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## Domestic Violence Survivor Uses Meditation to Build a New Life

By *Sophie Braccini*



Mojgan Kaviani in her home Photo Sophie Braccini

Mojgan Kaviani greets her visitors with warmth and grace before inviting them to sit in her living room where tea will be served, along with the pastries she made herself. Far away from her native Iran, Kaviani has reconstructed a life for herself and her two children, part pastry chef and part meditation instructor. She says it is meditation that gave her the strength to leave an abusive marriage. She now shares her knowledge locally and with women seeking refuge in shelters.

Twenty-two years ago, as Kaviani lived within the confines of her unhappy marriage, a friend of her family invited her to meet someone who might be able to help her. Kaviani had no idea of who that person was or what was going to happen, she just trusted her friend. "I was invited to sit down by this man from India," she recalls. "He said I'm giving you a tool to get to know yourself, how you use it is your own choice."

Kaviani never asked his name and never saw him again. That person taught her transcendental meditation.

"He gave me a mantra," she says. "It is something that has a specific vibration, just for you to start the journey inside and detach yourself from the outside. It does not necessarily have a meaning. I don't know how he came up with this mantra, but it does not matter. Because it started changing me from inside."

Gradually Kaviani stopped looking for everybody's approval. "I was using the combination of praying, visualization, imagination and using my mantra; that's what my meditation was made of." She believes the process gave her the strength to leave her husband and her country, with her children, and venture to the United States.

Kaviani started working at the Bank of the West in Orinda then held different jobs, but when she went to visit one of her nieces, who is a baker living in Paris, she started her pastry training. Family and friends began asking for more of her sweet creations. "I love it," she says. "It's like another form of meditation for me." She holds a cottage license for her company, From Moj With Love, and she sells her products through Facebook.

Then another opportunity presented itself, one she believes was a miracle. A year and a half ago, as she was planning to attend another class in France, Kaviani received an email from the Deepak Chopra Center telling her that she had been randomly selected to spend a week there. "I felt this was the place where I belonged," she says. "I owe everything to meditation, and this place was calling my name." When staff at the center heard her story, they offered her a scholarship to become a certified Primordial Sound Meditation instructor. It was arduous study, with a lot of reading, analyzing, writing and presenting, but she succeeded. "I was married at 18 and never

studied, and suddenly I was becoming something," she says. It was arduous study, with a lot of reading, analyzing, writing and presenting, but she succeeded. "I was married at 18 and never studied, and suddenly I was becoming something," she says.

One week before her finals, she received an invitation from a friend to attend a luncheon for the nonprofit Stand for Families Free of Violence. Kaviani now regularly teaches meditation in transitional homes for women in Contra Costa County.

Kaviani also teaches meditation in Lamorinda and believes that meditation is a way to access the inner self; it is irreversible, and once it is learned, it cannot be forgotten. "Who we are has nothing to do with who we are socially," she said. "I think there is more to life than meets the eye."

Kaviani will offer an open group meditation at 11:30 a.m. March 26 at the Lafayette Library, and a class starting at the Lafayette Community Center on Thursdays from 6 to 7 p.m. April 14 through May 19. She also offers meditation classes on Wednesdays in her home. For information, call (925) 286-4434.

### Assembly Bill to Fund Support for Domestic Violence Victims

Assemblywoman Catharine Baker of District 16, which covers Lamorinda, is supporting legislation that funds programs for victims of domestic violence. Assembly Bill 1399, which allows an individual to designate on his or her tax return that a specified amount in excess of his or her tax liability be transferred to the California Domestic Violence Fund, was passed by the state Assembly at the end of January. The Assemblywoman says that domestic violence can happen everywhere, but that programs helping victims of domestic violence have faced a significant funding shortfall in recent years. "I'm thankful my colleagues in the Assembly agree that action must be taken," she said. AB 1399 now goes to the state Senate for consideration.

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[back](#)

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