



Meditation Primer

Found in cultures, spiritual traditions, and disciplines throughout the world, meditation is a mind-body practice with many forms – all of which are grounded in the silence and stillness of present moment awareness, “Meditation is simplicity itself. It’s about stopping and being present. That is all.” said Jon Kabat-Zinn. An analogy can be made with a radio dial. The static represents the countless daily thoughts and sensations that preoccupy us. Meditation is the tool that fine-tunes the dial (the mind) so we can experience balance and harmony in the midst of the many changes happening around us.

Forms of Meditation

- *Filling the mind*. Direct attention toward a word, sound, image, prayer, object, or the breath.
- *Emptying the mind*. Focus on nothing. Allow thoughts to come and go and focus only on emptiness.
- Meditation while *sitting* (zazen)
- *Movement* meditation

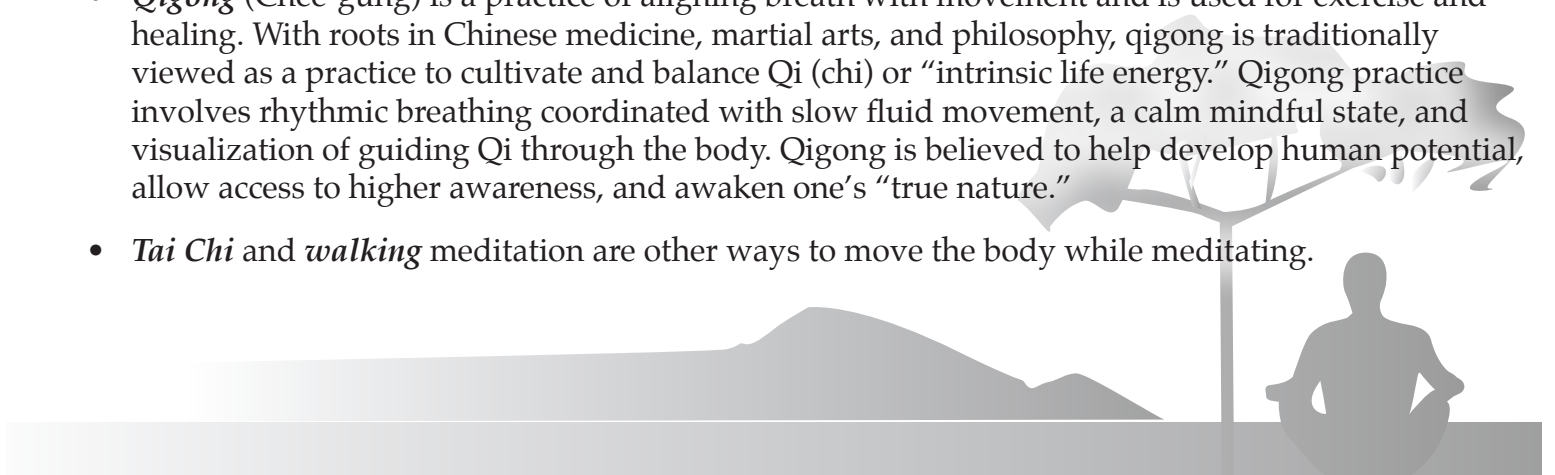
Why meditation?

Scientists have developed tools to see what goes on in the brain when we meditate. Frontal lobe, parietal lobe, thalamus and reticular formation all respond to meditation. Meditation has a positive effect on the following neurotransmitters in the brain: dopamine to increase pleasure, serotonin to improve mood and sleep, norepinephrine for alertness, and endorphins to decrease pain. Meditation has also been shown to improve physical health. Meditation thickens the cerebral cortex which is responsible for decision making, attention, memory, concentration, and creativity. Meditation also shifts activity in the prefrontal cortex from right to left hemispheres. The right prefrontal cortex is associated with a more negative disposition and the left prefrontal cortex is linked to greater enthusiasm, more interests, greater ability to relax, and a happier mood.

Movement Meditations

Some people find it difficult to sit still for a sustained period of time and prefer to move while they meditate.

- *Yoga* – UW-Platteville and most communities offer yoga and relaxation classes. Yoga DVDs are available at most libraries and short video clips are available on YouTube or other Internet sources.
- *Qigong* (Chee-gung) is a practice of aligning breath with movement and is used for exercise and healing. With roots in Chinese medicine, martial arts, and philosophy, qigong is traditionally viewed as a practice to cultivate and balance Qi (chi) or “intrinsic life energy.” Qigong practice involves rhythmic breathing coordinated with slow fluid movement, a calm mindful state, and visualization of guiding Qi through the body. Qigong is believed to help develop human potential, allow access to higher awareness, and awaken one’s “true nature.”
- *Tai Chi* and *walking* meditation are other ways to move the body while meditating.



Suggestions for Zazen

Sit in a quiet and comfortable place. Choose a time each day to meditate. Wear loose, comfortable clothing. Allow the mind to settle into the present moment, become still and receptive. Focus on breath. Watch every thought come and go, whether it be a worry, a fear, an anxiety. When thoughts occur don't ignore or suppress them but simply note them, and use your breathing as an anchor, imagining thoughts leaving your mind with every exhalation. If you find yourself getting carried away in your thoughts, observe where your mind went off to, without judging, and simply return to your breathing. Remember not to be hard on yourself if this happens. Don't fight or push thoughts away simply accept them and quietly let them go. Try to stay present rather than thinking about the past or the future. To remain present it may be helpful to remember to utilize all of your senses and answer the following questions: I hear __, I see __, I feel __, I smell __, I taste __.

The following are some examples of focused meditations that can be incorporated into your practice during or after you have spent time in meditation. They may also be helpful to improve relationships.

Loving Kindness Meditation

*May I be free from harm, inner and outer. May I be safe and protected.
May I be happy, free of mental suffering and distress.
May I be strong, healthy, and free of physical pain.
May I live in this world peacefully and happily, with joy and ease in my heart.
May you be free from harm, inner and outer. May you be safe and protected.
May you be happy, free of mental suffering and distress.
May you be strong, healthy, and free of physical pain.
May you live in this world peacefully and happily, with joy and ease in your heart.*

Compassion Meditation

*"I honor the place in you in which the entire universe dwells.
I honor the place in you which is of love, of truth, of light, and of peace.
When you are in that place in you, and I am in that place in me, we are one."
– Namaste*

Use of Stones or Objects in Meditation

Stones or objects serve as anchors during meditation and allow greater focus for deep thought and contemplation. They can serve as a focal point and a place to invest energy. The use of stones, beads, candles, or crystals during meditation can help to keep the mind from wandering. Some stones refer directly to issues of concern for those meditating. You can use specific stones during meditation to help you focus and direct your energy:

- Amethyst or Topaz.....Meditating to calm the mind
- Amethyst or Quartz.....Meditating for healing
- Citrine or Clear Quartz.....Meditating to dispel negativity and balance energy
- Amethyst or Hematite.....Meditating to relieve stress
- Topaz or Smoky Quartz.....Meditating for vitality and to rejuvenate energy

Amethyst is also known as the stone of transformation and spirituality. Golden Tiger's Eye is the stone of independence of body and spirit. Pink Rose Quartz is the stone of love and sensuality.

