

S. N. GOENKA NORTH AMERICAN TOUR 2002
Meditation Now: Inner Peace for Inner Wisdom

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND —VIPASSANA MEDITATION

Vipassana is one of the world's most ancient meditative techniques. It was practiced 25 centuries ago by Gotama the Buddha, who said he had rediscovered a much older practice. After his enlightenment in 528 BCE, the Buddha spent the remaining 45 years of his life teaching the way out of suffering. Vipassana is the essence of what he taught. The Buddha's teaching is known by the general term *Dhamma* (Sanskrit: *Dharma*).

For five centuries Vipassana helped millions of people in India, the Buddha's homeland. This era saw the matchless reign of the great Emperor Asoka (273-236 BCE) who united India and initiated a golden age of peace and prosperity. Asoka also sent ambassadors of Dhamma to all the neighboring kingdoms (including what has become Myanmar in modern times), thereby spreading both the practice and the words of the Buddha.

After about 500 years the practice of Vipassana had disappeared from India. Fortunately it was maintained by a continuous chain of meditation teachers in the neighboring country of Myanmar (Burma) until the present day.

In our time, Vipassana has been reintroduced to India and to people from all over the world by S. N. Goenka, a retired industrialist of Indian heritage who was born in Myanmar. He learned the technique of Vipassana from Sayagyi U Ba Khin, the renowned lay Vipassana teacher who was the first to teach westerners in English. U Ba Khin appointed him to teach Vipassana in 1969.

CHRONOLOGY OF VIPASSANA DEVELOPMENT IN RECENT TIMES

- Venerable Ledi Sayadaw (1846-1923), was perhaps the outstanding Buddhist figure of his age. This scholarly, saintly monk was instrumental in re-enlivening the traditional practice of Vipassana, making it more available for renunciates as well as the laity in Myanmar.
- **1915**—Ven. Ledi Sayadaw appoints Saya Thetgyi (1873-1945) as a lay teacher of Vipassana and charges him with the task of teaching the technique to 6000 lay people.
- **1937**—U Ba Khin (1899-1971), then a clerk in the office of the Accountant General of British Burma, takes his first ten-day Vipassana course with Saya Thetgyi.
- **1950**—Sayagyi U Ba Khin, now the Accountant General of independent Burma, founds the Vipassana Association of the Accountant General's Office in order to teach Vipassana to the employees of that office. ("Sayagyi" means "respected teacher.")
- **1952**—The International Meditation Centre opens in Yangon. Sayagyi U Ba Khin can now teach Vipassana to the public. Indians and Westerners, as well as the Burmese laity, thus have the opportunity to come into contact with the technique.
- **1955**—S.N. Goenka takes his first ten-day course with Sayagyi U Ba Khin.

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- **1969**—Mr. Goenka leaves Burma and goes to India. Prior to his departure Sayagyi U Ba Khin appoints him a teacher and charges him with the task of returning Vipassana to the land of its origin. From there, Sayagyi predicted, it would spread to the rest of the world. Goenka conducts his first ten-day course in Mumbai, India, in July, 1969.
- **1969-1979**—Mr. Goenka limits his teaching to India for ten years in order to build a solid foundation of practice there. Many Westerner travelers meet him and start their Vipassana practice during this time.
- **1974**—Land is purchased for the first Vipassana center in India, the Vipassana International Academy (VIA), *Dhamma Giri*, at Igatpuri, Maharashtra. In October, 1976, *Dhamma Giri* opens its doors with its first ten-day course for the public.
- **1979-1991**—Mr. Goenka travels outside India to teach in the West. The first Western course is held in July, 1979, at Gaillon, France. This follows 161 courses conducted by Mr. Goenka during the first ten years in India. For the next 12 years he regularly travels to Western countries and Japan, teaching courses, guiding the fledgling centers and training assistant teachers to conduct courses in his absence.
- **1981**—The first Vipassana meditation centers outside India and Myanmar are established in Shelburne, Massachusetts, USA, and Blackheath, NSW, Australia.
- **1985**—The Vipassana Research Institute (VRI) is founded in Igatpuri, India, for the purpose of conducting research into the sources and applications of Vipassana.
- **1991-2000**—Mr. Goenka focuses his travels and energy on the traditional Buddhist countries of Asia. Vipassana centers arise in Thailand, Sri Lanka, Cambodia, Taiwan, Indonesia, Mongolia. Mr. Goenka inaugurates centers in Myanmar, the traditional home of Vipassana. Courses begin at non-center sites in mainland China.
- **1995-2000**—VRI publishes the first books of the Pali *Tipitaka* (the Buddhist scriptures) in Devanagari script, the script of the northern Indian languages. The full publication (140 volumes) was completed in 2000. In 1997 all volumes are published by VRI on one *Tipitaka* CD, with seven scripts and full search engine. These publications are distributed to scholars and universities free of charge.
- **1997**—Foundation laid for the Grand Pagoda, near Mumbai, India, with 5000 guests from different parts of the world in attendance. When completed it will be the largest clear-span structure in the world and 375 feet high. It will seat 8,000 to 10,000 for meditation, offer the public informative exhibits about the Buddha's teaching, and likely become a world-famous landmark.
- **2000**—Mr. Goenka addresses the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland in February, 2000, and spiritual leaders taking part in the World Millennium Peace Summit at the United Nations, New York, August, 2000.
- **2002**—Mr. Goenka embarks on a four month tour to teach in the West, the most extensive since he began teaching 32 years ago.

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