



Rev S N Goenka Ji with others in meeting at Yangon, Burma, 1960s.

## A SLOW DANCE WITH SILENCE

### REJI VARGHESE SHARES HIS EXPERIENCE AT A TEN-DAY-LONG VIPASSANA MEDITATION CAMP



Imagine a place cut off from the rest of civilisation — no TV, no phones, no newspapers, no reading or writing material. You wake up at 4 a.m. and meditate for 10 hours a day. The last meal of the day is lunch at 11 a.m. You live here in complete silence with a hundred other people who you can't talk to for ten days. Sounds crazy? Welcome to the world of Vipassana meditation, a boot camp for the mind.

If I knew how tough it was going to be, I would have chickened out, but my friend said, "Think of it as a slow dance with silence." With that thought in mind, I checked into the meditation centre in a rural area about six km from Pallavaram on a sultry Wednesday evening and surrendered my phone, my wallet and myself for ten days.

We were woken up the following morning by a loud gong, and at 4.30 a.m., the meditation started. There were just a few simple instructions given on how to observe your breath as it comes and goes. I thought to myself this is going to be easy — no mantras to learn, no auto suggestion — just observe the breath.

A few moments later, I realised how difficult it really is to 'just observe the breath'. In a few breaths, my mind had wandered; it had drifted to some old memories which triggered thoughts, plans and worries about the future. I was hurtling at great speed between the past and the future, unable to concentrate on the simple task.

Vipassana means insight, or to see things as they really are. The first insight I had was about silence. I realised that even in a quiet environment conducive to meditation, the main noise was not from the outside, but from within my head. My mind was chattering non-stop — commenting, planning, worrying, judging, liking and

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## Goenkaji explains

**Q: I get sensations on some parts but I don't get sensations on many parts of the body.**

**A:** If you cannot feel sensations in some parts, there is no need to worry or to feel disappointed. Wherever you don't get sensations, stop there for a minute, or at the most for two minutes. If there is still no sensation and if it is a covered part, feel the touch of the cloth; if it is an uncovered part, feel the touch of the air, the touch of the atmosphere. Just be aware of whatever you can feel at such parts.

As you continue to work in this way, you will start to feel the natural body sensations. There should be no disappointment; just accept the present reality as it is. If you cannot feel any sensation at this moment in this part, just accept, "There is no clear sensation here. This too is impermanent; this will also change." Then your mind will remain equanimous.

**Q: You said that we should try to be aware of sensations all the time. What should we do after returning home? Besides the morning and evening sittings, when can we meditate?**

**A:** If Once you go home, you need not meditate throughout the day. During the course, we learn to develop continuity of awareness to sharpen the mind. At home, you need to practise meditation only in the morning and evening.

While working, your entire attention should be on your work, so that you do it successfully.

However, if you have some free time, try to be aware of sensations or respiration with open eyes. In this way, you can make best use of your time.

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BIRTH  
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As Queen Mahamaya was strolling in the park at Lumbini, she extended her hand to hold the branch of a Sal tree, a son was born to her. This Bodhisatta having fulfilled all the perfections was foremost in the world. It was his last birth.

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disliking. The absence of external sound is not what silence is about.

An even bigger insight was to find that the tool I use to make decisions every day — my mind — was not in my control. During the evening discourse, it was explained that the problem of a wandering, uncontrolled mind was universal, and it needed to be trained with patience and persistence. Far from being a slow dance with silence, this was turning out to be a wrestling match with my mind.

Vipassana is not only about silence or a heightened sense of awareness. It's about observing reality as it is, and along with the pleasant sensations of quietness and calmness, unpleasant sensations also came up. Bad memories, painful experiences, people and events that caused me hurt and pain, surfaced. But instead of reacting with

bitterness and hurt as I had done before, I watched the emotions rise, and after a while, they passed away.

For 10 days, I see-sawed between silence and pain, the pleasant and unpleasant, and I did what I was asked to do — observe. The last morning, we were getting ready to go back to the real world; a world of noise, phones, emails, texts, arguments and the constant struggle of just trying to get by. My mind felt as if it had been put through a washing machine and all the muck had been cleaned out.

I looked around to say goodbye to silence, my elusive dance partner, and I couldn't find her. It took awhile to realise that she was with me. At the end of 10 days, I realised that the dance and dancers had become one.

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Following Mega courses are scheduled on:-

**i)** Sunday 29th September, 2019 on the occasion of 5th death anniversary of Goenkaji coinciding with Sharad Purnima; and **ii)** Sunday 12th January 2020, on the occasion of death Anniversary of Mataji & Sayagyi U Ba Khin, will be organised from 11 am till 4 pm. Non-meditators may participate in the 3 pm discourse with prior registration and avail of immense benefit by meditating in group.

Sangha-Dana on 29th September 2019 and 12th January 2020 are being organized at 9 am respectively. Those who wish to take part in the meritorious Sangha-dana may

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