

My Experience of Vipassana

A number of friends have asked me about my experience at the 10 day Vipassana course I attended. This is my version – that I do not claim to be the definitive guide – it is only what I understood and experienced. For those that are seriously interested, I would recommend that you go to the original source itself at www.dhamma.org and read what Guruji has himself written.

What is Vipassana?

Vipassana means *to see things as they really are*. It is a highly evolved technique of meditation that was rediscovered by Siddharth Gautama- the Buddha more than 2500 years ago that teaches us the *real Art Of Living*.

It is not a religious or sectarian technique, so “non Buddhists” need not fear that they are giving up their faith or religion if they start practicing Vipassana.

Do you need to think about meditation?

Think of it this way: Every major religion teaches us to reach peace in the presence of God – in a church, temple, mosque or gurudwara – by closing our eyes in prayer and concentrating on God. This period of concentration or *meditation is meant to provide the path to peace of mind* as during this period of meditation, our mind is meant to be in a state of concentration that cuts out all distractions (sensory, memories, hopes) that normally keep us engulfed. Sadly, in reality we rarely reach that state as we do not really know how to harness our mind and senses.

You will agree that if we were to really close our eyes and try to concentrate, we first encounter our senses protesting: we seek visuals to replace what our eyes see, we hear noise, we feel itchy on our body, our throat feels dry/wet, we can smell more acutely. This is our five senses trying to bring us back to our “normal state”. If we overcome this hurdle, we encounter our mind. It loves dwelling in the past – good and bad memories come swirling by; or the future – our plans, aspirations, dreams and imagination runs amok! How does one concentrate when faced with such wild forces!

This is our normal state. This is why we find it so hard to stay focused at work, or feel so fatigued and stressed out at the end of each day. It is because our conscious and sub conscious mind is working overtime! Sleep is disturbed as the mind keeps ticking away...and we rarely wake up feeling refreshed as the subconscious mind is at work all night and the moment one wakes up, the conscious mind starts ticking all over again!

When it gets too much to take, we take holidays, short breaks or sabbaticals ...*to destress ourselves! Some treat “retail therapy”, partying, drinking, “letting loose” as palliatives. The morning after is usually even worse as the basic cause has not been addressed!*

- “There is no joy in the finite. There is joy only in the infinite.”

Finally, we discover meditation.

Through meditation, we tame our senses and our mind to obey what we consciously wish to focus on. Like a wild horse, it takes a while for our senses and mind to come under our command. Once we have harnessed this horse, you can ride it at the speed of wind and gallop at will!

That meditation is good, is beyond discussion. However, how does one do it?

Most meditation techniques operate at a very basic level. We are taught to repeat some mantra or name or sound or concentrate on some visual image or mental construct. While this certainly serves to concentrate the mind and cuts out the sensory and mental “noise” it is a bit akin to watching a movie in a hypnotic trance. Like most other palliatives, this too does not really work once the trance is broken.

However, at least one finds that one is able to concentrate better through this technique of “prayer” of mantra chanting. Yet, after a while even this does not help and we slip back into our daily rut.

Meditation is pure concentration. Focus the mind on something without wandering until it is fully absorbed in the object of contemplation. This will lead to insight. This is the root of judgment, character, will.

Why Vipassana

Siddharth Gautam left his princely life in search of Nirvana. He wished to go beyond current joys or sadness or palliatives into an eternal state of bliss. It was while meditating on these issues that he made his central, startling discovery:

Our senses and our mind essentially dwell on sensations of craving or aversion. If we like something, the “sensation” leaves a pleasant mark on us – much like a line etched on a stone. Similarly if we dislike something, the unpleasant “sensation” also leaves a deep imprint on us. He referred to these imprints as “sanskaras”. We can think of these sanskaras as our “long term memory” that shape our reactions. Hence when we are faced with a particular sensation or the prospect of that sensation, our senses or our mind subconsciously react with that past memory/expectation even before our mind can make a conscious reaction.

It is these “reactions” that lead to craving ...for the “sensation” that you felt when...ate that piece of chocolate, went on that great holiday experience, bought that new car. Similarly, the “aversion” that is experienced when faced with illness, death, old age, ugliness etc.

Equally, these “sanskaras” work in our subconscious mind that then dwells on either past “sensations” of sadness and joy and is unable to let go...or builds future castles in the air or dread.

Everything, then comes back to our reactions and why **we** react in a certain manner. We all *know* that the same external stimuli is received and reacted to differently by different people *who experience the same thing at the same time*. Yet, we are unable to make the connection as to how we ourselves can control or shape our reactions.

- **By attaining *consciousness*, we can know the nature of everything. This study is *Brahm-vidya*, the supreme science. In it, the mind is the object of study and the laboratory itself. Attention is turned inward, in meditation.**

This, was the break through discovery and insight of Siddharth Gautam. *He made the linkage that like an imprint on a stone, every event leaves a mark on our mind and body*. Through self observation based on the technique of Vipassana, he observed each sensation that arose on his body. He then observed and experienced how each sensation was linked to some “sanskara” that had left its mark on him earlier. He also observed how each sensation arose, reached a peak and then passed away...and the continuous mind-body interplay that was going on.

It was this observation based path of self exploration that allowed him to discover the common root of the mind and body and that eventually led him to Nirvana.

As he observed sensations arising-peaking and passing away, the common law of the Universe started emerging. The cycle of life, seasons, happiness, pain, indeed *everything arises-peaks and passes away!* Once the common law of Nature that governs all of us is self experienced, we begin to view each sensation in a dispassionate, equanimous and detached manner. “This too shall pass” does not remain a phrase but something that we experience deep within ourselves.

As he progressed on this path, he was able to systematically bring up to the surface of consciousness all his piled up good/bad sanskaras and remove their “imprints” so that each new sensation/event was then faced with objectivity and equanimity.

*“When all desires
that surge in the heart ...are renounced
The mortal becomes immortal.
When all knots
That strangle the heart... are loosened
The mortal becomes immortal.
This sums up the teachings of the Scriptures.”*
- Katha II.3, 14-15

Vipassana, unlike other forms of meditation that merely serve to “concentrate the mind on the object of contemplation” actually allows one to observe oneself and regain control of one’s own mind and untangle its “knots”.

Now, as you progress, the Truth begins to reveal itself:

*“Above the senses is the mind.
Above the mind is the intellect.
Above that is the Ego
And above that is the Unmanifested Cause
And beyond is Brahman
Omnipresent, Attributeless...”*

In the climax of meditation as we cross the barriers of the senses, the mind and the “intellect” that is observing all this, we encounter the biggest barrier of the “I”, the thin layer of personal identity or the Ego.

Reflect on it, our personal sense of identity is also a “sanskara” based on a name that somebody gave us, an identity that we learnt to react to, a set of habits that we formed and a series of “sankaras” that formed our “personality”. As we start dissolving these – a startling discovery starts emerging...

...our entire body and physical state can be seen as a series of atoms and “vibrations”. It is these vibrations that attract other atoms around it that start forming clusters and it is these clusters that start shaping our identity, our form and our reactions. We are no different from what we see around us in the universe... break the objects down like we did in Biology and we go to a sub-atomic level under the microscope. Blow the image up and we are part of a planetary system that is part of a solar system that is part of a milky galaxy that is...

Get the picture?

So at the level beyond the Ego lies “the unmanifested cause” – what we call the spirit, the vibration, the soul, the Atma...the purpose for which we are here.

At an experiential level you can see that one “vibration” craves something that then gets attracted to it and a cluster or a sanskara forms that builds up indefinitely until the form grows and grows and grows. At a physical level, imagine a person who craves food and the form ends up obese. At a mental level imagine a person who lives in anger and you can spot the tense body and reactions of that person.

We are all creatures of the vibes we are creating and living by. It is these vibes or sankaras or karmas that shape our future since they attract similar vibes towards them.

Rebirth is nothing but an unfulfilled set of vibes/craving/karma. This birth itself is for setting those past vibes to rest...and yet we keep creating more and more craving and aversion so that we remain forever enmeshed in the cycle of karma and rebirth.

At the climax of his Unitive state, the Buddha saw this reality and achieved Enlightenment.

The self is seen to be one, the same in everyone and the ultimate reality called God. “*The Self is Brahman*” is the central discovery of the Upanishads and indeed all Spirituality.

- **When one attains union with the Self - in that state – all desires are fulfilled. One is free from all desires because all desires are fulfilled – for *the Self is our desire!* “*Apta-kamam atma-kamam a-kammam rupam.*”**

- **Man's one overriding desire is for self realization.**

*“You are what your deep driving desire is.
As is your Desire, so is your Will.
As is your Will, so is your Deed.
As is your Deed, so is your Destiny.”*

- Brihadranyaka IV.4.5

Life is a school in which the individual is constantly evolving, growing life after life towards a fully human stature. The goal of life is the realization of one's true nature, the real self and the unity with the Infinite.

The Courses

The technique is taught at ten-day residential courses during which participants follow a prescribed [Code of Discipline](#), learn the basics of the method, and practice sufficiently to experience its beneficial results.

The course requires hard, serious work. There are three steps to the training. The first step is, for the period of the course, to abstain from killing, stealing, sexual activity, speaking falsely, and intoxicants. This simple code of moral conduct serves to calm the mind, which otherwise would be too agitated to perform the task of self-observation.

The next step is to develop some mastery over the mind by learning to fix one's attention on the natural reality of the ever changing flow of breath as it enters and leaves the nostrils.

By the fourth day the mind is calmer and more focused, better able to undertake the practice of Vipassana itself: observing sensations throughout the body, understanding their nature, and developing equanimity by learning not to react to them.

Finally, on the last full day participants learn the meditation of loving kindness or goodwill towards all, in which the purity developed during the course is shared with all beings.

The entire practice is actually a mental training. Just as we use physical exercises to improve our bodily health, Vipassana can be used to develop a healthy mind.

Because it has been found to be genuinely helpful, great emphasis is put on preserving the technique in its original, authentic form. It is not taught commercially, but instead is offered freely. No person involved in its teaching receives any material remuneration.

There are no charges for the courses - not even to cover the cost of food and accommodation. All expenses are met by donations from people who, having completed a course and experienced the benefits of Vipassana, wish to give others the opportunity to benefit from it also.

Of course, the results come gradually through continued practice. It is unrealistic to expect all problems to be solved in ten days. Within that time, however, the essentials of Vipassana can be learned so that it can be applied in daily life. The more the technique is practiced, the greater the freedom from misery, and the closer the approach to the ultimate goal of full liberation. Even ten days can provide results which are vivid and obviously beneficial in everyday life.

All sincere people are welcome to join a Vipassana course to see for themselves how the technique works and to measure the benefits. All those who try it will find Vipassana to be an invaluable tool with which to achieve and share real happiness with others.

The Essence of the Upanishads

- “There is no joy in the finite. There is joy only in the *infinite*.”
- There is a *Reality* underlying Life, the *essence* of everything, our *real* Self. To realize this *oneness* is the purpose of life and the goal towards which we all evolve.
- By attaining *consciousness*, we can know the nature of everything. This study is *Brahm-vidya*, the supreme science. In it, the mind is the object of study and the laboratory itself. Attention is turned inward, in meditation.
- *Meditation is pure concentration*. Focus the mind on something without wandering until it is fully absorbed in the object of contemplation. This will lead to *insight*. *This is the root of judgment, character, will*.
- In the climax of meditation, the barrier of the “I”, the thin layer of personal identity vanishes. In this unitive state, the self is seen to be one, the same in everyone and the ultimate reality called God. “*The Self is Brahman*” is the central discovery of the Upanishads.

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- Man’s one over riding desire is for *self realization*.

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- Do not retire from the world, but learn to live *selflessly* with senses and passion under control.
- The ideal of the Upanishads is to live in the world in full awareness of life’s unity. Giving and enjoying, participating in each others joys and sorrows, but never unaware even for one moment that *the world comes from God and returns to God*.

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- Life is a school in which the individual is constantly evolving, growing life after life towards a fully human stature. The goal of life is the realization of one's true nature, the real self and the unity with the Infinite.

*“Brahman cannot be realized by those
Who are subject to greed, fear and anger.
Brahman cannot be realized by those
Who are subject to the pride of name and fame
Or the vanity of scholarship.
Brahman cannot be realized by those
Who are enmeshed in life's dualities.”*

- If personality returns life after life, then is it not clear that *heaven is only a state of consciousness*, part of the created world itself?
- **Wisdom means a life of selfless service.** Wisdom begins with *detachment*.
- The Universe is founded on two principles:
 - *Rit-a*:- Law of rhythm, regularity
 - *Yajna*:- Sacrifice of what you hold dearest; willing renunciation of self interest.
- **“There is no joy in the finite. There is joy only in the infinite.”**