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# VIPASSANA IN GOVERNMENT

An effective instrument for  
change and reform

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### About Author:

With all his multifarious responsibilities as Home Secretary to the Government of Rajasthan, Shri Ram Singh took leave for ten days to attend a Vipassana course held in Jaipur in the year 1975. He felt inspired by the great change he noticed in one of his friends who had taken a Vipassana course.

At the completion of his 10-day course, he found the technique very effective and result oriented, scientific and non-sectarian. He felt that Vipassana can provide an effective instrument for change and reform in government. He persuaded some of the key officials in the Home department to undergo training in Vipassana and with their help reorganised the department. He introduced Vipassana in the Central Jail and Rajasthan Police Academy, Jaipur, with good results. He continued his own regular practice of Vipassana and kept inspiring his colleagues and friends to take benefits of Vipassana courses.

After retirement from the Indian Administrative Service, he was appointed as a member of the Rajasthan Public Service Commission, its Chairman. When he retired from the commission, he was offered assignments with greater mundane benefits and wider sphere of responsibilities, which he declined. He decided to dedicate his life to serving society through Vipassana.

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## Vipassana in Government

### An effective instrument for change and reform

Vipassana, an ancient meditation technique of India, is the quintessence of the Buddha's teaching. It is a method of objective observation of mind-body phenomena, leading to purification of the mind.

*The technique is non-sectarian and can be practised by all, irrespective of caste, creed, religion or nationality.*

The technique has been found to be an effective means for attitudinal change, management of stress and strain and instilling such qualities as compassion, equanimity, integrity and efficiency in discharging one's duties and responsibilities.

In the remote past, as far back as the third century B.C., *Asoka*, the great emperor of India used Vipassana as an instrument of reform in the governance of his vast empire. His actions in the administration and management of State reflect piety, love, magnanimity, high moral discipline and ethical conduct in his personal as well as public life. He organised a system of government, efficient, humane and responsive to public weal, unparalleled in human history.

The record of his administration chiselled on rocks in the different parts of his empire, on the highways and hills, caves and public places enshrines the noblest sentiments of a man who loved his people like his own children, respected all sects and religious faiths and instilled confidence in the neighbouring countries for peace and concord.

In one of his most renowned edicts-*the Delhi Topra Pillar*, *Asoka* gives a comprehensive review of the measures he took during his reign. The inscription as it unfolds brings *Asoka* face to face with people. He says that whereas kings and rulers, prior to him cherished the same wish as his for advancement of people failed, yet he succeeded. He explains in the Edict - he used *Nijhatiya*, differently interpreted as *inner meditation, reflection, contemplation - Vipassana*. He further says that *let this fact be engraved on stones and pillars so that his message endures till the Sun and Moon shine on Earth!*

This is, indeed, an eloquent record of an effective use of Vipassana to achieve the aims of a government committed to the welfare of the people.

In the post-Asokan period, impact of Vipassana continued for several centuries as the graphic accounts of the Chinese pilgrims indicate and speak highly of the culture and civilisation of the people and how they lived in peace, prosperity and

harmony. As the time passed and centuries after centuries rolled by, distortions and admixture was caused in the technique by unscrupulous elements, Vipassana lost its efficiency, and finally, it was lost in India, the home of its origin.

Myanmar, (then Burma) our neighbouring country preserved it in its pristine purity through a chain of teachers from generation to generation since its inception during the period of Asoka, who sent *dhamma messengers* to several countries far and wide to spread the message of the Enlightened One, the message of Vipassana.

Sayagyi U Ba Khin in the recent past (1898-1971) was the most outstanding teacher of Vipassana. As the Accountant General of Myanmar, he introduced far reaching reforms in the departments under his charge. He succeeded in eradicating corruption, instilling efficiency and accelerating the pace of decision making and fostering harmony and better relationship. He says -

*“The fruits of meditation are innumerable-those who take to meditation with good intention can be assured of success. With the development of purity and the power of the mind backed by insight into the Ultimate Truth of Nature, one might be able to do a lot of things in the right direction for the benefit of mankind... how many advantage accrue to a person who undergoes a successful course of training whether he be a religious man, an administrator, a politician, a businessman or a student”.*

Sayagyi U Ba Khin maintained that meditation can help in “creating a reservoir of calm and balanced energy to be used for the building of a welfare state and as bulwark against corruption in public life”. This was amply illustrated by his own noble example.

Sayagyi U Ba Khin deeply desired that Vipassana should return to India, the home of its origin. He entrusted this mission to Shri S.N. Goenka, his most illustrious student, who arrived in India in 1969 and with his first course in the month of July, the same year, set in motion the Wheel of Dhamma once again.

The Government of Rajasthan took a pioneering decision to introduce Vipassana as an instrument of reform in the government organisations. As a first step, Goenkaji was invited to conduct a Vipassana course in the Central Jail, Jaipur in the year 1975 for jail inmates convicted of heinous crimes and some members of jail staff. The courses yielded wonderful results. The convicts felt remorseful and greatly relieved of tensions with perceptible change in their behaviour. The jail staff

who participated in the course, developed greater awareness towards their duties and responsibilities.

The success of the course led to the organisation of a course in the Rajasthan Police Academy in early 1976 in which police officers of all ranks participated. The course had a profound impact on the behavioural pattern of the participants. They got clear perceptions of their functions and roles and developed greater awareness of their duty towards the society. Then, followed a second course in the Central Jail, Jaipur conducted by Goenkaji with similar results.

During the same period, some senior officers in the department of Home in the Government of Rajasthan who attended Vipassana courses were instrumental in initiating internal reforms in the department leading to the reduction of paper work, quicker decision making, clearance of pending work accumulated over years and better staff-officer relationship. Departments coming within the jurisdiction of Home Department were reorganised and their training system streamlined resulting in greater efficiency, economy in functioning and inculcation of trust and harmony.

Subsequent to the successful experiments in Rajasthan, Vipassana courses were organised in the Central Jail, Ahmedabad and the Central Jail, Vadodara in Gujarat State with positive results. In 1993, the first Vipassana course was held in Central Jail, Tihar, New Delhi, one of the biggest prisons in Asia, followed by four more courses and then a mega-course of over one thousand jail-inmates in 1994. This course was conducted by Shri S.N. Goenka himself which made a significant impact on the prisoners, an event unique in the annals of prison reform. Central Jail, Tihar now has a full-fledged Vipassana center exclusively for the prison inmates where regular courses are being held leading to change in the prison environment and continuous process of human development.

The Government of India has recommended to the state governments to consider introducing Vipassana in prisons as a measure of reform.

The Government of Maharashtra has taken a major step for introduction of Vipassana in all the jails of the State. A regular centre has been established in the Nashik Central Jail as in Tihar. Similarly, Vipassana courses are being organised in the Central Jails in the states of Haryana, Bihar, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka.

The Government of Maharashtra has also taken a decision to provide an opportunity to senior officials to avail of the

benefits of Vipassana courses for which they would get commuted leave and actual travel expenses according to their entitlement.

The Government of Madhya Pradesh has taken a decision that officers joining Vipassana courses held in the State Academy of Administration will be treated on duty.

The Government of Rajasthan has recently decided that police personnel of all ranks belonging to State and Subordinate Services be exposed to Vipassana meditation courses, including personnel of various police stations in the city of Jaipur. In a major policy decision the Government has enabled all cadres of Government officials to have the benefit of special leave to attend Vipassana courses. The Government has also decided to have regular courses for trainees in the State Institute of Public Administration and Rajasthan Police Academy and other training institutes.

This is a brief account of history of Vipassana in government.

Today governments play an all-pervasive role in society. The character and quality of government is shaped by the people who run the government and who control the government. They have to be trained to be humane, responsive and of high integrity. This cannot come about by imparting skills in management only. Attitudes have to be changed-an eternal challenge to mankind. Vipassana can change attitudes.

*Vipassana is now available to all through the benevolent effort of Shri S.N. Goenka, the founding father of the Vipassana movement in India and the world. Its efficacy is well tested in the past, as well as now.*

By making Vipassana an integral part of the training system, we can be assured of a good government, the noblest aspiration of every citizen. Vipassana is the most effective resource of human development, an invaluable heritage of India.

**Ram Singh**

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