



## **MINDFULNESS MEDITATION**

### **Supporting us in Qigong practice and daily life**

*(Gerald Seminatore, Long White Cloud Qigong instructor)*

**THE TAKEAWAY.** A regular meditation practice can support and deepen resilience and wellness—as well as make our Qigong practice stronger. Many Qigong meditation practices (“internal arts”) emphasize directing the flow of energy with the mind. Those techniques are generally meant for regular practitioners who have strengthened and enlivened the “center” or “dantien.” However, some teachers may introduce fundamental Qigong and mindfulness meditation techniques during a moving (dynamic) Qigong practice session.

Of course, Qigong can be powerful with no specific reference to meditation. And traditional Qigong meditations differ from “mindfulness” meditation. We do not need to meditate to practice Qigong—nor do we need Qigong to meditate and practice mindfulness. But one practice can support the other in powerful ways.

## **CONTEXT AND TOPICS**

As we continue to adjust to changing circumstances in this era of pandemic, many of us are feeling stressed, uncertain, or anxious. And many of us are directly experiencing the impacts of the pandemic in our family relationships, jobs, social lives, and faith

communities. There are political and societal concerns and tensions that have been thrown into sharp relief. Many are asking what we might do to find a sense of balance, both in our own lives and in our communities.

As Qigong practitioners, we also know that attempting to minimize or ignore stress can have serious implications for our physical and mental health. In these challenging times, we have an opportunity to again take up or re-invigorate wellness practices that both energize the body and calm the mind. In this way, we can take care of ourselves—and find some strength and clarity to take care of others in our lives.

Of course, the primary activity of the SQC teachers group is to promote the practice of Qigong—through teaching, encouraging, and leading by example in the community. We often describe Qigong as “moving meditation”—but what does this mean?

When we move in Qigong, we aspire to be be mindful and aware of our movement, of our breathing, and our intention. Practicing awareness in Qigong has some clear parallels with the practice of seated (or standing) meditation and mindfulness practices. For some folks, past attempts at meditation may have seemed foreign, challenging, or unsettling. Certainly, our reactions to any type of mind/body training should be recognized and acknowledged. But sometimes, we just need some encouragement to investigate techniques that fall outside of our normal routines or comfort zones.

Here are a few common misconceptions about mindfulness and meditation.

**Meditation is physically rigorous—when I try it, I feel discomfort or even physical pain. So it’s not for me.**

It is true that some meditation styles (and teachers) emphasize silence and long periods of sitting without moving. But this is by no means universal. And we don’t expect ourselves to to climb a mountain before we are comfortable walking up a hill.

When we practice mindfulness, we are cultivating awareness of our body and thinking while sitting, standing, walking, and lying down. We aren't training to run a marathon!

A “mindful” walk in the woods and 30 or 60 minutes of seated meditation on a cushion or chair are not the same thing. Yet if our intention is clear and awareness is present, either activity is beneficial—and in the *doing*, our conceptual differentiating between the two activities fades into the background. We can be mindful while gardening, while driving, while cooking, while cleaning, and while talking with others. And of course, while practicing Qigong!

In fact, moving Qigong practices provide an excellent foundation for seated meditation—as the dantien and body grows stronger, our ability to sit and center our awareness without discomfort can also grow stronger. For some of us, seated meditation presents no particular challenges. For others, cultivating stillness can be physically challenging. Dynamic Qigong practice may help transform difficulty and effort into ease and flow—and then we are ready to sit down and meditate. There is no one size fits all prescription in this respect. So we investigate, experiment, and identify practices and techniques that allow us to become more aware of our own physical condition, thought patterns, and life situation. If we gift ourselves with a regular and consistent practice, things usually become easier on their own accord.

Ultimately, mindfulness meditation poses a few basic questions—and the answers are right there if we only look. What are we doing now, in this moment? Where is our attention and focus? Close your eyes—or just let the eyes relax. Take ten deep and mindful breaths, without applying effort or strain. Notice how it feels to inhale and exhale. Notice the other sensations in your body. You have just done a short mindfulness meditation in the present moment!

**When I try to meditate, I can't stop thinking—so it doesn't work for me.**

If we begin meditating with an agenda—to become blissful, to stop thinking, to heal trauma, to become more productive, or to feel connected to a higher power—then we are likely setting ourselves up for disappointment. A core principle of mindfulness meditation is that there is “nothing to do, and nowhere to go.” If our present reality is a busy or distracted mind, then meditation helps create some space to see our mind as it churns out one thought after another. If our reality is a sense of sadness or anxiety, then mindfulness can create some space for us to see that clearly. Through mindfulness, we can begin to transform those emotions simply by paying attention to and accepting them without judging ourselves. Meditation is not something we have to be “good” at, and it’s not a self-improvement program. But with some practice, we may discover unexpected improvements in different areas of our lives—often in ways that surprise or delight us.

Fundamentally, mindfulness is an attitude about how we want to live our lives. Do we wish to be attentive to our own wellness and emotions? Do we wish to be more attentive and compassionate to ourselves and others? Do we want to enjoy what life brings—even it’s not necessarily what we think we want or need? Mindfulness can help us become clear about our agendas, intentions, and habit energies. It can help us more fully appreciate what it means to be alive—and help us detach from a sense of dissatisfaction when our daily experience isn’t everything we might wish for.

### **Meditation conflicts with my religious beliefs.**

People of faith aspire to live by the teachings of their respective traditions. And most faith traditions have forms of meditation. In the West, some of our contemporary meditation “gurus” have trained in Eastern traditions with distinctive cultural or historical roots. Yoga and its meditation techniques came to the West via India—and is influenced by the Hindu history of the subcontinent. Vipassana (“insight”) meditation was imported by Western students who traveled to study in countries such as Burma, Thailand, and Sri Lanka. And of course, some Asian teachers also came to the West and began to teach. Zen Buddhism comes to us via China and Japan, where it was

historically connected to temple practice centers, monks, and nuns. Contemplative meditation and prayer has been part of monastic Christian life for centuries. If we consider the intellectual and creative roles that religious communities have always played in different cultures, it is no surprise that contemplative practices flowered in those settings.

Contemporary mindfulness practices aspire to transcend the cultural and religious histories of any particular style of meditation. In mindfulness meditation, there are no dogmatic, doctrinal, or religious beliefs that need to be accepted—or rejected. Mindfulness simply invites us to re-discover our awareness and the richness of our senses. It helps us recognize thoughts and thinking patterns that usually are operating just under the surface of our habitual attention (or lack of attention). In some cases, it is these very thinking patterns that are producing stress, anxiety, and illness in our lives. Mindfulness meditation offers the possibility of calming our minds, relaxing our bodies, and inviting a sense of joy and ease into our lived experience. Once sensed and appreciated, this awareness and insight can support you as you walk the spiritual paths of your own faith tradition.

### **I don't have time for meditation.**

We all have the opportunity to set priorities for health and wellness, each and every day. Mindfulness meditation does not need to be a big project—even 15 minutes a day of meditation, done regularly, can yield real benefits. Or even 5 minutes, as you set your intention for a moving Qigong practice session, finish up a yoga workout with some gentle rest, or consciously notice your surroundings while out walking the dog. If we truly feel we don't have time to care for ourselves with intention and mindfulness—well, that might be a clear sign that something needs to change.



## **MINDFULNESS RESOURCES**

**(Online courses, print, e-books, or audiobooks)**

### **LINDA recommends**

Jon Kabat-Zinn's *Mindfulness for Beginners: Reclaiming the Present Moment and Your Life*. Dr. Zinn is the founder and director of the Stress Reduction Clinic at the University of Massachusetts Medical Center. His video talk *Nine Attitudes of Mindfulness* surveys principles informing MBSR (Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction) in clinical care and daily life.

Pema Chodron is a widely read author on the topics of mindfulness, meditation, and compassion practices. She is an "Acharaya" (teaching nun) and scholar in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. *When Things Fall Apart: Heart Advice for Difficult Times* is a particularly penetrating book written for the general public.

### **TRICIA recommends**

***The Palouse Mindfulness course.*** This is a complete online course in MBSR (Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction). The course is designed to span eight weeks, but it can be completed at your own speed and convenience. Best of all, it is free, which means that the only thing you need to invest up front is some time to investigate the course activities and topics.

### **GERALD recommends**

Tai Chi and meditation teacher Stephen Procter had made a comprehensive set of mindfulness training videos and resources available at his [Meditation in the Shire](#) website. *MIDL (Mindfulness in Daily Life) 15 Minute Meditations* links to a YouTube playlist of several 15 minute guided meditations. These are grounded in fundamental aspects of the “Insight” mindfulness movement in the West.

An excellent guide to the topics of mindfulness and meditation is *Mindfulness in Plain English* by [Bhante Henepola Gunaratana](#). He is a monk and scholar in the Theravadan Buddhist tradition—but is writing for a general audience. Jon Kabat-Zinn (mentioned under “Linda Recommends”) calls this book a “masterpiece.”

### ***Finally, a note about meditation apps...***

Mindfulness practices are intended to help us see the sources of distraction and fragmented experience in our lives. Many (most?) of us have strong habit energy associated with the use of smartphones and other kind7s of screens. Certainly, these technologies can connect us in the virtual world, and offer many benefits. Yet far too often, they also disconnect us from our immediate experience of the people and the

world around us. (In fact, they are engineered and designed to do so.) Organizing a regular mindfulness or meditation practice through the use of smartphone, tablet, or desktop computer may present a built-in conflict to your attention.

For this reason, we are not recommending any particular app on any platform. There are myriad meditation apps and timers. If you need one to help support your mindfulness practice, then by all means, check out a few. We aren't saying you shouldn't use one—they can be helpful. But, if you do use one, do so mindfully!