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# Enlightening Leadership: A Phenomenology

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ENLIGHTENING LEADERSHIP: A PHENOMENOLOGY

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Dissertation

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## ABSTRACT

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Enlightening Leadership: A phenomenology.

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The mechanistic, seventeenth century paradigm that has informed the leadership of our organizations has evolved into the quantum realm (Capra, 1984). This scientific renaissance is revealing a depth of knowledge that is stirring a new found interest in wisdom traditions as the truths of modern science appear to mirror knowledge found in ancient philosophic and meditative practices. Such Eastern spiritual practices have entered into the American mainstream and are becoming validated from a scientific perspective (Lampman, 2006).

Continuing research on meditation has revealed its effectiveness in producing many of the characteristics deemed essential in the field of transformational leadership. Congruently meditation centers are proliferating, many offering courses specifically designed for those in leadership positions. While awareness practices are continually being researched, practiced, and identified as obligatory in the field of transformational leadership, there is little research to date that explores the relationship, impact, and experience of meditation and leadership.

This phenomenological study explores the leadership experience of individuals that practice Vipassana meditation. Seven purposefully selected organizational leaders, all of whom have completed at least one, ten day meditation seminar, participated in extensive, semi-structured, telephone interviews. The development of intimate familiarity with the rich data elicited from the interview protocol produced meaning units. These common experiential themes in the leadership of meditators were analyzed and synthesized to reveal the basic, essential essence. Building upon the knowledge gathered through the data analysis and synthesis, this study establishes findings that contribute to the field of leadership.

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Also, I'd like to acknowledge the great network of individuals, from S. N. Goenka all the way back to S. Guatama, for making the teachings of Vipassana Meditation available to all.

## DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to the love of my life. Melanie, thank you for moving to Montana and supporting me throughout this process; I'm so fortunate to have you in my life. Also, love and gratitude to my mom and dad. You gave me the foundation to make it here. To you I owe it all. Thank you.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

### Introduction

In our age of ever increasing complexity and change, the importance of leadership is unprecedented (House, Spangler & Woycke, 1991). Leadership as a field, however, has developed quite slowly, existing in a confused state for decades (Yukl, 1998). Rushing from one fad to another, most leadership theories contain conceptual weakness and a lack of empirical support (Yukl, 1998). Indeed, leadership is one of the most observed and least understood phenomena on earth (Burns, 1978).

In pursuit of more comprehensive knowledge regarding leadership, scholars seeking new leadership paradigms are beginning to recognize the importance of spirituality as a leadership construct (Dent, 2005). Sergiovanni (2006) suggests that it is the failure to view leadership as spiritual rather than psychological that causes the failure of modern leadership. Similarly, Sanders, Hopkins, and Geroy (2003) state that, “We should be calling for a more comprehensive and integrated theory of leadership that acknowledges leaders as complex beings who mature and develop over time in relationship to spiritual...domains and recognizes that leaders have desired transcendent-related work accomplishments.”

Konz & Ryan (1999) continue along this vein stating, “Leaders who bring their spirituality to work transform organizations from merely mission-driven activities into places where individual and collective spirituality are encouraged and spiritual development is integrated into the day-to-day work life.” Such spiritually inclined leaders “inspire and energize behavior in employees based on meaning and purpose rather than

rewards and security, thus compelling employees to transcend their self-interest for the welfare of their organizational members” (Dehler & Welsh, 1994).

Addressing the powerful connection in between leadership and spirituality, Peter Senge stated that he himself incorporates the practice of meditation into his work with managers (McLeod, 2001). Similarly, Wheatley suggests that all the characteristics learned while meditating can be used in the practice of organizing and running an organization (McLeod, 2001).

Thus, the similarities between spirituality and effective leadership are being noted by scholars and organizational leaders alike (Dent, 2005). Many business leaders who have learned meditation, for example, are making claims regarding its effect on their leadership abilities. Past President and CEO of Ya Ya, Keith Ferrazzi, suggested that the practice of meditation, specifically Vipassana meditation, makes him a “better leader and CEO,” while Rob Moodie, CEO of VicHealth made the bold assertion that; “Vipassana is by far the best training [he’s] ever had in management and leadership” (Goenka, 2006).

Similarly, research in India has noted the effect of meditation on organizations. An engineering firm with 60% of its employees attending a Vipassana meditation course found a productivity increase of 20%, along with increased efficiency, increased profits, improved mental health and interpersonal relations, and a shift from authority rule to consensus decision making (Shah, 2006). Indeed, awareness regarding the positive impact of spirituality on leadership, by both scholars and leaders, is on the rise.

The demand for spiritual awareness, such as that taught in Vipassana meditation, is increasing dramatically (Lampman, 2006) with hundreds of free courses offered annually in the United States and hundreds more around the world (Goenka, 2006).

Furthermore, requests for meditation instruction, specifically among organizational leaders, are great enough to warrant the development of executive meditation courses designed specifically with the leader in mind (Hart, 1987).

While theorists and leaders are beginning to emphasize the importance and effectiveness of spirituality as a construct informing leadership, “research on leadership remains narrowly focused on leadership behaviors, power dimensions, traits and skills, and situational context” (Fairholm, 1998). That is, research on spirituality in leadership remains in its infancy, and that of meditation specifically, is nonexistent.

#### Problem Statement

A void exists regarding research on the effects of meditation on leadership. While studies have investigated the psychotherapeutic and physiological effects of meditation (Taylor, 2005), there are none in regards to leadership. Fleischman (1994), states that meditation “increases self-awareness, promotes integration of subjective experience, and facilitates acceptance and tolerance to sufficiently reduce physical and psychological distress.” These and other reported effects of meditation mirror many of the qualities posited as essential in the field of transformational leadership, yet a direct connection between meditation and leadership has not been made. This void occurs in the face of a mainstream that is increasingly characterized by spiritual ideals.

“Within the past decade, the concept of spirituality and religion in the workplace has gained enough strength and interest that the Academy of Management has created a new special interest group...Management, Spirituality, and Religion...This is helping to legitimize within academia the study of spirituality in the workplace while simultaneously paving the way for introducing this emerging concept into the leadership

research agenda” (Dent, 2005). Similarly, the topic is being taught in graduate and undergraduate business courses, as well as conferences, around the world (Biberman & Altman, 2004). While theories on leadership and spirituality are yet minimal, spiritual practice as a leadership tool has existed for millennia. Meditation, for example, has informed positive leadership for over two thousand years and has influenced thousands of people (Vipassana Research Institute, 1991). This ancient wisdom is now resurfacing and enlightening our leadership.

Vipassana meditation, the specific form of spiritual practice explored in this research, is a practical, non-sectarian meditation technique (Hart, 1987) that is said to provide executives with real benefits such as:

- Improved concentration and mental clarity
- Decreased stress and anxiety
- Increased energy and efficiency
- Strengthening in ethical principles and responsible values
- Greater balance when facing challenges
- Deepened sense of purpose

While leaders are increasingly praising the leadership outcomes of meditation practice ([www.bhumi.dhamma.org](http://www.bhumi.dhamma.org)), no research has been done to explain the effects of meditation on the leadership style and effectiveness of its practitioners. This study will explore the leadership experience of individuals that practice Vipassana meditation.

### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding regarding leadership and meditation. Specifically, the leadership experience of meditation practitioners will be explored. In order to most effectively understand this impact, a phenomenological design will be used.

### Research Question

The research questions herein are composed of a single overarching question as well as multiple sub-questions. Creswell describes overarching questions as the broadest questions that can be posed and which do not limit the emerging data. Sub-questions, then, narrow the focus of the study without constraining the research (Creswell, 1998). The research questions are essential in guiding the design of the interview protocol while informing the data discovery process. Overarching and sub-questions for this study, as described in Creswell, are listed below.

#### Overarching and Sub-Questions

*What lessons can be learned from the leadership experience of individuals who practice meditation?*

1. What meanings do meditation practitioners give their leadership experience?
2. What are the themes and contexts that account for the leadership experience of meditators?
3. What are the universal structures accounting for the leadership experience of meditators?
4. What are the non-variable, overarching themes that describe the essence of a meditator's leadership experience?

### Theoretical Perspective

Two theoretical perspectives guide this study. The first perspective focuses on Buddhist psychology and the second is oriented around transformational leadership. The first perspective, Buddhist psychology, is taught in the 10-day meditation seminar. Vipassana International offers hundreds of annual 10-day seminars throughout the world. Instruction at every seminar is identically structured, with equivalent rules, time frames, and teachings. To retain the identical nature of the instruction, every discourse is presented on video. This assures that every student is exposed to exactly the same material as every other student (Goenka, 2006). The rules, expectations, and practices of all Vipassana meditation seminars, which are universal for all courses, are listed in Appendix A. All research participants have taken at least one of these courses. The second theoretical perspective is based in the theories of transformational leadership. A detailed discussion of these theories can be found in Chapter Two.

### Definition of Terms

Self-Awareness. Having a knowledge of one's own reactive patterns as they manifest over time, as well as a recognition of those reactions as they arise.

Egolessness. The possession of a non-ego driven disposition in which thinking and acting are intentionally based upon awareness, equanimity, and what is needed in the situation.

Equanimity. Thinking and acting in a manner that is intentional and non-reactive. Equanimity is based upon a foundation of self-awareness.

Leader. An individual having a position of influence within an organization.

Leaders interviewed in this study ranged from multi-company president, to venture capitalist, to attorney.

Metta. Selfless love and good will.

Metta-Bhavana. The systematic cultivation of selfless love and good will.

Transformational Leadership. The school of leadership thought, originally developed by Burns (1978), in which leaders seek to engage and motivate employees through meeting higher order needs thus achieving desired outcomes.

Meditation. The practice of Vipassana (vip-ōs-onna) meditation specifically taught by S.N. Goenka. Also referred to as insight meditation, Vipassana has increased in popularity across the West over the past several decades (Hart, 1987). All leaders interviewed in this study participated in at least one 10-day meditation course.

#### Significance of the Study

This study is salient for multiple reasons. With the rapid expansion of a Buddhist paradigm, Buddhism has come of age in the secularized West (Reilly, 2006). This, in conjunction with the emergence of meditation courses designed exclusively with executives in mind (Goenka, 2006), and the lack of understanding how Buddhist psychology applies to the constructs of leadership, makes this study significant. It is also significant in that some theorists believe that theories of leadership are conceptually weak and lack empirical support (Yukl, 1998).

#### Limitations

Due to the participants' diverse geographical locale, the data collection process took place primarily over the telephone and through the internet. In keeping with the



procedures specific to phenomenology, data collection and interpretation proceeded with every attempt being made to retain complete objectivity throughout the process.

### Role of Researcher

It is important to note that this researcher has participated in nine Vipassana meditation seminars and continues to practice the meditation technique taught therein. The underlying purpose of Vipassana meditation is that of awareness and balance of mind. Thus, the benefits of meditation practice by the researcher regarding the development of objectivity serve as compensation for possible bias in the research process. That being said, the researcher paid specific attention to his own bias, assuring that all data processing and interpretation remained objective and unaffected by his own beliefs regarding the practice of meditation.

### Delimitations

Creswell (1998) suggests that the process of collecting data for a phenomenological study requires up to 10 participants. In this study, seven participants were purposefully selected from a group of individuals who serve in leadership positions and have completed at least one Vipassana meditation course. Because of the sample's limited nature, the pool of participants was quite specific. Data saturation, as facilitated by the interview process, allowed for the emergence of the themes and constructs necessary in uncovering the essence of the leadership experience explored in this study (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). The findings of this study are generalizable to the population of Vipassana meditating leaders.

## CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

This chapter will review the key concepts of Buddhist psychology as learned in a 10-day Vipassana meditation course. Once defined, the core concepts will be compared and contrasted with seminal themes in transformational leadership. Comparing Buddhist psychology with transformational leadership will provide a deeper understanding of the concepts of meditation – concepts to which the participants in this research sample are exposed. Similarly, this review will illuminate the resurgence of ancient psychological concepts through the most contemporary transformational leadership theory. That is, core concepts of transformational leadership will be seen to reflect many ideas developed millennia ago through the practice of insight meditation. Through this exploration, the comprehensive nature of Buddhist psychology as a leadership construct will be revealed.

### Vipassana Meditation

Vipassana, or insight, is literally defined as “seeing things clearly.” Vipassana meditation, then, is a practice in which participants gain awareness and balance of mind by seeing the depth of reality as it is. To gain this ability, every participant of a Vipassana meditation seminar is exposed, both intellectually and experientially, to a host of concepts that form the core of Buddhist psychology.

Vipassana is an art of living (Hart, 1987; Vipassana Research International, 1991), an art of conflict management, and an art of people management (Jyoti). Based upon the original teachings of Siddhartha Guatama, the Buddha, Vipassana is a simple and straightforward technique of meditation practiced for the purpose of developing an enlightened mind (Goenka, 1987). This technique, which originated in the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E. has been passed down orally from generation to generation and is gaining

immense popularity around the world today. Vipassana is a non-sectarian approach to meditation. That is, it is not a religion; is non-dogmatic; and works universally for any person of any gender, race, or religion (Vipassana Research International, 1991).

The framework supporting the practice of Vipassana meditation is a Buddhist psychology of mind that has been informing the paradigm of the East for millennia. In fact, the original teachings in the language of Pali are still in use today. For ease of understanding and readability, this researcher will define key Pali terms, then discuss them using their English translations.

The core teachings of Vipassana meditation revolve around the experience and embodiment of a “middle” path. That is, “The Buddha taught that seekers of truth must avoid two extremes – that of the path of sensual pleasure and that of extreme penance or austerity. Having avoided these two extremes, the Buddha discovered the middle path. He explained it by means of the Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path” (Vipassana Research Institute, 1991). The Four Noble Truths and the Eightfold Path, then, are the guidelines that help a practitioner of meditation gain an enlightened mind and are a central element in a Vipassana meditation seminar.

#### Four Noble Truths

At the core of Vipassana is the teaching of the Four Noble Truths. This teaching offers a perspective on the suffering immanent in the human condition, and affirms a path one can take to free oneself from this state. According to Nyanaponika Thera (Bercholz & Sherab, 1993) suffering, or discontentment, is a natural condition of everything in existence. However, as the Four Noble Truths state, there is a path that one can take that is free from this predicament.

This central teaching lays out the basic psychology of Vipassana.

Following is a list of The Four Noble Truths:

1. The truth of suffering
2. The origin of suffering
3. The cessation of suffering
4. The path from suffering

The first noble truth is the truth of suffering. Again, this suggests that the natural condition of humanity is that of pain and struggle. Our lives are lived in a continual state of discontent and dissatisfaction as we seek that which we do not have and avert objects and feelings that we don't like. Our unhappiness with the state of our world takes the form of high divorce rates, suicide levels, alcoholism, rampant greed, failing organizations, and general dissatisfaction, to mention but a few (Hart, 1987).

The second noble truth is the truth of the origin of suffering. This truth states that the suffering we experience in the world is a product of our craving or desire (Hanh, 1998). Throughout our lives we want good feelings such as happiness, love, and contentment, and we suffer when these feelings are not present. Similarly, we crave social positions, power, and wealth while having aversion to a life without status or social position. These cravings and aversions, that is, desire for things to be other than what they are, is the origin of our suffering. Remaining attached to static ideas and beliefs about who we are, what we want, or the nature of reality, in the face of a dynamic reality give rise to our misery. However, as will be evidenced by the third noble truth, to remain stuck in our suffering is not necessary.

The third noble truth states that the cessation of suffering can be realized. Specifically, if craving ceases, suffering ceases. That is, by eliminating craving, and transcending our attachments, our suffering can be overcome and a life free from misery can be experienced. The actual method for eliminating craving and overcoming suffering is explained in the fourth noble truth, the truth of the path.

The fourth noble truth explains that there is a path leading to the cessation of suffering. This is referred to as the Eightfold Path. The Eightfold Path is divided into three parts; morality, concentration, and wisdom. By establishing a ground in morality, concentration, and wisdom, one can continue along the path free from both craving and suffering.

#### Eightfold Path

The Eightfold Path, the path leading away from suffering and toward an enlightened mind, consists of three distinct segments: morality (Sila), concentration (Samadhi), and wisdom (Panna). Through these divisions, the Eightfold Path explains the specifics of how one must live, think, and communicate if he wishes to attain a liberated state of mind; that is, one free from the dysfunction that comes from attachment to craving and aversion (Sayadaw, 1977). The three components of the Eightfold Path, morality, concentration, and wisdom, are divided accordingly:

#### Morality

1. Right speech
2. Right action
3. Right livelihood

### Concentration

4. Right effort
5. Right awareness
6. Right focus

### Wisdom

7. Right view
8. Right intention

### Morality

The teaching of Vipassana employs a very specific notion of morality.

Generally, living life in a moral fashion consists of avoiding unwholesome action and embracing those which are wholesome. Unwholesome actions are those that harm or disturb the peace and harmony of others, while wholesome actions are those that help others by contributing to their peace and harmony (Hart, 1987). Harmful actions are avoided not only because they harm others, but because they disrupt one's own peace of mind as well. According to Goenka, "It is impossible to commit an unwholesome action – to insult, kill, steal, or rape – without generating great agitation in the mind" (Hart, 1987, 58). Being that one aim of meditation is peace of mind, one should abstain from harming others. With this in mind, practitioners of Vipassana must first agree to five precepts before beginning a meditation seminar. These include abstaining from:

1. Killing any living creature
2. Stealing
3. Sexual misconduct
4. False speech
5. Taking intoxicants

In the practice of Vipassana, acting in a manner that is wholesome encompasses one's actions as well as his or her speech and livelihood. That is, one's speech must be pure and truthful, while one's livelihood must not break or encourage anyone to break the five precepts. Thus, by following the code of morality; right speech, action, and livelihood; and adhering to the five precepts, Vipassana practitioners evolve on the path of enlightenment, freeing themselves from life's misery.

### Concentration

The second division of the Noble Eightfold Path is concentration. While morality is the foundation upon which the path toward a liberated mind is built, focus or concentration is essential in keeping on the path. When practicing Vipassana one attempts to act in a moral fashion, controlling speech and physical actions. However, the true cause of suffering lies in the realm of the mind (Goenka, 2006). Thus, we suffer as the mind continues to struggle with craving and aversion. By developing concentration of mind, one reduces the agitation that leads toward broken precepts.

Right effort, awareness, and focus are the component aspects of concentration in Vipassana. Right effort consists of disciplining the mind in a practice of focusing on respiration. With repeated and continuous practice, the mind is tamed. Training it to focus on the immediate moment disrupts patterns of endless wandering and calms the mind, making it more aware and balanced.

The awareness that is taught in Vipassana practice is of the body and the mind. By becoming deeply aware of one's breathing and then sensations as they arise in the body, perspectives are developed regarding how the mind reacts to physical sensations (Goenka, 1987). That is, it is realized that feelings in the body spawn mental reactions of

craving and aversion. Thus, awareness in the practice of Vipassana includes remaining grounded and conscious in the face of the reality of the present moment.

Focus in Vipassana, comes through the act of keeping one's concentration fixed on the actual sensation of the breath entering and leaving the nostrils as the breath rises and falls, from moment to moment, until the mind becomes calm. This practice aids the practitioner by calming the mind while establishing a deeper level of awareness of physical sensations and feelings (Hart, 1986).

Right effort, in the practice of Vipassana meditation, manifests as practitioners exert energy in their attempt to keep the mind focused. Along with right focus and right awareness, right effort fosters the self knowledge that lead one toward an enlightened state.

### Wisdom

Like three legs of a table, morality, concentration, and wisdom are required to free one from the pain and suffering inherent in the human condition. The five precepts (morality) keep the mind from becoming agitated while practicing concentration. This opens the door for true wisdom in the practice of Vipassana. According to the Buddhist tradition, the practice of wisdom requires one to have right intention and right view (Hanh, 1998).

Right view, simply put, is to see things as they are. By realizing the Four Noble Truths and seeing through the impermanent and imperfect nature of worldly objects, one begins to achieve right view. "Right view refers to the cognitive aspect of wisdom, while right intention refers to the volitional aspect" (Knierim, 2006). The mental energy that controls our actions is the seat of right intention. Right thought



requires the intention to resist the pull of desire, anger, and aversion, and to not harm any being. When embracing right view and right thought, one allows feelings and sensations to arise, as they are, without repressing or reacting to them in any way. In this manner, the store house of mental issues is cleansed. Thus, the roots of suffering are torn out through the practice of wisdom. By developing awareness of reality as it is and then remaining balanced and retaining equanimity, craving and aversion will diminish. This state of awareness and equanimity represents the heart of the Buddhist path to a liberated mind (Hart, 1987).

### Awareness & Equanimity

Awareness and equanimity are two of the teachings from the Eightfold Path that are most often emphasized and put into practice in a Vipassana meditation seminar. Like two wheels on a cart, these concepts work together to help an individual walk down the path of insight. Both must be developed synonymously and intentionally. S.N. Goenka states, “we must develop awareness of the totality of mind and matter in their subtlest nature” (Hart, 1987, 105). He goes on to say, “It is not enough merely to be mindful of superficial aspects of body and mind, such as physical movements or thoughts. We must develop awareness of sensations throughout the body and maintain equanimity toward them.”

To this end, Vipassana participants learn to experience the sensations that arise in their bodies with openness and clarity. The practice of concentration which is taught during the course aids participants in focusing their minds and overcoming its wandering tendency while developing a deeper awareness of the actual physical sensations within

the confines of their bodies. Awareness of this body/mind process lends itself to a deeper awareness of other people, relationships, and situations in general (Goldstein, 2002).

As awareness is cultivated, equanimity is developed simply through the act of observing sensations without reacting to them in any way. In this manner, one becomes a scientist, objectively observing the arising and passing sensations in the body without any mental and physical reactions. Attempts are made to eliminate judgments, commentary, and inner dialogue about particular sensations and simply experience feelings as they are, thus neutralizing reactive tendencies.

In much the same way that the unconscious mind is aware of the body at all times (ie. rolling over or scratching in one's sleep), one can actually enter the unconscious mind by bringing the attention into the realm of the body. The teaching of Vipassana explains that by bringing awareness into the body without reacting to what is perceived, that is, by developing both awareness and equanimity, one can move toward an enlightened state of being. Wisdom is cultivated by experiencing the reality within the body, as it is, objectively, without reacting in either mind or action (Hart, 1987, 105).

Vipassana offers a technique in which practitioners cultivate a deeper awareness of themselves and their own mental and emotional process so that they can interact with the external environment in a manner which is discriminating and balanced. Transformational leadership literature embraces both awareness and balance of mind as central concepts of effective leadership (Bass, 1981; Zaleznik, 1977; Avolio & Bass, 1985; Levinson & Rosenthal, 1984; Sergiovanni, 2006; Farr, 1998).

### Change, Egolessness, & Suffering

According to the original Buddhist teachings, all phenomena have three basic and interrelated characteristics; these are change (Anicca), egolessness (Anatta), and suffering (Dukkha) (Vipassana Research Institute, 1991). Through the practice of Vipassana meditation, practitioners experience the reality of continuous change. In the body, sensations arise and pass away with great rapidity. Vipassana practitioners, in the practice of concentration, focus on the physical sensations in their bodies, experiencing first hand the reality of change. This same impermanence applies to all matter and, indeed, everything in existence. Everything, without exception arises, sustains, and eventually passes away. Thus the body, the mind, and all perceptible matter continually change, existing in a state of flux. At the most elemental level, individuals are void of a solid, continual self. This lack of a self at the most fundamental level is what is referred to as egolessness (Trungpa, 1991).

According to the Buddhist paradigm as taught in Vipassana meditation courses, the ego identity that humans develop is illusory at best. There is no true ego or “I” of which to speak. Instead, one finds, at the deepest level, that the mental self, the ego, is composed of a myriad of mental conceptions and processes, of patterns of thinking and belief which are all in a state of change (Goenka, 1987).

Failing to realize the nature of egolessness and the omnipresence of change, one falls in to the trap of becoming attached to the ideas and beliefs that arise in the mind. This attachment to any thing, be it the sense of self, material possessions, or idealistic conceptions, ultimately gives rise to suffering. Thus, suffering arises because one clings to objects that are, by nature, changing and to a self that has no substance.

### The Five Aggregates

Within Buddhist psychology is a mental model which finds no equivalent in any leadership literature or anywhere outside the Eastern paradigm. The teaching, referred to as the five aggregates, is an essential part of Vipassana meditation. This consists of four mental processes, and physical existence (rupa). The mental processes, including consciousness (vinnana), perception (sanna), sensation (vedana), and reaction (sankhara) are said to explain the human experience (Goenks, 1987). While transformational leadership literature lacks such a mental model, it does serve as a foundation for two concepts discussed earlier – awareness and equanimity – which are prevalent in the writing on leadership. Thus, conveying an understanding of the five aggregates is essential in understanding other ideas which find equivalents in the seminal concepts of transformational leadership.

The first process, consciousness, concerns the receiving part of the mind. Our consciousness acts as a blank field upon which any externally sensed object is objectively received. That is, our consciousness registers the phenomena that our senses come into contact with. At the level of consciousness, the mind makes no evaluation regarding the object being received, but merely cognizes at a purely objective level.

The next mental process is perception. After the mind has received raw stimuli from the external environment, it recognizes it. The mind identifies that which the consciousness has noted. It “distinguishes, labels, and categorizes the incoming raw data and makes evaluations, positive or negative” (Hart, 1987, 27).

The third process of the mind is sensation. In this stage, a signal that something has entered the field of consciousness spawns an arising sensation. As long as the input

remains free from evaluation in the perception phase, the sensation remains neutral. However, if an evaluation regarding the object of sense perception is made, either negative or positive, a corresponding sensation arises. From this, the mind responds accordingly with liking or disliking. S.N. Goenka gives the following example:

“When the ear is functioning normally and one hears a sound, cognition is at work. When the sound is recognized as words, with positive or negative connotations, perception has started to function. Next, sensation comes into play. If the words are praise, a pleasant sensation arises. If they are about abuse, an unpleasant sensation arises” (1987, 27).

The fourth process of the mind is reaction. As sensations arise, our mind reacts depending upon the sensation. If the sensation is perceived as unpleasant, the mind will react with disliking. On the level of action, this could appear as aversion to the object to which negative feelings are associated. Similarly, positive sensations will be met with craving.

The four mental processes, consciousness, perception, sensation, and reaction, occur in such a rapid succession that one is typically unaware of what is happening. Not until a particular reaction happens again and again over an extended period of time, taking an intensified form, does one develop awareness at the conscious level (Hart, 1987, 27).

The stockpiling of mental reactions influence, over time, how one perceives sensed objects. If we have a positive store of feelings and sensations about a particular person, for example, we will meet that person positively. This could occur if we see the person for the first time in ten years, even though the person may have completely changed in character. Positive feelings may come from the fact that, originally, the

person helped us to attain a desired object, which satisfied our craving, rather the actual character of the individual. Similarly, we may have an experience where someone thwarted us in gaining a desired object. The act of not gaining that which we crave brings up a negative sensation, which we react to. Bringing awareness to our feelings of craving and aversion without reacting to them brings us back to the heart of the teaching during the 10-day Vipassana retreat: awareness and equanimity.

### Metta

The final teaching to discuss here is that of Metta. Metta, or selfless love and good will, is cultivated through a systematic practice during the Vipassana meditation seminar. This practice of developing good will toward others is referred to as metta-bhavana in the Vipassana tradition (Hart, 1997). Aiding others in moving out of their pain and suffering in life is elemental in the practice of Vipassana meditation. The practice of Vipassana meditation not only aids individual practitioners in overcoming their own suffering in life, but intends to create harmonious environments that benefit all. Thus, participants in the Vipassana meditation seminar cultivate acceptance and kindness toward themselves, as well as toward others.

### Vipassana Meditation Seminar

Together, the concepts that participants in a 10-day Vipassana meditation course are exposed to form the heart of the teachings of Buddhist psychology. The Vipassana course structure, described in Appendix B, is extremely rigorous. Participants meditate in conjunct one-to two-hour periods from 4:30AM to 9:00PM daily, with succinct technical instructions given throughout the day. Complete silence is required for nine of the ten days, thus allowing each practitioner to meditate free from social

distraction. Through the scrupulous and demanding seminar design, participants in each course are exposed to an identical training in the ancient technique of insight meditation. Many of these ancient teachings find their equivalent in the latest literature and research on transformational leadership.

### Transformational Leadership

The concept of transformational leadership, coined transforming leadership by James MacGregor Burns (1978) began a new era in understanding of leadership. Prior to Burns, leadership was commonly perceived as being transactional in nature.

Transactional leaders assured that subordinates got what they wanted from work when their performance warranted it (Bass, 1985). That is, they exchanged rewards for performance to get compliance. Transactional leaders do not concern themselves with ideas about truth, but rather what is efficient. They utilize rewards and punishments to assure optimum performance by employees (Bass, 1985).

Standing in stark contrast, or at the other end of the spectrum as some would argue, to the more behavioral, transactional approach, transformational leadership seeks to elicit trust, admiration, loyalty and respect thus motivating employees to attain the highest level of performance (Yukl, 1998). Burns specifically defined transformational leadership as “a process where leaders and followers engage in a mutual process of raising one another to higher levels of morality and motivation”

([http://changingminds.org/disciplines/leadership/theories/burns\\_transformational.htm](http://changingminds.org/disciplines/leadership/theories/burns_transformational.htm)).

Further literature and research by scores of authors from Bass to Sergiovanni have established the transformational paradigm as a valid leadership construct. Many of the key elements of transformational leadership reflect those learned and practiced in

Vipassana and thus offer the possibility that meditation may in fact serve as a vehicle for developing transformational leadership skills.

### Transformational Leadership & Vipassana Meditation

This section will explore the key concepts experienced in a Vipassana meditation course as they are found in the literature on transformational leadership. Such teachings as the Four Noble Truths, the Eightfold Path, change, egolessness, awareness, equanimity, and Metta will be explored in the context of leadership.

#### Four Noble Truths

When applied to leadership, the core Buddhist constructs of the Four Noble Truths, manifest through organizations and leaders in the attachments and cravings that create dysfunction. That is, as leaders cling onto structures and processes, the organization suffers, yet can achieve harmony when working successfully with openness and uncertainty (McLeod, 2001). In much the same manner that businesses, such as our American car companies, lost their competitive edge because of their inability to adopt innovative ideas in a changing economy (Senge, 1992), leaders that seek the status quo can ultimately harm the organization.

#### Awareness and Equanimity

When actively applied, the Vipassana concepts of equanimity and awareness suggests that individuals can be aware of themselves and their environment, remaining non-reactive in the face of adversity, and that they can make conscious decisions in a proactive rather than reactive manner. These same notions are reflected often throughout the literature on transformational leadership. Indeed, many authors agree that, “Insight and awareness are factors associated with leadership ability,” (Bass, 1981, 53) and have



attested to the importance of serving employees and organizations in a manner that embodies these characteristics.

Zaleznik (1977), for example, states that leaders are active rather than reactive, and shape ideas rather than react to them. Similarly, Bass states that leaders must be more proactive than reactive (1985). Further, he suggests that leaders will emerge in times of distress and rapid change. Avolio and Bass (1985) state similar sentiments, suggesting that transformational leaders do not just react to environmental circumstances, they shape and create them. Levinson and Rosenthal (1984) embrace a parallel perspective, stating that leaders have good timing rather than being impulsive perfectionists. This suggestion of non-reactivity is also explicitly echoed by Tichy and Devanna who suggest that, “What may separate transformational from transactional leaders is that transformational leaders are more likely to be proactive than reactive” (1986, 124).

Thus, literature on transformational leadership supports the notion of equanimity, or balance of mind, as taught in Vipassana seminars to organizational leaders. Similarly, transformational leadership scholars have established the importance of awareness as a quality essential in effective leadership.

Sergiovanni (2006), for example, states that moral leadership is based upon awareness. Specifically, it is a lack of awareness of the motives underlying leadership behavior and the impact of that behavior on others that makes leadership immoral. Only by attaining self-awareness and leading oneself can executives transcend management roles and become true leaders (Farr, 1998).

Goleman, in exploring emotional intelligence, defines self-awareness in a slightly more comprehensive manner. His definition encompasses both the awareness and equanimity elemental in the Vipassana teaching. Suggesting that self-awareness equates to “taking in whatever passes through awareness with impartiality, as an interested yet unreactive witness” (1995, 47), he asserts that awareness and equanimity are essential elements of the emotional intelligence required for effective leadership. Similarly, when exploring the relationship between emotional intelligence and school leadership, Stone, Parker, and Wood (2005), recognize that professional development programs for school administrators are wise to focus on developing self-awareness as a core element in improving administrative leadership.

#### Change, Egolessness, and Suffering

The notions of change, egolessness, and suffering, as defined in Vipassana, manifest in organizations in a multitude of interdependent ways. For example, suffering in an organization manifests when a leader fails to accept and embody the changing nature of the organization, or becomes overly attached to the self concept, the power that accompanies the leadership role, or to organizational structure and/or processes (McLeod, 2001). Schein (1985) suggested that when an organization becomes overly static or rigid in this way, the organization will either not survive or will find a way to change.

An organization with leaders that are not ego-attached, on the other hand, is one that empowers employees and embraces a nonhierarchical organizational structure. Literature on transformational leadership is replete with discussions specifically eschewing the importance of embracing change and managing one’s ego as characteristics of effective leadership.

Throughout the literature, transformational leaders have been identified as those who remain flexible, not only adapting to, but embracing change within themselves, their employees, the organization, and the culture in general. Bass (1985) suggests that the role of the transformational leader is to actually change self identities, while Maccoby (1981) states that leaders must be “flexible about social arrangements and willing to experiment with new relationships.” According to Levinson and Rosenthal (1984), transformational leaders remain flexible, welcome ambiguity, and seek opportunities to shape new directions. Similarly, instituting change is an important element of transformative leadership for Tichy and Ulrich (1983). Hickman and Silva (1984) refer to the ability to anticipate change as versatility and identify it as one of the key areas in contemporary leadership.

The importance of embracing change in transformational leadership cannot be overstated. The practice of Vipassana meditation is said to offer a technique by which practitioners experience change within themselves while becoming versed at working within a changing and dynamic environment (Goenka, 1987). Thus, the ability to embrace and adapt to change as expressed in literature on transformational leadership appears to be addressed in the experience of Vipassana meditation. According to the teaching of Vipassana, this is most effectively done by individuals who are able to relinquish their psychological attachments of their ego and embrace the present moment as it is.

Since Burns coined the term transforming leadership, leadership scholars have elucidated the importance of leadership that is service orientated and empowering. Schein (1985), for example, states that leaders must have commitment beyond their own

self-interest, while Bennis and Nanus (1985) recognize the need for leaders to have a positive self regard, but state that they must trust themselves without being egotistical. In this commitment to others, transformational leaders treat others with positive regard.

### Metta

The practice of Metta, or selfless good-will toward others, is implied throughout the literature on transformational leadership. Burns (1978), in positioning tyranny at the polar opposite of leadership, implicitly upholds the importance of good-will as a leadership construct. Similarly, Nadler and Tushman (1990), state that leaders with charisma demonstrate empathy and have the ability to listen, understand, and express support. While Decrans suggests that leaders have humor and humility, Melendez states that kindness is a key element in effective leadership (Drucker, 1992).

Good-will toward others as a leadership construct is most explicitly understood, however, through the guise of servant leadership. Greenleaf (1970), in discussing the quality of servant as leader, states that in servant leadership care is taken, "to make sure that other people's highest priority needs are being served. The best test, and difficult to administer, is: Do those served grow as persons? Do they, *while being served*, become healthier, wiser, freer, more autonomous, more likely themselves to become servants?" These qualities mirror the kind selfless intention developed in the practice of Buddhist psychology and reveal the connection between the two schools of thought.

### Conclusion

The psychology of mind as taught in a Vipassana meditation seminar finds many conceptual parallels in the literature of transformational leadership. From the awareness and balance of mind discussed by such seminal authors as Schein and Senge,

to the call for flexibility in the face of change that has been established as essential by Bass (1985) and Maccoby (1981), the psychology of Vipassana and transformational leadership are in many ways reflective of each other. Thus, the literature suggests that the practice of Vipassana meditation is a technique that fosters qualities perceived as essential in transformative leadership.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

This chapter will discuss the methodology of phenomenology utilized herein to describe the leadership experience of individuals that practice Vipassana meditation. As Creswell asserts, this qualitative approach will “describe the meaning of a lived experience for several individuals about a concept” (1998, pg. 51). The primary elements of a phenomenological procedure, gathering a sample, data collection, analysis, reporting, researcher role, reliability, and validity, will be detailed in this chapter.

### Research Design

This study sought to develop an understanding of the leadership experience of Vipassana meditators. In order to most effectively gain an insightful understanding of this experience, a phenomenological research design was utilized. This design fostered the emergence of themes that were revealed through the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). The use of a phenomenological design was essential in identifying the structural meanings of experiences while uncovering the themes and contexts that account for the lived experience of the participants (Creswell, 1998).

### Participant Pool

The participants for this study were derived purposefully in order to most effectively understand the leadership experience of meditators. Literature regarding the number of participants required to achieve the data saturation needed in a phenomenology supports the process used in this study. Creswell (1998) suggests data collection for a phenomenological study requires up to 10 participants while Dukes (1984) recommends range of three to 10 individuals. The seven participants of this research consisted of ‘old’ students (having taken at least one 10- day course) of

Vipassana meditation who served in leadership positions. The participants came from all walks of life and, while having attended at least one meditation seminar, did not subscribe to any particular philosophy or religion.

Access to the participant pool came through the Vipassana Meditation Center's web site, which offered a partial list of executives that had participated in the 10-day course. Snowball sampling was used to gather the participant pool. This is a method of expanding the sample by asking participants to recommend others for interviewing (Crabtree and Miller, 1992).

### Data Collection

Due to the geographic distribution of the sample population, data was collected through telephone interviews. Creswell suggests that telephone interviews are the best alternative to direct contact (1998).

### Data Collection Procedures

The data collection procedures utilized in this study follow the protocol discussed in Creswell (1998) and include the following stages: initial contact, setting a meeting time, reviewing the interview format, discussing protocol, and gathering the data. The initial interview procedures, prior to the actual data gathering, utilized both internet and telephone contacts, depending upon the availability of the participant. Also, prior to data gathering, the researcher asked participant's permission to record the interview.

Participants were informed that all responses would remain anonymous.

An interview protocol was utilized in exploring the research question, "What lessons can be learned from the leadership experience of individuals who practice meditation?" The interview regiment consisted of an overarching question and eight

subsequent sub-questions. This semi-structured interview protocol utilized in the study optimized the data collection by allowing for both structure and flexibility. The protocol was intentionally designed to provide rich and thick descriptors of the participant's leadership experience.

The first seven questions of the protocol composed the bulk of the interview process. The eighth question, "discuss the specific impact of meditation on your leadership" elicited additional information from participants whom, without prompt, connected meditation and leadership. That is, only the participants who broached the subject of meditation during the interview were asked question eight at the end of the interview process. If a participant did not mention meditation during the interview, question eight was withheld. Requesting additional information that connected meditation and leadership to those that had already made the connection allowed the interviewer to avoid influencing the participants while extracting important data.

A total of seven telephone interviews, of up to 60 minutes in length, were recorded, transcribed, and subjected to phenomenological analysis. Following is the interview protocol utilized in this study (also see Appendix C):

What is your leadership experience?

1. Describe your leadership style.
2. What experiences best prepared you for leadership?
3. What do you find enjoyable about leadership?
4. What are your leadership strengths?
5. What are the biggest difficulties you face in your leadership?
6. What would you like to change about your leadership?



7. What are the values and/or practices that inform your leadership?
8. Discuss the impact of meditation on your leadership.

### Data Analysis

There is no consensus regarding the analysis of data in qualitative research (Creswell, 1994). However, the intent of a phenomenological design is to explain fully the lived experience of individuals that undergo a particular phenomenon (Creswell, 1998, Kruger, 1988). A phenomenology is “concerned with understanding the social and psychological phenomena from the perspectives of the people involved” (Welman and Kruger, 1999, pg 189) and is most appropriate for this study. Thus, the phenomenological process as discussed by Creswell (1998) informed the structure of this research design.

Once the data collection was completed, taped interviews of the participants were transcribed with significant statements extracted from the transcribed interviews. This horizonation process (Creswell, 1998), which allowed for themes in the data to be revealed, is presented in Table 4-1. The statements were then classified into meaning units and defined texturally. Meaning unit explanations were supported with verbatim participant statements. In keeping with Creswell (1998), once the data classification was complete, meaning units were synthesized in a manner that expressed the essence of the leadership experience of Vipassana meditators.

### Summary

This chapter discussed the phenomenological method that was utilized in gaining an understanding regarding the leadership experience of meditation practitioners. The purposefully selected sample of Vipassana meditating leaders was discussed, along

with data collection and analysis procedures, and general rationale. Following the procedures put forth by scholars of phenomenological research design, a substantial understanding regarding the leadership experience of individuals that practice Vipassana meditation was derived.

## CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

### Introduction

This study was created to portray a substantive description of the phenomena of leadership as perceived by practitioners of Vipassana meditation. Through in-depth interviews with meditating leaders, thick and rich data emerged in pursuit the research question. The interview protocol was framed and guided through the following overarching research and sub-questions: *What lessons can be learned from the leadership experience of individuals that practice meditation?*

1. What meanings do meditation practitioners give their leadership experience?
2. What are the themes and contexts that account for the leadership experience of meditators?
3. What are the universal structures accounting for the leadership experience of meditators?
4. What are the non-variable, overarching themes that facilitate a description of a meditator's leadership experience?

To most effectively explore the data gathered in this study, this chapter is divided into five sections. The first section provides a basic demographic overview of the participants. Building upon this base, the second section presents the raw data in verbatim form with core responses to each question expressly represented along with researcher reflection on those comments. In the third section, duplication is eliminated and thematic meaning units are presented. The fourth refines the descriptions to their most basic themes, presenting the essence of the phenomenon at hand. The chapter ends with a detailed summary, highlighting themes and significance of findings for this study.

### Demographic Information

The general demographic information collected in this study includes participant gender, leadership role, and meditation experience. Information regarding each participant's meditation experience was collected at the close of the interview to assure the questioning did not lead, or in any way impact, the participant's response.

Table 4-1 Demographic Information on Sample

<b>Participant code</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Leadership Role</b>	<b>Participation in course: Y/N</b>	<b>Current meditator Y/N</b>
S1	M	Attorney	Y	N
S2	M	Semi-retired Construction mgr.	Y	Y
S3	M	HR consultant	Y	Y
S4	M	Patent Attorney	Y	Y
S5	M	Venture Capitalist	Y	Y
S6	M	Multi-Company President	Y	Y
S7	M	Organizer-Meditation teacher	Y	Y

### Data Analysis

In this section, representative data gleaned from the interviews is presented, underscoring the texture and meaning elicited from each question. The questions asked were intentionally open-ended and broad, thus allowing for a wide range of responses. Tables 4-2, 4-3, 4-6, and 4-7 depict the participant statements relative to the specific interview item, as well as the researcher's reflections of said discussion. Table 4-4 and 4-5 each contain two questions due the similar and overlapping nature of the responses given. The following interview statements and questions were used to draw out data regarding the lived experience of leaders practicing meditation:

Table 4-2	Question 1: Describe your leadership style.
Table 4-3	Question 2: What experiences best prepared you for leadership?
Table 4-4	Question 3: What do you find enjoyable about leadership? Question 4: What are your leadership strengths?
Table 4-5	Question 5: What are the biggest difficulties you face in your leadership? Question 6: What would you like to change about your leadership?
Table 4-6	Question 7: What are the values and/or practices that inform your leadership?
Table 4-7	Question 8: Discuss the impact of meditation on your leadership.

During the interview process questions were followed up with discussion stimulating statements, such as, “can you please say more about that?” to broaden the depth of information provided. Additionally, Question 8 was added to probe further into the participant’s experience and perceptions regarding the impact and experience of meditation practice on their leadership directly. This item was inserted only after the completion of the initial protocol and only for individuals that identified Vipassana meditation as important in their leadership development. Introducing this item at the end of the interview protocol assured that the original data gathered was in no way influenced by the researcher, and fostered a deeper qualitative understanding of the leadership experience.

Table 4-2 Question 1: Describe your leadership style.

Participants' Statements	Researcher's Reflections
S1-I reflect on my own experience.	Self reflection
S2-Most of my leadership is by example.	Leading by example
S2-When we have a problem not to back away from them but to jump in the middle.	Assertive
S2-Low key and listen a lot. Not as confrontational, treating the other person on the other side, even if it is an adversary, with dignity and respect. Listen carefully and give them the benefit of the doubt but still being firm.	Quiet listening Treating adversary with respectful and dignity Giving benefit of the doubt Setting firm boundaries
S3-Build relationships that would inspire, I think those are the main ways in which I would practice leadership.	Relationships that inspire
S3-Servent leadership is leading others by serving their development needs.	Serving others so they develop
S4-I tend to lead by example. I try to lead by giving the people that I think are competent and have potential as much responsibility and as much discretion and judgment room as they can handle, rather than dictating to them and trying to override, second guess and let's say, control them in a very direct fashion.	Lead by example Give freedom and responsibility rather than directing or control
S5-I am not a very, in the corporate world, a political person. So, I am a very straight forward, straight shooter, not really any hidden agenda. I will always say how I feel about the situation. The leadership is collaborative.	Straight forward No hidden agenda Honestly speak out feelings Collaboration

Table 4-2 Question 1: Describe your leadership style.

Participants' Statements	Researcher's Reflections
<p>S6-I give everybody responsibility and hold them accountable and don't waste their time policing them. It's really not my job as manager to be managing them. It's really my job to be coaching them...encouraging them.</p>	<p>Give responsibility and accountability Not manage but coach and encourage</p>
<p>S7-Moving out from that self-centric state and stop being a jack-ass. Involvement, activity, altruistic connection being involved in something other than self aggrandizement.</p>	<p>Stop being self-centered Involve others Altruistic connection No self aggrandizement</p>
<p>S2-It's more leadership by what you do and how you do it that consciously thinking of yourself as a leader, you just do it without necessarily being aware that you are leading but then look back and see that a whole lot of people are listening and responding and you're getting good results.</p>	<p>Leadership by example Doing the right thing as a leader Not leading for leading sake</p>
<p>S2-It's just about being respectful and not antagonistic, for the sake of puffing my chest.</p>	<p>Respectful and not antagonistic or egotistical</p>
<p>S4-My style of leadership, I'd say it's a values based leadership and also servant leadership.</p>	<p>Values and servant based leadership</p>
<p>S6-My logic is to take a long term approach and to have to be patient and not, "if you don't do it this way I'm firing you." It's a little bit more of a Vipassana approach.</p>	<p>Big picture Patience</p>

Table 4-3 Question 2: What experiences best prepared you for leadership?

Participants' Statements	Researcher's Reflections
<p>S1-After law school I spent six months in a meditation center, which gave me a good tool.</p> <p>S2-I think to start with my dad recognized the importance of learning our business. After I graduated from MIT, I thought I was pretty smart. He immediately put me out doing construction inspection for six years and you learn a lot of humility out there dealing with the contractor. You also learn a lot about human nature and dealing with people and how to be effective in that capacity, so that kind of got it started.</p> <p>S2-In my youth I was pretty feisty and pretty puffed up but over time I learned better. I have three kids, twin boys, one of them is a Buddhist Monk and the other one is very interested in the Buddhist teaching, that got me interested in the Buddhist teachings. That teaches a very egoless way of doing things and I have found that to be quite useful.</p> <p>S3-My life experience. I made a choice early on to get more clear about what I wanted to get out of life and why I was living it. That sort of led me down a more alternative route. That posed certain challenges and certain experiences that I was able to go through, and I think made me more capable, more insightful, more able to serve other people</p>	<p>Six months meditating</p> <p>Father teaching humility Learning about human nature</p> <p>Interest in Buddhism from children Doing things in an egoless way</p> <p>Life experience Searching for clarity and value in life created capable insight and ability to serve</p>



Table 4-3 Question 2: What experiences best prepared you for leadership?

Participants' Statements	Researcher's Reflections
<p>S4-Meditation, I think is great training. It trains you to understand your own reactions to things and not be as prone to knee jerk reactions in circumstances, but rather to keep your balance in the face of circumstances and then make a rational judgmental decision about how you need to respond to the situation.</p>	<p>Meditation practice Training to understand your reactions and to reduce them, thus keeping balance and remaining rational</p>
<p>S5-Vipassana. When you are in control, which is our situation, we are always in control, we make the investments so we feel powerful, having a leg up over the CEO and basically being able to tell him what to do. On the other hand we must be caring and be thoughtful and do the right thing no matter what the situation is. Meditation really brought that insight to me.</p>	<p>Meditation Not being negatively affected by power Not over reactive Being caring and thoughtful Doing the right thing</p>
<p>S5-I came from the banking world, fast paced, fast moving; without giving any consideration for people's hearts and feelings. My meditation practices have kind of put that humane aspect back into my business.</p>	<p>Meditation practice brings humanity into business</p>
<p>S6-I've only done one course of Vipassana, As a leader one thing that I learned is to observe without really over reacting. I think this helps give a very good message to all of your staff.</p>	<p>Meditation to observe without reacting</p>
<p>S6-We all have crisis, but it's not something we should get overly stressed about or lose sleep over because it does become temporary, it does go away. Vipassana taught me that. The other thing...it helps you to slow down and observe; you can actually become a little more concentrated in your thinking.</p>	<p>Meditation. Not getting overly stressed in crisis. It will go away Slow down and observe Concentrate thinking</p>

Table 4-3 Question 2: What experiences best prepared you for leadership?

Participants' Statements	Researcher's Reflections
S7-Vipassana. Moving out from that self-centric state of promoting oneself and replacing it with all the attributes in terms of real happiness.	Meditation Stop self-promoting and becoming content and happy

Table 4-4 Question 3: What do you find enjoyable about leadership?  
Question 4: What are your leadership strengths?

Participants' Statements	Researcher's Reflections
<p>S1-I can be sitting right across from somebody who's on the other side and be talking about trying to resolve some case, and what I just said really pissed this person off. One thing I've been able to do in a situation like that is being able to get the information across and make my stand, but then go right back to the relationship. We were opposed to each other a moment ago, but now I'm going to say something funny and be warm with you. I still want to be good with you; I want this relationship to work even if we're going to fight. I think that is a strength.</p> <p>S2-I enjoy dealing with our people and dealing with our customers' people. The people side of it is the thing that motivates me the most.</p> <p>S3-I like being around people and I enjoy being part of a team or an organization that's trying to achieve something that is meaningful. So, the real joy for me is getting to know and understand different people and understanding where they're coming from and then trying to create situations or work that can be done together so that everyone is growing and learning and working toward the achievement of whatever the objective is.</p> <p>S3-The ability to inspire, the ability to see the big picture, engage people, work with people, and understand where they're coming from.</p>	<p>Focusing on keeping positive relationships even when delivering difficult information  Being warm, funny, and good with others even with adversaries</p> <p>Enjoyment of working with people  Motivated by relationships</p> <p>Enjoyment of working with people and being part of a team  Doing meaningful work together  Creating growth, learning situations for employees</p> <p>Inspiring others, seeing the big picture and understanding people</p>

Table 4-4 Question 3: What do you find enjoyable about leadership?  
Question 4: What are your leadership strengths?

Participants' Statements	Researcher's Reflections
<p>S4-I enjoy and it's fun to help other people grow and succeed; it's a feeling of satisfaction when you pass the baton. To see other people develop and develop skills as they grow and flourish themselves in their own professional capacity, as well as their own abilities to lead others.</p>	<p>Helping people grow, develop skills, and succeed</p>
<p>S4-Tenacity and the ability to support someone and give them encouragement. To give them a feeling that they are doing a good job, positive feedback and so forth; I think that is a strength.</p>	<p>Giving support and encouragement  Leaving others with the feeling that they are doing a good job</p>
<p>S6-I maintain a very open door policy which is a huge strength. The openness and the willingness to be available and be able to share experiences.</p>	<p>Open door policy  Openness and willingness to be available</p>
<p>S7-The activity of working on one's self service as an extension of working on one's self has been self fulfilling.</p>	<p>Helping others as a form of self development</p>
<p>S2-It is very gratifying to see that our organization starting with our president and our chief operating officer and other people really value the relationship with the client and giving good service and the importance of having a good workplace, so I don't know to what extent I've influenced that, but it is very gratifying to see the whole organization is moving in a good direction.</p>	<p>Working with an organization that values relationships and to see the organization moving in a good direction</p>

Table 4-5 Question 5: What are the biggest difficulties you face in your leadership?  
Question 6: What would you like to change about your leadership?

Participants' Statements	Researcher's Reflections
<p>S1-What I am working on right now is just having more clarity about my intentions. Having a greater sense of the direction I'm moving.</p>	<p>Developing clarity of intentions Gaining greater sense of personal direction</p>
<p>S1-Letting myself get easily distracted.</p>	<p>Too easily distracted</p>
<p>S2-I've been in the process of evolving and changing and improving for many, many years.</p>	<p>Have been evolving, changing, and improving for many years</p>
<p>S3-If people have bought into that process then that can be rewarding and enjoyable. But, if people are just digging their heels in and don't want to see the other point of view, then it can slow down the whole thing and be frustrating, especially if you have a clear sense of where something is ultimately going.</p>	<p>Frustrated by having to slow down to work with other's resistance</p>
<p>S4-Dealing with people in whom I place a lot of confidence and have them do some of the things that I thought were very ungrateful and maybe unethical, it's very disappointing.</p>	<p>Disappointed when others act ungrateful or unethical</p>
<p>S5-My strength is that I get to the end solution very quickly. My challenge from a leadership standpoint is how do I go through all those points along the way that people want to discuss and meet and meet and discuss again and meet and discuss again, then to finally arrive at some conclusion I have been at for some time. I'm a little impatient you know. I've got to work on myself, the patience part.</p>	<p>Challenge is slowing down so that others can catch up Patience</p>

Table 4-5 Question 5: What are the biggest difficulties you face in your leadership?  
Question 6: What would you like to change about your leadership?

Participants' Statements	Researcher's Reflections
<p>S5- When you give input and the guy doesn't listen. You give input to him a second time and he doesn't listen to you, you give it to him the third time, he doesn't get it, he's not listening to you. Then you have to have a sit down meeting with him and say listen, we've given you a suggestion three times and you have managed to ignore it, what is the reason?</p>	<p>Challenged when others don't listen or act on recommendations</p>
<p>S6-My biggest challenge there is a balance in the amount of work I do and the time I take off. I tend to get very caught up in work.</p>	<p>Work/life balance</p>
<p>S7-Any time you're dealing with people, you've got a host of challenges in terms of helping people get over their own self defeating tendencies that you know so well because you've been there.</p>	<p>Helping others get over their self defeating tendencies</p>
<p>S7-I'd like to have more empathy.</p>	<p>I'd like to gain more empathy</p>

Table 4-6 Question 7:

What are the values and/or practices that inform your leadership?

Participants' Statements	Researcher's Reflections
<p>S1-You have to be open to using your intuition, paying attention to your emotional reaction, being empathic. I think that people that just focus on being separate and making decisions are really missing the boat; in the long run alienating people.</p>	<p>Intuition Being aware of emotional reactions Empathy Connections with others</p>
<p>S1-It is important to be objective about my own emotional reaction.</p>	<p>Aware of own emotional reactions</p>
<p>S1-I don't think that you can lead without making mistakes because you are the one that is responsible, no one is perfect. You are going to screw up. So, you have to have that ability to forgive yourself.</p>	<p>Making mistakes and forgiving self</p>
<p>S1-If you're going to be responsible for other people, you've got to be able to make good judgments. So being able to make a good judgment, you've got to be aware of what's a good thing. It can't just be based on your own ideas, you've got to be paying attention to what's good for the other people, too. That involves communication, listening and being sensitive.</p>	<p>Making good judgments based on awareness of others  Communication and sensitivity</p>
<p>S2-The idea of servant leadership is that you're trying to build consensus, doing it collaboratively, and you're not the lone ranger.</p>	<p>Serving others as a leader Building consensus through collaboration</p>
<p>S3-I think self awareness is real fundamental for leadership. You've got to be able to read people, you've got to be able to understand what makes them tick, you've got to be able to empathize with them and be objective and be in the present moment with them and really understand</p>	<p>Self awareness Knowing your own preferences, values, and habits Reading and understanding others Empathy Presence Being fresh, clear, and energetic</p>

Table 4-6 Question 7:  
What are the values and/or practices that inform your leadership?

Participants' Statements	Researcher's Reflections
<p>and hear where they're coming from, and to do that I think you need a good foundation of self awareness; knowing about your own preferences, your own values and your own sort of habit patterns and things, just being fresh, being clear and energetic and I've found meditation is really very helpful in this regard.</p>	<p>Self knowledge</p> <p>Importance of meditation</p>
<p>S3-I consider sitting (meditating) twice a day to be fundamental to my ability to be of service to others and to lead. It helps me be more clear. It helps me make better decisions: it helps me not react to things that are around me: it helps me to stay calm about things when they crop up.</p>	<p>Meditating to help serve others effectively</p> <p>Clarity and good decisions</p> <p>Non-reactive</p> <p>Staying calm in face of challenges</p>
<p>S5-Situations where you feel anger toward somebody, feeling frustrated about somebody's actions and then suddenly a little voice in your head, which was very faint when I started practicing meditation, and has become louder and louder, will tell you, think about the big picture. You are showing anger towards one person because he may be doing something ignorantly. So you let go and don't foster any animosity.</p>	<p>Self-awareness</p> <p>Non-reactive</p> <p>Big picture</p>
<p>S6-You can't be the guy yourself that knows everything. Go find the guys that are much smarter than you and then lead them and show them the way; I try to coach them.</p>	<p>Defer to the knowledge of others</p> <p>Coach</p>
<p>S7-Selfless service. Talking the talk and walking the walk.</p>	<p>Selfless service with integrity</p>
<p>S7-Improve yourself and you'll improve your leadership.</p>	<p>Continual self improvement</p>



Table 4-6 Question 7:

What are the values and/or practices that inform your leadership?

Participants' Statements	Researcher's Reflections
<p>S1-When you look at what is bugging you about any given interaction with another person, it is your own mind. If I'm reacting to them, then it's not going to settle the situation if I just get away from them. Somebody else will come along, and I'll have the same reaction. It was my reaction, so that's what the actual issue is, how do I change? Your reaction is part of the difficulty of the whole situation.</p>	<p>Recognize that difficulties are in own mind</p>
<p>S2-Leadership by what you do and how you do it rather than consciously thinking of yourself as a leader. You just do it without necessarily being aware that you are leading, but then look back and see that a whole lot of people are listening and responding and you're getting good results.</p>	<p>Egoless</p>
<p>S5- I am making decisions a lot of times in a vacuum. Just close your eyes for a minute and all your thoughts come to you; you can't stop them, so you have a thought about business and you think, so what are the sensations around this thought? If I did this, you know, and suddenly my heart is racing, that's the wrong decision. It comes with practice; it's a very powerful tool.</p>	<p>Pay attention to sensations as they arise and not react to them but used them as a way to gain information.</p>

Table 4.7 Question 8:

What impact has the practice of meditation had on your leadership?

Participants' Statements	Researcher's Reflections
S5-My meditation practices have kind of put that humane aspect back into my business.	Kindness, humanity
S3-It helps me be more clear. It helps me make better decisions. It helps me not react to things that are around me as much and it helps me to stay calm about things when they crop up. I'm more effective in my relationships as a result.	Clarity Decision making  Non-reactive
S7-I would probably be a lot more Nazi, and I probably was. But I've been doing it so long now (meditating), it's hard to remember those days. I probably didn't do a lot of leading.	Tyrannical without meditation  Poor leadership
S3-I consider sitting twice a day to be fundamental to my ability to be of service to others and to lead.	Meditating is essential to leading

### Meaning Units

Creswell (1998) states that a thorough exploration of the data reveals structured patterns of meaning. The patterns, or meaning units, expressed in this study create the context from which the essence of the leadership experience, as reported by meditators, is understood. Four specific meaning units emerged through the data analysis; they are presented in Table 4.9.

Table 4.9 Meaning Units

The practice of self awareness
The value of acting intentionally
The importance of a service orientation
The quest for continual growth/openness to learning

Each of the meaning units discussed here is supported by statements made by participants through the interview process. In this section, a detailed explanation of each meaning unit is given, providing the overall framework for understanding the lived experience of participants.

### The Practice of Self-Awareness

The first meaning unit to be discussed here is that of self-awareness. The participants interviewed in this study consistently utilize self-awareness as tools in their leadership. The meaning given to self-awareness, as discussed the by participants, is knowledge of one's own reactive patterns. This also includes a quality of presence, in the moment, of those reactions as they arise. Thus having knowledge of one's reactive patterns, and being cognizant of these patterns as they arise, appears to be intrinsically bound in the leadership experience of participants. Most of the participants suggested they reflect on their own experience specifically for the purpose of gaining this self-awareness.

In utilizing self-awareness as a vehicle of leadership, one participant explained that, "it's important to be objective about my own emotional reaction" (S1). To "observe without really over-reacting" (S4) was considered a primary and effective practice in leadership. The importance attributed to "understand[ing] your own reactions to things" (S6) was echoed throughout the interviews as a key experience of leadership. The experience of self-awareness took on the form of reflectivity as well as openness to feedback and created a foundation for the next meaning unit, non-reactivity.

### The Value of Acting Intentionally

Participants expounded repeatedly upon the second meaning unit, acting intentionally or non-reactively, as an elemental component of their leadership experience. One participant, in building upon the first meaning unit of self-awareness, stated that he is not “as prone to knee jerk reactions” (S6). He continued to suggest that by being non-reactive, one is better able to “keep your balance in the face of circumstances and then make a rational judgmental decision about how you need to respond to the situation” (S6).

Another participant suggested that with the awareness that comes from thinking more clearly and getting his ego in check, he’s much more effective in leadership (S2). The importance of keeping one’s ego removed from the leadership equation, in an attempt to act intentionally, was resonant during most of the interviews. One participant stated that his primary work as leader is in “moving out from that self-centric state of promoting oneself, and replacing it with all the attributes that we’re after in terms of real happiness” (S7). To be a good leader, he went on, “You have to first stop being a jack-ass. This is effectively what we’re doing in Vipassana.”

The themes of self-awareness and intentional action as vehicles for effective leadership were conceptualized by one particular participant who stated that, “When you look at what is bugging you about any given interaction with another person, it is your own mind. If I’m reacting to them, then it’s not going to settle the situation if I just get away from them. Somebody else will come along, and I’ll have the same reaction. It was my reaction. So that’s what the actual issue is, how do I change? Your reaction is part of the difficulty of the whole situation” (S1). “There doesn’t need to be a lot of

storming around and unnecessary strife” (S2) stated another when discussing the importance of keeping a non-reactive stance. In this manner, participants have an awareness of their role, through their reactive and non-intentional behavior, in the difficulties they face in their leadership interactions. Similarly, they minimize the damage they do by mitigating their own emotional reactivity.

### The Importance of a Service Orientation

The next meaning unit thematically represented here, the importance of having a service orientation, builds upon and interconnects with the previous themes of self-awareness and intentionality. Having self-awareness while taking intentional action, allows leaders to remove the dysfunction of their ego needs from the leadership equation. As one participant put it, to “stop being a jerk and begin paying attention to the needs of others.” Thus, leaders bring collaboration, motivation, inspiration and support to their work environment in an attempt to lead with a service orientation that is not egocentric, and creates tangible outcomes.

One participant explicitly stated, for example, that his strengths lie in “the ability to inspire, the ability to see the big picture, engage people, work with people, and understand where they’re coming from” (S3). Another, continuing this thought, suggested that his role as leader of others is “to give them a feeling that they are doing a good job, positive feedback and so forth (S4).” In this manner, participants don’t experience their leadership in a top down, command and control style, but rather one in which the needs of others and relationships take priority.

Creating positive relationships, for example, was a theme that echoed throughout the interviews. “I can be sitting right across from somebody who’s on the other side and

be talking about trying to resolve some case, and what I just said really pissed this person off. One thing I've been able to do in a situation like that is being able to get the information across and make my stand, but then go right back to the relationship. We were opposed to each other a moment ago, but now I'm going to say something funny and be warm with you. I still want to be good with you; I want this relationship to work, even if we're going to fight" (S1).

In this manner, leaders don't take satisfaction from ego-driven needs, such as being right, being in control, or using authority. Instead, participants in this study experience a deep enjoyment and profound satisfaction in serving and collaborating with others to produce results. "I enjoy dealing with our people and dealing with our customer's people. The people side of it is the thing that motivates me the most," stated one participant (S2). Another suggested, "I like being around people, and I enjoy being part of a team or an organization that's trying to achieve something that is meaningful. So, the real joy for me is getting to know and understand different people and understanding where they're coming from and then trying to create situations or work that can be done together so that everyone is growing and learning and working toward the achievement of whatever the objective is" (S3).

Leading with a service orientation, by facilitating growth and change in others, also fosters satisfaction. "I enjoy and it's fun to see other people grow and succeed," suggested one participant, (S4) who went on to say, "It's a feeling of satisfaction when you pass the baton. To see other people develop and develop skills as they grow and flourish themselves in their own professional capacity, as well as their own abilities to lead others" (S4). Many of the participants reported a similar leadership experience,

suggesting that leadership is a process of building “consensus, doing it collaboratively and not being the lone ranger” (S2).

Similarly, participant leaders defer to their constituents’ knowledge and expertise. “You can’t be the guy yourself that knows everything. Go find the guys that are much smarter than you, and then lead them and show them the way. I try to coach them” (S6). The notion of bringing together, coaching, and motivating as a service-oriented leadership method, is practiced extensively by the meditating leaders in this study.

### Continual Growth

From the data gathered throughout the interview process, the final theme that emerged was that of continual growth. That is, participants experience and enjoy the process of continual growth in their leadership. In this way, leadership is an evolving, adaptable, and forgiving growth practice that is consciously practiced: “Improve yourself, and you’ll improve your leadership” (S7). When expounding upon the leadership experience of personal growth, another participant reported: “I’ve been in the process of evolving and changing and improving for many, many years (S2).” The notion of working on one’s self as: a part of a leadership style was recurrent throughout the data with other such comments as “What I am working on right now is just having more clarity about my intentions” (S1).

Meditators who practice leadership find the personal growth to be satisfying and enjoyable. This notion is well represented by the statement: “The activity of working on one’s self service as an extension of working on one’s self has been self fulfilling” (S7). Leaders, in practicing personal growth, keep open minds, remaining “open to using your intuition” (S1), while retaining “that ability to forgive yourself” (S1).

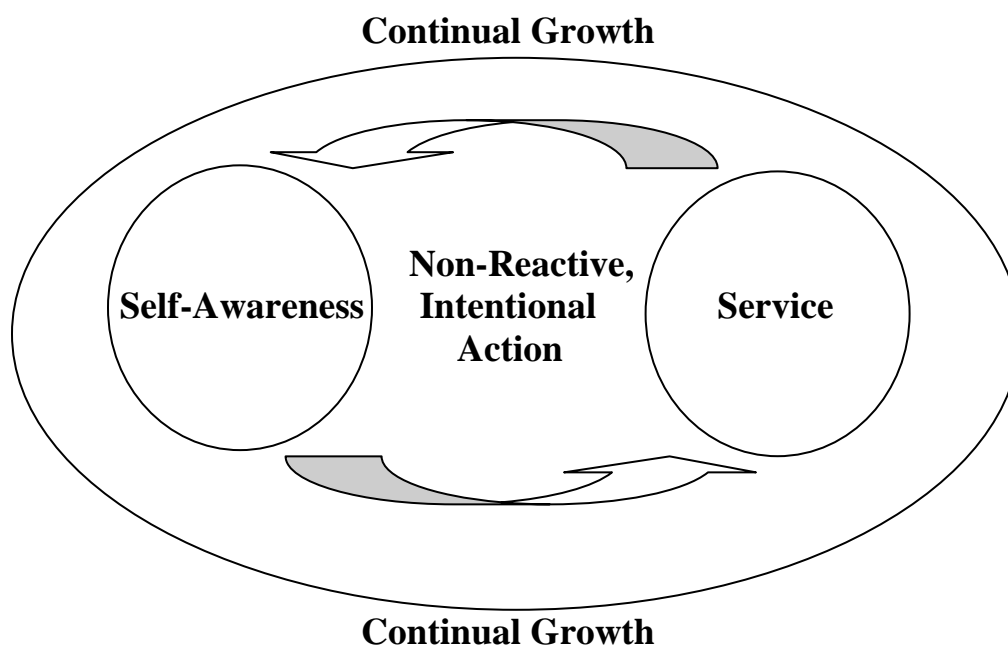
The notion of personal growth, as reported by participants, was a thread weaving through the other three themes. Leaders in this study continue to grow in their self-awareness; their intentional, non-reactive action; and in their service orientation, as leader of others. Self-awareness, intentional action, and service then, are not an achieved state that leaders necessarily attain, but rather a path upon which leaders proceed.

#### Essential Essence: Enlightening Leadership

In a phenomenology, the essential essence is the most general meaning of a particular experienced phenomenon (Giorgi, 1985). Through the synthesis of the individual meaning units into one broad, encompassing statement, the essence is revealed. In this study, synthesis of the four meaning units, self-awareness, intentional action, service, and continual growth, resulted in a statement regarding the essential leadership experience of meditators. The in-depth analysis of the data collected for this study supported *enlightening leadership* as the essence of the experience of meditation practitioners. The four meaning units and the essential essence produced from the data are pictorially represented under the heading Enlightening leadership in table 4.91.



Table 4.91 Enlightening Leadership Model



Enlightening leadership, the essence of the leadership experience discovered here, encompasses each of the particular meaning units revealed in the data in a manner that synthesizes the individual themes into one concise descriptor of the leadership experience. What follows is an analysis of the essential essence of enlightening leadership relative to the derived meaning units.

The notion that participants in this study pursue enlightening leadership is expressly supported by the individual meaning units gleaned from the raw data. The drive for self awareness as a vehicle of leadership, for example, was a prominent theme throughout the data. Participants perceived that through self-awareness they are more effective leaders, and thus made self-awareness a part of their leadership practice. Movement toward developing continually higher levels of self awareness (continual

growth) was reported by all participants in the study and serves as a foundation in the pursuit of enlightening leadership.

The pursuit of enlightening leadership is also expressly supported through the meaning unit of non-reactivity. Participants identified reactive action as being detrimental to effective leadership and expressed the importance of remaining balanced, non-reactive and intentional in the leadership and decision making processes. Using self-awareness as a foundation, participants reduced their reactivity and took intentional leadership action.

Based upon the foundations of self-awareness and intentional action, leaders in this study value and practice service to others in their leadership interactions. One participant, for example, stated that regardless of the content of his communication, or the adversarial position of the other, he always attempted to keep his interaction warm and positive. In this manner, he intentionally created relationships that were healthy and effective.

Finally, the essence of enlightening leadership is supported by the meaning unit of continual growth. Participants in this study experience leadership as a path walked upon rather than an end state. Hence, leadership is a dynamic process of continued evolution and change. Meditating leaders specifically seek on-going development regarding their self-awareness, intentionality of action, and service orientation in their leadership experience.

## CHAPTER FIVE: FINDINGS AND IMPLICATIONS

### Introduction

This study took a phenomenological approach to understanding the leadership experience of individuals that practice Vipassana meditation. In following the process set forth by Creswell (1998), the study began with an immersion into the data elicited through the interview protocol. Developing a high level of familiarity with the data fostered the next step, discovery of themes or meaning units. The meaning units, supported through verbatim statements by participants, were then analyzed, synthesized, and condensed, allowing the essential of the experience to emerge.

This section will examine the meanings and essence attributed to the experience of leadership. The implications for these findings will then be presented ending with a discussion of ideas for further study to conclude this research.

### Findings

The essential essence of the phenomena experienced in this study is enlightening leadership. Enlightening leadership, the process of evolving toward an increasingly self-aware, intentional, and service orientation in leadership, is supported by four meaning units. The meaning units that emerged from the data include the following: (1) the practice of self-awareness; (2) the development of intentional, non-reactive action; (3) the value of a service orientation; and (4) the quest for continual growth. These meaning units, as well as the overarching, essential essence of the leadership experience, support three significant finding in the field of leadership.

- Meditation can have a meaningful impact on the leadership of individuals who practice it.

- Meditation may be an effective tool in leadership development.
- The practice of meditation by leaders specifically can foster the qualities of transformational leadership.

### The Impact of Meditation on Leadership

On the broadest level, participants in this study found that meditation practice had a meaningful impact on their leadership. These individuals use the core meditation teachings of self-awareness and understanding as vehicles in their leadership. Self-awareness gives leaders in this study a knowledge of their reactive patterns over time. Additionally, they are cognizant of their patterns, as they arise, in the moment. This awareness of the patterns that drive behavior and presence of mind as these patterns arise, allows these leaders to make decisions that are both conscious and intentional.

Self-awareness and equanimity are two of the central concepts in the practice of Vipassana meditation. During the 10-day seminar attended by all of the participants, time is specifically devoted to practicing techniques that foster greater levels of the self-awareness and equanimity that leaders found so imperative in their leadership. The tendency to stop and reflect in the heat of the moment and to make conscious leadership decisions that are based upon awareness is the experience of the participants in this study. When speaking of the impact of meditation on leadership, one participant stated, “It helps me make better decisions. It helps me not react to things that are around me as much, and it helps me to stay calm about things when they crop up. I’m more effective in my relationships as a result” (S3).

In this ability to make conscious decisions that are based upon awareness and equanimity, participants reported that they have gained humanity in their leadership. One

participant went so far as to state that prior to practicing meditation, he didn't actually lead but acted as a dictator. Several participants suggested that sitting in meditation is fundamental to their ability to be of service to others and to lead. Throughout the course of the interview process participants repeatedly recognized the positive impact of meditation on their leadership.

Also of consequence in the leadership of meditators is the practice of metta-bhavana. Metta-bhavana, the practice of developing loving kindness toward others finds itself embedded in the leadership experience of the interview pool. Several of the participants exclaiming the importance of non-ego driven service discussed the impact that metta-bhavana has in their leadership. The practice of acting with deep kindness as a vehicle of leadership was made explicit. From the intention to inspire (S3), to helping others flourish (S4), to simply being warm and friendly with opponents in leadership (S1), this study finds that practitioners of meditation use kindness, awareness, and equanimity as tools in their leadership practice.

While the results of this study are not generalizable to the population at large, the leadership experience of the participants in this study could be replicated by other leaders practicing meditation. The consistency of experience reported in this study suggests that there is a leadership impact by practicing meditation. Thus, meditation may serve as a vehicle on the path to effective leadership.

The experience of leadership reported in this study reflects the teaching of meditation in several ways. This suggests that the teaching of meditation may be impactful in leadership. However, it may be explained through other means. For example it is likely that a certain type of leader would self select to learn meditation.

Individuals attracted to the practice of meditation would likely be those that value continual growth. Hence, to suggest it is solely the practice of meditation that establishes the value of ongoing personal, development in leaders can not be asserted; the link is not necessarily causal. What can be stated is that leaders in this study, that do practice meditation, value continual growth. The same may be said for self awareness, non-reactive action, and a service orientation as well. Individuals with these attributes might naturally self select to the teachings of meditation. However, it is with certainty that participants in this study, those that do practice meditation, value the afore mentioned attributes.

#### Meditation as a Tool in Leadership Development

A second significant finding of this study is that, for the participants of this study, meditation is an effective tool in leadership development. Many claims have been made regarding the impact of meditation as a tool in developing effective leadership. For example, in one online testimonial of the 10-day Executive Vipassana Meditation seminar, an individual explicitly states; “Out of all the training courses I have done in the context of my professional career, including those offered at the *Sloan School of Management* at MIT and the *London Business School*, (sic) this course has provided the most benefit” ([www.bhumi.dhamma.org](http://www.bhumi.dhamma.org)). There has, however, been no previous research to validate these statements. Participants in this study found that meditation is an effective tool in leadership development.

Scholars have noted, for example, that self-awareness needs to be a core element in professional development programs for school leaders (Stone, Parker, & Wood, 2005). The leaders that practice meditation in this study have such self-awareness and utilize it

as a leadership tool. Every leader in this study referred to the practice of self-awareness as an important element in their leadership with many explicitly stating that they learned and began the practice of self-awareness through meditation.

The usefulness of meditation as an effective leadership development tool is also supported by the first finding, that meditation impacts leadership. Many of the participants of this study stated that without the practice of meditation their leadership would be less effective, and that by practicing meditation their leadership has improved. Thus, as meditation has an impact on the experience of leadership, it is also useful tool in development for practitioners here.

Meditation may also prove useful in leadership development with regards to the notion of service. That is, while Schein (1985) states that leaders must have commitment beyond their own self-interest, practitioners of meditation state that service to others is a key ingredient in their leadership. In this way, meditating leaders in this study have developed commitment beyond their own self interest. This service orientation is a primary theme in the leadership of meditation practitioners.

Similarly, scholars state that effective leaders must have trust in themselves without being egotistical (Bennis & Nanus, 1985). In this research, meditation practitioners have developed this leadership quality. One participant, a high performing venture capitalist, for instance, powerfully described how, through learning meditation his volition shifted from that of self interest and greed to a less egocentric, service orientation. “When I started in the banking business my volition was to make a million dollars a year so I can have a great life and vacation houses around the world.” He continues on to say, “Now I am earning money...for my maintenance and my parents’

well being and to give charitable donation.” Through learning and practicing meditation, the intention driving his work has dramatically changed from the ego driven accumulation of money to that of serving others through extensive charitable donation. This specific example represents the findings of this study: meditation served as an effective a tool in leadership development.

Serving as a leadership tool, meditation may be an effective tool for the leadership population in general in the quest to develop leadership. As with the last finding, it may be that individuals with a natural proclivity toward self awareness, intentional action, servicing others, and continual growth are drawn to the practice of meditation and would have reported a similar leadership experience without the practice of meditation. However, the repetitive occurrence of these themes throughout the data strongly suggests that meditation may be useful as a vehicle in developing effective leadership.

#### The Effectiveness of Meditation in Cultivating the Qualities of Transformational Leadership

Finally, leaders in this study, who practice meditation, embody the qualities of transformational leadership. This study began with an exploration of the literature on transformational literature as a valid and researched leadership construct. The study finds that meditation served as an effective tool in fostering the qualities deemed essential in transformational leadership among participants. Sergiovanni, (2006) for example, suggests that transformational leadership is based upon awareness. Awareness is elemental in the leadership of meditators, and all of the participants herein have a developed practice, and language, around it.



Similarly, other qualities of transformational leadership, such as taking proactive, intentional action, are practiced by the participants of this study. Avolio and Bass (1985), state that transformational leaders do not just react to environmental circumstances, they shape and create them, while Tichy and Devanna (1986) suggest that transformational leaders are more likely to be proactive than reactive. Similarly, Kirkpatrick and lock state that “Effective leaders are proactive. They make choices and take action that leads to change instead of just reacting to events or waiting for things to happen.” (1991) The leaders in this study that practice Vipassana meditation clearly embody this aspect of transformational leadership.

While Kouzes and Posner (2002) state that effective leaders thrive on and learn from adversity, participants in this study consistently reported that they value and practice continued growth in their leadership. Similarly, Bass (1985) states that the role of the transformational leader is to change self identities. As leaders in this study suggest, changing identities is one of the primary experiences of meditators. The theme of continual growth, for example, emerged from the interview data. That is, participants are continually growing, evolving, and changing their own identity as leader. One participant put it concisely, stating that he’s “been in the process of evolving and changing and improving for many, many years” (S2).

The dynamic nature of individual leaders in this study is echoed in the way they facilitate leadership in others – facilitating change and growth in the identity of followers. Another participant exclaimed, “I enjoy and it’s fun to help other people grow and succeed...To see other people develop and develop skills as they grow and flourish” (S4). This sentiment was echoed by another who stated that what he enjoyed most about

leadership was creating an environment in which “everyone is growing and learning”(S3). Fostering continued growth and change, self awareness, and non-reactivity, meditators in this study possess the qualities regarded as effective in transformational leadership.

A correlation between meditation and transformational leadership cannot be made here. However, since the participants of this study exemplify transformational leadership, it can be stated that individuals that practice Vipassana meditation in this study, embody the characteristics of transformational leaders. Whether this notion is able to be generalized, that all individuals practicing meditation embody transformational leadership, should be the focus of additional research.

#### Implications

The findings from this study present practical implications. As meditation is found to be effective in developing the skills necessary in transformational leadership, and of leadership in general, leaders are advised to explore the meditation seminar as a vehicle for improving their leadership. Similarly, individuals who are moving into leadership positions, or who are having difficulty in their leadership, are advised to experience a seminar in meditation to in order gain the necessary skills to become a proficient leader. Also, as the qualities developed in the meditation seminar apply to all, not only leaders. Participation is advisable to all that are interested in developing a higher quality of life.

#### Recommendations

Little other research exists regarding the impact of meditation on leadership, thus, the field is wide open and there are many valuable studies that could advance the field of

leadership. One recommendation is to explore the changes in leadership brought about by learning meditation. Conducting pre- and post- seminar assessments could help gain a deeper understanding of the leadership impact of learning meditation. Similarly, comparing and contrasting meditating leaders with those who do not practice meditation would be valuable in developing a deeper understanding of the impact of meditation on leadership. It is also recommended that meditation be compared with other forms of leadership development programs in an effort to gain an understanding of the impact that a course of meditation has relative to other forms of leadership development.

Another recommendation includes exploring meditation practice and economic viability. That is, in knowing that meditation impacts leadership, a study would be prudent that tied the practice of meditation by leaders into an organization's bottom line. How does the pursuit of enlightening leadership impact a company's profit margin?

The field is wide open regarding understanding the impact of meditation and leadership. Advanced knowledge in this regard will be increasingly needed as meditation continues to become more mainstream and more popular.

### Summary

This study utilized a phenomenological research design to understand the leadership experience of Vipassana meditation practitioners. Seven in-depth interviews produced thick and rich data that was recorded and transcribed. Intimate familiarity with the data fostered the emergence of four general themes, or meaning units. These meaning units – the desire for self awareness, the value of acting intentionally, the importance of a service orientation, and the quest for continual growth – were analyzed and synthesized to establish the overall essential essence: enlightening leadership.

This study found that meditation practice directly impacts the leadership of its practitioners, is useful as a leadership development tool, and aids in cultivating the qualities essential in transformational leadership. The conscious, intentional, service oriented aspects of enlightening leadership is tied together by the thread of continual growth. That is, leaders who practice meditation are on the path of leadership improvement by continuously developing higher levels of awareness, equanimity, and service in their leadership.

The practice of enlightening leadership reflects the leading edge in leadership development. As discussed in the literature review, much of the leadership practiced today reflects the mechanistic, reductionistic paradigm lingering from the seventeenth century. While cutting edge leadership thought is beginning to mirror the quantum thinking in science that breaks down the illusion of separateness and casts us all in a net of interdependence, it is still constrained by the parameters of an evolving knowledge base. Research on meditation and leadership is positioned to add new, profound knowledge to the field and practice of leadership, transcending the boundaries of modern thought, and opening the doors to timeless wisdom as a leadership construct.

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## Appendix A: Vipassana Meditation Seminar- Code of Discipline

The foundation of the practice is **sila** --moral conduct. **Sila** provides a basis for the development of **samadhi** --concentration of mind. From a foundation of Sila and Samadi comes the purification of the mind achieved through **panna** --the wisdom of insight.

### **The Precepts**

All who attend a Vipassana course must conscientiously undertake the following five precepts for the duration of the course:

1. To abstain from killing any living creature
2. To abstain from stealing
3. To abstain from all sexual activity
4. To abstain from telling lies
5. To abstain from all intoxicants

There are three additional precepts which old students (that is, those who have completed a course with S.N. Goenka or one of his assistant teachers) are expected to follow during the course:

6. To abstain from eating after midday
7. To abstain from sensual entertainment and bodily decoration
8. To abstain from using high or luxurious beds

Old students will observe the sixth precept by having tea without milk or fruit juice at the 5 p.m. break, whereas new student may have tea with milk and some fruit. The teacher may excuse an old student from observing this precept for health reasons. The seventh and eighth precept will be observed by all.

### **Acceptance of the Teacher and the Technique**

Students must declare themselves willing to comply fully and for the duration of the course with the teacher's guidance and instructions; that is, to observe the discipline and to meditate exactly as the teacher asks, without ignoring any part of the instructions, nor adding anything to them. This acceptance should be one of discrimination and understanding, not blind submission. Only with an attitude of trust can a student work diligently and thoroughly. Such confidence in the teacher and the technique is essential for success in meditation.

### **Other Techniques, Rites, and Forms of Worship**

During the course it is absolutely essential that all forms of prayer, worship, or religious ceremony--fasting, burning incense, counting beads, reciting mantras, singing and dancing, etc.--be discontinued. All other meditation techniques and healing or spiritual practices should also be suspended. This is not to condemn any other technique or practice, but to give a fair trial to the technique of Vipassana in its purity.

Students are strongly advised that deliberately mixing other techniques of meditation with Vipassana will impede and even reverse their progress. Despite repeated warnings by the teacher, there have been cases in the past where students have intentionally mixed this technique with a ritual or another practice, and have done themselves a great disservice. Any doubts or confusion which may arise should always be clarified by meeting with the teacher.

### **Interviews with the Teacher**

Problems or questions regarding the meditation should be taken only to the teacher for clarification. The time between 12 noon and 1 p.m. is set aside for private interviews.

Questions may also be asked in public between 9:00 and 9:30 p.m. in the meditation hall. Interviews and question times are solely for the purpose of clarifying actual practical problems concerned with the technique. They are not to be regarded as opportunities to indulge in philosophical discussions or intellectual arguments. The unique nature of Vipassana meditation can only be appreciated by putting it into practice and during the course students should concentrate exclusively on this task.

### **Noble Silence**

All students must observe Noble Silence from the beginning of the course until the morning of the last full day. Noble Silence means silence of body, speech, and mind. Any form of communication with fellow student, whether by gestures, sign language, written notes, etc., is prohibited.

Students may, however, speak with the teacher whenever necessary and they may approach the management with any problems related to food, accommodation, health, etc. But even these contacts should be kept to a minimum. Students should cultivate the feeling that they are working in isolation.

### **Separation of Men and Women**

Complete segregation of men and women is to be maintained. Couples, married or otherwise, should not contact each other in any way during the course. The same applies to friends, members of the same family, etc.

### **Physical Contact**

It is important that throughout the course there be no physical contact whatsoever between persons of the same or opposite sex.

### **Yoga and Physical Exercise**

Although physical yoga and other exercises are compatible with Vipassana, they should be suspended during the course because proper secluded facilities are not available at the

course site. Jogging is also not permitted. Students may exercise during rest periods by walking in the designated areas.

### **Religious Objects, Rosaries, Crystals, Talismans, etc.**

No such items should be brought to the course site. If brought inadvertently they should be deposited with the management for the duration of the course.

### **Intoxicants and Drugs**

No drugs, alcohol, or other intoxicants should be brought to the site; this also applies to tranquilizers, sleeping pills, and all other sedatives. Those taking medicines or drugs on a doctor's prescription should notify the teacher.

### **Tobacco**

For the health and comfort of all students, smoking, chewing tobacco, and taking snuff are not permitted at the course.

### **Food**

It is not possible to satisfy the special food preferences and requirements of all the meditators. Students are therefore kindly requested to make do with the simple vegetarian meals provided. The course management endeavors to prepare a balanced, wholesome menu suitable for meditation. If any students have been prescribed a special diet because of ill-health, they should inform the management at the time of application.

### **Clothing**

Dress should be simple, modest, and comfortable. Tight, transparent, revealing, or otherwise striking clothing (such as shorts, short skirts, tights and leggings, sleeveless or skimpy tops) should not be worn. Sunbathing and partial nudity are not permitted. This is important in order to minimize distraction to others.

### **Laundry and Bathing**

No washing machines or dryers are available, so students should bring sufficient clothing. Small items can be hand-washed. Bathing and laundry may be done only in the break periods and not during meditation hours.

### **Outside Contacts**

Students must remain within the course boundaries throughout the course. They may leave only with the specific consent of the teacher. No outside communications is allowed before the course ends. This includes letters, phone calls and visitors. In case of an emergency, a friend or relative may contact the management.

### **Music, Reading and Writing**

The playing of musical instruments, radios, etc. is not permitted. No reading or writing materials should be brought to the course. Students should not distract themselves by taking notes. The restriction on reading and writing is to emphasize the strictly practical nature of this meditation.

### **Tape Recorders and Cameras**

These may not be used except with the express permission of the teacher.

### **Course Finances**

According to the tradition of pure Vipassana, courses are run solely on a donation basis. Donations are accepted only from those who have completed at least one 10-day course with S.N. Goenka or one of his assisting teachers. Someone taking the course for the first time may give a donation on the last day of the course or any time thereafter.

In this way course are supported by those who have realized for themselves the benefits of the practice. Wishing to share these benefits with others, one gives a donation according to one's means and volition. Such donations are the only source of funding for courses in this tradition around the world. There is no wealthy foundation or individual sponsoring them. Neither the teachers nor the organizers receive any kind of payment for their service. Thus, the spread of Vipassana is carried out with purity of purpose, free from any commercialism.

Whether a donation is large or small, it should be given with the wish to help others: "The course I have taken has been paid for through the generosity of past students; now let me give something towards the cost of a future course, so that others may also benefit by this technique."

### **Summary**

To clarify the spirit behind the discipline and rules, they may be summarized as follows:

**Take great care that your actions do not disturb anyone. Take no notice of distractions caused by others.**

It may be that a student cannot understand the practical reasons for one or several of the above rules. Rather than allow negativity and doubt to develop, immediate clarification should be sought from the teacher.

It is only by taking a disciplined approach and by making maximum effort that a student can fully grasp the practice and benefit from it. The emphasis during the course is on work. A golden rule is to meditate as if one were alone, with one's mind turned inward, ignoring any inconveniences and distractions that one may encounter.

Finally, students should note that their progress in Vipassana depends solely on their own good qualities and personal development and on five factors: earnest efforts, confidence, sincerity, health, and wisdom.

May the above information help you to obtain maximum benefit from your meditation course. We are happy to have the opportunity to serve, and wish you peace and harmony from your experience of Vipassana.

(Goenka, 2006)

Appendix B: Vipassana meditation Seminar - Timetable (Goenka, 2006)

The daily timetable is broken up into segments to maximize the experience of the meditator. The daily schedule is as follows.

4:00 a.m.....	Morning wake-up bell
4:30-6:30 a.m. ....	Meditate in the hall or your own room
6:30-8:00 a.m. ....	Breakfast break
8:00-9:00 a.m. ....	GROUP MEDITATION IN THE HALL
9:00-11:00 a.m. ....	Meditate in the hall or your own room
11:00-12 noon .....	Lunch break
12 noon-1:00 p.m. ....	Rest and interviews with the teacher
1:00-2:30 p.m. ....	Meditate in the hall or your own room
2:30-3:30 p.m. ....	GROUP MEDITATION IN THE HALL
3:30-5:00 p.m. ....	Meditate in the hall or your own room
5:00-6:00 p.m. ....	Tea break
6:00-7:00 p.m. ....	GROUP MEDITATION IN THE HALL
7:00-8:15 p.m. ....	Teacher's Discourse in the hall
8:15-9:00 p.m. ....	GROUP MEDITATION IN THE HALL
9:00-9:30 p.m. ....	Question time in the hall
9:30 p.m. ....	Retire to your own room--Lights out

Appendix C: Questionnaire

What is your leadership experience?

1. Describe your leadership style.
2. What experiences best prepared you for leadership?
3. What do you find enjoyable about leadership?
4. What do you consider to be the biggest difficulties in leading?
5. What are your strengths in regards to leadership?
6. What would you like to change about your leadership?
7. What are the values and/or practices that inform your leadership?
8. Discuss the impact of meditation on your leadership.





The University of  
**Montana**

#222-06

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**Date:** November 28, 2006

**To:** Kevin Mays, Ed. Leadership


**From:** Claudia Denker, IRB Chair

**RE:** IRB approval of your proposal : "Enlightened Leadership: A Phenomenological Study on the Leadership Experience of Vipassana Meditation Practitioners"

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This study has been approved by expedited review on the date that the "checklist" was signed. You have also been granted the requested waiver of written consent (under federal regulation 45 CFR 46.116(d)). **Approval continues for one year.** If the study runs more than one year, a continuation form must be approved by 11/27/07 or it will need to be resubmitted.

Also, you are required to notify the IRB if there are any significant changes or if unanticipated or adverse events occur during the study. Finally, when you terminate the study, please notify our office in writing so that we can close the file.

  
Claudia D. Denker