

Vipassana

About a year ago I accidentally stumbled across the word «Vipassana», a 10-day meditation course where you wake up at 4:00 am every morning, meditate for 10 hours and go to bed at 9:00 pm. The entire time there is spent in silence, interaction between course participants is prohibited, men and women are housed separately and all distractions such as mobile phones, pen, paper, headphones must be handed in.

Somehow all of this piqued my curiosity, so two months ago I signed up for a course at the Vipassana Center in Switzerland. I didn't know exactly what I was hoping to get from it, I just knew that I wanted to face this challenge.

Day 1 - One year

I arrived on a snowy Mont-Soleil. I had to drag my suitcase through the snow thinking the worst was behind me. But as the noble stillness and the meditation began, I began to realize how difficult it really was to spend hour after hour with **just your mind** without distraction. I kept glancing at the watch on my wrist only to realize it had only been 3 minutes. The first day felt like a whole year. I wanted to pack my bag and leave at least 20 times, but I stayed seated.

Day 2 – catchy song

When the gong woke me up at 4am after a bad night, I wanted nothing less than having to get up. But I still dragged myself into the meditation hall and sat down on my seat. The day felt like a whole month. Shortly before lunchtime (thanks to my nephew) I got a catchy song that wouldn't let me go for hours - **Baby shark**. As soon as the song faded, I thought about giving up again. But then a quote from Nelson Mandela, a man who served 27 years in prison, came to mind:

"I am the master of my fate: I am the captain of my soul". – Nelson Mandela

Day 3 - Pain

Today I slept well, but the pain in my knees, hips and back was unbearable. I constantly had to change my seating position to keep going. Another quote came to mind. This time from a video I saw years ago by Eric Thomas:

«Pain is temporary. It may last for a minute, or an hour, or a day. Or even a year. But eventually, it will subside, and something else will take its place. If I quit however, it will last forever.» – Eric Thomas

Day 4 - Woman overboard

That afternoon we were introduced to the Vipassana technique, which involved sitting for three hours. But an hour after lunch, I realized something was wrong with my stomach. I had such stomach cramps that I could hardly stand up straight. It had to come from the lettuce I had eaten earlier despite it looking off that I was now paying the price for. Luckily, I had pills with me, but only 3 of them. Two were gone in no time, but I still sat slumped on my meditation cushion arched in pain. During the break I went to the manager and informed her about my **food poisoning**. She asked if I could stay until 9:00 pm for the compulsory lessons. I said I didn't know but if she wanted me to come the next day, she would have to get me a supply of medicine to which she agreed.

Day 5 - Waiting

In the morning, a helper from the center took the cable car to the village to get me the medicine from the pharmacy. I'd told her the pharmacy would have it, but they didn't. It had to be ordered, for which she had to wait for until the afternoon. I got the medicine in the evening and trembled with joy when I took a pill and fell asleep shortly afterwards, totally exhausted.

Day 6 – Telepathy?

Before I signed up for Vipassana, I'd scoured the internet extensively for testimonials. In one, I'd read that on the seventh day a woman felt the sensations in her body so intensely that she discovered a splinter of wood in her foot that she had been carrying for months. I was excited to see what would come out of me. And then, lost in thought, it happened. As I pulled the curtains off my bed, I touched the wooden frame of the bedstead with my left hand. I immediately felt a **splinter of wood** dig into my left hand. If that wasn't telepathy...

I tried to get it out in vain. During the meditation, my hand pulsated so badly that I again had to go to the manager during the break and ask her for tweezers. She didn't have any but brought me a sewing needle. When I still couldn't get the splinter out, she said she unfortunately couldn't help me. I didn't even want to know why and just thought: **only I can help myself.**

Day 7 - Good

Finally, a good day. The splinter of wood came out yesterday and the stomach pain was also gone. Meditating was also going well and the pain from sitting had almost subsided. I was beginning to enjoy the experience and thought about who would benefit from such a course. Three people (whom I know are suffering, inwardly) came to mind.

Day 8 - Gift

While fireworks of pain, stinging, heat, and pressure had been spreading in my stomach area over the past few days, I felt a pleasant tingling sensation for the first-time during meditation today. I was overjoyed and just thought:

Everything that comes now is a gift.

Day 9 - Breathe

Today there were slight doubts again. Doubts about what was I actually doing here, and as I wondered, I suddenly noticed the breathing of the woman next to me. It sounded like a broken cassette. Even though I kept my eyes closed, I knew the woman next to me was **crying**. I wanted to hug her and comfort her, but it wasn't allowed. She could only help herself anyway, I thought, so I began to take deeper breaths. After a few minutes she joined my breathing and we breathed our way through the pain, in and out, over and over again.

Day 10 - Pregnant

Today it was finally time, the last day. Finally! After a few hours of meditation, we were allowed to dissolve the noble silence at 10:00 am. Everyone ran into the dining room to exchange, but I wasn't sure if I wanted to do that at all. Speaking again after so many days felt strange. I didn't want to miss the experience either, which is why I finally followed the others. In the dining room everyone started talking wildly. One woman told

me she was supposed to have her period on the second day, but she didn't get it. She had never had that before, which is why she wondered every day if she was pregnant. Another shared her experience and I quickly realized that each one was struggling with their own suffering, only that we didn't realize it. But how were we supposed to when we were not allowed to talk to each other. I wondered how many other times I went through my life and had someone next to me who was going through a difficult time without me noticing it.

Conclusion

This course was definitely a challenge for me. It was tough, intense and educational. Vipassana taught me that **everything is impermanent**. The pain, the love, the life. Everything is a process. Spring, summer, autumn, winter, life, everything is a cycle of comings and goings. It is important to maintain **equanimity** and to **observe** the emotions and sensations **instead of reacting immediately**. Things may not always turn out well in the end, but things turn out the way they are supposed to. Or in words from the Vipassana course:

Start again. Start again. Start again.

Work intelligently, intelligently, patiently.

Take rest.

Start again...

