
DHAMMA SEVA GUIDE

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Sabba dānam dhammadānam jināti
— THE GIFT OF DHAMMA EXCELS ALL OTHER GIFTS

Dear travelers on the path of Dhamma,

This Seva guide is our humble attempt to provide comprehensive understanding on various aspects of Dhamma seva; a reference book to derive the best benefits from seva (service).

It is a systematic compilation of selected articles/ discourses addressed by our Guruji, Mr. S. N. Goenka on Dhamma seva, including questions & answers and code of conduct.

This guide encompasses the following aspects of Dhamma seva:

1. Why to serve
2. How to serve
3. Things not to do
4. Relationship between Dhamma servers
5. How to overcome obstacles
6. Procedural aspects of serving at Vipassana Centres

With profound metta,

-VRI team

In brief – Seva outline

Why to serve

(refer pg. 10-14)

- To get established in Vipassana
- To develop *paramis*
- To learn how to apply Vipassana in daily life
- Out of gratitude

How to serve

(refer pg. 15-18)

- With love, sympathetic joy & humility
- By following instructions of conducting teacher
- With the volition to help students without expecting anything in return
- By being a living example of Dhamma

Things not to do

(refer pg. 19-20)

- Breaking any of the *Sila* (precepts)
- Back-biting /gossiping/ idle talk or arguments
- Advising students about anything related to Vipassana technique

Relationship between servers

(refer pg. 22-23)

- Like a family
- Senior servers should guide juniors with love & compassion
- Junior servers should have respect for seniors
- In the Centre: discuss Dhamma matters or observe noble silence

In brief - overcoming obstacles

Conflicts between servers	<u>Do's:</u> • Meditate • Talk directly to concerned server with <i>metta</i> • If not resolved, both go to conducting teacher	<u>Dont's:</u> • Talk about incident/server with others • Gossip • Generate negativity towards that server
Conflict with students	<u>Do's:</u> • Politely stop the conversation • Apologies, if necessary • Immediately inform conducting teacher • Meditate to regain equanimity	<u>Dont's:</u> • Argue with student • Talk about incident/student with others • Confront student on day 10
Feeling negative	<u>Do's:</u> • Meditate • Talk to conducting teacher • Retire from seva for some time	<u>Dont's:</u> • Continue serving • Talk to other servers • Gossip

Self-reflection questionnaire

Dealing with self

- More equanimous?
- More independent?
- More gratitude?
- Less egoistic?
- Taking criticism constructively?

Dealing with people

- Less judgemental?
- More forgiving?
- More loving & compassionate ?
- Serving selflessly?
- Happy at success of others?

Dealing with situations

- More balanced?
- Content in every situation?
- Understanding '*anicca*'?
- Equanimously finding solutions without blaming anyone?

ESSENCE OF DHAMMA SEVA

The time has ripened for the spread of Dhamma, to help many come out of misery. We are fortunate to have the opportunity to help others in Dhamma. By doing so, we help ourselves develop our own *pāramis* (wholesome qualities) in order to reach the goal of liberation. There is no greater service than Dhamma service, since it enables miserable people to go to the root of their problems and emerge from all sufferings. Whatever the service one gives - whether guiding others in Dhamma or providing for their physical needs - its value depends only on the volition with which it is given. The most exalted task is worthless if performed with arrogance. The most menial task is invaluable if performed with humility and love. Therefore the base of service must be the actual practice of Dhamma in order to ensure the proper results¹.

– S. N. GOENKA

¹ VRI newsletter Vol.1 No.4/5 July, 1991

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SECTION I: INSPIRATIONAL



Essence of Buddha's teachings

(Published in VRI newsletter Vol. 19, No. 10: 4 October 2009)

For progressing in Vipassana meditation, a student must keep knowing *anicca* as continuously as possible. The Buddha's advice to monks is that they should try to maintain their awareness of *anicca*, *dukkha* or *anattā* in all postures. Continuous awareness of *anicca*, and so of *dukkha* and *anattā* is the secret of success.

The last words of the Buddha just before he breathed his last and passed away into *Mahā Parinibbāna* were: ***"Decay (anicca) is inherent in all component things. Work out your own salvation with diligence."***

This is in fact the essence of all his teachings during the forty-five years of his ministry. If you will keep up the awareness of the *anicca* that is inherent in all component things, you are sure to reach the goal in the course of time.

—Sayagyi U Ba Khin

HOW TO SERVE YOUR SELF-INTEREST

(Excerpt from discourse given by Guruji, Mr. S. N. Goenka, in December, 1985 at Dhamma Giri. Published by VRI in the book titled 'For the benefit of many')

Earlier today I read the Code of Discipline for Dhamma Servers once again; it is a beautiful article, full of Dhamma. You all must have read it, so there is no use in my repeating it now. But if the pamphlet is left to lie in the office and you don't follow the guidelines, it won't help. You must observe this code of discipline.

You are here on Dhamma land for your own benefit. Even when you are serving others, you are doing so for your own benefit. I want every student of Vipassana to be selfish. This is the Buddha's teaching: be selfish. But understand where your real self-interest lies: Your mental action is the real action, not the physical or vocal action; this is what you learn in Dhamma. If your mental action is unwholesome, you will harm yourself, even if you appear to be giving enormous service to the students.

There are two kinds of Dhamma service. In the first type you don't come in contact with meditators; for example, you might water plants, whitewash buildings or clean bathrooms. The second kind involves direct contact with students. Whether your service brings you in contact with students or not, you should get the maximum benefit from your stay here.

When you serve in a way that doesn't involve contact with meditators, keep examining how much sympathetic joy you are generating. While you are cleaning or whitewashing, you should joyfully think, "The first impression for a new student arriving at this Dhamma centre is so important. My service will help so many who visit!"

When you are watering plants, you should be filled with joy. You should feel a rapport with each plant and as you tend it lovingly you will begin to feel how it generates vibrations of love, of Dhamma. It is not worth doing any job here unless you generate sympathetic joy while you are working. If you think, "Well, I want to sit continuous courses but the management won't allow me, and I don't have enough money to stay in a hotel, so I will stay and serve with negativity," you will pollute the atmosphere of this Dhamma land and simultaneously harm yourself.

If your service brings you directly in contact with students, you must keep examining yourself, "By this service, am I harming or helping myself?" Be selfish. Sometimes during the one-hour group sitting, I see a new meditator, perhaps without understanding or perhaps with real cause, get up and leave. Then I am sorry to see a frowning Dhamma server run after the student. How will this server behave outside? I know very well that whatever is said will be full of negativity. If you have a frown on your face, what sort of service can you give? You cannot help others

while generating negativity. Even if this person has broken a rule deliberately, without respect for the discipline of the centre, how will your frown help? You need a smile on your face and compassion for the student. You are here to serve this person. If this point is missed, your service is not service.

I receive letters from students who came to Dhamma Giri saying they admire the Dhamma servers so much, many of whom work with such joy, compassion and *mettā*. But I also receive critical letters saying, "Was this an example of Dhamma? The server I met was full of negativity, there was no trace of *mettā* in that person, and I found the whole atmosphere to be full of negativity." If a server generates negativity towards a student, the student will feel surrounded by negativity. By mistake, perhaps out of your enthusiasm to serve, you have created a barrier for someone to progress in Dhamma. This person will never return to a Dhamma centre, and in turn will become a barrier for others who might have come, by saying, "At those centres people talk of Dhamma but do not apply it."

By behaving harshly, without a trace of love, compassion or sympathy for the students, you are not serving them no matter how hard you work. Instead you should feel, "By my service I can encourage those students who have storms to face. I passed through the same storms when I came to my first courses." Don't overlook the fact that students break rules, but be human in dealing with them. If you work in this way, then you are serving not only them but yourself.

Now a few words about segregation: I know most Western students come from a culture where segregation is foreign and you can't understand why it is needed. But the Buddha was very particular about segregation; this is part of the teaching. We find not one or two but hundreds of cases where *Māra* [the forces opposed to liberation] creates difficulties for meditators in this area. Your biggest enemy is passion. Without too much difficulty, a meditator can usually take out the other defilements one after another, but the defilement of passion is so deep that it is difficult to root out.

There are two possible dangers. One is that *māra* might stimulate the seed of passion in you. You might talk with somebody of the other sex without any wrong intention, but once you start talking, standing nearer and nearer to that person, the proximity might stimulate passion. This is a hospital where a deep mental operation is being carried out and because of this operation; *sankhāras* of passion may be stirred up. While talking to and standing near someone of the opposite sex, the *sankhāras* may overpower you. You could make a mistake that would be very harmful for you, and also for the other person.

Now, a few words about the use of *dāna*: If while giving service, a Dhamma server wastes even a cent of Dhamma money, he or she is not giving real service. People

have to work hard to earn money honestly, so it is difficult for them to give it away. Therefore any donation that has been given must be properly used. A Dhamma server must not waste a cent of it.

Keep these three points in mind: Your service must be true Dhamma service that gives you real benefit. Segregation has to be observed; it is in your own interest. And lastly, make best use of the contributions received; this is also in your interest.

When you work for your own benefit you will find that you have also started helping others deeply. Dhamma is for one's own good and also for the good of others, for one's own benefit and also for the benefit of others. Dhamma is for one's own liberation and also for the liberation of others.

Make best use of the Dhamma while you are staying here. If your service is good, continue, and improve it wherever possible. If you have not yet learned how to give good service, learn now, give good service and gain merits. Gain purity of mind, develop your *pāramīs*, and come out of all your miseries.

Bhavatu sabba mangalam

We serve merely for the sake of serving, without expecting anything in return. And the result will be to create an atmosphere of love, good-will and purity, which will help those who come now, and in later generations, to grasp the Dhamma and find real peace.

Therefore, Dhamma service is an extraordinary opportunity. Perform it to liberate yourselves and to help others be liberated from defilements, from bondages, from misery. Be the torchbearers of the Dhamma to dispel the surrounding darkness of ignorance and suffering.

-S. N. GOENKA

(Published in VRI newsletter Vol.1 No.4/5 July, 1991)

ROLE OF DHAMMA SEVA IN DEVELOPMENT OF PARAMIS

(The following is excerpted and adapted from a talk given by Guruji, Mr. S. N. Goenka to Dhamma servers at hamma Dhara & Dhamma Giri in July 91 & April 92 and published by VRI in the book titled 'For the Benefit of Many')

Dhamma service is actually one of the *pāramīs*, because a server contributes to the *dāna* of Dhamma. People come here to receive the Dhamma and your service ensures that this gift of Dhamma can occur. Of the ten *pāramīs*, *dāna* is one of the greatest, and *dharmadāna* is the highest form of that *dāna*. The Buddha said, *Sabbadānam dharmadānam jināti*—the highest *dāna* is the *dāna* of Dhamma.

When you give *dāna* to a hospital, a school or an orphanage, people benefit—it is a *pāramī*—but later on the recipients will once again lack medicine, food or clothing. If you give monetary *dāna* to a place where Dhamma is taught, it is more valuable because the Dhamma gives people the path from misery to liberation, and nothing compares to that. So donating to an organization or a centre that gives Dhamma is a valuable *pāramī*, but the *pāramī* of *dāna* is even more valuable when you give physical service.

What, after all, is *pāramī*? It is just a mental volition. Before you give a monetary *dāna* you feel, "Ah, wonderful, my money will be used for a very good purpose!" That volition becomes your *pāramī*. But when you give service for ten long days—whether you are cooking, managing, or sweeping the floor—you keep thinking, "Look, by my service so many people are benefiting. How can I help so that they can work peacefully, without any obstacles or hindrances?" This wonderful volition continues for the whole ten days.

So the *dāna* of Dhamma service is higher than the *dāna* of money. We don't say that giving money is bad, no. It is important, it is good, and it gives very good results. But giving service is many times more fruitful because you generate *mettā* and goodwill for such a long time. Every moment during service your *pāramī* is developing. So to me Dhamma service is the greatest *dāna*.

But when you serve on a ten-day course you have an opportunity to develop all the other *pāramīs* too, not only the *dāna pāramī*.

While giving service there will be times when the students are agitated and negative because a deep operation is going on, and they throw this agitation at you. You smile and understand, "Oh, this person is miserable." You don't react with negativity but generate *mettā* for them, so your *khanti pāramī*, the *pāramī* of tolerance, becomes stronger, and your *mettā pāramī* becomes stronger. Then two or three times a day you meditate and your *paññā pāramī* is strengthened.

Similarly for the *pāramīs* of *sīla*, *nekkhamma* [renunciation], *virīya* [effort], *sacca* [truthfulness], *adhitthāna* [strong determination], and *upekkhā* [equanimity]—all are strengthened by giving Dhamma service.

When you sit a course you deal only with yourself, but when you serve you learn how to deal with others and how to live properly in the outside world. You may have practiced Vipassana diligently and maintained equanimity towards all sensations, but you are not supposed to live in a glass house. You have to apply Dhamma in the world outside, and that is not easy. In a centre you are in a protected, healthy, wholesome atmosphere and that gives you the strength to apply Vipassana to face the vicissitudes of life.

I know from my own experience and also from that of others who have started giving Dhamma service that meditation improves after serving. The meditation is deeper, the equanimity is stronger, and there is more *mettā*. This is because the *pāramīs* have increased by giving Dhamma service. In every way Dhamma service gives wonderful results.

APPLICATION OF DHAMMA IN LIFE

(Following is excerpt from an article 'serving yourself and others', by Goenkaji, published in Vol.13 No.6 June 14, 2003)

In daily life, there are many ups and downs. To maintain equanimity despite these vicissitudes and to generate love and compassion is the training of Vipassana. When Vipassana meditators give Dhamma service, they learn in a healthy atmosphere how to apply Dhamma in life.

While giving service you come across different types of meditators. Some may be lazy or talkative or rude. Sometimes an immature Dhamma server reacts in kind and replies rudely, or behaves like a jailer. But you are trained not to become angry in spite of any mistakes made by the students. Instead, you try maintain a balanced mind filled with love and compassion. You keep making mistakes and correcting yourself, and in this way you learn how to face unwanted situations equanimously. In the atmosphere of a Dhamma centre or course it is easier to learn how to face various situations, and then, you can start to apply this wisdom in your daily life. This is a training ground for each Dhamma server to learn how to live a good life.

The Buddha said that a good Dhamma person has two qualities: the quality of selflessly serving others and the quality of gratitude for help received. These two qualities are rare. A Dhamma server has the opportunity to develop both. You practice serving others without expecting anything in return; and you start to develop a feeling of gratitude towards the Buddha, who discovered this wonderful technique and gave it to the world, and towards the chain of teachers, who maintained this technique in its pristine purity. One feels like repaying the debt of gratitude by serving others in order to fulfil the mission of the Teacher.

One feels so happy and contented serving others and helping them to come out of their misery. Therefore, Dhamma service works both ways: It helps others and it helps the Dhamma server too.

RIGHT VOLITION OF DHAMMA SERVICE

(Excerpt from a talk by Guruji, Mr. S. N. Goenka for old students at Dhamma Nāsikā on March 5, 2005 & published in VRI Newsletter Vol.15 No.4 April 24, 2005)

The purpose of Dhamma service is not to inflate the ego. If you are free from ego, then the work you do will be Dhamma work, Dhamma service. Whoever works here – whether one is a teacher or a trustee – all are Dhamma servers. Whoever works in a Vipassana centre must work with the volition to serve, not for the sake of financial remuneration or livelihood. Each person who works in a Vipassana centre is a Dhamma server. They come here with this volition of service, the volition that their service may benefit others. They serve with this wholesome volition full of love and compassion.

Dhamma service means to serve those who come to meditate. You should serve them with love and humility, not like a paid employee. It is possible that the Vipassana trust may give an honorarium to some Dhamma servers who are serving fulltime. This should not be considered as salary. There are no salaried employees in a Vipassana centre. Everyone is a Dhamma server. The volition is to get an opportunity to gain the merits of service. The merit of service is invaluable.

Sabba dānaṃ dhammadānaṃ jināti – the gift of Dhamma excels all other gifts. The gift of Dhamma is superior to all other gifts because when one gets the gift of Dhamma, both the present and the future get better.

One who teaches Dhamma is certainly giving the gift of Dhamma (*dhamma-dāna*). But all the Dhamma servers are also giving the gift of Dhamma. How can a Dhamma teacher teach Dhamma without the help of Dhamma servers? How can courses be organized without the help of Dhamma servers?

At so many places, I see how the cooks prepare food with so much love, so much mindfulness. They work with so much dedication. The food for so many persons has to be prepared in time. How can they be so devoted if they are working only for a salary? Likewise, the others also perform their duties with love, goodwill and compassion. If the Dhamma servers serve selflessly, then the Dhamma land will be a true Dhamma land. Otherwise, it will become the industry of an industrialist; it will become the business of a businessman.

The teachers, organizers, trustees and servers of the present generation as well as those of future generations should be very mindful about this. Pure Dhamma has returned to our country after such a long interval. It should be preserved and should benefit people for a long time. How can this be achieved? Even if one receives some honorarium for subsistence, the principle that should always be followed is that he or she must be a meditator. He should have completed at least one ten-day course

and should take courses from time to time. He should meditate regularly, morning and evening.

People will be reborn on this Dhamma land. I was also born twice. The first time I was born from the womb of my mother. And the second time, when I received Dhamma, it was like the second birth of a bird. A bird is born twice. The first time it is born in the form of an egg. The second birth is the real birth when the shell of the egg gets broken.

Similarly, people will be born here in the real sense by breaking the shell of ignorance. Dhamma will arise in them; wisdom will arise in them. Just as in the meditation centres all over the world, one must serve here with right understanding and the volition to serve so that more and more people get maximum benefit! This should be the sole purpose of Dhamma service. It makes no difference whether the Dhamma servers are rich or poor, learned or illiterate, men or women. What is most important is that their mental volition must be full of love and compassion.

Bhavatu sabba maṅgalaṃ – May all beings be happy!

How to observe Noble speech

(Excerpt from a discourse given by Guruji, Mr. S. N. Goenka, 'how to strengthen a Dhamma Centre', in August 1988 at Dhamma Mahi, France. It is published by VRI in the book 'for the benefit of many')

At a Dhamma centre, as on a course, there should be no singing or chanting, not even chanting words of Dhamma. Convince questioners of the value of this rule by explaining that when one chants or sings one generates vibrations, and only those who have been properly trained should do that at a centre. One who has been trained to chant goes deep inside with equanimity and feels sensations whenever there is a pause. This kind of chanting generates healthy vibrations. However developed a student may be, he or she has not been properly trained to chant and should refrain from doing so. Singing is out of the question.

Between courses, gossip and chatter should be discouraged. You do not have to maintain silence but there should be only such talk as is necessary. There are four kinds of verbal impurity: telling lies, backbiting, slanderous talk, and indulging in idle chatter. Although you don't have to be silent, be careful that this fourth impurity is avoided along with the others.

THE PURPOSE OF DHAMMA SERVICE

(The following is excerpted and adapted from a talk given by Guruji, Mr. S. N. Goenka to Dhamma servers at Dhamma Giri in June 1986. Published by VRI in the book titled 'For the Benefit of Many')

What is the best way to serve? Without knowing this, servers cannot help others or themselves; instead they may even do harm. However noble the Dhamma mission, there can be no true benefit in helping to fulfill it if the volition of the Dhamma server is not sound. The service will not be beneficial if it is given to inflate the server's ego, or to obtain something in return—even if only words of praise or appreciation.

When you give service see that you meditate at least three times a day for one hour each, to keep yourself fit to give service. If you find your mind is agitated or full of negativity and it cannot work properly, then you had better stop serving and join the course. First help yourself! Understand, unless you have helped and strengthened yourself in Dhamma, you can't help others. A lame person cannot support another lame person; a blind person cannot guide another blind person. Strengthen yourself so that you can give wholesome service.

Every action of yours is important because the students examine the actions of the teacher, the management and the Dhamma servers, and if they find these people are short-tempered, they will be discouraged. But if they find the teacher, management and the servers are peaceful, smiling, helpful, and full of love, without a trace of ill will, they will certainly be encouraged to walk diligently on the path.

Therefore, understand that you have a great responsibility. Every action of yours on this Dhamma land should be such that you generate devotion and confidence towards Dhamma in the mind of the newcomers, and you help to strengthen devotion and confidence in the minds of the old students.

Just as you expect a new student to observe the precepts and the discipline of the course, in the same way see that you yourself observe the discipline and silence as much as possible. Say only what is essential. Speak politely, lovingly, truthfully, helpfully. You have to observe all the Five Precepts while you are giving Dhamma service. If you break any precept you will harm the atmosphere of the centre and harm others.

A Dhamma server is not a jailer but a servant, a Dhamma servant. The students are not prisoners. Of course the rules and discipline must be observed, but if a student is found breaking them, it does not mean the Dhamma server should take action against this person with the mentality of a jailer towards a convict. No, there must be sympathy.

If somebody has broken a rule, it shows that this person is either ignorant or highly agitated. A good Dhamma server will generate a feeling of sympathy and think, "This person is suffering; how can I help him come out of suffering?" This cannot be done by punishment or using hard words full of anger and hatred—that would be like throwing fire on somebody already burning. This person requires soothing words of sympathy, love and compassion.

At times, you might have to use strong words but see that they are not hurtful, filled with ill will. If by mistake you have spoken wrongly, see how quickly you realize this and develop love and compassion towards the same student. Seek an opportunity to meet this person and smilingly speak a few words of love and compassion. If this person was hurt by your wrong action, the bad effect will be washed away and the student will start working once again with enthusiasm.

Understand that even though you are a server, you are always a student. Therefore never try to play the role of the teacher. If a student approaches you with any difficulty pertaining to the meditation, don't be enthusiastic to give advice on the technique to the student. In a humble way take the person to the teacher and let the teacher answer questions pertaining to the technique.

While serving you can give suggestions, but don't expect that these suggestions will be accepted by the manager or by the teacher. Don't inflate your ego or you will start to harm yourself. If you feel agitated because your suggestions have not been accepted, you are not learning Dhamma. You are here to serve, not to dominate others.

Do not expect anything in return for your service. When you insist that your suggestions should be accepted, you are expecting something. Keep understanding: "I am here to serve, that is all. I am learning how to serve without expecting anything in return; I am serving with only one volition: to see that more and more people benefit. May I be a good example to them; this will help them and will help me also."

Understand that while serving, you are learning how to apply Dhamma in day-to-day life. After all, Dhamma is not an escape from daily responsibilities. By learning to act according to the Dhamma in dealing with the students and situations here in the little world of a meditation course or centre, you train yourself to act in the same way in the world outside.

Despite the unwanted behavior of another person, you practice trying to keep the balance of your mind, and to generate love and compassion in response. This is the lesson you are trying to master here. You are a student as much as those who are sitting the course.

May all of you who give Dhamma service become strengthened in Dhamma. May you learn to develop your goodwill, love and compassion for others. May all of you progress in Dhamma to enjoy real peace, real harmony, real happiness.

Bhavatu sabba mangalam — May all beings be happy!

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF DHAMMA SERVICE

(The following discourse was given by Guruji, Mr. S. N. Goenka at Dhamma Giri on January 25, 1999 and published by VRI in the book titled 'For the Benefit of Many')

Giving Dhamma service is a great responsibility. While fulfilling it, you must understand you have your own limitations and work within them. A Dhamma server should help students with management problems but should not give them meditation advice. Only those who have been authorized may teach Dhamma. When you are developed enough to give such instructions, I will happily make you assistant teachers, but it takes time to ripen in Dhamma; until then continue to work within the limitations set for you.

When a student is in trouble, you might feel you could say the same thing the teachers would say, for example, "Have slightly hard breathing. Bring your attention to the extremities." But you must never give instructions because there is a danger that although you might be helpful, you might also give guidance that goes totally against Vipassana. This is what happened last night when a student complained of intense pain and an experienced Dhamma server said, "I will give you acupuncture to relieve your pain." What a serious mistake!

A few months back I got a call saying someone on a course in the Himalayas had practiced Reiki on a student who was in a great deal of pain. These two events were serious errors. In both cases I had to take strong action in order to protect the purity of the technique.

Understand why this is so important: Impurities are brought to the surface by the practice of Vipassana, and only Vipassana can eradicate them—no other technique. If you mix another technique with Vipassana, it will become predominant and Vipassana will be forgotten.

In the past this happened in India. Our research tells us that for the five hundred years following the Buddha, Vipassana was taught in its pristine purity. Then unscrupulous people started to add to it, and whatever was added became predominant and Vipassana faded away. Even during the short time I have been teaching, some people who had benefited after taking several courses decided to use this wonderful technique in their own religion. But if they had taught it exactly as we

do, their sectarian views would have had no place, so they added the instruction to observe the soul. The result was that within ten years their students came to me and said, "Now we don't observe sensations, we only observe the soul." They have totally lost Vipassana. And the same thing will happen here in centres if anything is added. The Dhamma has returned to India after two thousand years and is now spreading around the world. My responsibility as the Teacher is to see it is maintained in its pristine purity for the benefit of future generations. One who is at the helm has to be very careful; therefore I cannot tolerate certain activities that harm the spread of Dhamma. The first such activity is sexual misbehavior, and the second is instructing students to add anything to Vipassana.

I know most of you would never make such mistakes, but you should learn from yesterday's incident and ensure such things never happen in the future, wherever you give service.

My teacher, Sayagyi U Ba Khin, wouldn't allow me to take my first course because I had told him I intended to join it in order to rid myself of migraine. Even though I was a leader of the Indian community in Rangoon, a leader of the business community, the president of the Chamber of Commerce, a multi-millionaire, Sayagyi said, "No, I can't teach you. If you wish to learn a high spiritual path I will help you, but if you come for relief from a physical disease then leave; you are devaluing Dhamma."

If a student is in pain and we start using acupressure, Reiki or anything else, we would harm the students; we would devalue Dhamma. Be careful. This advice is given with *mettā* to help you understand: Wherever you give any Dhamma service, you must ensure that no server ever gives meditation instructions to students and nobody advises students to mix anything else with Vipassana. I am sure you yourselves won't do such things.

THE DHAMMA-DANA OF MEDITATION

(From a talk given by Guruji, Mr. S. N. Goenka on March 14, 1982 at Dhamma Thalī to inaugurate construction of its pagoda. Published in VRI newsletter Vol.14 No.1 January 7, 2004)

There are so many ways to help. One can help physically. One can help by speaking. If someone has wealth, then one can help financially. These are essential; however, the best way to help is by meditating.

The more old students meditate on this land, the more their efforts will become instrumental in the welfare of many. During the lifetime of Sayagyi U Ba Khin, there were so many of his students who had reached the stage of *nibbāna* and could experience it whenever they wished and as long as they wished. One could ask, "How did they become free of their debt to the Dhamma, the centre and their teacher?" Others might give *dāna* of physical effort or wealth or other kinds of help to become free of their debts. But for such good meditators, it is proper that at least once a week, they visit this place and sitting in some cell for an hour, they enter *nibbāna*. That is such a great service. The whole centre will become suffused with those Dhamma vibrations. The Dhamma strength of the vibrations generated by each meditator will depend upon how much he or she has meditated and what stage has been attained, but all right effort will benefit those who come to the centre.

Building meditation cells for students is in itself a very meritorious act. However, it is much more meritorious for every meditator to come here once a week to meditate. This is the *dāna* of our meditation. It is the *dāna* of our meditative vibrations that will purify the land, will ripen it, thereby making it easier for future students to gain more with less effort. Each person has to put in effort, has made an effort to fight the defilements within. However, if the environment around is charged with Dhamma vibrations, the effort becomes easier. If the vibrations at the centre are impure, they hinder progress, making it more difficult for the student to face the defilements within. They prevent the student from working properly. If students receive the protection of pure Dhamma vibrations, they gain great strength, great help.

Meditators should generate *mettā* within. By meditating at the centre, we certainly benefit ourselves. We cannot say how many others will also benefit by our meditation, will gain from our work. People will benefit for centuries. They will automatically become attracted to a place where Dhamma vibrations arise. So long as the Dhamma is maintained in its pure form, people will meditate and benefit for centuries.

Love, which alone is a means for the unity of mankind, must be supreme, and cannot be so unless the mind is transcendently pure. — Sayagyi U Ba Khin

(Published in VRI newsletter Vol.2 No.1 January, 1992)

THE FAMILY OF DHAMMA

(The following is excerpt from the closing address by Guruji, Mr. S. N. Goenka at the Annual Meeting, Dhamma Thalī on January 5, 1993. Published in VRI newsletter Vol.15 No.5 May 23, 2005)

The report that I just heard was quite positive. The Dhamma family is growing and this is a good sign. But at the same time it must grow in a proper way. The whole Vipassana family should be united without any disharmony.

For this, the relationship between all dhamma servers is very important. This is the inner core of the Vipassana family, from the Dhamma servers to the deputy teacher. If you quarrel, where is Dhamma? You are representatives of Dhamma. People examine Dhamma through you. They watch whether you live a proper life, and if so, they decide that Dhamma is good. If you are not living a proper life, they see it as all a sham. You will harm people by turning them away from the path of Dhamma.

If a senior finds that there is some defect in a junior, work with compassion and love, thinking, “I must take out whatever is wrong in this person. I must not drive this person away.” So with all the love try to rectify, to correct that junior. And juniors must always have respect for the seniors. This is the tradition from the time of Buddha.

Similarly, anybody who is appointed earlier to these responsibilities will be seen as senior and respected by someone who is appointed later. Understand that he or she represents Dhamma, I bow down to Dhamma, and I have to respect them. Only then will the whole atmosphere be very congenial. The seniors must always have love and compassion for the juniors.

At the time of the Buddha, of course there were some who didn’t work properly, but the vast majority of his followers, the monks, etc., were renowned for this. *Samaggā* – “Look how they live united. Wonderful!” They were the followers of Buddha, the sons and daughters of Buddha.

You are all sons and daughters of Buddha, because you were given a new life with the words of Buddha. How did those sons and daughters of Buddha live? *Samaggā* – united, free from quarrelling, with happiness inside.

Sammodamānā – all the time there is compassion, love, happiness, cordiality. That is the quality of a Buddha *putra* or a Buddha *putri*, of a son or daughter of the Buddha. *Avivadamānā* – they don’t quarrel. If they quarrel then they are not fit sons and fit daughters.

And then, *khīrodakībhūtā* – *Khīra* means milk, *udaka* means water: they live like water and milk joined together; you can’t separate them. And they look at each other with

love in their eyes, not with anger, not with red eyes. Their eyes are full of honey – *piyacakkhū*, so much love. This is their way of life. That ideal must be continued. This is the code of the family: *khīrodakībhūtā*. The whole family must live like brothers and sisters. Be an example; be ideal.

It is a very big responsibility. This is the time when the expansion is starting. Now it will be very rapid, there is no doubt. We are very fortunate that we have an opportunity to serve in such a good atmosphere. This is a time when there is so much unhappiness; Dhamma has to arise. It has started arising. It will grow, in spite of us, whether we are there or not. Now we have an opportunity to serve and to develop our own *pāramīs*.

Make use of the opportunity for your own good and for the good of others; for your own liberation and happiness, and for the liberation and happiness of others. May Dhamma grow! May the people of the world come out of their miseries! May there be peace, harmony and happiness!

Importance of Noble silence

(Excerpt from an article published in VRI newsletter Vol. 25, No.5, 4 May, 2015)

Monasteries of the Buddha were not called ‘ashrams’, but were called ‘*vihāras*’ or meditation centres. These *vihāras* maintained strict discipline, out of the compassionate understanding, that all those living there would benefit from working hard to purify their minds. Most meditators were self-disciplined.

The most important rule in a *vihāra* regarding talking was:

“Dhammī vā kathā ariyo vā tunhībhāvo.”– (MI.273 Pāsārāsi Sutta)
– **Either discuss Dhamma or observe noble silence.**

How to discuss Dhamma matters?

When a meditator sought guidance from a senior regarding the theory and practice of Dhamma, he would receive proper answers. Either the questioner would ask questions, or the guide would answer; and only one would speak at a time. As a result, the peaceful atmosphere of the meditation centre was not disturbed. Had they begun to debate or argue, then uproar would have ensued. But when one asked a question, others present were able to listen to the answer, and their doubts would also be removed. They accordingly received Dhamma inspiration, observed noble silence and were absorbed in meditation.

Due to immeasurable merits gained by such dedicated monks, the number of meditation centres (*vihāras*) increased. More people were able to learn and practice Vipassana and come out of suffering. That is why so much importance was given to observing noble silence. Observing noble silence was conducive to deep meditation and contributed to the Dhamma splendor of the *Sangha*.

THE PRACTICE OF METTĀ BHĀVANĀ IN VIPASSANA MEDITATION

(Published in VRI newsletter Vol.2 No.2 April, 1992)

The practice of *mettā-bhāvanā* (meditation of loving-kindness) is an important adjunct to the technique of Vipassana meditation - indeed, it is its logical outcome. It is a technique whereby we radiate loving-kindness and goodwill toward all beings, deliberately charging the atmosphere around us with the calming, positive vibrations of pure and compassionate love. The Buddha instructed his followers to develop *mettā* so as to lead more peaceful and harmonious lives and to help others to do so as well. Students of Vipassana should follow that instruction because *mettā* gives us a way to share with all others the peace and harmony we are developing.

The commentaries state: "*Mijjati siniyhati' ti mettā* - that which inclines one to a friendly disposition is *mettā*". It is a sincere wish for the good and welfare of all, devoid of ill-will. "*Adoso 'ti mettā* - non-aversion is *mettā*." The chief characteristic of *mettā* is a benevolent attitude. It culminates in the identification of oneself with all beings, a recognition of the fellowship of all life.

To grasp this concept at least intellectually is easy enough, but it is far harder to develop such an attitude in oneself. To do so, some practice is needed, and so we have the technique of *mettā-bhāvanā*, the systematic cultivation of goodwill toward others. To be really effective, though, *mettā* meditation must be practised along with Vipassana meditation. So long as negativities such as aversion dominate the mind, it is futile to formulate conscious thoughts of goodwill, and doing so would be a ritual devoid of inner meaning. However, when negativities are removed by the practice of Vipassana, goodwill naturally wells up in the mind; and emerging from the prison of self-obsession, we begin to concern ourselves with the welfare of others.

For this reason, the technique of *mettā-bhāvanā* is introduced only at the end of a Vipassana course, after the participants have passed through the process of purification. At such a time meditators often feel a deep wish for the well-being of others, making their practice of *mettā* truly effective. Though limited time is devoted to it in a course, *mettā* may be regarded as the culmination of the practice of Vipassana.

Nibbāna can be experienced only by those whose minds are filled with loving-kindness and compassion for all beings. Simply wishing for that state is not enough; we must purify our minds to attain it. We do so by Vipassana meditation; hence the emphasis on this technique during a course.

As we practice, we become aware that the underlying reality of the world and of ourselves consists of arising and passing away every moment. We realize that the

process of change continues without our control and regardless of our wishes. Gradually we understand that any attachment to what is ephemeral and insubstantial produces suffering for us. We learn to be detached and to keep the balance of our minds in the face of any experience. Then we begin to experience what real happiness is; not the satisfaction of desire nor the forestalling of fears, but rather liberation from the cycle of desire and fear. As inner serenity develops, we clearly see how others are enmeshed in suffering, and naturally this wish arises, "May they find what we have found: the way out of misery, the path of peace." This is the proper volition for the practice of *mettā-bhāvanā*.

Mettā is not prayer; nor is it the hope that an outside agency will help. On the contrary, it is a dynamic process producing a supportive atmosphere where others can act to help themselves. *Mettā* can be omni-directional or directed toward a particular person. In either case, meditators are simply providing an outlet; because the *mettā* we feel is not 'our' *mettā*. By eliminating egotism we open our minds and make them conduits for the forces of positivity throughout the universe. The realization that *mettā* is not produced by us makes its transmission truly selfless.

In order to conduct *mettā*, the mind must be calm, balanced and free from negativity. This is the type of mind developed in the practice of Vipassana. A meditator knows by experience how anger, antipathy, or ill-will destroys peace and frustrates any efforts to help others. Only as hatred is removed and equanimity is developed can we be happy and wish happiness for others. The words "May all beings be happy" have great force only when uttered from a pure mind. Backed by this purity, they will certainly be effective in fostering the happiness of others.

We must therefore examine ourselves before practicing *mettā-bhāvanā* to check whether we are really capable of transmitting *mettā*. If we find even a tinge of hatred or aversion in our minds, we should refrain at that time. Otherwise we would transmit that negativity, causing harm to others. However, if mind and body are filled with serenity and well-being, it is natural and appropriate to share this happiness with others: "May you be happy, may you be liberated from the defilements that are the causes of suffering, may all beings be peaceful."

This loving attitude enables us to deal far more skillfully with the vicissitudes of life. Suppose, for example, one encounters a person who is acting out of deliberate ill-will to harm others. The common response - to react with fear and hatred-is self-centredness, does nothing to improve the situation and, in fact, magnifies the negativity. It would be far more helpful to remain calm and balanced, with a feeling of goodwill even for the person who is acting wrongly. This must not be merely an intellectual stance, a veneer over unresolved negativity. *Mettā* works only when it is the spontaneous overflow of a purified mind.

The serenity gained in Vipassana meditation naturally gives rise to feelings of *mettā*, and throughout the day this will continue to affect us and our environment in a positive way. Thus, Vipassana ultimately has a dual function: to bring us happiness by purifying our minds, and to help us foster the happiness of others by preparing us to practice *mettā*. What, after all, is the purpose of freeing ourselves of negativity and egotism unless we share these benefits with others? In a retreat we cut ourselves off from the world temporarily in order to return and share with others what we have gained in solitude. These two aspects of the practice of Vipassana are inseparable. In these times of violent unrest, widespread malaise and suffering, the need for such a practice as *mettā-bhāvanā* is clear. If peace and harmony are to reign throughout the world, they must first be established in the minds of all the inhabitants of the world.

ANICCA

(Published in VRI newsletter Vol.1 No.4/5 July, 1991)

There is no cause without an effect and there is no effect without a cause.

The law of *KAMMA* (moral causation) is supreme and inevitable. What you have now is the result of what you have done in the past.

Until we get rid of the forces of *KAMMA* which belong to us once and for all, and enter the supreme *NIBBĀNA*, there is bound to be some trouble or other, here and there, during the remainder of our existence which we must put up with, using the strength of *ANICCA* (impermanence).

ANICCA will surely prevail upon them and you will keep yourself in good stead inspite of all these.

ANICCA is power. Thorns in the way are inevitable. Make use of the power of *ANICCA* with diligence and there will be peace with you.

-Sayagyi U Ba Khin

I have given you *ANICCA* as the Dhamma for refuge. For so long as you are with *ANICCA*, you are with me. *ANICCA* when properly developed will solve almost all your problems. It might not even be necessary for you to ask questions for answers. As the appreciation of *ANICCA* grows, so will the veil of ignorance fade away. When the way becomes clear for the Right Understanding, doubts and fears will disappear automatically. You will then see things in the true perspective

- Sayagyi U Ba Khin

(Published in VRI newsletter Vol.1 No.4/5 July, 1991)

THE JOY OF DHAMMA SERVICE

(By a Dhamma server. Published in VRI Newsletter vol. no. 11, no. 8, August 4, 2001)

Upon completing my last course, I decided that I wanted to make Vipassana a larger part of my life. I chose to serve a course and it was a far more expansive experience than I had ever expected.

I knew that serving would be an excellent way to give *dāna*, and to help others to experience the wonders of Vipassana, yet I had no idea how much it would expand my practice. Serving changed my conception of Vipassana from an intense personal experience, to a community experience more easily integrated into my life.

After sitting a course, it was difficult for me to incorporate the practice into daily life. Familiar surroundings and interactions at home quickly distracted me, and the old habit patterns of my mind came streaming forth. While serving, the novel setting and emphasis on awareness allowed me to utilize the practice throughout the day. Each day I became more conscious of my sensations outside the Dhamma hall.

Serving was different than sitting a course in that my interactions with others brought forth very obvious issues that I frequently faced in life. Confronting those limiting patterns, while still sitting three hours a day and living within a supportive atmosphere, gave me a better understanding of how not to react to, but to grow from, those difficulties.

Spending ten days alongside similarly motivated individuals was surprisingly inspiring. Having shared these experiences, I now feel part of a supportive community. I know from direct interaction that I am not the only one out there who finds this practice extremely difficult and wonderfully beautiful. It makes each step down this path a little easier, each stride a little longer.

I cannot explain the joy I experienced seeing ninety-one meditators completed the course. I guess that is the power of *dāna*. It was wonderful to see so many smiling faces, to hear of their paths and newfound liberation. It is amazing how powerful it is to share the most precious part of my life.

Looking back at the end of the course, I was surprised by the depth and breadth of experience those ten days provided. No one told me I would grow and expand my practice in such directions. I hope that your life will offer you the opportunity to have this experience and to deepen your practice. May you be happy.

SECTION II: CODE OF CONDUCT

SELFLESS SERVICE

Selfless service is an essential part of the path of Dhamma, an important step in the direction of liberation. The practice of Vipassana gradually eradicates mental impurities until inner peace and happiness are attained. At first, this liberation from misery may be only partial, but still it brings a deep sense of gratitude for having been given the wonderful teaching of Dhamma. With these feelings of love and compassion, the wish naturally arises to help others come out of their misery. Serving on courses provides an opportunity to express this gratitude by helping people as they learn Dhamma, without expecting anything in return. In selflessly serving others we also serve ourselves by developing the ten *parami* and dissolving the habit of egotism.

WHO IS QUALIFIED FOR DHAMMA SERVICE

Students who have successfully completed a ten-day Vipassana course with Goenkaji or one of his assistant teachers, and who have not practiced any other meditation technique since their last Vipassana course, may give Dhamma service. Servers are also encouraged to be trying to maintain their daily practice at home.

THE CODE OF DISCIPLINE

Unless otherwise stated here, Dhamma servers should, as far as possible, follow the rules in the Code of Discipline for Meditation Courses. Those rules also apply to servers. In certain instances, however, relaxation of them is necessary and permitted.

THE FIVE PRECEPTS

The Five Precepts are the foundation of the Code of Discipline: To abstain from killing any being, to abstain from stealing, to abstain from sexual misconduct (meaning, at the meditation centre, to abstain from all sexual activity whatsoever), to abstain from wrong speech, to abstain from all intoxicants.

These Five Precepts are mandatory for everyone at the centre and must be observed scrupulously at all times. It is expected that those serving are also seriously trying to maintain the Five Precepts in their daily lives.

ACCEPTING GUIDANCE

Dhamma servers should follow the instructions of the Teachers, the assistant teachers, and the centre administration and management committees, being amenable to the advice and guidance of those who are elder in meditation or in

service. Changing established practices or initiating projects without authorization or against the directions of those responsible will cause confusion, duplication of efforts and be a waste of time and material. Insisting on working independently of any direction is inconsistent with the spirit of cooperation and congeniality which pervades the Dhamma atmosphere. By following instructions servers learn to set aside personal preferences and prejudices and do what is needed for the good of the meditators and the efficient and harmonious running of courses and the centre. Problems should be resolved openly and with humility. Positive suggestions are always welcome.

RELATIONS WITH MEDITATORS

In every situation Dhamma servers should defer to the welfare of the students who are sitting a course. Courses and centres are for meditators; they are the most important people, doing the most essential work. The job of a Dhamma server is simply to assist the meditators in whatever way possible. Students should therefore be given preference for accommodation and food. Unless they have pressing duties, Dhamma servers should not take their food until after the students have been served, and they should not sit with students in the dining hall. Dhamma servers should use the bathrooms for bathing and laundry at times other than the students, and they should go to bed only after the students have done so, in case a problem should arise at that time. For all other facilities as well, students must be given preference, and servers should avoid disturbing them as much as possible.

DEALING WITH STUDENTS

Only course managers should interact directly with the students--female managers with female students, male managers with male students. They need to be aware whether the students are following the discipline and timetable, and may have to speak with those who are not doing so. This task should always be done in a friendly and compassionate manner, with the volition of encouraging the meditators to overcome their difficulties. Words should be phrased mindfully, in a positive way--never harshly. If one is unable to do so, a co-worker should deal with the situation. Managers must always take care to inquire about rather than assume the cause of some apparent misconduct.

All Dhamma servers should be respectful and polite, and available to help when approached. It is usually helpful to ask the student's name. Servers should try to refer students to the proper person with a minimum of talking or distraction--either the assistant teacher or the course manager--depending on the nature of the problem. Dhamma servers should not attempt to answer students' questions pertaining to meditation, but should suggest that such questions be asked of the assistant teachers. Assistant teachers should be kept informed of any contact the management has with

students. The private affairs of students should never be unnecessarily discussed with others serving in the kitchen or elsewhere.

MEDITATION PRACTICE FOR SERVERS

Dhamma servers should serve conscientiously, without wasting time, giving full attention to their work; this is their training. At the same time, they must also maintain their meditation practice. Every server must meditate at least three hours daily; if possible, this should be during the group sittings at 8:00 a.m., 2:30 p.m. and 6:00 p.m. In addition, every evening that an assistant teacher is present, there is a short meditation session for servers in the Dhamma hall at 9:00 p.m. These meditation periods are essential for the well-being of the Dhamma servers. Servers on a course should practice Vipassana, using *anapana* when needed. Dhamma servers may change their positions during group sittings if they wish.

At all times Dhamma servers have a responsibility to observe themselves. They should try to be equanimous in all circumstances and aware of their mental volition. If unable to do so because of tiredness or any other reason, they should meditate or rest more, no matter how pressing their work seems. Servers should not imagine themselves to be indispensable. One can only give proper Dhamma service when there is peace and harmony within. If the base is not positive, the work that is done will not be truly beneficial. Servers staying at the centre for longer times must periodically sit a 10-day course, completely laying aside all work, and not expecting any special preference or privilege as a result of having given Dhamma service.

MEETING THE ASSISTANT TEACHERS

Servers should discuss any problems or difficulties with the Teachers or the assistant teachers. The proper time to raise questions about serving or general matters is after the 9:00 p.m. evening meditation session for servers. Private interviews can also be arranged. In the absence of assistant teachers, servers should bring questions or difficulties to the centre management.

SEPARATION OF MEN AND WOMEN

This separation is always in effect, both during and between courses. While absolute separation of the sexes is not practical for the servers due to the close working conditions, this situation should not be misunderstood as an opportunity for men and women to socialize beyond what is necessary to perform their Dhamma service. This rule is all the more important for couples.

PHYSICAL CONTACT

In order to maintain the pure meditative atmosphere and the introspective nature of the practice, and to set a good example for the students, all Dhamma servers must

avoid any physical contact with meditators and other servers of either sex. Both during and between courses, this rule is always to be followed.

NOBLE SPEECH

The Noble Silence of the meditators should be respected by the Dhamma servers. They should try to be silent within the meditation compound and speak only when necessary. Even if students are not within earshot or there is no course in progress, it is important not to disturb the silence needlessly.

When speaking, servers must practice Right Speech, refraining from:

- Speaking lies or anything less than the truth.
- Harsh language or rude words. Someone practicing Dhamma should always be polite and soft-spoken.
- Slander or backbiting. There should be no criticism of others arising from one's own negative feelings. A problem should be brought to the attention of the person concerned or to the assistant teachers or centre management.
- Idle gossip, singing, whistling or humming.

Noble Speech is, without a doubt, much more difficult than silence. It is therefore a very important training for anyone following the path of Dhamma.

PERSONAL APPEARANCE

In the eyes of others, Dhamma servers are representatives of the Teaching and the centre. For this reason, the appearance of the servers should always be neat and clean, and nothing should be worn which is tight, transparent, gaudy or revealing, or that might attract undue attention (such as shorts, short skirts, tights and leggings, sleeveless or skimpy tops). Jewelry should be kept to a minimum or not worn at all. This attitude of modesty prevails at all times.

SMOKING

It is assumed that one who has accepted Dhamma is no longer involved in the use of intoxicants such as alcohol, hashish, marijuana, and so forth. The use of tobacco in any form is also totally forbidden, indoors or outdoors, either within or outside of the meditation compound. Neither should Dhamma servers leave the property to smoke.

FOOD

The centre provides simple, wholesome, vegetarian meals, without subscribing to any particular food philosophy. The Dhamma servers, like all students, are expected to accept what is offered in a spirit of renunciation.

Because meals prepared and served at courses are completely vegetarian, food containing alcohol or liqueur, eggs or food containing eggs (some baked goods,

mayonnaise, etc.), or cheese with animal rennet, may not be brought to the centre. In general, any food from outside should be kept to an absolute minimum.

Servers observe Five Precepts and may therefore have a meal in the evening if they wish. Fasting is not permitted.

READING

Servers who would like to keep abreast of current events may read newspapers or news magazines, but only in the rest areas set aside for Dhamma servers and out of sight of the students. Anyone wishing to read more than the daily news is invited to choose books from those that appear on the recommended reading list or from the Dhamma library at the centre. Novels or other books read for entertainment are not permitted.

OUTSIDE CONTACTS

Servers are not required to divorce themselves entirely from the outside world. While serving on a course, however, they should leave the site only on urgent business and with the permission of the assistant teachers. Telephone calls should be kept to a necessary minimum. Private visitors may come to the centre only with the prior permission of the management.

KEEPING THE CENTRE CLEAN

It is the duty of the Dhamma servers to help keep the centre neat and clean. Besides the kitchen and dining hall, the residences, meditation hall, bathrooms, offices and other areas may need attention. Servers should also be prepared, if necessary, to do occasional chores unrelated to food preparation and cleaning.

USE OF CENTRE PROPERTY

Every student of Vipassana undertakes to abstain from taking what is not given. Dhamma servers must therefore be careful not to appropriate centre property by taking anything for their quarters or personal use without first obtaining permission from the management.

STAYING AT THE CENTRE FOR EXTENDED PERIODS

With the agreement of an assistant teacher, serious students may stay at the centre for longer periods in order to become more established in the theory and practice of Dhamma. During this time they will be able to meditate on some courses and serve on others, as decided in consultation with the teachers and management.

DANA

The Code of Discipline for meditators states that there are no charges at courses or centres, either for the Teaching, or for board, lodging, or other facilities provided to students. This applies to Dhamma servers as well.

The teaching of pure Dhamma is always given freely. Food, accommodation and other facilities are offered as gifts made possible by the donations of students of the past. Dhamma servers should recognize this and give their service making best use of the gifts received, so that the donors may receive maximum benefit from their *dana*. Servers in turn can develop their own *dana parami* by giving donations according to their means, for the benefit of others. Courses and centres are able to operate only by the donations of grateful students.

No one may pay for him - or herself, either by giving money or in any other way. Every donation is for the benefit of others. Nor can Dhamma service be a form of payment for room and board. On the contrary, service is of benefit to the servers themselves, since it affords them further valuable Dhamma training. A course or centre provides an opportunity to practice meditation and also to practice applying Dhamma by learning to serve and deal with others with compassion and humility.

CONCLUSION

Dhamma servers should serve following the guidance of the assistant teachers and management. They should do all they can to assist the meditators without disturbing them in any way. The conduct of the servers should inspire confidence in Dhamma in those who are doubtful and greater faith where it already exists. They should always bear in mind that the purpose of their service is to help others, and in so doing help themselves to grow in Dhamma.

If these rules present any difficulties for you, please seek clarification immediately from the assistant teachers or the management.

May your service help you to advance on the path of Dhamma, of liberation, of freedom from all suffering, of real happiness.

May all Beings be Happy!

SECTION III: QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

(Selected questions & answers with Guruji, Mr. S. N. Goenka, on dhamma service)

MOST IMPORTANT QUALITY FOR SERVING

Q: What is the most important quality needed while serving the Dhamma?

Goenkaji: If you don't have *mettā*, it is better that you don't give Dhamma service. Sometimes a Dhamma server shouts like a policeman or a policewoman at students who do not observe the rules, and this is totally wrong. Every Dhamma server is actually a representative of the Dhamma; students watch their behaviour and if they are just as arrogant as others, the students will lose confidence in the Dhamma. Therefore Dhamma service is a great responsibility. If someone cannot work with *mettā* in a humble way, it is better to refrain from taking this responsibility.

(Source: From the book 'for the benefit of many' published by VRI. Questions & Answers at Dhamma Sikhara, India, March 22, 1998)

IMPORTANCE OF OBSERVING SILA (PRECEPTS)

Q: Goenkaji, why is it so important to maintain the Five Precepts on Dhamma land?

Goenkaji: It is important to observe the Five Precepts everywhere but it is especially important on Dhamma land.

The first reason is that it is so difficult to observe these precepts in the outside world. In daily life there are many reasons why people break their *sīla*. But on Dhamma land, where there is a wonderful Dhamma atmosphere, the influence of Māra is much weaker than in the outside world, so you should take advantage of this to strengthen yourself in *sīla*. If you cannot observe *sīla* in an atmosphere like this, how can you expect to maintain *sīla* in the world? How will you develop in Dhamma?

Secondly, it is meritorious to observe *sīla* anywhere, but observing *sīla* on Dhamma land is more meritorious. Equally, it is harmful to break *sīla* anywhere, but breaking *sīla* on Dhamma land is more harmful. Understand why this is so. As soon as a defilement is generated in the mind you contribute a bad vibration to the atmosphere, and you can't break any *sīla* unless some impurity first comes in the mind and then manifests as an unwholesome action of speech or body. If you generate that kind of vibration in a marketplace full of unhealthy vibrations, you

contribute something bad to the atmosphere, no doubt. But it is already full of bad vibrations, so your contribution is inconspicuous—just as a new stain on a dirty shirt is inconspicuous. But if you generate mental defilements in the good atmosphere of a centre, you pollute the atmosphere in the same way that even a tiny spot of dirt spoils a clean white shirt.

The mind doesn't stay idle; it generates either impurity or purity. When you don't generate impurity you generate purity, good vibrations, and these are your positive contributions to the atmosphere. After all, how does land become Dhamma land? By the meditation of good-hearted people generating good vibrations, which permeate the atmosphere. This is your *dāna* to the centre, and it is far superior to material *dāna*.

The more people who meditate in one place, the stronger the vibration becomes. And the good vibrations at a Dhamma centre are helpful not only to those who attend the present courses; they also accumulate. This atmosphere of pure Dhamma will support students for generations, for centuries. You don't know who will come to your centre after five or ten generations, after centuries. What a wonderful gift you are giving to those unknown people. Your *dāna* is wonderful.

Equally, the negative vibrations you generate are harmful not only to the present meditators, but also to future meditators who won't get the strong, good atmosphere that they should. That is why it is important to observe *sīla* on Dhamma land. It is fruitful for the one who generates good vibrations by observing *sīla*, and fruitful for others now and in the future. Therefore observe *sīla*. It is the foundation of Dhamma. Keep this foundation strong.

(Source: From the book 'for the benefit of many', questions & answers at Dhamma Dhara, USA & Dhamma Giri, India, July 1991 & April 1992).

Q: Why is abstaining from sexual misconduct and intoxicants so important for a Dhamma server?

Goenkaji: They are important in order to progress in Dhamma. All the *sīlas* are important for a Dhamma server, but these two are the most important.

If you keep taking any intoxicant you will remain a slave to intoxication, and you cannot progress in Dhamma; the mind cannot be balanced when it is enslaved. You must become your own master, and intoxication cannot make you your own master.

Similarly for sexual misconduct: by practicing Dhamma, both husband and wife will ultimately reach the stage where they naturally live a life of celibacy. But if there is a relationship with more than one person, sexual desire will continue to increase. It is like adding petrol to a fire that you want to put out.

So the first discipline is that a sexual relationship should only exist between spouses.

If both are good Vipassana meditators, when passion arises they observe the sensations arising and accept the fact, "There is passion in my mind." As they observe the sensations they will probably come out of passion. But if they don't and have bodily relations, there is nothing wrong because they have not broken their SĪLA. I have seen many cases where, if they keep working like this, people easily come out of passion and still feel so contented, so happy. The need does not arise. A sexual relationship is actually designed by nature for reproduction, but it is human beings' weakness to go against nature and use it only for passion.

Slowly, if you keep working with Vipassana, you will come out of passion and reach a stage where there is a natural celibacy—a celibacy achieved through suppression doesn't help—and this natural celibacy will help you to develop so much in Dhamma. You progress by leaps and bounds once you reach that stage.

(Source: VRI newsletter Vol.18 No.3 March 21, 2008)

Q: Why is there segregation of sexes on a course?

Goenkaji: This would not have been necessary if we were working with other types of meditation which impose a good layer at the surface of the mind, making you forget everything that is deep inside.

But this technique is totally different. From the very beginning it starts an operation of the mind, taking out the impurities from the deepest level. When you operate on a wound, only pus will come out; you can't expect rose water to come out. What is the pus of the mind? Now the worst pus that you have is sexual passion. The entire loka in which you are living is called *kāma-loka*, the *loka* where sexual passion is predominant. Even at the apparent level your birth is because of the sexual contact of your parents. The base of sexual passion is deep inside. And if sexual passion comes on the surface, it becomes stronger for a male when he is in contact with the vibration of a female. When a female develops passion, it is strengthened by contact with the vibrations of a male. And if you remain intermingled while you are doing this operation, it is dangerous. It will harm you. Instead of your coming out of passion, there is every possibility that you will multiply passion. So better remain separated as much as possible. It is essential. §

(Source: From the book, 'for the benefit of many', published by VRI, Questions & answers at Annual Meeting: Dhamma Giri, India, March 3, 1989)

Q: Why are both students and Dhamma servers asked to refrain from physical contact with others at a course site or centre, whether a course is going on or not? Can't physical contact also be a way of expressing *mettā*?

Goenkaji: You say physical contact is just an expression of *mettā*, but that is slippery ground because you don't know when you will get caught in passion. It is very important to avoid this danger. There can be no justification for physical contact at a

centre. People keep telling me that in the West physical contact doesn't involve passion. Maybe not always, but I have seen cases in the West where a student on a course started having physical contact saying it was without passion, and ultimately it resulted in an unhealthy situation.

You have to be especially cautious because you are working on Dhamma land, and the anti-Dhamma forces will always try to pull you down. You are representing Dhamma. If you have any little weakness (and passion is a great weakness) these anti-Dhamma vibrations will arouse passion in you, and you will spoil the entire atmosphere. So you'd better avoid any kind of physical contact. However people may justify it, don't listen to their arguments. It is a strict rule in every Dhamma centre or even at a non-centre course that no physical contact is allowed.

(Source: From the book 'for the benefit of many', questions & answers at Dhamma Dhara, USA & Dhamma Giri, India, July 1991 & April 1992).

Q: When students are serving on courses or staying at centres, they might feel an attraction to a person with whom they would like to establish a relationship, and hopefully, a Dhamma partnership. How should students who are at the beginning stages or later stages of a new relationship conduct themselves when they are serving on courses or at centres?

Goenkaji: It must be very clear that Dhamma land is not the proper place for any kind of courtship—whether it is the early or the later stage of a relationship makes no difference. If any Dhamma server finds that he or she is becoming attracted towards another person they should immediately leave, they should not stay at the centre even for a minute. Develop your romantic relationships outside the Dhamma centre. At a Dhamma centre you have to behave towards each other like brothers and sisters. Even a trace of passion arising in the mind of anyone will disturb the atmosphere of the centre, and this has to be avoided at all costs. It should be made crystal clear to every Dhamma server that a Dhamma centre is not a place for courtship.

(Source: From the book 'for the benefit of many', questions & answers at Dhamma Dhara, USA & Dhamma Giri, India, July 1991 & April 1992).

Q: We feel that the hardest *sīla* for us to observe when we are serving is right speech. Can you guide us as to how to practice right speech?

Goenkaji: Idle talk is a form of wrong speech; you are breaking your *sīla* by indulging in idle talk and gossip. If somebody wants to gossip, they had better leave the Dhamma centre. Here, as the Buddha repeatedly used to say, have either Dhamma talk or *tunhībhāvo*—noble silence, complete silence, nothing else. Otherwise, all the types of wrong speech that you mentioned are bound to occur. When you are chatting idly your mind is so loose that the talk becomes looser and looser, and you

won't care what you are saying, with the result that you may create difficulties for other students. This must be totally avoided.

(Source: From the book 'for the benefit of many', questions & answers at Dhamma Dhara, USA & Dhamma Giri, India, July 1991 & April 1992).

Q: Sometimes when we are serving a course, the topic of other techniques and therapies comes up naturally in conversation.

Goenkaji: Just as gossip comes up naturally! Take out this "naturally" business! Whenever something wrong happens, people say it is happening "naturally." Change that!

(Source: From the book 'for the benefit of many', questions & answers at Dhamma Dhara, USA & Dhamma Giri, India, July 1991 & April 1992).

Q: Some students find these conversations helpful in clarifying differences between Vipassana and other methods.

Goenkaji: The conversations may also be helpful in creating confusion, so leave aside such clarification. You can discuss that sort of thing outside the centre, but not at the centre; not at any cost.

(Source: From the book 'for the benefit of many', questions & answers at Dhamma Dhara, USA & Dhamma Giri, India, July 1991 & April 1992).

DAILY METTA SESSION

Q: What is the significance of the 9:00 p.m. *mettā* session?

Goenkaji: Well, *mettā* is *mettā*. It is always good, whatever the time; it helps. This special *mettā* period is part of the duty of the teacher who tries to keep the mind as pure as possible, and with that purity tries to get tuned up with the vibrations of all saintly beings. It is the job of the teacher to get tuned up with these vibrations and spread them. The students who are sitting there receive them. In many cases Dhamma servers work very hard the whole day, and after these ten minutes of *mettā* they come and say, "Now, I feel really relaxed." This is because they were able to get tuned up with these vibrations.

Of course there are some who may not get anything. We cannot judge who is capable of accepting *mettā* and who is not. Our duty is just to give as much *mettā* as possible. Sayagyi used to say, "I'm a transformer. I may draw 11,000 volts and then distribute 1,100, 440, 220, or 110, volts. According to a person's capacity, they accept it." So this is the job of the teacher. The students will accept it, whatever their capacity.

(Source: From the book 'for the benefit of many', published by VRI, questions & answers at Dhamma Giri, India, January 13, 1991).

Q: Goenkaji, please explain how the Dhamma servers should meditate at 9:00 p.m. when assistant teachers play the workers' *mettā* tape.

Goenkaji: The Dhamma servers should understand properly what they are doing. They should not make it a rite or a ritual; otherwise it will be a waste of time, and this will set an unwholesome precedent which will be harmful in the future.

They should keep their attention on the top of the head, be aware of any sensation there and the truth that this sensation is impermanent. When they are with the truth of *anicca* they are ready to accept the *mettā* vibrations or Dhamma vibrations that are given. They should also have a feeling of acceptance of good vibrations. If they start working like this they will soon start experiencing that there are good vibrations which they can receive.

During the day they have been working hard; then in this session they gain new strength, and become fresh to work again the next day.

(Source: From the book 'for the benefit of many', published by VRI, questions & answers at Dhamma Giri, India, January 10, 1999).

Q: When we have the Dhamma workers' *mettā* session at 9:00 p.m., why are we asked to put our attention at the top of the head?

Goenkaji: This is a good question. According to the law of nature there is a flow of energy coming out of the extremities [the palms of the hands, the soles of the feet, and the top of the head], especially when you meditate. If you are a good meditator there is a constant flow going out, which also contains certain impurities. But one extremity—the top of the head—also has the capacity to draw vibrations from the atmosphere; the other extremities cannot do that.

While you are being given *mettā*, you are receiving good Dhamma vibrations. If your attention is at the top of the head and you start feeling sensations there, it means the top extremity is open at that time. At the same time you have to maintain the mental volition to accept any good vibrations that are coming. If your mind is calm and as pure as possible, you will get tuned up with the *mettā* vibrations and they can be received at the top of the head. This is why this area is given so much importance.

(Source: From the book 'for the benefit of many', published by VRI, questions & answers at Dhamma Dhara, USA & Dhamma Giri, India, July 1991 & April 1992).

PRACTICING METTA

Q: If I am not able to experience subtle sensation in the body, how can I practice *mettā*?

Goenkaji: It is true that if you practice *mettā* with these subtle sensations, it is very strong, very effective, because then you are working with the deepest level of your mind. If you are experiencing a gross sensation, that means only the surface level of your mind is working and the *mettā* is not that effective. But it doesn't matter. In this case just keep imagining at the intellectual, conscious level, "May all beings be happy. May all beings be happy." And keep on working. When you reach the stage where there are subtle vibrations, you will work at a deeper level and the *mettā* will be more effective.

(Source: VRI newsletter Vol.9 No.8 August, 1999)

Q: Will *mettā* get stronger as *samādhi* gets stronger?

Goenkaji: Certainly. Without *samādhi* the *mettā* is really not *mettā*. When the *samādhi* is weak, the mind is very agitated, and the mind is agitated only when it is generating some impurity, some type of craving or aversion. With these impurities you cannot expect to generate good qualities, vibrations of *mettā* [loving kindness], of *karunā* [compassion]. It isn't possible.

At the vocal level, you may keep saying, "Be happy, be happy," but this doesn't work. If you have *samādhi*, then your mind is calm and quiet, at least for that moment. It is not necessary that all the impurities have gone away; but at least for that moment when you are going to give *mettā*, your mind is quiet, calm, and not generating any impurity. Then whatever *mettā* you give is strong, fruitful, beneficial. (Source: From the book 'for the benefit of many' published by VRI. Question & Answers at Annual meeting, Dhamma Giri, India, January 13, 1991)

Q: How does one develop compassion in oneself and how do we encourage it in others?

Goenkaji: Compassion and purity go together. If there is no purity, you can't generate compassion. By practising Vipassana, you purify your mind, and that will help to develop your quality of compassion. To help others to generate compassion is difficult. We can't do anything to help others to develop their good qualities.

But still, there is a way to do both. When you practise Vipassana on a course you purify your mind, and then on the last day you practise *mettā*. Going back home, after you practise for one hour, you practise a few minutes of *mettā*. However, if you give ten days of your life to serve in a Vipassana course, then for all the ten days you get an opportunity to generate *mettā*, to generate compassion for all the students. And this is how one develops compassion.

This is also how you can help others to generate compassion, because you are helping them to practise Vipassana properly. And as they purify their minds by the

practice of Vipassana, they also will start generating compassion. This is the only way I see.

(Source: From the book 'for the benefit of many' published by VRI. Question & Answers at Annual meeting, Dhamma Thali, India, January 3, 1993)

Q: How does *mettā* helps in the development of *muditā* (sympathetic joy) and *kārunā* (compassion)?

Goenkaji: *Muditā* and *kārunā* naturally follow as one develops *mettā*. *Mettā* is love for all beings. *Mettā* takes away the traces of aversion, animosity and hatred toward others. It takes away the traces of jealousy and envy toward others.

What is *muditā*? When you see other people progressing, becoming happier, if your mind is not pure, you will generate jealousy toward these people. "Why did they get this, and not I? I'm a more deserving person. Why are they given such a position of power, or status? Why not I? Why have they earned so much money? Why not I?" This kind of jealousy is the manifestation of an impure mind.

As your mind gets purer by Vipassana and your *mettā* gets stronger, you will feel happy when seeing others happy. "All around there is misery. Look, at least one person is happy. May he be happy and contented. May he progress in Dhamma, progress in worldly ways." This is *muditā*, sympathetic happiness. It will come.

Similarly, when you find somebody suffering, *kārunā* automatically arises if your mind is pure. If you are an ego-centred person, full of impurities, without the proper practice of Vipassana, without *mettā*, then seeing someone in trouble doesn't affect you. You don't care; you are indifferent. You try to delude yourself saying, "Oh, this fellow is suffering because of his own *karma*. How can I do anything about it?" Such thoughts show that the mind is not yet pure. If the mind becomes pure and *mettā* develops, hardness of heart cannot stay; it starts melting. You see people suffering and your heart goes out to them. You don't start crying; that's another extreme. Rather, you feel like helping such people. If it is within your means, you give some tangible help. Otherwise, at least you help with your vibrations: "May you be happy. May you come out of your misery. "Even if you have no material means to help somebody, you always have this spiritual means.

(Source: VRI newsletter Vol.2 No.1 January, 1992)

Q: Is the generation of *mettā* a natural consequence of the purity of the mind or is it something that must be actively developed? Are there progressive stages in *mettā*?

Goenkaji: Both are true. According to the law of nature-the law of Dhamma-as the mind is purified; the quality of *mettā* develops naturally. On the other hand, you must work to develop it by practicing *mettā-bhāvanā*. It is only at a very high stage of

mental purity that *mettā* is generated naturally, and nothing has to be done, no training has to be given. Until one reaches that stage, one has to practice.

Also, people who don't practice Vipassana can practice *mettā-bhāvanā*. In such countries as Burma, Sri Lanka and Thailand, *mettā-bhāvanā* is very common in every household. However, the practice usually is confined to mentally reciting, "May all beings be happy, be peaceful." This certainly gives some peace of mind to the person who is practicing it. To some extent good vibrations enter the atmosphere, but they are not strong.

However, when you practice Vipassana, purification starts. With this base of purity, your practice of *mettā* naturally becomes stronger. Then you won't need to repeat these good wishes aloud. A stage will come when every fibre of the body keeps on feeling good for others, generating good will for others.

(Source: VRI newsletter Vol.2 No.1 January, 1992)

MEDITATION DURING SEVA

Q: Sometimes it seems that we are picking up negativity, fear, etc. from the students we are serving. How does this happen and what can we do?

Goenkaji: You can't pick up anything from others. If you are affected by a student's emotions, it is because you have a stock of the same kind of impurity within you. For example, if a fear complex comes to the surface in a student because of their practice of Vipassana, the atmosphere around them will become charged with that kind of vibration and that stimulates your own stock of fear to arise. Be thankful to the student that this situation has allowed your own impurity to be eradicated. Meditate, observe sensations, and come out of it. Why worry?

While you are here in this atmosphere, you can work on anything that comes up and eradicate it. If you are free from a particular impurity, nothing will happen when you come in contact with that impurity. Let's say somebody generates anger near a Buddha, anger would not arise in the Buddha because he is totally free from anger. So long as you have the seed of a particular impurity within you, when the same impurity arises in your vicinity it will stimulate your own impurity.

(Source: From the book 'for the benefit of many' published by VRI. Questions & Answers at Dhamma Dhara, USA & Dhamma Giri, India July, 1991 & April, 1992)

Q: While I am serving when should I practice *Anapana*? When should I practice Vipassana? And when should I practice *mettā*?

Goenkaji: This is a good question. Instead of sitting the course, you are serving, and so you should decide how to work just as you do in your daily practice at home. You

have to decide whether you should start by practicing *anapana* or work with Vipassana straight away, and if you do start with *anapana* you have to decide for how long. That is at the discretion of each server. If you feel that your *samādhi* is very weak and you want to strengthen it by doing *anapana* for the first three days and then switch over to Vipassana, this is acceptable.

Most important is that you meditate two times or three times per day while you are working on Dhamma land. If you don't sit you won't be able to give proper service, you won't generate good vibrations. So in your own interest, and also in the interest of the students whom you are serving, it is essential that you sit.

One difficulty has been noticed. Sometimes, even if there are very few Dhamma servers on a course, each one wants to meditate with closed eyes during the group sittings. That is wrong; you are a Dhamma server here, not a student.

During the sittings one or two of you should keep your eyes open and see if the students have any difficulties. Of course, if there are many servers you can divide the responsibility amongst yourselves: One or two females and one or two males keep their eyes open while the others meditate seriously, there's nothing wrong with that. But if all the servers meditate with closed eyes you create difficulties because the teacher cannot get your attention if he or she needs assistance. That should be avoided.

(Source: From the book 'for the benefit of many' published by VRI. Questions & Answers at Dhamma Dhara, USA & Dhamma Giri, India July, 1991 & April, 1992)

Q: Every time assistant teachers enter and leave the meditation hall, Dhamma servers bow down. The students are watching this, and when they offer Dhamma service they do the same thing. It has become almost a ritual. Could you please advise on this?

Goenkaji: In pure Dhamma no ritual at all should be allowed. Dhamma and ritual cannot co-exist. I find nothing wrong in somebody's paying respect to an assistant teacher, provided this person is paying respect to Dhamma. An assistant teacher or whoever sits on the Dhamma seat—assistant or senior assistant or deputy or teacher, anybody—is representing the Buddha, the teachings of the Buddha, the Dhamma and the entire lineage of the teachers of Vipassana. He or she lives a life of Dhamma and is serving people in Dhamma. One develops a feeling of devotion, of gratitude towards this person. Bowing down is a meritorious deed. Actually one is bowing down to Dhamma, paying respect to Dhamma.

But when this becomes merely a formal rite or ritual, it goes totally against Dhamma. If someone bows out of respect and others feel, "If I do not bow then people will consider me a very discourteous person, so I must also bow," again, there is no

Dhamma. To act with Dhamma is always to have a pure volition in the mind. Otherwise it is just a mechanical exercise: You bow down and give good exercise to your back! If these back exercises are to be done, better do them in your own room. If somebody does not bow because at that particular moment he or she has not developed the volition of devotion towards Dhamma, I feel happy, "Very good." Bowing must be with this volition of paying respect to Dhamma, not to the individual.

Even the Buddha did not like people paying respect to him. He said, "You may be with me all the time, catching one corner of my robe, yet you are far away from me. But if you are practising Dhamma with purity of mind, though you may be thousands of miles away, you are near me."

Yo dhammam passati so mam passati, yo mam passati so dhammampassati. One who is observing Dhamma—that means observing Dhamma inside—is observing me, is seeing me. If one is not observing Dhamma, then bowing down is merely a mad exercise.

(Source: From the book 'for the benefit of many' published by VRI. Questions & Answers at Dhamma Giri, January 21, 1994)

INTERACTING WITH STUDENTS

Q: If a student is having a storm and the assistant teacher is not immediately available, can we, as Dhamma servers, help the student by giving meditation instructions—for example, saying to use more *anapana* and to work on the extremities, or to work in a more relaxed way by lying down or taking a walk?

Goenkaji: That would be risky. You must understand that when somebody is authorized to give Dhamma as an assistant teacher or a senior or a full-fledged teacher, the good vibrations associated with Dhamma come in contact with this person while they are sitting on the Dhamma seat, and that helps the students.

A server is not an authorized teacher, and should never play the role of teacher because the AT is supposedly unavailable. You may think, "Somebody is in trouble so I'd better give advice," but be very careful not to do so. At most you can say, "Go and lie down and relax. When the teacher is available, I will ask you to meet him or her." That is not a technique, and has nothing to do with the practice. Don't say anything more than that; don't try to give any instructions. There is every possibility that your instructions might create difficulty for the student. Authorization and establishing contact with the Dhamma vibrations play an important part in the work done by the assistant teachers.

(Source: From the book 'for the benefit of many', published by VRI, questions & answers at Dhamma Dhara, USA & Dhamma Giri, India, July 1991 & April 1992).

Q: I know that an experienced Dhamma server should treat new students and visitors with more *mettā* than old students. How can one do this?

Goenkaji: By practicing Dhamma more and more. When your mind becomes purer naturally you will have more *mettā*. In an earlier question you asked why it is important to practice daily. Understand, if you don't practice daily you will not have any *mettā*, and if you have no *mettā* you can't serve. So practice daily, make yourself strong in Dhamma, and naturally your *mettā* will become strong and have a great impact on the students who visit.

As I said, those who come to a course always look at the Dhamma servers, the teacher and all those who manage the centre. If they find these people are not practicing what is being taught here, they will think that this is a sham. They will say to themselves, "Look, the technique has not helped those who practice here, why should I waste my time?"

Be very careful: Make yourself strong in Dhamma so that you can give more *mettā*. Keep the atmosphere full of *mettā*, full of *mettā*. If you do that you will be successful and the centre will be successful; more and more people will be benefited.

(Source: From the book 'for the benefit of many' published by VRI. Questions & Answers at Dhamma Sikhara, India, March 22, 1998)

CONFLICT BETWEEN SERVERS

Q: Sometimes on a course we find that for one reason or another conflict arise between Dhamma servers. How can we best use our service to confront our own egos and to develop humility?

Goenkaji: When you are not able to keep your mind calm, quiet, full of love and compassion for others, and negativity arises, you should retire from service. You may say, "It's not my fault, the other person is to blame." Whatever the truth is, it is your fault that you have started generating negativity. You have become involved in conflict with others, so you should understand that you are not fit to serve at that time. You had better meditate. Sit and meditate. You can't serve people when you are generating negativity because you would throw the vibration of negativity at them.

If you find there is a fault with another server, politely and humbly place your view before him or her. Calmly explain your concerns and sincerely try to understand the other's point of view. If this person doesn't change, after some time you can again politely and humbly explain your concern. Perhaps the other person still doesn't agree, but I would say explaining your view twice is enough. In very rare cases you can discuss the problem a third time, but never more than that. Otherwise, however correct your view may be, raising the same concern more than three times shows that you have developed a tremendous amount of attachment; you want things to happen according to your understanding. That is wrong. Explain your concern once, twice, at

most three times, and if there is still no change politely tell him or her, "Well, this is my understanding, now let's put the question to a senior."

But before putting the case to anybody else, first talk with the person with whom you have a difference of opinion. After that you can inform your seniors – whether it is a senior student, the trustees, an assistant teacher, a senior assistant teacher, the local teacher or the Teacher. Remember that first you have to discuss the problem with the person concerned. If you work in this way there will be no unwholesome speech; otherwise there would be backbiting, which is wrong.

If nothing happens and this person does not amend their ways, don't have aversion for them, have more compassion. Always examine yourself. If you feel agitated because something you want is not being done, it is clear that your ego is strong and your attachment to your ego is predominant. This is not Dhamma. Amend yourself before trying to amend others.

(Source: From the book 'for the benefit of many' published by VRI. Questions & Answers at Dhamma Dhara, USA & Dhamma Giri, India July, 1991 & April, 1992)

Q: If our senior in Dhamma takes an independent decision which goes against the guidelines you have formulated, what should we as Dhamma servers do?

Goenkaji: Very humbly and politely place your view before this person, saying, "Well, according to my understanding of the guidelines, this is an incorrect decision. I believe the guidelines suggest another course of action." Then your senior can explain the reasons for his or her decision. If you still find there is a difference of opinion you can say, "Since we do not agree on this matter I will write to a senior teacher or to Goenkaji. Let us explain the situation to a senior and let him or her decide." But never write to a senior without first discussing your difference of opinion with this person, otherwise it would be backbiting, a breakage of *sīla*. Be careful not to break your vocal *sīla*.

Often people write letters to me saying, "So-and-so is behaving like this. So-and-so is doing this." Then I ask whether they have discussed the matter with the person they are complaining about and they reply that they have not. In such a situation why write to me?

It is very important that you talk over the problem with the person concerned first. Most of your difficulties will be settled when you discuss the matter directly – not with a negative attitude but a positive attitude, making an effort to understand the other person's view. Maybe your view is wrong or maybe the elder's view is wrong, and when you discuss with them things will become clearer. If you find that the situation is not becoming clearer, then there is nothing wrong in informing other elders.

(Source: From the book 'for the benefit of many' published by VRI. Questions & Answers at Dhamma Sikhara, India, March 22, 1998)

SECTION IV: SERVING AT CENTERS



Right volition of Dhamma Service

(Excerpt from a talk by Goenkaji for old students at Dhamma Nāsikā on 5 March 2005, published in VRI Newsletter Vol.15 No.4 April 24, 2005)

An assistant professor at the University of Burma, a very learned person, used to come to meditate when the courses were held at the centre. When there was no course, he would come very early in the morning to clean the whole centre and to clean the toilets. He did not do this work at home. But here, at the centre, it was his way of serving: “May everyone be healthy, may they enjoy all facilities!”

One serves with the volition that people should be able to meditate without any hindrance. This is a place for service, a place for Dhamma service. One should always be very heedful about this. We should not allow the purity of Dhamma to be lost. Dhamma is for all. One should serve everybody with the same love and goodwill.

Different Vipassana Centers have different requirements for seva, hence it is better to call a Center near your residence for inquiries. The following is common list of seva which every Center requires:

- **SERVING BETWEEN THE COURSES**

The period between the courses is when a centre prepares to welcome new students of the next course. There are a number of things to be done during this time. Old students come together to clean the rooms, dhamma hall and centre, arrange provisions for coming 10-day course, so that students can meditate in a clean & peaceful environment without any disturbance. When old students serve together, it generates immense sympathetic joy (*mudita*) for them and it also helps in strengthening purity of the centre.

Most importantly, it is a good time to be at the centre, meeting other meditators and strengthen your practice. If you cannot serve for all 3 days, you can serve for any time as per your convenience and as per requirement of a particular centre.

- **DHAMMA SERVICE PERIOD**

This is a special period dedicated for cleaning the centre thoroughly. It is a joy to serve with fellow meditators, where all meditate together & serve selflessly with *metta*. On such occasions, every corner of the centre gets suffused with the vibration of dhamma. It's a great way to get to know the centre, to interact with the teacher & to give service in a low key way that supports strengthening your practice.

If old students cannot serve for the entire period, they can serve for a partial period, according to their convenience and as per requirement of a particular centre.

- **JOINING A SEVA GROUP(S)**

Joining a seva group is another way to serve. This includes, taking active part in planning respective tasks and executing them along with fellow old students for smooth functioning of centre. Different Centres have different seva groups but in general, there are following seva groups. Old students may form their own group as per requirement of a particular centre.

- Housekeeping
- Kitchen
- Computer related

- **SEVA REQUIRING PROFESSIONAL SKILLS**

Although professional skills are not necessary for giving Dhamma seva, they may prove to be very useful. There are often activities, large and small, for e.g. doctors, accountants, lawyers, engineers, architects, photographers, carpenters, plumbers, gardeners, or those with office or computer skills.

Very often the centre may need medical/legal/regulatory assistance or Government liaisoning for specific activity, as the centre may not have access to experts for understanding, guidance and execution methods.

If you think your particular skill might be useful for the centre, please inform the Centre about the same. You may call the management or send an email.

- **SERVING 10-DAY COURSES**

Serving a ten-day course is a very special kind of service. It is an invaluable tool for strengthening our own practice as well as helping others to get Dhamma.

If you wish to serve any course, please apply online on the course schedule page the respective Centre.

- **Nature of activities involved in 10-day course service:**

Activities involved in a 10-day course are segregated as dhamma hall seva, dining, compounding, bellringing and cleaning. On Day Zero, course manager interviews each server and assigns them different activities.

- **SERVING CHILDREN'S COURSES**

Serving children courses is one of the most fulfilling experiences a Dhamma server can have. It gives a great joy to be part of a course where students are getting dhamma at such a young age.

Please contact your nearby Centre to inquire about children courses.

- **LONG TERM SEVA**

Long-term Dhamma Seva is for those who wish to develop their practice by serving for longer periods of time. It gives students the opportunity to bring depth and maturity to their meditation practice by integrating what they have learned during courses and applying it while serving. Students will learn to serve properly with an attitude of humility and renunciation. This extended period of service provides a great opportunity to deepen one's practice as well as helping the centre to run smoothly.

Different Centres have different programmes for long term seva. However, in general there are following types of long term seva programmes:

SIT & SERVE PROGRAMME

This programme has been designed for the serious old meditators who wish to grow in dhamma by staying in Centre for extended period. In this programme, students serve two courses and sit for one course. Schedule for serving & sitting will be decided after discussion with ATs.

Students can serve for a 10-day course or in any of the supporting activities essential for the smooth running of the centre like course management, communication, gardening, kitchen or housekeeping. Commitment period and other details vary with each Centre.

REMOTE SEVA/OFFSITE LONG TERM SEVA

Under this programme, students can serve without staying at the centre. There is a variety of activities that can be included such as registration, accounting, communication with servers or students, office work, managing first-aid box and computer related activities. Seva involving professional/special skills are also included under this programme.

This programme offers flexibility to students to serve as per their convenience. However, firm commitment is required for activity taken up by the respective students. Commitment of time is different for each activity and is generally decided after discussing the expertise and available time period with the concerned server.

GUIDELINES FOR RESIDENTIAL LONG TERM & 10-DAY DHAMMA SERVERS

Guidelines for Dhamma servers may vary from Centre to Centre. The following are sample guidelines:

Five Precepts - All Dhamma servers must observe the five precepts for the entire duration of their seva.

Daily Meditation Practice - All residential servers must meditate for at least 3 hours a day, and are also required to attend evening *Metta*. Offsite long term servers are also required to maintain their daily meditation practice at home.

Accommodation - Long-term Dhamma servers will be given priority in the assignment of accommodations for Dhamma servers. Accommodations may be changed often, however, to meet the immediate needs of the course. There should be

no sense of “entitlement” to better accommodations even if one has been at the centre for some time.

Meeting with Assistant Teachers - All long-term Dhamma servers, whether sitting or serving, are required to meet with the assistant teacher after each course. They may also meet with the AT by arrangement to discuss any questions or problems they are experiencing or to ask questions about the meditation.

Sitting Courses - Residential long-term Dhamma servers should alternate between serving and sitting courses, depending course needs. Offsite long-term servers can decide their sitting schedule depending upon their daily responsibilities and nature of activities they have undertaken. Offsite dhamma servers are encouraged to sit short courses/one day courses to maintain continuity of practice.

Serving Courses - While serving on a course, long-term Dhamma servers should put aside their daily routines and give their full attention to the course. As far as possible, personal affairs, medical appointments, etc., should be attended between the courses. Unless they are given permission to leave by the conducting teachers, Dhamma servers should remain at the Centre during courses.

Between Courses - In addition to serving courses, there is a lot of work to be done to keep the centre running smoothly. The centre manager will delegate various tasks in this regard. Residential long-term Dhamma servers are also encouraged to join one of the seva groups that oversee the centre on an ongoing basis.

Long-term Dhamma servers may leave the centre between the courses. But they should notify the centre manager beforehand and inform him or her of the date when they will return. These breaks will be for rest or to conduct personal business. The centre should never be used as a base to go from one social affair to another. If a server feels a need for a longer break, then arrangements should be made for outside accommodation.

Segregation of the Sexes - To protect the Dhamma atmosphere of the Centre, segregation of the sexes should be maintained at all times, both during and between courses. There are separate accommodations for men and women, and separate dining areas as well. Dhamma servers must be very careful to treat those of the opposite sex as their Dhamma brothers or sisters.

Reading Material - If available, Dhamma servers may use the centre Library of Dhamma books. Reading other material is not appropriate at the centre.

Telephone and Email – Just like students, servers of 10-day course, should deposit their mobile with administration on day 0. They are also not allowed to use centre telephone, except with the permission of the conducting teacher.

The Office has a computer with email facility. But during the course, access to computer is not allowed, except with the permission of the conducting teacher. Long term servers may use computer to check their emails only between the courses.

Use of Centre Property - As a Dhamma server, one lives the life of renunciation. The centre will provide the basic requirements of food and shelter; other expenses are the responsibility of the servers themselves. As everything at the centre is the result of *Dana* by other students, Dhamma servers should take care that they are not using property of the centre for their own use without permission.

The following pages contain the description of seva for 10-day courses. On arrival at the centre, the course manager or the conducting teacher will allocate responsibility to each server after meeting them in person.

During the course, Dhamma servers can meet the conducting teacher, in case they need some clarification or change in their time-table.

A little story

(Excerpt taken from a discourse given by Guruji, Mr. S. N. Goenka on August, 1988 at Dhamma Mahi, France. It was published by VRI in the book titled 'For the benefit of many')

A bullock cart owner used to transport goods from one place to the other. This man had a small dog. When he travelled from one village to another, he trained the dog to walk under the bullock cart to avoid the sun's heat. Wherever they travelled, the farmer sat on the bullock cart but the dog walked below in the shade of the cart.

In time the small dog came to feel that he was carrying the entire burden of the cart, and he wondered why the farmer gave so much attention to the bullocks. He thought, "I am carrying the burden of this cart! Wherever we travel, it is over my back. More importance should be given to me!"

Actually, nobody is carrying the cart; the Dhamma is carrying the cart. Nobody should feel, "I am the most important person, it is only because of me that the centre functions properly. It is only because of me that the teaching is given, that Dhamma spreads." Come out of this madness!

Understand that you are simply a vehicle, a tool, and Dhamma is doing its job. If you had not been given this responsibility, somebody else would have taken it and the work would go on. Dhamma is bound to spread now; the clock of Vipassana has struck. You have been given the opportunity to serve in one way or another, and this should not become a cause of inflating your ego.