

The Problem With Meditation

Meditation is the technique with the longest track record for calming the mind. It has been done for thousands of years and is the foundation of many spiritual practices. It is absolutely essential for gaining comfort with levels of one's own being beyond the rational thinking level. Through meditation, one can rip back the curtain of illusion and tune into the ground of being. The health benefits, physical and mental, have been widely explored and documented.

Meditation comes in many forms. Practitioners focus on their breathing, on mantras, on their qi, on holy scriptures, pictures and mandalas, by chanting, and through yoga postures, repetitive movements, inner focus, and outer focus. Taijiquan can be a moving meditation. Ultimately, these practices all seek to allow one to move beyond the limitations of conscious thought and to a direct experience of NOW, unfiltered by analysis. Dualistic thinking melts away to reveal the underlying Reality that is All that there is. Dao.

As powerful a tool as meditation is, it is underutilized and frequently abandoned before it can show significant results. The most common complaint I hear is of how much time it takes to feel anything significant. Too often, the thoughts that nag at a person during his day are too persistent to be dismissed in a 15-20 minute meditation session. Even if he has had an experience where such thoughts were transcended for a time, he feels frustrated when it can't be easily replicated. Others dread silence where the thoughts they busily avoid may now return unhindered.

Meditation for many people is too steep a hill to climb. They abandon their quest because there is little sense of progress. The non-coherence of their qi has the effect of over-stimulating their nervous systems. Their minds are continually disrupted by urgent warnings of real and imagined dangers—past, present, and future. The mind eventually finds its own comfort level in a controlled chaos. It can then seek or create new problems to maintain the familiar level of stress, even while publicly protesting that peace is all it wants.

Very few of us can embrace peace of mind with no problem. It's an acquired taste. There is always a temptation to bump up against something in the mind; to worry or fret; to anticipate difficulties. If things are too calm at home, we pick up the morning newspaper or tune in CNN to hear about the tragedies around the globe. We have a certain ratio of coherence/non-coherence that defines our comfort zone and we unconsciously find ways to maintain it.

It takes practice to embrace coherence and the quietude that accompanies it. When you focus on that, meditation takes on a whole new quality. Much of the internal conflict melts away.

Exercise: Instant Meditation

1. Sit upright in a comfortable position, feet flat on the floor, hands in your lap. Breathe deeply a few times to slow down your nervous system. Relax your body. Take a minute to notice your thoughts. Don't do anything about them, just notice that they are there.

2. Point with the index fingers of both hands while relaxing your arms and shoulders. Just use the amount of effort and attention it would take to flip a light switch. Draw tiny circles with your fingertips, if needed.
3. Hold that for a minute. Notice the tingling sensations in your hands and arms, possibly felt in other parts of the body as well.
4. Now look at your thoughts. In a coherent state, your thoughts will be gone. More accurately, you will see glimmers of a transrational state. You will still perceive what is happening around you, but unfiltered by thoughts *about* it. Of course, once you start to notice what you are doing you may start thinking again. But for the moment, enjoy the clear mind state.

This technique is a powerful meditation on its own, or may be used with other practices. The essence of meditation is to free the mind from the maze of dualistic thinking. The above exercise assists that process by first establishing a foundation of energetic coherence. Other forms of meditation can also produce high states of coherence. Most require more time to implement. This technique allows it to be accessed almost immediately, and even in very stressful circumstances.

Exercise: Now. Now. Now.

1. This exercise can be done sitting, standing, lying down, walking-whatever.
2. Access coherence by pointing the index fingers and feeling them. Feel the qi. Allow your thoughts to disappear. Notice the space between the thoughts. Allow that space to expand and continue as much as is comfortable.
3. When more thoughts emerge, relax your fingers, and then point again. Again, notice the space between thoughts.
4. Repeat this process. Notice that your attention goes in and out of the present. It can be brought back by accessing coherence.

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Taijiquan: Through the Western Gate (Blue Snake)

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