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Title : Youth vote for Vipassana

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# Youth vote for Vipassana

## As hectic lifestyles and demanding jobs push people to look for stress busters, this intense meditation retreat draws more 20-somethings

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The idea of cutting off communication from the world might be a cause for panic attacks. But as Vipassana centres around Mumbai report, the number of stressed-out city dwellers between the ages of 22-30 who're opting for the intensive meditation technique is steadily increasing.

Sujata Khanna, registrar, Pattana Vipassana Centre, Goregaon says that the number of people below the age of

30 who opt for Vipassana has increased noticeably in the past year. "While Vipassana was considered to be popular among the older crowd, we now find that the number of people below the age of 30 outnumber the senior crowd."

She adds that during the vacation season, the ratio of women to men is higher:

"Most come because they cannot handle the stress in their daily lives."

Another reason for the youth to attend the intense

retreat is to develop concentration skills that will help them in their studies and career.

"We always ask for a doctor's certificate before they come, because Vipassana isn't physically easy," Khanna explains. "You have to sit for long hours and wake up very early, which is a big change from your usual routine. Some people do break down and cry, but a teacher is there to help them with the right techniques to deal with their situation. In fact, we've noticed almost 50 per cent of our young students come back."



### Break it down

Advertising executive Labony Kaushal, 25, admits the only reason she thought of giving Vipassana a shot was to alleviate her boredom. "I was just tired of doing the same thing, and having nothing new in life to look forward to. I thought that 10 days of not talking to anyone would be good for me, since I'm not a very talkative person anyway." Kaushal didn't do any research before signing up, which she recommends for anyone who's rolling the idea around in their head.

"It's not about religion; it's an intense physical and mental experience because you're just sitting and observing yourself. So, everybody's experience is different."

The first day, called Zero Day, is where an audio-visual explains the techniques of meditation to the new arrivals... and little else. "You expect someone to come up to you and tell you something, but you're just sitting in one place, meditating. I got a headache on the first day, which is something they warn you of because your body is not used to it," she recalls.

By the second day, Kaushal experienced a



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-Labony Kaushal

surge of energy, but admits the days dragged on. "I was doing a mental countdown to the end. And every day, it felt like I was running a never-ending race," she says, adding, "But by the final day, I didn't want to come back to Mumbai. And I definitely want to go back there soon."

Ask Kaushal whether she's noticed any permanent changes and she says, "I was an angry person who'd react without thinking of the consequences, but I've become more patient now. I can feel a balance, though I would need to be in an extreme situation to test how powerful it is."

### Expert speak

Clinical psychologist and psychotherapist Seema Hingorrany admits she's seen a substantial rise in the number of young patients opting for Vipassana, and cites stress as the main reason. "Patients between the ages of 22 to 30, who find that they cannot cope with the stress in their lives and the constant need to be in touch with people, take this step because Vipassana teaches you to detach yourself," she says, adding, "Many of them are going

through a break-up in their relationships, or have parents who are getting divorced. They listen to recommendations from friends or their spiritual guru, or

have read up on the subject."

Hingorrany says that she gets emails and calls from patients asking what the right age for Vipassana is, but she opines, "It's not about being the right age, but having the right reason. If someone is emotionally disturbed or unbalanced, I wouldn't recommend this intensive introspection because it might further upset the mental balance and cause you to crumble."

For those who return from their retreat successfully, Hingorrany notices a change in their composition. "I've seen patients achieve a balance in body and mind. Many reveal that their stress-related migraines and allergies disappear. And of course, they become emotionally stronger because they have enhanced their coping methods."

Patients between 22 to 30 often take this step because Vipassana teaches you to detach yourself.

-Psychologist, Seema Hingorrany