

## S. N. Goenka

**MR. SATYA NARAYAN GOENKA**, the foremost lay teacher of Vipassana meditation in the tradition of the Venerable Ledi Sayadaw, was a student of the late Sayagyi U Ba Khin of Burma (Myanmar). The technique which Mr. Goenka teaches represents a tradition that is traced back to the Buddha. The Buddha never taught a sectarian religion; he taught Dhamma—the way to liberation—which is universal. In the same way, Mr. Goenka's approach is totally nonsectarian. For this reason, his teaching has a profound appeal to people of all backgrounds, of every religion and no religion, from every part of the world.

### **From Businessman to Spiritual Teacher**

Mr. Goenka was born in Mandalay, Myanmar in 1924. He joined his family business in 1940 and rapidly became a pioneering industrialist establishing several manufacturing corporations. He soon became a leading figure in Myanmar's large influential Indian community and for many years headed such organizations as the Burma Marwari Chamber of Commerce and the Rangoon Chamber of Commerce & Industry. He often accompanied Union of Burma trade delegations on international tours as an advisor.

In 1962, when the newly installed military government of Myanmar nationalized all industry in the country, Mr. Goenka retired from his business activities. In 1969, after fourteen years training with his teacher, he was appointed a teacher of Vipassana and devoted his life to spreading the technique for the benefit of all humanity. In the same year he came to India and held his first ten-day meditation course. In a country still sharply divided by caste and religion, Vipassana was widely and easily accepted because of its nonsectarian nature.

In 1974 Mr. Goenka established the Vipassana International Academy at Dhamma Giri, Igatpuri, near Bombay, India, where courses of ten days and even longer duration are held continuously. In 1979, he began travelling abroad to introduce Vipassana in other countries of the world.

Mr. S. N. Goenka has personally taught tens of thousands of people in more than 300 ten-day courses around the world, in India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Japan, U.S.A., Canada, U.K., France, Switzerland, Myanmar, Thailand, Australia, and New Zealand. In response to ever-growing demand, he started training assistant teachers to conduct these ten-day residential courses on his behalf. So far, he has trained more than 600 assistant teachers who have conducted courses, with the help of thousands of volunteers, in more than ninety countries including the People's Republic of China, Iran, Muscat, UAE, South Africa, Zimbabwe, Mongolia, Russia, Serbia, Taiwan, Cambodia, Mexico and all the countries of South America. More than seventy centers devoted to the teaching of Vipassana have been established in twenty-one countries. There is never any charge for the teaching in these courses, which



today have grown to over 700 courses annually around the world. Neither Mr. Goenka nor his assistants receive any financial gain from these courses.

A prolific writer and poet, Mr. Goenka writes in English, Hindi and Rajasthani. His works have been translated into many languages around the world. He has been invited to lecture by institutes as diverse as the Dharma Drum Mountain Monastery (of Ven. Sheng Yen) in Taiwan, the World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland, and the Millennium World Peace Summit at the United Nations.

### **Teaching for all sections of society: from prisoners to civil servants**

Vipassana meditation has been taught to prison inmates and staff in many parts of India as well as the United States, Britain, New Zealand, Taiwan and Nepal. There are permanent Vipassana centers in two Indian prisons. More than ten thousand prisoners have attended ten-day Vipassana courses in prisons around the world. One thousand prisoners participated in a ten-day course conducted by Mr. S. N. Goenka in Tihar Jail, Delhi in April, 1994. What started in a big way in Tihar has now spread all over India. In February 2000 there was a course for about 500 prisoners in Yerawada prison in Pune. Convinced of its positive results the Government of India has recommended that every prison in the country should organize ten-day Vipassana courses for inmates. As a result hundreds of prisoners continue to participate in Vipassana retreats every month. Thousands of police officers have attended Vipassana courses in the center at the Police Academy, Delhi and in other centers throughout India.

Men and women of all walks of life have practised Vipassana. They include the highly educated and the illiterate, the wealthy and the impoverished, aristocrats and slum-dwellers, devout followers of every religion and followers of none, the powerful and the powerless, the aged and the young. Courses have been set up for the disabled, including the blind and leprosy patients. Other programs have focused on school children, drug addicts, homeless children, college students and business executives.

Governments of Indian states of Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh, giant corporations such as Oil and Natural Gas Commission, apex research institutes such as the Bhabha Atomic Research Institute, national training institutes such as Indian Institute of Taxation encourage employees to attend Vipassana courses as part of their ongoing job training.

### **Commitment to Peace**

Mr. S. N. Goenka believes and teaches that for peace outside (among nations, among different communities) there must be peace inside. Individuals must learn the Art of Living in order to live peaceful lives. This is the heart of his teaching to people from different backgrounds in his workshops.

One important consequence of his work in India has been his subtle but telling influence on inter-religious harmony. Thousands of Catholic priests, Buddhist monks, Jain ascetics, Hindu *sanyasis* have come and continue to come to his courses along with other religious leaders. The universality of the Buddha's teaching of Vipassana is providing the platform for bridging ideological spans without any threat of conversion.

Mr. S. N. Goenka recently made history in India when he and a top Hindu leader, H H Shankaracharya Shri Jayendra Saraswati of Kanchi met and together exhorted Hindus and Buddhists alike to forget past differences and live in harmony. But mere exhortations cannot alone bring the desired result. Only when individuals undertake to remove from within themselves the blocks to peace and harmony can it begin to flower outside and affect society. For this reason Mr. S. N. Goenka remains emphatic that the practical application of meditation is what will empower man to achieve inner as well as outer peace.