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GOING ON

retreat

CHANGED

my life

Is it possible to seriously improve your life in just a few days? Three very different retreats helped these women do just that, discovers Beverley Hadgraft





## 10-day Vipassana meditation retreat in Blackheath, NSW



Masami Hussey, 39, Sydney



I wanted to learn about Vipassana (which means to see things as they really are)

after reading about a father who kept putting pressure on his daughter and was constantly disappointed in her. After Vipassana he changed – all he wanted was her happiness. As the mother of two young children, I wanted that too.

The retreat wasn't easy. It was up to 11 hours of meditation a day and complete silence. The only people we could speak to were the teachers.

During the first meditation I noticed the woman next to me was wearing a diamond. Next thing I knew I was thinking about the film *Blood Diamond*, Leonardo DiCaprio, the Spice Girls... I thought: 'This is wild! Is it how my mind always works?' As the days progressed, my mind wandered less and I learned how to bring it back to the sensations I was feeling.

Every meditation was different. Some were peaceful, others painful. Every evening we listened to a talk by Goenka, a leading

Vipassana teacher. One of these was on the subject of attachment and he spoke of a watch he owned that broke. He was very upset as he'd loved that watch, yet when his friend's identical watch broke he was not sad at all. Why? He explained that it is all to do with being attached to things, and if you are attached to things you're on the path to misery.

I experienced so many different sensations on that meditation: a warm tingling around my heart when I thought of my children, and tears when I meditated on my father. He had suffered depression and when I was nine he disappeared. We believed that he had committed suicide. He eventually did return home but I had remained angry with him ever since.

Now I realised I had only ever looked at that time from a selfish point of view. It had always been about me. I didn't see what he went through. I pictured him now as an elderly man whose daughter barely talks to him and who wants to love his grandchildren and I thought, 'He doesn't



deserve this.' I stopped feeling like a victim and emerged feeling completely different towards him.

Some people might say therapy could have helped just as well but therapy is someone else's input and ideas. This came from within me and so I believe it will stick.

The meditation really changed me. I realised I was always worrying about things in the future that were beyond my control. Now I've stopped fretting about how my son will fare at school, or whether he is as advanced as other children, and simply enjoy him for the

sensitive, curious, full-of-life little boy he is.

I also learned to stop reacting to situations and instead to observe my sensations. For instance, one morning my husband pulled open a bag of muesli and spilt it. Normally, I'd have scolded him, but instead I was aware of a rush of heat going through my body and I thought: 'That is anger'. Then, instead of getting mad I said: 'Let me take over', and I cut the bag open with scissors and put the muesli in a jar.

I feel this equanimous happiness now. I wish I'd discovered it earlier.

[www.dhamma.org.au](http://www.dhamma.org.au)

 **Extended Lifestyle Support Program at The Golden Door, Qld** 

**Tania Stegemann, 45, Melbourne**



My job involves lots of long-haul international travel, which means that my body gets bashed around. I wasn't sick but I wasn't as well as I could be either. I knew what I should be doing but it wasn't always practical. I knew green vegetables were good, for example, but I'd done four trips to Mongolia in a year and they don't have green vegetables.

Then I heard about the Extended Lifestyle Support Program. It involved going to a retreat at The Golden Door to detoxify my body and set myself up while having coaching sessions to develop a holistic wellness program individually tailored to my needs. I then had six follow-up coaching sessions over the phone to keep me accountable and to discuss any issues that had cropped up.

At the retreat, my coach considered my wellness goals – we discussed the obstacles that were stopping me achieving them and came up with strategies to overcome them. Immediately after the retreat, for instance, I was flying to Montreal where I knew I'd be eating out and struggling to resist all the yummy French food on offer. It would also be snowing, which meant I couldn't walk for exercise and I didn't know if my hotels had gyms.

We looked at ways I could balance my eating – alternating meals out with soup and salad in my hotel, choosing light meals like omelettes occasionally and not feeling I had to have a croissant every day, even though I love them!

I was enjoying the Golden Door tai chi classes so I bought a DVD to pop in my computer, and my coach also arranged for the personal trainer to show me a workout I could do using the furniture in my room.

We also talked about the importance of listening to my body and getting proper rest while I am away and after I returned. I have a tendency to rush to the gym and work out like a maniac every time I get home. I think women have a tendency to forget their bodies can't always keep up with what their minds think they can do.

The course has made a big difference to me. What I've learned is easily sustainable and now if I have issues, I know how to work around them. I also know that if I do fall off the rails, it only takes a couple of days to get myself straight again.

Anyone can tell you how to be healthy but if it's not tailored for you, you won't do it. It's like the time my naturopath told me to make myself a big pot of chicken soup. I said: "Have you seen my diary? I haven't even got time to buy the chicken!" [www.goldendoor.com.au](http://www.goldendoor.com.au)



 **Cleanse and Nourish Retreat, NSW, with Michele Chevally Hedge** 

**Jacquie Randall, 55, Sydney**



I only went on my first retreat because I'd just lost my driver's licence. I was trying to find things to do where I wouldn't have to worry about driving and that was six days taken care of!

I signed up and was sent a workbook to prepare me for the week ahead. It asked me to give up something before arriving such as sugar or alcohol. I chose coffee. I was powering through work by drinking 14 cups of black instant coffee a day.

I arrived feeling like a fish out of water and just sat very quietly, which is not my nature

at all, but I didn't want to make a dork of myself.

The days started with yoga which I'd never done in my life but loved. Then we had a wholesome breakfast followed by an informal talk. Michele [Chevally Hedge] gave us evidence-based advice on food, which was balanced, never rigid, and designed to fit in with our lifestyles.

One of the first talks we had was about stools and I was amazed. I thought: "What have I done every day since I was born? And who has ever taught me what our stools mean before?" She also explained how the body



uses food and how fruit was one of the worst foods to eat for breakfast because it gives you a sugar spike and then you're hungry again very quickly. I really liked the way information was delivered in a way I could understand and carry with me.

For the first two days we ate vegetables, then added proteins such as eggs or fish and then finally various non-processed grains.

All the food was nourishing and cleansing. I'd been living on apples and takeaway so it was exciting to eat and know everything was good for me.

In the afternoons we'd have a walk or a swim, then another talk, another yoga session, dinner and an early night.

Afterwards, I felt as if I'd taken my body in for a service. In fact, I felt so great that I was completely converted.

I now walk to yoga classes twice a week, I've quit alcohol, drink herbal teas and eat clean, healthy food – mainly eggs, vegetables and occasionally fish. I drink lots of soy milk and have a soy decaffeinated cappuccino as a treat.

Michele doesn't advocate that everyone is that strict. She just says: 'Do what you can.' Her only complete no-no is white bread. However, I'm sticking with my new regimen as I feel so sensational.

I now believe that if you treat your body right, you're in for a miracle and I saw a stunning example of that when I took someone else to a Cleanse and Nourish Retreat. She had polycystic ovarian syndrome and after rounds of specialists was all ready to start IVF – 10 weeks later she was pregnant.

[www.ahhealthyview.com.au](http://www.ahhealthyview.com.au)



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