

Dear Vipassana Centre Workers,

Over the past three years, I have been fortunate enough to meditate vipassana courses in your centres at times and to serve with you at other times. When we serve together we are doing simple but important work: chopping vegetables, making chappatis, cleaning vessels, cleaning the rooms, washing linens, constructing new buildings, and painting walls. When I speak to people about this work it is hard for me to explain why it is so important. I will try to explain in the form of a story.

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I came to India in 2012. I was rich but very unhappy. I was so rich I could fly anywhere I wanted, buy any car I wanted, eat in any restaurant... but it didn't feel like it was enough. I always wanted more.

At that time I was a drunkard. I would smoke cigarettes and use drugs. I would sleep strange hours. I was an unreliable employee — I would come late to work and often I would not even come to work because of laziness. I would eat unhealthy food and I rarely exercised. Because I was so unhealthy, I would get sick very often.

I was fat — in my body and in my mind.

Because my mind was unhealthy, I would make the wrong decisions. Around my friends and coworkers I would use hurtful words and I would shout. I was angry all the time. I became so angry some days it hurt to breathe.

I became very careless. Sometimes I was even so careless I would physically hurt people. One time I was riding my bicycle very fast and hit an old couple on a scooter. The old lady went flying off the back of the scooter and hurt her hand. I was even more careless with my friends and family... I would take them for granted and never show that I really appreciated them. I was always expecting that someone else must do something for me.

Finally, my life reached a breaking point. I could not sleep at all. I was smoking one cigarette after another. I was drinking and smoking marijuana every day to dull my thoughts and emotions. It felt as if I had gone crazy.

And then everything changed. My friend suggested I take a 10-day Vipassana course. Let me be clear: There was no magic and my problems did not disappear overnight. Vipassana is not a miracle cure — I had to work very hard during those ten days. But after that first course I truly understood how I was hurting myself and hurting everyone around me. After that, nothing was ever the same again.

It has been seven years since my first 10-day Vipassana course. I ran my first half-marathon this past July. I do not drink, smoke, or do drugs any more. I am the healthiest I have ever been in my life. I sleep peacefully. Now I speak

gently to family and friends and I try to show them the love they deserve. Now I spend my energy trying to improve the world around me.

Vipassana saved my life.

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This is why our work is so important. This is why your work is so important. There are many people like me — confused, angry, and full of greed.

You are doing so much more than feeding people, cleaning for people, or building a place for people to stay. Cooking for people, cleaning for people, and building for people — these are all very important jobs, even on their own. But with every chappati you cook, with every vessel you clean, with every brick or board you lay down for a new building you are giving those same people a place to meditate Vipassana. This gives each and every person who comes to the Vipassana centre an opportunity to change the way I have changed. And once they change, they too can focus their energy to improve the world around them, as you do.

It is for this reason that your work at the Vipassana Centre is so important. It is for this reason that I am so grateful for the work that you do.

Be Happy,

-steven