

Meditations On Meditation

By Blas Moros



Intro

In June 2017, I went on a 10-day silent Vipassana meditation retreat in Kathmandu, Nepal. This kind of retreat has been on my bucket list for some time and I finally had enough space and time to make it a reality. It was one of the more difficult, inspiring, impactful, and enlightening experiences of my life.

My aim is to learn and do things which I think have a good chance of being helpful throughout my life, prioritizing what is meaningful and expedient rather than what is ephemeral and short-term. I want to look broadly across disciplines and avoid becoming siloed and “specialized” – be it with work, relationships, athletics, or any other life dimension which composes a “well-balanced life mosaic.”

Although this approach may be more difficult and the payoffs less immediate and less clear, I believe these types of things are ultimately far more rewarding and impactful.

I think this challenge perfectly suits these criteria and, while 10 days is a very short stint to dive into your consciousness and work on self-discovery and self-mastery, it has served as an incredible catalyst to make meditation a more regular and focused part of my everyday life. Below are some of my takeaways and thoughts on my 10-day retreat...

Vipassana: Its Goals and Theory (As I Understand It)

- [Vipassana](#) means understanding reality as it truly is, and not as you want it to be, through the framework of the body.
- It is a totally non-secular, universal approach as there are no images of deities tied in, chanting, mantras, or other typically religious aspects involved which can isolate or polarize people from different backgrounds. It is simply non-judgmental, non-reactive, equanimous observation and awareness of ever subtler bodily sensations, breath and thoughts with the understanding that all of it is impermanent – “[Anitya](#).” True understanding of this impermanence, whether the sensation is typically considered desirable or not desirable, helps develop a balanced mind as one gradually gets less attached to pleasurable sensations and slowly starts despising less the pain, tension, wandering mind, or misery which accompanies long sits and, of course, life in general.

- Although we will still face misery, frustration, desires, envy, and other emotions, the goal is that when these emotions do surface, their acknowledgment will be more transparent and immediate, and their magnitude and duration will be considerably less.
- By simply observing your bodily sensations and thoughts without judgment or reaction, you will slowly retrain your thought and habit patterns to one of observation and action rather than of judgment and impulsive reaction. One begins to notice the changing nature of body and mind which leads to the understanding of the universal truths of impermanence, suffering, and egolessness. This truth-realization by direct experience is the beginning of the path towards liberation from suffering. Thus, staying equanimous for long periods of time allows old sankharas (deep-rooted "5 big enemies" of craving, aversion, drowsiness, hesitation, and doubt) to arise in body or thought and if you can simply observe rather than judge and react, they will slowly weaken and eventually disappear. Your non-emotional observation takes away the fuel they rely on and is why they gradually burn out. You will remember them but from a detached and non-reacting place.

The Technique

- Days 1-3
 - These days are to focus on Sila or proper morality and include: abstaining from killing, stealing, sexual misconduct, wrong speech, and all intoxicants
 - On the afternoon before the retreat officially begins, Noble Silence is put in place. This means silence of speech, body, and mind – no talking, gesturing, reading, writing, eye contact, or any other form of communication. This may seem strange or difficult but it really helps you be able to focus on your own path without worrying or comparing yourself to others. Questions and requests can be made to the teachers and volunteers if need be.
 - You start with focusing solely on the breath, specifically on your nose, nostrils and upper lip – anapana meditation. If one has trouble feeling any sensations at first, take a couple hard breaths. Your mind will soon still, adjust and be able to feel the subtlest of breaths
 - On days 2 and 3 you narrow down the focus even further to even smaller areas of the nose such as the outer nostrils. The purpose of these 3 days is to focus, calm

and still the mind, improving one's concentration and subtlety of awareness. Without this time, the mind is not focused or prepared to be able to notice the incredibly subtle sensations in the rest of the body which starts with full body scans in the afternoon of Day 3.

- Other rules: segregation of men and women, exercise is limited to walking and stretching, religious rituals or objects should be done away with during these 10 days, food is simple and vegetarian with only a light meal of fruit for dinner, clothing should be modest and comfortable, reading and writing and music are prohibited.

- Day 4
 - Today we did our first full day of body scans rather than simply focusing on the sensation around the nostrils while breathing.
 - Start at the top of the head with a 1-inch diameter circle, scan the scalp, then each part of the face, the throat, the arms, the chest and abdomen, the back and the legs, and then repeat. Simply observe your sensations the whole time and if you can't feel a particular area, stop for a minute and focus on it intently. If you feel something or not, move on after this minute has passed and over time you will build your subtlety of awareness so that you have no blind spots. Regardless, understand these sensations are ever-changing phenomena, not to be tied to, excited by or upset by

- Days 5-6
 - Starting today, in the three one-hour group sittings, we try not to move at all in order to practice strong self-discipline or [adhitthana](#) and improve our experiential understanding of impermanence or [anitya](#).

- Day 7
 - Today we started scanning the body in bigger chunks as our awareness and subtlety of attention have improved (i.e. doing both limbs simultaneously rather than one at a time)

- Day 8
 - As much as possible maintain meditation in all that you do. When you eat, eat but must also always be aware of respiration and bodily sensations.
 - Working with and observing of sensations puts you in touch with the deepest parts of the mind, the root, where real and lasting changes can be made.

- Day 9
 - Once start feeling really subtle uniform sensations throughout the body, can do 2-3 free flow body scans before going back to 1-2 part-by-part scans.
 - These free flow scans should feel as if someone poured water over your head and it's running down your body.
 - Once this practice becomes regular, you can start doing front to back and side to side 'penetrating' scans to start feeling the internal parts of the body. The teacher said that once you get this subtle form, the body may start to feel like it dissolves as you feel like there's nothing solid.
 - Then can start separately scanning the spinal cord as well

- Day 10
 - Today is "[Metta](#) Day." Noble Silence turned to 'Noble Chatter' after the 8-9am sit as we learned the Metta meditation technique, or loving-kindness meditation.
 - After finishing the regular meditation, first see if you have peace in body and mind. If not, do not do this meditation. Simply recognize your racing mind or whatever the case may be and wrap up. If you do feel quiet and peaceful, wish yourself to find happiness, peacefulness, compassionate love and to be liberated from your own impurities. Then wish the same for all living beings. Then ask for forgiveness for what you have done, intentionally and unintentionally, knowingly and unknowingly. Then forgive others for doing the same. Finish by saying "I have no enemies, all are my friend." Lastly, feel the flow of energy up and down the spinal cord.
 - Emanate this love and happiness from the heart to expand and fill the room and over time greater and greater spaces.

- Do this at the end of every meditation but only if you really feel it

- Additional info
 - They really emphasized the importance of doing a one hour sit in the morning and at night as part of your daily routine.
 - Recommended meditating in the same place and time to build habits and good vibes in that spot
 - Join a meditation group as often as once per week
 - Simply observe every sensation without judging or reacting
 - Do 5 minutes of observing sensations and understanding Anitya upon rising and before falling asleep

The Timetable (minor changes on certain days)

- 4am - wake up
- 4:30-6:30am - meditate in the hall
- 6:30-8:00am - breakfast and rest
- 8:00-9:00 - group sit in hall
- 9:00-11:00 - meditate in hall
- 11:00am-1:00pm - lunch and rest
- 1:00-2:30pm - meditate in hall
- 2:30-3:30pm - group sit in hall
- 3:30-5:00pm - meditate in hall
- 5:00-6:00pm - light meal and rest
- 6:00-7:00pm - group sit in hall
- 7:00-8:30pm - Dharma Discourse
- 8:30-9:00pm - group sit in hall
- 9:00-9:30pm - Q&A with teachers if needed

My Learnings and Experiences

- Day 1
 - Extremely tough first day. Body is in a ton of pain and can't get into a flow, mind is wandering, and am asking myself "why am I here?" The pain comes from inflexibility and not being used to sitting cross-legged for such extended periods of time. I feel it in my knees, hips, and back more than anywhere else
 - The Dharma discourse at the end of the day saved me and was very reassuring. I'm doing this to see things as they are, to better understand myself, to make the mind an amazing tool rather than a terrible master, to eliminate misery as much as possible as well as other mental impurities

- Day 2
 - Much better day and I got into a great flow for the 4:30-6:30 meditation
 - Have some different postures for when body hurts and when pain arises I say, "I see you, I accept you, and I thank you for being an obstacle for me to overcome." Helps deal with the pain for some time and makes it clear that this is something that must be faced and dealt with rather than "pushed away"
 - Afternoon was tough physically but made it through
 - Dharma Discourse (end of day video and explanations) - narrow down focus on nose to become more aware of the smallest subtleties. Simply observe and do not wish to change or feel any particular sensation
 - Trying to develop: Quiet mind. Slow mind. Aware mind. Non-reacting mind. Observing mind. Equanimous mind. Subtle mind. Focused mind
 - Being aware and focused on such subtleties as the breath passing the nostrils really quiets the mind and sharpens focus

- Day 3
 - This is the best mental training possible. Focus, awareness, sharpness, disregard the noise, see things as they truly are and not how you want them to be
 - One's mind really gets so sharp, still and focused over these days. The little voice in your head quiets down and you go from a couple of minutes of flow, quiet, and

deep focus to much longer stretches. While your mind invariably wanders, you are quicker to catch it and bring it back to center and the present moment

- When I get into flow, I start feeling my mind slow, with few thoughts and every breath, thought or movement is thoughtful, slow, and mindful. Calmness and slowing down is vital for me as I love thinking, doing, reading, being productive, having ideas. Paradoxically, slowing down ends up speeding things up in the end since my motor is supercharged and ready, I can better ignore the noise and distractions, and my wells of creativity are filled. Combine slow and fast!
 - Focus on Anitya (impermanence), narrow down focus to just outer nostril and upper lip
 - These first three days we focused only on breathing and the sensations in and around the nose and upper lip (anapana meditation) to sharpen our focus and improve the mind's ability to sense subtle sensations
 - [Sila](#) or proper moral conduct is the foundation of Vipassana and these first three days set the foundation
- Day 4
 - We did some group chanting but mostly it is a recording of [SN Goenka's](#) chanting that we listen to. Find chanting music and/or the Goenka recordings. There's something to this chanting which is very powerful, bonding, healing, and soothing
 - Subtlety of focus and awareness definitely increased, especially around nostrils
 - Physical discomfort pretty high but have some different positions I rotate through
 - Vipassana = to observe things as they truly are, the truth from moment to moment while understanding the impermanence or anitya of everything.
 - 3 tenets introduced today - 1 hour adhitthana or strong self-discipline where you try not to move whatsoever, eyes closed at all times, and sit with a straight back
 - I really want to abide but working through this pain will be difficult. Curious, scared, and excited to find out how the next several days go
 - [Sankhara](#) = craving or aversion or reaction which arises in the body through blind spots, pain, etc.
 - Simply staying equanimous for long periods of time allows old sankharas to arise and if you can simply observe rather than judge and react to them, these suppressed cravings, aversions, grudges, etc. will slowly weaken and disappear

- Every day napping less and at night sleeping like a baby
 - Today flew by as I got into a nice flow
 - Vipassana allows one to objectively experience bodily sensations, not wanting or wishing for any particular feelings or to not feel others
 - One's mental base or volition is most important. What one intends always comes to fruition or is manifested in some fashion. Intention. Intention. Intention.
 - Vipassana teaches one how to die as it teaches one how to truly live
 - Subtlety, impermanence, mental stillness and discipline are increasing every day
 - Amazing how blind spots open up and you can really feel a broad array of sensations like tingling, heat, cold, shots of electricity, numbness, etc. in parts of your body where you didn't feel a thing just a couple days before
- Day 5 (my 27th birthday...)
 - Starting today the three one-hour group sittings we try not to move at all in order to practice strong self-discipline or adhitthana, impermanence or anitya
 - By viewing sensations objectively we can change our habits of mind and eliminate the good/bad dichotomy, clinging, suffering, preferences, craving, etc.
 - My routine - wake up at 4, breathing and exercise for 10 minutes, meditate, slow breakfast, meditate until 11, slow lunch and nap, meditate until 5, snack and lie down, meditate until 7, Dharma Discourse until 8:30, meditate until 9 and pass out
 - Got through “no move” session with only one move which was a big breakthrough
 - Breath and sensations getting so slow, subtle, refined
 - Working through objectivity where I can push through the pain and tension a little more every day where it is just another sensation, as is every blissful sensation
 - The afternoon session absolutely broke me. Incredible pain, mind wandering, impatience. Like Chinese water torture. Just you and your thoughts for 100+ hours. Nowhere to go, nowhere to hide. Mentally and physically just lost it. So hard to just observe sensations without reacting, body is in pain and couldn't sit still and get into any sort of flow
 - The most important and meaningful things in life you have to do yourself. Nobody can walk the path for you

- Day 6
 - You are training your mind to be equanimous, to observe all sensations, even pain and tension, as equal and merely observe and not react to them.
 - More than understanding intellectually, Vipassana helps you understand experientially how to observe and be aware and not simply react
 - Goenka has a lot of wisdom - find readings and discourses
 - Anitya, Anitya, Anitya - understand impermanence
 - What would the best version of Blas do? You know immediately and intuitively. Just follow through and do it
 - Laws of nature such that if can maintain equanimous mind for long periods, sankharas (cravings, reactions, aversions) will arise from unconscious and be eliminated at the root level by simply observing them
 - Had to be broken yesterday to deeper understand experientially the concepts of equanimous mind and Anitya
 - Finishing chant by Goenka - Bhavatu Sabba Mangalam (may all beings be happy)

- Day 7
 - Wisdom is not learning new things, it is coming to understand, through experience, universal truths at ever deeper levels
 - 5 big enemies which keep from meditating - craving, aversion, drowsiness, doubt, hesitation
 - Today we started scanning the body in bigger chunks as our awareness and subtlety of attention have improved (i.e. doing both limbs simultaneously rather than one at a time)
 - I am "patiently and persistently, ardently and diligently" developing my equanimous mind which to me is a balanced, calm, slow, non-reacting, observing, curious mind with no aversions or cravings, recognizing all sensations, whether typically considered pleasurable or unpleasurable, as impermanent and the equanimous mind sees good and bad as false human constructs which bring misery. All sensations are changing phenomena - Anitya, Anitya, Anitya
 - Can 're-brand' pain as throbbing, heat, inflammation, etc. By being equanimous to it, one can dive into pain, embrace it, observe it, and you'll find it isn't nearly that

bad and disappears occasionally. Was only able to take first steps into this but I now see and have experienced the path

- I have realized I'm more tied to my body and health than I realized. How I feel, what I eat, etc. Be aware of this when overly concerned or when it brings misery.
 - When my mind drifts it tends to be towards the future and to things I'm excited about more than the past or mistakes. Natural I think but want to be even more present and perhaps crave things a little less. Being aware of this is a good first step
 - These 10 days are like a cleanse, a therapy, a mental training, a self-discovery, a self-discipline training, a mirror into oneself, and more, all in one. Attracts a fascinating group of people
 - I am discovering the value of knowing things at the experiential level vs. solely or at least mostly at the intellectual level. Of course I still want to combine learning from other's major mistakes and successes as much as possible, but first-hand experience so drives it home
 - When I get stressed and lose equanimity I rush things and don't take enough time to think. I have seen this in play out in tennis, investing, making difficult decisions, eating, while meditating, and more. It manifests itself in every area of life so set up hindrances, alerts, habits, and reminders to combat this
- Day 8
 - As much as possible maintain meditation in all that you do. When you eat, eat but also always be aware of respiration and bodily sensations
 - Can slowly feel the habit patterns, the neural pathways, starting to change as I notice I can more quickly and nonjudgmentally and equanimously observe my thoughts, cravings and aversions which lessens their power, and slowly will reduce their frequency and magnitude as I come to deeper understand their impermanence
 - Level of equanimity is a good measuring stick for how far along the [Dharma](#) path you are
 - I can see the light at the end of the tunnel and am getting excited about the rest of my summer but am trying to balance it with being present and lessening cravings
 - Noble silence, no connectivity has been refreshing but ready to get back to real world soon

- Definite burst of creativity and energy increasing every day
 - Awareness and equanimity are the two wheels of [Dhamma](#) and they must be equally strong
 - Working with and observing sensations puts you in touch with the deepest parts of the mind, the root, where real and lasting changes can be made
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- Day 9
 - Find project to do with loved ones. Publish books, build things, learn things. This deepens and solidifies relationships and creates lasting memories and bonds.
 - I got to a really deep, peaceful, weird place with the internal penetration scan. Feeling buzzing energy inside very small internal parts of my body and feel like I can outline or 3D scan inside
 - The Dharma workers or volunteers are all incredible and have made this retreat special
 - Living in a community of strangers for 10 days with total trust and love is so unique
 - If I was worried or curious whether I had gotten “soft” post-tennis, I proved myself wrong throughout these 10 days, but especially today. I got through one of the one-hour Adhittana self-discipline sittings without moving at all. Wouldn't have thought this possible earlier on because of the pain in my hips, knees and back. Very proud and will have that accomplishment for life and can keep building off this base for longer and deeper sits. Nobody can walk the walk for you
 - Every day before bed or meals I would ask that the food nourish my mind, body, and soul and help me adapt and flourish. Keep up this short practice in day to day life
 - Vipassana is an art of life, helping to live a peaceful, harmonious, happy life. Observe, be aware, and act rather than judge and react. This mindset will help lessen the number of times when one is miserable and, if one does get worked up, it reduces the duration and magnitude
 - Vipassana gives us an internal lens which is so much more important than the external view nearly everyone employs. So important yet so neglected. The external view offers only a sliver of the whole truth but developing and being aware of one's internal lens or feelings gives you a fuller, more complete and

accurate view of truth. This vastly more important second angle helps us align with nature and make better decisions, be happier, more equanimous and more resilient.

- Day 10

- Today was [Metta](#) Day. Noble silence turned to Noble Chatter at 9am as we learned the Metta meditation technique or loving kindness meditation. First see if you have peace in body in mind. If not, do not attempt this meditation. If you do, wish yourself to find happiness, peacefulness, compassionate love and to be liberated from your own impurities. Then wish the same for all living beings. Then ask for forgiveness for what you have done, intentionally and unintentionally, knowingly and unknowingly. Then forgive others for doing the same. I have no enemies, all are my friend. Then three deep humming breaths and say Bhavatu Sabba Mangalam and feel the flow up and down the spinal cord. Emanate this love and happiness from the heart to fill the room and over time greater and greater spaces. Do this at the end of every meditation but only if you really feel it
- Additional info at [Dhamma.org](#)

- Day 11

- Short morning meditation followed by Discourse and a group Metta in which all the workers and volunteers joined as well. Powerful vibrations of love filled the entire hall and made my heartbeat rise. Could of course be totally in my head but I definitely felt greater peace, calm, happiness and gratitude in that final sit
- Pack up and head back to Hemraj at Family Peace House to catch up on life and reflect on this experience

