



PART ONE: THE INVITATION

A Reflection on Trauma-Sensitivity, Meditation, and QigongDharma

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Perhaps you came to meditation hoping for relief. You had heard the promises that sitting quietly and watching the breath would bring calm. That mindfulness would ease the anxious churning in your chest, quiet the racing thoughts, and help you finally feel at peace in your own skin. This reflection is an invitation—not to push through discomfort, but to listen more wisely to what your body is already saying.

And perhaps, for a while, it did. Or perhaps it never quite worked the way it was supposed to. Instead of settling into stillness, you grew more agitated. Instead of calm, you felt your heart pounding harder. The instruction to "just observe" your sensations became a trap; the more you noticed your tight throat or shallow breathing, the more alarmed you became. What was meant to be a refuge became another place where your body felt like the enemy.

If this has been your experience, I want you to know something important: *There is nothing wrong with you.*

You are not failing at meditation. You are not too broken to heal. What you are experiencing is your nervous system doing exactly what it learned to do, protecting you. Somewhere along the way, your body learned that stillness could be dangerous, that turning inward meant encountering pain, and that quiet spaces were not safe. And so when you try to meditate in the traditional way, your body sounds the alarm. It is not betraying you. It is trying, in its ancient wisdom, to keep you alive. What we often call "anxiety" or "restlessness" is frequently the body's memory speaking in sensations rather than words.

The difficulty is that this protection, once so necessary, may no longer serve you. The alarm keeps sounding even when there is no fire. And the very practices that might help you heal can feel inaccessible because approaching them triggers the protection you no longer need.

This is the tender paradox many people face, and it is the reason I have spent decades developing and teaching what I call QigongDharma, a path that honors both the ancient wisdom of meditation and the real needs of the human nervous system.

Another Way In

The Buddha himself knew that meditation was not only about sitting. In the earliest teachings on mindfulness, he spoke of awareness in all postures, including walking, standing, lying down, and yes, sitting. The body was never meant to be forced into stillness like a prisoner. It was meant to be a home for awareness, a place where we could settle with comfort and ease.

QigongDharma takes this understanding seriously. It offers what I consider **doorways**, multiple ways to enter the present moment, cultivate awareness, and heal. If the door of sitting meditation is locked for you right now, that does not mean you cannot enter. It simply means you need a different door.

For many people, especially those whose nervous systems carry the imprint of trauma, that doorway is *movement*. Gentle, mindful movement that allows the body to feel its own aliveness without becoming overwhelmed. Breath that flows naturally rather than being forced into patterns.

Practices that say to your deepest self: *You are safe here. You have choice. You can stop whenever you need to.*

This is not a lesser form of meditation. It is not a remedial practice for people who cannot handle "real" meditation. It is simply another path up the same mountain, and for some of us, it is the path that actually leads somewhere.

What This Teaching Offers

In the teachings that follow, I want to share with you what I have learned over fifty years of practice and teaching as a Zen teacher, a practitioner of the Daoist internal arts, and someone who has sat with countless students whose bodies carried burdens their minds could not name.

We will explore together why meditation sometimes hurts rather than helps, and what is actually happening in your nervous system when that happens. Not so you become an expert in neuroscience, but so you can understand your own experience with compassion rather than judgment.

We will learn about the body's natural capacity to find balance, what scientists call regulation, and how practices rooted in movement, breath, and gentle awareness can help you expand your ability to be present without becoming overwhelmed.

We will discover QigongDharma's core teachings: the **Five Regulations**, simple orienting principles that gently harmonize body, breath, mind, energy, and spirit. . The principle of **wú wéi**, effortless action, that allows us to cultivate well-being without straining or forcing. The understanding that healing happens not through conquest but through kindness.

And throughout, I will invite you to trust your own inner wisdom. Your body knows what your mind has forgotten. Your nervous system, for all its alarm bells, is trying to communicate something important. Part of this path is learning to **listen**, not with frustration, but with the tenderness you would offer a dear friend who has been through something difficult.

A Word About Pace

There is no rush here. Healing does not happen on a schedule, and the nervous system cannot be bullied into peace. The Daoist tradition speaks of the watercourse way, in which water finds its path not by forcing its way through obstacles but by flowing around them, always moving toward the sea.

Your healing will have its own current, its own timing.

Some of what I share may resonate immediately. Other parts may need to wait until you are ready. Trust that. If something in these teachings feels like too much, set it aside. If a practice feels wrong for your body today, honor that. The instruction "listen to your body" is not merely a suggestion; it is the foundation of everything we do.

As we say in QigongDharma: "Force is not needed."

In harmony with the Dao, nothing is done, and nothing is left undone. We are not trying to achieve a special state or becoming someone other than who we are. We are simply learning to be present to our lives with an open heart. This is the wisdom of the universe, available to you in this moment, wherever you are.

Shall we begin?