



University for Peace
Universidad para la Paz



Masters Degree in Gender and Peace Building

August 7, 2006

**Prospects for Meditation as an Intervention
for Domestic Violence Batterers**

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Abstract

In this paper I explore how and if meditation may be used as a tool of transforming domestic violence batterers (people who use violence and coercion with intimates), into peaceful, non-violent individuals. Previous studies on the effectiveness of Vipassana and Transcendental meditation used in prisons indicate that meditation has improved the subjective well being and quality of life of inmates through such determinants as reductions in the rate of recidivism, criminal propensity, and feelings of depression and helplessness. Though batterers are often not imprisoned for the crime of domestic violence, many batterers have similar issues as violent inmates, and recidivism is one of the greatest challenges to batterers intervention programs.

Since violence is learned, it is necessary to examine how the brain functions in order to change thought patterns and learned reactions. Using research from neuroscientists and quantum physicists, I explore how we become addicted to certain emotional responses, and how meditation practices physically change the brain.

In addition, since domestic violence is a complex and widespread social ill, it is important to fully understand its many dimensions in order to properly treat it. Therefore, I explore gender construction, violence and masculinity, and how the patriarchal society creates power imbalances that perpetuate violence against women. I conclude the domestic violence section by reviewing current approaches to ending violent behavior in batterers, such as batterer intervention and anger management programs.

The intention of my research is to see if individuals working in the domestic violence field (with batterers and victims), as well as prison meditation teachers, think that a) meditation would be an effective method of transforming batterers, b) if it needs to be complemented with additional approaches, and c) if there are any obstacles that might inhibit the effectiveness of meditation. After analyzing the findings, I propose an alternative model for batterers intervention programs which includes meditation as a guiding practice for transformation.

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List of Acronyms

DV	Domestic Violence
TM	Transcendental Meditation
EEG	Electroencephalogram
ERP	Event-Related Potential
MBSR	Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction
DEVAW	Declaration on the Elimination of Violence Against Women
VAW	Violence Against Women
MVAW	Male Violence Against Women
CAADV	California Alliance Against Domestic Violence
BIP	Batterer Intervention Program
AM	Anger Management
TCSD	Travis County Sheriff's Department
SFSD	San Francisco Sheriff's Department
DDRR	Disarmament, Demobilization, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration
US	United States
UK	United Kingdom
SA	Sexual Assault
MFT	Marriage and Family Therapy
PTSD	Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder
CA	California

Acknowledgments

I would like to share my heartfelt gratitude to my parents who have supported me unconditionally and have always so generously shared their love and encouragement.

I would like to appreciate the students, faculty, and staff of the University for Peace, including all of my professors, and the 2005-2006 Gender and Peace Building class in particular. My dear classmates taught me much more than I could have learned from lectures or books. -I wish you all a world full of peace.

Special thanks to Dina Rodriguez who has loyally supported my endeavors at UPEACE, and Amr Abdalla for his contagious enthusiasm and for enriching my understanding of research methodologies. And thanks to Alessandro Cordero, for his brilliant technical assistance.

I would also like to thank Rachna Toshniwal for introducing me to prison meditation practices, bringing me relevant materials from India, and encouraging me to do Vipassana. Also, special thanks to Rachna's uncle Arun for so thoughtfully sending me research materials and "The Art of Living." You have both touched my life in a meaningful way. -Namaste.

Me gusteria agradecer la comunidad de Ciudad Colon, y en particular mi familia Tica para su apoyo y amor. Gracias por hacerme sentir a casa y por todo su generosidad.

I would like to acknowledge Vipassana El Salvador, and all those who hosted the course and shared metta with me. A special thanks to Silvia Escorel for her enthusiasm for my research topic.

I would like to appreciate Robert Ayres, who unknowingly influenced my research topic through his faith in meditation.

Special thanks to my former co-workers at Tahoe Women's Services. I learned so much working with all of you which has inspired me to keep working to prevent VAW.

Special thanks my dear friends Rosalind Williams, Anna Carla Lopez, Wendy Geise, and Molly Batchelder for their inspiration and support.

In addition, I would like to thank Matthew Norton for his insightful comments and suggestions. -Thank you for being such a positive force.

Lastly, I would like to thank all of the all of the individuals who responded to my emails for honestly sharing your opinions, experiences, and insight on the matter. I am truly inspired by all of those working towards ending DV, as well as those who teach meditation to help end suffering. Thank you for the great work that you do.

May all beings be happy! May all beings be peaceful! May all beings be liberated!
-Namaste-

My Spring Break Saga: Suffering in San Salvador, A Personal Journey

During Spring break of 2006, many UPEACE students found themselves basking in the glorious sunshine on one of the many spectacular beaches in Costa Rica, watching monkeys glide from tree to palm tree in the adjoining national parks, while at the same time other students were relaxing in luxurious natural hot springs, sipping piña coladas and taking in the incredible firework-like display atop Volcano Arenal. I found myself in a “Sacred heart of Mary” missionary home in a bad part of San Salvador, (El Salvador), tormented with pain, exercise deprived and practically starved! In other words, I took part in an eleven day Vipassana meditation course, meditating from 4:30 am until 9:00pm everyday. Surprisingly, I have not yet revealed the most astonishing part of the story: the thirty of us participating in this activity did so in complete and total silence. I did not even wish my roommate, “Happy birthday”, as I had no idea it was her birthday, and in any case, we were not allowed to look at each other, let alone exchange greetings.

Call me a masochist, as I chose this option for myself knowing full well that it would be difficult, (yet I had no idea just how excruciating I would find it). Call me a dedicated student, as I underwent this seemingly self-flagellating exercise to gain insight for my thesis which examines how prisons are using meditation to transform inmates and to explore if and how this might apply to domestic violence batterers. Or, rather, call me human who, like many others have done for millennium, was simply searching for a way to end suffering in my life and attain a state of blissful inner-peace.

Ironically, in many ways the activity resembled prison: men and women were separated at all times, we were allowed to walk in the courtyard after meals (the basketball court and garden area were divided into two distinct sections for men and women), we shared a bare room with a roommate, we had to do chores such as clean the bathroom and sweep the hallways, we were given only a small portion of vegetarian food for each meal, and we were only allowed a piece of fruit as our dinner. Since speaking and touching each other were not allowed, there was no jovial camaraderie. On the contrary, most participants looked somber and unapproachable.

During meditation we were allowed to sit on cushions, which, at first were very comfortable. However, after 10 minutes in the same position I would feel the urge to shift positions, after 30 minutes my legs had commonly fallen asleep, and general pain has slowly set in, after 45 minutes the sensations were tantamount to my final ascent up Mount Kilimanjaro last summer, I was practically screaming out in agony, felt feverish, dizzy, nauseous, and even insane! The worst part was not even the piercing pain, but the insufferable itch inflicted by the evening's blood-thirsty mosquitoes.

Imagine, you sit down on your cushion to begin a peaceful hour or two of meditating...you breathe in...ahhh...then it hits you and you cry out in despair and disbelief as you realize you forgot to put on your trusty mosquito repellent! You anxiously wait, hoping they will not realize this immense oversight, you begin to get comfortable and start watching your breath again. Not long after, you feel the first mosquito penetrating your vulnerable, bare ankle. Since no movement is allowed, you know you will not be able to swat the pesky insect away. You try adjusting your ankle so it is not obvious you are moving, but it is too late, the mosquito has prevailed. The next fifteen minutes are spent observing the itching sensation while trying to not have the craving to scratch your skin off. Eventually, the itching subsides, for, as S.N. Goenka explains, “no itch is eternal.” But the mosquito is still hungry, or perhaps he invites his friends for the grand feast, and soon you are quietly observing eight different mosquito bites, producing sensations that are akin to torture.

The physical pain was, of course, doubled by the mental anguish that accompanied it, “Why am I doing this to myself?”, “I am in pain!”, “This is not natural...”, etc. It occurred to me that instead of eradicating suffering from my life I was greatly increasing it. Suddenly, I too, wanted to be sunning at the beach, treating my body to a hot sulfur dip, or be anywhere but at the “Sacred heart of Mary” missionary house in south-central San Salvador. Even if I appeared to remain calm and silent it was merely a facade, during the majority of the first few days an inner voice incessantly screamed out, “I can't do this! Why did I choose to come here? Why? Why? Why?”

Inconsistent to the impression I may be giving that the Vipassana course was completely

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