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Vipassana Meditation: An Art of Living

Be a lamp and refuge unto yourselves. Look for no other refuge.
Let the Truth be your lamp and your refuge. Seek no refuge elsewhere.

—Gautama the Buddha

DEHRA DUN, India 20 December 1995

By Pramila Jayapal

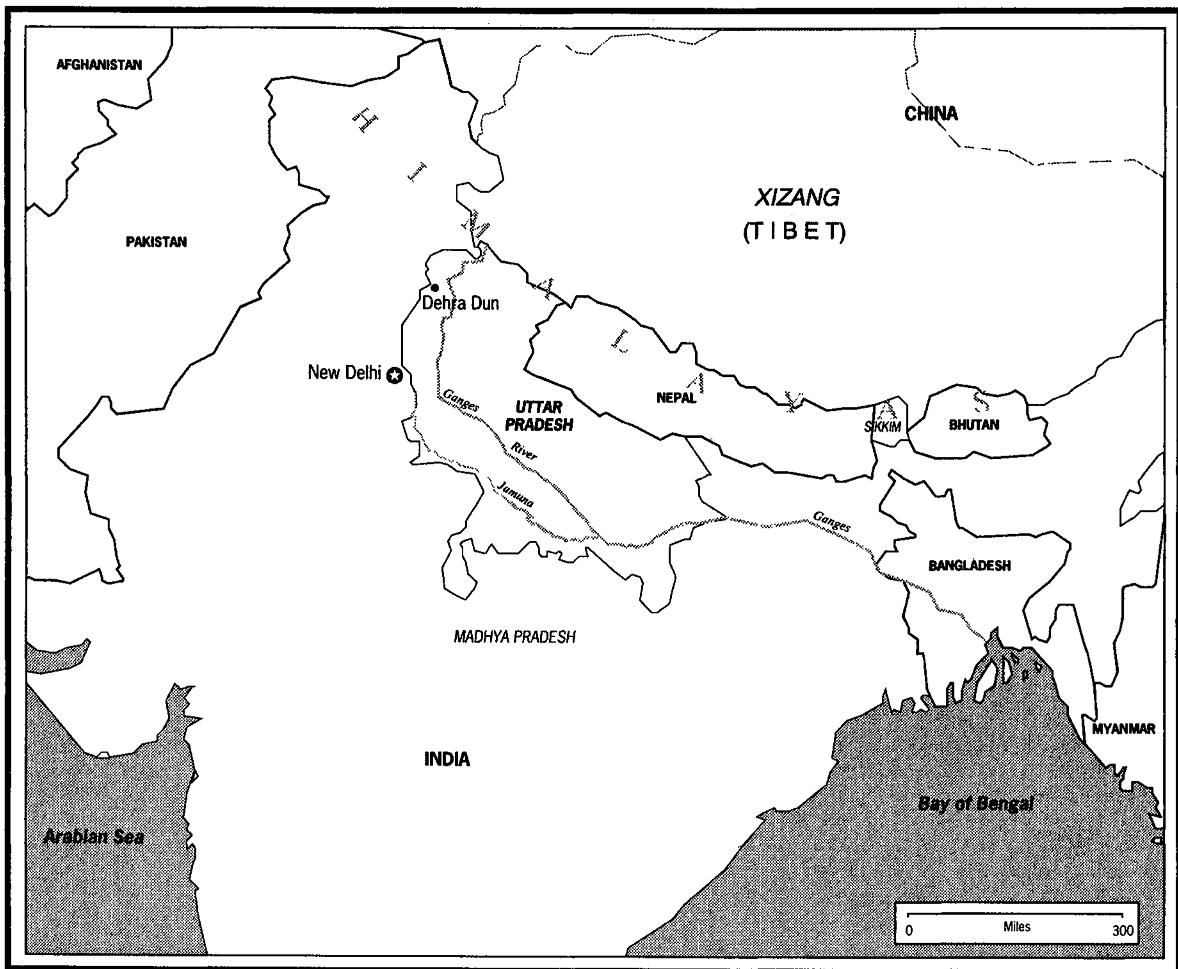
4 A.M. — From far away, a bell sounds. As my conscious mind stirs, the gongs get closer. I open my eyes slowly, stare at the dark room, pull the quilts higher over my body. At this vulnerable moment of awakening light seems too harsh, so Mrs. Goel, my roommate, and I dress in darkness and silence. Once dressed, the light goes on in an attempt to jar the senses into alertness. Cold water splashed on the face, teeth brushed, and we hear the gong sounding its five-minute signal. The gate creaks as we unlock it and go outside. It is still dark, except for a faint silvery glow to the sky signaling that in a few hours, day will break. The painted white barks of the trees that mark the path up to the Dhamma Hall gleam. I feel the rocks and stones of the mud path through the soles of my rubber sandals and wool socks. It is cold, but the air feels good against my cheeks. A big shawl wrapped around me and a neck warmer and hat keep my own body heat locked in. We take our shoes off outside the hall, and take our "seats" — cushions on the floor — for the day's first meditation session.

For ten days, our mornings would begin like this. With only a vague notion of what we were entering into, my husband and I decided to participate in a Vipassana (pronounced vi-PASH-ana) meditation retreat. Our good friends in Mussourie, who run a non-profit development organization, had been successfully conducting Vipassana camps for their staff as part of their effort to change underlying attitudes toward life. Over the course of ten days, we lived like monks and nuns, meditating for ten hours daily, eating only one small snack after 11:30 A.M., taking a vow of silence (except to ask the teacher questions about the meditation technique), and refraining from reading, writing, and even eye contact with others. During this period, we were to undergo what was termed a "surgical operation of our minds," a physically and mentally exhausting process to penetrate the unconscious levels of our minds.

Before the camp, I had only a hazy picture in my mind of what meditation was, a blurred image of all the sitting Buddhas in the monasteries of Ladakh, of contemplating one's life reflectively, of looking deep within one's mind to see who we really are. I pictured meditation like going to see a psychiatrist, except that this psychiatrist was inside, this psychiatrist was your mind. This mind would listen, probe, work with you to absolve you of all your problems, insecurities, issues. Yes, in some ways, I even pictured the physical comfort of a sofa or a warm, cozy place to sit and undergo this *tête-à-tête* with one's mind.

It was my first lesson in one of Vipassana's basic precepts — that real understanding of anything comes only through one's own direct experience. I had created a

Pramila Jayapal is an Institute Fellow spending two years living amid and writing about societal issues in widely diverse regions of India. With her is her husband, Alan Preston.



completely inaccurate picture of meditation, romanticizing it, adorning it with my own frills of expectation. Yes, Buddha looks peaceful in all the pictures, but the pictures were drawn from people's imaginations and depict him at the end of his journey when he was fully enlightened. There are no pictures of Buddha when he was a "new" student, wincing or screaming with pain because his knees had been in the same position for hours, because his feet had fallen asleep and there was that unpleasant tingly sensation, or because his neck had become as heavy as a boulder from keeping it straight; no pictures that show the true nature of this thing called the mind, or its wild strength before it has been tamed; no pictures of Buddha chasing around his mind, struggling to keep it still and concentrated, much less harnessing it to use to his benefit, to reach his goal of enlightenment. No, none of this is shown; it must be experienced.

Vipassana is one of India's most ancient meditation techniques, rediscovered by Gautama the Buddha 25 centuries ago. Vipassana was the basis of Buddha's teachings and, as a result, came to be practiced by large numbers of people across Northern India, and later Burma, Sri Lanka and Thailand. Although the nature of Buddhism practiced today has changed in many ways, Buddhism taught by the Buddha was more a way of life than a religion. It was a "noble path for living where humanism, equality, justice and peace reign supreme." Buddha rejected all forms of rites, rituals and idolatry; he promised no heaven or bliss to his followers. Instead, he taught that the key to our "salvation" lay entirely within us: a person's life would be only a product of his actions.

There is an old story about one of Buddha's followers whose father had died. The man went to Buddha and asked him to conduct some special rites that would grant the father eternal peace and a good next life. Buddha asked the man to fill two big pots, one with butter and one with rocks. The man, extremely happy in thinking that Buddha was going to use his power to ensure his father's happiness, did as asked. Next, Buddha asked the man to throw both the pots into the river. The light pot with the butter rose to the surface, while the heavy pot with stones sank to the bottom. "Why did this happen?" Buddha asked his follower. "Naturally because butter is light and stones are heavy," replied the man. "So as people's lives," Buddha told him. "If you have lived a life that is as light and pure as butter, you will float in the next life. If you have lived a life that is as heavy with impurity as the

stones, you will sink. There is nothing I can do for your father."

Five centuries after Buddha, Vipassana again disappeared from India, but its purity of teaching was preserved by a chain of teachers in Burma. Vipassana was reintroduced or "popularized" in recent times by S.N. Goenka, a 74-year old Burmese native. Goenka was born into a wealthy merchant family, and was successful early on in his family's business. However, he became plagued with migraine headaches, that required strong regular doses of morphine. When it became clear that he needed alternative treatment to resist a morphine addiction, he traveled in vain to Europe, America and Japan in search of some treatment. Upon returning to Burma, he heard about Vipassana and approached a well-known meditation teacher, Sayagi U Ba Khin, who also served as the Accountant General of Burma. U Ba Khin refused to take Goenka at first, telling him that Vipassana was for purifying the mind, not curing headaches. In the end, however, he agreed, and Goenka's introduction to Vipassana led to not only the complete eradication of his migraines, but also to a total transformation of his life. Today, there are over twenty Vipassana centers worldwide, half in India and the rest in Nepal, U.K., France, Australia, Thailand, Japan and America.

Vipassana's growing popularity over the past two decades is one indication of a changing world consciousness, as increasing numbers of people search for ways to simplify their lives, get in touch with a greater sense of spirituality, or attain "inner peace." Witness the astounding popularity of books like *The Celestine Prophecy*, or the advent of numerous "self-help, positive attitude" courses. These courses and books promise not just change in one's personal life, but also in one's productivity and effectiveness in the workplace. *The Times of India*, a well-read national newspaper, last week reported on the use of an ancient healing technique called *Reiki* in corporate circles. Vipassana itself has had myriad applications. Perhaps one of Vipassana's most interesting uses has been with the prisoners and wardens of Delhi's Tihar Jail. The initial course, given to 1,000 people, resulted in such a change in the jail atmosphere that a permanent Vipassana center has been set up on the premises of the jail. At a meeting of Inspector Generals of Prisons from all over India, the Ministry of Home Affairs recommended that Vipassana be officially recognized as a reform measure.

A Vipassana course is an experiential journey along Buddha's 8-Fold Noble Path to enlightenment. The 8-fold path, also known as The Noble Path of Truth or The Middle Way, has three main components: *shila* (moral living), *samadhi* (mental concentration), and *panne* (wisdom). During the camp, to uphold the concept of *shila*, each student is required to undertake five moral precepts: abstention from killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct and the use of intoxicants. *Samadhi* is developed in the first three days of the camp through the practice of *Anapana* meditation, which focuses on observing one's own respiration. Finally, on the fourth day, one begins to develop *panne* through the practice of Vipassana meditation, a process of "penetrating one's entire physical and mental structure with the clarity of insight," thus purifying the mind of underlying negativities.

All Vipassana courses are a minimum of ten days. No fees are accepted for the course, board or lodging; these costs (including the building of centers) are met solely by donations of past students. Donations, small or large, are accepted only from students after the course if they feel that they have actually benefited from the teaching and wish others to benefit. This commitment is upheld scrupulously in the course—there is absolutely no "pressure" to donate, no guidelines for how much one should donate, no sideline talks from the staffers about how it would be good for our own lives to feel the generosity of giving. It is left entirely to the student.

The center outside Dehra Dun, about an hour and a half from Mussourie, where we attended our course, is next to a protected forest reserve, surrounded by trees and set against the twinkling hills of Mussourie. There is a dining hall, that has two separate sides for men and women. Mats are spread on the floor, and the food is simple, healthful and vegetarian. On either side of the compound are the men's and women's residences, separated by a wide dirt path. The rooms in both residences are built around central open courtyards. Rooms are simple, concrete structures about 10 feet by 8 feet, with two single beds and a few shelves built into the walls for one's belongings. Some rooms had attached baths, but hot water could be obtained only from the large common bath and toilet area. Currently, the center can accommodate approximately 40 people, though expansion is underway to increase the capacity to about 75.

Separate paths for men and women lead to the Dhamma* Hall where all the meditations occur. It is a large room about 30 feet by 60 feet, with high pointed ceilings and a tin roof that magnifies the outside noises of leaves falling, langurs playing, and the gentle patter of rain. The hall was lit with two bare bulbs, one in the front, one in the back. We took the same seats each day, with men and women segregated on different sides of the room. Goenka, considered to be The Teacher, is not present at most camps but all instructions on the meditation technique as well as the hour and a half discourses every night are taped recordings of his voice. At the front of the room sat the Assistant Teacher, a radiologist by profession from the neighboring district of Tehri. His face was round, and usually the only part of his body we could see. Like everyone else in the room, he had a big shawl wrapped around himself, and sat

*Dhamma, or dharma, was the word that Buddha used to describe his entire teaching. It has many meanings, including the law of nature. The Dhamma Hall was the room in which all meditation occurred.

cross-legged and straight-backed. His body was perfectly still for hours on end, his face serene.

There were only seven students in our class, as it is a new Vipassana Center and this camp was only the third to be given since its opening. My husband and I were the only "new" students, meaning that this was our first course, and Alan was the only foreigner. Our co-students were Mr. and Mrs. Goel — he a surgeon — probably in their 50s; Ravi, a young pediatrician from Ludhiana; Mr. Mehta, a limber, yoga-practicing retired engineer in his 70s; and another small woman who is a college professor and always sat as straight-backed and still as the Assistant Teacher.

Daily Schedule

Mornings:

4:30 - 6:30	Meditation
6:30 - 7:00	Breakfast
7:00 - 8:00	Rest
8:00 - 9:00	Group Meditation
9:00 - 11:00	Meditation
11:00 - 12:00	Lunch

Afternoons and Evenings:

12:00 - 1:00	Rest
1:00 - 2:30	Meditation
2:30 - 3:30	Group Meditation
3:30 - 5:00	Meditation
5:00 - 6:00	Tea Break
6:00 - 7:00	Group Meditation
7:00 - 8:30	Dhamma Discourse
8:30 - 9:00	Meditation

The beginning and end of sessions and breaks were signaled by the sounding of a gong. The daily schedule was tightly regulated (see box). New students must agree at the outset to stay for the entire ten days. During the course, as I personally experienced, there are countless times when a student yearns to leave out of boredom, frustration, or just fear of what is to come. This is expected; but enduring these feelings is essential to a student's understanding of a fundamental concept of Vipassana: the changing, impermanent nature of our physical and mental structures.

The first three and a half days are spent "sharpening the mind" through *Anapana* meditation, a technique whereby one merely observes one's own respiration. *Anapana* is not about regulating breath, as one might do in yoga, but merely observing, knowing our own natural breath. One who has never meditated before might think this is child's play. Certainly I did not think it could be too difficult. But, first of all, there is the schedule. This is not about observing one's breath for a minute, for ten minutes, or even for an hour. This is about observing one's breath for 10.5 hours a day for three and a half days! Second, one must consider what exactly it means to observe one's breath. One is not looking at the flow of breath from the nose to the rest of the body. *Anapana* asks you to limit your observation to only your nose, the small triangular space including inside and outside of the nostrils. On the second day, I was thrilled to hear that we would be "expanding this area of observation." The expansion? The triangular space was enlarged to include the area above the upper lip, below the nostrils, and we were now asked to feel where our breath touched as it went in and out. And on the third night, in order to prepare our minds for the extreme concentration and alertness needed to practice Vipassana, we were asked to now narrow down this area of focus to simply that small area below the nostrils and above the upper lip.

It never occurred to me that I would be asked, at any time in my life, to become aware of which nostril my breath came in and out of, or where, on this small area the size of my forefinger, I felt my breath touching. It seemed crazy, but in fact, was far less so than the nature of the human mind. The human mind, as I observed, is flighty, transient, jumping, wandering, inattentive. It is difficult to keep an untrained mind concentrated on any single thing for a length of time, much less for a few minutes. Goenka, in one of his discourses, talked about how the mind wanders in two directions: the past and the future; it is staying in the present moment that is so intolerable. Because I have rarely regretted past decisions in my life, I have always thought that this meant I lived in the present; to my surprise, I found otherwise. No, my mind did not often wander to the past, but it did drift constantly into the future: to thoughts of future plans, or imaginary future conversations. No matter how hard I tried to focus my attention on my respiration, I could not seem to keep my mind in the present. The realization that underneath my well-cultivated intellect lay an untrained and inattentive mind was both confronting and disturbing.

This battle with my mind also clearly demonstrated the reason for the vow of silence each student was required to take. If one can at least quieten the outer inputs that come through conversation with people, then one source of thoughts for the mind has been eliminated. The next task then is just to focus on quieting the inner conversations that are stimulated by thoughts of the past and future. (The other reason for silence is the natural tendency to compare one's experience with others; this is completely contradictory to the essence of Vipassana that whatever one experiences within the framework of one's body is the Truth.)

The actual technique of Vipassana meditation is introduced on the fourth day. A student is asked to simply observe the sensations on one's body, dividing the body into small pieces about three inches wide. One moves from top to bottom, and then later, from bottom to top. The sensations that I experienced (different for every student) ranged from gross pain from holding a position for a long period of time or sometimes for no apparent reason, to heat or cold, to itching, tickling, or

to a gentle pulsing, throbbing or vibrating. The reason for observing body sensations is that mind and matter are interrelated; Buddha taught that thoughts that arise in the mind will also manifest themselves as sensations on the body. To observe the mind, which is abstract and not visible in itself, one can observe the sensations that arise on the body as a result of thoughts.

In observing these sensations, one understands that sensations are generally of two kinds: pleasant (*e.g.* a relaxed, gentle throbbing) or unpleasant (*e.g.* pain, heat or cold). Our reactions to these sensations, according to Buddha, are of two respective types: craving and aversion. These reactions are based on habit patterns which have been established in the unconscious mind from past reactions. For example, when we feel an itchy sensation, we might automatically respond by scratching, because we are conditioned to avert an unpleasant sensation like itchiness. Vipassana teaches that if we instead simply observe the itchiness objectively, we would see that it, like everything in nature, is impermanent, passing. Moreover, in not reacting to sensations like this, we start to break the conditioned habit patterns of the unconscious mind.

The understanding of impermanence (*anicha*) was fundamental to Buddha's enlightenment. According to *Dhamma*, the universal law of nature, everything is impermanent. The world, composed of infinite subatomic particles of matter, is constantly changing. The physical and mental structures of the body and mind are also so. And yet, humans react to these impermanent sensations as if they either can be made permanent or are permanent. It is these reactions of desire and hatred that are the root causes of our suffering, said Buddha. If one can develop equanimity with the understanding of impermanence, one can be liberated from all miseries.

In order to gain enlightenment, Buddha taught, one must understand that the cause of our suffering is in our thoughts of craving and aversion, not in our physical or vocal actions. To alleviate suffering, we must train our minds to remain equanimous to all emotions, thus breaking past reaction patterns and purifying the mind of its negativities. This is the essence of Vipassana meditation. The first step of the process is to observe and remain equanimous to sensations we feel within our own bodies. It is immaterial what sensations one experiences; the yardstick of progress in Vipassana is only the degree to which one is able to observe these sensations with equanimity, with a lack of craving for different sensations or aversion for current sensations. The next step is developing equanimity to the vicissitudes of daily life. This equanimity is the measure of one's progress on the path to enlightenment.

It is, as I found, extremely difficult to observe one's sensations equanimously. During the first three days of the camp, we had been "allowed" to change postures during meditations. However, on beginning Vipassana, we were instructed that we should use *adithana* or "strong determination" to maintain the same position during the three daily one-hour group meditation sessions. This instruction is primarily to facilitate the observation of sensations such as pain, and to understand the power of mind over matter. In the beginning, it seemed impossible. My knees screamed with pain after about 15 minutes, my feet felt as if they would fall off from numbness, and I developed searing pain in the muscles between my shoulder blades from trying to keep my back straight. Yet, I found that as I watched, the pain in my knees lessened, and eventually disappeared. The pain in my back disappeared. And, on the seventh day, I was able to move away from using the wall as support, in spite of a long-standing problem with a missing disk in my lower spine that has caused me severe pain.

I also experienced, on the sixth day, what it feels like when a deeply hidden emotion (termed a *sankara*) emerges from the unconscious mind. It was during an evening meditation session. I was in a peaceful, calm and attentive state, when I suddenly felt a wave of emotion which was very clearly anger. I was not angry, nor was I thinking of anything that made me angry, and yet all the sensations that go with anger were present: a rapid heartbeat, flushed body, some perspiration. I watched the entire emotion equanimously, and saw that within five minutes or so, it had gone. Just as a balloon loses its air when popped, observation acts as a needle that is poked into the bubble of emotion. Not only does the equanimous observation of anger diffuse one's reactions in the moment, but it also starts to dissipate the energy of past *sankaras* of anger in the unconscious mind, dissolving old habit patterns and hidden emotions.

As a student gets more attentive to body sensations, there is a point at which one feels the entire body pulsing or vibrating as if energy is actually flowing through the body. There is no leap of faith required; no "supreme bliss" achieved, no hallucinations or imaginations. It is just the reality of one's own body. The later point at which one feels complete dissolution of all solid parts of the body into their individual pulsing masses of subatomic particles apparently leads to an understanding that even the body is constantly changing, thus the attachment that humans have to "I", "me" or "mine" becomes meaningless. By eliminating craving, aversion and ignorance, the root causes of suffering are eliminated, thereby leading people to become progressively more enlightened, or less attached to their own egos. The stage where one is without craving or attachment is *nirvana* (or *nibbana*), which literally means no (*ni*) craving (*vana*).

By holding that one's peace of mind is directly related to the degree to which one is able to remain equanimous, or not react, Buddha's teachings place complete responsibility for an individual's happiness in his or her hands. In the ever-increasing "shame-and-

blame," victim mentality that prevails in our society and allows people to believe they are not responsible for their own happiness, this message is invaluable. Goenka, offering an example, says: Imagine that someone has wronged you. You take the case to court and it takes seven years to make its way through several appeals. Finally, it reaches the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court rules in your favor, and penalizes the wrong-doer. The highest court in the nation has just agreed that you are not to blame, you have been wronged, and yet *you* are the one who has had no peace of mind for seven years, and *you* are the one who will continue grumbling for the next seven about the ineffective court system and the fact that your monetary award is barely sufficient to cover your legal fees. Another example is given. A man who was angry at Buddha for taking his children away from their traditional religious rites and rituals and into the Noble Path of meditation went to Buddha and verbally abused him. Buddha just smiled. The old man became even more furious. "Why are you smiling? Did you not hear what I said?" Buddha then replied, "Old man, if someone gives you a gift and you refuse to accept it, where does the gift go?" The old man angrily replied, "What a stupid question! Of course, if you do not accept the gift, the bearer of the gift will have to take it back and keep it." "Exactly," said Buddha. "If you come bearing this gift of insults, and I refuse to accept it, *you* will have to keep it. *You* will be miserable, not I." We, and we alone, are responsible for our own happiness, and we alone can liberate ourselves from miseries.

One of Vipassana's greatest strengths is that it is universal and nonsectarian. There is no condition that one must convert to a religion in order to be "saved" — salvation comes through one's own actions in this very life. The technique as well as the theory is always explained in a language that anyone, from a poor peasant to a high intellectual, can understand. There are no rites or rituals, no one God. Even Buddha simply means "enlightened one", and anyone who achieves enlightenment can be a Buddha. Buddha apparently was very careful to request that when people paid tribute to him, they would salute all those who had ever been or were currently Buddhas. As a Hindu, I found nothing in Vipassana to contradict Hinduism; yet, it certainly (and, I feel, correctly) pushed me to question some of those very "truths" I have always accepted because of upbringing or tradition. For those who understand its teachings, this is bound to happen. And yet, one is not asked to give up one's beliefs or religion, but rather question them, whether it be Hinduism, Christianity, Judaism, Islam or Buddhism. Through this questioning, the beliefs that one finally chooses to accept will be grounded in understanding rather than blind faith. The Noble Path, therefore, is about a right way of living, *not* about religion.

Vipassana advocates that one should not react to or be overpowered by emotion. At the beginning of the course, I found this to be a stumbling block. I imagined this path leading to a world full of dispassionate, equanimous robots who had no strong beliefs that would move them to action. A discussion with the Assistant Teacher clarified for me that that the human mind is actually naturally full of compassion. Harnessing this compassion, rather than giving way to our passions, actually conserves energy and allows us to work efficiently, effectively, and with full commitment to our beliefs. There is, I began to see, nothing that can be achieved with passion that cannot be achieved with compassion. In Goenka's words, "Vipassana will make life full of action, but free from reaction."

Mahatma Gandhi, though he did not practice Vipassana *per se*, shared much in common with its teachings. He too, in his search for truth, had seen the value in making the mind equanimous. In his autobiography, *My Experiments with Truth*, Gandhi talks about the difficulty of this task:

"But the path of self-purification is hard and steep. To attain to perfect purity one has to become absolutely passion-free in thought, speech and action; to rise above the opposing currents of love and hatred, attachment and repulsion. I know that I have not in me as yet that triple purity, in spite of constant ceaseless striving for it...To conquer the subtle passions seems to me to be harder far than the physical conquest of the world by the force of arms...I know that I have still before me a difficult path to traverse."

Vipassana, as a technique, is more scientific than spiritual. It is a logical, rational process in which one is asked to believe only that which one experiences. There is no place for imagination in Vipassana. Unlike many other meditation techniques that focus on visualization of objects, idols or places to concentrate the mind, Vipassana focuses on observing only that which is: one's own respiration and body sensations. While other meditation techniques may utilize what are called "vibrating mantras" such as the chanting of the word *aum*, Vipassana believes that such mantras, while effectively concentrating the mind, take away from observing one's own fundamental truths and the goal of purifying the mind.

The logical nature of Vipassana can sometimes lead to people embracing the theory without maintaining the practice. However, Goenka is entirely clear that this method will not provide any benefit in daily life. If one accepts the theories at an intellectual level but does not practice meditation to purify the mind, one is simply playing "intellectual games." Goenka assures that if Vipassana is practiced properly, it will provide results in this life, and soon. The practice consists of daily meditation, as well as bringing the principles of equanimity into daily situations. Buddha's teachings, including the technique of Vipassana, are entirely centered around individuals developing their own wisdom through personal experience.

It has been almost a week since we finished the camp. Strikingly, our single daily hour of meditation seems almost as challenging as the rigorous ten hours we practiced during the camp, a testimony to the difficulty of maintaining awareness of the present moment given the rush of daily life. The theory of walking the path to wisdom and enlightenment, of dealing equanimously with the vicissitudes of life makes perfect sense to most individuals. The practice, however, requires *adithana,* resolve, courage. Unlike other "personal growth" courses I know of in the States where one builds to a feverish pitch of excitement, I came out of this retreat feeling a calm determination but knowing that the path is difficult and filled with the obstacles of our own unconscious minds. This was only the beginning of a long journey.

The last morning of the camp, the sky was filled with tufts of clouds, their edges tinged with the pink of daybreak. I stood for a few minutes in the peace of outer and inner quiet. A crow, its blackness accentuated by the blue and white sky, sailed away in the distance. It was time to leave, to begin the process of finding refuge within myself. ❑

Current Fellows & Their Activities

Hisham Ahmed. Born blind in the Palestinian Dheisheh Refugee Camp near Bethlehem, Hisham finished his A-levels with the fifth highest score out of 13,000 students throughout Israel. He received a B.A. in political science on a scholarship from Illinois State University and his M.A. and Ph.D. from the University of California in Santa Barbara. Back in East Jerusalem and still blind, Hisham plans to gather oral histories from a broad selection of Palestinians to produce a "Portrait of Palestine" at this crucial point in Middle Eastern history. [MIDEAST/N. AFRICA]

Adam Albion. A former research associate at the Institute for EastWest Studies at Prague in the Czech Republic, Adam is spending two years studying and writing about Turkey's regional role and growing importance as an actor in the Balkans, the Middle East and the former Soviet bloc. A Harvard graduate (1988; History), Adam has completed the first year of a two-year M. Litt. degree in Russian/East European history and languages at Oxford University. [EUROPE/RUSSIA]

Cynthia Caron. With a Masters degree in Forest Science from the Yale School of Forestry and Environment, Cynthia is spending two years in South Asia as ICWA's first John Miller Musser Memorial Forest & Society Fellow. She is studying and writing about the impact of forest-preservation projects on the lives (and land-tenure) of indigenous peoples and local farmers who live on their fringes. Her fellowship includes stays in Bhutan, India and Sri Lanka. [SOUTH ASIA/Forest & Society]

William F. Foote. Formerly a financial analyst with Lehman Brothers' Emerging Markets Group, Willy Foote is examining the economic substructure of Mexico and the impact of free-market reforms on Mexico's people, society and politics. Willy holds a Bachelor's degree from Yale University (history), a Master's from the London School of Economics (Development Economics; Latin America) and studied Basque history in San Sebastian, Spain. He carried out intensive Spanish-language studies in Guatemala in 1990 and then worked as a copy editor and Reporter for the Buenos Aires Herald from 1990 to 1992. [THE AMERICAS]

Sharon Griffin. A feature writer and contributing columnist on African affairs at the *San Diego Union-Tribune*, Sharon is spending two years in southern Africa studying Zulu and the KwaZulu kingdom and writing about the role of nongovernmental organizations as fulfillment centers for national needs in developing countries where governments are still feeling their way toward effective administration. She plans to travel and live in Namibia and Zimbabwe as well as South Africa. [sub-SAHARA]

John Harris. A would-be lawyer with an undergraduate degree in History from the University of Chicago, John reverted to international studies after a year of internship in the product-liability department of a Chicago law firm and took two years of postgraduate Russian at the University of Washington in Seattle. Based in Moscow during his fellowship, John is studying and writing about Russia's nascent political parties as they begin the difficult transition from identities based on the personalities of their leaders to positions based on national and international issues. [EUROPE/RUSSIA]

Pramila Jayapal. Born in India, Pramila left when she was four and went through primary and secondary education in Indonesia. She graduated from Georgetown University in 1986 and won an M.B.A. from the Kellogg School of Management in Evanston, Illinois in 1990. She has worked as a corporate analyst for PaineWebber and an accounts manager for the world's leading producer of cardiac defibrillators, but most recently managed a $7 million developing-country revolving-loan fund for the Program for Appropriate Technology in Health (PATH) in Seattle. Pramila is spending two years in India tracing her roots and studying social issues involving religion, the status of women, population and AIDS. [SOUTH ASIA]

Teresa C. Yates. A former member of the American Civil Liberties Union's national task force on the workplace, Teresa is spending two years in South Africa observing and reporting on the efforts of the Mandela government to reform the national land-tenure system. A Vassar graduate with a *juris doctor* from the University of Cincinnati College of Law, Teresa had an internship at the Centre for Applied Legal Studies in Johannesburg in 1991 and 1992, studying the feasibility of including social and economic rights in the new South African constitution. While with the ACLU, she also conducted a Seminar on Women in the Law at Fordham Law School in New York. [sub-SAHARA]