

Vipassana Meditation Course



**Introduction
and
Code of Discipline**

In the Tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin
as taught by S. N. Goenka

May your meditation prove most beneficial to you. We offer the following information with all good wishes for your success.

Introduction to the Technique

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

What Vipassana is not:

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

What Vipassana is:

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

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

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

The process of self-purification by introspection is certainly never easy - one has to work really hard at it. By their own efforts, the students arrive at their own realisations - no one else can work for them. Therefore, the meditation will suit only those willing to work seriously and observe the discipline, which is actually for their own benefit and protection. The rules and regulations are an integral part of the meditation practice.

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

A student will have to stay for the complete ten days. Besides this, the other rules should be carefully read and considered. Only those who feel that they can honestly follow the discipline scrupulously should apply for admission.

Those not prepared to make full-hearted efforts will only waste their time and, even worse, cause a disturbance to others who wish to work seriously. Intending students are warned that it would be both harmful and unpleasant to have to leave without finishing the course if they find the discipline too difficult. Likewise, it would be most unfortunate if, in spite of repeated warnings, they do not follow the rules and have to be asked to leave.

The Code of Discipline

The foundation of the practice of Vipassana is *sila* - moral conduct. *Sila* provides a basis for the development of *samadhi* - concentration of mind; and the purification of the mental processes is achieved through *panna* - the wisdom of insight.

The Precepts:

All who attend a Vipassana course should observe rigorously the following five precepts:

1. To abstain from killing.
2. To abstain from stealing.
3. To abstain from all sexual activities.
4. To abstain from telling lies.
5. To abstain from all intoxicants.

There are an additional three precepts which old students are expected to observe:

6. To abstain from taking food after midday.
7. To abstain from sensual amusements and bodily decorations.
8. To abstain from using high or luxurious beds.

Old students will have to observe the sixth precept by taking only lemon water at the 5pm break, whereas the new students will take milk or tea and fruit. The teacher may excuse an old student from observing this precept for health reasons. The seventh and eighth precepts will be observed by all old students.

Acceptance of the Teacher and the Technique

For the period of the course, the student is asked to comply fully with the teacher's instruction and guidance; the student should follow the technique and discipline without any addition or subtraction. Only with an attitude of acceptance and trust can a student work diligently and thoroughly. This acceptance should be with discrimination and understanding and not through forceful or blind submission. Such confidence in the teacher and technique is essential for success in one's meditation.

Rites, Rituals and other Techniques

For the period of the course it is absolutely essential that all rites and rituals such as burning incense and lamps, counting beads, reciting mantras, singing and dancing, total fasting, praying etc be totally suspended. All other meditation and healing practices

should also be suspended without condemning them. The reason for this is to give a fair trial to the technique of Vipassana in its purity. Despite repeated warnings by the teacher, there have been cases in the past where students have deliberately mixed this technique with a ritual or other practice, and harmed themselves. Any doubts or confusion which may arise can also be clarified by meeting with the teacher.

Meeting the Teacher

Problems or confusion about the meditation should be taken only to the teacher for clarification. The time between 12 noon and 1 pm is set aside for these private interviews with the teacher. Questions may also be asked in public between 9 pm and 9.30 in the meditation hall.

Such a meeting is solely for the purpose of clarifying actual practical problems connected to the technique. It should not be taken as an opportunity to indulge in philosophical discussions or intellectual arguments. Vipassana meditation is unique in itself, and the students should concentrate exclusively on putting it into practice.

Noble Silence

Students must observe Noble Silence from the start of the course until 10 am on Day 10. Noble Silence is silence of body, speech and mind. Any form of communication, whether by physical gestures, written notes, sign language etc, is prohibited. However the student may speak with the teacher whenever necessary. Students may also contact the managers with any problem connected with accommodation, food etc. All these contacts should be kept to a minimum. Students should cultivate the feeling that they are working in isolation.

Yoga and Physical Exercise

Although physical yoga and other exercises are compatible with Vipassana, they should be suspended because they would be a distraction. You can walk for exercise in the designated areas.

Outside Contacts

Students will have to remain inside the course site for the entire course. They may leave only with the specific consent of the teacher. All telephone calls, letters and contact with visitors will have to be suspended. In case of emergency, a friend or relative may contact the managers.

Couples

Complete segregation of the sexes is to be observed. Couples, married or otherwise, should not contact each other in any way during the course.

Physical Contact

There should be no physical contact whatsoever between persons of the same or opposite sex for the entire course.

Talismans, Rosaries, etc

No such items should be brought to the site. If they are brought inadvertently they should be deposited with the managers for the ten days.

Intoxicants and Drugs

No drugs, alcohol or other intoxicants are permitted. This includes tranquillisers, sleeping pills and all other sedatives. Those taking medicines or drugs on a doctor's prescription should notify the teacher.

Smoking

Smoking or chewing tobacco is not permitted on the course. Those who have such habits should realise that by using tobacco they would also arouse the same desire in others who are trying to give up the habit.

Food

It is not possible to satisfy the special food requirements of all meditators. The students are therefore kindly requested to make do with the simple vegetarian menu. If a student has been prescribed a special diet because of ill-health, he or she should inform the managers prior to registration.

Clothing

Dress should be simple, modest and comfortable. Transparent, revealing, tight or otherwise striking clothing (such as shorts, short skirts, singlets, or skimpy tops) should not be worn. Sunbathing and partial nudity are not permitted. This is important in order to minimise distractions to others.

Cleanliness

Students must live and work in common rooms, so it is essential that they bathe daily and keep their clothes clean. As there is no laundry service, students will have to wash their own clothes. This should be done only during the break periods.

Music, Reading and Writing

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

Tape Recorders and Cameras

These can be used only with specific permission of the teacher.

Serious Mental Disorders

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

Course Finances

According to the tradition of pure Dhamma, courses are run solely on a donation (*dana*) basis. Donations are only accepted from old students, that is, those who have completed at least one ten-day course with Goenkaji or one of his assistant teachers. Someone taking a course for the first time is free to give a donation on the last day of the course or any time thereafter.

In this way, finance for courses is received only from those who have realised for themselves the benefits of Dhamma. Wishing to share these benefits with others, a donation can be given according to one's means. Even a very small donation can reflect the proper understanding of wishing to give at least something for someone else. This understanding deepens when one realises that not only is it important to give a donation, but that it should be in line with one's capacity to give. A poor person's capacity certainly differs from that of a rich person, though the volition to help others may be the same.

These donations are the only means of financing these courses around the world. There is no wealthy foundation or individual sponsoring these courses. Neither the teachers nor the organizers profit materially in any way from these courses.

In this way, the spread of Dhamma is carried out with purity of purpose, free from any taint of commercialism.

Therefore, whether your donation be large or small, let it be with pure volition: "Since someone else has donated toward the expenses of my course, let me now give something for someone else's course."

Summary

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

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

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

It is only by taking a disciplined approach and by execution of maximum effort that the student will both achieve a good grasp of the practice and gain benefit. The emphasis during the ten days is on *work* - a golden rule is to work as if one were alone on the course, ignoring any distractions and inconveniences encountered, working with one's mind turned inward.

Finally, students should note that their progress in Vipassana depends solely on their own *paramitas* (previously accumulated merits) and on five factors: full-hearted efforts, confidence, sincerity, health and wisdom.

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

The Timetable

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

4.00 am	Morning wake-up bell
4.30 - 6.30 am	Meditate in either the meditation hall or in your own room
6.30 - 8.00 am	Breakfast break
8.00 - 9.00 am	<u>Group meditation in the hall</u>
9.00 - 11.00 am	Meditate in either the hall or in your own room according to the teacher's instructions
11.00 - 12 noon	Lunch
12.00 - 1.00 pm	Rest
1.00 - 2.30 pm	Meditate in either the meditation hall or in your own room
2.30 - 3.30 pm	<u>Group meditation in the hall</u>
3.30 - 5.00 pm	Meditate in either the hall or in your own room according to the teacher's instructions
5.00 - 6.00 pm	Tea break
6.00 - 7.00 pm	<u>Group meditation in the hall</u>
7.00 - 8.00 pm	Teacher's discourse in the hall
8.00 - 9.00 pm	<u>Group meditation in the hall</u>
9.00 - 9.30 pm	Question time in the hall
9.30 pm	Retire to own room. Lights out

Group meditation takes place in the meditation hall. During other meditation sessions students may meditate in the meditation hall or in their own room.