenka and his assistants, and have implemented the practice within their own respective systems (Goenka 1991g, 151). Goenka (1991c, 108) writes:

> This can be practised by one and all. The disease is not sectarian, therefore the remedy cannot be sectarian: it must be universal. Everyone faces the problem of suffering. When one suffers from anger, it is not Buddhist anger, Hindu anger, Christian anger. Anger is anger....The malady is universal. The remedy must also be universal.

Goenka (1991a, 18) claims that the title 'Buddha' given to Gotama, means "awakened one", and therefore does not imply sectarianism. Since there is no word in the Pali canonical sources equivalent to the term 'Buddhist', Goenka suggests that the Buddha did not teach a religion for people to convert to[17]. He constantly emphasizes that the Buddha taught the *dhamma*, which is universally relevant, and that anyone who practices morality, concentration, and purification of the mind, whether he or she call themselves Buddhist or not, is a true follower of the Buddha.

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[17] Most experts would contest Goenka's claim that the Buddha did not practice conversion, as there are numerous references in the Pali canon that indicate that the Buddha asked his followers to take refuge in him and the *Dhamma*. Furthermore, the Buddha also insisted that his followers who had taught other systems of thought should remain silent until it was certain that they would preach his system only.

Another salient characteristic of Protestant Buddhism is its claim that the Buddha's teaching, which denies an omnipotent creator God, is not a religion but a rational and scientific philosophy. In the 1960's, Jayatilleke, a philosophy professor and Protestant Buddhist, argued that every major intellectual development in the modern world ranging from the fields of sociology to astro-physics, had already been anticipated by the Buddha (Gombrich 1988, 195-6).

This notion of the Buddha's teaching as scientific and rational is further justified by its advice that one should always question the validity of whatever is beyond one's experience, and never accept anything on blind faith. The *Kalama Sutta* of the *Anguttara Nikaya* states:

> Do not believe in what ye have heard; do not believe in the traditions, because they have been handed down for generations; do not believe in anything because it is rumoured and spoken by many; do not believe merely because a written statement of some old sage is produced; do not believe in conjectures; do not believe in that as truth to which you have become attached by habit; do not believe merely the authority of your teachers and elders. After observation and analysis, when it agrees with reason and is conducive to the good and gain of one and all, then accept it and live up to it (c.f. Ba Khin 1994b, 36).

William Hart (1988, 14-5), an assistant-teacher to Goenka, explains that the ultimate authority is one's direct experience of truth, and that nothing should be accepted on faith or intellectual reasoning alone. The Buddha encouraged his pupils to develop their own understanding based on experience, allowing them to become their own authorities.

In this respect, Hart (1988, 2) writes that Goenka shuns all expressions of reverence towards himself, instead directing his student's devotion to the technique of meditation and the truth that they find within themselves. Rather than dependence on the teacher or Sangha, he teaches his students independence and self-responsibility. The real test of *Vipassanā*, he preaches, is its application in daily life. He encourages meditators not to sit at his feet, but to go out and engage themselves harmoniously with the world.

To sum up, the rise of the *Vipassanā* reformist movement started with Ledi Sayadaw who broke the monastic restrictions and began disseminating the practice of *Vipassanā* meditation to his lay students, particularly to the farmer Saya Thetgyi, who in turn taught it to Goenka's teacher, Sayagyi U Ba Khin. These twentieth-century reformist teachers have redefined classical approaches towards the Buddha's teaching. As we shall see in the following chapters, the lineage's emphasis on meditation practice and moral cultivation, and their de-emphasis upon passive dependence on the Buddhist monkhood (or anyone else for that matter), has thus created an influential integration of the Buddha's teachings into the larger, modern social context.

Chapter Three: *Vipassanā* Meditation as taught by S.N. Goenka

In the first chapter we saw the traditional Theravāda meditative approaches for acquiring *sīla*, *samādhi*, and *paññā*. This chapter presents Goenka's modernist redefinition of *vipassanā* as not only something that one acquires through meditative practice, but also including the meditation practice itself, hence the title, *Vipassanā* meditation. His modern innovative approach of teaching classical Theravāda meditation is discussed in this section, including an examination of the practical and theoretical foundations of his meditative exercises in light of Pali canonical sources and commentaries. Following we will see how the practice contributes to the alleviation of suffering through self-purification, and how this process shifts the meditator's perception towards the social context through the development of equanimity, loving-kindness, compassion, and sympathetic joy for all life forms.

1) S.N. Goenka's Ten-Day Course

a) Introduction to the Course

According to Goenka (1987), *Vipassanā* meditation was a practice rediscovered[19] by Gotama the Buddha twenty-five hundred years ago. *Vipassanā* literally translates as "clear seeing", which here refers to the ability to see all events clearly in terms of the three marks of existence: impermanence (*anicca*), suffering (*dukkha*), and selflessness (*anattā*). Goenka claims that his technique of *Vipassanā* meditation is a simple, practical, and rational way of achieving insight and peace of mind through self-observation. The practice gradually purifies the mind by removing the deep-seated causes of suffering, eventually leading to complete liberation from all mental negativities.

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[19] *Vipassanā* is thought to have been discovered by previous Buddhas, but was forgotten with time due to lack of practice.

The ten-day *Vipassanā* course designed by Goenka is streamlined for the modern person while aiming to preserve the quintessential aspects of the Buddha's teaching. Although ten days is not a lot of time to learn about oneself, he asserts that ten days of unbroken practice is the minimum amount of time needed in which the very basics of the technique could be learned in order to apply the teaching in one's daily life[19]. It is also recommended that one should not attempt to learn *Vipassanā* on one's own, but take an initial course under the supervision of a qualified instructor who can assist the practitioner with any difficulties that may arise (Goenka 1987).

For the duration of the course, students remain at the site totally removed from contact with the outside world. They abstain from reading and writing, and suspend any other spiritual practice. The students observe silence for the first nine days. They do not communicate at all with the other students, however, they are free to ask questions to the instructor regarding the technique or to the staff members regarding any material need related to food, accommodation, health, etc. In this way the external stimuli are kept to a minimum, facilitating a conducive atmosphere for the meditator to observe the true nature of the mind without interference.

Students receive methodical meditation instructions throughout the day from Goenka himself or via audio tapes, and each day's progress is explained during an evening discourse from Goenka on video tape. Goenka's assistant-teachers are present throughout the day to meditate with the students and answer their questions. As students mature in their practice, they are usually encouraged to be self-reliant and answer their own questions.

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[19] In the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna Sutta*, the Buddha asserted that some people may master the principles of *vipassanā* in seven days; others in seven years. It is said that awakening varies a great deal from one practitioner to another, as not every practitioner begins the journey of *vipassanā* at the same point (VRI 1996, 79).

Formal *Vipassanā* courses are structured around ethical guidelines of behaviour, meditative concentration, and self-purification through the realization of inherent personal transiency. Goenka has formulated the rules, regulations, and daily timetable (see figure 1) in such a way that participants can make best use of their time at the centre. He says that they are not for the benefit of the teacher or management, nor are they mere expressions of blind faith in an organised religion. Rather, they are based on the practical experience of other students over the years (Goenka 1987).

Figure 1:
Daily Timetable of a Ten-Day *Vipassanā* Course

4:00am	Morning wake-up bell
4:30-6:30	Meditation in hall or residence
6:30-8:00	Breakfast and break
8:00-9:00	Group meditation in hall
9:00-11:00	Meditation in hall or residence according to teacher's instructions
11:00-12:00	Lunch and break
12:00-1:00	Interviews with teacher or break
1:00-2:30	Meditation in hall or residence
2:30-3:30	Group meditation in hall
3:30-5:00	Meditation in hall or residence according to teacher's instructions
5:00-6:00	Tea break
6:00-7:00	Group meditation in hall
7:00-8:30	Taped discourse of Goenka in hall
8:30-9:00	Group meditation in hall
9:00-9:30	Question time in hall or retire to room
10:00pm	Lights out

b) The Foundations of *Vipassanā* Meditation

A ten-day course in *Vipassanā* meditation always begins with the students acknowledging certain formalities and then repeating them aloud to clearly inform themselves of the

endeavour they are about to undertake. This process permits whole-hearted engagement in the practice, and removes any sort of wishful thinking about what magical results might be accrued. These formalities are broken down into four parts: (i) refuge, (ii) precepts, (iii) surrender, and (iv) request for the teaching.

(i) The first formality entails going for refuge to the *Buddha*, *Dhamma*, and *Saṅgha*. Embracing these refuges means finding inspiration and protection in the quality and process of enlightenment. Goenka explains this by stating that without a sense of safety and protection, one will find it difficult to plumb the depths of the mind (Goenka 1987, 54).

Goenka says that taking refuge in the *Buddha* does not imply that the Buddha is a saviour or will extinguish one's suffering. The word "Buddha" is a title that means "awakened person" or "one who personifies being awake". When one takes refuge in the *Buddha*, one is taking refuge in the qualities of the *Buddha*, and not in the person himself. Goenka says that one does this in order to derive inspiration for developing the qualities of enlightenment in oneself. It is said that all beings have the potential for enlightenment. This potential however, needs to be cultivated. By taking refuge in enlightenment, one takes shelter in order to strengthen the process of developing one's own enlightenment. When one participates in *Vipassanā*, every moment of awareness is used as an opportunity to become enlightened (Goenka 1991e, 121; 1987, 54-5).

For Goenka, taking refuge in the *Dhamma* is not converting to a particular religion or following a ritual of a sect; but it is taking refuge in a universal teaching applicable to all (Goenka 1991e, 122; 1987, 54-5). This teaching, as explained in the first chapter, is divided into three interrelated parts: morality (*sīla*), concentration (*samādhi*), and wisdom (*paññā*).

Sīla refers to a set of moral precepts prescribed by the Buddha (see below). *Samādhi* is accomplished by the practice of *Ānāpāna-sati*, or observation of the breath. Goenka prefers this form of concentrative meditation over others as the breath is a universal object that all people share, and it is available at all times (Ba Khin 1991b, 46; 1991c, 56; Goenka 1987). *Paññā* leads to the total purification of the mind. Its development is resultant of the practice of *Vipassanā* by which the meditator objectively observes the mental and physical reality at the level of natural physical sensations. This choice of natural sensations, like the breath in the previous technique, is based on the feature of universality as well (Hart 1988, Goenka 1987). Discussions of *Ānāpāna* and *Vipassanā* will be elaborated in greater detail later on in the chapter.

Saṅgha, the third refuge, translates as congregation or community of noble people[21]. When one takes refuge in this community, one is taking refuge in those who are walking or who have already walked on the path of purification, rather than in some particular sect (Goenka 1991e, 122; 1987).

(ii) The second formality requires the students' acknowledgement of the five moral precepts outlined below. According to Goenka (1987, 55-6), the observance of these precepts in conjunction with the maintenance of silence is indispensable for proper meditation. This combination enables the mind to sufficiently calm down for it to undergo the task of self-observation. Without the precepts, a meditator is pulled in two opposing directions: on the one hand, one is trying to concentrate and calm the mind down; and on the other hand, one is engaging in behaviours that agitate the balance of the mind (Hart 1988, 56-66).

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[21] According to the traditional Buddhism, noble people (*ariyas*) are those said to have experienced partial or complete liberation (*nibbāna*). They include stream entrants, once-returners, never-returners, and *arahants*.

The five precepts undertaken are as follows:

1. To abstain from killing
2. To abstain from stealing
3. To abstain from sexual activity
4. To abstain from false speech
5. To abstain from intoxicants

Students who have already taken at least one course are asked to follow three more precepts:

6. To abstain from eating after noon
7. To abstain from dancing, singing, music, watching grotesque mime, from using garlands, perfumes, cosmetics, and personal adornments
8. To abstain from using high and luxurious seats or beds

The intensity of the daily timetable assists the practitioner in maintaining these precepts while doing a course. The student is kept busy from early on in the morning until late at night. In addition, the students maintain silence and segregation between the sexes. When students return to their daily lives, they are encouraged to continue following the first five precepts. However, the third precept of abstaining from sexual activity is substituted with an abstention from "sexual misconduct" which refers to rape, adultery, and uncommitted sexual relations.

(iii) The third formality is to surrender to the teacher and to the technique of meditation for the duration of the course. According to Goenka (1987, 56), this enables the student to follow the instructions properly, and provides an opportunity to give a fair trial to the technique. If one mixes *Vipassanā* with some other technique from the start, then one will

not be able to accurately measure its benefits, nor will one be able to understand it in its purity.

(iv) The fourth formality requires the student to make a request for the teaching of *dhamma*.

Undergoing these formalities serves to clarify the reasons for practising *Vipassanā*. Going through these formalities in this way also serves to establish some initial faith in the teaching.

c) The Practice

Once these formalities are properly understood and have taken place, the next step is to learn the preliminary concentrative meditation of observing the natural process of respiration (*Ānāpāna-sati*). For the first three days of the course, the students learn to focus their attention on the area around the nostrils from the base of the upper lip to the tip of the nose in order to develop a single pointed concentration[21]. They observe the natural flow of the incoming and outgoing breath without trying to manipulate it in any way. Students are encouraged to take a comfortable sitting position that they can maintain for extended periods of time. They may sit cross-legged on a cushion or use a chair if they prefer. The most important thing they are told regarding posture is to keep their back and neck straight. While observing the respiration, they focus their attention at the entrance of the nostrils and gradually narrow that area of awareness in order to sharpen the one-pointedness of their concentration. This calming and focusing of the mind prepares the student for the actual practice of *Vipassanā* which begins on the fourth day (Ibid., 56).

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[21] In Goenka's teaching of *Ānāpāna* the emphasis is not on attaining *jhāna* (see chapter one), but simply on concentrating the mind as much as possible.

The breath serves as an object to train the mind with. When the mind drifts off into various thoughts, memories, fantasies, etc., the students are told to gently bring their attention back to the breath. The student will usually notice that the habit pattern of the mind is for it to constantly wander away. The task then is to simply bring the attention back to the breath without becoming frustrated or feeling defeated, as these disturbing feelings only make it more difficult to concentrate. Thus, this process is critical not only for developing concentration, but also for developing patience with the wandering mind. With proper practice, the student eventually begins to be aware of the breath for increased and uninterrupted periods of time. As the mind gradually quietens, it becomes ready for the practice of *Vipassanā* (Hart 1988, 71-82; Goenka 1987, 2-5).

On the third day of the course, the student is told not only to be aware of the breath itself, but to discern any physical sensation happening at the point below the nostrils and above the upper lip. The sensation may be of any type: hot, cold, itching, tickling, pulsing, or even something unidentifiable. The idea is not to label the sensation, but to develop the capacity to feel sensations even more subtle than the touch of the breath. When practising *Vipassanā*, students come to understand that they are moving from the apparent, solidified, gross level of reality to finer, and more subtle levels of underlying experience (Goenka 1987).

On the fourth day, students learn Goenka's technique of *Vipassanā* meditation. From the awareness of the breath and sensations of the small triangular area around the nostrils, students are guided to scan the entire structure of the body from the top of the head to the tips of the toes (Ibid., 16). As the days progress, the students learn different ways to observe bodily sensations with an understanding of impermanence (Bodian 1991, 157-9; Goenka 1991h, 169; Ba Khin 1991a, 34-5; Goenka 1987, 57).

The students are instructed to notice that all the sensations in the body are changing every moment. At times, one's sensations may feel gross, solidified, or painful;

while at other times they may be subtle and pleasant. Goenka explains that the meditator may experience both gross and subtle sensations simultaneously on different parts of the body, or perhaps neither pleasant or unpleasant but neutral ones. The main point is that the type of sensation that is felt does not really matter. The goal is to cultivate a detached awareness and equanimity with an understanding of the nature of impermanence. This mode of being enables the meditator to purify negative patterns of reaction - craving for pleasant sensations and aversion towards unpleasant ones (Goenka 1987, 35-41).

Goenka says that the mind is always reacting at the "unconscious" level to bodily sensations. When one feels pleasant sensations, even if unaware of them, the mind tends to crave for their sustainment and continuation. Likewise, when unpleasant sensations are felt, the mind reacts with aversion and wants them to go away. The example he gives is of a person who is bitten by a mosquito while in deep sleep. An unpleasant itchy sensation occurs. The conscious mind may not know what happened, but the unconscious mind immediately reacts by scratching the bite. When that person wakes up and is asked if he was bitten, he would not know (presuming there is no leftover mark of the mosquito's presence). Goenka explains that by disciplining the mind to observe constantly changing sensations at the subtlest levels, the barrier between the conscious, or surface level of the mind, and the unconscious, or the deepest levels of the mind, is gradually removed (Goenka 1991d, 112; 1987, 35-41; Hart 1988, 85-8).

When these habit patterns of craving and aversion diminish, the process of identifying oneself with the moment's sensations diminishes as well. Consequently the mind begins to dissolve the deepest layers of inner tension. Goenka says that when one continues to meditate, deep rooted negativities rise to the surface. But if equanimity and the understanding of impermanence is maintained, then the meditator will not react to the surfacing negativities, resulting in a mental state of peace and harmony (Ba Khin 1991c,

57-8; Hart 1988, 85-8; Goenka 1987). This process of purification will be further elaborated later on in the chapter.

On the morning of the tenth day of the course, prior to breaking their silence, the students learn one last technique of meditation: *Mettā-bhāvanā*, or the development of loving-kindness. This practice entails the generation of loving-kindness towards oneself and sharing this feeling and the merits accrued during one's practice with all sentient beings. This aspect of the teaching initiates a gregarious integration back into the world. Students are encouraged to practice *Mettā-bhāvanā* for a few minutes at the end of all their sittings (Goenka 1987). This practice will be explained in greater detail further on.

After this teaching, the students resume speaking, and use the remainder of the course as a transition period back to an extroverted way of life. Before the conclusion of the course on the morning of the eleventh day, a discourse is given on how to develop a daily practice of two hours, and how to integrate *Vipassanā* into one's everyday life.

Before continuing, it is worth asking whether or not *Vipassanā* meditation is a technique suitable for everyone. Technically speaking anyone, anywhere, and at any time can undergo formal training in *Vipassanā*; however Paul Fleischman (1999, 55, 64), an assistant-teacher to Goenka and well-known modern exponent of *Vipassanā* meditation, contends that it might not always be appropriate for everyone at every juncture of their life to submerge themselves into such an intense experience of unbroken silence and meditation. Though these courses can immensely benefit anyone who can adhere to the code of discipline, they also have their limits, and cannot be undertaken by all. Some people may have medical problems whose needs cannot be met adequately, or may have overwhelming addictions to certain substances that are prohibited at courses; while others may have prejudices and preconceptions that would not allow them to meditate properly. He explains that for maximum benefit and understanding of *Vipassanā*, one must join a

course on one's own volition as there "can be no conversion, exhortation, arm-twisting or imposition on this respectful and non-harmful path." *Vipassanā* meditation does not require above average athletic ability or intelligence, nor does one need to come from a particular background, but it does require "character strength and a call."

2) Theory of the Five Aggregates and Their Relation to *Vipassanā* meditation

a) The Process of Mind and Matter

As we have seen in the first chapter, the guiding notion of the Buddha's teaching of human liberation is the impermanent nature of all phenomena. Fleischman (1999, 85) writes: "... *anicca* is not merely a concept...it is a word-indicator that points to a fact of reality: the ceaseless transformation of all material in the universe....Every 'thing' is really an 'event'. Even a stone is a form of river, and a mountain is only a slow wave." In the practice of *Vipassanā* meditation, "*anicca* is a direct experience of the nature of one's own mind and body, a plunge into universal reality directly within oneself." As we have seen in the first chapter, this view is connected to two corollary concepts: *dukkha*, the "innate nature of suffering", resulting from the inherent dissatisfaction with an ever-changing reality, and *anattā*, selflessness, which is the understanding that no abiding individual entity comprises a substantial and separate being (Fleischman 1999, 85; Ba Khin 1991c, 57-8).

These three existential characteristics follow from the Buddha's teaching on the five dynamic aggregates (*pañcakhanda*) of mind and matter. Buddhist scholar Mathieu Boisvert (1995, 4) writes: "...what we conventionally call a person can be understood in terms of five aggregates, the sum of which must not be mistaken for a permanent entity since beings are nothing but an amalgam of ever-changing phenomena."

The Buddha taught that the five aggregates[22] comprise the physical (*rūpa*) and psychological (*nāma*) aspects of one's being. The first aggregate material form (*rūpa*) consists "of a cloud of particles, a bundle of energy, responding to the scientific laws that run the universe...that operate upon electrons, protons, and neutrons" (Fleischman 1999, 47). The other aggregates are made up of four mental components (*nāma*): consciousness (*viññāṇa*), perception (*saññā*), sensation (*vedanā*), and reaction (*saṅkhāra*).

Traditionally, *rūpa*, or physical matter, is seen as composed of subatomic particles (*kalāpas*) that "exhibit in endless variation the basic qualities of matter: mass, cohesion, temperature, and movement" (Hart 1988, 26). When the units are combined with their four subsidiaries of colour, smell, taste, and nutritive essence, which are dependent upon and born out of the former qualities, they give the appearance of a solid or permanent object. However, these particles are also subject to the perpetual stream of arising into and passing away out of existence (Ba Khin 1991b, 43; Hart 1988, 26). Each *kalāpa*, according to Ba Khin, is termed a 'moment', and an innumerable such moments are said "to elapse during the wink of a man's eye". Ba Khin says that to a developed student of *Vipassanā* meditation these *kalapas* can be felt as a "stream of energy" (Ba Khin 1991a, 32).

According to Hart's (1988, 26-7) interpretation, the first process of *nāma* is consciousness (*viññāṇa*), which is "the act of undifferentiated awareness or cognition". This part of the mind simply receives the raw data of experience that comes into the mind without placing any sort of value judgement upon it. The second part of the mind is perception (*saññā*), "the act of recognition". This is where the incoming data is evaluated and categorised. The third mental process is sensation (*vedanā*)[23], which is a "signal that

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[22] For a detailed study of this topic, see Mathieu Boisvert's (1995) The Five Aggregates.

[23] The word *vedanā* is often translated as "feeling", giving rise to different interpretations of what it could mean. The scholar-monk Nyanaponika Thera (1962, 68) clarified the meaning: "The Pali term *vedanā*, rendered here by 'feeling', signifies, in Buddhist psychology, just pleasant, unpleasant, or indifferent

something is happening". He explains that each sensation arises as soon as there is mental input, however, it remains neutral until it is evaluated by the *saññā* as either positive or negative. Reaction (*saṅkhāra*), the last part of the process, develops as a form of craving, aversion, or indifference. If the sensation is pleasant, then the reactionary mind craves for it to be prolonged and intensified; if the sensation is unpleasant, then the mind wants it to stop; if the sensation is neutral, then the mind remains indifferent.

Goenka (1987, 16-21) illustrates how each of these components interacts in our moment to moment existence. As soon as an object (*rūpa*) comes into contact with any of our six sense doors - that is, a sight with our eyes; a sound with our ears; a smell with our nose; a taste with our mouth; a touch with our body; or a thought with our mind (according to the Buddha, the mind is considered as the sixth sense), cognition (*viññāṇa*) starts working and a neutral sensation (*vedanā*) instantly arises on the body. The perceiving part of the mind (*saññā*) then recognizes the input with positive or negative connotations in relation to some past experience. If the datum is positive, then the sensation becomes pleasant and a mental reaction (*saṅkhāra*) of craving for it to continue arises. If the datum is negative, then the sensation becomes unpleasant and a reaction of aversion arises for it to be extinguished. And if the datum is neutral, then a reaction of indifference arises (Hart 1988; Goenka 1987).

As these habitual tendencies rapidly repeat themselves, the consciousness (*viññāṇa*) becomes conditioned by the patterns of craving and aversion, thereby setting up a vicious cycle each time one comes into contact with a thought or a form. Through deeply ingrained patterns, the person ignorantly perpetuates his or her internal suffering. These mental reactions of craving and aversion that occur at the subtlest level, are in fact, the very seeds that bear the fruits of human hatred, anger, and ill-will (Hart 1988, 27-9). In

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sensation of physical or mental origin. It is not used, as in the English language, in the sense of 'emotion', which is a mental factor of a much more complex nature.

this light, Fleischman (1999, 47) writes: "The constant mental reaction to somatic pain and pleasure conditions our unconscious definition of who and what we are."

b) *Saṅkhārakhanda* in *Vipassanā* Meditation

The notion of *saṅkhāra* is most important in understanding how the mind works in *Vipassanā* meditation. A *saṅkhāra* arises with each present moment of consciousness conditioned by the previously repeated mental reactions, and in turn, is a conditioning agent for the future. When a person reacts to an event, the conditioning force is multiplied, increasing the chance that the person will react in a similar way the next time a similar event occurs. If the meditator truly understands the three marks of existence (*anicca, anattā, dukkha*), then that person will cease reacting unwholesomely to present stimuli, allowing for wholesome *saṅkhāras* such as wisdom (*paññā*) and equanimity (*upekkhā*) to arise. Thus, the previous conditioning forces of the mind will gradually decrease until complete elimination of negativities is achieved, resulting in a feeling of lasting peace and contentment (Boisvert 1995; Ba Khin 1991a, 31-2; Hart 1988, 106-11; Goenka 1987). Fleischman (1999, 48) relates this to the practice of *Vipassanā* meditation:

> At the level of covert, unconscious thought-behaviour, we are continuously impelled to respond as if these biochemical clouds of molecular events in our bodies were ourselves. Vipassana meditation enables us to experience the deep vibratory substrate of unconscious mental clinging or aversion to physical events in the body, and to elevate these reactions into consciousness. Through this process, the meditator can transform primitive somatic self-identifications that might have led to suffering, into awareness and free choice.

In this respect, a *saṅkhāra* is related to the concept of action (*kamma*). A *saṅkhāra* is considered to be both the result of a previous mental, vocal, or physical action, and the cause of one's vocal and physical actions, as it is the only part of the four mental aggregates that is active. Therefore, by reacting with craving now, one also sows the seed for the fruits of craving in the future (Ba Khin 1991c, 61). Goenka (1987) and

Hart (1988, 35-41) explain that the accumulation of momentary reactions, in this light, manifests into deep-rooted patterns of habitual response that become very difficult to break. Thus, the popular interpretation of *kamma* as merely being one's fate or destiny is erroneous, since this implies an absence of control. In *Vipassanā* meditation, Goenka explains that *kamma* works in a way that allows for a choice with every moment to change the habitual tendencies of the mind and become free of negative reactions, while simultaneously working on the dormant agglomeration of negativities. Fleischman (1999, 50) writes:

> Vipassana meditation heals through ethical dedication, lifelong introspective discipline, self-knowledge, and self-responsibility. Events are at best only partly under my control. My reactions, however, occur within the field of my physical life and self-identification, and ultimately are under my own control. I suffer not because of what has happened to me, but because I was unable to detach myself from the reactions to those events within my own mind-body. Objectivity is freedom from suffering. Detachment from internal reactivity releases energy for giving. External fate may be imposed upon each of us, but psychological fate is a matter of consciousness and decision.

In this light, one could speculate that the entire drama of sentient beings is a result of a complex web of closely interrelated *saṅkhāra*s.

c) Emphasis of *vedanākhanda* in *Vipassanā* meditation

As we saw in the first chapter, the Buddha presented various exercises for *vipassanā-bhāvanā* in the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna sutta*, describing awareness (*sati*) as involving the observation of the four highlighted components: body, sensations, mind, and mental contents. If this is so, why does Goenka place so much emphasis on sensations over the other three that lie on an equal basis?

The fundamental role Goenka places on sensations can be appreciated by the etymology of the Pali word for *vedanā*. The root of *vedanā* is *vid*, which contains a two-fold meaning: "intellectually, to know, or with reference to general feeling, to experience"

(PTS 1921). Goenka (1998, 123) shows that the position sensations hold in the mind-matter phenomenon is summed up by the Buddha's statement found in the *Mūlaka Sutta* of the *Aṅguttara Nikaya* (III, 158): "Everything that arises in the mind is accompanied by sensation."

Goenka (1998) and Hart (1987, 147-9) assert that the arising and passing away of sensations occurs simultaneously with mental contents as they are closely interrelated - whatever occurs in one is reflected in the other. Moreover, physical sensations can be observed more objectively than mental contents because they are something tangible rather than abstract concepts. According to this line of thought, it is quite easy to become entangled in the subjectivity of the mental contents while losing one's perspective on things, because the mind wanders so rapidly from one thought to the next. Nonetheless, Goenka explains that one should still pay some attention to the details of the mind, but without getting caught up in them. He elucidates that since the mind and body are so closely interrelated, any thought or emotion will "manifest itself in the breath and sensation of that moment" (Goenka 1991c, 107). Thus by observing the respiration or sensation, one is indirectly observing the mind and its contents. According to this explanation, this emphasis on sensations is critical to the Buddha's teaching on meditation.

Goenka (1998) also defends his interpretation by focusing on the term *sampajaññā*, which he translates as the "constant thorough understanding of impermanence", rather than the traditional Theravāda translation as "thorough understanding". The Buddha said in the *Samyutta Nikaya* (VRI 1996, 83):

> And how, monks[24], does a monk understand thoroughly? Here, monks, a monk experiences sensations arising in him, experiences their persisting, and experiences their vanishing; he experiences perceptions arising in him, experiences their persisting, and experiences their vanishing; he experiences each initial application

[24] According to Goenka (1998), monks in here should be understood as meditators.

> of the mind [on an object] arising in him, experiences its persisting, and experiences its vanishing. This, monks, is how a monk knows thoroughly.

Furthermore, the Buddha illustrated the scope of these instructions:

> Again, monks, a monk while going forward or backward, he does so with constant thorough understanding of impermanence; whether he is looking straight ahead or sideways...is bending or stretching... wearing his robes or carrying his bowl... eating, drinking, chewing, or savouring...while attending to the calls of nature...is walking, standing, sitting, sleeping or waking, speaking or in silence, he does so with constant thorough understanding of impermanence (VRI 1996, 9).

If Goenka considers *sampajaññā* as synonymous with awareness (*sati*) of the arising and passing away of sensations, we can see the fundamental role of sensation in his interpretation of the Buddha's instructions for meditation. These two passages indicate that when observing sensations with the understanding of impermanence, the other three foundations of mindfulness are automatically included. But as we saw in the first chapter, the thorough understanding of any one of the four foundations involves knowing the other three as well. However, Goenka asserts that if the nature of impermanence is not felt at the level of sensation, then the understanding cannot be complete as it will merely be intellectual (Goenka 1998; VRI 1996, 83-4; VRI 1991c, 252-3).

The critical importance of *vedanā* is reflected by a position of similar importance within the Buddha's theory of Dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*)[25]. This theory is considered to be a description of the process that originates and perpetuates human suffering. Dependent Origination is often portrayed as a twelve-part cyclical chain of events where each link conditions the next and is conditioned by the preceding. The chain describes suffering as a process resulting from ignorance and leading to death (Ba Khin 1991b, 48-9; VRI 1991d, 254-6). Among the twelve links, we see that *vedanā* serves as a direct conditioning link between sensory contact and craving (*taṇhā*). It is written:

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[25] see figure 2

> Having learned to examine the depths of his own mind, he [the Buddha] realized that between the external object and the mental reflex of craving is a missing link: *vedanā* (sensation). Whenever we encounter an object through the five senses or the mind, a sensation arises; and based on the sensation, *taṇhā* arises. If the sensation is pleasant, we crave to prolong it, and if it is unpleasant, we crave to be rid of it. It is in the chain of Dependent Origination that the Buddha expressed his profound discovery. '*Phassa-paccayā vedanā; vedanā-paccayā taṇhā*'. Dependent upon contact [with an object], sensation arises; dependent on sensation, craving arises. The immediate cause for the arising of craving and of suffering is, therefore, not something outside of us, but rather the sensations that occur within us. To free ourselves of craving and of suffering we must deal with this inner reality of sensations (VRI 1991d, 256).

This description clarifies the process of inner intervention that is applied in *Vipassanā* meditation, resulting in *paṭiloma-paṭiccasamuppāda* - a reversal of the order of Dependent Origination[26] wherein the chain is broken and the causal process of suffering comes to an end (Boisvert 1995, 142; VRI 1991d, 254-6; Hart 1988, 48-52). Here the meditator must move from an external locus of reacting to outside objects, to an internal locus of taking responsibility for one's life experiences. This process of reversal is achieved when the meditator deactivates any one of the twelve links of the chain (Boisvert 1995, 142). However, according to Goenka's teaching, it occurs only when *vedanā* is prevented from reacting with craving (*taṇhā*) so that it does not turn into attachment (*upādāna*). This transformation in attitude stops the sensation from giving rise to fresh negative reactions; instead giving rise to wisdom (*paññā*) of impermanence (Hart 1988, 96).

Thus, we can see that sensation is an indicator of the meditator's personal truth. It is a direct product of a biochemical reaction, rather than something external that is depended upon. It is not the job of the meditator to determine the possible causes of the sensation, but rather to simply remain aware and equanimous with it. The neutral observance of the constantly changing sensations permits the realisation of one's own

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[26] see figure 3

ephemeral nature, making obvious the futility of attachment to something that is so transitory.

Figure 2[27]:

The Chain of Dependent Origination (*paṭicasamuppāda*)

With the base of ignorance (*avijjā*), reaction (*saṅkhāra*) arises;
with the base of reaction (*saṅkhāra*), consciousness (*viññāṇa*) arises;
with the base of consciousness (*viññāṇa*), mind and body (*nāma-rūpa*) arises;
with the base of mind and body (*nāma-rūpa*), the six senses (*saḷāyatanāni*) arise;
with the base of the six senses (*saḷāyatanāni*), contact (*phassa*) arises;
with the base of contact (*phassa*), sensation (*vedanā*) arises;
with the base of sensation (*vedanā*), craving (*taṇhā*) arises;
with the base of craving (*taṇhā*), attachment (*upādāna*) arises;
with the base of attachment (*upādāna*), process of becoming (*bhava*) arises;
with the base of process of becoming (*bhava*), birth (*jāti*) arises;
with the base of birth (*jāti*), ageing (*jarā*) and death (*maraṇam*) arise, together with sorrow (*soka*), lamentation (*paridev*), physical and mental sufferings and tribulations (*dukkha-domanassupāyāsā*).
Thus arises this entire mass of suffering

Figure 3:

The Reverse Order of the Chain of Dependent Origination (*paṭiloma-paticcasamuppāda*)

With the complete eradication and cessation of ignorance (*avijjā*), reaction (*saṅkhāra*) ceases;
with the cessation of reaction (*saṅkhāra*), consciousness (*viññāṇa*) ceases;
with the cessation of consciousness (*viññāṇa*), mind and body (*nāma-rūpa*) cease;
with the cessation of mind and body (*nāma-rūpa*), the six senses (*saḷāyatanāni*) cease;
with the cessation of the six senses (*saḷāyatanāni*), contact (*phassa*) ceases;
with the cessation of contact (*phassa*), sensation (*vedanā*) ceases;
with the cessation of sensation (*vedanā*), craving (*taṇhā*) ceases;
with the cessation of craving (*taṇhā*), attachment (*upādāna*) ceases;
with the cessation of attachment (*upādāna*), process of becoming (*bhava*) ceases;
with the cessation of the process of becoming (*bhava*), birth (*jāti*) ceases;
with the cessation of birth (*jāti*), ageing (*jarā*) and death (*maraṇam*) cease, together with the sorrow (*soka*), lamentation (*paridev*), physical and mental suffering and tribulations (*dukkha-domanassupāyāsā*).

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[27] Both these figures are from the *Paṭiccasamuppāda Sutta* in the *Samyutta Nikaya* (PTS XII.1).

Thus the entire mass of suffering ceases.

The importance given to sensations in Goenka's interpretation of the Buddha's teaching has now been established. What remains to be seen though, is how this focus is considered to actually function in eradicating deep-rooted unconscious mental defilements.

3) The Process of Purification in *Vipassanā* Meditation

The word "pure" suggests a cleansing process that is "free from what vitiates, weakens, or pollutes" and "unmixed with any other matter: free from taint" (Merriam-Webster 1974). Crowley likens the purification process found in *Vipassanā* meditation to fasting. When a person stops eating, layers of faecal matter that has accumulated in the colon are dislodged and then expelled. A deeper stage is reached when the other organs begin to detoxify as well. Finally, impurities in the blood stream also detoxify, resulting in a healthy, energised, and vital system. All the underlying toxins have come to the surface and exited the body, producing a general feeling of well-being (Crowley 1997, 34-5).

The Buddha described a similar process in the *Paṭhama Gelaññā Sutta* of the *Samyutta-Nikaya*:

> If a monk abides observing the impermanence of pleasant sensations within the body, its decline, fading and ceasing, and also observing his own relinquishing of attachment to such sensation within the body, then his underlying conditioning of craving toward pleasant sensation within the body is eliminated.
> If a monk abides observing the impermanence of unpleasant sensations within the body...then his underlying conditioning of aversion toward unpleasant sensation within the body is eliminated.
> If a monk abides observing the impermanence of neutral sensations within the body...then his underlying conditioning of ignorance toward neutral sensation within the body is eliminated (PTS XXXVI.I.7; c.f. Hart 1988, 156).

The above explanation reveals that meditation must be a process of mental purification, instead of some banal technique of stress reduction. The Buddha's statement

indicates that the observation of sensation with the understanding of impermanence not only purifies the mind of accumulated defilements at the surface level, but also at the deeper levels of past conditionings that remain latent. Goenka (1998; 1987) explains that each successive momentary experience of sensation is not only an experience of the present, but also a result of past reactions, as well as a choice for the future.

Goenka (1991c, 108; 1987) teaches that when a meditator is observing sensations, and pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral sensations arise anywhere on the body, then if practising properly, that person will be able to carefully discern with poise the underlying transitory quality of the given sensation. With each moment of equanimity, the mind is strengthened, and the underlying tendency to react with aversion is weakened. Goenka explains that this allows for layers of impurities to be "peeled away", and for the deepest layers to rise to the surface. However, Goenka explains that if one reacts to a given situation with craving or aversion, then the tendency to react with negativity each time one is faced with a similar unpleasant sensation will increase. This only adds to the stock of misery that is felt now and in the future. In addition, this process is not only internal, but is manifest externally as well. He explains that one must learn to experience agreeable situations in life without generating craving for them; and similarly, without generating tension, resistance, or avoidance to disagreeable situations.

The reader must understand that according to Goenka, liberation is not achieved by attending just one ten-day course. There are no short cuts on the path of *Vipassanā*. It is considered to be a life-long practice of sustained effort in the pursuit of experiential gnosis in the midst of the maelstrom of daily life. Fleischman (1999, 37) comments:

> Meditation cannot be practised casually in the bedroom; there must be real training. But there is also an essential requirement for disciplined regularity in daily life. According to the Buddha, the ultimate source of human suffering is ignorance, which includes within itself a resistance to knowing the truth that can set us free.

> The moment we turn away is when the bird glides into the nest. When we skip, miss, forget, can't make it- that's when the unconscious controls us. Systematic choiceless routine is essential for opening the mind to observation, for in one small lapse the large source of that lapse is obscured.

4) The Practice of Loving-Kindness (*Mettā-bhāvanā*)

Kornfield (1977) states that the Buddha's teaching can be expressed by two words: wisdom and compassion. He writes "Wisdom in its passive aspect is that penetrating insight into the nature of all existence and the balance of mind this illumination brings. Compassion and loving-kindness are the active aspects of this wisdom, the expression in the world of a deep understanding of the Dharma, the laws of nature." Kornfield explains that without the latter, the former can become "dry and analytical"; without the former, the latter is apt to be "superficial and misguided." Therefore, both must be developed for the practice to be complete (Kornfield 1977, 14-5).

> The Buddha stated in the *Mettā Sutta*:
>
> What should be done by one skilful in good...
> And let him think: In safety and in bliss
> May creatures all be of a blissful heart.
> Whatever breathing beings there may be,
> No matter whether they are frail or firm,
> With none excepted, be they long or big
> Or middle-sized, or be they short or small
> Or thick, as well as those seen or unseen,
> Or whether they are dwelling far or near,
> Existing or yet seeking to exist,
> May creatures all be of a blissful heart.
> Let no one work another one's undoing
> Or even slight him at all anywhere:
> And never let them wish each other ill
> Through provocation or resentful thought.
> ...And purges greed for sensual desires,
> He surely comes no more to any womb (Nanamoli Thera 1958, 47-8).

After three days of focusing one's concentration on the breath and six days of observing bodily sensations in order to develop equanimity and an awareness of impermanence, Goenka's students complete their course with a meditation technique that initiates a reintegration into the world. *Mettā-bhāvanā*, or the 'development of loving-kindness', is taught at the end of the rigour of *Vipassanā*. After ten days of intense meditation practice, the mind is considerably more calm, focused, and at peace with its deepest nature. Students often feel as if their bodies have opened up, allowing for a pleasant flow of sensations. However, students are warned not to become attached to this pleasantness, but to observe its transitory nature, and also use it in the practice of *Mettā* (Goenka 1987).

In the practice of *Mettā*, the student first begins by relaxing the posture into a comfortable position. Then, the meditator generates a desire to be free from all sorts of negativity, particularly the negativities that may have recently been faced. The person then mentally infuses the pleasant "free-flow" of bodily sensations. Or, if there is no "free-flow", then the infusion occurs on any part of the body that is free of unpleasant sensations, with feelings of loving-kindness, compassion, sympathetic joy, and equanimity. Next, the meditator shares these feelings with other beings, wishing that they may also experience this harmonious state of mind free of suffering. This could be expressed as a visualisation or a verbalisation, whichever the meditator prefers. The person distributes these feelings not only to loved ones, but to all beings, including one's enemies. The meditator is instructed to project these feelings to those in the same room, building, street, town, country, planet, and universe in outward moving concentric circles (Goenka 1987).

The *Appamannavibhanga* states:

> And how does a *bhikkhu* abide with his heart imbued with loving-kindness extending over one direction? Just as he would feel friendliness on seeing a dearly beloved person, so he extends loving-kindness to all creatures (Nanamoli Thera 1958, 50).

Most Theravāda traditions practice *Mettā-bhāvanā* prior to other meditations of concentration and mindfulness. However, Goenka (1987) elucidates that for *Mettā-bhāvanā* to be genuine, it must be embodied in the experience of wisdom (*paññā*). If there is no wisdom to back it up, the practice will be devoid of any real meaning. But when wisdom is present, *Mettā-bhāvanā*, rather than being merely a constructed meditative experience, becomes an expression of purity of mind that is a natural result of the penetrating insight that comes from sustained practice. Hart (1988, 126) says that when the mind is free of the defiled psychological universe of blind reaction along with awareness and equanimity, it will naturally give rise to sublime qualities such as: "good will, love that seeks the benefit of others without expecting anything in return; compassion for others in their failings and sufferings; sympathetic joy in their success and good fortune." It is said by followers of the Buddha that fully enlightened beings dwell in these sublime states all the time as they no longer generate negativity. Although it is quite unlikely that after ten days a student will reach this point, the effects of one course are often sufficient to significantly alter the deep habit patterns of the mind, and produce a desire to continue with the practice.

5) Practising for Everyone

The Buddha stated in the *Anguttara Nikaya*:

> He who has understanding and great wisdom does not think of harming himself or another, nor of harming both alike. He rather thinks of his own welfare, of that of others, of that of both, and of the welfare of the whole world. In that way one shows understanding and great wisdom (PTS 186).

Meditation practice is often charged with being a selfish enterprise in that one is only striving for one's own personal welfare. The scholar-monk Thanissaro Bhikkhu

(1996, 80) however argues against this accusation by claiming that there is no ultimate distinction between one's own true welfare and that of others: "To work for the true welfare of others is to work for one's own welfare; to work for one's own is to work for theirs." He defends this statement by citing numerous examples from the Pali canon where the Buddha taught that by working for one's own welfare, one simultaneously works for the welfare of others, and vice-versa. Both dynamics are shown in the Buddha's example of two acrobats each balancing on either end of a pole- if one falls, both fall, therefore, each must remain balanced. Therefore the act of developing good qualities in one's mind (as described in the next chapter) is automatically an act of kindness to others which is exposed in social interactions.

With this last point in mind, we can proceed to the next chapter which reviews Goenka's movement of teaching meditation as a tool directed towards the eradication of both individual and social misery.

Chapter Four: *Vipassanā*'s Contributions to the Individual and Society

From the perspective of the Buddha's teachings, social disharmony results from human ignorance of the constant cravings that plague the human mind at its deepest levels. This chapter will examine the *Vipassanā* movement's claim that curing afflictive states of mind is the basis for social reparation (Goenka 1994). After an elaboration on mental health and the general therapeutic effects that correspond with the practice of *Vipassanā*, a discussion concerning the relationship between *Vipassanā* and social action will be presented, focusing on the movement's activities within their centres. Finally, the movement's out-reach programs will be reviewed by examining various case-studies regarding the integration of *Vipassanā* meditation with the fields of health, corrections, and education.

1) *Vipassanā* and Mental Health

As was evident in the last chapter, the Buddha's model of mental activity is an ongoing dynamic relationship between internal mental states and external sensory objects. In his commentary on the *Abhidhamma*, the classical guide to traditional Buddhist psychology, the scholar-monk Narada Thera (1968) explains that each successive mental state is attended by a subset of a possible fifty-two basic perceptual, cognitive, and affective categories, which gives the mental state its distinctive flavour. The basic dichotomy in this model is between a pure, wholesome, and healthy (*kusala*) mental state versus an impure, unwholesome, and unhealthy (*akusala*) mental state.

According to Goldenson (1984; c.f. Khurana & Dhar 2000, 7), mental health is a state of mind characterised by "emotional well-being, relative freedom from anxiety and disabling symptoms and a capacity to establish constructive relationship with ordinary demands and stresses of life." Ryff et al. (1995; c.f. Khurana & Dhar 2000, 7) propose a

theoretical model of well-being which encompasses seven dimensions: autonomy, environment, mastery, personal growth, positive relation with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Anxiety and disabling symptoms of mental health, on the other hand, often manifest either as various grades of mental imbalance ranging from neurosis to psychosis. They also may be psycho-somatic in nature, affecting one or more organs or physiological functions of the body (Savla 1994). According to Raman Khosla (1994), psychologist and assistant-teacher to Goenka, these disorders result from an accumulation of mental defilements. In this thinking, all who have not fully purified their minds, i.e.: those who still contain craving and aversion, are considered mentally unbalanced to some degree[28].

Modern scientific research has shown that mental health can be improved through the practice of *Vipassanā* meditation (Khurana & Dhar 2000; Fleischman 1999; Chandiramani et al. 1995; Chandiramani et al.1994; Khosla 1994). How one will benefit, and to what degree, however, varies with each individual depending on who one is, one's background, and the level of commitment to the practice throughout one's lifetime. As Fleischman (1999, 38) writes: "Each student is coming from a different place, and progresses individually; there is no magic and no guarantee."

In the preceding chapter, we saw that the *Vipassanā* technique is regarded as conducive to creating a healthy mental state. This is facilitated through the gradual liberation of the mind from yearnings and memories of the past and desires and fears of the future. This is said to occur by allowing the mind to rest in the present reality as it is, without evoking a reaction to the mechanical operations of the mind. By this process,

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[28] It is worth noting the different conceptions of mental health between traditional psycho-therapy and *Vipassanā*. The former views mental health as the normal, well-adjusted condition of the average human-being; while the latter views mental health as a state of complete elimination of afflictive psychological states - a state only experienced by *arhants*.

certain therapeutic actions have the potential to develop within the meditator. Some of these actions include:

> increased self-knowledge, deepened human trust and participation, integration with and acceptance of one's past, deepened activation of one's will, an increased sense of responsibility for one's own fate; greater concentration, deepened ethical commitments, firm yet flexible life structures and disciplines, fluid access to deeper streams of feeling and imagery, expanded historical and contemporary community; prepared confrontation with core realities such as time, change, death, loss, pain leading to an eventual diminution of dread, anxiety, and delusion; fuller body-mind integration, decreased narcissism, and a fuller panorama of character strengths such as generosity, compassion, and human love (Ibid., 38).

In his chapter entitled A Unique Contribution to Mental Health, Fleischman (1999) claims that *Vipassanā*'s contribution to well-being is derived from a constellation of therapeutic actions that affect six levels of personality: molecular, biological, psychological, cognitive-behavioural, environmental, and transcendental. These claims are significant because, as discussed further below, a positive social transformation is thought to depend upon individual positive transformation.

According to Fleischman (1999, 62), the practice of *Vipassanā* meditation induces a metamorphosis at the *molecular* level of the person's body. He explains that systematic and equanimous observation of the body alters the flow of stress-related chemicals. When practised over an extended period of time, bare observation "reduces the frequency and intensity with which somatic alarm signals release their neurotransmitters. Storage, release, amount, and type of circulating messenger neurochemicals are altered by long-term practice of harmony and non-reactivity in the place of anger, fear, or passion."

The second level of change occurs at the *biological* level of the meditator's body. Fleischman explains that as the neurochemical composition changes, along with positive changes in attitude and lifestyle, both psychosomatic diseases and the basic functions like

weight acquisition, heart-rate, and so forth may be modified. He adds: "Our tissues have the capacity to remould themselves to some extent in response to our friendship with them. Attunement to our body is automatically experienced as nurturance of it" (Ibid., 62-3).

These molecular and biological findings are significant because they show that the meditator can actually *feel* the concrete changes that are occurring within the person's physical structure, as opposed to the more abstract psychological changes which also occur. When we turn to Sanghvi's (1994) study on the patients of the Nature Cure Centre, we will see a more detailed analysis concerning the effects of *Vipassanā* on the meditator's physiology.

The most dramatic and obvious effect of *Vipassanā* is at the *psychological* level, as "old complexes are relinquished, new attitudes and virtues are cultivated, memories surface, relationships are seen and developed in new light, the future is deconstructed and reopened in new ways, human history and community are known to have different potentials than was once believed, and event after event in one's life is re-experienced and re-examined in a new perspective" (Fleishman 1999, 63). This claim has already been discussed in detail in the previous chapter, and is also the basis for the following point.

The fourth level of personality deals with *cognitive-behavioural* psychology. Fleischman calls *Vipassanā* a "value-based education" that encourages the active practice of self-cultivation through social engagement and problem-solving. "Character building is a matter of repetition and effort", he says, "not just sitting still with eyes closed" (Ibid., 63). This claim is best exemplified by the various case-studies concerning the movement's outreach activities in correctional institutions which we shall examine below.

Next, *Vipassanā* can be deemed an *environmental* psychology. Our actions, which are expressions of our psyches, "set in motion responses which we will in turn be receiving back from the recipients of our outgoing messages" (Ibid., 63-4). Thus, when we pollute

the earth, air, and water with toxic chemicals, we experience the effects of our actions through soil erosion, global warming, and unsafe drinking water. This idea can be related to a more general conception of the Buddha's theory of interdependence (see Dependent origination in the previous chapter). The present state of the world is an indication of the way the world is generally treated by humans. Through meditation, one comes to understand that respect for all life forms is a logical extension of respect for oneself. The surrounding environment is a mirror which reveals our inner-selves. Fleischman (1999, 64) writes: "Everything around us is also feeling the sting of our wrath, or humming our hum."

Lastly, Fleischman asserts that encoded in *Vipassanā* is the *transcendence* of attachment to the sensual world and elimination of suffering (*nibbāna*)[29]. This transcendence is an experiential thrust beyond the borders of conceptual language (Ibid., 64).

After examining the theoretical position of *Vipassanā* meditation in chapter three, and its potential relevance in creating a healthy mental state free of afflictive emotions in the last section of this chapter, we shall now proceed with a discussion of Goenka's movement's engagement within society.

2) *Vipassanā* and Social Action

"Wars begin in the minds of men and therefore it is in the minds of men that defences of peace must be constructed."

-UNESCO constitution

Buddhist scholar and social activist Ken Jones (1981, 1) defines the term 'social action' as:

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[29] A discussion of *nibbāna* is beyond the scope of this study. Please see Ledi Sayadaw's (1999) Manuals of Dhamma and Saddhatissa's (1970) Buddhist Ethics for a clear explanation of this concept, which Saddhatissa calls the "Highest Happiness".

> ...the many different kinds of action intended to benefit mankind. These range from simple individual acts of charity, teaching and training, organised kinds of service, 'Right Livelihood' in and outside the helping professions, and through various kinds of community development as well as political activity in working for a better society.

In the Buddha's discourses, we clearly see a concern for the establishment of favourable social conditions which enable individual cultivation of ethical values. Rahula (1978; c.f. Jones 1981, 2) writes that the Buddha's teaching "arose in India as a spiritual force against social injustices, against degrading superstitious rites, ceremonies and sacrifices; it denounced the tyranny of the caste system and advocated the equality of all men; it emancipated women and gave her complete spiritual freedom." This general direction of social thinking can be suggestive for our times; however Jones (1981, 2-3) argues, it would be pedantic to literally apply the Buddha's detailed social prescriptions from twenty-five centuries ago to meet the needs of modern industrial society. He explains that the average householder as described in the *suttas* led a completely different life than today's householder, and that "the conditions which might favour their cultivation of the 'middle way' must be secured by correspondingly different - and more complex - social, economic, and political strategies." Jones adds that it would not be wise to transmit the scriptural teaching of the Buddha uncritically and without careful thought of the functioning of the modern world (Ibid., 2-3). This notion of adjusting the teachings to the environment is reflected in Goenka's method of teaching *Vipassanā* meditation in the fashion of ten-day courses to a primarily lay audience in the work-stressed twenty-first century.

a) Action through Education

Dukkha, commonly translated as 'suffering', is the starting point of the Buddha's teaching. Jones argues that if any attempt to base one's social activity upon the Buddhist perspective is made, then the meaning of *dukkha* must be properly understood, as it has a much broader meaning than the common translation implies. On the one hand, it refers to the major worldly sufferings- war, poverty, hunger, political oppression, and so forth, and their psychological accompaniments of insecurity, anxiety and restlessness. On the other hand, *dukkha*, at a subtler existential level, also refers to that profound sense of unease that arises from the very transient nature of life, and the restless struggle to construct a meaningful and lasting identity in the face of a disturbing awareness of our insubstantiality (Ibid., 5-6).

From the Buddha's perspective, when an individual recognizes his or her suffering, a natural desire arises to extinguish it in oneself and in others. However, engaging in charitable social activities such as providing food, money, clothing, and shelter to the poor, are only helpful to a degree. According to Goenka (1987), the task of trying to *satisfy* the desire of extinguishing suffering is endless. He explains that by helping someone learn the *dhamma*, which is the highest form of service in the *Vipassanā* movement, one *transforms* that desire, rather than merely trying to *satisfy* it (Goenka 1987; Jones 1981, 6). This idea is related to the following allegory: "By giving a hungry man a fish, you feed him for a day; by teaching him how to fish, you feed him for life." It is for this reason alone that the primary form of social engagement for the *Vipassanā* movement is the teaching of *Vipassanā* meditation.

b) The Role of the Centres

Although they are not permanent residential centres, it has been the author's observations that the *Vipassanā* centres could be seen as a community within a community, where

people come together to draw strength and inspiration from one another, sharing experiences both on and off the meditation cushion (while volunteering during courses or when courses are not in progress). These social aspects of the centres aid in the process of purification as the individual is surrounded by values of honesty and concern for others.

The primary form of the *Vipassanā* movement's engagement with society is its provision of meditation centres where people can come learn a method of self-cultivation in a supportive atmosphere where all the basic needs of life- food, warmth, and encouragement in a long and arduous endeavour, are provided in moderate but sufficient amounts.

Besides meeting the basic requirements, the centres' quiet and simple atmosphere is conducive to learning mastery and purification of the mind, as external distractions are kept to a minimum. The centres are designed primarily for the particular task of intensive retreats. There is very limited social interaction while sitting a course.

According to Goenka (1987), an important feature for preserving the integrity and authentic transmission of the teachings is that it must be run on a non-profit, donation basis[30], making it accessible to people from all strata of society. Neither the teachers, nor their assistant staff receive any sort of payment for their services. The assistant staff, or "Dhamma-workers", are students who have completed at least one course, and have volunteered their time to help with the cooking, cleaning, administrative duties, and so forth. In most areas where centres are located, a small retinue of highly dedicated meditators live near the centre in order to see to the smooth functioning of the operation. This is reported by local meditators to be trying as times as there is often a high turnover of volunteer staff.

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[30] Courses are financed only by those who have taken at least one course and want to share the benefits with others.

Social engagement at the centres is organised and practised in such a way that not only builds upon the potential for self-development, but also guards against worldly seductions. Collective labour with fellow meditators opens up one's flow of creative energy, encourages positive attitudes, and engenders a strong sense of solidarity. In this expansive process of serving a course, many challenges of the real-world are often presented along the way - conflicts, disagreements, and so forth. However, these obstacles provide rich opportunities for personal growth as long as mindfulness and equanimity are maintained.

According to the meditators with whom the author spoke, engaging in volunteer service during a course is as great an opportunity to learn about oneself as attending a course as a student. They claim that the social experience at the centres while serving is just as important as the inner meditative experience, as it switches the intense personal experience on the meditation cushion to a communal experience that is more easily integrated into one's daily life. Meditators often say that they have found it difficult to incorporate the practice into their daily life as familiar surroundings and interactions at home often make it easy to fall into their old habit patterns. Serving a course, or at the centre between courses, provides a novel setting that catalyzes awareness throughout outward activity.

By giving service, an opportunity for the ripening of compassion avails itself, thereby benefiting the individual and those whom the individual is associated with. Yet, like anything else, if done without proper awareness, it could stir up partisan emotions of an exulted opinionated ego. This danger is recognised at the *Vipassanā* centres and is responded to by setting aside three meditation periods per day for volunteers, and periods of longer intervals for those who commit to longer periods of service than just ten days. These compulsory sessions of meditation allow the person to achieve a better

understanding of not reacting to common issues that are frequently faced in life, providing an opportunity for growth in situations normally considered as obstacles.

Although there is not much spirit of proselytising, each centre usually has a committee in charge of reaching out to the general public to let them know of the centre's activities. People can also find course information on the internet, or by contacting the centres directly. Informal gatherings sometimes take place at a meditator's house where an introductory video is shown to interested parties, and a representative from the centre is present to answer any questions. Once or twice a year, centres host an open-house to welcome visitors, give tours of the premises, show an introductory video, and answer any questions concerning the centre, the organisation, or the technique.

In addition to the *Vipassanā* movement's activities in the centres, the last few years has witnessed an out-reach towards social institutions in the fields of health, corrections, and education, in which an integration of the *Vipassanā* technique has been coupled with the institutions' previously existing curriculums in order to bring about effective social reform. Let us now examine how this process has been undertaken, and what results have accrued.

3) The Integration of *Vipassanā* with Healing Practices

In recent years, data concerning the beneficial effects of *Vipassanā* meditation practised in conjunction with physical and psychological healing modalities has been amassed. For example, Khosla's (1994) studies based on psychological indexes, checklists, scales, and questionnaires of patients with mental disorders[31] showed a marked improvement in mental health over a one-year period of continued practice. He writes that *Vipassanā*

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[31] See Khosla's (1994) case studies on alcohol dependence, depression, panic disorder, obsessive-compulsive disorder, sexual disorder, and borderline personality disorder.

generally helps alleviate mental disorders; however, "it requires a lot of patience and diligence on the part of the meditator and professional psychiatric advice, in addition to guidance by a qualified Vipassana teacher" (Khosla 1994, 131).

During the last number of years, Dr. Sanghvi (1994), a *Vipassanā* meditator and director at the Nature Cure Centre in Gujarat, began integrating *Vipassanā* meditation into the centre's naturopathic regime. Patients are advised to take a ten-day *Vipassanā* course either before, during, or after treatment, depending on the particular case. Some of Sanghvi's observations in regards to the impacts of the integration of *Vipassanā* with his treatments of patients suffering from asthma, mucouscolitis, ulcerative colitis, hyper-acidity, hyper-tension, peptic ulcer, diabetes, renal failure, muscular atrophy, and pamphigus vulgaris have been as follows[32]: (i) the healing process for patients has hastened due to increased patience, equanimity, and co-operation with treatments; (ii) the patient's capacity to endure suffering increases with enhanced equanimity and understanding of the impermanent nature of the disease; (iii) an increase in equanimity reduces the pain and agony of terminally-ill patients in the face of imminent death, and helps them die peacefully; (iv) the role of the mind in the genesis of disease becomes more evident to the patient; (v) the patients with chronic renal disease or failure, who were on transplants, showed improvement (Sanghvi 1994, 113-6). These results are significant as they not only assist the individual physically, but also positively alter the person's perspective towards life and illness.

'Start Again' in Switzerland and 'Cyrenian House' in Australia are both addiction therapy centres for drug dependants that aim at the rehabilitation of drug addicts, and their reintegration into society. Both centres try to achieve this task through the implementation of what drug therapists Scholz & Studer (1999a, 1) call a "depth-systemic addiction

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[32] For a detailed medical case studies, see Sanghvi's Integrating Vipassana with Naturopathy (1994) and Savla's Vipassana and Health (1994).

therapy" program, which is a synthesis of three distinct healing modalities[33]: professional systemic therapies; the twelve-step Narcotics Anonymous program; and *Ānāpāna* and *Vipassanā* meditations[34] as taught by S.N. Goenka (Scholz & Studer 1999, 1999a; Hammersley & Cregan 1986). The first two programs, the authors claim, act as a foundation builder for the eventual practice of *Ānāpāna* and *Vipassanā*, which deal with the core issues of addiction (Scholz & Studer 1999, 1999a). These three separate yet interrelated disciplines, according to Studer (1999, 1), focus on a common field by (i) formulating a structured principle of the world around and within us; (ii) providing a systemic experience within the framework of one's own physical and psychological structure, as well as in one's interaction with others; and (iii) introducing a structural transformation at both the individual and societal levels in everyday experience.

More than two-hundred people have entered the program at Start Again, either voluntarily or because they have been sentenced for drug related crimes, while approximately one thousand people have been treated at Cyrenian House (Scholz & Studer 1999a; Hammersley & Cregan 1986). The therapeutic focus at both centres is not based:

> on the old myth of professionals of 'wanting to heal', but rather on learning from the individual family and life history as well as from the personality structure of the clients....[I]n accordance with the autonomy-provoking logic of 'help for self-help', so that they may dismantle step by step their illusions and escape mechanisms, develop new social relations and extend their possibilities and options for creating individual realities (Scholz & Studer 1999a, 1).

Scholz and Studer (1999a, 2) indicate that approximately twenty-five percent of the clients drop out due to severe relapses and/or "program-client incompatibility". The

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[33] For a detailed description of these programs, see Scholz's (1994) Comprehension of Therapy According To The Drug Therapy Station *Start Again* and Studer's (1999) Vipassana, Professional Therapy, and Science.

[34] *Ānāpāna* meditation is taught at the *Start Again* centre, while *Vipassanā* meditation is taught at a nearby *Vipassanā* meditation centre (Scholz & Studer 1999a).

clients who stayed at the centre for at least one year and who completed the program, indicate a success rate of approximately seventy percent. Success in this case refers to "no consumption of hard drugs and a clear relative increase in life-practical autonomy." At Cyrenian House, where nearly eighty percent of the staff are both *Vipassanā* meditators and ex-addicts who passed through the Cyrenian House program, the success rate is claimed to be one-hundred percent (Hammersley & Cregan 1986, 2).

Studer's (1999, 8-9) observations of the empirical results concerning the effects of those who practise *Vipassanā* meditation in the context of addiction therapy lead to two primary conclusions. Firstly, the meditation induces positive effects in regards to the above definition of success, as it reduces and prevents the clients from experiencing a relapse. Secondly, after doing just one course, it helps develop effective new perspectives and strategies in response to the individual's experiences during the course. Scholz & Studer (1999, 4) acknowledge the importance of framing the *Vipassanā* experience within a professional therapeutic process, as it is a common tendency of clients to instrumentalize *Vipassana* as a quick-fix remedy for their problems (whereas it has already been explained that it requires a life-long commitment for maximum benefit). Studer (1999, 8-9), however, also points out that the effects in the long-term of practice are different as they gradually increase the individual's determination and effort to work properly without the help of other addiction-therapies.

Besides all the benefits we have seen for patients in the above studies, it is said that *Vipassana* meditation can also be an important healing tool for healers themselves (Fleischman 1999; Pethe & Chokhani 1994; Poland 1991). The phrase "Physician heal thyself" is well-known amongst those in the healing professions. It is common knowledge that Freud and Jung insisted that analysts be analysed. As healers travel the compassionate life-long journey that constantly exposes them to human suffering, at times they require a

treatment of their own. Teachers of *Vipassanā* claim that the *Vipassanā* technique is significant to healers of diverse disciplines because of its absence of dogma, its experiential basis, and its focuses on the relief of common human suffering. Through *Vipassanā*, healers can learn to deepen their autonomy, insight, compassion, and empathy, while at the same time improving their ability as professional anchors for their patients during turbulent times (Fleischman 1999; Pethe & Chokhani 1994; Sanghvi 1994; Poland 1991).

Teachers of *Vipassanā* maintain that the direction of the meditation's essential healing power is not merely towards healing psycho-somatic disease, but human suffering at the deepest level of the mind (Fleischman 1999; Savla 1994; Hart 1988; Goenka 1987). As we have seen, the clinical utility of *Vipassanā* meditation is not a particular response to a particular problem, but rather the cultivation of a "general psychological pattern of positive mental states" (Pethe & Chokhani 1994, 111). In spite of the therapeutic benefits the meditator can gain through devoted practice, it should not be attempted merely to cure a particular disease lest such efforts turn counter-productive (as we have seen in the first chapter where it was mentioned that Sayagyi U Ba Khin refused Goenka permission from taking a course in *Vipassanā* for the purpose of alleviating his migraines). However, the aforementioned case-studies do indicate that when *Vipassanā* is used in collaboration with other forms of specific treatment, the patient's healing process is hastened and has a greater rate of success (Scholz & Studer 1999a, 1999b; Studer 1999; Sanghvi 1994; Khosla 1994). In addition, Fleischman (1999, 39) writes: "Meditation is most therapeutic when it is not looked upon for a therapeutic effect, but is put into practice as an end in itself, and is an expression of an aspect of human nature."

4) *Vipassanā* and Prison Reform

We have seen the relevance of integrating the practice of *Vipassanā* into a health system, now we will see the techniques' role in the reformation and rehabilitation of prisoners. First the relationship between aberrant social behaviour and mental illness will be discussed, followed by a brief historical survey of the *Vipassanā* meditation courses held in correctional facilities, and lastly an examination of the results from various studies pertaining to the effects of the courses on the inmate populations, jail staff, and the overall prison environment.

a) Aberrant Social Behaviour and Mental Illness

The imprisonment of criminals serves many purposes: to isolate the criminals; to express the community's retributive feelings towards them; to deter potential offenders from engaging in criminal activity; and to assist in their correction, reformation, and rehabilitation so that they can re-enter society as good and healthy citizens (Khurana & Dhar 2000; Dhar 1994b; Vora 1994).

However, P.L. Dhar (1994b, 53), a social-scientist and *Vipassanā* meditator, questions to what extent these purposes are being fulfilled, as most prisons today are becoming 'training academies' where petty criminals learn how to become full-fledged criminals under the patronage of those serving long-term sentences. Furthermore, the sub-human living conditions combined with easy accessibility to drugs, only worsens the situation in terms of rehabilitation.

Both Vora's (1994) and Greenberg's (1977; c.f. Dhar 1994b, 53) studies of corrective measures such as vocational training, group counselling, individual interview therapy, employment opportunities, and so forth held in conventional prisons and reformatories, conclude that these programs serve many functions such as alleviating the monotony of being incarcerated, but do not meet their intended goals of preventing a

return to a life of crime. Greenberg states: "The blanket assertion that 'nothing works' is an exaggeration, but not by very much." No wonder, Dhar (1994b, 53) says, that drastic measures such as chemical pacification are now being used to tranquillise prisoners.

Aggressive behaviour patterns have existed at all times in all societies, threatening the security and harmony of the society. Chandiramani et al. (1995) assert that although corrections may be a legal and sociological issue, it is also a deeply psychological one. Aggressive behaviour to a certain degree is common to most people at some time or another. Character traits such as hostility, mistrust, helplessness, etc. manifest themselves in everyone. It is only when offences are repeated frequently that a person is labelled as "antisocial". Many antecedent and maintaining factors exist resulting from these behaviours - disregard for social norms, deficient impulse control, inability to learn from experience, educational failures, and so forth. These factors, indicating an inner weakness and lack of control, often manifest "in the form of externalisation and avoidance of consciousness of one's own inner life, resulting in the narcissism riddled with rage and sadism." Such people do not only suffer from behavioural problems, but from deep emotional problems as well.

Researchers explain that in addition to the inmates' aberrant social behaviour, further inner-tensions arise as a result of the stresses of incarceration such as "separation from their families, overcrowding, sensory deprivation, exposure to a high density of hard-core offenders, and a variety of uncertainties, fears, and frustrations" (Khurana & Dhar 2000). The trial period is also a great stress to the individual due to the uncertainty of the outcome, fear of punishment, loss of social status, and so forth (Khurana and Dhar 2000). According to Chandiramani et al.'s (1995) studies, estimates of inmates with mental illness sufficient to warrant treatment are reported to vary between ten and seventy-five percent.

Feelings of frustration, hostility, alienation and helplessness are both causes and consequences of antisocial behaviour, which according to the Buddha's psychology, stem from an undisciplined thinking process, and result in misery for both the doer and recipient of such actions. Dhar (1994b, 48) explains that only when the mind is controlled do the corrupt activities stop. The ultimate goal of integrating *Vipassanā* into the prison system then, is for the eradication of these psychological factors, the prevention of criminal behaviour, and the positive reintegration of prisoners into society (Khurana & Dhar 2000).

b) History of *Vipassanā* Courses in Correctional Facilities

In 1975 the first *Vipassanā* course held in a prison took place at the maximum security Central Jail in Jaipur for 120 inmates. A few months later in 1976 followed a course for senior police officials at the Jaipur Police Academy. Late in 1977, after the second prison course, Ram Singh, the Home Secretary of Rajasthan who had arranged these courses, was transferred to another post. His successor cancelled the program as he thought meditation would dilute the deterrent impact of punishment. It was not until 1990 that the third, and many other subsequent *Vipassanā* courses took place there (Singh, R. 1994, 33-4). In 1991, Sabarmati Jail in Gujarat held its first *Vipassanā* course for life-term convicts. The positive results led to further courses at the nearby Baroda Jail starting in 1992, which has continued to this day (Ibid., 34).

In 1993, the *Vipassanā* technique was introduced to the notorious Tihar Jail in India's capital - New Delhi. Tihar Jail is one of the largest jails in the world housing about 10 000 inmates. Most of the prison population consists of detainees and under-trials; about ten percent are actual convicts (Dhar 1994b, 48). When Kiran Bedi, the Inspector-General of Tihar arrived at the facility in 1993, she found a "hell-hole". There were areas that staff "simply refused to enter in fear of their lives. Nutrition and sanitation was non-existent, corruption was rife, and gangs of prisoners ruled the prison using violence and

extortion" (Mogensen 2000, 10). In Bedi's search for an effective method which would not only prepare the inmates for a successful reintegration into society but also render an appropriate prison atmosphere for doing so, she learned about *Vipassanā* and its prior use in prisons through a jail colleague (Mogensen 2000; Chandiramani et al.1995, 1994).

Many preparations were needed for a *Vipassanā* course to be held in a prison, such as training the jail staff, selection of the ward and course venue, and pre-course orientation for students and staff. As no meditation hall was available, a tent structure was erected (Singh, R. 1994, 35). Taped introductory discourses of Goenka explaining the technique were shown to the inmates on three occasions in order to introduce the technique and its code of discipline. Eleven jail staff members went to the centres in Jaipur and Delhi for courses before hand so that they would be properly acquainted with the course's organisation, rules, and regulations, as it is necessary that staff members who had taken at least one course be present during the prison course (Dhar 1994b, 49; Kumar 1994, 56).

The first course was held in November of 1993 for ninety-six inmates who were mostly convicts, and twenty-three prison officials of different ranks (Singh, R. 1994, 35). Four more concurrent courses followed in different sections of the Tihar prison complex in January 1994 for 334 prisoners (Kumar 1994 56). In April 1994 the next course took place for 1004 male inmates, the largest course in the movement's history. The course was personally conducted by Goenka, along with fifteen assistant-teachers under a large tented structure specially built for the course. Prisoners from all wards attended, representing every type of criminal from murder and bride-burning to theft and drug-trafficking. Two female assistant-teachers conducted a concurrent course for forty-nine women in a separate section (Singh, R. 1994, 38).

Immediately after the historic meditation course, a permanent meditation centre was inaugurated within the prison complex by Goenka in the presence of Tihar's Inspector General, jail officials, prisoners who took the course, international government officials,

and members of the press. The centre, named *Dhamma Tihar*, now offers two ten-day courses per month, two one-day courses for veteran students, and an annual twenty-day course for advanced students (Ibid., 38).

As a result of the success of the jail courses, the Indian government recommended that *Vipassanā* meditation be held in jails throughout India. Since 1994, more than twenty-five other prisons in India have conducted *Vipassanā* courses on a regular basis. In 1997, Nasik Jail, just outside of Mumbai, established a permanent *Vipassanā* centre as well. In 1996, the first *Vipassanā* jail course outside of India was held in a Taiwanese drug-rehabilitation prison for 182 inmates. In November 1998, eight inmates at the medium-security Lancaster Castle Prison in England successfully completed a ten-day *Vipassanā* course. In September 1999, fourteen inmates at Te Ihi Tu, a Maori rehabilitation facility in New Zealand that has a strong emphasis on Maori culture, also completed a course, whose success has led to the implementation of *Vipassanā* into a three-month rehabilitation program for pre-release inmates.[35]

The first *Vipassanā* meditation course ever held in a North American jail took place in November of 1997 at the North Rehabilitation Facility (NRF) in Seattle, WA. Since then courses have been held approximately every three months for inmates. NRF, staffed entirely by the King County Departments of Public Health and Adult Detention, is a minimum security jail with a resident population of about three-hundred men and women. The focus of the facility is to address problems of substance abuse and related criminal behaviour through various forms of treatment, education, and work programs. The inmates at NRF include misdemeanants and felons who are frequent recidivists and who have histories of drug and alcohol addictions, mental illness, and/or learning

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[35] This information was obtained from an email sent to me by different people associated with these programs.

disabilities. None of the inmates have current violent criminal offences or high risk escape profiles (Meijer 1999, 10).

The idea of giving a *Vipassanā* course to the inmates was introduced by one of the facility's health-nurse practitioners who was also one of Goenka's assistant-teachers. After he, along with other *Vipassanā* representatives, had shown the NRF administration and personnel a documentary video about the prison courses in India (called Doing Time, Doing Vipassana), a series of discussions concerning the needs of a course, and the various administrative and security hurdles occurred. These discussions eventually led to an agreement that an effort would be made to hold a course at NRF (Ibid., 10).

The inmates were then shown Doing Time, Doing Vipassana, and had a discussion period with *Vipassanā* instructors who went over the code of discipline and regulations of the course with them. Meijer, the NRF administrator, comments that it was also made clear that no rewards were given to those who would participate and no punishments for those who did not. The general feeling at NRF, recalls Meijer, was that no one would volunteer: "When sixteen men did, no one believed that a single one would finish the course. When eleven men did, the next course was scheduled." This course was for women (Ibid., 10).

According to Meijer, inmates who have taken *Vipassanā* courses represent a cross-section of the general incarcerated population in terms of ethnicity, age, and criminal charges (which range from driving offences to drug crimes, including individuals with histories of assault and domestic violence). Many participants with mental health problems and prior difficulties with discipline have successfully completed courses (Ibid., 13).

After finishing a course, inmates are encouraged to meditate twice a day together[36]. Further efforts are made by the administration to house inmates who have

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[36] I learned from a conversation with a NRF staff member that this has chiefly been organized by two security guards who have previously taken courses. They come to work an hour early and leave an hour

taken a course in the same dorm, and if possible in the same room. A *Vipassanā* teacher also comes once a week to provide additional support for the inmates (Ibid., 13).

c) Results of Studies Conducted on Prisoners

A considerable amount of data has been documented in prisons regarding the social and psychological benefits of *Vipassanā* meditation. Shah's study (1976) of the first jail-course at the maximum-security Central Jail in Jaipur reports a considerable positive change in the attitude and behaviour of the inmates. Vora's (1994) observations of the four prison courses held at Baroda Jail in 1991 and 1992 indicate many positive changes: less quarrels between inmates and staff; decrease in crimes within the jail facility; improved discipline; improved mental and physical health; and increased willingness to work.

According to Vora, the director at Baroda, these changes have improved production and increased the rate of paid employment in the industrial sector of the jail. He explains that inmates increasingly realize the importance of work and the dangers of idleness, which helps them significantly when they are released into civil society. Vora adds that many prisoners have begun investing their wages, as well as collectively donating money to charity. He states that it is primarily due to *Vipassanā* that "a sense of responsibility towards society has been stimulated among the inmates" (Ibid., 42).

Along with the other changes, inmates have started responding positively to rehabilitation programs and artistic activities such as drawing, music, poetry, and literature. An example that Vora provides of the striking improvement in reform activities took place in 1994 during the commemoration of the 45th Republic Day of India when a rally of 150 prisoners were given permission to leave the facility with minimal escort to take part in the city's festivities. Vora writes: "True to their commitment, the rally was

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late in order to support those who otherwise might find it difficult to meditate on their own.

successfully conducted and the inmates returned peacefully to the jail, having fulfilled their obligation to themselves and their community" (Ibid., 42).

Psychological studies performed on the first course at Tihar also indicate positive results. Dhar (1994b, 50), along with other social scientists, distributed questionnaires to the participants one week before and three weeks after the course in order to assess the influence of the meditation on them. The results showed that most of them were there on their own volition, desired peace of mind, and to become better citizens. Twenty-seven percent of the participants claimed to have developed an aversion to the world of crime.

Dhar reports that the feedback from the respondents demonstrated that most of them felt that they had gained something from the course, with 42% indicating that they now had new direction in their lives. The majority said they had felt a release of tension and a greater feeling of overall peace, and suffered less stress due to pettiness. Other results showed that inmates had better control of their anger, increased compassion and empathy for other inmates and staff, decreased self-centeredness, and found satisfaction from being honest and speaking the truth[37]. Results also demonstrated that they were less bothered by the past, more concerned with the present, and more optimistic about the future. Most said they would maintain the regularity of the practice, would like to take more courses, would like to help serve other courses, and would recommend it to their family members (Dhar 1994b; Kumar 1994).

An additional result that emerged from the study was that 78% of those who were smokers or tobacco chewers claimed that their desires for these products had been extinguished. Other reported positive healthy effects included a diminution of backaches,

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[37] An interesting observation made by Dhar was that prior to the course, twenty-four percent of the inmates admitted to committing a crime, while forty-eight percent conceded the fact after the course (Dhar 1994b, 51).

stomach disorders, respiratory ailments, piles, and sleeplessness (Dhar 1994b; Kumar 1994).

Dhar points out that a general and constant feeling of wanting to take revenge against those who "had (falsely) implicated or (wrongly) convicted them" had attenuated during the course. This idea was dramatically expressed by one convict in front of the press at the end of the course, who confessed that he had written out detailed plans to kill his convicting judge, but burned them on the seventh day of the course (Dhar 1994b, 51). A similar story was stated publicly by a prisoner at Baroda Jail: "Revenge was always at the fore of my mind. I used to feel that I would not be at peace until I chopped off the head of the Nasik session judge who sentenced me. Now I thank the judge...I am now filled with an immense desire to serve the poor, to serve society, to serve humanity" (Singh, G. 1994, 58).

The results based on the feedback from the jail staff were positive but not as transformative as for the prisoners. According to Dhar, more than half of them felt they had new direction in their lives and wanted to continue with the practice; while 14% mentioned candidly that they "somehow managed to pass the time!" Kumar points out that most officers felt an increase in their sense of duty, and that their relations with the prisoners improved as they felt an increase in sympathy and compassion, and a decrease in hatred towards them. Dhar explains that the greatest difficulties staff members faced were the stigma associated with living amongst criminals inside the jail, and a lack of appropriate facilities. Most of the respondents felt that the course for staff should be held separately in the future. Dhar points out that only two of the staff members felt that these courses would spoil the discipline of the prison, while the majority believed the courses would improve the jail atmosphere. Eighty percent of the staff reported feeling more sympathy for the prisoners (Dhar 1994b; Kumar 1994).

After Dhar's initial testing of the first Tihar course, controlled studies for the following three concurrent courses were conducted, using a variety of psychiatric inventory tests[38] to measure the effects of *Vipassanā* with regard to psychiatric illness, as well as to try to determine a suitable length of regular practice required to achieve quantifiable results. Assessments were carried out on four occasions: three days prior to the course, three days after the course, three months after the course, and six months after the course (Chandiramani et al. 1995, 1994).

The results from the January 1994 study, based on a sample of 120 subjects, indicate a clinical improvement in approximately 70% of the participants, who claimed that their anxiety and depression had diminished. In the follow-up study carried out in April 1994 on 150 subjects (85 inmates who took a *Vipassanā* course, 65 who did not), the evaluations demonstrated that the participating subjects felt a reduction in neurotic dispositions, helplessness and hostility towards the jail environment, as well as enhanced well-being and a sense of hope for the future (Khurana & Dhar 2000; Chandiramani et al. 1995). According to the authors, these results suggest that *Vipassanā* could be a valuable adjunct to correctional psychiatric treatment.

In a later study done at Tihar investigating the effect of *Vipassanā* among 262 inmates (232 men, 30 women), the researchers used a series of standard psychiatric tests to collect data on "life satisfaction", "subjective well-being", and "criminal propensity" as dependent variables, and *Vipassanā* meditation as the independent variable. After the inmates underwent a ten-day *Vipassanā* course, the researchers found that both male and female inmates indicated a decrease in criminal propensity and an increase in subjective well-being and life satisfaction. The studies also showed a marked difference between the experimental group (those who took a course) compared to the control group (those who

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[38] See Chandiramani et al. (1994) Psychological Effects of Vipassana Meditation on Tihar Jail Inmates .

did not take a course). In their interviews and scale tests given to inmates who had done several *Vipassanā* courses over a few years, including the advanced twenty-day course[39], Khurana & Dhar elucidate that a marked improvement concerning life, emotion, society, family, responsibility, health, and mental peace was shown in the inmates' over-all personalities and attitudes towards life (Khurana & Dhar 2000).

Like the prison courses in India, Meijer asserts that the NRF staff have generally found that individuals who take a *Vipassanā* meditation course "are more co-operative, get along better with other inmates and are more likely to participate successfully in other program activities" (Meijer 1999, 12). One security guard mentions that the stress of her own job has diminished significantly since inmates have been taking courses (Bomann 1998). Another security guard comments: "I saw some dramatic changes in people attitude-wise...particularly for two inmates. Before the course they would constantly test the guards by not returning to their room on time for head-counts, being out of uniform and being noisy and manipulative. After the ten-day course, an awful lot of that went away" (Ibid. 1998).[40]

Meijer (1999, 10-12) indicates that recidivism rates at NRF among inmates who have taken a *Vipassanā* course have greatly been reduced. She writes: "This *could* be significant considering the fact that at any given time at least half of the inmates classified to NRF are NRF recidivists." However, despite the compelling evidence of immediate benefits, she acknowledges that a detailed study over a long period of time is necessary to evaluate the real impact on recidivism and post-release success.

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[39] Open to those who have taken five ten-day courses, kept the five precepts, and have maintained a regular twice daily practice for a minimum of two years.

[40] It is worth mentioning that the data on *Vipassanā* courses at NRF are anecdotal reports made by prison staff. Scientific studies examining the effects of the technique on NRF inmates have not yet been undertaken.

In addition to the cost of wasted human life in the vicious cycle of recidivism, is the huge financial cost spent each year on correctional facilities to house the inmates. If recidivism does truly decrease, then it will result in a decrease in public expenditure. Meijer comments in an interview: "If the inmates don't (return to jail) as soon, or for as serious a crime, that's a success too. To increase the number of crime-free days is a tremendous savings to the community" (Bomann 1998).

However, Dhar (1994b, 53) comments that recidivism cannot be the sole criteria for evaluating the efficacy of a correctional facility, as many forces impinge on the person after release. Vora (1994, 41) comments: "The individual is not always solely responsible for the crime he committed, because circumstances, environment and other influences are contributing elements towards the attitude which leads to crime." For these reasons, researchers (Khurana & Dhar 2000; Chandiramani et al. 1995; Dhar 1994b) explain that looking at the indicators of mental purification such as an increase in subjective well-being and life-satisfaction, and a decrease in afflictive mental states, is of utmost importance in regards to measuring efficacy of prisoner reformation.

d) Possibility for Change

Based on the above studies, it seems that *Vipassanā* meditation has the potential to be a useful tool for reforming inmates during their prison term. Vora (1994, 43) writes:

> It has successfully transformed them into good citizens who have the volition to serve the society when they return to it. It has been successful as a tool for reform because it helps to achieve the ultimate aim and objectives of imprisonment that have been set up by the government. It gives a purposefulness to the lives of prisoners and renders the various steps and activities for the welfare of the inmates more effective.

While the emotional climate of a prison can make rehabilitation quite difficult, it can also provide a conducive atmosphere for personal growth. Certain aspects of the prison milieu can be used creatively as shown by Bedi's instigation of rehabilitative

activities at Tihar such as vocational training, counselling, literacy classes, work projects, sports, prayer, etc. Bedi explains that the activities coupled with *Vipassanā* provide a holistic manner of reformation (Mogensen 2000).

In this light, *Vipassanā* courses have the potential for offering an experience quite different from the usual conception of jail as a brutal, uncaring, unresponsive, and humiliating environment. *Vipassanā* is founded upon an empathetic, non-retaliatory, caring, and unconditioned positive regard for oneself and others. However, it is also a firm and disciplined approach that can help the participants improve themselves. Furthermore, Chandiramani et al. (1995) assert that *Vipassanā* can help in shifting the inmates' focus from a desire for parole or discharge to increasing self-awareness and ameliorated living within the jail's walls.

The ideological value system fostered by *Vipassanā* can have many therapeutic benefits relevant to inmates. Chandiramani et al. (1994) state that following the five precepts "could be one of the best possible approaches to mental hygiene." Moreover, by learning to control the mind with *Ānāpāna*, one learns to handle harmful impulses and desires. Similarly, the authors assert that realizing the Buddha's truth of impermanence "can serve as a powerful antidote to all negativities of the mind such as anxiety, hostility, depression, and fear."

It is said that an aware and non-reactive mind with reference to the understanding of impermanence slows down the transition from thought to action, thereby giving the person an unprejudiced receptivity to make mature and careful decisions in any given situation. Dhar (1994a, 19-20) writes: "The tendency of the base, animal instincts to overpower the faculty of human reason can thus be effectively checked, leading to a gradual reduction in negative traits such as rashness, intolerance, intemperance and aggressive behaviour." He explains that this attitude

> enhances the ability to face the vicissitudes of life squarely and equanimously without taking recourse to such escapist alternatives as smoking, alcohol, and drugs, which have become the bane of modern society...[it] reduces the obsessive preoccupation with indulgence in unending materialistic desires, thereby allowing space for the manifestation of...meaningfulness, justice, truthfulness, service, love, compassion, etc. which modern psychology recognizes as essential components of basic human needs.

If this is so, we can see the usefulness of integrating *Vipassanā* meditation courses into the rehabilitation programs of correctional institutions.

5) *Vipassanā* and Education

In their essays Holistic Education and Vipassana and Anapana Meditation for Children, the respective authors Dhar (1994a) and Adaviyappa (1994) both criticize the mainstream education system for merely imparting to students some academic information concerning a few subjects which may or may not help them get a job, along with an additional minor emphasis on sports. They both argue that the system is failing for the most part in developing happy, healthy, and responsible children, as they learn too much "aggressive competition, pride, and envy", and lack proper training in "cultivation of the heart" (Dhar 1994a, 16). Dhar adds: "Consequently, at an age when children should be dreaming of beauty, greatness, and perfection, they now dream about sensory titillation and wealth, and spend time worrying about how to earn money."

Dhar (1994a, 16) argues that education should be holistic and concerned with "the totality of life and not with immediate responses to immediate challenges", and should cover four aspects of life: physical, emotional, intellectual, and spiritual. He writes that the *physical* aspect of education should not be restricted to physical exercises for keeping the body fit, but should also include "training to use the senses and physical framework wisely." *Emotional* education should focus on the cultivation of positive human emotions such as love, compassion, tolerance, humility, and the eradication of negative emotions such as greed, anger, envy, pride. The *intellectual* aspect of learning should consist of "not

only the development of the ability to think, but also the ability to act independently, rationally and logically on the basis of a deep understanding of the various phenomena of nature." The *spiritual* dimension of education should aim at refining the mind by cultivating "an intuitive understanding of the very purpose of our existence, and a clarity of what ought to be done to achieve it." These four dimensions of education have been put into practice in many schools in India and abroad by adopting meditation as part of their daily curriculum.

Since 1986, thousands of school children ranging between the ages of eight and fifteen have attended short meditation courses held at schools and at *Vipassanā* centres. These courses lasting one to two days at the schools and two to three days at the centres, are tailored to meet the specific needs, interests, and capabilities of the children (Shah & Katakam 1994, 29)[41].

An important prerequisite for courses given at schools, as at the prisons, is that the school must have at least one staff member who has done a ten-day *Vipassanā* course. In addition, the school must be willing to set aside ten to fifteen minutes a day for meditation practice. The courses are usually held during school hours so as not to inconvenience the child or his or her family's daily routine (Ibid., 29).

The focus of these courses is *Ānāpāna* meditation- the observation of the natural process of respiration (see chapter two), which helps the child cultivate a calm, tranquil, and concentrated mind. For the child who meditates properly, he or she learns that the breath is a bridge between the mind and body, and that the rhythm of the breath is closely related to that moment's state of mind. Over time, this awareness of respiration gradually assists the child in the eradication of an unbalanced mind.

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[41] Children are usually divided into age groups of 8-11 and 12-15, depending on the number of children at the course. After the age of fifteen, young people are normally considered ready to take a ten-day *Vipassanā* course.

Adaviyappa (1994), an assistant-teacher to Goenka, explains that because these courses can be a rigorous mental practice for children, the instructors are careful in preventing it from becoming a burden on them. Meditation sessions of fifteen to thirty minutes are interspersed with creative games, storytelling, snacks, sharing of meditative experiences, and journal writing. Counsellors, who are *Vipassanā* meditators, are assigned to play with and monitor small groups of children. The counsellors satisfy the children's natural inquisitiveness, and help them understand and integrate the teachings and practice into their lives.

For the courses held within the school facilities, teachers are encouraged to participate in the course with the students, as children are more willing to engage themselves when their teachers do so as well. Courses held at schools therefore require a firm commitment by the teachers and the institution to provide a proper atmosphere for this sort of training. Ideally, after a course in a school has taken place, a ten or fifteen minute slot should be provided in the daily curriculum every morning for meditation (Ibid., 25).

Children from all backgrounds are welcomed to the courses held at the centres. However, preference is normally given to children who have *Vipassanā* meditators in their families, or for whom *Ānāpāna* is part of the school curriculum. Shah and Katakam (1994, 28), both assistant-teachers to Goenka, explain that this is so because students from this sort of background usually derive greater benefit from the practice as there is greater opportunity for it to become a regular part of the child's life.

Adaviyappa (1994, 24-5) explains that the primary message on these courses is simple and straightforward: a good child is one who does not harm others by mental, vocal, or physical actions; who helps others; and who learns to discipline and purify the mind. At the start of a course the children take the five precepts which are worded differently than on a ten-day course for adults. It is emphasised that these precepts are of

no help if they are merely recited, but should be put into practice into one's daily life. They are taught how to do this through various stories of saints such as the Buddha, Mohammed, and Jesus. The children are also taught to respect their parents and teachers, and the value of keeping wholesome company. Adaviyappa asserts that these teachings are assimilated well because the children are learning to meditate at the same time.

In a secular state such as India, which consists of a plethora of religions, castes, and creeds, public schools are not allowed to teach any particular religion. It is arguable that this absence of spiritual teaching may result in a lack of inner-growth. It is for this reason that the technique of *Ānāpāna* has often been recognized by parents and teachers as a universally acceptable solution[42] for nourishing the deficient spiritual and emotional dimensions of modern education in India (Dhar 1994a, 17; Shah & Katakam 1994, 27). According to Adaviyappa (1994, 24-5), children who learn this technique receive the "opportunity to explore themselves and their minds with all their hidden faculties, latent abilities and subtle complexities." She explains that through meditation, the children find an effective method for dealing with the anxieties of childhood and adolescence. The children learn for themselves how the mind works, and how to acquire a certain degree of mastery over it.

Adaviyappa (1994) notes that the immediate and long-term benefits of the meditation program have been significant in helping children develop a strong moral foundation at an early age. The feedback from questionnaires distributed to parents and teachers by Adaviyappa (1994, 26) and Shah & Katakam (1994, 29) indicates noticeable changes in the children's behaviour such as an increase in discipline, honesty, co-operation, attentiveness, cleanliness, and concentration; and a decrease in irritability, quarrelling, use

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[42] After the Kothari Commission acknowledged the need for inculcating social, moral, and spiritual values through education, many attempts had been made through various means such as prayer, group discussions, and meetings with various religious institutions. Nonetheless, most failed in the public school sector as the approaches were not able to gain wide acceptance by the students' families (Dhar 1994, 17).

of abusive language, and feelings of inferiority. In addition, assessments have also shown that academic performance has improved in children who have begun meditating regularly. Teachers have also reported that since they have implemented meditation into their daily schedule, the classrooms seem less hectic and the interactions between teacher and student have become more harmonious.

Thus we have seen the social contribution that the *Vipassanā* movement has had not only through providing meditation courses at their own centres, but in the health, correctional, and educational sectors of society as well. We have seen the various therapeutic benefits that may be accrued by the practitioner. These effects help create a positive state of mental health for the individual by gradually eliminating mental impurities. This process of self-cultivation enables the person to face the daily vicissitudes of life in a calm and balanced manner, thus rendering the individual a more confident, well-adjusted, and beneficial participant in society.

Conclusions

> Only man is the architect of his own destiny. The biggest revolution of our generation is that human beings, changing the deepest intimate habit patterns of their minds, can change the external aspects of their lives.
>
> -William James

1) The Importance of Inner-Cleansing

The last century has witnessed tremendous progress in the fields of science and technology, resulting in rapid economic and material development, the aim of which is to improve the human standard of living. To what degree have these improvements really been achieved? The environment has suffered tremendously as it has experienced heavily taxed resources; the rapid shrinking of bio-diverse species; toxic pollution of the earth, air, and waters; and explosive rates of population growth which have only been further aggravated by foolish and narrow exploitative notions of unlimited economic growth, conspicuous consumption, industrial manipulation, and militaristic conquest. Despite advances of the last century, we read in the daily newspapers of increasingly high rates of mental illness, crime, drug and alcohol addiction, and suicide. The individual in modern society is a victim of varying degrees of stresses and strains, whose existence is in constant conflict between the world within and the world outside. The common human appetite is insatiable, causing deep dissatisfaction, distress, and frustration with the world around it.

From the perspective of the Buddha's teachings, the various external social and environmental pollutions are a manifestation of human internal moral pollution. Buddhist scholar and *Vipassanā* meditator Lily De Silva (1994, 121), writes that "when moral degeneration becomes rampant in society, it causes adverse changes in the human body and in our environment." She gives an example from the *Agganna Sutta* where the Buddha

asserted that when individual and social morality deteriorates, society will experience a loss in human beauty and a depletion of natural resources.

According to this teaching of the Buddha, all existence is interrelated. From the human mind and body to the planet's flora and fauna, all phenomena are "intricately interconnected through an all-embracing network of cause and effect, to make one whole psychologically sensitive and responsive eco-system"[43] (Ibid., 121). This idea is also found in the *Samyutta Nikaya* (PTS I 39) where the Buddha stated: "The world is led by the mind, it is dragged hither and thither by the mind. The mind is one reality under the power of which everything goes" (c.f. Ibid., 121).

From the dawn of human civilization when humans began hunting, gathering, and settled agriculture, to the present high-tech nuclear and space age, human ideas have brought about major changes in the world. Today, human exploitative activities increase at greater rates than nature's replenishing capabilities, causing unprecedented environmental pollution and social impoverishment. According to the above statement of the Buddha, this condition is interconnected to every facet of life - economic, social, political, and spiritual, and is a result of the constant cravings that plague the human mind. De Silva writes: "The human brain has developed without keeping pace with the human heart and moral responsibility. Intellectually, modern man may be a giant, but emotionally he is a dwarf suffering with spiritual bankruptcy" (Ibid., 122).

As we saw in the third chapter, Goenka elucidates how one is responsible for one's own actions, and that one's happiness or woe is experienced according to one's *kamma*. This process is also related to the societal level. In a talk on the social relevance of *Vipassanā*, Goenka (1994, 3-4) professes that if society is to reform itself, then each person who makes up that society must first be reformed. He asks: "If the individual can't

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[43] For an elaboration of this subject, see Francis Cook's (1977) discussion of "cosmic ecology" in Hua-Yen Buddhism.

come out of misery, how can society come out of misery?" Goenka further says that one must deal with the human mind, as it is in the mind from which all the different types of pollution stem. He says: "As long as the mind remains impure, it will continue to generate unhealthy vibrations, making the entire atmosphere full of misery." In this light, De Silva writes: "If wholesome moral energy is widespread, there is peace in society and life is comparatively happy and comfortable. If unwholesome moral energy is widespread, strife in society is similarly rampant and life becomes more and more troublesome" (De Silva 1994, 122; Jones 1981). Thus, according to these statements, the experience of today's social and environmental problems results from an inner moral crisis wrought with mental defilements.

As the moral disposition of humans has a deeply intertwined relationship with the present social and environmental dilemma, De Silva believes that *Vipassanā* meditation can offer a pragmatic way for humans to experience a positive change in attitude, entailing a restored and sustained approach to society and the environment. She asserts that *Vipassanā* can teach humans to lead an ethical, simple, and satisfied life; and if done collectively on a grander scale, the multi-dimensional wounds of the planet could gradually be mitigated (De Silva 1994, 124).

According to Fleischman, treading the path of *Vipassanā* "seasons and matures" one's personality, and "leads to a slow, cumulative social change by organising individual lives around new sources of well-being." The personal transformation that occurs with meditation becomes a catalyst for social change as everything has an influence on everything else. Just as egoistic desires are an undercurrent for social rage, replacing those desires with awareness, equanimity and *mettā*, become the undercurrent for social harmony. A natural result of developed meditation is a respect for a social and biological diversity, and an abstinence from material heedlessness out of sympathy and compassion for all sentient beings (Fleischman 1999, 85-94; De Silva 1994, 124).

Thus, the basis of a healthy society is a healthy individual. If the Buddha's statement "the world operates through the human mind" is correct, then we can clearly see the relevance of *Vipassanā* to positive social and environmental change. These changes, however, cannot be accomplished by lectures, sermons, or moral injunctions. Only when each person finds some peace within, can the greater society expect to find peace as well. Goenka (1994) explains that it is only when one develops insight into one's being that one's perception begins to change, which enables objective observation of a situation in its totality. He explains that when a person's mental impurities are peeled away, one develops better judgement of people and situations, thus improving one's relationship with others and the environment as one's decision-making abilities become more appropriate and effective. Moshak (1994, 13-4), a student of Goenka's, writes: "When our minds undergo a cleaning process...the energy that was being consumed in our struggle with tensions, emotional blocks, and a narrow-minded ego-centred way of living - this now gets channelled more profitably. Our work efficiency increases both qualitatively and quantitatively." According to Moshak's statement, *Vipassanā* helps people make a constructive and positive contribution to the society in which they live. He adds: "One learns the art of constructive social living which promotes positive social interaction." *Vipassanā* is therefore not only a method of self-development that alters habits and attitudes, but also a method for social development. Through continuous practice, the individual is empowered to develop wholesome mental states such as love, compassion, joy, and equanimity, which foster harmonious interpersonal relations and ethical behaviour.

2) A Few Last Remarks

As we have seen, *Vipassanā* meditation, according to Goenka, was rediscovered by Gotama the Buddha twenty-five centuries ago. Although *Vipassanā* meditation holds the core of what has been later called Buddhism, Goenka maintains that to practice *Vipassanā* one does not need to convert to an organised religion, as it is open to people of any faith, nationality, colour, and background. Goenka's technique of *Vipassanā* is a non-sectarian way of life that harmonizes with the laws of nature. It is an ethical, practical, and social path that is derived from self-exploration. The goal of the practice is the complete alleviation of human suffering by observing objectively and equanimously the arising and passing away of everything that composes the mind, body, and the universe associated with the two. For this tradition, the practice of this technique necessarily involves the compassionate interaction of the individual with the social environment.

Throughout this paper the patient reader may have interpreted this painted picture of *Vipassana* as the only method for attaining awakening as described by the Buddha. However, this cannot be the case as awakening could be achieved by any modality that eliminates mental conditioning and ignites the flames of sincere love, compassion, joy, and equanimity. If truth, as Goenka teaches, is universal and objective, then it cannot belong to any particular school of thought, idea, or doctrine. Nor can it ever imply the common dualistic separation of "us" versus "them", which prevents one from seeing objective reality in a holistic perspective. Anyone with an open-mind can share in the truth of awakening. *Vipassanā* meditation is just one well trod and proven path of exploration. It is an objective method towards an understanding of the subjective, and does not mean that people who do not engage in the practice are excluded from sharing the truth of reality.

It should also be clear to the reader by now that embracing a meditative exercise such as *Vipassanā* does not mean rejecting one's community or religion, but affirming and engaging in it whole-heartedly. From an outside observer's perspective, *Vipassanā* may

appear as an escapist practice merely concerned with individual enlightenment; however as Goenka and his spokespeople assert, this very enlightenment, as well as its process of realization, entails engaging oneself responsibly in the service of others. This has been explicit by the *Vipassanā* movement's relationship to constructive social engagement within their centres and *viz.* their integration with health, correctional, and educational social institutions. In this light, the Dalai Lama (1976; c.f. Jones 1981, 60) comments:

> You should not cut yourself off from your society; you should continue to live within your own community and with its members. This is not only for your sake but for others' also, because by rejecting your community you obviously cannot benefit others, which actually is the basic aim of religion.

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