

GRACE THERAPY: A NEW APPROACH TO THE TREATMENT OF MALE BATTERERS

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“Grace Therapy” is a restorative approach to the treatment of violent men. It is a new model of therapy for male batterers based, in part, on the philosophy of the 12-step programs which says that, while men might be powerless over their violence, they are fully responsible for their recovery. The basis of this powerlessness is seen as having three dimensions: behavioral, mental, and spiritual. The recovery process is conditional and semi-deterministic in that the men can regain their capacity to make healthy, non-violent choices. This approach is most effective when offered in conjunction with a customary retributive approach. The principles of Grace Therapy are outlined herein.

KEY WORDS: 12-Step program, domestic violence, Grace therapy, restorative treatment, Win–Win

“Love is indeed the highest form of non-violence. It is the basis of all domestic duties.”

“Hatred can be overcome only by love. Counter-hatred only increases the surface as well as the depth of hatred.”

—Gandhi

INTRODUCTION

At different times in history and throughout the many diverse cultures of the world, the violent behavior men exhibited toward their spouses and

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offspring has drawn varying reactions from the society in which these men lived. In current western culture, for example, we see a strong reaction against men who rely on violence as a means to obtain what they desire in their relationships with others. Yet, as we increase our focus on the human psyche and change strategies based in rehabilitation as opposed to retribution, we are alarmed to note the types of methods that are accepted and used in the treatment and rehabilitation of male batterers. Not only does emotional public reaction, mainly through fear and anger, tend to cloud the issues at hand (Gil, 1996) but also the men are subjected to strategies aimed at stopping violence (e.g. Tolman, 1996) that do not reach to the basis of their aggression (Tifft, 1993).

For the most part these strategies include a retributive employment of the law enforcement system, that is, jail and forced therapy which is sometimes carried out in the form of “coerced voluntarism” (Peyrot, 1982). Unfortunately, many of these methods originate from the same logic about the value of control and manipulation that resides at the base of domestic violence. An attempt to respond to the use of power with an even greater use of power, that is, responding via “repressive institutional violence”, denies the social source of the batterer’s violence and the need for a basic transformation in his values and politics (Gil, 1996). Is a power-based response really the best example for these men (Edleson, 1996)? Is it logical to try to heal an abuser with “more of the same” (Watzlawick, Weakland and Fisch, 1979)? Clearly not, for counterviolence is not only another form of social harm but also fails to reach to the heart of the problem.

Our aim here is to describe a new model for understanding the problem of abuse and to offer an original and effective approach for treatment. The model encompasses contributions from many sources: the theory of moral development (Kohlberg, 1981; Kohlberg and Ryncarz, 1990); a belief in the power of unconditional love (Sorokin, 1967); and the spiritual teachings from notable sources of wisdom including the writings of Shlomo Kalo, a renowned spiritual teacher living in Israel (e.g. Kalo, 1997). We have also broadened the basic concepts of the well-known and successful 12-Step program of Alcoholics Anonymous (Ronel, paper in preparation) and applied them to the therapeutic setting thereby creating a change process that is quite different from that of the original self-help groups. The result is an original development that we call Grace Therapy.

Relying on the wisdom of 12-Step programs (Narcotics Anonymous, 1988), and other psycho-spiritual schools (e.g. Frankl, 1985), the Grace Model uses a three-dimensional approach to working with the men who batter: behavioral, mental, and spiritual. The behavioral and mental dimensions

of the Grace Model resemble existing models of treatment, but the spiritual dimension we incorporate gives the model its originality.

This paper, then, focuses on the process of treatment for men who batter through a Grace Therapy approach. It addresses how such violence occurs from the point of view of the men but avoids a linear-causal explanation of the violence (Giles-Sims, 1983). However, we will not deal with the overall dynamics of a couple or family where we often observe a shared contribution to the deterioration of a relationship. While we recognize that in some relationships violent behavior is not limited to men alone, our focus will remain on the violence that the men engage in.

The following description of Grace Therapy for male batterers is based on clinical experience at the Daycare Center for Domestic Violence Treatment and Prevention in Tel Aviv, Israel. This center is operated by Naamat, a national women's organization. Naamat also has a separate program designed for female victims. During the past four years, over 300 men have participated in several Grace Therapy groups. Below are the stories of some of these men and how they began upon the road to recovery.

AN ALTERNATIVE LOOK AT BATTERING

Various existing therapeutic models attempt to confront the phenomenon of men who batter (Tifft, 1993). One widely held model interprets battering to be the result of loss of self control, that is, a man loses control over his rage and consequently displays a violent outburst. According to this model, the solution lies in teaching the men to master their anger. Some further argue that, since violence is a learned behavior, it can be extinguished by learning non-violent and alternative behaviors (Adams, 1988). Supporters of this approach do not necessarily believe that criminalization of the batterer or other retaliatory techniques help reduce the incidence of intimate violence (Eisikovits and Buchbinder, 1996).

Another widely-adopted model interprets battering as men exerting their physical superiority and/or higher social position to control their spouse or significant other (Adams, 1988). According to this model, a reasonable solution is to counter the man's use of power with even stronger retaliatory actions, usually via law enforcement because these men, by their actions, are criminal offenders. The retributive act/s can be accompanied by a treatment that challenges the men's attempts to control. Proponents of this model justify the need for stronger retributive acts by arguing that educating the batterer on how to master his violent behavior (the logic behind the treatment indicated in the first model) is, in effect,

teaching him a new way of exerting control over his wife or significant other (Gondolf and Russell, 1986). How then do we solve this dichotomy?

A plausible answer lies in understanding battering (including physical, emotional, sexual, verbal, and economical violence) as a behavioral symptom resulting from a situation of conditioned powerlessness. Violence is the result of an overall powerlessness that takes over when certain conditions exist. Male batterers are powerless over anger and aggression, over specific thoughts and emotions, over certain inner motives and attitudes, and over the existential understanding and meaning of existence in the world. The lack of control over anger and the wish to take control over their significant other are both symptoms of their inadequacy. Therefore, the understanding of violence as powerlessness in situations where one seeks to exert power is an inclusive interpretation.

Several distinct types of violent personalities can be identified as in the case of alcoholism (Jellinek, 1960). These range from men who can easily change their basic life perception about the nature of relationships and grow out of their violent responses to those men who are so inclined to a violent reaction whenever they face certain circumstances that they need constant, ongoing support. However, the common denominator for all types of batterers is the feeling that they are powerless to control their violent response.

A BEHAVIORAL POWERLESSNESS OVER VIOLENCE

The Case of Shaul and Dafna

Shaul and Dafna are newlyweds. For Shaul, age 37, this is his first marriage. For Dafna, age 27, this is her second marriage. She has a young daughter from her first marriage.

Shaul recounts that, three months into their marriage, he began battering Dafna. On one occasion, he and Dafna were at a party. He wanted to dance with her but she refused saying that she was too tired. A while later she got up and danced with a friend of theirs. Shaul felt humiliated and frustrated. He left the party and went out to his car. Dafna came out after him and they began to argue. She left and he drove away. He tried to calm down but that night at home they continued fighting and he beat her.

Another outburst occurred several weeks later. Dafna went to a women's therapy group and he came to pick her up after the meeting. He noticed that the other women had already come out yet Dafna

stayed in the meeting an extra 10 minutes. He became more frustrated as each minute ticked by, perceiving her delay as a sign of her disregard for him. When he tried to make his point clear during the drive home, they began to argue. When they got home, he hit her. That night they slept in separate rooms. Early the next morning, Shaul came to her wanting to have sexual intercourse to help settle the fight. Dafna refused. Feeling humiliated, he plead with her for just one kiss as a sign of closeness. He begged so persistently that Dafna finally agreed to kiss him "to have some peace." Of course Shaul was not satisfied with the kiss and continued being frustrated for several more days.

Because of Dafna's insistence and, in order to save their relationship, Shaul approached us and joined the men's group. Dafna also entered therapy and realized that she too needed help with her aggressive behavior. After 18 months with us they are doing well together and gladly taking care of their new baby. Dafna ended her therapy but Shaul chose to remain in the advanced Grace Therapy group to continue to work on himself and learn to deal with issues other than violence.

This scenario about violence is representative of many men in our groups and we can understand it by using a conditioned powerlessness approach. On the behavioral level, we see that almost every time Shaul argued with his wife, the argument ended with him battering her. He described to the group what he was experiencing during this time; he said he suddenly felt like everything in front of him was black and he reacted by hitting her. While Shaul wanted to stop his violent behavior very badly and not be swept away by his anger, he rarely succeeded. For him it was not a question of will power. It was a conditioned powerlessness over his reactions.

When a batterer experiences a certain chain of events, he loses control over his behavior; his circumstances control his conduct. Without intervention, this behavior may become increasingly worse over time and the level of violence might escalate. The escalation of his negative response includes, but is not limited to, physical violence. Furthermore, knowledge of sure and even severe consequences for one's behavior does not seem to be a deterrent. We have witnessed many men arrested and paroled on the condition of not repeating their transgression yet, as soon as they are faced with their trigger chain of events, they slide back into a destructive cycle. Fear of consequences does not stop the recurrence of their physical outbursts.

So what is going on? Do we release the batterer from responsibility due to his conditioned powerlessness? How can Shaul, and others like him,

assume responsibility for their violent behavior? Clearly, we see Grace Therapy as a means to this end.

Fundamental to the principles of Grace Therapy is the understanding that Shaul is fully responsible for his behavior. Since he cannot stop the ruinous progression from occurring, then it is his responsibility to avoid the situation altogether. This means that he must abstain from the "causative" situation in much the same way that an alcoholic must abstain from taking a drink. In Shaul's case, during the initial stage of his recovery, he had to abstain from arguing with Dafna since, during an argument, the situation always escalated to the point where he lost control. This sounds deceptively simple but Shaul and others in his situation are unable to accomplish it easily. Although Shaul knows precisely what to abstain from, well understands that abstinence is his responsibility, and knows that he can improve his marital situation through abstinence, he cannot quite get to that part of himself which is able to make the right choice and follow it. Frequently, when Shaul is around his wife, he is tense and violence has a pseudo-relieving effect on him by providing a false mechanism to relieve the tension. Because he is driven to this behavior by his mental situation against his declared wishes, we identify this state as mental powerlessness.

MENTAL POWERLESSNESS OVER VIOLENCE

Anger and the repertoire of unadjusted thinking and emotions that lead to violent actions (Clow, Hutchins and Vogler, 1990) follow patterns of thought that are clearly identifiable. At their core exists a detrimental system for contending with a flawed view of the symmetric or comparative balance within relationships (Bateson, 1971), termed the principle of Win-Lose. Win-Lose operates inside a relatively closed system that is separated from its social environment by inflexible boundaries (Giles-Sims, 1983). Relationships based on Win-Lose contain an implicit expectation that each partner will support and nurture the other's sense of self (Tiftt, 1993). They are also based on the belief that a finite measure of physical, mental, or existential gratification exists within a closed system and that people must compete for it ("My gain is your loss and your gain is my loss."). This attitude creates a perceived mutual dependency where each person's gain or loss is perceived to be dependent on the other's share of the pot. The male batterer typically builds his intimate relationships, and frequently other relationships as well, based on this Win-Lose perception of life. As is the case of Shaul, he feels he is losing when Dafna is not

at hand (e.g., she is late when he is waiting for her), and falsely interprets this as an action intentionally carried against him.

Let us postulate three main considerations that the men perceive as measures of gratification and which shape most of the content of the mental dimension we have been talking about. They are: control and respect; wealth and anxiety over property; and hedonism. While at the heart of the violent experience we find false perceptions (Ferraro, 1988) and distorted emotions (Eisikovits and Buchbinder, 1996), these three motives serve as the content of the emotional conflict and the perception.

The motive of control and respect is very much characteristic of the male batterer (Tifft, 1993). Losing control is equated with losing honor and/or self-respect and is deemed a disastrous, demeaning event to the self. Any attempt toward independence by the partner is a perceived loss of control to a man who sees only two alternatives, win and lose. Either he is in full control or he has lost, meaning that existentially he himself is lost. The threat of being lost leads to a situation of powerlessness and the man is driven to re-gain control by any and all means, including extreme violence. In an attempt for control, "battering behaviors and tactics are intended to change who the partner is" (Tifft, 1993, p. 22), that is, from a threatening agent into a controlled one. One man openly shared with our Grace Therapy group after it was revealed to him that he was a tyrant in his home:

She always says that I am frightening her and the children, but I thought that she only wanted to control me. So I did not let her. I could never see it as it probably was, that I was the one who was trying to rule everything around me.

A social aspect of the motive of control and respect is the perception that different rights exist for the two genders principal among which is that men have authority over women. This perception lies within "the context of hierarchical power arrangements that refuse women the tools for self-development" (Tifft, 1993, p. 13). Many male batterers hold to this notion. It legitimizes controlling behaviors and the hedonistic demands of men from women. Our continuing experience reveals that this thinking is deeply rooted in the cultural background of many of the men in our groups. Cultural legitimization of masculine control is often a crucial step towards the construction of the mental state of violence. However, this is but one among several factors.

The motive of wealth and anxiety over property operates in the same fashion. If the man's desire is for wealth and property, then he perceives

anything that threatens it or stands in his way as an existential threat. Lying at the core of the quarrel between Shaul and Dafna was a financial conflict. It turns out that Shaul owned the house they lived in for many years before he met Dafna. He considered it his own property and feared that, if they broke up, Dafna would try to take it away from him out of either greed or a desire to hurt him. The local Israeli culture emphasizes the importance of owning your house hence, in marital breakdown, it is a main point of conflict. Shaul's case is thus representative. At the same time, Dafna also mistrusts Shaul when it comes to property. Mutual mistrust is the underlying cause of many of their arguments; however, in reality theirs is not really a financial issue. It is an existential issue based on a Win-Lose threat and says nothing about the actual financial situation of the family. When they consulted a mediating lawyer, it was revealed that their actual financial conflict was minor and bridgeable. The male batterer perceives fights as necessary since he feels he has no other way of dealing with the existential threat (Ferraro, 1988). Therefore, Shaul's powerlessness had nothing to do with his actual financial situation but was based on a deep mistrust of others and an existential anxiety over property and wealth.

The third motive underlying the exercise of power is hedonism. Hedonism is the wish for pleasure and gratification, convenience, comfort, laziness and the wish to be served. A threat to hedonistic desires is also an existential threat and leads to an escalation of and increase in violent outbursts. In one group meeting, a man claimed that his wife was lazy and did nothing around the house. After a brief investigation into the situation, the group revealed that this "lazy" woman was actually in an advanced stage of pregnancy and at risk of losing the baby. Her doctor ordered her to rest and stay off her feet. Her husband, somehow, could not understand this. He expected to be waited on at home and felt that her rest was his loss. Since his hedonism is the focal point, guided by the Win-Lose principle, it blinded his perception and distorted his emotional state. As a result, he became powerless and acted accordingly.

A major existential threat concerning the motive of hedonism is that of sexuality. Most male batterers we have worked with perceived their sexual drive as a need, something that must be satisfied. For the batterer there is no connection between the overall relationship with his wife or significant other, her subjective situation and his wish to be sexually satisfied. Accordingly, when he is sexually driven he sees any "resistance" as an existential threat to a basic need, an attempt to deprive him of his "natural right." Many men confessed that a refusal to have sexual intercourse led to violence and/or forced intercourse. Most of them never perceived this act

as it really was, a rape. Instead, they saw their behavior as an attempt to keep their natural gain, and maintain the equilibrium. In one meeting a man confessed that he used to deprive his wife, who had a much lower income than his, of funds for the household. When she refused his advances for sexual intimacy, he used to offer her money. On many occasions she accepted the offer, and the man “purchased” his gratification. In the same vein, several hours after battering his wife, Shaul became aroused and could not understand Dafna’s unwillingness to be intimate. Here again we see how the motive of hedonism distorts a batterer’s perception leading to a state of powerlessness.

The three motives (i.e., control, anxiety over property, and hedonism) rarely operate alone, but usually work hand in hand. The motive of control joins with the motive of hedonism when Shaul’s sexual advances toward Dafna are rejected. In the example of the man who purchased sexual services from his wife, the motive of anxiety over property led to extremely tight-fisted behavior and joined with that of control and hedonism when he was sexually aroused.

Together or apart, these motives can be traced in the cognition of the men, and we can see how they operate in the Win-Lose competition. A Win-Lose competition inevitably leads to a constant struggle to achieve a better position, meaning more gains and fewer losses. The strategy of the struggle is characterized by an “other-orientation.” This means that the man is concerned with measuring the other’s achievements and attempts to reduce or eliminate them as much as possible. It is a symptom of the perceived mutual-dependency on the common allotment and serves as a key factor for analyzing the man’s condition or improvement. The more concerned he is with “her,” the worse his condition becomes. Many male batterers with an other-orientation build their lives around the life of their wife or significant other. They gradually isolate themselves and their spouse from the external world, using the isolation as a tool to take more control in the relationship and deprive their partner of any external means of control. The isolation serves to keep the system stable, hence ensuring the men’s advantage and reducing the threat of a loss.

The other-orientation is typically manifested in the extreme possessiveness and jealousy that many male batterers experience. When Dafna danced with another man, Shaul’s jealousy led to suspicion and aggression. It also led him to find strategies for avoiding the existential danger and to put stipulations on Dafna’s free-time (e.g., driving her places instead of letting her go by herself, following her, etc.). In one meeting a man shared that his wife used to be his “little girl”, totally dependent on him. They spoke several times everyday on the telephone “just to make

sure that everything is OK.” He would not allow her to be out without him guarding her:

She is just like a girl, my girl. She can't manage by herself. People can take advantage of her childlike naiveté and abuse her. You can never tell these days how things can happen.

After twenty years, the wife rebelled against his restrictions:

I don't know what's wrong with her. When she was my baby, everything was fine. Now everything is wrong. She says she is not a girl and never was in our relationship. She wants to go out by herself, to spend time with her friends. We don't need it! If something happens, even if I only suspect something is happening, I will kill her. That is it! That is the only way to deal with it. She can go, but even if we separate, she will never have another man in her life. Never!

Consequently, when this man's strategy to control his wife's actions failed, he had an extremely violent outburst. He declared his wishes to kill her and their children and ended up turning his violence on himself by cutting himself with a sharp broken bottle: “So she can feel the depth of my pain. She caused it!”

Partners usually achieve a balance for using the perceived limited source of the common allotment for gratification. This balance is manifested within the family division of labor and decision-making arrangements (Tifft, 1993). Nevertheless, when the balance is disturbed, like with Shaul and Dafna—when a challenge to the assumed or accepted understandings that underline these arrangements arises (*ibid.*)—one partner becomes threatened by a potential loss and may react radically to avoid that loss and to reassert the reality of the arrangements. Shaul felt a loss of control whenever he argued with Dafna. She always won in a verbal confrontation. In these situations, although he felt he was in the right, he could never convince her. It was a loss of perceived respect and control, which he could not allow. Out of the threat of a loss, and from an uncontrolled desire for relief, Shaul, with his other-orientation at work, attacked Dafna whom he falsely perceived to be the cause of his loss. The result was that after several outbursts, their marital situation became worse and his loss increased. His wrong and unadjusted attempts to gain based on a Win-Lose perception led him to experience a Lose-Lose situation, that of “rock bottom.” Because of their reciprocal competition (Shaul's part was described herein; Dafna acknowledged her own mistakes as well) both Shaul and Dafna reached a state of constant mutual loss.

The period of Lose-Lose can be a turning point. Like other male batterers, Shaul has no other choice but to find a better way to cope, which represents a different order than the one he knows. The Grace ideology of inner change offers the men such an order by encouraging them to follow a different model, the Win-Win model. However, before we describe that model, which is based on the spiritual perception of the Grace Therapy approach, we must deal with the spiritual dimension of powerlessness.

THE SPIRITUAL OUTLOOK ON POWERLESSNESS

We regard the spiritual dimension as the place where a person identifies his or her faith, meaning of life, and attitude toward the world. It is at this level that the roots of a batterer's powerlessness take hold. It is precisely the level at which conditions for the Win-Lose principle are created.

In the spiritual dimension of a person experiencing a Win-Lose sense of powerlessness, the key words are self-centeredness and egocentrism. We consider self-centeredness to be a spiritual disorder. A self-centered man is one who attempts to "play the role of God" in his life (Alcoholics Anonymous, 1976), and in the lives of others, and especially in the life of his significant other. It is the common denominator of various manifestations of violence. When one's self interest is the motivator, spiritual powerlessness is awakened, which can then activate further levels of powerlessness. In general, we can describe male batterers as extremely self-centered men whose most frequent motivation is the satisfaction of their own needs. As we will see, self-centeredness is the source of the suffering experienced by the individual, which in turn leads to a violent response.

In an extreme egocentric state, a man is fully self-absorbed, perceiving himself to be of central importance in any given social situation. He is overly sensitive to his own suffering. To him the main function of others in life is to fulfill his needs and desires. He will do whatever he needs to avoid suffering and to satisfy his hedonism. His relationship with others becomes conditional and limited to perceived gain-loss calculations and their corresponding reactions. If there is a gain, there is a positive phase to the relationship. If there is a risk of loss, or if an obstacle to achieving the promised gain exists, then he must defend himself.

In this state of mind, a man does not see and respect people as autonomous beings, but depersonalizes them and views them like objects (Denzin, 1984; Tifft, 1993). Typically, he ignores their subjective and human existence. The further he sinks into this abyss, the more superficial his relationships become.

Consequently, feelings of loneliness and isolation exist within the phenomenology of the man as part of the violent experience (Eisikovits and Buchbinder, 1996). Those feelings, amplified by the man's self-absorption, are experienced as existential suffering. Although unpleasant, it allows him to neutralize his own behavior (Sykes and Matza, 1957) and the suffering he inflicts on others. When he has an outburst, his victim becomes an object, one that he must shape so he can get better results from it. As the person who is being objectified may threaten, shaping "it" by hostility is justified by his drive to survive in what he now sees as an unjust world. For example, during the separation of her parents, a young girl became the key issue in their conflict. The man felt that, with the help of the authorities, his wife unjustly succeeded in depriving him of his daughter. He became so outraged that, during an outburst, he threatened to kill his wife and then himself. He saw nothing but revenge. His egocentricity rendered him incapable of feeling the suffering that his daughter and others would experience as a result of what he was planning to do. Several days later, when he was calm and understood the incident as a dangerous relapse, he confessed that during his rage he felt nothing but his exaggerated emotions and the wish to satisfy them. He said:

Even if my beloved mother tried to stop me, I wouldn't see her. I could push her away and even kill her if she tried to stand between my wife and me. I was so blind[ed] by rage!

The existential picture is more complicated because, in the midst of such suffering, the man becomes attached to the objects which promise him gain or loss. The spiritual dimension is the place where he can make a choice out of free will. However, the more powerless he is, the less able he is to experience free will. The more a man is bound to his egocentrism, the less he is able to make choices, and the less responsible he feels for his own behavior. He feels forced into the behavior by the external situation. His perception is influenced and interpreted by motives of mental powerlessness. He actually feels like the victim in the situation and the relationship. He has lost any sense of independence because he is trapped in a semi-deterministic process of powerlessness. It is an experience of the meaningless of life, of existential emptiness. Because of his extreme egocentrism, he feels loneliness and emptiness. As he tries to fill this emptiness with superficial rewards, the process continues and his emptiness and sense of isolation increase.

RELEASE FROM VIOLENCE

According to the principles of Grace Therapy, a man can find the answer to egocentrism and self-centeredness when he is free to make new choices;

when he is free to assume responsibility for the mental and behavioral dimensions of his own existence; and when he is free not to give in to his power-based self and, paradoxically, end his experience of existential suffering.

The process of recovery has two parallel directions, which the “recovering” person can take simultaneously:

- To gradually redirect his life away from a self-centered existence into what has been described as a “God-centered existence” (Miller and Kurtz, 1994). Although one may initially confuse the idea of God-centeredness with formal religion, we attempt to avoid such a confusion by adopting AA’s concept of “God as we understand Him” (Alcoholics Anonymous, 1976). This conception has been easy for most of the men in our groups to accept. The philosophy imparted to them is that of a loving God (as they understand Him[sic]) who does not punish or force. Our pragmatic suggestion of letting God into our lives on an “as if” basis was also found to help release the common resistance to this idea.
- To begin living a life centered more and more on unconditional care, exhibiting concern and giving to others, especially his wife or significant other. The person may take this direction independently from the one above, or as an actualization of it. It is an adaptation to a Lose–Win principle of life, when a person is prepared to give up his or her own gain for the benefit of another. An unconditional Lose–Win is actually experienced as a Win–Win principle, where the man perceives another’s gain to be his own gain as well.

When a man ceases playing God and gives up the wish for control (Kalo, 1997), his craving for power and authority must be channeled appropriately or he will revert to his old behavior. As he transforms his attitudes towards others, and works toward learning to give of himself unconditionally, his former feelings of separation vanish. The more he learns to experience others, the less he becomes able to rationalize and neutralize the misery that he inflicts on them, he is increasingly motivated to pursue the process of recovery. Changing a belief system and life long pattern is hard. It means tearing down unhealthy methods for coping that have been in place for most of a lifetime. Grace Therapy provides the men with direction and support during their journey to inner healing.

The spiritual transformation that is described here is a shift from a Win–Lose model to that of a Lose–Win model. The Lose–Win model is based on a principle of partnership and relationship, where the man works to provide the other partner (instead of himself) with benefits. He no longer perceives of his wife or significant other as an opponent, but as a close and intimate ally. He is content with her gratification.

Clearly the Lose–Win model entails letting go, (i.e., a person lets go of his desire to control, his anxiety over property, and his hedonistic desires). Instead of fostering a mutually dependent condition, the Lose–Win approach brings about a sense of independence. It is the path for becoming closer, of ending the struggle and the trade. The tension from constantly being on guard is replaced by a growing sense of trust.

To illustrate, Avi and his wife Rose are immigrants from Iran to Israel. Their cultural background places strong emphasis on extended family relationships. On one occasion, Avi called his group leader in distress. There was a wedding party on “her” side of the family and Rose wanted Avi to join her. Avi did not want to go because Rose did not join him in “his” family gatherings. Reciprocal attendance at family functions was a heated issue for them and they fought over it constantly. Neither would budge. The situation became volatile. In this case, a strict Win–Lose principle led to mutual dependence and ultimately to a Lose–Lose experience of endless conflict. Avi, of course, was sure that he was right and wanted his group leader to become involved and help him argue his case—a typical attitude. However, the group leader was not as sympathetic to his cause as Avi had hoped, indeed recommended a different way out of the struggle. First, he advised Avi to end the artificial division of “her” family affairs and “his” family affairs that was at the heart of their Win–Lose competition, and instead, to adopt the concept of “our” family affairs (regardless of Rose’s actions). Next, he encouraged Avi to act autonomously, independent of her actions (a Lose–Win act). This meant that Avi had to give up complaining about the past based on the dependent other-orientation. He was to go to all family functions, even if Rose did not go to “his”. Because Avi grasped the importance of autonomy in his life, he was able to follow the advice offered and the long-standing argument between him and his wife soon disappeared.

But what happens when the man steps out of his egocentric pattern, is ready to lose for his mate’s gain and, instead of being faced with a W–W situation, winds up with the opposite—a wife or significant other who responds to his gestures with greater demands and hostility? Our experience shows that, while this is a threat perceived by most men, it rarely occurs. However, unfortunately it does happen. It usually happens when the relationship is so deteriorated that it is virtually impossible to renew it or when the spouse is also an abusive person and is unwilling to change. This is a complex predicament, but under such circumstances, Grace Therapy does not direct men into continual forced sacrifice. When this happens, it is clear that the relationship should end. When he is sure that he did his best and has become relatively free from his former mutual

dependency through Lose–Win acts, he becomes stronger and better able to end a wrong, unhealthy relationship while maintaining relative calm about it. The failure of the Lose–Win intention is not really a failure but a process of empowerment that enables the man to stand on his own two feet.

Obviously, a moral transformation occurs when we “let go and let God” be our source of unconditional caring. It is a change from a morality of extreme self-centeredness, (the first level of moral reasoning according to the cognitive-developmental school), to one that is contrary to first level morality (Kohlberg, 1981). The moral reasoning suggested by Grace Therapy is the highest moral reasoning possible. It is a judgment of good and bad based on love in the sense of agape (Kohlberg and Ryncarz, 1990) stemming from a faith in God. Such a morality fosters personal autonomy because it is based on an inner interpretation and reasoning instead of the expectation of an external outcome. The good is that which follows the principle of justice, but which also gives way to unconditional care and a willingness to lose gratification for another’s gain. How can men who are themselves victims of extreme self-centeredness accept such a tremendous shift? Before answering that, we must look into how we attract batterers who are willing to participate in self-transformation therapy.

HOW DO THEY COME?

Unfortunately, a serious limitation to our voluntary-based approach to treatment is the lack of initial motivation on the part of most men to participate in a therapeutic group. Although these men might experience significant suffering, they usually attempt to deal with the problem alone. When difficult situations arise, they place the blame on their partner, their partner’s family, and their financial situation. They do not conceptualize the situation as being caused by their own actions.

Usually, if changes are to take place in their lives, the changes are initiated through some form of external intervention. When everything around these men crashes, their relationships are threatened with collapse or the law enforcement system becomes involved and then, and only then, are they ready to consider changing their view of the world. Since the woman’s (and family’s) suffering and safety are of prime consideration, motivation to change needs to be built quickly and may require a strong driving force such as intervention via law enforcement. It is not uncommon for a run-in with the law to be the prime motivation for batterers to make an initial effort to change. This moment can be used positively to support him in building a solid motivation to change (DiClemente, 1993;

Miller and Rollnick, 1991). However, since the initial motivation is based in forced obedience (Pepinski, 1997), and not in a recognition of wrongdoing or in feelings for another's suffering, the motivation quickly dies out. Nevertheless, during that fragile moment when a man is agreeable to contemplate the possibility of change, Grace Therapy groups can step in. This is a time in a batterer's life when he needs more than threats; he needs an outstretched hand to welcome him and offer him support.

The Case of Simon and Rena

To illustrate this point Simon, a member of one of our groups, confessed that he was violent with his wife Rena and others as well. Rena tried on several occasions to get help from the police but each time they came to the house they only gave Simon a warning so his violent behavior continued unchecked. During his last outburst, the police were called again. Rena asked the officer not to arrest him; she explained that he was a suffering person, not a criminal, and needed therapy. Nevertheless, this time Simon was arrested. Was it right to arrest Simon? It seems that there was no other solution. When the only consequence for his actions was a warning, he continued being violent. He himself confessed that they were lucky that the police came on that particular day because he was so mad at Rena that he might have killed her.

However, what were the results of the arrest? At the beginning of that long night in jail, Simon was busy planning his revenge. Rena put him in prison and she would pay! A simple Win-Lose pattern of logic in the fight for control and respect. However, fortunately for Simon and Rena there was another man in jail to whom Simon told his story. This man helped Simon realize that Rena did not put him in jail without cause. She had done so because of the endless suffering he had caused her by his violent behavior. For Simon this was a turning point, a time of empathy (Pepinski, 1997); for the rest of the night he contemplated the meaning of his violence. He experienced deep sorrow and remorse. Not long afterwards he came to see us, joined our group, and did enormous inner work based on his insight (W-W work). He no longer feels or exhibits any violence towards Rena.

But, what would have happened if Simon had not met this man that night? He might have come out of jail and carried out his revenge as many men do. Alternatively, he might have come out of jail obedient but filled with resentment. This relationship would then have deteriorated further causing additional suffering to the partners and everyone around them.

As stated earlier, a retributive system gives quick but partial solutions based on a Win-Lose principle with a motive of control similar to that exhibited by the batterers themselves. An arrest that offers a solution to the problems at hand is far more inclusive and can be said to be radical because it is more effective. Fortunately Simon met someone while in jail who served as a "restorative catalyst." As such, this man initiated in Simon a Lose-Win process.

But what about all the men who are incarcerated and who are not fortunate enough to meet someone like this man? For them, the justice system has to create a forum to help individuals get to the root of their violence. A probation officer may serve as such an agent and our Daycare Center cooperates regularly with the Probation Service. About one third of the men that we work with were sent to us by probation officers. Although legally the men may refuse the referral, their cooperation with us assures them a better position in court, which usually leads to a "second chance" instead of imprisonment. In place of retributive punishment, they receive a chance for restoration. It is a social Lose-Win principle in action and it has saved many families.

Another point to consider is the questionable motivation of a man who enters treatment because he is threatened with being imprisoned if he does not attend the program, or is threatened with separation by his wife. We regard this type of "forced motivation" as a promising starting point. The man may perceive the situation as coercion, but our emphasis on voluntarism diminishes such a perception greatly. In the very first encounter with a man who comes to us, we seek to create an atmosphere that welcomes participation. For that reason the man understands that it is his own decision to join the group. We never seek the men out or convince them to stay. Instead, we offer them an alternate point of view whereby they understand that they are coming to us because of their suffering. Their decision to stay is actually the least painful of the available choices. It is an opportunity for them to face and overcome their suffering. In one instance, a man recently approached us because his wife put pressure on him to do so; he told us in his first group meeting that he had joined us conditionally, that is, he would stay only if his wife joined the parallel women's group. After several veterans of the process shared their experiences with him, he realized that being part of the group was a privilege that could benefit him greatly. He knew he was suffering because of his destroyed relationship; he knew he had much change to undergo; and he knew that becoming part of the group could have a positive effect on his marriage as well as his own mental state. He was motivated to become part of the Grace Therapy process.

GRACE THERAPY GROUPS AT WORK

Since we are part of a treatment agency, our intent is not to punish the men who come to us or to attempt to control their behavior or force them into change. This would be an institutional misuse of authority and power (Gil, 1986; Shamai, 1996) and a perpetuation of the same destructive behaviors the men exhibit when trying to force change on, or gain control over, their significant other. "If the logic of criminalization reinforces the acceptability of control and the exercise of power, then the logic of an approach to ending violence must negate power exercise" (Tifft, 1993, p. 133).

Grace Therapy, therefore, seeks to be a model of its own teachings. Within the Grace Therapy Group, a social structure evolves that carries a message of non-violence via the non-violent principles of voluntarism, acceptance, forgiveness, and non-invasive communication. Grace Therapy attempts to lead the participant into a willingly-given commitment to non-violent values, which are self-controlled rather than externally-controlled. This approach has proven to have a more lasting influence than punishing deterrence (Davis and Anderson, 1983; Etzioni, 1997). The group provides an environment where men can experience "battle free" relationships. For many, it is their first experience within a caring relationship and draws them into being part of a community. They experience a strong desire for self-change which motivates them and produces a yearning for increased closeness and intimacy. It can help them overcome their fears and feelings of being threatened and eliminates their desire to control others.

At the Naamat Daycare Center for Domestic Violence Treatment and Prevention, where our Grace Therapy groups operate, we structure the groups in a way that counters the mental structure that justifies the use of violence. Our aim is to end physical abuse, to eliminate any threat of violence, and to liberate the men from their hostility. It is not to teach them to control their rage, but to experience freedom from anger, which is a prerequisite for leading a nonviolent life. We are aware that this is a direction which most programs do not take (Edleson, 1996). We also know how difficult it is to fully achieve this aim. However, following Kohlberg's distinction between the "is" and the "ought" (1981), we promote a goal which leads the men towards the "ought," a W-W goal, giving direction to their struggle for recovery.

As already indicated, the group's structure, processes, and contents foster personal change based on the principle of W-W. Because this social ethic differs at its core from that prevailing in society (an ethic based on Win-Lose) many participants experience a period of confusion early on in the process. Edleson (1996) questions whether it is proper to expect male batterers to achieve goals that go far beyond what most men in society set

for themselves. Our experience is that most of our members consider being part of the group a privilege rather than a burden. The men see that the growth process gives meaning to and enhances the quality of their lives, far beyond what they have ever experienced. So what is the nature of this unique process and how do we create it?

At our Daycare Center, we operate several ongoing groups that are open to new members. We currently have three parallel groups all following the Grace Therapy approach. Each group meets once a week. The number of participants in each of the groups fluctuates between three and ten men (ten being the maximum) depending on the number of men in therapy at any given time. One of our basic principles is to immediately accept the men who come to us. They never have to wait for a new group to begin. As the groups reach their maximum number, we either allow the extra participant to join an existing group, or we open a new group with the aid of a few veteran members (two or three) who volunteer to leave their group and assist in constructing a new one. The immediate acceptance of a newcomer into a group is sometimes enough to assure him of our sincere wish to help him. We are there when he needs us. He can trust us. It is a factor found to have a lasting effect on most men.

It needs to be pointed out that there are no admission requirements that a man must meet in order to enter a Grace Therapy group, and most of the men who come to us do enter the group process. A "therapeutic" contract is actually a Win-Lose agreement and we attempt, to the best of our ability, to avoid any Win-Lose situation between the group's leader and its participants. We try to provide the men with an active W-W principle; hence there are no declared limits within the group except that each respects his and the other participants' voluntarism. There are no sanctions in the group and our experience reveals that, within the Grace Therapy context, sanctions are never needed.

Customarily, leaving the group is a decision jointly made between the man and the group leader. There is no official graduation from a Grace Therapy group. Usually the men stay in the group anywhere from three months to two years or more, depending on the need.

Clearly, in an ongoing group, a newcomer will meet veteran participants. This has a strong effect on both role-takers as is the case in self-help groups (Ronel, 1998). Veterans help newcomers with their transition into the group and serve as models and agents of recovery. From this process, the veteran members benefit as well. Newcomers help them to remember how they began their recovery and to where they can fall if they relapse. By taking on the role of assisting the new members, the veterans gain the many benefits of helper therapy (Gartner and Riessman, 1977).

Establishing a Grace Therapy group that has a moral atmosphere of the highest calibre (Ronel, in print) is a long process. Grace Therapy groups carry a message with values and norms of behaviors that represent a different order than that of the everyday life of the participants. As indicated, the role of veteran participants in creating and maintaining such an order is crucial and by welcoming newcomers to the group, the moral atmosphere stays alive. But, while those entering an already existing Grace Therapy group are immediately exposed to its moral atmosphere, they find that assimilating the basic principles of Grace Therapy, even partially, usually takes a considerable period of time.

The sessions begin with a short moment of silence to help the men focus and concentrate on the group's purpose. After the silence, the group leader usually encourages those who feel an urgent need to share, to begin talking about their issues. The ensuing discussions typically center around the everyday problems which caused the men tension during the previous week. In a given session, it is not uncommon to hear confessions about harmful behavior, complaints about the behavior of one's spouse, or a success story about assimilating Grace principles into their lives. The group session may include a circle of sharing so that each participant can talk about his own situation. However, when warranted, we focus on a few participants' incidents. In addition to the spontaneous sharing of participants, the group leader sometimes presents educational teachings along with several exercises (explained in greater detail below). The bottom line is to maintain flexibility so as to meet the needs of the participants.

Within the group, the men understand that nothing is expected from them. If a man chooses to share his story, the others listen and may ask a question or two to help him fully understand his situation. In cases when a newcomer is suspicious of the group or the process, or questions his need to be in such a group, the group leader may ask several veterans to talk about the resistance they experienced upon first entering a group. This helps put the men at ease and gives them additional opportunities to open up. During his introductory period in the group, the newcomer is encouraged to listen to his peers or to tell his own story, but he is instructed to avoid judging others in the group until he learns the group's unique language and principles. After several weeks, when a new group member feels more at home, the group leader or fellow group members can help the newcomer learn the group's "ideology" by examining his situation. This only happens if he is agreeable to it. Consequently, the sharing of stories by the group's members the leader's educational explanations, and an integration of the Grace ideology with the men's stories helps build the group process.

A new group member becomes open or bonded to his group when the group process somehow touches his own suffering. When the group addresses the issue of personal suffering, it exposes a new motivation to change in most men. For example, one man shared with his group that he was experiencing extreme jealousy toward his wife. To his surprise, instead of criticizing him for such feelings, the group responded with empathy. The feedback he received was that it seemed his obsession over his wife was too weighty to carry around with him all the time. It monopolized his life and robbed him of his peace of mind. Such a response helped him to see the same situation in a new light and to recognize that his jealousy and obsession were "the real enemy," not his wife. With the recognition came a great release and he conceded that he could benefit by being a more integral part of the group.

As we already mentioned, Grace Therapy groups are easily accessible to most men. Accessibility to the group continues throughout a man's stay with us, as well as after he leaves. Members of the group are encouraged to call the group leader whenever they need to. We tell them to raise the receiver before they raise their hands or their voices. The men can call us at any hour of the day or night, during workdays, weekends and even holidays. Although this sounds like a heavy burden for the group leader to carry, it is actually not. The men rarely abuse this right. Most night calls, and there are quite a few of them, originate because the caller was in a real need situation. For example, a group leader received a telephone call just before midnight from a man who had a huge fight with his partner. He felt powerless and recognized that he was quite close to a violent outburst. He could not deal with it alone so immediately he called his group leader. His awareness of his predicament and the subsequent telephone call, were enough to pull him out of the pit. The conversation calmed him down to the point that he could make peace with his partner. He later confessed that, if he had not had the option to call, he might have lost control and become violent.

Similar to self-help groups (Kurtz, 1997), a Grace Therapy group is an educational environment in which a man learns a different view of himself, of partnership, and possible solutions to his handling conflicting situations. The content of this educational process is the aforementioned Grace Theory of Violence. One of the methods we found most effective in imparting solutions according to this theory is the use of easy-to-remember stories or word pictures. For example, to illustrate the behavioral dimension of powerlessness, we draw a junction of two roads. One of the roads is a dead-end. Once the man turns down this path he loses his breaks and it is almost impossible for him to stop without crashing into the wall at the end

of the street (i.e., a violent outburst is almost unavoidable). The men learn to recognize this dead-end road (i.e., this situation that leads to violence), and to turn away from it. As the man reaches further stages in the recovery process, he will learn to recognize these potentially explosive situations sooner and hence travel a shorter and shorter distance down the dangerous path, and eventually avoid it altogether.

Silent exercises of contemplation also help to carry the Grace Therapy message. The leader directs the men to concentrate on a suggested theme comprised of one or two words such as "absolute purity." The men assign their own meaning to the word or words they are focusing on, although it is nearly always associated with their understanding of God. This helps them focus above the level at which they are used to operating and helps them rise above their initial emotions and reactions. Many men effectively carry this exercise into their everyday lives and use it in a positive manner. One man discovered, for example, that his wife was beating their son. His first reaction was intense rage. Then he remembered the analogy of the dead-end road and decided to turn away from it to avoid the inevitable crash. To help himself alter his instinctive response, he began concentrating on "absolute purity." He calmed down, was able to behave rationally and dealt with the situation successfully.

In guided-imagination exercises, the group leader directs the men to a silent self-examination structured around the Grace message of recovery. The men quietly contemplate their own conduct and attitudes in different situations, both violent and non-violent, without sharing the results. During one such exercise the men watch themselves grow angry from within, identify with this anger, and then gradually move aside to look at themselves more objectively. Finally, they are able to watch the situation from the eyes of the other person they are confronting who is usually their partner.

If this kind of therapeutic process is to reap maximum rewards, the group must encourage all its members to speak freely and openly about their inner pain and perceived troubles. Because all share their pain in some way, the meetings combine education, as described above, with a cathartic experience sensed by both the sharer and the identifying audience. The men learn and experience Grace Therapy principles through discussions about their everyday experiences and the interpretation of those experiences according to Grace Therapy understanding. It is proven that these types of social discussions have a stronger ability to influence the moral development of the participants (Higgins, 1991). The more "cases" the men are exposed to, the more they practice Grace Therapy principles and are able to assimilate them into their lives.

A note should be made here about the interaction of the men with society. As we have already said, Grace Therapy groups create a moral or ethical atmosphere that is much different from that of the prevailing society. This difference is acknowledged in the group process and the men learn how to overcome its consequences in their everyday lives, as well as where to look for reinforcements that support, not oppose, their new direction. Only when the men learn how to recognize and avoid social influences that negate their new direction can they become independent. Most men do not fully succeed in this and need ongoing support in order to “recharge their batteries” as they say. Unfortunately, no such support mechanism currently exists and so our next assignment is to establish one.

While we were preparing this paper, we asked a number of men in various groups how they viewed the main properties of the Grace Therapy process. They agreed that one of the most prominent features of participating in Grace Therapy is the changing of the priorities in their lives. They said that before entering a group their major goal was to gain gratification, but now their priority was to correct themselves. In the struggle for self-correction, a man is ready to lose in order to gain the wished-for transformation. It is a paradoxical Lose–Win shift where, out of a wish for self-improvement, a person is ready to give up his self-centeredness. His primary orientation toward others, then, is no longer egocentric but spiritual. But this is a deep, true, and complete transformation that only a few men have gone through, slowly and step by step. As one man shared with us:

One year ago I defined myself as an atheist. Here I learned a new view. Today I can willingly say that I am a believer. My faith is not something that is removed from my everyday life. It is a part of it. This means that in situations where I used to be anxious, these days I have an awareness that says ‘act correctly and everything will be all right!’ So I examine myself, act properly, and feel a calmness that I never felt before. Things that were a frustration not so long ago are much different today. And this knowledge makes me feel even better. If I choose correctly, I can now overcome past impulses.

CONCLUSION

In our contemporary society, where materialistic success is the supreme measure of value and competition is an accepted norm, the principles of Grace Therapy provide men who batter with a different world view and the means to actualize that view in their daily lives. If they succeed in

assimilating these principles and transforming their own world view (Ronel and Humphreys, 1998–89), society has gained more individuals who relate to others personally rather than according to prevailing materialistic norms which promote and reward objectification. The Grace therapy process is a micro social change and, through immersion in this process, a person soon realizes that all change begins not through the exercise of power or control, but by self-transformation. The Grace Therapy process demonstrates that people are not forced into violence by their own nature but are capable of relating to others through non-violent, caring, and supportive means, that is, with love (Gil, 1986). We can see how a self-transformed man who chooses the non-compromising morality of Grace Therapy is actualizing Ghandi's words of non-violence (Settel, 1995): "Mankind has to get out of violence only through non-violence." (p. 78).

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Biography

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