This is to log my 10 day, stay experience at vipassana meditation center in Chennai. I was there at the venue for registration by 5th June 2019 by 3:00 PM. Course started on 6th June 2019 morning till 15th June 2019. I was back home on 16th June 2019 morning.

Day 0:- As part of registration we had to fill our details, after which room was allocated. Room was twin sharing basis. I was also given bedsheet and pillow cover. Mattress was in the room. As I entered my room and placed my luggage I could feel the heat inside. It was first week of June and summer hasn’t subside still in Chennai. By then I didn’t realize what experience was in store for me during my stay in that room. Post settling down we were asked to deposit our valuables, cell phone(s) and gadgets at office. Items were put in a box which was labeled, by which they were identified. These labels were written on our registration card, by which our items can be retrieved when we leave home. After sun set they served dinner, I knew that my next dinner would be only after 10 days back at home. No dinner for rest of my stay at the center. After that we had pre course briefing, it was high level view of how the course is laid, what to expect and what is expected out of the students / meditators. Then it was declared that our “noble silence” has started from that moment. Which means we are not supposed to talk with fellow meditators, no hand gesture, no eye contact. We were allowed to talk to “dhamma servers” and teacher only. We can’t talk to anyone, anyone other than them. After a brief break, we were asked to assemble before “Dhamma Hall”. We were allocated seat inside the hall, we were not allowed to change our seat location or to other seat without prior approval from teacher. After approval from teacher, “Dhamma servers” would move to a chair or beside the wall to rest our back based on the request. When everyone settled in their respective seat, teacher introduced himself and he played first discourse video. All discourses during our stay were using video. Video had the talk of Guruji S.N.Goenka. In the video he instructed us what to do tomorrow starting 4:30am. All days, our activity starts at 4:30am and ends at 9:30am with few breaks and rest in between.

Day 1 to Day 9 schedule would be as below.

4:00am Wake up call

4:30am to 6:30am Meditation

6:30am to 7:00am Breakfast

8:00am to 9:00am Group Meditation

9:00am to 11:00am Meditation

11:00am to 11:30am Lunch

12:00pm to 12:30pm Doubt clearing with teacher

1:00pm to 2:30pm Meditation

2:30pm to 3:30pm Group Meditation

3:30pm to 5:00pm Meditation

5:00pm to 5:30pm Tea and Snacks

6:00pm to 7:00pm Group Meditation

7:00pm to 8:30pm Discourse

8:30pm to 9:00pm Meditation

9:00pm to 9:30pm Doubt clearing with teacher

9:30pm Lights off and rest

Note: - Difference between meditation and group meditation is in group meditation you are not allowed to get up and go outside of the hall.

Day 1:- We were taught breath watch, I was carefully watching my breath as it goes in and out of my nostril. It would be only for few minutes or I don’t know it could have been only for few seconds thoughts would take over. Mind would go behind the thoughts past, present or something random jumping here and there like monkey jumping in tree branch to branch. After few minutes I would feel random pains here and there in my body. I would get up when the pain become unbearable. During meditation hour teacher would call us in batch asking about our meditation experience. Most of them had same complain like me unbearable pain. And had problem of thought taking over and focus on breath was for shorter duration. Teacher clarified that pain was due to mind and matter and this will be clarified during discourse. We were asked not to go behind thought or create new thought. As soon someone realize that his mind has wandered away focus has to bring back to breath.

Day 2:- we were asked to now focus on sensation. Upper lip as base of the triangle and sides of your nose as the side we were asked to observe any sensation in this area while we breathe. Any sensation outside of this area to be ignore, which includes pain in your back, leg, knee or where so ever. Many had problem in classifying sensation. So teacher clarified that it could be touch or your breath, itching, perspiration, tingling, burning, chillness, dryness, pulsating, throbbing etc., Wandering of mind was better than yesterday, frequency of wandering and duration of wandering came down.

Day 3:- Next day area of observation was shrunken, base remains the same, however the tip of the triangle was tip of your nose. Mind was trained to focus on smaller area and observe subtle senses when breathing. Control over the mind was getting little better than previous although thoughts were there, I could see it reduced.

Day 4:- We were introduced to vipassana meditation. In brief vipassana is to observe sensation in various part of the body in specific order. And strict instruction was given that during vipassana in group meditation you shouldn’t open your eyes, change posture of your hand or leg. You are to remain still with no drastic body movements for an hour. This was one of the toughest as I was never used to sitting on floor more than 20mins. They call this adhittana, sitting with strong will-power builds your mind strong.

Day 5 and Day 6:- We were making advancement in vipassana meditation. Mostly it was the way we were observing sensation in the body.

Day 7 and Day 8:- We were given individual cells in pagoda for our meditation. While group meditation happened in hall. Other meditative hours were done in cell allocated to us. Pagoda has many cells for meditators. It was a tomb designed for meditation, it was like meditating inside energy center. It was very effective, everyone could feel the difference. Everyone was precipitating as they went inside, people who sustained for little long felt things settling and cooling down. People not willing to wait for long came outside in short stint.

Day 9:- Advanced technique were taught to us, to take our experience to next level. As it was advanced exploration of senses in your body not many were able to experience it.

Day 10:- Schedule had little change from rest of the days. Till 9:00am group meditation everything remained same. Group meditation timing, lunch, tea and snacks, evening discourse timing was still intact. From 9:15am to 10:00am we had discourse after which “noble silence” was removed. We were allowed to talk with each other. It was as if flood gates were open. All spoke with each other loud with laughter. Most of them looked lighter and relaxed than they entered the course on day 0. We were allowed to collect our valuables, cell phone(s) and gadgets. Whoever had charge in their phone or a charger made calls to their loved ones, hooked on to internet the long lost digital world caught hold of them. People meditated only during group meditation hour, rest of the time they spent time knowing each other. Impact and importance of “Noble Silence” was felt during group meditation. Thoughts bubbled up more often than previous days. It was a precursor of what to expect when we meditate in our respective home. Few decided to go back home the same day after daily discourse. Quite a few stayed, it was 11:00pm when most of them hit their bed.

Day 11:- 4:15am We had bhajan audio by guruji Goenka, 5:00am had metha madhana act of showing gratitude for all being and wishing peace, harmony and love for all being. 6:15am we packed to home.

We spent almost 10 hours a day in meditation. Meditation was done mostly in “Dhamma Hall”. Most of the time we were in the hall. Rest of the time we were in respective room or in dining hall. So it would be appropriate to record experience on food and stay.

Food was vegetarian satvik food. Morning it would be mostly one of these Pongal / Kichadi / Poha / Semiya Sevai / Idly. They were served with white chutney with no trace of spice. Ginger Tea and Milk.

Lunch had roti, rice, dhall, curd, butter milk, gravy with no trace of spice mostly made out of cereal. Two days we were lucky to have sweet kheer and payasam. One day we got chikki (kadalai mittai).

Snacks had puffed rice (pori), banana and watermelon was accompanied mostly, one or two days it was missing. Ginger Tea and Milk were also available. While these were only for new students. Old students were to take only lemon water with ginger, salt / sugar.

Food that were served had no trace of spiciness, onion, garlic or masala. Any hard core non vegetarian will have tough time getting used to the food type.

Room was above average by my standard, it had cob web in few places and dirt on the floor, I don’t think in a place like this one should expect them. I would stay room was better compared to its attached bathroom. Scales and dirt sediments in floor, closet and wash basin, could adjust as its going to few mins to be spent there. Stay was all good till day 1. It all started on day 2, power supply in few rooms were cut at 2:00am and my room was one among those. It came back only by 7:00am. My sleep time halved. I didn’t know it was just the start, Just that the reason would be different. From day 3, sleep became a distant friend, never had a good sleep. Mostly it was due to empty stomach and room was like an oven, though fan was in high speed we had only hot air, it was stuffy and I was sweating a lot. This experience was same till the end. I felt summer (Mar to Aug) is not appropriate time to take this 10 day session in this center. When one part of your intellect says so, other says your training was to train your mind to see pleasant and unpleasant sensation as impermanence. Hmm, time should have an answer where and when would be my second appearance to the course. In summary except the time between 9:30pm to 4:00am rest of the activities the whole day was a blissful experience.

Let all beings small or big, near or far, human or non-human, living or non-living share my merit, peace, love and dhamma.

Let all beings be happy.