

## Overview of Vipassanā Meditation

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Though the term “meditation” is well-known in the Western world today, it is not well known that various meditation techniques can have many commonalities but also many significant differences. Understanding what differentiates a particular style of meditation as well as the style of teaching it from another technique and style of teaching is vital to understanding any one style of meditation (Drummond, 2006; Drummond, 2006; Fleischman, 2016). This study takes as foundational some of the unique features of vipassanā and S. N. Goenka’s style of teaching it, and so this chapter will clarify some of those unique features. An in-depth examination of technical terms and their theoretical relationships will be provided later in the proposed study. Therefore, this section will only provide a brief description of important concepts within the stated tradition of vipassanā. For reference, you can use [The Taxonomy of Vipassanā Terms](#) as a guide to orient you reading this chapter.

A word on the pronunciation of technical terms provided in Pāli, the language spoken by the Buddha. Vowels are pronounced in the long English form. The ‘u’ symbol is pronounced “oo.” A vowel with a macron such as ā, a shorthand combination for two roman ‘a’ characters together, is pronounced as a long “ahh”. A vowel standing alone is pronounced in English in short form, such as ‘a’ as “aye”. Two consonants together indicate that the preceding vowel is short with a slight pause, as with a short ‘i’ in anicca. The symbol ñ symbol is pronounced with nasalized “ny” as in Spanish. For simplicity, roman consonants with a dot under them, such as ṅ, can be pronounced as in English (Goenka, 2015, pp. xiii-xii).

### **The Buddha’s Unique Discovery: Vedanā Paccaya Taṇhā?**

Vipassanā is a word in Pāli, the language spoken in India at the time of the Buddha. It translates roughly to “seeing things as they are.” Simply put, vipassanā represents a “science of mind and matter” (Goenka, 2000). Vipassanā meditation is the practice which helps a person live in line the “universal law of nature” (Goenka, 1987/2012, p. 19).

Contrary to popular belief, Siddhatta Gotama, the historical figure who lived 2500 years ago and is known as “The Buddha,” was not interested in creating a religion, sect, or belief system. Instead, he was interested in investigating the law of nature as it existed before him and would continue to exist after him (Goenka, 1987/2012). He was a human being who performed a rigorous experiment to discover natural laws by investigating them within the framework of his own body and mind (Rahula, 1974). He then operationalized a theory and practical technique so that others could perform the same experiment (Hart, 1987). He taught the *dhamma* (Sanskrit: dharma), which is the law or laws of nature, as a universal fact which did not pertain to a particular belief system and applies to the entire universe. Fleischman (2016) has called the dhamma the “unwavering,

orchestrating natural information state of the universe” (p. 23). Gotama’s students, though most often referred to in his discourses as *bikkhave* (monks), were called *dhammako*, or students of dhamma (Goenka, 2000). Today, this would be equivalent to saying that a scientist is a student of nature as universal objective truth.

Fleischman writes that “In the Twenty-First Century, it is science, not mysticism, to recognize that we are products of a cosmic information-state that can lead us beyond its own material manifestations” (Fleischman, 2016, p. 26). In every one of his discourses and publications, Goenka repeatedly urges that use of the sectarian term “Buddhist” erodes the universality of an investigation into the law of nature, a law which is observable by anyone who reproduces his experiment regardless of label or affiliation (Goenka, 2000). Goenka states that the Buddha only taught “pure dhamma,” and calling a student of the dhamma a “Buddhist” would be equivalent to saying that a modern scientist’s discoveries only apply to people who call themselves scientists (Goenka S. N., 1987/2012; 1990a; 1990b; 2006; 2015).

As a “super scientist” Siddhatta Gotama’s unique achievement was the discovery of facts about the life process which pertain to all of life, and how to overcome the suffering that is a natural product of this process (Goenka, 1990a). He mastered and became unsatisfied with the styles of meditation of the time (Rahula, 1974), and set out to conduct what is now called an observational N of 1 experiment (Kazdin, 2016) to understand how his physical and mental structure functioned. His experiment was scientific in the sense that his goal was to understand objective facts of nature which exist independently of his observing them, through a process of systematic observation which was distorted by his own subjectivity as little as possible (Goenka, 1990a). It was not scientific in the sense that he did not conduct a randomized control trial that produced generalized probabilistic assumptions about a population based on a representative sample.

His experiment was intended to be verified or refuted using his particular method of investigation which for technical reasons requires direct contact of the observer’s sensory apparatus with the observed phenomenon, namely bodily sensations (Goenka, 2006). As with the use of a null-hypothesis, Gotama repeatedly implored his students to doubt his teaching until they have verified its value for themselves. “The words *bh?vito bahul?kato*—know with your own experience and thus gain and multiply knowledge occurs many times in [the Buddha’s P?li discourses]” (Goenka, 2006, p. 5). In the *K?l?ma Sutta*, or Discourse to the K?l?ma clan of Northern India (as translated by the P?li Text Society), Gotama says:

Do not simply believe whatever you are told, or whatever has been handed down from past generations, or what is common opinion, or whatever the scriptures say. Do not accept something as true merely by deduction or inference, or by considering outward appearances, or by partiality for a certain view, or because of its plausibility, or because your teacher tells you it is so. But when you yourselves directly know, “These principles are unwholesome, blameworthy, condemned by the wise; when adopted and carried out they lead to harm and suffering,” then you should abandon them. And when you yourselves

directly know, “These principles are wholesome, blameless, praised by the wise; when adopted and carried out they lead to welfare and happiness,” then you should accept and practice them (Hart, 1987, p. 14).

The result of this experiment was the proposition of natural laws which organize and guide the life process of all living things, known as *pa?iccasamupp?da*, the Second Noble Truth, or “the cause of suffering”. It was utilizing knowledge of these laws in practice to increase his own functioning at the deepest physiological and psychological level that lead to what was called his “enlightenment” (Goenka, 1987/2012). *Pa?iccasamupp?da* is a simple and deep law, but it is impossible to comprehend fully without advanced experience reproducing Gotama’s experiment. In fact, it was the total comprehension of *pa?iccasamupp?da* that marked his own enlightenment (Macy, 1991, p. 26). Nevertheless, the most important parts of *pa?iccasamupp?da* are easy for an untrained person to understand. The parts which are more difficult to understand become clearer as a person progresses in the practice.

*Pa?iccasamupp?da* is comprised of twelve distinct physiological and psychological (i.e. organizational /informational) variables or steps which define the life process. It also relies on a particular paradigm of reciprocal, or mutual-causality that defines how each variable relates to the other. Developing the capacity to view reality as this mutual-causal paradigm is a key component of enlightenment (Macy, 1991). The following list shows these variables, or steps in the loop of *pa?iccasamupp?da*, in the order that informs a new student of *satipa??h?na/vipassan?* (Goenka, 1987/2012),

1. *avijja* (ignorance)
2. *viññ??a* (consciousness)
3. *sa?kh?ra* (reaction)
4. *n?ma/rup?* (mind and matter)
5. *sa??yatana* (six sense bases/organs)
6. *phassa* (contact with sense object)
7. *vedan?* (bodily sensation)
8. *ta?h?* (craving)
9. *upp?d?na* (clinging)
10. *bhava* (becoming)
11. *j?ti* (birth)
12. *jar?-mara?a?-soka-parideva-dukkha-domanassup?yas?* (sickness, old-age, death, together with sorrow, lamentation, physical and mental sufferings and tribulations).

Though each variable influences all the others, all twelve together form a feedback loop which repeats many times every second. The entire system exhibits entropic behavior depending on the

accumulation of “impurities” (Goenka, 1987/2012, p. 15) known as *sa?kh?ra* (Sanskrit: *sa?sk?ra*), and the resulting dissonant noise in the loop. These *sa?kh?ras* are the behavioral reaction that result from the habitual programming of past experiences. A simple example would be an automatic addictive response to the sensations generated from the contact of a substance like alcohol or even chocolate to the taste-sense system or the recalled mental image of the substance (Gürtler, Studer, & Scholtz, 2011).

Most of all, it is important to note the positions of *vedan?* (sensations), and *ta?h?* (craving), that loop. “Others proclaimed that *sa??yatana pacchay? ta?h?* [the sense organs and their respective objects cause/condition craving]; the Buddha discovered and disclosed that *vedan? paccaya ta?h?* [sensations cause/condition craving], which means that defilements arise at the level of *vedan?* and in response to *vedan?*” (Goenka, 2006, p. 4). The discovery of the Buddha, that the real cause of *ta?h?* lies in *vedan?*, is the unparalleled gift of the Buddha to humanity” (Goenka, 2006, p. 4). “A meditator who has reached the end (has experienced the entire range) of sensations (and has gone beyond) is freed from craving, is fully liberated” (Goenka, 2006, p. 4).

In the simplest form, Gotama discovered that the process of craving is the result of the aggregate combination of *nam?/rup?* (mind and matter), where mind consists of four integrated systems. First, one of the *sa??yatana*, or six sense organs or systems where mind is included as a sense for the purposes of this system, vibrates upon *phassa* (contact) with a sense object or information from that sense object. He called this vibration *viññyana* (consciousness). Second, the sensory information is cognized or recognized based on past conditioning, is evaluated and assigned a valence to indicate the desirability of the associated object. He called this system *sañña* (perception) Third, the mind generates sensations on the body according to the valence. He called this *vedan?* (sensation). This important term pertains to all sensory experience including thought, as the mind is included as a sense organ in this system often by way of internal feedback within the body. Finally, the mind reacts to the sensations in accordance with their valence. He called this action *sa?kh?r?* (reaction) (Goenka, 1990a), which in some traditions is called *kamma* (Sanskrit: *karma*). *Sa?kh?r?* as action or reaction might be equated with a biological notion of emotion as an automatic response to the environment, a concept described in the previous chapter on Bowen theory.

Because the process of *pa?iccasamupp?da* occurs so fast, even “trillions of times every second” (Hart, 1987, p. 47), it appears to take on a life or character of its own. This is similar to a light appearing to be a discrete entity when it is actually the aggregation of enumerable chemical reactions occurring with “such great rapidity” that it appears to be a single process with a singular character. Goenka (1987/2012) describes this illusion in his 10-day courses,

Everything is ephemeral, arising and passing away every moment—*anicca*; but the rapidity and continuity of the process create the illusion of permanence. The flame of a candle and the light of an electric lamp are both changing constantly. If by one’s senses one can detect the process of change, as is possible in the case of the candle flame, then one can

emerge from the illusion. But when, as in the case of the electric light, the change is so rapid and continuous that one's senses cannot detect it, then the illusion is far more difficult to break. One may be able to detect the constant change in a flowing river, but how is one to understand that the man who bathes in that river is also changing every moment?

The only way to break the illusion is to learn to explore within oneself, and to experience the reality of one's own physical and mental structure. This is what Siddhattha Gotama did to become a Buddha. (pp. 27-28)

For Gotama, the system of mind and its material basis develops an emotive character by virtue of the step of *sa?kh?ra* (reaction) that behaves as though it is a single entity in its own right. This illusory emotive character is what people call "I," or "me." By observing his own physical and mental structure "objectively" (Goenka, 1987/2012, p. 33), he claimed to have discovered that his physical and mental structure is nothing but the aggregate result of countless *kal?pas*, or sub-atomic particles, which arise and pass trillions of times per second (U Ba Khin, 2014). Coincidentally, Gotama likely made this discovery within a few years of Democritus forming his atomic hypothesis, around 400-500 B.C. However, Gotama also claimed that the nature of these particles could be distinctly experienced if the mind was highly trained, an anecdote supported by serious lay practitioners today (Henderson, 2000). He also discovered that it is difficult for the mind to comprehend the complex and fluid nature of itself, and it creates the aggregate label "I" as a practical placeholder (Goenka, 1987/2012). Hart and Goenka (1987) write,

He found that the entire material universe was composed of particles, called in P?li *kal?pas*, or "indivisible units." These units exhibit in endless variation the basic qualities of matter: mass, cohesion, temperature, and movement. They combine to form structures which seem to have some permanence. But actually these are all composed of minuscule *kal?pas* which are in a state of continuously arising and passing away. This is the ultimate reality of matter: a constant stream of waves or particles. This is the body which we each call "myself." (p. 26)

The informational, or psychological, dissonance created by the disparity of what is accurate and what is inaccurate about the "I" label is called *ta?h?* (craving). A behavioral response that is in accordance with this informational dissonance is called *up?d?na* (clinging). However, Gotama's most important discovery was that craving occurs in response to sensations and not to the sensory objects or information involved in generating bodily sensations. Building on that key discovery, he found that the way out of craving is to develop equanimity to sensations. The reasoning that developing equanimity to sensations leads to the natural cessation of all suffering is known as *nirodha-sacca*, the Third Noble Truth, or "the cessation of suffering." The Third Noble Truth states that cutting the feedback between sensation and craving affects the entire twelve-step loop of *pa?iccasamupp?da* by virtue of the reciprocal relationships between each of the steps (Goenka,

1987/2012; Macy, 1991).

Finally, Gotama discovered that the way to practice in order to initiate the Third Noble Truth is two-fold; to concentrate the mind to be sensitive enough to feel sensations literally throughout the body; to develop equanimity (*uppekha*) with bodily sensations which encompass the entirety of life experience. From those four integrated systems that comprise mind (*viññana*/consciousness, *sañña*/perception/judgement, *vedanā*/sensation, *saṅkhārā*/action/reaction), it is decreasing the intensity of *sañña* that is possible and effects the whole loop. *Sañña* is the coefficient of reactivity. This is accomplished by observing the subtlest sensations throughout the body objectively, without reaction. "A meditator who has reached the end (has experienced the entire range) of sensations (and has gone beyond) is freed from craving, is fully liberated" (Goenka, 2006, p. 4). Gotama called this the practice of *satipaṭṭhāna* (foundations of mindfulness), known as the Fourth Noble Truth, or "the path to the cessation of suffering." *Satipaṭṭhāna* is synonymous with *vipassanā*, and encompasses the entirety of the Buddha's practical teaching as defined the *Mahāsatipaṭṭhana Sutta*, or Great Discourse on the Foundations of Mindfulness (Goenka, 2015).

### The Practice of *Satipaṭṭhāna*/*Vipassanā*

Goenka describes in his discourses how any dhamma teacher would turn away new students who only want to cure one particular disease or symptom. When he first tried to join a course taught by his teacher Sayagyi U Ba Khin, Goenka was turned away because he only wanted to cure his migraine headaches. Instead, U Ba Khin encouraged him that symptoms or diseases may be cured as a side-effect of the practice, but the process only works if they work with the intention of understanding the nature of all symptoms (Goenka, 1990a). Otherwise symptom relief might make a change in the short-term but will cause more problems in the long run. According to Goenka, practicing *vipassanā* to cure a specific disease is "totally against *vipassanā*?" (Goenka, 1990a). This orientation toward objective inquiry and away from mere symptom relief is a vital but often ignored aspect of the practice. "In learning *Vipassana* from U Ba Khin, Mr. Goenka found a discipline that went far beyond alleviating the symptoms of physical disease and transcended cultural and religious barriers" (Hart, 1987, p. 1).

The application of this kind of inquisitive, detached and scientific attitude alters the loop of *paṭiccasamuppāda* at the one link that is possible: between bodily sensations and the craving that is conditioned by them. This is the practical reflection of Gotama's unique discovery. Moving further up the chain of *paṭiccasamuppāda*, it is not possible to stop sense objects making contact with their respective sense organs or to stop the physical and mental structure from causing/conditioning the sense organs, because these occur largely out of the observer's awareness and/or control. But it is possible to alter the generation of craving which is caused/conditioned by or sensations (Goenka, 1987/2012).

At the time of Gotama's birth, it was commonly understood that suffering occurs when there is craving for a sense object. The teachers at the time instructed students to stop craving material

objects and stop craving for undesired objects or circumstances to go away. It was also known that craving was the product of what was known as “mind” and that the way out consisted of training the mind (Goenka, 1987/2012). Gotama’s unique contribution, as he directly experienced it through his observational experiment, was the discovery that the mind does not “crave” the object but the sensations generated on the body as a result of receiving sensory information associated with the object. He attained the state known as enlightenment by optimizing the process of *pañiccasamuppāda* to such an extent that it was not possible for craving to occur in reaction to bodily sensation. When sufficiently sustained, this application of the Third Noble Truth leads to the absolute maturation of the mind/body system to one which is irrevocably incapable of suffering (Bodhi, 2013). Vipassanā meditation involves replicating the experiment to discover these natural laws within the context of one’s own physical and mental structure.

“One begins by learning to observe without reacting” (Goenka, 1987/2012, p. 39). As with modern science, this practice relies on the ability to observe concrete physiological phenomena *yathābhūta* (“objectively,” “as it is”) (Goenka, 1987/2012), or accurately as they occur with minimal intervention by the observer. Goenka (1987/2012) summarizes the notion of “objective” observation,

It is a choiceless observation. Never try to select sensations; instead, accept whatever arises naturally. If you start looking for something in particular, something extraordinary, you will create difficulties for yourself, and will not be able to progress on the path. The technique is not to experience something special, but rather to remain equanimous in the face of any sensation. In the past you had similar sensations in your body, but you were not aware of them consciously, and you reacted to them. Now you are learning to be aware and not to react, to feel whatever is happening at the physical level and to maintain equanimity. (p. 33)

This kind of observation is simple, yet proves quite difficult. Goenka’s instructions rely on the assumption that the only phenomena which can be observed directly and completely are bodily sensations because of the physiological connection with the mind that operates at a high enough frequency, or sample rate, to observe the rapid fluctuation of the subtlest sensations. Also, observation of bodily sensations provides a way to observe mental phenomena by virtue of their occurring simultaneously with sensations. Gotama’s words for this theoretical principle were “*vedanā samosaraṃ sabbe dhammā*” (Mulaka Sutta, Anguttara Nikāya, VIII. ix. 3), which translates to “Everything that arises in the mind starts flowing with a sensation on the body” (Goenka, 2015, p. 26). That is, every thought has an accompanying bodily sensation which can be observed directly.

It is taught that observation of this kind reveals three basic facts about the physical and mental structure that are so basic that they pertain to all observable things in the universe. These three facts are sometimes referred to as the Three Marks of Existence: that all things are

impermanent (*anicca*), and impersonal (*anatt?*), and that clinging to phenomena as permanent or as personal invariably causes suffering (*dukkha*). This becomes more and more apparent to a meditator as the mind becomes sensitive enough to detect subtler but very distinct collections of sensations which occur within gross-level sensations like searing leg pain from sitting for long hours in the same position. Eventually it becomes clear that even the most intense pain is only the aggregation of many subtle sensations which are constantly arising and passing with “great rapidity” (Goenka, 1987/2012, p. 55), and possess no singular character at all. By that point, what was once unbearable pain is no longer an obstacle (Goenka, 1990a), and a preliminary aspect of this stage is often experienced within a student’s first 10-day vipassan? course. The basic realization that bodily sensations occur without initiation by the mind is the beginning of the discovery that all things have an impersonal nature and there is no unchanging core or soul that can be called “I,” that everything, including bodily sensation which encompass the entirety of life experience, is *anatt?* (Goenka, 1990a). While a meditator is developing awareness of sensations *sabbak?yapa?isa?ved?* (throughout the body) (Goenka, 2015, p. 29), and practicing non-reactivity and disidentification from sensations, their capacity for auto-regulation of affect can increase dramatically (Gürtler, Studer, & Scholtz, 2011; Zeng, Oei, & Lui, 2014; Zeng, Oei, Ye, & Lui, 2015).

The acceptance of the theory of vipassan? at a logical or intellectual level, as is the standard in modern science, as opposed to engaging with it as a system of rigorous personal practice, can transform vipassan? into a devotional or belief system that loses the practical element. The actual practice is the essence of vipassan?. Hart (1987) paraphrases Goenka’s 10-day discourses,

Through their own investigations, modern scientists have recognized and accepted this ultimate reality of the material universe [as ephemeral; impermanent]. However, these scientists have not become liberated, enlightened persons. Out of curiosity they have investigated the nature of the universe, using their intellects and relying on instruments to verify their theories. In contrast, the Buddha was motivated not simply by curiosity but rather by the wish to find a way out of suffering. He used no instrument in his investigation other than his own mind. The truth that he discovered was the result not of intellectualizing but of his own direct experience, and that is why it could liberate him. (pp. 25-26)

Throughout his discourses, Gotama repeated that his instructions only have value if they are actually put into practice (Goenka, 1987/2012). When performed as it was originally intended, the practice includes eight integrated steps or components. Together these form a highly integrated unit called *ariyo a??ha?giko maggo*, or the Eightfold Noble Path, which is the Fourth Noble Truth of the “way to the cessation of suffering.” If one of the eight pieces is missing from the actual practice, the integration of the complete unit is lost. Goenka explains, the Eight-Fold Noble Path “is noble in the sense that anyone who walks on the path is bound to become a noble-hearted, saintly person, freed from suffering” (Hart, 1987, p. 16). The eight components are divided into three categories, or fields, of morality (*sila*), concentration (*samadhi*), and wisdom (*pañña*). All three have to be combined together for the practice to work as intended. If concentration and wisdom is

developed without morality, then the practice is not complete and will never produce the intended outcome. Similarly, if morality and wisdom are developed without concentration, then the wisdom will not be sufficient and will never produce the intended outcome (Goenka, 1987/2012).

The first field of Sila, or morality, involves right speech (*samm? vac?*), right action (*samm? kammanta*), and right livelihood (*samm? ?jiva*). This means no stealing, killing, lying, and having a profession which contributes to the common good and does not harm living things. All of these are required to have enough peace of mind to progress to the second field of *sam?dhi*, or concentration of the mind. The field of *sam?dhi* involves right effort or exercise (*samm? vay?m?*), right awareness (*samm? sati*), and right concentration (*samm? samadhi*).

The word *sati* can be translated as “memory,” and is often translated as “mindfulness.” This is, in fact, the “mindfulness” that has become a well-known word and somewhat synonymous with “meditation” in Western popular culture. Similar to popular mindfulness literature, Goenka (1987/2012) describes *samm?-sati* in his discourse summaries,

*Samm?-sati*—right awareness, awareness of the reality of the present moment. Of the past there can only be memories; for the future there can only be aspirations, fears, imaginations. You have started practicing *samm?-sati* by training yourself to remain aware of whatever reality manifests at the present moment, within the limited area of the nostrils. . . . The habit pattern of the mind, as you have seen, is to roll in the future or in the past, generating craving or aversion. By practicing right awareness you have started to break this habit. Not that after this course you will forget the past entirely, and have no thought at all for the future. But in fact you used to waste your energy by rolling needlessly in the past or future, so much so that when you needed to remember or plan something, you could not do so. By developing *samm?-sati*, you will learn to fix your mind more firmly in the present reality, and you will find that you can easily recall the past when needed, and make proper provisions for the future. You will be able to lead a happy, healthy life. (pp. 21-22)

However, for Goenka, and also for the Buddha, *sati*, or mindfulness, is just one component of the Eight-Fold Noble Path which operates as an integrated unit. And *sati* is only *samm?-sati*, or right awareness when it is practiced on the reality of sensations, and at subtler and subtler levels. Goenka (1987/2012) describes this distinction,

To begin, you gave attention to the conscious, intentional breath, then the natural, soft breath, then the touch of the breath. Now you will take a still subtler object of attention: the natural, physical sensations within this limited area. You may feel the temperature of the breath, slightly cold as it enters, slightly warm as it leaves the body. Beyond that, there are innumerable sensations not related to breath: heat, cold, itching, pulsing, vibrating, pressure, tension, pain, etc. (p. 22)

The initial act of formal meditation to develop in the field of *samādhi*, which is the ability to hold attention on a single point on the body and to become sensitive enough to feel extremely subtle but distinct sensations that were otherwise impossible to detect (Goenka, 1987/2012). However, it is only “right concentration” if the object of concentration is a naturally occurring phenomenon in the body and not a product of imagination, visualization, verbalization, or an object outside the body (Goenka, 1990a). Though this suggested level of concentration is extremely high relative to the concentration of an experienced person, it can be sufficiently developed over the course of three days to proceed to the third phase of *pañña*, or wisdom by direct experience. Development in the field of *pañña* is the ultimate goal of the Eight-Fold Noble Path.

*Pañña* involves *sammā saṅkappa* (right thoughts), and *sammā diṭṭhi* (right understanding or view). Right thoughts means becoming so involved in the practice that the mind naturally generates more thoughts of leading a good life than of “hatred, aversion, ill will, and animosity” (Goenka, 2015, p. 101). Right view, or wisdom gained by direct experience, is possible after combining all seven of the previous parts of the Eight-Fold Noble path simultaneously. It is literally the rigorous objective investigation of the physical and mental structure “like a scientist who observes an experiment in his laboratory” (Goenka, 1987/2012, p. 39). The goal is to understand what it is made of, how it works, and how it comes to arise and pass away trillions of times every moment in the birth and death of the process of *paṭicca-samuppāda* just as it literally arises and passes away at the birth and death of this lifetime. As with science, *sammā-pañña*, which is right view or wisdom by direct experience, is the product of investigating every null-hypothesis to the end in an inductive effort to understand the law of nature.

Fleischman (Fleischman, 2016) describes the effect of *vipassanā* as multi-faced, and centering around improving the quality of relationship,

As an expression of the peace that meditation often brings, interpersonal relationships may improve, increasing pro-social and altruistic feelings. Harmonious moods like gratitude may fill spaces vacated by the reduction of lesser concerns. Meditation is optimized when it is carried forward to create a positive feedback community in which individual meditation expands into interpersonal harmony which in turn nurtures individual meditation. For this to happen, there needs to be stabilizing traditions, agreed upon training, and teachers who exemplify wise life choices.

This section has summarized the entirety of Gotama’s discovery and teaching. He only taught the way out of suffering by virtue of understanding the precise nature of suffering. Though this description includes esoteric terms which may at times seem mystical, Gotama’s intention was for each person to prove or refute his hypothesis for themselves. The recognition of “Buddhism” as a world religion or belief system is likely an artifact of scholarship or a creation of sectarian groups and not of the original material. Gotama’s intention was to develop a system which pertains to the very same realm of reality that can be observed by any person willing to replicate his efforts, that is,

a series of observations which exist within what is now called the realm of natural science.

### **Vipassan? Meditation as taught by S.N. Goenka in the tradition of Sayagyi U Ba Khin**

Satya Naryan Goenka was a successful business man born to an Indian family in Burma, where he met his teacher teacher Sayagyi U Ba Khin in 1955 (Hart, 1987). U Ba Khin in turn learned vipassan? from the Burmese lay teacher Saya Thet Gyi, who learned from the famous Burmese scholar-monk Ledi Sayadaw (An?layo, 2006). Prior to the British occupation of Burma, vipassan? was only practiced by the monastic orders. This did not reflect the tradition of the Buddha which included lay practitioners. Ledi popularized the practice vipassan? to lay students in order to protect it from the destructive British occupation which attempted to purge “religious” systems from Burmese culture (Braun, 2013). He learned vipassan? from the unnamed lineage of monks who maintained it in its present form after the *arahants* (enlightened people) Sona and Uttara brought it to Burma. These two arahants were sent by the famous Indian king *Ashoka* in the second century B.C, two hundred years after the death of Gotama, the Buddha (VRI, 1988).

U Ba Khin was teaching to a small local audience in Burma in the 1950’s and 1960’s when Goenka was approved to teach and spread the practice 15 years after he began learning vipassan? from U Ba Khin. Goenka drew on his experience as a successful industrialist to construct the standardized international system of teaching that is found today. He eventually became the most widely recognized lay teacher of vipassan? in the world (Hart, 1987) and “wished to see *Dhamma* communicated with scientific concepts and language” (Fleischman, 2016, p. iv). In *Vipassana Meditation and the Scientific World View*, vipassan? teacher Paul Fleischman (2016) describes the unique aspect of Goenka’s achievement,

One of the important factors by which Acharya Goenkaji re-kindled Vipassana mediation in the second half of the Twentieth Century was his emphasis on the similarities between the world views of Vipassana and science. For many Vipassana students around the world, this emphasis facilitated their openness to giving meditation a fair trial. . . Once it is clearly presented, the scientific portrayal of reality can be easily understood to clarify such Pali terms as “Anicca,” “Anatt?,” “Kamma,” and “Dhamma.” Science today not only clarifies some intellectual aspects of Vipassana, but it also adds momentum to the psychological and moral implications of meditation practice. (p. iii)

The practice only works as it was intended if all eight parts of the Eight-Fold Noble Path are practiced together as an integrated unit. Each step of the path, divided into three categories of sila, sam?dhi, and pañña, are developed in order but ultimately inform and condition each other. That is, they have precisely defined reciprocal relationships, and a particular property of the practice emerges from the integration of these three parts when practiced in samm?, or ideal, fashion (Goenka, 1987/2012). However, daily life makes it practically impossible to learn sila, samadhi, and pañña as an integrated unit as it was originally taught. Indeed, providing this kind of environment is

a complex and difficult task.

For this reason, S. N. Goenka only taught new students within the context of a full 10-day courses. These courses are held at established centers or rented sites under the oversight of approved assistant-teachers to ensure that they provide the necessary conditions for students to work without interruption. All food, lodging, and course materials are provided by “old students” who have completed at least one ten-day course with Goenka. In this controlled environment, every need is provided so that students can concentrate completely on the practice, following the “code of conduct” organized to maximize the efficacy of the practice (Dhamma.org, n.d.). Students refrain from contact with others as much as possible in order to maintain unbroken focus on their body and to effectively work in isolation. Having an attitude of working alone enforces the principle that progress in vipassanā occurs when the focus is on oneself for oneself. This includes leaving all electronics and valuable possessions with the management, and refraining from reading, writing, eye contact and physical gestures with others. They are permitted to ask the teachers questions about the practice at any time, or to address logistical problems with the management of the course. Every moment is accounted for in a repeating daily schedule of near constant guided meditation to develop samādhi in the first three days, pañña beginning on day four and continuing to the end of the course. The daily schedule is as follows (Dhamma.org, n.d.):

4:00 am	Morning wake-up bell
4:30-6:30 am	Meditate in the hall or in your room
6:30-8:00 am	Breakfast break
8:00-9:00 am	Group meditation in the hall
9:00-11:00 am instructions	Meditate in the hall or in your room according to the teacher's instructions
11:00-12:00 noon	Lunch break
12 noon-1:00 pm	Rest and interviews with the teacher
1:00-2:30 pm	Meditate in the hall or in your room
2:30-3:30 pm	Group meditation in the hall
3:30-5:00 pm instructions	Meditate in the hall or in your own room according to the teacher's instructions
5:00-6:00 pm	Tea break

6:00-7:00 pm	Group meditation in the hall
7:00-8:15 pm	Teacher's Discourse in the hall
8:15-9:00 pm	Group meditation in the hall
9:00-9:30 pm	Question time in the hall
9:30 pm	Retire to your own room--Lights out

Even the published summaries of Goenka's discourses from his 10-day courses are intended to be taken in the context of a full course, as described in the disclaimer by editor William Hart (1987/2012),

The [discourse] summaries should not be treated as a do-it-yourself manual for learning Vipassana, a substitute for a ten-day course. Meditation is a serious matter, especially the Vipassana technique, which deals with the depths of the mind. It should never be approached lightly or casually. The proper way to learn Vipassana is only by joining a formal course, where there is a suitable environment to support the meditator, and a trained guide. If someone chooses to disregard this warning and tries to teach himself the technique only from reading about it, he proceeds entirely at his own risk. (p. 4)

This strict but practical system for teaching vipassanā has the purpose of creating an environment that is free from distraction and allows students to maintain "perfect sila" when developing samādhi and pañña (Goenka, 1987/2012). That is, students don't have the opportunity to lie, steal, kill, embellish sexual desires, or consume intoxicants. They are effectively "living the life of a monk or a nun" (Goenka, 1990a) in order to learn the Eight-Fold Noble Path as a complete, integrated unit. They are encouraged to "refrain from all rites and rituals" from previous systems during the ten days in order to give the technique a "fair trial" (Goenka, 1987/2012, p. 15) and to work exactly as the practice was intended. At the same time, they are encouraged to decide for themselves after the course is over whether or not they want to continue the practice, but only based on giving it a truly fair trial free from confounding the results with other practices (Goenka, 1990a). Those who decide to include the practice in their daily lives are encouraged to practice a minimum of one hour, twice daily.

As of this writing, there are about 180 autonomous, non-profit vipassanā centers conducting courses on Goenka's behalf world-wide (Dhamma.org, n.d.). Each center and vipassanā course is supported entirely by donations and volunteer efforts of students of S. N. Goenka who have completed at least one 10-day course. Though highly experienced, teachers and assistant teachers

receive no compensation and are lay “householders” who hold jobs to support themselves. Every center follows the same daily schedule, plays the same recorded discourses, which ensures that an old student can attend a center anywhere and operate in the same system of practice and communication with people of all races and backgrounds. It also provides a standardized way to roughly assess a student’s progress and minimize the resources required to conduct a course. A center typically conducts a 10, 20, 30, 45, or 60-day course, followed by a short service period, followed by another course and service period, and so on throughout the year. All activity in the centers is dedicated to the practice or supporting the practice of vipassanā, and nearly all 10-day courses hold waiting lists of one or two months (Hart, 1987).

Goenka claims that the courses must be taught at a minimum of ten days because this is the minimum-average amount of serious practice required for new student to discover crucial facts about the physical and mental structure required to facilitate an unsupported practice for the rest of their lives. He also claims that only allowing the centers to receive donations from students who have successfully completed a 10-day course prevents the system from losing the purity of its mission by becoming a commercial interest, and increases the value of the system’s own survival to stand as evidence of the efficacy of the practice (Goenka, 1987/2012). He claims that a system of this kind allows the teaching to be taught “in its pristine purity” as a non-sectarian and purely scientific practice, with all vital aspects of the practice combined as the complete, integrated unit that they were originally intended to be (Goenka, 2015, p. 9). This distinction separates this form of teaching vipassanā from other forms which typically involve looser restrictions to accommodate popular demand. It is important to note, however, that historical evidence for this bold claim of “pristine purity” has not been provided, and so the efficacy or authenticity of the practice is mostly left to the anecdotal or scientific study of the practice itself.

### Use of the term Vedanā

There is debate about the meaning of the term vedanā among vipassanā scholars, and the various understandings of the term have significant implications for the actual practice of satipaṭṭhāna/vipassanā. In Goenka’s case, vedanā is defined as “experience, a feeling, a sensation,” (Goenka, 1990a), and “anything that one feels at the physical level ... any natural, normal, ordinary bodily sensation, whether pleasant or unpleasant, whether gross or subtle, whether intense or feeble” (Goenka, 1987/2012, p. 33). Emphasis is given to vedanā as physical, bodily sensations, where activity in the mind can also be experienced through physical sensations as described earlier. In Goenka’s technical exposition of the Mahāsatipaṭṭhāna sutta where the Buddha lays out the entire practice of satipaṭṭhāna/vipassanā, he describes how an advanced meditator can eventually process the four divisions of physical and mental vedanā together as a single stream, and that beginning with bodily sensations is the easiest way. He gives a particularly important description of the technical reasoning behind the importance of vedanā as concrete, distinct sensation throughout the entire body in a 1990 essay entitled *Why Vedanā and What is Vedanā* found in the 1990 publication of a seminar proceedings entitled *The Importance of Vedanā and Sampajañña*, published by the Vipassana Research Institute in the same year.

Though a difficult read for an untrained meditator, this essay defines the precise understanding of this term which distinguishes Goenka's way of teaching vipassanā from others.

It should be noted that Anālayo (2006), a German monk who does not practice in Goenka's tradition, determined through scholarly review that Goenka's use of the term vedanā and its implications for practice are as plausible, but no more (or less) supported by the historical evidence than differing views.

### Conclusions on Vipassanā Meditation

This chapter provided an outline of the historical Buddha's discovery of the Four Noble Truths: that life is suffering, how suffering arises, the conditions required for it to cease, and the instructions for how to cause it to cease. It covered the aspects of the theory pertaining to how suffering arises, with emphasis on the elements of the life process and their place in an objective reality. It then finished with the description of S.N. Goenka's system of teaching vipassanā meditation with emphasis on the non-sectarian, and scientific investigation into the dhamma, or "law of nature," via the Eight-Fold Noble path as a complete, integrated unit. The theory of vipassanā described was taken entirely from this particular tradition. This was done partly because this tradition is hypothesized to be uniquely appropriate for the research question, and partly to support the suggestion that research into Eastern traditions should clearly differentiate which traditional context is used to define their respective research terms.

The ideas in this chapter were articulated in a fashion that would highlight their compatibility with the philosophy and research in the natural sciences in order to ask the question, "To what extent did the Buddha define a natural system?" Embedded in this question is the notion of a natural system, which points to a particular paradigm of natural science. In a nutshell, this paradigm is one in which prioritizes observation of phenomena "as it is" in nature over influencing those phenomena, and one which organizes those observations in a way which can scale to increasing complexity. While on the surface these paradigmatic principles appear fundamental to natural science, there remains a paucity of research on human behavior in terms of natural systems. Murray Bowen provided one natural system theory of human behavior which remains the only well-developed example of such a theory. This study hypothesizes that the thinking that Bowen brought into his work is unique and subtle, and that aspects of this mode of thinking may also be evident in vipassanā meditation as taught by S. N. Goenka. The next chapter will outline how this study will systematically examine the literature from these two perspectives on human behavior to tease out the principles that define mode of thinking, and any scientific consilience found between them.

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