



Vipassana Meditation Technique by Satya Narayan Goenka at Dhamma Java Bogor

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Abstract

In the modern era, many individuals experience spiritual emptiness and mental health disorders due to the pressures of life and loss of meaning in life. S.N. Goenka's technique of Vipassana meditation is present as an alternative to spiritual practice that emphasizes the observation of bodily sensations without ritual and is non-sectarian, thus attracting the interest of lay practitioners from various backgrounds. This research examines one of the rapidly growing practices in Indonesia today: the vipassana meditation technique used by S.N. Goenka. This technique is unique and interesting to study in depth because it uses direct observation of bodily sensations, without rituals, without note-taking, and without jhana requirements, thus attracting modern lay practitioners. This study integrates the reasons why vipassana meditation has not been beneficial for physical and mental health. Based on holistic theory, yoga sutra theory, and Buddhist meditation, it compares, aligns, and analyzes SN Goenka's Vipassana Meditation technique. This study uses data collection techniques including participant observation, direct interviews, and document studies. Data analysis is carried out through data reduction, presentation, and conclusion drawing. Based on data analysis, the following findings were obtained: Holistically, physical and mental causes are not obstacles but rather means to realize bodily sensations, not absolute causes. In sutra yoga theory, sila is in harmony with yama and niyama, emphasizing internal self-discipline. In conclusion, S.N. Goenka's Vipassana meditation technique is a spiritual path to self-transformation that is relevant to physical and mental health today.

Keywords: meditation; vipassana; S.N. Goenka; anicca; dukkha; anatta

Introduction

In today's modern era, many people feel a spiritual emptiness due to the loss of meaning in life amid technological advances (Fang, 2025; Greenfield, 2016; Uddin, 2024; Youvan, 2024a, 2024b). Most focus on material pursuits and the busyness of life, which has diminished spiritual values, creating a feeling of inner emptiness (Abdul & Nidaul, 2025). Work burnout, hectic schedules, endless deadlines, and a myriad of problems can sometimes lead to a loss of meaning in life. A survey (Jakmin, 2023) noted that 59.1% of Generation Z (aged 15-26 years) have mental health disorders. Meditation is one of the alternatives that is currently booming in the West and in Indonesia.

Based on initial observations during a Vipassana meditation course using S.N. In a lecture on the Goenka technique in the Java Dhamma (December 22, 2024), the author observes and directly experiences the importance of this Vipassana meditation practice, which emphasizes the observation of bodily sensations, without the demands of jhana attainment, without note-taking, and a non-sectarian universal approach to finding the meaning of life.

The practice is open to people of all religious backgrounds and beliefs. S.N. Goenka's Vipassana Meditation is a scientific method for self-understanding and does not depend on any particular religious beliefs (Parrish, 2023; Rahmani, 2021; Sedlmeier, 2022). What's interesting and unique about S.N. Goenka's Vipassana meditation is that most of the participants in his course are members of the general public, not just Buddhists or monks (Babchuk, 2024; Pandey, 2022; Wallentin, 2023). This technique is not part of the structure of a Buddhist monastery.

Several previous studies have examined the practice of S.N. Goenka's Vipassana meditation technique from various perspectives. Pagis (2019) in his ethnographic study in Israel found that this technique is able to bridge traditional spiritual practices with the mental health needs of modern society, where practitioners experience a significant reduction in stress and anxiety levels through the observation of bodily sensations as the key to building self-awareness, as well as its non-sectarian approach facilitating acceptance among religiously diverse Western societies. Zeng et al. (2021) in a mixed-methods study in China with 120 participants proved that the practice of Vipassana significantly improved subjective happiness scores and lowered depression scores compared to the control group, with the practice sustained for six months resulting in further improvements in emotion regulation and self-acceptance through the development of metacognition or awareness of thought processes. Meanwhile, Kumari and Singh (2022) through a phenomenological approach in India with 25 experienced practitioners identified four main themes of transformation: changes in responses to physical pain, increased ethical awareness in social interactions, decreased emotional reactivity to conflict, and the development of a universal sense of connectedness, which shows how the observation of bodily sensations (*vedanā*) gradually changes the way practitioners interpret life experiences from reactive Become more reflective and thoughtful.

Although these three studies made important contributions, there are still gaps that need to be filled. The research of Pagis (2019) focused on the Israeli context with participants from Jewish and Christian backgrounds, while the research of Zeng et al. (2021) was conducted in China with participants who were mostly from non-religious or traditional Buddhist backgrounds. The research of Kumari and Singh (2022) was conducted in India, the country of origin of the Vipassana technique, with participants who had mostly been familiar with Hindu-Buddhist spiritual culture for a long time. The context of Indonesia, as a country with the largest Muslim population in the world and having unique socio-cultural dynamics, has not been widely studied in the literature on S.N. Goenka's technique of Vipassana meditation. In fact, the Dhamma Java meditation center in Bogor has been established since 2004 and has graduated thousands of practitioners from various religious and professional backgrounds, making it a rich location for empirical studies.

This research is essential to understand how S.N. Goenka's Vipassana meditation practice works and explores its potential benefits for managing physical and mental health. The research also aims to provide practical recommendations for individuals and organizations interested in practicing S.N. Goenka's Vipassana meditation techniques as part of a program to improve the quality of life for everyone. This research is expected to make a significant contribution to the academic literature on Vipassana meditation and provide strong empirical evidence to support Vipassana meditation techniques in the concepts of physical and mental health.

Method

This research is designed as a research in the field of religious and cultural studies, especially about samadhi with qualitative research is a research to explore and understand the meaning that a number of individuals or groups of people consider to come from social problems (Creswell, 2014:4). This qualitative research uses a phenomenological approach that seeks to explore and understand individual lived experiences as they experience them directly, without theoretical intervention or initial assessment.

The Phenomenological approach seeks to understand reality not as something purely objective, but as experienced directly by each individual. In this context, the experience of body heat sensations, the emergence of calmness, and behavioral transformation is understood from the perspective of practitioners, not only from theories or external explanations. According to Schutz (1970) added that phenomenology also emphasizes inter-subjectivity, i.e. how individual experiences are understood in social and cultural contexts.

This research interprets a holistic theory that considers that the whole of a person continuously needs motivation in one direction or more that people have the potential to grow towards physical and mental health, namely self-actualization. Where self-actualization can be achieved by fulfilling the needs of the basic hierarchy, namely physical needs, a sense of security, social relationships, rewards, then fulfilling the needs of self-actualization (Maslow, 1943). The theory of yoga is an art, a science, and a philosophy. The practice of Yoga teaches humans on every physical, mental and spiritual level. The method of practicing yoga to make humans full of purpose, meaning, useful and valuable in living their lives (Suamba, 2015).

In Buddhist Theory, vipassana meditation is one of the main practices in the Theravāda tradition aimed at obtaining a clear view (*vipassana bhavana*) of true reality, which is the three characteristics of existence: *anicca* (impermanence), *dukkha* (suffering), and *anattā* (without the essence of the self). In the Buddhist texts of the Theravada tradition, especially the commentary *tipitaka* by Bodhi (1995).

Data was collected over several months using three main techniques: Participant observation by doing so with a participant observation approach is a qualitative data collection in which the author is directly involved as a practitioner or as a direct student, while observing behavior, interaction, and following practice. In-depth interviews by creating a list of questions in a semi-structured live interview with face-to-face and in-person Q&A. This process involves collecting documentation or photographs before and after attending the vipassana meditation course, with the permission of the management and the meditation teacher to analyze, compare, and synthesize the documents to form a systematic, integrated, and complete study. Research instruments are used to support research operational steps, especially related to data collection techniques so that the key instrument in qualitative research is the researcher himself. Analyzing data is the process of systematically searching and compiling data from observations, interviews, and documentation by organizing data and choosing which ones are important and which need to be studied and making conclusions so that they are easy to understand. The qualitative analysis uses the foundations of holistic theory, Sutra Yoga theory and Buddhist meditation. Data analysis activities in this study include recording the results of interviews or data collection, data reduction, analysis and drawing conclusions or data verification. Triangulation between data sources is used to improve the validity of interpretations.

Results and Discussion

Physical and Mental Health

Vipassanā meditation is not only seen as for physical health and security, but the path of self-actualization that is, self-transcendence, involves a sense of connection to something nobler and is characterized by a shift from self-interest to a higher goal and focusing on others. One of the findings as well as the development of Maslow's holistic theory of self-

transcendence is the calmness of inner balance as a result of the practice of vipassana meditation by S.N. Goenka Technique. Where each individual no longer reacts negatively to anything that happens through either through the five senses or the mind, so that his mind remains calm purely from the impurity of mind and negativity resulting from the reactions of the body and mind.

Psychological Aspects (Silas, Samadhi, and Panna)

Psychological Implications of the practice of self-discipline in the practice of meditation vipassana technique S.N. Goenka, seems to perform simple activities such as walking, picking up food, or cleaning the meditation area with great attention. It shows the integration between sati (full awareness) and self-discipline, that is, acting with great care to reduce the adverse impact on the environment and other beings. Students show a tendency to help others without seeking personal gain. Students are often active listeners and active supporters for new students who are struggling. The implications of inner peace (samadhi) in Buddhist theory in practice play an important role in developing samādhi (correct concentration) as the foundation and initial process through ānāpānasati training the mind to be focused on the breath, creating calmness and stability of mind (citta-ekaggatā). This fosters upekkhā (equanimity), which is a sign of the spiritual and psychological maturity of the practitioner. The psychological implications of wisdom that the practice of S.N. Goenka's technique vipassanā meditation in the Dhamma Java Bogor is an effective means of forming true wisdom (paññā) through direct experience of the phenomena of the body and mind. The experience of body sensations observed without reaction reveals the essence of anicca (impermanence), dukkha (suffering), and anattā (without the core of the self), so that the reactive, emotional, and inherent mindset slowly transforms into a reflective, balanced, and thoughtful mindset.

Sociological Aspects

S.N. Goenka's technique vipassana meditation not only results in the liberation of the inner person, but also manifestly forms a compassionate and thoughtful social character. This change occurs through the interconnectedness of the three main pillars of Buddhist psychology, Sila (morality), samādhi (concentration), and paññā (wisdom) which are the foundation for ethical behavior in speech, action, and mindset. Vipassana meditation strengthens students' ability to respond to conflict consciously and non-reactively, as well as cultivate mettā (universal love) and upekkhā (equanimity), improving the quality of interpersonal relationships. Through the practice of noble silence and the practice of mettā bhāvanā, old students learn to foster honest, non-hurt, and constructive communication. By realizing the root of the conflict in one's own mind, namely desire, hatred, and ignorance, students develop a paññā to see social situations with clarity and love. The application of dasa pāramī (ten mental perfections) in daily life makes meditation not just a personal exercise, but a way to perfect moral character and build harmonious social relationships.

Theoretical and Practical Implications

S.N. Goenka's research on vipassana meditation techniques in the Java Dhamma makes a significant contribution to the study of meditation techniques and practices by placing religious teachings within the framework of broader physical and mental, psychological,

sociological and educational health. The findings generate theoretical insights while offering the development and change of mindset for their application in religious, academic, and policy contexts.

Theoretical Contributions

First, based on holistic needs theory, it shows how S.N. Goenka's technique vipassanā meditation practice not only trains inner awareness, but also facilitates holistic change in every layer of human needs. Thus the gradual process towards the fulfillment of holistic needs in vipassanā meditation can be seen as not just a path to self-actualization, but more of a factor of self-transcendence beyond the self-focused nature of self-actualization. Self-transcendence involves a sense of connection to something nobler and is characterized by a shift from self-interest to a higher purpose and focusing on others.

Second, the implementation of S.N. Goenka's vipassanā meditation technique in the Dhamma Java Bogor can be understood as a cross-tradition practice that shows structural harmony with Patañjali sutra yoga. Although rooted in Theravāda Buddhism, this contemplative discipline has a common point with the concept of aṣṭāṅga yoga (eight stages), specifically in moral control, concentration, and inner transformation. However, in the understanding of vipassana meditation, it is the concept of anatta (self-absence) that the body and mind are just phenomena without entities. It is different in the yoga sutra that consciousness is the supreme spirit (puruṣa), which is unaffected by suffering (kleśa), action (karma), the consequences of actions (vipaka) or the results of latent impressions (asaya).

third, Theoretically, this study shows that S.N. Goenka's vipassanā meditation technique is not only one of the Buddhist meditation techniques that has developed, but the process of monastic transformation becomes more modern where laypeople have the same opportunity to practice vipassana meditation that seems inclusive. S.N. Goenka's technique vipassana meditation is a structured and practical middle ground for modern laypeople to achieve enlightenment or purity, where before vipassana meditation does not have to reach jhana (level of serenity) first, it is enough inner peace as the basis for entry before entering vipassana meditation.

Implications of Direct Practice

From a practical point of view, this research enriches meaningful knowledge and insights that benefit meditation practitioners and society at large:

- a. For the old Students, regular practice maintains the stability of the samādhi, and prevents the re-emergence of new negative saṅkhāra. Practice does not stop in the meditation room during the course. The Dhamma needs to be applied in speech, action, and thought, including in social relationships, work, and decision-making. It helps to ground the self-precepts, samadhi and panna in real life. This practice expands the influence of inner transformation into a positive influence on social relationships and creates collective peace with the saying "Be Happy".
- b. For the community, it is advisable to look at vipassana meditation not as a religious practice, but as a universal technique for physical and mental health, helping to cope with stress, anxiety, and inner conflict in a natural way by practicing awareness of bodily sensations. Through the introduction of the principles of morality, people can

develop an honest, peaceful, and responsible work ethic that supports social harmony, regardless of religious or cultural background.

- c. Governments, schools, and social institutions can adopt vipassana meditation values such as sati, mettā, and samādhi into character education curricula, deep learning or rehabilitation programs to build a more balanced and compassionate society. People can use vipassana meditation techniques as part of a preventive approach to maintaining physical and mental health, as well as as a companion in the healing process from trauma, psychosomatic illnesses, and social tensions.

Conclusion

This study explores the practice and benefits of S.N. Goenka's technique vipassana meditation at Dhamma Java Bogor, by integrating holistic insights, psychological (self-precept, samadhi and Panna), and social aspects. The findings show that although it is a technique of vipassana meditation derived from Buddhism it is acceptable to all religions, non-sectarian, morality education towards self-actualization, high spiritual attainment and a life in harmony with man and the universe. The study identified several key challenges: a limited misunderstanding of the practice of vipassana meditation, and a gap in theory and practice among modern and monastic lay practitioners. These problems are the cause of the process of practicing vipassana meditation on physical and mental health, the psychological of the practice of precepts (morality), Samadhi (concentration), and finally the attainment of panna (wisdom) through direct observation.

Despite these challenges, everyone has the same potential and ability to gain self-transformation through the recognition and observation of these bodily sensations. These include improving Buddhist education, strengthening the support structure of meditation communities, promoting mental health for younger generations, and integrating the principles of vipassana meditation to improve the quality of life for everyone. In the end, this study confirms that S.N. Goenka's vipassana meditation technique to manage the physical and mental becomes calmer, balanced, and thoughtful. The vipassana meditation technique is a technique that is able to meet the needs of physical, mental, spiritual and social health. This technique offers a practical path to inner change for modern laymen, meditation immunity and sustainable well-being.

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