

Why We Shouldn't Become Assassins to Defend our Honour and Get Justice by Killing Bill

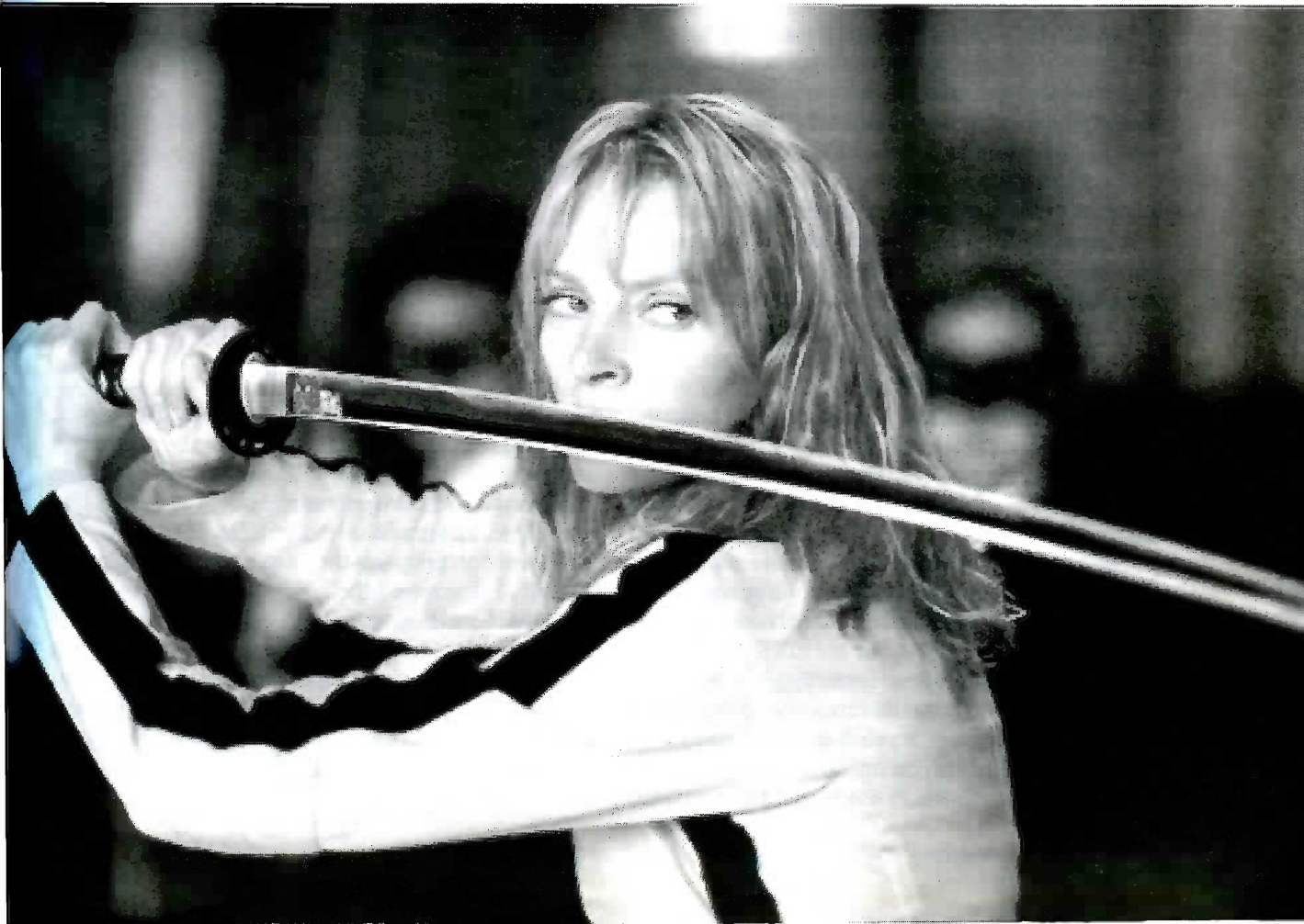
By Marianita 'aka' "Girlie" Villariba

Women who have power are women breathing and loving.

I am writing this article for women who want to experience power and live inspired lives. I share my reflections as a woman discovering the female body and meditation practices. I will not examine culturally composed images of women from political angles, but will touch on how the movie industry constructs perceptions of female bodies, and imposes values and

standards, such as being attractive, ugly, beautiful, undesirable, or sexy.

This piece will end with a brief introduction to a spiritual practice for women and men, young and old. I will share a specific body and meditation practice that can ease the burden of women and help protect their integrity. Hopefully, I will take you to a less-traveled road to health and peace of mind, where power begins with mindful breathing and being fully alive.



Flashback to the Fifties

I was born in the fifties, right after World War II, and my parents were war survivors. My father and my mother were orphaned early and sought to build a big family. They produced 13 offsprings, and I am the eldest daughter. My father was sent to New York as a scholar at Columbia University to earn his -doctorate in education in the fifties. When he came home with an American doctorate, our upbringing had begun to be partly influenced by American values and standards.

Very early, as a five-year-old, I watched Hollywood movies and amused myself with fantasy films. My first fascination was with stars like Doris Day, Rock Hudson, Audrey Hepburn, and Sandra Dee. I copied their fashion and attitude. My body image was based on what they wore and how they used it to marry their millionaire-husbands. Alas, I was Malay looking—petite, brown, with uneven teeth and pimples. Looking at the fashionable women featured in elite society pages, I felt downright homely. Nevertheless, I had a rich imagination and a determined attitude.

I made many friends and continued enriching my mind and body. I joined dance troupes and learned all the folk dances and latest dance craze. I could dance nimbly on a wooden bench and on clapping bamboo poles, and even do the limbo rock. I asked my mother if she could afford to send me to ballet school. But having 13 kids was a heavy responsibility, and ballet school for a small-town girl was out of the budget. So I just danced with my fantasies, inviting kids in my neighborhood to watch my dance improvisations.

School...and Activism

At 16, I got accepted at the University of the Philippines in Diliman. My journey into body beautiful was difficult. I had gorgeous classmates, straight from elite finishing schools. The sorority girls were the *creme de la creme*. I wanted to belong, but I did not come from a *buena familia*—an old, rich and beautiful family. So I focused on psychology, and I discovered Filipino psychology. I no longer craved for a Hollywood image. I was *mujer indigena*! A native woman coming of age.

By the time I finished college in the early seventies, the peace movement and the hippie generation were on the rise. I plunged into youth activism and joined activist groups. The fashion image was simple—jeans and t-shirt. In fact, the more one looked like a peasant

or worker, the better. No *bourgeois* look. No make-up. No perfume. No jewelry. Sandals or slippers were in. In the Philippines, this proletarian look was the dominant left image among intellectuals and activists. But during recruitment of students, the men still sought beautiful fair-skinned girls from exclusive Catholic schools. So I wondered why leftist men had rightist organs and preferred Hollywood trophy wives and lovers.

...what is particularly dangerous—especially in this West-Hollywood reign—is the image of killer beauties being promoted...It is this lethal combination of women who are sexy and who kill without compunction, remorse or regret that is being sold to young women all over the world...That is the message of films, of cartoons, of fashion, of commerce: A culture of sexy evil.

In the years of the dictatorship in the Philippines, 1972 to 1986, so many women were drawn to activism and became a force in the social movement. Within this period, I became a feminist, looking at myself as an advocate of humanist feminist philosophy that valued women for who they are and for why they are women. I discovered the *babaylanes* (women priests) and the heroic women of the colonial struggles. I debated with various groups of men and women, taking a pluralist democratic stance. I sought beautiful images, but the standards were based on indigenous and Asian norms. I went ethnic in dressing and was proud of my Malay bearings.

Sexy and Violent Power

In the course of combining my roles as woman, sister, lover, partner, and mother, I discovered various facets of my womanhood. I realised that to condemn class rule and dominance was relatively easier, as compared to the danger in challenging patriarchy. Even within the social movement, being a feminist was difficult.

Powerful men, both in the traditional and progressive circles, would praise women for expanding their circles of influence but would delegate repetitive and boring tasks to women whom they treated like servants. The women had to work doubly hard to break the glass ceiling. From the start, I saw men in the upper echelons marry trophy wives (fashionable, rich and intelligent). Unfortunately, these women became unhappy with their marriages, and many divorced their husbands. Some became feminist and sought to be free of the restrictions of their sex and class.

As I focused on being a Malay woman, I realised that image and power as mediated by media is the domain of struggle I wanted to study. Up to this age, we are still bombarded by beauty contests, formal and informal. At the age of two, my daughter started asking me how pretty she was, and she became more preoccupied with her image every year. The standards of beauty have been dominated by the West for centuries, and in the twenty-first century, it is still Hollywood that reigns.

But what is particularly dangerous—especially in this West-Hollywood reign—is the image of killer beauties being promoted, typified by the *Kill Bill* assassins, and the women agents like Sidney of *Alias* and *Charlie's Angels*. This lethal combination of women who are sexy and who kill without compunction or remorse is being sold to young women all over the world. It is not enough to be a beauty queen. Since society is dominated by powerful males who prey on beautiful women, one has to be good at killing and getting retribution. That is the message of films, of cartoons, of fashion, of commerce: a culture of sexy evil.

To rob cultures of their heritage and disable anyone in competitive pursuit is Lara Croft of *Tomb Raiders*. To spy on a nation and assassinate leaders

is Sidney's task in *Alias*. To use the latest information technology is the Chinese path of revenge in *So Close*. Women assassins of *Kill Bill I* and *II* are the rage, with Uma Thurman and Lucy Liu exhibiting their *samurai* skills and acrobatic combat moves as champions of evil and good. These women are able to decapitate hundreds of Japanese men. Thurman is impressive in using *kung fu* to break through a coffin and rise from the grave.

I must admit that the image of women combining Eastern and Western ways of fighting can be fascinating. It takes revenge to a higher level, and women who have been violated or subjected to torture and rape can be drawn to these images of women power.

But is it not a culture of death that is being propagated in films, masquerading as entertainment? Examining all the images spawned by commercial movies, we see that most of the women characters are raped, and revenge is the solution. Law and order are no longer the source of resolution. Respect for institutions that honor life above all is eroded.

Indeed, there is greater danger in the violence advocated in women's resolution of crisis. Any man who has wronged a woman will find his due *karma*, and the way for a woman to get revenge is to be as lethal as the man. In her film, Jennifer Lopez trained herself to fight so she could take on her abusive husband *mano a mano*. But the movie industry has also realised that films that use the formula of revenge appeal to the wallets of moviegoers. Hence, there is the frequency of films about women banding together to assassinate a serial rapist-killer or who interpret the law according to the harsh rules of the jungle.

But are we powerless as women, left with no choice but to accept the reality of violent resolution? How can we end abuse and murder?

Breathing and Loving

I have reflected on why I read novels and watch movies where women fight. I am drawn to the spirit of women who rise above suffering and whose strength and courage enable them to get justice. But in the course of studying violence, I have also come across spiritual practices that promote non-violence and overcome obstacles to "enlightenment."

One such indigenous practice is the Eastern inner energy cultivation and therapy. It is a 500-year-old discipline developed by the Sufis and Islamic masters. One such school is the *Tetada Kalimasada* started in Surabaya, Indonesia. The Indonesians studied various meditation practices, martial arts and traditional healing. In all these, they realised how powerful the breath is when in harmony with a Higher Mind, and they sought to develop it. The inner power is called *tenaga* by the Indonesians, *prana* by the Indians, and *chi* by the Chinese.

In my meditation research, I have experienced the power of breathing during meditation, especially when infused with loving thoughts of God. The specific “triangular diaphragmatic breathing techniques” I learned in *Tetada Kalimasada* allow me to generate energy and direct it to any part of the body.

This power principle of using breath is dramatised in the fist technique that Thurman used in breaking the coffin and rising above the ground in *Kill Bill*. It is part of the five-finger-technique used in killing Bill in that film, who gets tapped in five points and dies of a heart attack after taking five steps. The fighting scenes in *Kill Bill* may be full of special effects and stunts, but the principle of *chi* is real. The intent to defend oneself from harm by using *chi* is a principal lesson. One must note, however, that the movie failed to show that the way to learn the art of fighting is not by becoming a slave to a master but in meditating actively to achieve harmony in life. You do not become a killing machine by employing *kung fu*. You become a student, a loving being, a person whose breath and spirit is in harmony with the Higher Being. By being in unity, the person becomes flowing energy and can accomplish one’s mission of healing people.

Women Masters

It is the image of spiritual women masters—powerful women whose mindful breath can lift objects, whose breath can heal wounds, whose breath can sense both positive and negative thoughts—that I am drawn to. There are such women, and they are very alive.

One example is Ibu Ida Surohadi, master and head of the international instruction of *Tetada Kalimasada* from Surabaya, Indonesia. I am in awe of this woman, a doctor and an expert of *pencat silak*, the Indonesian

martial arts. She can match Lui’s skill for organising an army for she has a hundred thousand students all over the world. She can meditate in the North Pole without a coat, conduct *jurus* (synchronised movements) barefoot and in cotton attire without freezing. She can walk through a path of live coals under a canopy of fire and not get singed or burned. She can scan fruits being sliced 10 meters away. But most of all, she is a master in inner power cultivation and has sought to teach many how to achieve harmony in one’s life.

Ibu Ida is beautiful and kind. Her husband Pak Eddy Surohadi, grand master and founder of *Tetada Kalimasada*, recognises Ibu Ida as his equal. There is no contest between the two, and they have no need to use violence of any sort to resolve issues.

Another example is Chatsumarn Kabilsingh who embraced the Buddhist tradition and is serving as head of the Buddhist *bikkunis* (nuns) in Thailand. I met her as a sociologist in 1995 in the University of Thailand. Chatsumarn studied the Buddhist religion and its precepts, and undertook the research in places where the Buddha lived and taught. She introduced me to Buddhism and taught me active meditation. At the peak of her professional career as a sociologist, she dedicated her life to becoming a Buddhist *bikkuni* and spiritual leader. She divorced her husband and gave her children their legacy. Her life is one of unconditional love for being and in the service of *dharma* precepts. It is her daily meditations that enrich the lives of people in her temple and those who reach out to her.

Spiritual Practices: Breathing and Meditations

If I were to recast the women in *Kill Bill*, I would choose Lui first and portray her as overcoming her trauma (in the movie, she witnessed the rape and murder of her mother) by choosing the path of courage and not of criminality (she later became a gangster in the movie). I would put her under the care of women like Chatsumarn and Ibu Ida to learn the discipline of developing inner strength and energy. She will practise daily to wield her breath like a *samurai* sword and cut through the layers of ignorance and deceptions. She will develop her courage, and take a stand against injustice and oppression by living according to the precepts of a loving, peaceful, life-honoring community.

The most important element in our daily lives is cultivating the breath and directing it to keep us inspired. Breathing is drawing hard and soft energy to create a force inside and around us that makes action in synch with everything. To energise oneself is a powerful antidote to disease and a guaranteed protection from harm.

In my daily practice of *Tetada Kalimasada*, I start the process by acknowledging there is a powerful source of life. I call this "God" and I offer every breath I take from God. As I do my breathing, it is organised into inhaling for 15 *dzikir*, pressing and holding my breath in the abdomen for 33 *dzikir* and exhaling for 15 *dzikir*. *Dzikir* is Indonesian term for remembering God. This practice is the triangular diaphragmatic breathing, and it activates the human bio-electric generator. Such breathing increases the hemoglobin level, reduces the destruction of cells, massages the abdominal cavity, and activates the parasympathetic nervous system.

This breathing technique is combined with alpha concentration (where the brain is relaxed with 7 to 14 hertz) and can do wonders to one's consciousness. I stress that the whole practice is a package, complete with synchronised movements and progressive relaxation, but I will not write here about the full discipline. It is sufficient to say that there are cultures in the East that have created ways of being, using peaceful and loving disciplines that enable women to gain power over violence and suffering.

Breathing and Achieving Ease of Living

I underscore breathing because it is key to achieving and sustaining good health in daily life. It is free and does not need any equipment except your body. It is awesome when flowing and can be a healing force. I myself have healed many aches by directing my breath to painful muscles and nerves.

When I started the meditation practice called *duduk nafas* (breathing while seated similar to yoga), I was surprised to learn afterwards that I could feel my breath in my hands, in my legs or in any part of my body. It was like touching a warm water balloon, or like a rubber ball that expands like a band as you gain more breath. When we were told to use it to charge a light bulb so it will not break, I was delighted to see how an inanimate object could absorb my energy and

then bounce like a ball.

The most immediate effect of a regular practice of *kalimasada* is ease of living and mindfulness. I am menopausal and was about to end my fertile days of ovulating. But now I am still a regularly menstruating 54-year-old woman. Gone are my hot flushes, the rheumatism in my knees, my fatigue and emotional rollercoaster episodes. I am as organised, creative, compassionate and inspired as I was 36 years ago when I embarked on my journey as a young woman in love.

Speaking of partnerships in life, my husband Ed and I practise *kalimasada* together. The effect of practicing *kalimasada* together is increased energies for us for working as a team and in renewed vigour for loving and expressing it. We both draw delight in being overtly affectionate and are both comfortable with our maturing sex lives.

As a special tribute, let me express my gratitude in this article for my teacher Mars Robosa, called a *pelatih* in the *tetada kalimasada* institute, who can do wonders with his breathing energy by pressing and holding it in his abdominal cavity. He can find lost objects. He can heal by remote sensing. He can shield himself from harm and can lasso with his breath any one snatching his mobile phone. His patience is praiseworthy, and his discipline in teaching is full of loving kindness. There are many things he can do by "intent"—as we call it in directing the breath. I often ask him why and how that is possible. The answers will be in another story, and, hopefully, the readers of *Isis* will want to learn more about inner energy cultivation as a paradigm and a path to achieving personal and social power.

Let me close this article with our opening and closing greeting at our *tetada kalimasada* sessions: *Salam. Peace. Hope.*☺

(Note: The basic body and meditation practice described in this article is learned through demonstration and guided practice of at least 10 sessions.)

Girlie is a sociologist who practise babaylan work—the indigenous ways of remembering and honoring personal and community wellness. she is busy gathering bouquets of remarkable lives and presenting them in ways where common people can claim them as part of their legacies.