

## **Open letter to the communities of Refuge Recovery and Against the Stream Buddhist Meditation Society.**

This is a complicated letter to write because I am essentially writing three groups of people in one open letter. I have a completely different perspective of my experiences with each of you individually and as groups of people. I'm going to approach this with compassion, willingness to listen and attempt to make sense of what is a layered, messy, painful situation.

I feel that it's important for everyone to know that none of this had anything to do with students of ATS or members of Refuge Recovery. These were issues that came from my personal life.

I take full responsibility for anything that I have actually done. And will continue to be honest and cooperative with the process and anyone seeking the truth. That said, I will likewise also continue to tell the truth about what never happened, such as the accusation that I assaulted someone.

To the women who have come forward and expressed a sense of suffering because of interpersonal experiences with me, I am sorry I caused you harm and I ask your forgiveness. I wanted to connect and to explore a relationship. This has been a deeply painful learning experience. I want to take full responsibility for any harm I caused to anyone and everyone with whom I have had a dating relationship. I want to make amends for my behavior if it didn't feel good to them. I don't want to defend or minimize. It is important to me that any woman who felt harmed, now feels heard. I want to understand. It matters. I was shocked to hear (months later) that someone was unhappy in any way with our interactions. I was not aware at the time that anything was amiss with how we connected. Whenever a boundary was stated – physical, emotional, or otherwise - I always honored it.

This is part of the learning for me in all of this - that just because someone doesn't say "No" or express displeasure at the time, doesn't always mean they are happy about it. I can also see that I wasn't taking into account my power/privilege and status as a dharma teacher in my personal dating life. Perhaps I've had some denial or dismissive tendencies around my role as the founder of these two

communities (ATS and RR). This has been a very painful way to wake up to the reality of who I am and how I'm seen by others.

For my communities, my heart breaks that intimate experiences from my personal life have caused a ripple effect that has made our community fragment. I can't explain to you the depth of my sadness as I think of each of you and what has come to be a community trauma. I am especially sensitive to the needs of the recovery community and I encourage you to lean on each other. Against the Stream may not exist in name, but the community still exists in each other. Refuge Recovery meetings are a peer-led process, support each-other and continue the necessary work of your own healing and recovery. In moments like this we must remember even more to take refuge in the Buddha, Dharma and Sangha.

For my colleagues, I feel betrayed and abandoned. You were my family. We taught compassion and forgiveness together. I feel you did the opposite. You silenced me. You isolated me. You did not give me the benefit of the doubt, and you offered me no path to forgiveness and healing.

As a community we face the painful reality of all that has taken place and we now have the task of beginning the process of grieving the losses, navigating the changes and rebuilding the trust and connection that we once had. I have every intention of carrying on with my calling and mission, that is to practice the Dharma, to embody wisdom and compassion as best I can and to share the teachings of the Buddha with all who are interested to receive it.

I will continue my work at Refuge Recovery Treatment Centers providing addiction treatment to suffering addicts as well as teaching my weekly meditation group at our new location in Venice. I will also be offering residential retreats through my friends at Rebel Saints Meditation Society. For now it looks like all of the other organizations and retreat centers that I have been teaching at for the past many years will cancel my events out of fear of the criticism they will receive if they continue to have me as faculty.

I am continuing to process all of this with my psychotherapist who specializes in Sexuality, and staying in contact with some of my Buddhist teachers.

I will end with my meditation phrase-

Please forgive me for any harm I have caused, intentionally or unintentionally.

Noah Levine