



## MEDITATION AND THE WORKPLACE

### VIPASSANA

Spirit in Business starts with the individual, a perennial idea reinforced by **S.N. Goenka**, spiritual teacher and businessman, who has been promulgating the effects of his early encounter with the non-sectarian technique of Vipassana meditation since the late 1960s.

Photo courtesy of the Vipassana Research Institute



S. N. Goenka

"If businesspeople start practicing spirituality, it is not only good for themselves but all of society. When cruelty changes into compassion it is spirituality. When hatred turns into love it is spirituality. When selfishness changes into selflessness it is spirituality. I suffered from severe migraine, and no doctor could help me. Morphine injections meant I would end up taking morphine for morphine's sake. I tried treatment from the

best doctors in the world, and nothing worked. Then a friend said, 'The strain of your life is the cause of your migraine.' I went to take a 10-day Vipassana course, but the teacher said, 'This is a very high spiritual path, and you want to use it to cure migraine? This should not be your goal. Calm your mind, the stress will go away, and then perhaps you will get rid of your migraine.'

"[With Vipassana] I started treating my workers as family members. Before, there were strikes and fighting. Then, production increased. Profits increased. These workers are now partners. My relationship with my wife, children, other members of my family, all changed."

There are more than 60 centers and other venues around the world where one can learn Vipassana, sometimes called 'insight meditation.'

### SAHAJA YOGA

Vipassana is just one useful meditational path. Dr Ramech Manocha, Barry Wren Fellow and Lecturer at the Royal Hospital for Women in Sydney, and Prof. Maurizio Zollo, associate professor at INSEAD, described their systematic evaluation of sahaja yoga, adapted for modern consumption by Her Holiness Shri Mataji Nirmala Devi. Sahaja yoga was the subject of some important early research in India by Professor U.C.Rai. Based on bringing the chakras into a state of alignment through awakening the kundalini (an energy understood to be a healing, benevolent and gentle power within us all), it is a method of quieting the mind and taming the brainstorm that is going on in

our minds. A study of sahaja meditators using a quantitative electroencephalogram demonstrated widespread changes in brainwaves, with prominent theta wave activity at the precise moment that the meditators reported a state of complete mental silence and oneness.

"We taught sahaja yoga to 350 people at IBM, and 80 per cent of them said they experienced some slowing or elimination of thinking activity while remaining fully alert and aware," Dr Manocha said.

"It became quite clear throughout our presentations that meditation has a strong impact as a managerial tool. Our goal is to demonstrate how important it is for managers and academics to create research partnerships that allow us to test and verify meditation as a managerial tool."

"We have the first body of empirical evidence on the correlation between meditation and the enhancement of emotional intelligence," Prof. Zollo told Spirit in Business conferees. "[We have come up with] both a theoretical rationale as well as initial evidence as to why consciousness enhancement (through meditation practice, in this case) can be connected with improved effectiveness for the entire organization."

He explained that meditation improves cognitive capabilities, emotional competence and ethical conduct, making it easier for workers to develop strategies, and for routines and capabilities to evolve. "This will allow more rapid and effective adaptation of the company to fast-paced change in a competitive environment," he said.

Dr Manocha has initiated a Meditation Research Program, and in a trial of sahaja meditation, nine out of 10 menopausal women reported at least 50 percent reduction in frequency of their hot flushes, and the overall improvement in their condition was comparable to that seen in hormone replacement therapy. He is currently conducting research into the effects of meditation-based yoga on the autonomic nervous system and its application in chronic illnesses. ●

*A sahaja yoga practitioner meditating while having her brain electrical activity measured. This project is part of ongoing activities at the Meditation Research Program, Royal Hospital for Women, Sydney, Australia.*

