

# Vipassana and Comprehensive Training

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**Abstract:** *Education is what remains, said Albert Einstein, after all, that is taught at school is lost. At most, the modern education method imparts specific knowledge, but no heart development is possible, writes Ravi Agrawal. No wonder today, twin devils in creation in acquisitive conduct, our world is devoured. Thinkers and thinkers of all colours, whether in India or abroad, think that a comprehensive revision of the education system is necessary.*

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## 1. Introduction

Education, said Albert Einstein, is what remains after all that is taught at school is lost. If this concept is used to assess modern schooling, its primary outcomes can easily be described as violent rivalry, pride and envy. At its best, the modern education system imparts some professional knowledge and skills, but there is no cultivation of the heart. The effect is simply to make students proud materialists. As a consequence, at a moment when children are supposed to be thinking about elegance, success and excellence, they instead believe about physical titillation and riches and spend time stressing about how to make money. No wonder today our civilization is devoured by twin devils of pursuing acquisitive behaviour, with socially severe problems of corruption, confrontation and aggression, and ecological issues such as environmental pollution and the rapid degradation of resources which threaten the very existence of humanity on this earth. Thinkers and thinkers of all colours, whether in India or abroad, believe that a full overhaul of the education system is a requirement for the solution of these major diseases that are besieging humanity. For until human beings become harmonized inside themselves, by a profound shift of their animal instincts—which will be the fundamental object of education—all improvements of their outward conditions will inevitably be overwhelmed by their instinctual, animal cruelty.

### A dream for integrated schooling

Education should be concerned with the whole of life and not with immediate responses to immediate challenges. Four distinct yet interrelated facets of human life can usually be recognized: physical, mental, intellectual and spiritual. All these things can be thoroughly mastered through comprehensive schooling. Physical education, for example, would require not only the execution of physical activities to keep the body healthy but also instruction to utilize the senses and the social environment carefully.

In the same way, emotional education will emphasize the kind of mind-training that produces meaningful human emotions of unconditional affection, kindness, forbearance, modesty, patience, etc., and eradicates baser impulses such as greed, jealousy, arrogance, violence, etc. Through this way, a positive partnership with the community may be built.

Intellectual education would include not only the creation of the potential to perceive but also the willingness to behave

objectively, rationally and critically based on a deep comprehension of the different manifestations of existence. Finally, spiritual education should cultivate the refinement of the mind, to manifest that elusive "fourth dimension" of human personality, which gives rise to an intuitive understanding of the very purpose of our existence and the clarity of what needs to be done to achieve it. It is very evident that the current education paradigm totally sidesteps the mental and moral facets of human nature, and caters instead to physical and academic growth—and that, too, often in a shallow manner. It is not as if the planners of education and training were not aware of this deficiency because, as early as 1966, the Kothari Commission recognized the need to teach social, moral and spiritual values through education. However, the way to do this in a multicultural culture like India, where the conceptions of caste, race and faith are quite deeply rooted, has questioned a socially appropriate approach. There have, of course, been numerous efforts to promote spiritual education indirectly by different methods, such as reflection, debate and meditation, etc. In multiple establishments such as Christian Missionary Schools; Islamic Schools; meditational approaches, lectures and discourses also made Anglo-Vedic Schools direct attempts. Ramakrishna Mission Schools; ISKCON; Maharishi Mahesh Yogi Centers; Krishnamurti Foundation; and Saibaba Trust, etc. However, these approaches have not been widely accepted.

Today, there is a modern approach of mind management and purification in India and many other nations, which, if properly combined with the educational framework, has the potential to become a socially appropriate strategy for cultivating the mental and spiritual aspects of human personality. This practice, the ancient science of mind and body, is called meditation Vipassana. Here is a short overview of the methodology and how it can be incorporated into current education.

### Vipassana Meditation

Viewed from the viewpoint of holistic education, Vipassana meditation can be considered to be a technique of purifying the mind of its most essential impulses, such that one begins to manifest the genuinely human qualities of universal goodness, kindness, sympathy, compassion, modesty, patience, etc., and at the same time to gain insight into the true nature and intent of human life. This is accomplished in a somewhat logical way by the systemic cultivation of Correct Mindfulness combined with non-reactivity; that is, the production of the habit of paying careful attention to

whatever happens in our complete organism—the body with its five senses and the mind that works inside and around it—without any mixture of individual decisions or reactions. The element that purifies the brain at the highest level is the mental aspect of objectivity or serenity that emerges from a continuous, detailed awareness of the impermanence of all the components of the mind-body phenomena.

A significant prerequisite for the formal practice of Vipassana is the scrupulous observance of five essential moral precepts—i.e., abstention from violence, theft, false speech, sexual harassment, and intoxicants—because any deliberate breach of such doctrines induces violent mental distress, which makes it challenging to examine the mind objectively. Of example, the practice of Vipassana often allows one to acquire the mental strength required to uphold the spiritual precepts of everyday life. While the full details of this systematic practice are best learned in a meditation camp under the careful guidance of a teacher, some critical features of the technique and its theoretical basis are explained here.

The building stone in the development of Proper Mindfulness (or Awareness) lies of giving mind to the body. The art of structured self-observation starts by paying emphasis on breathing, breathing in and out of the body. This method, called Anapana, is an activity in the development of correct consciousness, not in the manipulation or power of the body (such as praa.naayaama or other breathing exercises). It is just a quiet "good study" of the normal rhythm of breathing, with a calm and robust focus free from any pressure. Nobody notes the duration of the intake, short or long. To order to improve awareness better, the pupil is encouraged to concentrate more to more excellent information, such as which nostril the air is going to and out or where the air is reaching in the region around the nostrils.

The whole exercise is to observe reality as it is, without any preferences or reactions. This is very normal that it would not be able to concentrate attention always on the breath at the outset, except for a minute or two. The natural propensity of the mind to drift away from the given role appears to the surface very quickly, enabling the pupil to witness for his or herself the chaotic existence of the mind. The student learns to consider this phenomenon by himself, dispassionately, without becoming dejected by the constant "ping backwards" of the mind and once again turns his concentration on the air.

The systemic practise of Anapana over a few days results in increased concentration and natural calming and breathing equalization. Since the air is so closely connected to the soul, this contributes concurrently to a relaxing of the soul—indeed, of the entire life-rhythm. The consciousness often is alert enough to recognize the more nuanced aspects of the body-mind network, e.g. the stimuli that arise in the region near the nose where concentration is concentrated during the practice of awareness and breathing.

This takes us to the next step in the practice of Correct Mindfulness, that is, knowledge of the body's sensations. The focus of meditation is body feeling. There are feelings

about the organization. However, these are experienced by the subconscious. As one is studying the inward perception of one's beliefs, one is merely experiencing the relationship between mind and matter (Vedanaa-samosara.naa sabbe dhamma: all that occurs in mind is followed by sensation). Besides, impressions (vedana) provide a critical connection between the effect (Phassa) on the six sense doors and the subsequent craze and aversion response (Ta'nhaa) that is the root cause of all pain. In reality, this remarkable insight is one of the essential elements of the instruction of the supreme scientist of mind and body, Gotama Buddha.

Vipassana 's practise is to "sense" the stimulus in the body without any reaction or assessment, fostering equanimity in a rather profound process. This is, of course, better said than achieved, as our subconscious mind, which is continuously "feeling" the stimuli of the body, has a persistent, stubborn tendency of responding in a specific way to such stimuli. It usually reacts with an aversion to sound stimuli of desire and painful stimuli, thereby reinforcing the mind's ingrained urge to chase for sensory stimulation and to run away from discomfort.

The discipline intolerance and serenity amid the whole continuum of stimuli helps to interrupt this cycle of practice subtly. Someone frequently experiences the sensations as they are: continuously changing-raising, lingering for some time, going away, and giving birth to personal impressions. In this regular exercise, the reflex of response is substituted with an understanding of anicca or impermanence. The pupil is taught to concentrate his or her attention on the evolving essence of the stimuli, while slowly removing the ingrained reflex of judging them as good or negative. This scientific method of observing sensations as they are, without any evaluation based on past conditioning, is what the word Vipassana describes. Vipassana, the Pali term, simply means "to see things as they are"—in their true essence, their real trait of impermanence (Anic).

Thus, one will slowly train the mind to perceive the physical stimuli in an unbiased manner — without some sense of their becoming G4my experiences in the same way as one can dispassionately examine the waves rising and falling in the sea. Hence, by exercising this analytical observation, the mentality of "enjoyment"—one of the significant manifestations of the ego — is diminished.

The attitude of staying equanimous against all internal processes arising from the engagement of mind and body is simultaneously reiterated, as the student consistently acknowledges the reality of the fleeting essence (Anic) of the mind-body cycle.

The systematic practice of mindfulness of stimuli incorporates into itself many essential facets of the development of Correct Awareness, i.e., the awareness of the state of mind and the nature of consciousness at any particular moment. When the alertness and objectiveness of the meditator improve (by the constant practice of non-reactive evaluation of perceptions), he or she will quickly become a meditator.

The most important effect of Vipassana practice is that it offers the mind a normal tendency for the aim of absolute enlightenment, total freedom from all bondages. Meanwhile, one establishes a deep conviction that all hindrances to the Direction can be resolved.

### Vipassana 's position in training

We will now see how Vipassana bridges this critical void in western schooling and mental conditioning that can contribute to a happy, harmonious and purposeful existence. Vipassana practise offers a way to perceive critically and impersonally all the manifestations of this subjective universe through the eye of an equanimous spirit. The various advantages of this approach are addressed at length in this seminar and provided the foundation for work undertaken by the Vipassana Research Institute (Igatpuri, India) in a variety of fields of human life. Only those aspects relating to the area of education are discussed here.

The "naked focus" mindset (given by the mind at once aware and non-reactive) speeds down the change between thinking to practice, providing the professional more time-those vital moments required to make a rational decision. Therefore, the propensity of the foundation, animal impulses, to overwhelm the faculty of human thought may be successfully regulated, contributing to a steady reduction of negative behaviours such as rashness, hostility, intemperance and violent actions that define modern youth. This emotional education would inevitably add to a significant change in the student-teacher partnership, which has gradually eroded over the years owing to the corroding effect of a materialistic world view combined with the negative characteristics listed above.

At the other hand, this discipline in the non-reactive examination, in reality, combined with the wisdom of anicca, improves one 's capacity to face the difficulties of life honestly and equitably without resorting to solutions such as smoke, drinking and narcotics that have become the bane of contemporary culture. This disposition of equanimity often decreases the excessive obsession for the indulgence of constant materialistic impulses, creating room for the realization of the so-called "higher needs"-the need for self-actualization in purpose, right, truthfulness, obligation, devotion, kindness, etc., which modern philosophy considers as central components of fundamental human needs. Latest work has found that individuals who are willing to fulfil such "higher needs" are usually far more imaginative and inventive because self-actualization has to provide "a more lasting fuel for innovation" than a desire for sensual pleasure.

Observation of mental material is often a powerful medium in self-education because it shows to the meditator a magnificent view in his weak points and abilities without harming his self-esteem. Therefore, the healthy habit of hurriedly glossing over one's shortcomings, or blowing one 's capabilities out of proportion, is tested. Gradually, one gains the inner strength needed to overcome one 's weaknesses without the need to exercise violent will or forceful repression, both of which are harmful in the long run. This frank self-examination decreases self-righteousness, enhances one 's knowledge of the

shortcomings of others, tends to cultivate modesty and kindness, and eliminates pride.

The attitude of Correct Knowledge coupled with equanimity strongly correlates to the temperament of the real scientist and scholar, which is defined by a simple understanding of the topic, unprejudiced receptivity to the truth, the absence of the subjective aspect in the decision, and the postponement of the arrangement until a proper review of the evidence has been carried out. Accordingly, this practice should be of great help in increasing the scientific temper.

Vipassana meditation reinforces the scientific outlook in a much more direct way. After some period of practice of awareness of stimuli, any meditator attains a condition where he encounters the entire body as a mass of vibrations. This interpretation is compatible with the quantum-relativistic explanation of the matter. This direct interaction offers far more insight into the essence of the subject than the statistical formula scores provided by the class descriptions.

Another significant advantage of regular practice-especially awareness of breath, which is of vital importance in education is the enhancement of one's capacity to focus on a job. As explained earlier, the purpose of the practice is to train the mind to hold its focus continually on the target ( i.e., the breath) and to reduce the drift of the mind through meaningless daydreams, which are the principal obstacle to concentration. Learning to identify emotional conditions is often very useful. Suppose these daydreams have appeared (whether during contemplation or during daily activity), if one renders such fantasies themselves the target of scrutiny, their power of diversion is dramatically diminished, and they are easily dispersed. This results in a fast recovery of the concentration.

The mindset of non-reactive impersonal contemplation is of fundamental importance in the final deliverance of the soul from all bondages, which is the real object of spiritual instruction. To quote Venerable Nyanaponika Thera: "The inner isolation from life ... as gained, briefly and partly, through bare focus, teaches us, from our knowledge, the likelihood of achieving the full separation and the joy arising from it. This gives us the faith that such a temporary separation may well one day become a total detachment from this universe of misery.

For order to accomplish this goal, the essential prerequisite is to gain an understanding of the fundamental aspects of life. Impermanence (anicca) is the critical feature that the student of Vipassana is continually faced with. When this knowledge is entrenched, the awareness of the other characteristics — i.e., pain (dukkha) and egolessness (anatta)—develops naturally, leading us to a strong comprehension of the meaning of existence and the path to attain it — the very centre of spiritual education.

## 2. Conclusion

It should be evident from the above brief definition that Vipassana meditation is a strict science practice, a universal community of mind which does not adhere to any religious

values, dogmas or rituals. It would also be widely appropriate as an essential part of schooling. Its advantages have been verified by thousands of professionals, both young and elderly, belonging to various castes, creeds, countries and religious beliefs. Vivekananda 's vision of creating a "man-made school" may be achieved by introducing Vipassana into modern education. It is about time that an action plan in the field of education was drawn up, at least on an experimental basis, to clinically verify the effectiveness of Vipassana over a more extended period. Some of the main concerns which need to be discussed include:

- 1) How can students, teachers and school and college managers be encouraged to introduce Anapana and Vipassana and reduce resistance from unintentional students and teachers?
- 2) The extent of training needed before allowing members of the education staff to teach meditation in schools and colleges.
- 3) Format and the minimum length of in-house camps arranged to introduce young students to meditation in Anapana, taking into account practical constraints (especially overnight stays).
- 4) How will the quality of instruction be preserved throughout the tight timetable of schools and colleges?
- 5) Will there be a systematic sequence in meditation in the curricula in schools and colleges?
- 6) Why do we assess the positive impact of Vipassana on instructors, students and the teaching-learning process?
- 7) Why can I align Vipassana with student counselling programs in schools and colleges?

A well-thought-out action strategy, if executed honestly, will pave the way for the development of organizations that will deliver genuinely comprehensive schooling. Such organizations will make a vital contribution to the creation of stable people and a harmonious community

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