5-21-2011

Waking up to the Present: Vipassana Meditation and the Body

Craig Geffre
Linfield College

Waking Up to the Present:

Vipassana Meditation and the Body

Craig Geffre

Anthropology Honors Thesis

Linfield College

Spring 2011

PERMISSION TO DEPOSIT STUDENT PROJECTS
IN DigitalCommons@Linfield

Please read this document carefully before signing. If you have questions about any of these permissions, please contact the Digital Commons Coordinator.

Title of the Project:
Waking Up to the Present: Vipassana Meditation and the Body

Author's Name: (Last name, first name)

Loffre, Craig

Advisor's Name

Dr. Hillary Crane

DigitalCommons@Linfield is our web based, open access compliant institutional repository for digital content produced by Linfield faculty, students, staff, and their collaborators. It is a permanent archive. By placing your project in the Digital Commons, all materials will be searchable via Google Scholar and other search engines. Materials that are located in the Digital Commons are freely accessible to the world; however, your copyright protects against unauthorized use of the content. Although you have certain rights and privileges with your copyright, there are also responsibilities. Please review the following statements and identify that you have read them by signing below. Some departments may choose to protect the work of their students because of continuing research. In these cases the project is still posted in the repository, but content will only be accessible by individuals who are part of the Linfield community.

CHOOSE THE STATEMENT BELOW THAT DEFINES HOW YOU WANT TO SHARE YOUR PROJECT.

X I **agree** to make my project(s) available to the Linfield College community and to the larger scholarly community upon its deposit in our permanent digital archive, DigitalCommons@Linfield or its successor technology.

OR

_____ I **do not want** my student project(s) available to the larger scholarly community upon deposit in DigitalCommons@Linfield. I want my project(s) available only to the Linfield community, permanently_____ or until (date)_____ when it may be made available to the larger scholarly community.

Signed *Signature redacted* Date 5/21/11 (over)

NOTICE OF ORIGINAL WORK AND USE OF COPYRIGHT PROTECTED MATERIALS:

If your work includes images that are not original works by you, you must include permissions from original content provider or the images will not be included in the repository. If your work includes videos, music, data sets, or other accompanying material that is not original work by you, the same copyright stipulations apply. If your work includes interviews, you must include a statement that you have the permission from the interviewees to make their interviews public. For information about obtaining permissions and sample forms see http://copyright.columbia.edu/copyright/permissions/.

NOTICE OF APPROVAL TO USE HUMAN SUBJECTS BY THE LINFIELD COLLEGE INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH BOARD (IRB).

If your research includes human subjects, you must include a letter of approval from the IRB. For more information see http://www.linfield.edu/irb/.

BY SIGNING THIS FORM, I ACKNOWLEDGE THAT ALL WORK CONTAINED IN THIS PAPER IS ORIGINAL WORK BY ME OR INCLUDES APPROPRIATE CITATIONS AND/OR PERMISSIONS WHEN CITING OR INCLUDING EXCERPTS OF WORK(S) BY OTHERS.

IF APPLICABLE, I HAVE INCLUDED AN APPROVAL LETTER FROM THE IRB TO USE HUMAN SUBJECTS.

Signature _ *Signature redacted* _____ Date 5/21/11

Printed Name Craig Geffre

Approved by Faculty Advisor _ *Signature redacted* _____ Date 5/24/11

5/18/10

Acknowledgments

I wish to extend my gratitude to Ajarn Fa Thai for teaching me about meditation and life, Professor Hillary Crane for her extensive guidance, advice, and assistance, Professor Amy Orr for coordinating the department's thesis writers, Professor Tom Love for advising me throughout my undergraduate years, the rest of the Department of Sociology & Anthropology at Linfield College for their outstanding support, and my parents for everything they have done and continue to do for me.

Table of Contents

Abstract

Using ethnographic methods I examine the process of learning vipassana meditation, a form of meditation in which the practitioner focuses on their bodily sensations, and the ways in which learning this form of meditation affects the practitioner's daily life. I employ reflexivity alongside an ethnography of the particular to capture my experiences as the student of a Thai Theravada Buddhist monk who teaches at a temple in Portland, Oregon. Through this process I have found that learning vipassana meditation pervades numerous aspects of daily life, extending beyond direct instruction and meditation practice, bringing about perceptual changes in reality as learned concepts become embodied through both meditation and lived experience.

INTRODUCTION

Sitting on a mat on the floor of an open room—the main hall at a Buddhist temple in the heart of Portland, Oregon—a monk addresses the laypeople who are sitting before him. He asks us to close our eyes and observe our breathing. "Take a few deep breaths to start, but then do not try to control your breathing," he advises, "just observe. If your mind begins to wander, come back to your breathing. Always come back to your breathing." Soon, my wandering mind becomes focused, and I find myself in a deep state of calm; I breathe in, and I breathe out. Everything seems so still, so peaceful. Again, the master speaks; "Our eyes are closed, but we are *awake*." We sit like this for twenty minutes—practicing *vipassana* meditation.

Vipassana ("insight") meditation is a form of Buddhist meditation in which the practitioner gives full attention to the body at the present moment, focusing on their breath or some other bodily phenomena. Through vipassana the meditator is expected to go from conceptual knowledge of Buddhist concepts to embodied knowledge after realizing Buddhist teachings experientially (Pagis, 2010a:475). Ultimately, the realization of Buddhist concepts through meditation is intended to eliminate suffering by altering the practitioner's consciousness (Barendgregt, 1987:4). I examine this phenomenon using anthropological and sociological theory and methods, looking at how vipassana meditation is learned and, through practice, brings about changes in how everyday reality is perceived.

Meditation and other altered states of consciousness are an important aspect of religious experience, yet they often go unexamined in anthropological study. As Thomas

Csordas observes, “altered states of consciousness remain virtual black boxes” (1993:147), and only recently have they been regarded as cultural phenomena that can be investigated and used to inform our understandings of religion and culture. By acknowledging altered states of consciousness as forms of perception it is possible to examine them as socially informed experiences shared between participants (Csordas, 1993:148) and look at their broader cultural implications. This is particularly important when studying religions, cultures, or altered states of consciousness themselves in which the experience of the altered perception is an important cultural phenomenon, as is the case with meditation and those who practice it.

Understanding meditation and how it affects practitioners requires that we consider meditation within its cultural context and not assume that its practice nor outcomes are independent from other influences. In the case of vipassana meditation, the learning process may include lectures, books, videos, conversations, and lived experiences that inform the individual's practice and changes in perception. To capture these diverse influences and experience how meditation is learned and practiced, I utilize a first-person methodology, studying vipassana meditation under the direction of a Thai Buddhist monk and analyzing his teachings and how they affect my development as a practitioner. Through this process I have found that learning vipassana meditation is a multifaceted endeavor that pervades numerous aspects of daily life and brings about perceptual changes in reality as learned concepts are practiced and experienced through meditation and lived experience.

Historical Context

In order to understand the place of vipassana meditation in contemporary North American society, it is necessary to understand its cultural and historical background. Practitioners trace the roots of vipassana practice to the religious figure who first founded Buddhism in India, Siddhartha Gautama (Gautama Buddha), believed by most modern scholars to have lived between 563BCE – 483BCE (Snelling, 1998). Vipassana meditation spread with the Theravada school of Buddhism, which is the primary school of Buddhism practiced in South and Southeast Asian countries including Thailand, Burma, Laos, Sri Lanka, and Cambodia (Cadge, 2005).

Anthropologist Wendy Cadge's *Heartwood* (2005) describes how Theravada Buddhism eventually spread to the United States from Southeast Asia, being introduced permanently and institutionally in the mid-1960s as immigrants and refugees left their homelands for economic and political reasons after the United States immigration reforms of 1965. Interest from native-born Americans subsequently escalated during and after the 1960s (Cadge, 2005). These factors contributed to a rapid rise in Theravada Buddhist temples, meditation centers, and the primary form of Theravada meditation practice—vipassana (Cadge, 2005). Between 1987 and 1997 alone, the number of Theravada Buddhist meditation centers in the United States is estimated to have increased from 72 to 152 (Morreale, 1998), and the groups listed in the vipassana-oriented English-language newsletter *Inquiring Mind* increased from 16 to 232 between the years 1984 and 2000 (Cadge, 2005).

Regarding the particular temple that my research takes place in, it is important to

note that Theravada Buddhism has also been growing in Taiwan as the population of Thai immigrant laborers in Taiwan has increased (Jones, 1999:xiii). This has led to Theravada monks partnering with Chan and Pure Land temples in Taiwan to teach and conduct ceremonies for the immigrant Theravada Buddhists from Thailand.[1] In contrast to Theravada, Chan and Pure Land are forms of Mahayana Buddhism. Mahayana differs from Theravada Buddhism primarily in Mahayana's conception of the *bodhisattva* ideal,[2] the deification of the Gautama Buddha, and the primary forms of meditation practiced (Snelling, 1998). The fundamental teachings of the Buddha, however, remain nearly unchanged between these two schools of thought (Snelling, 1998). It is in this context and background that the temple I have done my research at exists, appearing principally Pure Land and Chan in aesthetics, but having both Theravada and Mahayana monastics and lay-practitioners within the temple's community.

1 While broadly recognized by practitioners in the temple in which I have conducted my research, this phenomenon of Theravada monks teaching to Thai immigrants in Taiwan has not yet been explored in academic literature.

2 A *bodhisattva* is an enlightened individual who, in their great compassion, decides to be continuously reborn to help all beings attain enlightenment (Snelling, 1998:68).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Amidst the growth of Buddhism within the United States, interest in meditation has been rising rapidly. The prevalence of meditation among all adults who use alternative and complementary forms of medicine rose from 7.6% to 9.4% between 2002 and 2007 (Barnes, Bloom, & Nahin, 2008) in addition to the aforementioned increases in vipassana practitioners since the 1960s. Despite this long period of increasing numbers of Theravada Buddhists and meditation practitioners, studies of meditation practice itself and the experiences involved with this altered state of consciousness have only begun appearing within the last couple of years. Most of the studies that have been done focus on the medical and neurological aspects of meditation, neglecting the holistic context in which meditation is learned and practiced. Recent studies in the social sciences are beginning to address this by examining the broader implications of vipassana meditation practice and changes in practitioners' understanding of mind-body relationships. However, the initial learning processes that lead to these changes and how they affect the daily lived experiences of practitioners have gone largely unexamined, leaving a gap in our understanding of how vipassana meditation affects practitioners.

Academic studies of meditation to date have principally examined how meditation practice affects the brain physiologically and what potential health effects meditation might yield (Chiesa & Serretti, 2010; Horowitz, 2010). Published clinical benefits of vipassana in particular have included reductions in stress, improved coping styles, and lessened alcohol and substance dependence (Chiesa, 2010). Neurobiological studies using neuroimaging technology have also found greater thickness in parts of the brain related to

attention, learning and memory processes, regulation of emotion, and perspective taking (Hölzel et al., 2011) as well as increased subcortical gray matter in the hippocampus and right insula of practitioners (Chiesa, 2010). These studies indicate that vipassana meditation practice does have a notable affect on the brain, even causing physiological changes to its structure after long term practice.

While studies on the physical changes of the brain provide important information regarding the physiological changes that occur, the social dimension of how these changes occur through instruction and practice must also be examined in order to develop comprehensive understandings of how meditation practice works. It has therefore been necessary that the social sciences also engage the topic of meditation practice as cultural phenomena with observable implications for individuals and society.

In order to address the need for a social understanding of meditation, sociology, anthropology, and other related fields have recently taken to studying meditation practice and its functions, particularly through ethnographic and other qualitative methods. The focuses of these studies have varied widely. For example, anthropologist Ingrid Jordt (2006) examines how meditation-derived knowledge has formed the basis of knowledge communities amidst Burma's lay meditation movement, exploring the social importance placed on gaining knowledge experientially through meditation practice which is considered a requisite for joining such a community. Alternatively, rather than focusing on the social functions of meditation, some researchers have brought their attention to the practice of meditation itself—which is what this study is primarily concerned with.

The recent attention that meditation is beginning to receive requires the

development of basic frameworks for understanding meditation. Wolfgang Fasching (2008) made a significant contribution to this by putting forth the theory that meditation can be understood as a way of becoming aware of consciousness itself. He posits that the general aim of meditation across forms is to still the mind and, in various ways, withdraw from intentionally dealing with objects (Fasching, 2008:464). This means that the practitioner is to "do" nothing but remain fully conscious—in this way, the individual becomes aware of the simple presence of phenomena as they exist (Fasching, 2008). With persistent practice, practitioners are said to learn to always experience themselves as the very moment of consciousness that they are within (Fasching, 2008). This theory is consistent with the central underlying Buddhist concept of mindfulness and provides a basic premise from which more specific understandings of meditation practice can be developed.

Aspasia Leledaki & David Brown (2008) have brought the discussion on practicing mindfulness through meditation into the testable sociological sphere by examining the experiences of longtime yoga and meditation practitioners as they pertain to the transformation of mind-body relationships. The authors found that the stories of interviewees focused largely on transforming their 'dualistic' body-self, as configured by living in a Western culture that emphasizes mind-body dualisms in everyday activities (Leledaki & Brown, 2008:303). These transformations took the form of "liberation" from such dualisms towards a mind-body unity, resulting in de-attachment from a fixed sense of self, thoughts, and sensations, the resolution of inner conflict, and the ability to negate feelings of domination (Leledaki & Brown, 2008). While very broad in its scope of what

practices were included, encompassing many forms of meditation and yoga, the study provides an interesting insight into what Westerners may be experiencing in practicing such techniques after longer periods of time. By only focusing on longtime practitioners, however, little can be said of the initial processes of learning about these techniques and how exactly they have affected practitioners over time as they have gained more experience.

Sociologist Michal Pagis (2010a, 2010b, 2009) has begun to address the gaps in what occurs during the learning process of meditation. Conducting her research with patrons of meditation centers, Pagis (2010a) examines how the Buddhist concepts of dissatisfaction, impermanence, and not-self become embodied through vipassana meditation practice. Her research is the result of two years of ethnographic observations and interviews with vipassana practitioners who have undergone ten and twenty day meditation retreats in the United States and Israel (2010a). In discussing conceptual and embodied knowledge, Pagis (2010a) finds that,

> Through my fieldwork among practitioners of vipassana meditation, I have realized the limitations to keeping a strict distinction between conceptual and embodied knowledge. On the one hand, the teachings of the Buddha, known as Dhamma, are highly theorized, written down in ancient texts and learned through reading and listening to lectures. On the other hand, for the practitioners of vipassana, these teachings become lived reality, or truth, only when they become embodied through the practice of meditation (p. 3).

According to Pagis (2010a), only through experience are Buddhist concepts truly realized and made a part of the practitioner's lived reality. It is not enough to merely study the Buddha's teachings, nor is the knowledge solely embedded at an unconscious level (Pagis, 2010a). These findings lead Pagis to conclude that the attainment of Buddhist

knowledge simultaneously requires "both bodily experience and intellectual reflection" (2010a:4).

The experience of these concepts is enhanced by the living conditions enforced in vipassana retreats, as spatial, temporal, and social elements are strictly controlled. However, it is suggested that these "sterile" settings are "not much different from a laboratory," thereby creating a tension between the everyday world and the meditation center (Pagis, 2010a:16). This tension can lead to feelings of disconnectedness and stress when the practitioners must reenter their everyday lives (Pagis, 2010a). These concentrated meditation retreats provide a valuable insight into how Buddhist concepts are realized, but do not necessarily reflect the changes and experiences that may occur through long term meditation practice, including how vipassana may affect the daily lives of practitioners.

Comprehensive sociocultural explanations for how the body and mind are affected by longterm meditation practice amidst everyday living are necessary in order to more fully understand meditation practice and its outcomes. As Francisco Varela and Jonathon Shear (1999) have observed, while third-person methodologies of studying consciousness and meditation have flourished with the use of fMRI, PET, and other brain-scanning technologies, firsthand studies of lived subjective experience have not kept pace. In beginning to explore such topics, this research seeks to address the current gap in social theory pertaining to meditation generally and vipassana in particular, bridging the divide between recent scientific analyses of meditation and the explanations given by practitioners.

THEORY & HYPOTHESIS

The process of learning and practicing vipassana meditation is an inseparably physical and mental activity as the mind focuses upon the experiences and sensations of the body, which are experienced through the body and mentally interpreted. The mind and body are inextricably linked and cannot be reduced to dualities as it is only together that they enable individuals to experience and make sense of reality. An examination of how meditation might affect the daily lived experience of practitioners must then take into account the holistic mind-body experience and how that experience might be altered through learning and practice.

The paradigm of embodiment allows for a study on what is happening with the mind and body in meditation to take place. Thomas Csordas defines embodiment as "an indeterminate methodological field defined by perceptual experience and the mode of presence and engagement in the world" (1993:135). This paradigm operates on the premise that the body is not an object to be studied as an aspect of or in relation to culture, but rather as the subject and origin of cultural phenomena (Csordas, 1990). It is therefore asserted that bodies are of fundamental importance; they matter tremendously to the people who inhabit them, and things done to the body are experienced as having been done to the self (McGuire, 1990).

Bodies work, live, suffer, and die—they are the vehicles through which we interact with the material realities of everyday life (McGuire, 1990). However, the tradition of Cartesian dualism, itself a cultural and historical construction that is not universally shared, has created a separation of the mind and body in Western thought

(Coakley, 1997; McGuire, 1990; Scheper-Hughes & Lock, 1987). A theoretical approach to embodiment requires that such distinctions be suspended, and the body must be considered as both biological and cultural (McGuire 1990), an active agent that is itself shaped by social moments and their history—what Scheper-Hughes & Lock (1987) refer to as the "mindful body."

In beginning with this mindful body, the goal becomes to "capture that moment of transcendence in which perception begins, and, in the midst of arbitrariness and indeterminacy, constitutes and is constituted by culture" (Csordas, 1988:9); to do so is to examine culture at the most immediate level of lived reality. This entails that a phenomenological study of perception seeks to describe the very beginnings of meaning as perceived through the physical body, not fully constituted cultural products (Csordas, 1988). Such an approach to studying culture can be done through a synthesis of Maurice Merleau-Ponty's theory of the preobjective and Pierre Bourdieu's theory of habitus (Csordas, 1988; McGuire, 2002).

Merleau-Ponty (1962) theorizes that perception begins with the body and that there is a brief moment before any objectification of experienced phenomena takes place, what he refers to as the preobjective. This preobjective state, in other words, is the instant in which the body has perceived something through the senses, but the perception has not yet been reconstituted into something that is consciously understood. It is the point at which three lines in a particular geometric configuration are perceived as nothing but lines; once recognized as being a triangle, the mind has already made an abstraction (Csordas, 1990). Perception, then, ends in objects, and we must begin with where

perception begins—the body (Merleau-Ponty, 1962).

This perspective shifts the study of sensation from being focused on the object as it exists to how that object is perceived, which may be incongruent with how the object is in objective reality, as can be clearly demonstrated with the use of optical illusions in which what is objectively present and what is thought to be present differ (Merleau-Ponty, 1962). To say that something is preabstract is not, however, to say that it is precultural; Csordas (1990) makes this point by referencing David Schneider's anecdote of an umpire who states that pitches are neither balls nor strikes until he says they are, yet this presupposes that there are preexisting cultural criteria for what ought to constitute a ball or a strike. The preobjective phenomenon already exists within a cultural context and, within that context, there are a limited number of ways in which that phenomenon can be interpreted.

Bourdieu (1977) furthers Merleau-Ponty's argument in stating that we experience the world through our culturally informed bodies, referred to as the habitus. This theory of habitus posits that “our very senses (our physical senses, not just our 'common sense,' 'sense of justice,' and 'sense of taste') are socialized and culturally patterned” (McGuire, 2002:208). Therefore, everything in how people physically act in and experience the world to how and what people think are culturally informed (Bourdieu, 1977), from “the apparently most insignificant techniques of the body...[to] fundamental principles of construction and evaluation of the social world” (Bourdieu, 1984:466). This concept collapses the dualities of mind-body and sign-significance as it allows for the examination of the psychologically internalized methods of human social operation

(Csordas, 1990) as they function on a level beneath consciousness (Bourdieu, 1984) and become physically manifested. It is this concept of the habitus which envelopes the cultural context of preobjective experience (Csordas, 1990).

Using these concepts it is possible to analyze religious experiences, including meditation practice, from the point at which preabstracted experiences engage the socially informed body (Csordas, 1990). Using Csordas' (1990) model, a study of vipassana meditation entails beginning with an analysis of how Buddhist concepts and meditation practices are taught to practitioners; this is necessary in order to understand what the culturally constituted objects of Buddhist thought are and how they can be expected to be realized. These cultural objects and understandings should then form the basis of a shared habitus among vipassana practitioners, and although the practitioners will experience original sensations through their practice, they ought to "nevertheless take a limited number of common forms because they emerge from a shared habitus" (Csordas, 1990:15). These phenomena, as they are experienced as lived and embodied reality, should continue to inform the habitus over time, affecting how preobjective experiences are perceived by the socially informed body. Consequently, I hypothesize that the teaching of vipassana meditation techniques and Buddhist beliefs informs the habitus of meditators in such a way that they can work toward developing embodied knowledge through meditation, gradually changing their preobjective and bodily informed experience of life.

METHODS

I have been learning about vipassana meditation by studying under the direction of a Thai monk named Ajarn[3] Fa Thai who teaches at a Buddhist temple in Portland, Oregon.[4] I have done this by attending weekly public services, particularly throughout the summer of 2010, having informal conversations, reading prescribed books, and practicing meditation independently. These procedures and their roles in informing my understanding and practice of vipassana meditation will be described at length later; for now, it suffices to say that I became a student of his in the truest sense. I entered with some knowledge of Buddhism, having taken several undergraduate courses on Eastern philosophy and religion, but a minimal knowledge of meditation and no knowledge at all regarding vipassana, though I was genuinely eager to learn about meditation in whatever form I might be taught. This approach put me in a position similar to that of many Americans who desire to learn about meditation, coming in with little prior exposure and the intent of being a lay-practitioner, except for my plan to also study meditation from an ethnographic perspective.

The roles of belief and practice in studying religious experience ethnographically have been addressed from a variety of perspectives. Some researchers have found value in maintaining a professional distance between themselves and their subjects; for instance, Gananath Obeyesekere (1981) claims that such a distance is useful in

3 "Ajarn" is an honorific title meaning "teacher" in Thai; it is typically used by senior monks in Thai monasteries (Sumedho, 2006). The word is also commonly transliterated in many other ways, including ajahn, ajaan, archan, achaan, and acharn.

4 As Ajarn Fa Thai's teachings feature prominently in this research and the material is not sensitive in nature, he has decided to not have his identity masked.

recognizing implicit meanings in symbols and making them explicit for analysis. Alternatively, many have claimed advantages to coming nearer to the experiences being studied. Victor Turner (1962) advances the notion that having some experience of belief is necessary to truly understand religious belief, and Susan Harding posits that "[s]ocial scientists through a variety of means generally do not let themselves get close enough to 'belief' to understand it, or, for that matter, even to see what it is" (1987:168). According to Harding (1987), it is the space between belief and disbelief that ethnographic fieldwork is conducted; the ill-defined gray area between academic skepticism and religious understanding. To understand what is happening in a religious experience requires that the ethnographer navigate this complex gap.

In the present case of vipassana meditation, navigating the gap between academic skepticism and religious understanding has entailed that I maintain an open mind toward vipassana's transformative potential, study Buddhist philosophy, and practice meditation myself. As a form of introspection and self-cultivation that is, in many respects, experienced alone within the practitioner's own mind (Pagis, 2010b), understanding vipassana meditation requires a self-reflexive approach (Barengregt, 1988). Harding (1987) observed that such a self-reflexive approach allows the ethnographer to engage in the experiences of their informants and explore the consequences of those experiences. Csordas (1993) further suggests that it is the development of a shared habitus that allows for this continuity in interpretive possibilities between researcher and informant to develop, and the researcher should not overlook their own experiences, as derived from a shared habitus, as an important source of information.

Through the development of a shared habitus and practice of vipassana meditation, my own experiences have become the primary lens through which I have been able to foster an understanding of how the practice of vipassana meditation alters the practitioner's culturally informed body. Jean Favret-Saada, in studying the altered states of consciousness involved in witchcraft in the French Bocage, found that such a prominent participant position prompted a methodological predicament; she observes, “if I participated, my fieldwork would turn into a personal adventure, the opposite of a professional venture; if I tried to 'observe,' that is to keep my distance, there would be nothing left for me to 'observe'” (1990:192). Like Favret-Saada, I found that only by indulging in subjectivism and becoming my “own informant” (1980:22) could I gain a comprehensive understanding of an altered state of consciousness.

In addition to studying under Ajarn Fa Thai and analyzing my own internalized experiences, I also had many informal conversations with other monastics and lay-practitioners at the temple about meditation, Buddhism, and various other topics. Some of these practitioners informed me of other techniques used in vipassana meditation and provided me with additional literature on Buddhism. It quickly became clear to me that at this temple both monastics and experienced lay-people play a prominent role in ensuring that visitors and new practitioners receive books and instructions pertinent to practicing meditation, Buddhism, and proper temple conduct. These interactions, as well as the chores that sometimes ensued by virtue of my being a young able-bodied person capable of carrying heavy bags of rice and garbage, also helped integrate me as a member of the temple's community. These practitioners have offered me support and insights regarding

my meditation practice and ethnographic fieldwork and their importance will not be understated in this study.

In order to adequately capture my own personal journey, the teachings of Ajarn Fa Thai, and interactions with particular individuals, the results from this research are presented as a mixture of reflexivity, using my embodied experiences as a student and meditator for data collection (Csordas, 1993:145; Favret-Saada, 1980:22), and in the form of an ethnography of the particular, as described by Lila Abu-Lughod (1991). An ethnography of the particular is based on the premise that "[w]hen one generalizes from experiences and conversations with a number of specific people in a community, one tends to flatten out differences among them and to homogenize them" (Abu-Lughod, 1991:152-153). Such generalizations would represent an assertion of scientific authority and institute a clear distinction between myself and the "other" (Abu-Lughod, 1991), effectively undermining my attempts to dissolve problematic and culturally constructed dichotomies. I instead focus on particular interactions, occasions, and insights as they have occurred in particular contexts of time and place. These particularities are also important in my examination of how vipassana meditation was taught to me through the process of instilling a shared habitus and my discussion of an evolving and alterable preobjective experience of lived reality.

I present this ethnography using "thick description," as described by Clifford Geertz (1973). Geertz (1973:7) advocates for an interpretive approach to studying culture in which the meanings of culture take precedence over simple observation of cultural phenomena. This means that instead of merely describing the acts of meditating,

receiving instructions, and so forth, I attempt to understand and convey the cultural meanings that exist in these acts and how they contribute to a holistic understanding of how vipassana meditation is taught and utilized as a practice. Geertz (1973:29) notes that this approach, like any other method of cultural analysis, never allows the ethnographer to get anywhere "near the bottom" of their object of study as there are always more layers of meaning than can be examined, but by describing events within their cultural context, more complete understandings can be achieved. I will therefore begin by providing a brief description of the temple and its general dynamics before moving on to an analysis of the primary means by which vipassana meditation was taught to me and how pertinent meanings were imparted and learned, both through communication and practice, with the purpose of altering my experience of everyday life.

My descriptions and analyses attempt to convey the many ways in which Ajarn Fa Thai and other personnel at the temple have communicated with me as well the processes I have been instructed to undertake in order to receive knowledge and meanings associated with vipassana meditation. These communications and processes have ranged from formal services to Facebook posts, and interactions with temple personnel to private meditation in my bedroom. To attempt to isolate meditation practice from Dharma talks,[5] books I was asked to read, and links posted to the internet would be impossible as they have all served to inform me on the expectations and practice of vipassana meditation. This is to say that all of these facets have contributed to how I learned to meditate and, subsequently, how I have been affected by my study and practice of meditation.

5 "Dharma talks" are public lessons on Buddhism from a teacher.

RESULTS & ANALYSIS

Temple Life

In order to provide a sufficient context for discussing my experiences, I will begin by outlining the temple's basic layout and describing the various roles held by personnel. The temple's aesthetics are primarily associated with the Chan and Pure Land schools of Buddhism in Taiwan, where the temple traces its origins, and Chinese decorations abound. The front entrance is guarded by two lion statues and the gated sides have gardens for vegetables and flowers. The first room upon entering has a large table where monastics and lay-practitioners often sit, and there is a reception desk on the left, which is typically staffed by a monk. The second room is large and spacious, containing numerous statues of bodhisattvas including Budai, the famous Chinese "Laughing Buddha," in the middle behind a donation box. The third room is short when walking straight from the other rooms, but quite wide; this hall is where community meals are held after services and it connects with restrooms, the kitchen, the gardens, and the main hall for services, teachings, and meditation. The main hall, then, is a versatile space where front-facing tables are easily moved in and out. Pure Land and Chan services keep the tables in for holding books containing the Chinese chants whereas the Theravada services pull the tables back to create an open space. Meditation cushions are laid behind each table unless relocated to the center for a Theravada service. At the front of this hall is a large alter with statues of two bodhisattvas and the Gautama Buddha, an offering table, many decorations and flowers, and ritual objects such as bells and gongs.

The temple is primarily maintained by a small group of monastics who live in

nearby apartments. I would regularly see only five around the temple in total, two nuns and three monks, with perhaps two monastics being around in the afternoons when services were not being held and up to four when a public lunch was prepared after a service. The Theravada sect is represented by two monks, with Ajarn Fa Thai being the primary public educator. The other Theravada monk is an American who trained in Thailand before returning to the United States; he occasionally fills in for services when Ajarn Fa Thai is away.

Lay personnel also play an important role at the temple in providing information and reading material for visitors to the temple. For example, after meditating at the temple on a weekday early on in my research, before I was recognizable as a regular, I greeted a Chinese laywoman and a nun who were sitting near the entrance of the temple as I was on my way out. The laywoman asked me if I had the introductory meditation book provided by the temple, and I responded that I did and had read it. However, she did not let me go so easily; she proceeded to lead me back to give me more books on Buddhist teachings and stories. One of the books had traditional Chinese characters on the cover page, which I pointed out as being in the traditional system. The woman, sensing my interest in Chinese writing, proceeded to pull several more books off of the shelf. She began reading a passage in traditional characters, reading the same passage in simplified characters out of another book, and then reading it in English out of a third. She proceeded to do this three or four more times, showing me how she had learned to read Chinese characters and how I could too, and I soon found myself leaving with a heavy backpack stuffed full of books—mostly the same book in multiple editions. While

I have yet to use my many editions to learn to read Chinese, I took the English versions as assigned reading and dutifully read the sutras that had been given to me. This also revealed one of the ways in which common knowledge amongst the community is created by providing particular texts free of charge.

Over time I began to undertake responsibilities at the temple myself, developing an understanding of how reliant the community is on the support of laypersons. This has included hauling boxes and sacks of rice into storage, organizing the tables and chairs for post-service community meals, washing dishes after lunch, taking out the garbage when it became too full, and introducing newcomers to the temple and giving them information about when English services would be held. I found myself taking on these roles as any lay-practitioner at the temple might and without any real forethought; through my typical presence I found myself becoming a community member in a very real sense, and the lines between practitioner and researcher became increasingly blurred. However, as previously mentioned, this ambiguity was necessary in order for me to capture the experience of a student entering vipassana meditation training.

The Venerable Master

I first came into contact with Ajarn Fa Thai in the Spring of 2010 on the popular social networking site Facebook through a professor. I wrote a somewhat lengthy message explaining my interest in studying meditation both as an academic enterprise and out of personal interest, to which I received a very short invitation to attend his Sunday services. Over the next few weeks I made arrangements to stay with a friend in a suburb outside of Portland during the summer so I could commute to the temple as often

as possible.

After moving to the suburb, I made my first Sunday trip downtown to the temple. As it happened, my first attempt to visit the temple was an absolute fiasco; I got lost for about an hour while trying to find the light rail station that would take me downtown after I was pointed in the wrong direction by two different store clerks. I finally arrived to the service in time to catch about the last fifteen minutes, completely missing Ajarn Fa Thai's instruction on meditation. However, my morning was considerably brightened when, as I approached Ajarn Fa Thai, he excitedly welcomed me by name and invited me to share a meal with him and the other practitioners at the temple.

It was during my lunch with Ajarn Fa Thai that I received my first instructions on meditation; specifically, he gave me some of the most difficult advice to follow—do not itch while meditating. His rationale for this was that itchiness and pain during meditation is symbolic of the sufferings of life, and we must learn to overcome these sufferings. He then gave me a book, *An Introduction to Buddhist Meditation for Results* (Ussivakul, 2003), which is provided for free to visitors and newcomers to the temple. This 416 page guidebook, published in Thailand and principally concerned with vipassana meditation, became my first real assignment in learning meditation. I took diligent notes as the book carefully outlined the different levels of meditation, obstacles that might be encountered, basic Buddhist tenets, and more. The book gave me some answers, but even more questions—many of which had deceptively simple answers. Other parts I would later be told to disregard completely. However, one concept emerged over and over again, and I would come to spend the next several months coming to understand it. The book calls

this central concept “Direct Awareness,” which I will describe later.

Ajarn Fa Thai's teachings are primarily on how to live and meditate, being nearly devoid of metaphysical teachings. He is very explicit in his belief that members of any religion or ideology can also be a Buddhist; his sole criterion is that the practitioner follow the Five Precepts. These precepts, as they are given at the temple, are to abstain from killing, stealing, misusing the senses, lying, and using intoxicants. The most important of these, according to the master, is the avoidance of intoxicants, as intoxicants can easily compromise following all of the other precepts. My favorite example of his illustrating this was given as a brief scenario; “One can of beer leads to two, two to three, three to four, and soon you are lying, killing things, and breaking every one of the precepts.” Lessons on living constitute the majority of Ajarn Fa Thai's teachings, with meditation training fitting in between his lectures and the chants at services. This situates vipassana meditation as an interwoven aspect of broader Buddhist teachings and practice.

Two particular aspects of Ajarn Fa Thai's lifestyle make him both easier and more difficult to access as a meditation teacher. To get to know him is to learn that he loves to travel; I have had plenty of experiences of commuting to Portland on a Sunday for a service to find that he had gone camping or to visit another temple, in which case the other Theravada monk would be covering for him. However, with the advent of technology, this does not necessarily mean that he is not readily accessible—his Facebook page is very active and, unless he is camping and away from technology, photographs, links, and messages keep him connected to his students wherever he or they might be.

It seems many people have a preconceived idea about monastics being cut off from technology, but clearly this is not necessarily the case, and the internet has indeed become an important tool for Ajarn Fa Thai. He regularly uses Facebook to share links and videos of Buddhist Dharma, as well as other miscellaneous tidbits that might help to brighten people's day, such as a short video clip of a seagull casually robbing food from a convenience store. On the more practical side of Ajarn Fa Thai's Facebook usage, many of the links he posts are of Buddhist sayings, articles, and information on meditation retreats. This provides an effective avenue through which he is able to pass teachings and information on to people beyond the spatial and temporal confines of the temple environment.

Group Practice

Ajarn Fa Thai's teachings are perhaps most accessible at his weekly Sunday services. He arrives around fifteen or twenty minutes before the service starts so he can talk with others who have arrived early, leads the group through the chants, gives a Dharma talk, guides a twenty minute vipassana meditation session, and participates in a group lunch. Typically, around half of the attendees are first or second generation Thai immigrants and the other half are of Euro-American descent. The chanting is done in the original Pali language with the rest of the service done mainly in English. There are numerous opportunities throughout the service for questions to be asked; most questions are in English, though more difficult questions might be asked in Thai, which Ajarn Fa Thai then translates into English to accommodate both languages.

The themes of Ajarn Fa Thai's talks and his instructions on meditation practice

tend to emphasize the same concepts; in effect, vipassana meditation is a practice of what he teaches. He constantly emphasizes being “in the moment,” which is the “Direct Awareness” concept that the first book I was given to read focused on. The point of this is to make the mind be still and focused on reality as it exists within the Theravada Buddhist paradigm. One component of this is to not be distracted by the events of the past, which one can no longer do anything about, or the future, which has not yet arrived. According to Ajarn Fa Thai, this does not mean that we cannot plan for the future or recall the past, but we must always then return to the present moment and what is actually happening around us. Another aspect is to see through the “illusions” created by ourselves and society, such as hierarchies, currency, pain, permanence, and so forth, recognizing that they are mental constructions that the practitioner should let go of.

These theoretical teachings are then practiced through a guided vipassana meditation session. Ajarn Fa Thai instructs the practitioners to take a few deep breaths to become relaxed before breathing normally and focusing on the breath and nothing else. Inevitably, the practitioner's mind begins to wander, which Ajarn Fa Thai refers to as “monkey mind,” at which point the practitioner is supposed to calmly return their focus to their breath. Ajarn Fa Thai occasionally gives a few reminders during the session to always return to the breath and, as he puts it, “Just do.” Following the twenty minute meditation session, the expectations of meditation practice are reiterated, and the importance of continued practice are often stated.

By first describing the theoretical aspects of meditation, Ajarn Fa Thai establishes the fundamentals of the philosophy he is teaching, setting the conceptual basis for

altering the practitioner's culturally informed body. This is to say that a common habitus is formed among the group; because everyone learns the concepts and how to realize them through meditation, it can be expected that the experiences of practitioners will be similar in many ways. Furthermore, because similar concepts are being realized in similar ways, the changes in lived reality that come about through practice should not vary widely. In effect, the shared social experience of learning meditation standardizes its practice. It is strongly emphasized, however, that practicing just once every week is not enough for significant progress; it is therefore essential that meditation practice be undertaken as an integrated part of everyday life, extending well beyond the services in which it is primarily taught. It is in this framework of everyday life that some of the most important experiences and realizations regarding vipassana practice may very well take place, and it is where vipassana's results are expected to manifest. To begin my analysis of meditation beyond services, I will begin by describing a particular event that greatly affected my understanding of vipassana meditation.

Belief Through Personal Experience

Given my knowledge of previous research and the general relaxation that I experienced from meditation, I began my study with a belief, at least conceptually, that meditation could produce very real results. However, I had not yet any sort of profound experience that strongly reinforced this, and it could be said that I did not yet embody this belief. However, on one hot summer day in July, I had the very good fortune of stumbling into a rather jarring and terrifying incident. I say fortunate because it gave me the opportunity to have the kind of experience that can really make an individual believe in

something with faith and confidence of its legitimacy and truth, which provides an invaluable insight into my examination of how vipassana meditation is initially learned and comes to affect the practitioner.

I was walking down the street towards the bus stop that would take me to the Portland public light rail service when I saw two young girls, probably ten to twelve years old, walking on the opposite side of the street from me. I continued walking until I heard yelling over the music coming from my headphones. Turning around to see what was happening, I saw the two girls, now on my side of the street, up against a fence with a loose pitbull barking and biting at them. After realizing that the dog and two girls were not playing, I immediately ran at the pitbull, and gave my best (and probably most ridiculous) impression of a large barking dog, scaring the pitbull back a few paces and placing myself between the girls and the pitpull. I then took my backpack off and held it between myself and the pitbull as if it were a weapon. At this juncture, my ideas had run out, and I tried to think of my next course of action. Thankfully, a man in a pick-up truck pulled up and honked his horn repeatedly, eventually getting the pitbull on the opposite side of the truck. He yelled for all of us to get in, but the girls hesitated, evidently now afraid of getting into a vehicle with a stranger. After some quick negotiation, the two girls headed down the street to their home, and I made way into the passenger side of the pick-up and was driven down the street, my heart still racing. I phoned in the attack to the police and boarded my bus. When I reached the light rail, I caught the sight of two dogs out of the corner of my eye, and nearly jumped out of my seat as my anxiety continued to run high. I was not feeling any better when I finally reached the temple forty-five minutes

later, but as I sat and cleared my mind, focusing on my breathing and the rising and falling of bodily sensations, my stress quickly dissipated. Within about fifteen minutes, I felt I had returned to homeostasis and was no longer encumbered by residual anxiety from the pitbull incident.

The level of calm I reached so quickly after feeling intense anxiety came as a great surprise to me and my confidence in meditation as having the potential to dramatically influence an individual's experience of reality suddenly became far more real to me than it had ever been before. Meditation as a cultural object was given a new meaning after having physically experienced its benefits in an acute way. It was with this newfound confidence that I continued on in my vipassana training.

Individual Practice

In accordance with Ajarn Fa Thai's instructions on meditation, I practiced vipassana on a daily basis throughout my research. This was usually done in my bedroom by folding a pillow and sitting on it, though during the summer I often also meditated at the temple. Ajarn Fa Thai's recommendation is to meditate for twenty minutes daily, so I made that my target, though some days were shorter at around fifteen minutes, and others were longer forty-five to sixty minute sessions. After every meditation session, I recorded my experiences in a meditation journal. Through my practice I found that vipassana meditation is something that is learned gradually, affects many facets of life and social interaction, and it must be practiced regularly.

Learning vipassana meditation is something that takes time, practice, and effort. Not only did I have to learn how to meditate from Ajarn Fa Thai and readings, but in

order to improve, I had to practice. When I began, I had to scratch when I had an itch, I could only focus for short periods at a time, and my initial lack of perceived success was at times a little frustrating. In this way, the early stage of practicing meditation is an exercise in learning patience. Improving my concentration and remaining completely calm after realizing how little I had been focusing on bodily phenomena took time. Even more difficult was to follow Ajarn Fa Thai's advice to not scratch itches; his rationale behind this was that the itch symbolizes our suffering in life. I describe facing these challenges in a passage from my meditation journal:

> Today I focused on not moving during meditation; in particular, no itching allowed. Many times, especially early on, I felt itchiness arise in my arms, legs, head, and face. However, I always returned to my breath, and eventually the discomfort dissipated….Thoughts also came and went from my mind quite regularly…though I try not to let it bother me. It would be a completely failed meditation if I let such things get to me; I just need to do it and not worry about if my mind is wandering or not, just coming back to my breath every time I realize I have become distracted.

Within a few weeks, however, I learned to observe the bodily discomforts I experienced rather than ignore them. By doing this I learned to observe my discomforts without suffering. About three weeks after the previous description, I noted, "I remember when I first began meditation this summer; I would try to not scratch an itch or shift my position at times, but it never lasted long—now, however, simply observing such discomforts seem very commonplace, and it is as if an itch during meditation is hardly bothersome at all." This ability to observe such phenomena transferred into my day to day living, and I learned to react to and experience such bodily irritants in a new way.

The implications of regular vipassana meditation practice extend well beyond the

personal, however, and have profound social implications. Meditation serves as both a daily practice and reminder of various Buddhist teachings, constantly training the practitioner to be mindful in perceptions and decisions. Vipassana meditation, then, becomes an integrated part of everyday life that has the potential to affect virtually any aspect of living. Through my practice I found myself becoming increasingly active in everything from energy conservation to taking extra time to help strangers. Beyond individual practice, Ajarn Fa Thai's integration of Facebook, readings, and services make his teachings a regularly present and reinforced part of the lives of his students, and I found this to be a strong secondary socializer, affecting my life in very diverse ways.

In order to maintain and continue with the changes brought about by vipassana meditation practice, it is necessary to continue practicing regularly. Ajarn Fa Thai made this point to me early on by saying that meditating is like cleaning a house; when we meditate, things stay clean, but if we do not, dust accumulates, and it takes time to get everything back in order again. I found this to be true when I stopped meditating over the December holiday season and well into January as I neglected to meditate while traveling in Europe. I found that without this regular practice of mindfulness, the changes I had made in how I perceived the world around me and interacted with others regressed over about a six week period. It was also difficult to reestablish the habit of regular meditation after my hiatus. Without practice, my altered bodily experience of the world essentially returned to how it was before practicing meditation.

CONCLUSION

My analysis of vipassana meditation indicates that this form of meditation practice does in fact affect the habitus in such a way that the everyday experience of life can be significantly altered. However, the sources that these changes might come from are more numerous than I had anticipated. I began this study with the intent of focusing to the greatest extent possible on the subjective experience of vipassana meditation practice, but I soon found that such a narrow focus paints a rather incomplete picture of the learning and development experience, and my methods were subsequently altered to reflect the need for a more holistic perspective which included examinations of the temple community, online communications, prescribed readings, and so forth. Furthermore, what is learned through these various sources are deeply intertwined; teachings pertain to meditation practice, meditation practice to daily life, and lived experience comes back to the practitioner's embodied understanding of the teachings. These aspects should be considered central to any study of meditation practice, and must not be neglected or considered to be peripheral phenomena as the biomedical and neurological fields often do. Their influence in socializing the practitioner cannot be understated and ought to be the subject of further investigation.

Similar to Michal Pagis (2010), I have found that vipassana meditation itself is largely a process by which conceptual knowledge is given embodied meaning through experiential realization, and this remains true at the novice level. Indeed, it may be the early forays with this altered state of consciousness in which the practitioner first experiences Buddhist concepts such as non-self and impermanence that make continued

practice more desirable. I have had several experiences in which I felt great elation and clarity during and after meditation practice, and as the world appears perceptively different in such cases, this might constitute a religious experience for some practitioners. The stories of some lay-practitioners I have spoken with mention similar experiences of clarity or understanding, though they also tend to emphasize the more steady progress of increased wellbeing and alleviated stress, anxiety and aggression that psychological and brain-scanning studies have explored.

Utilizing an ethnographic first-person methodology for studying vipassana meditation was effective in several ways. By practicing meditation myself and becoming engaged with a temple community I have come to better understand that meditation practice is just one facet of a wide array of methods that are used to alter the practitioner's culturally informed body, and that the implications of meditation are life-pervasive and cannot be limited to the categories typically assigned through third-person methods. These results also entail that the use of other methodologies, whether they are surveys, psychological assessments, or brain scans, should take into consideration other factors that could be creating changes within the practitioners, rather than attempting to isolate meditation practice as a variable independent of other forms of resocialization.

Through this study, I have identified a number of areas that warrant further exploration, including the diverse social dimensions of learning vipassana meditation, the interconnectivity of teachings and practice, and how the cultivation of greater mindfulness is expressed in everyday lived experience. I have emphasized that it is impossible to truly separate any one of these topics, though it is certainly possible to

focus on one while not neglecting the others. I have also noted the increasing numbers of Thai Theravada Buddhists in Taiwan, and how this has led to Theravada monks living in Mahayana temples; ethnographic studies examining how this is playing out could be an interesting topic to pursue.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Abu-Lughod, Lila. (1991) Writing Against Culture. In *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, pp. 137-162. Richard G. Fox, ed. Santa Fe, NM: School of American Research Press.

Barendgregt, Henk. (1988). Buddhist Phenomenology. Proceedings of the Conference on Topics and Perspectives of Contemporary Logic and Philosophy of Science, Cesena, Italy, January 7-10, 1987. M. dalla Chiara, ed. *CLUEB, 11*, 37-55.

Barnes, Patricia M., Bloom, Barbara, & Nahin, Richard L. (2008). Complementary and Alternative Medicine Use Among Adults and Children: United States, 2007. *National Health Statistics Reports, 12*, 1-24.

Bourdieu, Pierre. (1984). *Distinction* (Richard Nice, trans.). Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Bourdieu, Pierre. (1977). *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Richard Nice, trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Cadge, Wendy. (2005). *Heartwood: The First Generation of Theravada Buddhism in America*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Chiesa, Alberto. (2010). Vipassana Meditation: Systematic Review of Current Evidence. *The Journal of Alternative & Complementary Medicine, 16*(1), 37-46.

Chiesa, Alberto & Serretti, Alessandro. (2010). A systematic review of neurobiological and clinical features of mindfulness meditations. *Psychological Medicine, 40*, 1239-1252.

Coakley, Sarah (ed.). (1997). Introduction. In *Religion and the Body*, pp. 1-12. New York:

Cambridge University Press.

Csordas, Thomas J. (1993). Somatic Modes of Attention. *Cultural Anthropology, 8*(2), 135-156.

Csordas, Thomas J. (1990). Embodiment as a Paradigm for Anthropology. *Ethos, 18*(1), 5-47.

Fasching, Wolfgang. (2008). Consciousness, Self-Consciousness, and Meditation. *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, *7*(4), 463-483.

Favret-Saada, Jeanne. (1990). About Participation. *Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry*, *14*(2), 189-199.

Favret-Saada, Jeanne. (1980). *Deadly Words: Witchcraft in the Bocage* (Cahterine Cullen, trans.). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Geertz, Clifford. (1973). *The Interpretation of Cultures.* New York: Basic Books.

Harding, Susan F. (1987). Convicted by the Holy Spirit: The Rhetoric of Fundamentalist Baptist Conversion. *American Ethnologist, 14*(1), 167-181.

Hölzel, Britta K. et al. (2011). Mindfulness Practice Leads to Increases in Regional Brain Gray Matter Density. *Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging, 191*(1), 36-43.

Horowtiz, Sala. (2010). Health Benefits of Meditation: What the Newest Research Shows. *Alternative and Complementary Therapies, 16*(4), 223-228.

Jones, Charles B. (1999). *Buddhism in Taiwan: Religion and the State, 1660-1990*. Hawaii: University of Hawaii Press.

Jordt, Ingrid. (2006). Defining a True Buddhist: Meditation and Knowledge Formation in Burma. *Ethnology, 45*(3), 193-207.

Leledaki, Aspasia & Brown, David. (2009). 'Physicalisation': A Pedagogy of Body-Mind Cultivation for Liberation in Modern Yoga and Meditation Methods. *Asian Medicine, 4*(2), 303-337.

McGuire, Meredith B. (2002). New-Old Directions in the Social Scientific Study of Religion: Ethnography, Phenomenology, and the Human Body. In *Personal Knowledge and Beyond*, pp. 195-211. James B. Spickard, J. Shawn Landres, & Meredith B. McGuire, eds. New York: New York University Press.

McGuire, Meredith B. (1990). Religion and the Body: Rematerializing the Human Body in the Social Sciences of Religion. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion, 29*(3), 283-296.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. (1962). *Phenomenology of Perception* (Colin Smith, trans.). London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

Morreale, Don (ed.). (1998). *The Complete Guide to Buddhism in America*. Boston: Shambhala Press.

Obeyesekere, Gananath. (1981). *Medusa's Hair*. Chicago: The University of Chicago.

Pagis, Michal. (2010a). From Abstract Concepts to Experiential Knowledge: Embodying Enlightenment in a Meditation Center. *Qualitative Sociology, Special Issue on Knowledge in Practice.*

Pagis, Michal. (2010b). Producing Intersubjectivity in Silence: An Ethnographic Study of Meditation Practice. *Ethnography, 11*(2), 309-328.

Pagis, Michal. (2009). Embodied Self-Reflexivity. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 72*(3), 265-283.

Scheper-Hughes, Nancy M. & Lock, Margaret M. (1987). The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology. *Medical Anthropology Quarterly, 1*(1), 6-41.

Sumedho, Ajahn. (2006). Glossary. *DharmaWeb*. Accessed February 14, 2011. <http://www.dharmaweb.org/index.php/Venerable_Ajahn_Sumedho:_Glossary>.

Turner, Victor W. (1962). *Chihamba, the White Spirit: A Ritual Drama of the Ndembu*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

Ussivakul, Archan Vinai. (2003). *An Introduction to Buddhist Meditation for Results*. Bangkok, Thailand: TIPITAKA Study Center.

Varela, Francisco & Shear, Jonathon (eds.). (1999). First-Person Accounts: Why, What and How. In *The View from Within: First Person Methodologies for the Study of Consciousness*, pp. 1-14. Bowling Green: Imprint Academic.