



29th September 1969, New Delhi.

Dear Babu bhaiya,
Respectful salutations!

Over a month has passed and yet I have not been able to write to you about the third meditation retreat held in Mumbai from August 14 to 24. I will now describe as much of that course as I can recall. Nonetheless, whatever I remember, I send forth as cherished memories for the future.

It was arranged at the strong insistence of the students from Mumbai, and I too wished for it, because our father's Vipassanā practice had stopped. Our mother's Vipassanā practice was good, but she has pain in her foot along with back pain. Both of them had a strong aspiration to practice Vipassanā again and to become more firmly established on the path of Dhamma. But I also knew that, because of their circumstances, they would not be able to attend a meditation camp if it was held outside of Mumbai. As a result, a second camp in Mumbai was required for them both to benefit. There is also the option of holding a third course in Mumbai, with the goal of having both of them participate again. Anyway, for whatever reasons, the second retreat took place, and 15-16 Dhamma brothers and sisters, including my parents, benefited.

After the second camp in Madras ended in July, I stayed at our rice bran factory campus in Tadepalli Gudum for a few days. I also reinforced my meditation practice while practicing with Radhe and Vimala. Thereafter, on 12th August, I reached Hyderabad by train and met with some old Burmese friends and also met some other new Burmese expatriates. There was enthusiasm for a Vipassanā course to be held in Hyderabad from these folks, but I could not accept it now due to a lack of time.

When I reached Mumbai, there was another difficulty. Vijay Adukia, who had taken on the entire burden of managing the first camp, was encountering difficulties. He did not have anyone who could make the necessary arrangements for the upcoming course. He was relying on Dedraj, and Dedraj was so busy with work in the elder brother's office that it became too difficult to say anything to him. In this dilemma, the whole day passed. At 4:00 p.m., there was a thought in my mind that I should go and check the kothi (bungalow) that



had been booked for the course. Even though I had seen it previously, I thought of revisiting it. When I reached there with one old student, I found there was a new twist to the story. The owner of the kothi had returned and was refusing to allow us to use it for the course, even though the manager had been given ₹500 for rent for the 10-day period. This kothi is generally used for marriages at ₹500 per day, and now, even though it was lying vacant due to it being outside of the wedding season, the owner flatly refused us. The manager was shocked and looked helpless. None of us were ready for this situation.

The retreat was to commence the following day, and by this evening, we had yet to secure a venue. Faced with this unsettling predicament, we ventured out in search of an alternative location and found one around 8:00 p.m., two hours away from Mumbai. But I was concerned about who would take care of us out there. Also, there was not a single room in the facility where all the students could sit together to meditate and listen to the evening Dhamma discourse. However, with the help of Dhamma, we learned in the morning that there was a hostel in the CP Tank area owned by Vijay's in-laws, the Nemani's, who would vacate a floor for us. I went to see the place, and it did not seem suitable to me. But there was no other option. The camp had to start in the evening. So, I had to accept it, and the camp started there in the evening. The Nemanivadi hostel situated amidst the hustle and bustle of a densely populated neighborhood, in the middle of a marketplace. The cacophony of street traffic and household activities, amplified by the sounds of radios and musical instruments, created an even worse environment than the Panchayati Wadi. One of the many challenges here was that a floor above us was occupied by a household of the Nemanis' relatives. Engrossed in worldly pleasures as householders often are, this arrangement was far from conducive to our needs. However, the only saving grace was an empty floor between the family and us.

So, the layout of the hostel was somewhat like this. Our retreat occupied the first floor. Facing the street was a large hall, divided by drapes into three sections. One corner served as my sleeping chamber, adjacent to which was the meditation room. The remaining area of the hall was designated for male participants. Exiting this hall led to a large room allocated for women. Flanking either side of this floor were additional rooms accessible via stairways. One was converted into my office, while the other was left vacant for future needs. Towards the back was the kitchen, opposite which was a sizable bathroom, and beyond that, two toilets. But confronting us in front of these toilets was extreme filth, tossed down by residents from the floors above, making it increasingly difficult to maintain a peaceful state of mind. Yet again, we had no other options.

As for my personal sleeping arrangements, they were far from ideal. The iron cot provided for my use was particularly disagreeable. First, its origin was suspect, likely salvaged

from a junkyard, and it was rusted to such an extent that any contact would dirty one's hands. Second, the metal strips forming the bed were so uncomfortable that my thin, carpet-like mattress failed to offer any relief, digging the strips into my back.

Despite the physical discomfort of the bed, there were some other hardships that had never occurred before. The first three days here were extremely unpleasant and stifling. At times, the thought would cross my mind to ask someone to change the cot. But then, another sentiment arose within me: "No, I am a son of the Buddha. Facing and conquering all forms of fears and difficulties should be an integral part of my conduct." And so, I spent my nights filled with Vipassanā meditation and feelings of loving-kindness. After three nights, as the space began to be infused with the essence of Dhamma, the atmosphere gradually improved. Sleep came easily. I even grew accustomed to sleeping on the iron strips. All discomfort vanished.

There was another hurdle. At about 3:30 p.m., a middle-aged woman came up the stairs, went straight into the middle of the female meditators, and asked them a variety of questions. For some reason, the women brought her to my office, where she began to cry in a very dramatic manner. She said her husband had abandoned her and that she was very sad about the whole situation. She said she needed to be saved. She repeatedly began to ask for a miracle that would relieve her grief, and she kept bowing down and offering her hand. The woman created great disturbances. I explained to her firmly that I was neither able to do that nor was I a sorcerer or an astrologer. I have only this path coming from the teacher –disciple tradition of Lord Buddha, which purifies and calms the minds of students who practice it. But for that, too, nothing could be accomplished in less than 10 days. After half an hour, with great difficulty, I was able to send her out of the course area.

Similarly, two to three people came to visit me during the course. One person wanted to know what this path of meditation practice was and how a householder businessman was teaching it. But there were two people who were either ready to put 'Swami Ji' to the test or curious as to whether I could make them wealthy. For me, meeting such folks was a sad experience. Those that were truly curious, on the other hand, did not cause any problems.

Two days before the camp was over, an old student of Myanmar came from Morvi. The poor fellow had been sick for several days, yet he still came to practice. He sat for two days, practicing *Anapana* one day and Vipassanā the other. He was able to re-establish his lost Vipassanā.

In addition to the full-time students in the camp, a local old student arrived at 6:00 p.m. every evening and left for work after the morning group sitting. He also benefited from the experience of this short-term practice.

Similarly, when an old student came for three days, he was also given *Anapana* and

Vipassanā and began to awaken Vipassanā in his entire body, which he had completely lost for the past two or three years.

Father had successfully attended the previous Vipassanā course, yet his awareness of sensations, having grown weaker with time, finally had faded away. He had reverted back to his daily two-hour religious practice, which included chanting mantras. I was apprehensive that upon returning home, he would return to practicing these religious rituals and again lose awareness of sensations. While in the camp, he would succeed in awakening mild and at times strong sensations, but as soon as he relaxed his body or lay down the awareness of sensations would fade away. I had to encourage him repeatedly to keep trying. Upon returning home, whenever he sat with me, he was able to meditate, though not very deeply. I realized that he could not stay away from his religious practices and rituals; hence, before leaving, I firmly advised him to at least stay away from mantras for the duration of three Vipassanā camps. How far he follows that remains to be seen.

Mother's situation was different. For her, the camp turned out to be very beneficial. The constant headache that she suffered from had considerably reduced, and her awareness of Vipassanā had awakened deeply. By the 7th or 8th day, she experienced very fine and subtle sensations, and by the end of the course, she felt very light. I was not worried that she would ever revert back and lose herself in her rituals. I am trying my best to fulfil my gratitude by serving my parents on the path of pure Dhamma.

This was the second course for Mr. M., and he benefitted more from his meditation this time than on his first course; he felt that his entire family should benefit from this blessed Dhamma. In the middle of the course, he came to me repeatedly and requested that I visit his family and give them an inspiring discourse so that they too would embrace Vipassanā and leave aside the tantra path that they were involved in. Last time too, he had pleaded with me, but I had been unable to visit his house. Now I agreed, and at the end of the course, his son drove me to their house in Malad, about two hours away from South Mumbai. On the way, we visited his new house in the suburbs, which was under construction, and then reached his home, where his entire family had assembled. While giving a discourse, I narrated the story of Mother Visākhā and highlighted how a householder remains alert to his responsibilities while progressing on the path of Dhamma and that it is not necessary to leave home and become a renunciate. At the end, the family members asked a number of questions, including ones related to mantras and chants. Finally, they made repeated requests to hold a camp at their new house where they could all participate. Bound by my tight schedule, it was difficult for me to make any commitment to them.

I previously mentioned Mr. R. He was the student in Madras who had become upset during a discourse. However, by the end of that camp, he was deeply drawn to Dhamma,

and now he had returned with his wife. He struggled for the first day or two, but spent the remaining 8 days deeply engaged and enthusiastic. Now, as he deepened in his meditation practice and his mind was purified, the veil of false ideas crumbled and the truth became apparent. He benefited so much that at the end, he met me in my office, and bowing down, he asked for blessings to be free of the debt of birth to his mother. That day, during the discourse, I said that a child cannot easily become free of parental debt, even if he or she serves them for many lifetimes. However, there is a way to become free if the child helps to get them established in Dhamma so that they walk the path of liberation. He expressed a desire to bring his mother to the camp in Sarnath, but due to familial constraints, he could not come, though he mentioned that during future courses in Madras, he may be able to come with his mother.

He also informed two close friends of his from Bikaner, Rajasthan, about the upcoming course in Sarnath and that they should make the most of this blessed opportunity. Filled with excitement, they came to visit me on the day the camp was to start. Perhaps they were disappointed upon seeing a householder instead of some imagined bearded and robed sadhu because, as the camp was to start that evening, instead of returning as they had promised, they sent a message expressing their inability to attend.

A young man Mr. M. could not focus even briefly during *Anapana*, remaining quite confused. When I questioned him, he complained about pain in his legs and thighs, and he sat with a pillow under his legs. What suddenly sparked his interest was that three to four days after receiving Vipassanā, his leg ache disappeared. He could easily sit in *Adhiṭṭhāna* for an hour, and his restless mind had begun to quieten down. As his mind calmed down, he became deeply attentive to the discourses. In the end, he expressed a desire to attend another camp, this time with his wife. He will possibly come to one of the future courses.

Mr. R.C. had undertaken a 10-day Vipassana course in Myanmar, but upon his return to India, he became involved in tantra, getting himself into a very confused state. Yet there was a seed of wisdom nestled within, and he rushed to attend this course after being asked to do so by his father. Certainly, there were initial difficulties as the tantric mantras resonated in his mind. During *Anapana*, he grew restless and reported that his head seemed about to burst. But by the end of the third day, he calmed down. I had given Vipassanā to old students on Sunday afternoon but encouraged him to work with *Anapana* up until Monday so that he could become free from his obstacles. I feel that to be well established in Vipassanā, he will have to attend one more course.

Mr. L. was participating in his second Vipassanā camp, which he did very successfully. The shallow Vipassanā of his previous course now flowed piercingly, and he went deeper. Later, he came up to me and spoke in private about his younger brother, saying that he

had been very keen to join the course but could not do so due to financial constraints. This bothered me a lot. In the metropolitan areas, our camps were proving to be expensive indeed. The cost of food and accommodation for 10 days was prohibitive, discouraging those from the middle and lower classes from taking leave from their jobs. I felt that these camps should not become the exclusive domain of the rich and should be organized with minimal expense. This was a difficult proposition in cities like Mumbai, where Rs. 500 was spent on rent alone for a guest house, while Rs. 100 to 200 was spent on cooking vessels. Then, of course, came food and workers' expenses. And if the organizers spent freely, then the matter became even more difficult. Certainly, having ultra-rich participants with their innumerable demands concerning food who were not concerned with the expense did not help. I regretted their attitude of being 'VIP guests,' yet I found it difficult to get firm with them as they would push my father forward as their spokesperson. The bothersome thought had remained with me that this meditation path should not become the domain of the rich.

After the course in Sarnath, I was greatly relieved to see that with careful arrangements, the camps could be organized with much less expenditure, thereby encouraging the poor to participate freely. Now there is hope that this course in Delhi will not be as costly as the Mumbai one was.

(Even then, money was never explicitly asked from anyone. There was an understanding that people would contribute according to the expenses incurred. Those who couldn't contribute would naturally feel inferior. Therefore, Sayagyi wanted to minimize the expenses. Taking inspiration from the simple meals provided in Sarnath, Sayagyi set a rule that the entire expense of the retreat should be borne by the old attendees, and only voluntary donations should be accepted at the end.)

On the last day, which was Sunday, the final discourse was held in the Dhamma Hall from 6:30 to 7:00 p.m. after the group sitting. This time, an unusually large number of people had assembled. I felt this was due to the meritorious power of the 10-days of meditation. The Dhamma discourse generated an extraordinary positive response, and there were many requests to organize another course.

At the end of the discourse, I encountered another significant challenge. When the meditators fold their hands and bow down to me, I take it to be their respect for the Dhamma that they have received. So even when very elderly people bow down, it does not make me uncomfortable. I see in their bowing to me the respect of Dhamma and the respect of my teacher Sayagyi, whose Dhamma mission I fulfil as his representative. But when people who have not received dhamma-dāna from me come and touch my feet, as per Indian custom, I feel differently. Once the discourse was over, this happened, and I did not know what to do, but I truly wish that when anyone wants to express his respect, he would bow down the way

Burmese people do, and not touch the teacher's feet like Indians do. Cultural norms here make it difficult to change this practice, although it is necessary.

After staying in Mumbai for a day and a half, I left for Nagpur by train. Among the few people who came to the station to see me off were my old friends Kumar and Hariram [the father-in-law of Girdhari, Goenkaji's eldest son]. Both were eager for the next retreat to be held in Mumbai, where they plan to participate. Who knows when their desire will be fulfilled. From my side, I want to offer all friends and relatives the supreme gift of the 'Jewel of Dharma.'

At the conclusion of the Mumbai course, I shared the merits with all beings. I also shared the merits with my deeply respected teachers, whose blessings and *mettā* had supported the successful conclusion of this camp. And then I shared the merits with you all in Myanmar and our Indian friends and associates, whose support and goodwill have remained invaluable.

During the discourse, the owners of this guest house, the Nemani brothers, were among the listeners. Afterwards, they expressed their keenness for another course. I was a little apprehensive as, to avoid distracting the students, I had covered with cloth the large pictures of their ancestors that hung on the walls. And those white, shroud-like curtains were still hanging there, covering the pictures. But the Dhamma feelings of these Nemani family members were so strong that this action did not appear offensive to them. Such people, filled with eager desire towards Dhamma, their desire should certainly be fulfilled.

Your younger brother,

Satyanarayan