



The Athena Wellness Podcast
Episode 105 – Life as Meditation Practice with Mary Meckley
January 16, 2022

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[00:00:05] Kathy Robinson: Welcome to the *Athena Wellness Podcast*, the show that invites you to take a seat around the community fire and listen to stories that inspire. I'm your host, Kathy Robinson, author, coach, and founder of Athena Wellness, a company that's dedicated to supporting you on your journey to live more wholeheartedly.

Hello and welcome to Episode 105. Thanks so much for joining me. I'm joined today by meditation and yoga teacher, Mary Meckley, who is the creator and host of the *Daily Meditation Podcast*, which has over 50 million downloads. Mary also offers a meditation app called Sip And Om, which includes all aspects of the meditation lifestyle and supports healthy habits, including meditation, journaling, and setting intentions.

Mary lived in Japan for several years and studied ancient Japanese arts such as flower arrangement and tea ceremony. She likes to say that her quest for inner stillness was launched by sipping a cup of green tea.

Here's what we cover:

- Making the shift from corporate life to a meditation business;
- What meditation is and how to practice;
- How to settle into stillness and its benefits; and
- The components of the *Daily Meditation Podcast*.

We end this episode with our Dose of Inspiration segment where Mary shares some of the things that are lighting her up these days. As always, I'll put links to



those items, Mary's contact information, and her *Daily Meditation Podcast* in the show notes.

And now onto the show. I hope you enjoy the conversation.

[00:01:59] Kathy: Mary, welcome to the *Athena Wellness Podcast*, thanks so much for joining me today.

[00:02:04] Mary Meckley: Thank you for having me. I'm looking forward to this.

[00:02:06] Kathy: Same here. Please share a bit about who you are and what you do.

[00:02:12] Mary: Well, I'm Mary Meckley and I share ways for people to have a little more peace, energy, and clarity by meditating.

[00:02:24] Kathy: From what I understand, you didn't always do this type of work. I believe you were in corporate before you decided to start your own business and focus on meditation. Can you take us through how you got to what you do today?

[00:02:36] Mary: Yes. I started my meditation journey actually in Japan. I didn't actually start fully meditating there, but that's where it started. I worked for a company in Tokyo and I worked in the International Relations department. I was the only foreigner and the only female [chuckles] and there were several hundred colleagues on my floor. Every day, twice a day, actually three times a day depending on how long you worked there, there were tea ladies. They were ladies who would come by and serve green tea, and this is very common in Japan.

When the tea was being served, I would have it by my desk and I'd be sipping the tea while I was still working. I was the only one doing that because everybody else was taking a break and some were full out meditating, but I didn't really know much about meditation then. Many people would just sit back and just close their eyes and relax, sit in stillness. They all created stillness for themselves, whether they were meditating or whether they were sipping the tea. They were not scrolling



through their phones or looking at a magazine. They were just simply enjoying the stillness with the tea.

This happened a few times a day and I thought that I was really a hard worker, [chuckles] that I did not need my tea break, that I was so productive. I was just going to zip through. Sometimes I didn't even sip my tea, it would be cold and I was working. I noticed after a while that I thought the tea was so quaint but I did not sit in stillness. I was just full speed ahead and I realized that when my colleagues emerged from this break, that they were more focused and they had more clarity. In fact, after these breaks, everything just seemed to come together.

I thought this was something that was a little frustrating for me when I worked while in Japan for five years. I was ready to launch into what we were going to do and the plan and just do it from the moment I started work. I found that in Japan, my colleagues took some time to unwind and I thought they were not doing anything.

[laughter]

It used to frustrate me a little bit. I remember thinking, "What? Are you serious?" They're just sitting there and they weren't just sitting there, they were thinking. There's a lot of headwork that goes into, I was working within engineers pulling pieces together and so that's how it happened. They were working and reflecting and then they would have this clarity and insight and it would just come together.

They would've thought about the whole picture a little more than, for example, I was used to in the West, we just tackle it and things come together as they are and we'll just fix that when we get there and the process was so much more relaxing the way my colleagues worked. I started to think, there must really be something to this reflection and stillness. So I started to sit and sip my tea and just relax. I wouldn't think of anything at all. That was the key. It's not to think of anything at all, because you need your brain to rest.



Well, now that I'm sharing meditation and insight with others, I do a lot of research on the brain and how the brain is impacted by our physiology and our thoughts, and all the things we do. I realized that when you allow your brain just to rest, you're energizing your brain. It's like when we're sleeping, our organs rest and our brain rests. Well, when you give yourself these little pauses, that's what you're doing. That is still what I do to this day and it is such a better way to not feel so burned out while you're working and really to be more in tune and in touch with your emotions.

There were very few conflicts, and I know that Japan society is pretty unique, pretty homogeneous and so forth. They have more lifelong employment, those kinds of things. But still, you're working in cramped quarters and living in cramped quarters. Tokyo is the most densely populated city in the world. That's where I was living and working and it was really a pleasure. I was so sad to leave there. Even the jam packed trains, everything was very congested, but this stillness is very integral to the culture and to people getting along.

I continued to study. I wanted to learn more and I was studying the Japanese tea ceremony, which is really not about tea. It's more zen, more meditative. And I also studied ikebana, the Japanese art of flower arranging, which is also very zen. It's not really about the flowers as much as the connection with the moment and very mindfulness-based.

These made a very strong impression on me and I started to explore more. I came back to the United States. I was living in Seattle and then Portland Oregon, and I studied meditation. I received my training and certification and then we moved to Washington, D.C. and I now find myself in Florida and I'm really happy to share meditation online with others through my podcast and my app.

[00:09:20] Kathy: It's quite a journey and I can imagine you sitting in these, I see rows and rows of these desks, the typical picture of work in Tokyo, and how you can create your own space in the middle of all of that. It's like living in New York



City and riding the subway. You have your own space, not quite as formal as what you're outlining there.

Did you practice then for those five years, three times a day, like being at work like that, was that your practice, or did you start to get interested while you were there? I understand you did these other, the tea ceremony and the flower arranging, but was it love at first sight once you got it or was it something that evolved slowly over time?

[00:10:03] Mary: No, it really evolved slowly for me. In fact, the name of my business is called Sip and Om because for me, it started with a cup of tea, just sitting down learning to not even gulp my tea, waiting for it to get cool and gulp it. It really took some time for me to sip my tea and to feel this inner stillness.

That's why meditation is truly an art and a science. When you can allow your body to become calm, then your mind can relax. It really does take sitting still and then you just start to unwind a little bit and relax, but it doesn't happen quickly.

In fact, even for long time meditators, and I've been meditating now for over 20 years. Even when I sit down to meditate, I do meditation techniques. The techniques allow you to transition and that's what the tea did in Japan. It was a way to allow yourself to transition to the point where you can begin to feel that inner stillness. Because it's really difficult to pull away from whatever you've been doing in your day and instantly feel that calm and it would be jarring to be able to almost robotic to click it on.

We just had a little bit of a delay because I was in a traffic backup and I was a little late to our meeting time and so I was feeling, "Oh, I'm not sure, should we do this on the phone? Should I just pull over and we'll do this on the phone?" That's okay, it's not as though people often think, oh, if I meditate, I can never get mad again, otherwise, it's not working, or I'll never get stressed again. You will still experience the full range of human emotions.



Probably the best meditator on the planet, one of them is his Holiness the Dalai Lama. I think he represents for many people, not for everyone but for many, just this person who lives and breathes meditation, but yet he still gets fired up. He still feels nervous. He still feels stressed, but what meditation allows your brain to do is to process your emotions in a better way and you can recover much more quickly.

Another thing is that sometimes people will think, "Oh, I'm meditating so I can't act really hyper or excited because I need to be really peaceful or zen." Well, that's not really what meditation is about. Meditation is about allowing yourself to be very present in the moment with whatever you're experiencing, whether it's an emotion that elevates you or brings you crashing downward. It's being present and noticing what you're experiencing, not trying to control it, simply allowing this wave, riding the wave. What happens is when we're not really attuned or in touch with ourselves, we continue this vortex or whirlwind of energy whether it's super up or super down.

With meditation, you experience life's emotions as part of humanity and yet you are able to notice, "Okay, I'm feeling stress, but I've got some things to do today and so what I need to do is uplift myself a little bit and feel a little better right now." So you're able to get back on track.

I won't say balance. Many people, I do think that is considered a state of balance when you're able to notice your emotions and work with them. I don't think balance is a state of perfect equilibrium. I think we're always balancing our emotions and I think that's what life is all about. It changes moment by moment and we change moment by moment. Every time we sit down to meditate, it's a different experience because we bring ourselves into this moment.

[00:14:48] Kathy: It's almost like being your own collaborator.

[00:14:52] Mary: That's a great analogy. Yes, that is.



[00:14:56] Kathy: What I love about what you just said, I think it's comforting to many people who are listening that this isn't about trying to find this perfect state of equilibrium. This is actually about practicing to be able to notice and pause and react in a way that you want to, what you want to bring to that moment. So not controlling the moment but actually controlling your reaction to it, is that fair?

[00:15:21] Mary: I think that's a great way to describe it. Yes, because we can't control. We can't control things outside of ourselves. To some extent we might be able to, but not everything. And even what we set up, like being knocked over or changed. But what we can do is always retreat to that place of stillness. It's really our inner truth.

We often think, "Oh, I just need to relax." Well, relaxation is there always. It's tapping into it. So it's not like it's this thing outside of yourself that you have to, "Oh, I need like this pulse monitor," or, "Oh, I need the right cushion," or, "Oh, I need the right space, otherwise, how am I going to get my stillness?" It's not about out there. Those things can definitely help and support you, but it's really within yourself.

[00:16:23] Kathy: Why does that stillness scare us so? Why is that so scary? Especially for folks that have tried and a lot of the common pitfalls that I hear is I just can't sit and meditate. My mind goes all over the place. People can get anxious doing that or trying to monitor their breath. I really feel it's that, it's more of the reaction to that quiet place. What is it that's so scary about that for folks that are just starting?

[00:16:53] Mary: Yeah, that's a really great, important question. I think what frightens people or maybe not frightens them so much, but what makes them feel defeated before they even start is they feel that they are this certain way. And this is just how I am. I cannot relax. I'm just this certain way.

What meditation does is it really invites you to an opportunity to get in touch with yourself, your inner truth. A lot of times we cover that up with a mask and we've worked so hard to get ourselves into this certain state or this certain way of being



that we want to stay there. When we think of meditating, we almost think that we might lose our edge.

I remember sitting next to a comedian flying cross-country from Los Angeles to Washington DC and I remember he asked me, "Oh, what do you do?" I said, "Oh, I share meditation," and he said, "Oh, I could never do that because then I could never do my work. I'm a comedian."

I was thinking, "Actually you could do your work so much better because you'd be in tune with the people but so much more. You'd also be in tune with yourself." I didn't say that because I think that we are all on our own journey and it's important to meet people where they are.

Meditation is not a religion, there's no dogma in meditation. Some religions, such as Hinduism, include meditation and other religions. But meditation in and of itself is truly a way to calm your mind and body, and in doing so you allow yourself to not respond so much from the part of your brain that is the more, I won't get into all this science, but our lizard brain. I'm sure people are familiar with that. We're able to act more from our prefrontal lobes, which is right in the middle of your forehead.

This is also in India where you see people wear the Bindi and it's to keep your thoughts elevated. There's actually a physiological reaction when you sit up straight and you straighten your spine. If you do that now you immediately feel more focused, more confident and uplifted. When you just gently elevate your eyes to this point between your eyebrows in the middle of your forehead, that's the frontal lobes of your brain that are strengthened as we meditate.

The great news that we now know from science, there's been a lot of research that we've all read, especially the past decade. So that's not such a long stretch of research on meditation. Meditation is really coming into its own right now.



But there's been a lot of research, especially on mindfulness-based meditation, where after you meditate for 10 minutes, just 10 or 15 minutes sitting in stillness, for two weeks consistently every day, consistency is key, you begin to change your brain. You already notice that you respond differently to stress. If you meditate consistently for 10 to 15 minutes sitting in stillness for 60 days, they detected new neural pathways in your brain, so you're already changing your brain after 60 days.

[00:20:49] Kathy: Mmhmm, wow. One of the things that I love about your philosophy is that you recommend that people who are starting or meditation practitioners, not make their meditation practice precious. I love that because that's the natural inclination, especially for the people who feel that they "need meditation," people who are more wired, like me, more type As. You want to do it right, (laughs) you want to make sure you're doing this meditation thing right. And you give permission to say, "It's okay, just to sit there."

Can you talk a bit about what it's like to use something like a cup of tea to be able to have that mindful moment?

[00:21:34] Mary: Yes, so one of my taglines is: Give yourself permission to slow down. Many people think, as I was mentioning, oh, they need a space, "Oh, there's nowhere to meditate in my home. I'm constantly interrupted," they're thinking that, or, "I don't have time to meditate." That's one of the most popular reasons people don't meditate. "I'm too hyper, I have too much going on in my life right now. I'll wait until my life is calmer and then I'll start meditating." Well, actually, it takes a lot of energy to meditate. It's by no means passive.

I started my meditation ritual meditating in my car for 10 minutes at a time because I had two small children at that time and I was taking them to activities. I just found that when they were home, it was really difficult to meditate. I never lived near my family and we moved quite a bit so it was just me there with my children. What I found, the best time when I had time was when they were say at



soccer or art camp or whatever it would be. I would wait in the car or just leave for like 10 minutes and I would sit in the car and I would meditate.

There were often people around me, but that was a really good way for me to start meditating. I learned to be able to allow those interruptions. Now when I meditate, my children are raised now, but now when I meditate, I do have a space that's designated and I can sit uninterrupted. And so I find that many people feel a little intimidated by what might be required for meditation. Do I need a candle? Do I need incense? Do I need a cushion? Just pull a cushion off your bed or a sofa and sit on that.

Now I will say that it's very important to be comfortable when you meditate because if you're not, it's very difficult to calm your mind. And you can still do it. Let's say you're in a lot of pain, you can acknowledge your pain and that's okay. But when you sit, if you sit on the edge of the pillow, it's going to roll your hips forward and this actually takes pressure off your spine, but it does something more importantly. It allows you to align your spine, keep your spine straight.

Because if I would is not sitting on the pillow, say, I'm sitting in a chair now, I'm sitting in my chair, you can slump, but if you are sitting on the edge of the pillow, it allows you to, like I said, your hips roll forward and you're not hyper extending your back or arching it. Your spine is nice and neutral. Whether you sit on your bed, on your chair or on the floor, pillows can be your best friend when you meditate. And it doesn't have to be fancy or elaborate.

You can meditate anywhere. You can make meditation happen anywhere. You can just sit down. I meditate in airports, on airplanes. I see lots of people doing that more and more these days. You're just really gathering yourself even if there's not stillness, you know that you are allowing the dust to settle and that allows you to just emerge a little more refreshed.

That's what's so interesting about meditation is that one of the most common side effects of meditation is that you feel more confident and the reason is because



you feel energized, you feel calmer, but you feel ready to go and energized, very refreshed.

That's why in Japan, people would come back, they weren't groggy or sleepy from meditating. They were so refreshed because when you allow everything out there to settle and you release it, and you allow yourself to go inward with your own stillness, you feel empowered and you begin to notice how you feel. I think it's important to name the emotion you're feeling when you sit down to meditate and notice where you feel it in your body.

I know we might be doing the guided meditation later today so I'll guide you through this process. Everything I'm sharing now, I'll guide you right through that but that is very important. People say, I never expected to feel so confident. It's natural because you're really tapping into your true inner nature and that's who you are and you can just relax with who you are, and other people notice it too.

[00:26:49] Kathy: Yeah, I love this idea of life as meditation, that you can do this anywhere. I will tell you some of my best meditation sessions have been on airplanes. I used to travel quite a bit. But I love that no matter what, I mean, you had two kids and you were shuttling them all over the place and it's like, I'm just going to take this 10 minutes in the car, as noisy as it is, and just be there. I think that's a wonderful, wonderful example. Thank you.

[00:27:15] Mary: You're welcome.

[00:27:16] Kathy: You have an amazing show, a daily podcast. Can you tell the audience how it came about, what it is, and where they might be able to find it?

[00:27:24] Mary: Sure, I have the *Daily Meditation Podcast*. So every day I share some insight about a theme. We explore a theme every week and many of the themes come from the listeners. I've done this show for over seven years now, and



there's always a challenge for the week that's customized around the theme. Then every day we explore a different meditation technique. It's always a visualization.

We launch a new theme every Sunday, every Monday, it's always the affirmation, it's all customized around the theme. Tuesday's always a breathing technique. We also include mudras with your hands. You don't have to do these, but I share the classic meditation techniques. They've been around for 5,000 years. And because I lived in Asia, I saw how they worked and were such an important part of even, for example, Chinese medicine or Ayurvedic health systems. We do some chakras and some mudras. Like I said, you can go through the meditation without doing that, but I offer it.

Then Friday, we layer all these techniques we've been exploring throughout the week together in a flow, so we do them all together. Then Saturday is the final day of an episode and we always look back over the week. This awareness is really important because it allows you to notice what worked really well for you, depending on the theme.

This week, our theme is meditation remedies for top stressors. What I did is the top meditation requests I receive, I considered those the top stressors, which include relationships, health, anxiety, sleep, productivity, and there are seven one for each day of the week. Our theme is to listen to your body. Listen to where you hold these stresses in your body and begin to loosen those up and work with it. Even if you don't immediately feel relieved, you're serving the process and so that is what I share on the *Daily Meditation Podcast* and you're always guided through a meditation and the whole experience is 10 minutes a day.

[00:29:57] Kathy: Yes, and it's absolutely wonderful and tens of millions of people agree with me. It's got quite a following and just a lovely, lovely way to start the day.

[00:30:07] Mary: Thank you. Yes, we've had over 50 million downloads.



[00:30:11] Kathy: It's pretty amazing.

Mary, we wrap up with a segment that we call A Dose of Inspiration, where our listeners get to know you a little bit better. Just a couple of questions for you. I think we know your favorite wellness practice, because we've just spent the last 35 minutes talking about it, (laughs) but I think we'd be curious to know where are you focusing your wellness efforts? Is there a particular challenge that you're focused on right now that you're working with?

[00:30:40] Mary: Yes. Well, I actually do have another focus and that is spending time in nature. Nature is so restorative. The more time you can spend inhaling, especially among tall green trees, as we now know, this of course is an art in Japan, forest bathing. It's now becoming very popular around the world, but I am recently exploring qigong. I actually came from qigong class before this meditation, I had studied it previously and I'm picking it back up.

[00:31:15] Kathy: Wonderful. What have you read or listened to lately that you enjoyed?

[00:31:20] Mary: I'm an avid listener of podcasts, health and wellness podcasts and anything to do with your brain and body. One of my favorite books that I've read many times that I'm currently rereading is called *Tea Life, Tea Mind*. It is by the former, he's still alive, he's almost 100 years old, Grand Tea Master Soshitsu Sen, and his heir is now the Grand Tea Master. He passed it on, but the tea ceremony in Japan has gone through an unbroken line of the same family, generation after generation. We are on the 14th or 15th Grand Tea Master with the Japanese tea ceremony.

This is a great book, *Tea Life, Tea Mind*. It could be written about meditation. It could be written about anything to do with calming your mind and body. It's a beautiful book. It's a short book, you can read it quickly.



[00:32:20] Kathy: I will link that up in the notes and order it myself I think. What new thing or experience are you looking forward to trying?

[00:32:28] Mary: Well, the qigong, like I said, that's my first day. I also like to explore Tai Chi.

[00:32:34] Kathy: Okay. Envision your perfect road trip. Where do you go? What do you do?

[00:32:41] Mary: I love this question. When I lived in Japan, this for me would be a perfect road trip. I miss Japan greatly. One thing that I did often on the weekends, which many people do there, is spend time in the forest, beautiful forest. I would drive along a mountain chain that surrounds Tokyo and stop at the little inns and bathe in the hot springs around Mount Fuji and watch the sunrise and sunset and eat simply, maybe even fast for one of those days. It's amazing the clarity after you have fasted that you receive.

[00:33:25] Kathy: Beautiful. Again, life is meditation once again, right?

[00:33:28] Mary: Yeah.

[00:33:28] Kathy: Lovely. I love that. What has you feeling inspired these days? What's lighting you up?

[00:33:35] Mary: I'm excited that we are exploring in most parts of the world. Where it seems like everything is so negative, negative news. I think it forces us to raise our consciousness level and so I'm excited about that. I think change is difficult, but I think that's what life is about is change and especially where change is needed. I really am excited about the future.

[00:34:08] Kathy: Wonderful. What has you optimistic about the future?

[00:34:14] Mary: How what we're going through now touches everyone. Isn't just pockets of people, and I think that's why we will see some real lasting changes



that are positive. It's hard sometimes to get to that place, but I think we will experience amazing levels of higher consciousness through this experience we're going through.

[00:34:40] Kathy: It's so hard to deny interconnectivity when you're in the middle of a global pandemic, right?

[00:34:47] Mary: It really is. It brings us together and we can all relate to this and we've all suffered. I think that we're going to see great things.

[00:34:58] Kathy: That's beautiful. Beautiful way to close here. Tell everyone, Mary, what's the best way for our listeners to get in touch with you?

[00:35:06] Mary: The *Daily Meditation Podcast* is there. And if people are to the point where they want to go into a little deeper guided meditation, longer than 10 minutes, the Sip and Om meditation app, they can try it for a week free. You get a journal and a slow down guide with every week's series and you get to track your habits and monitor your moods and some other things. I'm just getting ready to launch the new version and so all those features will be there, so I'm excited. That way you can really create a meditation lifestyle.

One thing I want to say is that along with meditation each day, I think it's really important to have movement. Movement and meditation, get your energy going. It's not all zen, we need to be in the world and share our truth.

[00:35:59] Kathy: Perfect. The Sip and Om meditation app can be the Apple Store, Google Play?

[00:36:04] Mary: Yes. We have the Android as well as the iOS version.

[00:36:08] Kathy: Perfect. Great. I'll link all that stuff up.

[00:36:10] Mary: Thank you.



[00:36:11] Kathy: What a lovely rejuvenating conversation, Mary. Thank you so much for being here. I really appreciate it.

[00:36:17] Mary: Thank you for having me. It's really an honor to be here. Thank you.

[00:36:20] Kathy Thank you.

[music]

[00:36:26] Kathy: Thank you so much for joining me today. I know there are many ways you can spend your time. Thank you for choosing to spend it with me.

Until our paths cross again, be kind to yourself and show your Warrior Spirit some love. If you know anyone who could benefit from today's episode, please pass it on. Many thanks for supporting the show by subscribing and leaving a review. It means a lot and it helps others find their way to our circle.

If you'd like to access the show notes, have a question you'd like addressed on a future episode, or would like a transcript of this episode, visit www.AthenaWellness.com/podcast.

Until next time, be well!

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[00:37:29] [END OF AUDIO]