

Hi everyone,

I'm the friend in question who had a psychotic episode. I'm stable and doing well all things considered - actually, now that the dust has settled, I'm doing better than I was leading up to the retreat. Everything feels nice and flowy. Conversations with others are much more fruitful and a thick layer of anxiety has been removed. I did relieve a lot of trauma on this retreat, so it makes sense that I'm feeling good, despite having a bout of psychosis. There are some very minor symptoms still remaining, which I'll get into.

I want to start by saying THANK YOU. Going through all these posts on this platform brings a tear to my eye. It feels so comforting that random people on the internet who have no idea who I am are willing to take time out of their day to lend a helping hand to someone in need. This truly is such a wonderful and supportive community. Thank you. :)

Outside of doing recreational drugs or alcohol, this was the first time in waking reality that I felt out of control. There were lots of unknowing events that I'd like to diagnose, but not in this post. What I'll do is give you background info about myself, a very very very brief description of the retreat, the trauma and its aftermath, what helped/didn't help in my recovery, my current symptoms 2 weeks later, and a conclusion. I will probably post a separate thread with my phenomenological retreat experience and cross post it from this thread.

Know that this is going to be a long response. While I've tried to be as brief as possible, I also wanted to give you the full picture. Most importantly, I've put in a lot of information that I wish I knew about before going on a retreat like this. A lot of these traumatic events could've been avoided. I put most of the blame on myself, but I also think the culture around retreat centers in the US is too lax. I was dismissed from a retreat and left to my own vices without any sort of support. They didn't even give me a flyer with helpful websites or hospitals that I could go to. That seems crazy to me. I'm so lucky I have the support network of friends and family and like minded practitioners who talked me out of these delusional states, gave me tools to prevent them from coming up, and made me hopeful for my future.

This post has been very difficult to construct. Knowing that I'm probably going to say something that future me will cringe at, produces a lot of anxiety. I've also made myself pretty vulnerable in hopes that someone who is on a similar path will read this, relate to it, and alter their trajectory. If I do a meditation faux paw or you think something should be omitted from this post, please let me know and I will edit it out.

If you wanted to cut the amount of reading in half or are in dire need of a strategy, you could probably start the story at '*symptoms days after the retreat*' and read from there.

Relevant Background Information:

Practice:

- 4 years of TMI practice (stages 5-7 before retreat)
- 1 year of Mahasi noting in daily life

- Inconsistent jhana practice
- *Daily practice*: (1-1.5 hours sitting) + (0.5-1 hour of mindful living) = (2ish hours per day of meditating)
- *Learning*: 10 min - 1 hour of studying meditation theory per day: podcasts, books, forums, suttas, etc.
- *7 factors*:
 - Mindfulness (high): I have ADHD which means high resolution sense gates
 - Investigation (high): I'm very naturally curious. After 1-30 seconds of concentrating, I can see the vibrations of most sense gates in all parts of my being (excluding hearing or thoughts. I need more time to see the impermanence of those)
 - Energy (extreme): Dullness is rarely a problem. Restlessness and physical tension is almost always a problem
 - Rapture (extreme): I have a ton of energy on tap even though I don't attempt to cultivate it (well, I do jhana if it arises, but I'm not consistent with that yet)
 - Tranquility (really bad): Always fidgeting and on edge. Definitely need to learn how to balance and ground myself. Didn't realize this was a big problem until this retreat. Lack of tranquility was no doubt the reason the retreat went off the rails.
 - Concentration (atrocious): I cannot stay on the same thing for more than three breath cycles before my attention flickers or mind wandering begins. Being on a retreat kind of solves this problem.
 - Equanimity (medium??): I'm a relatively chill person, even in high stress environments such as the teaching profession. When shit hits the fan, I'm usually pretty calm and collected but not in a dismissive way. My administrators have said I'm too calm before. I disagree and think they are too wound up. I do recreational drugs which is effective practice in not losing my shit when uncomfortable mind states arise. I would never mix drugs and meditation, that seems dangerous. On the other side of the coin, I can be reactive, emotional, and anxiously spiral, but I'd say that's pretty rare (unless of course I'm doped up on concentration and forest spirits start mind controlling me!)
- *Pervious retreats*: Only one - 8 days - vipassana - 2023: On this retreat, I was told to stop meditating because I was too dialed in. I was successful in stopping meditation and grounding down on this past retreat.
- *Siddhis (Powers)*: I've always been agnostic towards siddhis. I still am agnostic and will continue to look at both sides of the coin. Pretty sure I've had a natural proclivity towards the powers my whole life. The previous statement is based on a very limited knowledge in this area and is besides the point (not going into details in this post).
- *Stream entrant?* Not before the retreat. Maybe after the retreat, but this is not a SE diagnosis post.

Lore

- I have ADHD
- I present as an extrovert but I'm truly an introvert: INFJ - T
- Occupation: HS math and physics teacher

- I'm very in tune with my body and mind. I'm great at identifying emotions, but sometimes they can get overwhelming and I can get lost in their content. As a person with ADHD, I have a lot of emotional sensitivity and often respond to intense things by shutting down completely. This doesn't happen as much since I started meditating.
- Others would probably describe me as relatively lucid and easy to talk to. They would definitely call me strange and bizarre.
- I've been told by friends that my superpower is allowing people to be their weird, true, and authentic selves around me by breaking down social barriers with my weirdness. I think the mechanism behind this is unconsciously absorbing, emulating and mirroring people's personalities, and then giving them a piece of my own. This is a double edged sword.
- I had a nicotine addiction: zyn every day for almost a year, social smoker for 12 years. Went cold turkey a week before the retreat
- I had a kratom addiction: 6 years 3x per week for most of the 6 years but became an everyday user 2 months before the retreat. Semi large dose (3-8g). I went cold turkey a week before the retreat.
- Despite my addictions to milder drugs, I do harder (but not super hard) recreational drugs with more responsibility. I'm talking MDMA, LSD, shrooms, ketamine, coke, DMT. Nothing like heroin, fent, meth, spice; that shit scares me. I have serious rules with the harder stuff and always supplement to prevent neurotoxic effects. Probably have hard drug sessions 2-4x per year. No addictions to any.

On the retreat: please note that I'm not trying to claim anything in this section. This is merely a timeline of where I think I was on the map at the time. A lot of these diagnoses might be wrong, especially the later days since I was in unknown territory.

Most nights I slept an average of 3 hours per night yet woke up feeling very well rested every time. I listened to my body the whole time and would probably cat nap 2-5x per day though getting sleep became more of a problem towards the end of the retreat. I did a lot of walking meditation and very few solo sits.

- Day 0: forest energy intense and tingling in my palms
- Day 1: Powers (?) experiences at beginning of day. Fear nana by bed time.
- Day 2: DN strugglin.
- Day 3: Reobservation
- Day 4: Punched through reobs to EQ. Tutttled around EQ and reobs all day
 - First unknowing event:
 - Saw 3C's the best I ever had in my life:
 - Push and pull vectors of suffering
 - Thoughts and intentions arising all by themselves separate from the observer
 - Posing the question, "And who exactly is the one noticing all this?"
 - Things got fuzzy and I was immediately kicked out of the state

- Didn't have sense of my body or where I was in the meditation hall, but the insights seemed crystal clear
 - Most insight I ever got in a single sit: a whole .zip file.
 - This event undoubtedly sparked real world change in everyday me
 - At night: realm of malleability
 - Jhanas 1-4: very very very light;
 - I just wanted to see if I could resolve to get a jhana and it appearing all on its own. It worked
 - I was half asleep while resolving but I do remember four distinct state shifts.
 - In reality I was super tired and just wanted to go to bed, but also curious about what was going down.
 - Resolved to get SE (whoopsies)
 - Resolved to sleep really well (great idea)
- Day 5: Awoke refreshed, feeling like a laser
 - Things were starting to synchronize, like they were all beginning to spiral toward a black hole
 - Got a guided tour of all the trauma in my upper torso, face, and arms. Could literally see my transparent body + body deformities.
 - At night before bed, malleability again
 - Vision was pulsing
 - Attention out of phase with reality
 - Things started blipping and flashing, like a hard drive was getting corrupted or updated
 - Attention started vibrating
 - Unknowing event
- Day 6: Very successful with samadhi and figured out how to just relax and let the meditation take over
 - Reached a very clear and deep third jhana on meta for the first time. I was so content I could've died and been okay with it.
 - Relieved more jaw and kratom trauma by just sitting with them and listening. Meta helped and soothed the wounds.
 - At night was listening to chanting (only the teacher). Suddenly they skipped a beat.
 - "Was that a cessation...? No way. They must've just stuttered."
- Day 7: This is where it gets weird
 - Woke up at 2:30 am well rested and in the realm of malleability
 - Directed mind toward insight
 - Again resolved to get SE (oh boy, bad idea)
 - 5 Unknowing events over the course of 2 hours. 3 different flavors of event.
 - Staring into the eyes of a nutcracker closed eye visual
 - Becoming my stomach and looking back at where I thought the observer to be. Ended in a zapzapzap skip.

- Becoming other body parts and attention and the body part started vibrating. Also ended in zapzapzap skip.
 - Watched nervous system receive updates and install new hardware.
 - There were bugs and glitches especially in physical movement
 - Brain and upper torso came tingling to life
 - Was feeling very lucid and blissful
- Got out of bed at 4:00 and meditated on the elements for an hour (bad idea)
 - Siphoned in water at a pond, fire in the fireplace, wind, space at a shrine, and lots of earth element for grounding purposes.
 - Didn't truly believe that siphoning in energy was a thing, just went along with it cause it sounded mystical and fun
- Cessation during morning sit chanting. The chanting literally skipped a couple of words. Upper, left arm tingled to life which caused other parts of my arms, hands, and sections of my brain to come tingling to life
- Meeting with teachers:
 - Told them about my experience
 - They told me I was going too fast and to ground down and not meditate
 - I agreed and said that I felt too dialed in, similar to taking just slightly too much MDMA (didn't tell them that bit): fun, enjoyable, but my pupils were a little too dilated
 - I had every conscious intention to listen to their instructions. I would often catch myself meditating while going about my day
 - "WTF. How long have I been noting my movement. I'm not supposed to be doing this, please stop"
 - This happened many times
- Decided to go on a walk in the forest
 - Didn't intentionally siphon forest energy but I did have my palms out on the walk and was smelling flowers.
 - Was feeling very very good
 - Kept catching myself accidentally noting behind my own back
 - Got back to the retreat after half an hour walk and I was fucking lit
 - The entire world was coated in a vibrant, beautiful, green.
 - I felt too good, like accidentally taking a double dose of MDMA + a double dose of LSD. The analogy falls apart because that would zonk anyone, and I was zonked, but I also felt pretty dialed in
- Felt like I was being mind controlled
- Thought it was forest spirits at the time (now I realize that it was just my mind, choosing a medium for which I could understand)
- Felt like my body was tethered and someone was leading me places
 - If i went against the grain, it'd be like moving through molasses
 - If I went with what it wanted me to do, it felt flowy and nice
 - Decided to just sit back and relax and see where the spirits took me
- Spirits
 - Relieved tons of trauma.

- Some of it recent
- The bulk of it was deep deep trauma I've had since I was in 5th grade. This trauma was reinforced every school day for three years of my life. Deep trauma
- Thought the spirits (my mind) was trying to help since it relieved so much trauma
- Completely forgot my promise not to meditate. I was way too jacked up on forest energy
- Brought me to my favorite sitting spot. This is the traumatic event (there's so much to talk about in this portion of the story which I'm going to simplify down by a ratio of 100:1)
 - Birds, bugs, and trees began communicating with me. Not talking, just telling me exactly what to do in their own language.
 - Trees crackling meant ground down
 - Bugs biting my face meant I had to give up trying to control and expand my awareness
 - Flies crawling on my face, eyelids, and in my ears meant to trigger fear nana
 - Everything felt so synchronous, like all of it was destined to happen anyways. Of course a fucking bird was telling me what to do, why would it not?
 - Spirits plugged me into a tree for 7 hours. Lying on my back, with shoes and socks off
 - Each finger went an inch into the soil and started siphoning forest energy.
 - They (I) banged my back against a rock to rearrange my back muscles. I could literally feel my muscles shifting
 - While this happened, my nervous system stretched a cord from my root chakra all the way to my cerebellum.
 - Didn't really know anything about chakras at this time. I had to look it up when I got home.
 - This took 3 hours of banging my back against a rock, again and again and again.
 - Finally the cord reached my cerebellum and began to jump start my brain, like jumping an old car. Took about 30 mins to get the engine running, but it felt like my whole brain came to life.
 - If I adjusted my position in any way, spirits would immediately correct the movement and send my body parts back to the position they were in.
 - Tilted my head slightly to the left? Immediate correction.
 - When I adjusted, I could feel the energy in the jump started system die down
 - Thought a centipede god had gotten into my brain and was corrupting my brain which is why I let this painful process continue

- For 4 more hours (7 in total), I was incapacitated on the forest floor, back still being banged against a rock. I had a lot less agency when plugged into the tree.
 - Thought I was going to die. Cried about it for a long time.
 - “I don’t want to die. Life was just starting to get good.”
 - Threw in the towel and basically said “I’m ready to die.”
 - Script completely flipped. Terror, sadness, and anger turned into bliss, awe, and wonder
 - While looking at a bunch of maple leaves (?) in the tree above me, I broke the vow of silence and whispered the words. “Wow. Everything is sooo beautiful..... Absolutely...perfect.”
 - Realm of malleability
 - 7ish unknowing events followed over the course of 2 hours. Some of them were surely cessations, but some of them were quite fuzzy (3 different flavors)
 - Falling into a void
 - Something evil being extracted out of my core that didn’t want to be extracted
 - Things spiraling inward and synchronizing
 - Realized the teachers were looking for me because I missed dinner and two group sits.
 - Told them what happened in a really jumbled, non-coherent way
 - Went to bed but didn’t sleep at all
 - Felt things moving around in my brain
 - Believed all the stories, especially the one about the centipede god corrupting everything
- Day 8: Aftermath
 - Saw through the centipede illusion around 6 am.
 - Teachers told me I had to leave the retreat for failing to follow instructions. I agreed and assured them that I had every conscious intention to follow their instructions and that it just got too far beyond me.
 - Asked if anyone else was affected by this. No one was, thank god.
 - The retreat offered a partial refund. I refused and donated it to the center and all teachers for having to deal with my dumbass.
 - They did a good job of keeping me grounded in conversation and giving me a lot of attention throughout the day. I felt really bad they had to deal with me. I was not a very good conversationalist in these moments of terror, anger, and misery.
 - Thought I was going to die all day
 - Held back what I thought would be the final cessation that would wake up my brain, and kill me immediately.
 - Every moment that my guard was down I was meditating without knowing it. Noting noting noting. Please stop noting.

- Kundalini energy flowing way too much. Taking deep breaths just took in more forest energy. That was my main grounding method and only made things worse.
 - Things would start to synchronize and vibrate all on their own
 - Attention would begin to vibrate
 - I started becoming different body parts again
 - Parts of my body wanted to be extracted out of me, and I felt their pull, like they were trying to escape.
 - I had to clench my butt cheeks everytime one of these things happened and resolve not to meditate
- I truly thought a cessation would turn my brain off for good or, at the very best, give me permanent brain damage. I was positive that brain damage was an absolute
- Felt my vacant kratom trauma seize up and fill with tree bark. Felt my brain fill with bark, the parts where the spirits installed wires (3 different large sections of my brain)
- Surprisingly, my back didn't hurt at all, although I could feel the cord that had originally stretched to my cerebellum. It was unplugged and only went half way up my back.
- Called all my friends to tell them goodbye
- My parents drove 5+ hours to pick me up, and then 5+ hours back to the house.
- 10 minutes after leaving the forest, I passed out in the car and got shitty car sleep the whole 5 hour drive home. While driving down the interstate, I could feel my palms sucking in energy from the trees.
 - It would shoot up my wrist like someone turned a garden hose on.
 - The intensity would be dependent on how fast the car was moving, as well as the proximity of the trees to the interstate.
 - I would literally have to sleep with my palms/wrists facing away from the trees, that helped a lot.
 - There was nothing I could do about breathing in forest energy through my nostrils except breathing shallowly, which really sucked.
 - When getting to a city with very few trees, the energy siphon would largely decrease.
 - When I got home, I slept the deepest sleep I've ever slept for 9 hours in a comfy bed.

Symptoms days after the retreat:

- Thinking I was going to have to quit my job because I had permanent brain damage that I could literally feel. Lots of tears and thoughts about future me wanting to kill myself (never any current thoughts of suicide, just thinking about what my future self might want to do if I had severe brain damage and was restricted to a hospital bed). This hopelessness lasted 4 days.
- ADHD forgetfulness x10 on day one, x5 on day two, x3 on day three, back to normal five days after the retreat

- PTSD like delusions of trees trying to siphon my soul out of me would trigger randomly for 3 days, usually at night. Always associated with these delusions was...
- ...Kundalini energy that I had a hard time taming. It's gotten better, but I still suck in forest energy through my palms and everything in my hands and arms turns to vibrations as soon as I concentrate on it.
- Feeling like I was being mind controlled again. I had a lot more agency this time compared to being on retreat. This lasted for 3 days and came in episodes.
- Motor function was floaty and clumsy for 4 days. A week and a half later, I still get random floaty feelings, but they don't last long.
- Feeling like my heart was going to explode. Although that's died down, I still feel like my heart is ultra sensitive and it feels like there's a large marble in there
- Feeling like three sections of my brain had received blunt trauma and were bruised. I can still sense these today, though the discomfort has died down substantially.
- I'm fairly certain that my brain just needed to process what was happening intermixed with some meditation induced PTSD. Like an extended hangover

What helped:

- Went to the ER. The only good thing that came out of this was getting a cat scan. It assured me there was no bleeding in my brain which was a relief, because it definitely felt like there was some hemorrhaging.
- Talking to someone who has a lot of experience with siddhis relieved a ton of anxiety I had about mystical experiences as well as gave me tools on how to reframe my traumatic experiences.
- My friends and family. Seriously though, this one was huge. My family took care of me when I was at my worst, giving me space, but also trying to line up appointments. My friends made a trip to come see me, which was so nice of them (they live very far away). That really pulled me out of my hole. In fact, as soon as my friends caught wind of my psychosis, they sprung into action. I adore my friends and family for their support.
- Online forums like DhO and /r/streumentry. I didn't actively read forums myself because I didn't have the mental capacity to do so. Instead, my friends would text me things they read about online. That really reassured myself in the realms of anxiety as well as helped develop the tools necessary in the recovery process.
- Doing grounding things like sleeping, eating, exercising, and talking with friends and family.
- Reading MCTB chapters "Am I crazy?" and "Those damn Fairy's" helped a ton. I read them multiple times, took extensive notes (clumsily), and tried out most of the suggestions, especially resolving for things to go back to normal and deconstructing PTSD into the 3Cs. Here are the techniques that worked best:
 - Reframing my delusions during moments of clarity and resolving not to believe them. Reinforcing these resolutions throughout the day.
 - "I formally resolve for these destabilizing events to stop, and for my normal functioning to return immediately, unless I formally resolve

otherwise.” Something along those lines. I can’t remember the exact quote in MCTB. This was a line I kept going back to.

- When kundalini started ramping up: “I formally resolve for these energetic experiences to stop and my energy channels to close up immediately.” I could literally feel tubes in my wrist close up. Sometimes I would use a version of this resolution and go body part by body part. The energy tube that was most difficult to close was the top of my nose wrapping around to my brain.
- Reinforcing resolutions throughout the day.
- When either spiraling, reliving the experience, or believing the forest spirit rhetoric:
 - *Resolving* helped a lot mixed with...
 - *...reframing* my past and current experiences in a buddhist context. In other words, vipassanizing everything.
 - This worked really well in riding the wave of my hyper concentrated mind and using the concentration AND all the meditation theory I’d acquired throughout the years as fuel to debunk my delusions.
 - Sometimes *light* contemplation worked best, sometimes *light* inquiry, sometimes doing *very mild* noting, sometimes labeling unhelpful thoughts/emotions, and sometimes a combination of all or some of these techniques.
 - It’s worth noting that going too hard on any of these sometimes made it worse. I really had to feel it out and experiment.
 - I don’t think any of this would’ve been a good strategy if I was more psychotic, but IDK for sure.
 - **Contemplation:** Reminding myself that, “Everything that’s happening in my experience right now is merely a projection of my own mind experiencing itself. It only exists because ‘I’ am conscious of it right now. All of this is impermanent, all of this is unsatisfactory, and all of this is happening on its own. Forest spirits don’t exist. Believing they exist creates more suffering. I don’t like suffering. These delusions are just my mind trying to make sense of an empty reality. Let’s relax those shoulders real quick. Niiiiice. Good job. That feels nice. Notice how nice that feels.” You get the picture.
 - **Inquiry:** Basically contemplation in the form of rhetorical and non-rhetorical questions
 - **Noting:** Used this technique to dissolve unwanted energy. Light noting worked best. Noting at 10 Hz made things worse for me. I used this technique the least, though in one instance it did help dissolve some unwanted kundalini.
 - **Labeling:** any unwanted emotion, sensation, or thought was labeled. Labeled gently. Smiled and felt happy that I was lucid enough to recognize that a thought or sensation arose that went

against my intention to ground myself. Kept gently labeling and let it disappear on its own.

- I would say the thing that made me hopeful for my future was talking to Dan Gilner at the caring space.
 - He helped develop the cheetah houses framework and worked closely with Willoughby Britton.
 - He understood exactly where I was coming from and had soooooo much useful information to give me. A perfect blend of western and eastern healing.
 - Truly one of the very best people I could have talked to.
 - He relieved a ton of anxiety about brain damage
 - Normalized my trauma while at the same time referencing it specifically and giving a neuroscientific explanation
 - Most importantly gave me an outlook and plan for my future.
 - Right now the plan is to NOT meditate and restore a little bit of agency through mammalian defense mechanisms. If you're interested in this framework, it's called the *cheetah house framework*, and there's a pdf online.
 - Aside from placing my hand near some plants from time to time to see if there's still energy being siphoned into my palms (there is), I am absolutely NOT going to meditate until given the all clear.
 - I have more meetings in the future with Dan and I look forward to them.

What didn't help:

- Going to the ER on day 3 (besides the ct scan).
 - They took out their DSM-5 and slapped a bipolar label on me even though they said they never encountered this situation before. Also, I have never had any history with mental disorders, so this was out of the ordinary.
 - They also tried to get me committed. I see why they did that, but that would have been the worst thing I could have done. I wasn't just sucking in forest energy, it was people's energy too. Like, I would take on the personality of the people around me.
 - I was lucid enough at the time to realize that the symptoms were tapering off. Had I been in a worse state, then yeah, commit me.
- My psychiatrist didn't really help much. I'm sure if it got to the point of needing meds (was very close), talking to her would have absolutely helped. But I was never prescribed anything. Like most of the other doctors, she was unfamiliar with meditation related trauma.
- Sleep:
 - While getting sleep definitely helped a ton, my delusions tended to arise when my guard was down; so, when I was sleeping.
 - I would awake to energy flowing uncontrollably through my body, and the trees outside my bedroom trying to siphon my soul.
 - Throughout the days, I got better at waking up as soon as energy arose and responded by resolving, resolving, resolving.
 - Eventually it didn't happen while I was sleeping anymore

How I feel now, 2 weeks after being dismissed from the retreat:

- Mixed feelings, but for the most part I feel better than I did leading up to the retreat.
- Unfortunately, I don't really have a control variable. Up until the retreat I was withdrawing from 6 years of consistent drug use. As a result, I can't tell what is post retreat goodies/baddies or drug related upsides/downsides.
 - For example, are/is *'conversations more fruitful'* because my thoughts are no longer clouded by consistent drug use, or is that a symptom of the meditation retreat?
 - Now replace *'conversations more fruitful'* with the phrase *'an increase in depressive tendencies,'* Or literally any other symptom that I'm about to tell you about.
 - Is it drug related, or could I maybe have attained stream entry and these are just the post-SE aftereffects? (don't answer that! - hah). So many variables.
 - Anyways, here's my current symptoms
- *THE GOOD: All these are noticeable but also subtle, if that makes any sense at all.*
 - Feeling very chill. Certainly chiller than before the retreat
 - Zero anxieties of my future self potentially having thoughts about suicide
 - A more consistent awareness program that's monitoring for potentially unhelpful thoughts and intentions. This program has increased its efficacy rating substantially.
 - Resolutions are more potent
 - Conversations seem very flowy.
 - Increased clarity and mindfulness of the other person I'm conversing with
 - Increased vocabulary and word choice. Like, I'm using vocab words that I knew I had in my memory, but don't usually use in conversation. Now I seem to be choosing the very best word that fits the situation.
 - Increased ability to listen effectively
 - Increased ability to formulate a near flawless response
 - Increased ability to not exaggerate my stories
 - Increased ability to say exactly what I want to say and as a result, not ruminate on what I said in the future. This is huge!
 - Decreased physical and mental tension. It's especially noticeable when seamlessly talking to people I don't know or who are acquaintances that I don't really have a rapport with.
 - Most of the time, I just intuitively know what responses would give me the largest suffering vector and as a result, construct an effective response that avoids those vectors (this doesn't always work out perfectly)
 - I feel monumentally different, but also almost exactly the same.
 - This one is going to sound crazy given the situation I just came out of but here we go. I feel like my mind just knows exactly what to do and I can trust it to lead me there.

- Along with the last bullet, I just feel like my intuition on everything is just so much deeper.
 - While I would like to awaken, I don't have the same motivation driving me there.
 - Accidentally meditating is no longer a problem
 - No more delusions or paranoia
- **THE NEUTRAL**
 - I still suck in energy from anything related to the earth element. The same buzzy, tingly sensations I got on day zero of the retreat x3
 - Kundalini energy is more manageable, but still flows and increases its flow rate if left unchecked
 - Even before this retreat, I was able to sense everything as vibrations with little to no effort (excluding auditory and thoughts). Now it's as if someone turned up the volume on the vibrations. I don't mind it, it's interesting tbh.
- **THE NEGATIVE**
 - I've lost a lot of trust from family and friends, especially the ones who are hard rooted in their scientific paradigm. I know this is an issue every practitioner faces, and I don't blame them at all. It's also very understandable given what happened, but it still hurts nonetheless. I'm sure time will heal this wound, so I'm not really worried about it.
 - Bouts of depression and hopelessness. These are pretty temporary and don't last very long.
 - Feeling floaty and clumsy sometimes. That may just be because I had four days of online class. Each class was 8 hours long and I basically just sat in my computer chair for most of it since all I own is a desktop. This may also describe the bouts of depression.
 - Sleep seems more shallow than normal. Like I'm almost always aware that I'm sleeping or dreaming and don't get full cycles in. Strangely enough, I have woken up at 5:30 am for four days in a row and I don't feel tired in the slightest.

Things I'd like to get off my chest to decrease the anxiety produced in posting uncomfortably truthful and embarrassing information in an online internet forum (In the form of FAQ):

Q: Do you actually believe in forest spirits?

A: I really don't want to because it scares me. However, that would go against my 'agnostic about everything' paradigm. I have reframed my experience to be my consciousness creating forest spirits as a way to hold true to a firmly held resolution AND to make sense of a traumatic and trippy situation. I hold true to that not just for usefulness purposes, but also because it makes the most sense. However, I'd be lying if I said there wasn't a small part of me that believes there might be something else out there that influenced my decisions, whether its forest spirits, collective consciousness, the ether, or whatever. With that in mind, I'd say it's the superposition of 95% - consciousness did this to me, 5% - might be something else.

Q: Do you believe in humans having the ability to siphon elemental energy?

A: Again, agnostic about everything. That being said, this is probably the most magical thing I believe in and something that I haven't even tried to apply my physics based paradigm to. Why do humans just instantly feel better when they submerge themselves in nature? Lot's of variables at play, but my guess would be that this might be one of them. Why did my mind know it could get more brain power just by plugging itself into a tree? I didn't know banging my back against a rock for hours on end would stretch a cord from my root chakra to my cerebellum, nor did I know where my root chakra was exactly located in the first place - but my mind certainly knew that information and was able to use that to power up my entire brain. Why did I feel the buzzing of the forest in my palms on day 0 of the retreat? In fact, feeling buzzing forest energy in my palms has existed in my life even before I started meditating consistently. I just wrote it off as unexplainable nervous system things. It's no doubt been amplified by meditating. There are whole traditions dedicated to this energy, qi-gong probably being the most well known. It's clear that other people can sense this too and good luck trying to apply a purely scientific lens to something as complex as the human experience. Anyways I'm ranting. Yes, I think people can siphon elemental energy and I think not knowing this information was part of the reason things went so badly. To really drive this point home, another practitioner on the retreat was in my meditation group meetings. He mentioned he had energetic tendencies. We were often awake together at the same wee hours of the night, drinking tea. If I was awake at 3:00 am, he was also awake. This was consistent throughout the entire retreat. I probably sound angry. That's because I am. This shit should be in textbooks and warnings should be given out to people on retreats who also have energetic sensitivities. Okay this paragraph is getting long, and I'm getting fired up, so I'll cut it here and lighten the mood :-).

Q: Did you learn your lesson about the power of resolutions?

A: Yes!

Q: Did you learn your lesson about the realm of malleability and it being a double edged sword?

A: Yes!

Q: Did you learn your lesson about the dangers of striving and trying to game the system.

A: No..... I'm just kidding, yes!

Q: Do you think you attained stream entry?

A: I don't know! This was supposed to be an update post and we're currently 16 pages into a google doc (sorry lol).

Conclusion: While these events were traumatic and certainly left a mark, I'm trying to get some value out of it, as it told me a lot about myself as well as what I need to work on. It's clear that my striving vector is much bigger than I thought. I mean, my unconscious is willing to hook itself up to a tree for 7 hours without moving, peeing, adjusting, or what have you, just to get further along the path. I'm sure the consistent resolutions to get SE in the realm of malleability didn't help. This striving undoubtedly stems from me thinking that I'm a dumber and slower human

than most other people; a rhetoric that's been reinforced my entire life by myself, my peers, and culture in general. Actually, a year ago at my last meditation retreat is when I finally started to see how damaging this doubtful self belief was. That was a nice change of pace. I guess I thought that awakening would prove to my friends and family that I wasn't stupid, and that was important to me. Now I realize how dangerous that thought train can be.

While I would love to start meditating again and see where my new baseline is at, I'm a little scared my delusions will come back. I know I'd eventually like to ease myself into another retreat to test the waters. I don't know how long it will be (at least a year, probably longer) but I do know that I need a lot more tranquility under my belt, specifically grounding techniques. I also know that I'm going to take it slow, and listen to whatever directions Dan from the caring space has to give me - get some sense of self and agency back in my life.

Now I realize the importance of teachers. I would say that laziness and executive dysfunction were part of the reason I didn't seek one out, but that's only partially true. The main reason is that I wanted to reach SE by myself, without any help, to prove some silly thing to myself and those close to me.

"See?!?! I'm not dumb. I reached awakening, all by myself."

Pretty ironic if you ask me. Ironic and foolish. Very very foolish. Over the past few days I've contemplated extensively on the viscous fear-grandiosity-striving cycle. More importantly, I've interrupted the cycle and reconciled what I think is the root cause: fear. There's probably still more work to be done, but I believe that I've gotten to the core of the issue and made a very strong intention to pump the brakes. "Take it slow and enjoy the ride" is my new motto.

If you've made it to the end of this, first of all, good job. Sixteen pages! And single spaced too. Second, if you find yourself in a similar situation, please learn from my mistakes and either deeply investigate that striving, pump the brakes, and/or, better yet, get a qualified teacher who knows the territory (speaking of which. Ahem. Any teachers out there who'd be comfortable in grounding an ADHD mother fucker like me?)

I never thought I'd be another statistic of someone who got fried on a retreat. I got fucking lucky. Lucky that I have loving parents that are able and willing to drive 10+ hours in a single day to take my terrified, crying ass home. Lucky that I've had the privilege and money to pursue my passion as well as seemingly perfect life events, both of which synergized and built resilience towards destabilizing situations like the one that occurred on this retreat. Lucky that I had friends that immediately sprung into action the moment I called them, making group texts, scheduling doctor appointments, communicating with my parents, posting on message boards, giving me resources, and many many other things that aided in my recovery. "It'll never happen to me," is the same thing I said too. Don't let pride be the thing that sends you to a mental hospital. Get a teacher, and stop fucking around. The shit we do is dangerous.

Okay, now that that's out of the way, I'd like to end on a good note. Everyone's favorite part: thank yous! I'll try to balance these upcoming sappy paragraphs with some dark and dry immaturity. Please don't skip.

Once again, thank you to everyone on this message board who helped in this matter. Those meetings wouldn't have happened without you. Big thank you to my most meditatively experienced friend who started this thread and really took the reins on getting me help. I couldn't think of a better person to lead the charge. Thank you to all my other friends for the emotional support, research, and collaboration with my parents and professionals (among many other things). Thank you to those close to me who thought to step back and give me space and not overwhelm me; truly that was exactly what I needed and it balanced out the chaos. Thank you to my parents for taking care of me when I was at my worst (classic). I'm sure it's not easy to wake up at 2:30 in the morning to support your fully grown-ass adult son, who happens to be muttering that the tree behind the house is trying to siphon his soul. Thank you to the teachers who convinced me to pump the brakes and who had Buddha levels of compassion and equanimity when I failed to follow those basic instructions. Thank you to the doctors and other practitioners who took time out of their vacation and life to meet with me, educate me on helpful grounding techniques, and most importantly, reassure me that everything was going to be alright. And to the causally dependent universe and my own mind, thank you for not diving too far into the deep end. It was just the right amount of insanity needed to seriously alter my reckless trajectory. I'm glad I learned this lesson earlier on the path as opposed to later. Actually, I couldn't think of a better time in my life for something like this to go down.

Kind of ironic if you think about it - my support network and all. That, when in the thick of it, the best possible thing that I could do for myself, was to give up control, sit back, ground down, and let all the other forces take over. I didn't have to 'do' a single thing. I'm beyond grateful to have that as an option and oh so happy to be alive and well.

I love you all...forest spirits included.

Thanks for reading.

Sources that helped when I was at my worst

Talking to someone:

- <https://www.cheetahhouse.org/>
- <https://thecaringspace.net/>

Valuable readings that gave me techniques and tools

- MCTB "crazy?"
<https://www.mctb.org/mctb2/table-of-contents/part-vi-my-spiritual-quest/61-crazy/>

- MCTB “Those damn fairies”
<https://www.mctb.org/mctb2/table-of-contents/part-vi-my-spiritual-quest/62-those-damn-fairies/>
- MCTB2 entire book
https://www.mctb.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/MCTB2_Complete_PDF_Final.pdf