

Article 51

Falun Gong and Its Applications to Counseling: Case Examples

Based on a program presented at the 2016 American Counseling Association Conference,
March 31–April 3, Montreal, Canada.

Margaret Trey

Trey, Margaret, PhD, is a holistic wellness and integrative counselor, researcher, and author of *The Mindful Practice of Falun Gong: Meditation for Health, Wellness and Beyond*. Also trained in Oriental therapies, shiatsu, yoga, vipassana meditation, and the yin-yang of foods, Dr. Trey embraces an integrated approach towards helping others in diverse settings. Since 2001, Dr. Trey has been researching the health-wellness effects of Falun Gong.

Abstract

Eastern meditative approaches have existed since time immemorial in traditional cultures, predating Christianity. That these disciplines are still being practiced today indicates that these traditional practices were and still are beneficial to humankind. Although their integration with counseling is still foreign for some, many in the West have embraced these practices as a way of life for their health and well-being. This trend has encouraged many counselors to follow suit in order to cater to the varied and ever-changing needs of their clients. Falun Gong is one such mind-body, spiritual meditative system that holds promise for counseling integration. The practice's beneficial effects and integration possibilities remain relatively unknown and undocumented. The main purpose of this paper is to present case examples illustrating the benefits of the practice and the feasibility of integrating Falun Gong with counseling—to help people toward self-healing and realizing their purpose in life.

Keywords: Falun Gong, Falun Dafa, meditation, cultivation practice, benefits, health, wellness

As researchers and writers have indicated, over the past three decades, an increasing number of people in the West are turning to Eastern meditative practices (Atwood & Maltin, 1991; Delmonte, 1985; Easton, 2005; Krisanaprakornkit, Sriraj, Piyavhatkul, & Laopaiboon, 2006; Monk-Turner, 2003; Singer, 2006; Walsh, 1989; Walsh & Vaughan, 1993). People from all walks of life, including CEOs and executives

NOTE: The author uses and cites from the Fair Winds Edition of *Zhuan Falun*, the main text for the teachings of Falun Gong. See Li, H. (2001). *Zhuan Falun*. Gloucester, MA: Fair Winds Press. Case illustrations in this article are based on real scenarios. Besides Barbara's story, personal information is altered to ensure anonymity and confidentiality. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Margaret Trey, e-mail: treymargaret@gmail.com

of big corporations like Apple, Google, Intel, and Yahoo!, are bringing meditative practices into the work place (Baer, 2013; Essig, 2012; Huffington, 2015; “Mindfulness in the corporate world,” 2013; Schaufenbuel, 2014; Wong, 2014). Many are drawn to Eastern practices because these approaches not only complement their values, beliefs, and lifestyles (Astin, 1998; Gordon & Edwards, 2005; Wu et al., 2007), but they also have healing benefits.

As more people in the West are attracted to Eastern meditative practices, the potential for integrating meditative practices with counseling has become more feasible. Delmonte (1985) noted that meditation was already extensively used as an adjunct to counseling and psychotherapy in the West as early as the 1980s. Numerous counselors and other health professionals have realized the integration potential and the diverse beneficial effects of these Eastern meditative movement practices (Atwood & Maltin, 1991; Bogart, 1991; Carpenter, 1977; Easton, 2005; Goleman, 1976; Lau, 2010a; Marlatt & Kristeller, 1999; McCown, 2004; Meyers, 2016; Ospina et al., 2008; Perez-De-Albeniz & Holmes, 2000; Schopen & Freeman, 1992; Shallcross, 2012; Singer, 2006; Trey, 2016b; Walsh & Vaughan, 1993).

Schopen and Freeman (1992) stated that meditation could replace “counseling as a healing force or change agent for certain clients” (p. 5). They described meditation as a “meta-therapy” (p. 5)—for relaxation, reducing stress, enhancing insights gleaned from talk therapy, and the potential for using meditative practices as a self-help strategy for clients in between sessions. Perez-De-Albeniz and Holmes (2000) summarized the physiological, behavioral, and psychological effects of meditation. These effects included increased positive emotions and thoughts; improved problem-solving skills, self-confidence, and memory; better relaxation and resilience; reduced anxiety and stress; lowered heart rate and blood pressure; and heightened awareness, acceptance, compassion, and tolerance towards self and others (Perez-De-Albeniz & Holmes, 2000, pp. 2–3). Researchers have found that meditation can actually change the brain structure (Congleton, Hölzel, & Lazar, 2015; Lazar et al., 2005). In recent years, Shallcross (2012) noted that many counselors are gravitating toward blending meditation with counseling.

Eastern approaches, such as qigong, tai chi, and yoga, involve some form of “meditative movement” (C. E. Rogers, Larkey, & Keller, 2009, p. 246). These ancient Eastern disciplines often have physical movements or postures, breathing, and meditation techniques (C. E. Rogers et al., 2009; Trey, 2016b). Falun Gong, which is a form of qigong and often dubbed as a Chinese yoga (Lau, 2010a; Parker, 2004; Trey, 2016b), can be considered a meditative movement practice. Also known as Falun Dafa, Falun Gong is one of the fastest emerging ancient Eastern meditative practices. Currently, there is still a dearth of literature exploring the effects of the practice and its potential integration with counseling and other helping professions. Trey (2016a) noted that the integration of Falun Gong with counseling and other helping professions requires ongoing consideration and evaluation by health and counseling professionals. While it is not absolutely imperative to have proper documentation on an integrated practice, it will be helpful for pioneers in the field to map out their journeys with Falun Gong as an inspiration for others.

So What Is Falun Gong?

Various sources have described Falun Gong as a mind-body spiritual practice with ancient roots in traditional Chinese culture, with elements from Buddhist and Taoist teachings (“Answers to Commonly Asked Questions,” 2004; “Brief Introduction to Falun Dafa,” 2012; Falun Dafa Information Center, 2015a, 2015b; Lau, 2010a; H. Li, 2001a, 2001b; Parker, 2004; “What is Falun Dafa?,” 2002). Falun Gong is based on and guided by the universal principles of truthfulness, compassion, forbearance—or *Zhen, Shan, Ren* in Chinese (H. Li, 2001b, pp. 13–17). Falun Gong is staunchly grounded in ancient Buddhist and Taoist philosophies that emphasize cultivation, which is an integral part of traditional Chinese culture.

The concept of cultivation or self-cultivation is largely unfamiliar to many Westerners. To cultivate, or *xiu lian* in Chinese, is an Eastern concept for mind, body, and spiritual improvement (Xie & Zhu, 2004). *Xiu* means “repair,” “restore,” or “fix”; *lian* denotes to “improve” or “refine” (Clearwisdom Editors, 2005, 2006; Trey, 2016a). Falun Gong embodies two aspects—cultivation and practice. Cultivation refers to cultivating one’s moral character, one’s heart and mind, or *xinxing* in Chinese (H. Li, 2001b). Practice comprises a sitting meditation and four simple standing exercises (H. Li, 2001a, 2001b). Of the two, cultivation is more important than the exercise component.

When the founder of Falun Gong, Mr. Li Hongzhi, first introduced Falun Gong to the public in 1992, the practice spread quickly by word of mouth (Ownby, 2008; D. Palmer, 2007; Parker, 2004; Penny, 2001; Porter, 2003; Trey 2016b). Between 1992 and 1995, the Chinese Communist Party’s (CCP) qigong organization helped to organize 54 public lectures for Mr. Li (Ownby, 2001; Xie & Zhu, 2004). By 1998, Falun Gong was so popular that a survey by the CCP found that there were about 70 million Chinese practicing Falun Gong in China (“The Journey of Falun Dafa,” 2002). Falun Gong became the largest and fastest emergent meditative practice in Chinese history. Thousands gathered in city parks early each morning to practice Falun Gong before going to work. When Jiang Zemin, the then CCP leader, unlawfully banned Falun Gong¹ on July 20, 1999, nearly one in thirteen Chinese people were practicing Falun Gong (Nania, 2013; Trey, 2016b).

One of the reasons for Falun Gong’s popularity is its healing benefits and health-wellness effects (Ackerman, 2005; Kutolowski, 2007; Ownby, 2001, 2008; S. J. Palmer, 2003; Porter, 2003; Pullen, 2000; Trey, 2016b; Wang et al., 1998; Xie & Zhu, 2004; Yang & Nania, 2001; Zhang & Xiao, 1996). Today, millions of people of all ages, cultures, backgrounds, and from all over world practice Falun Gong. These individuals achieve better health, wellness, and resilience (Lau, 2010a; Trey, 2016a, 2016b). According to Falun Gong literature, practitioners of Falun Gong often find improved energy levels, inner peace, and elevated morals. Many recover from debilitating and life-threatening health problems (Lau, 2010a; “Summary of health surveys,” 2002; “Summary of results,” 2003; Trey, 2016b).

¹ For more information, read ‘The Persecution of Falun Gong,’ Chapter 4 in *The Mindful Practice of Falun Gong*, or watch *The Persecution of Falun Gong* video produced by Swoop Films (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KiP-5MfA1Mk&t=9s>).

Literature Review on the Effects of Falun Gong

There is a dearth of literature and research on the effects of Falun Gong (Lau, 2010a, Trey 2016a, 2016b). Existing studies comprise those conducted in mainland China prior to 1999 and those completed outside of China after 1999. Five independent large-scale health surveys were conducted in Beijing, Dalian, Wuhan, and Guangdong province (“Summary of health surveys,” 2002). Over 90% of respondents, or 31,000 individuals, reported having a variety of illnesses before they started Falun Gong. Findings indicated that 98% of Falun Gong participants reported gaining significant health benefits (“Summary of Health Surveys,” 2002). The participants also reported that they were able to give up cigarette smoking, alcohol consumption, and gambling.

Falun Gong studies outside of China can be placed into two phases. Researchers from the earlier phase—Bruseker (2000), Lowe (2003), Ownby (2003, 2008), Porter (2003, 2005), and S. Palmer (2003)—did not specifically focus on the health-wellness effects of Falun Gong. However, the results from these independent studies did indicate that the practice’s popularity was mainly due to its reported significant health benefits. A Taiwanese study (Lio et al., 2003) investigated the health-wellness effects of Falun Gong. Results revealed that those who practiced Falun Gong were physically and mentally healthier than the general Taiwanese population.

After the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners began on July 20, 1999, a combined team of Canadian and U.S. Falun Gong practitioners carried out the first known health survey outside of China in October of that same year (“Report on 235 Cases,” 2003). The majority of respondents reported either excellent or very good health status after practicing Falun Gong. In 2001, a single-case study examining counselors’ burnout was completed (Lau, 2001b). The results from this study indicated that the practice of Falun Gong was effective as a buffer against burnout and stress. A small-scale study from the Russian Federal Internal Affairs Department also demonstrated the beneficial effects of Falun Gong. Practitioners of Falun Gong showed a 73% improvement rate in their health and wellness (“Russia: Report on the Healing Effects,” 2003). Then a team of U.S. medical doctors and researchers conducted a pilot study on the effects of Falun Gong on gene expression and the role of neutrophils in Falun Gong practitioners (Q. Li, Li, Garcia, Johnson, & Feng, 2005). Their findings found superior gene expression, enhanced immunity, and longer lifespan of neutrophils in Falun Gong respondents.

The second phase of studies on Falun Gong began around 2010. The aforementioned counselor burnout case study (Lau, 2001b) and health-wellness study, dubbed the Australian survey (Lau 2010a, 2010b), heralded the studies conducted under the auspices of Western universities. Findings from the 2010 survey (Lau 2010a) indicated that respondents were more likely to report excellent health, no or little use of medication, and less medical and health expenses compared to non-Falun Gong respondents (Trey 2016b). In an independent study, Yahiya (2010) examined the effects of Falun Gong on performance in the martial art form of judo. Yahiya’s study indicated that practicing Falun Gong enhances psychological and performance skills for judo martial artists. Cheung and Russell conducted a qualitative study in 2012 in Canada with Falun Gong practitioners. Their findings showed how Falun Gong helped to facilitate a peaceful resistance to human rights violations and that Falun Gong practitioners

displayed empowerment and resilience (Cheung, 2016). Bendig (2013) studied the cognitive and physiological effects of Falun Gong in a double study. Bendig's findings showed that Falun Gong boosted energy levels and enhanced positive mood for practitioners and that regular practice elicited lasting psychological benefits.

In a more recent study, Dong and her research team (2016) discovered that Falun Gong could improve cancer survival rate. Researchers from Switzerland, Taiwan, the United Kingdom, and the United States conducted a meta-analysis based on the self-reported cases from Chinese cancer patients between 2000 and 2015. Their findings showed that 98% of cancer patients ($n = 149$) who started practicing Falun Gong were still alive, with 97% ($n = 147$) reporting full symptom recovery (Dong et al., 2016; "Research finds Falun Gong," 2016). In the *Hearts Uplifted Project*, an Australian researcher observed and documented the lived experiences of Falun Gong practitioners to examine their health, wellness, and resilience (Trey, 2016b, 2017a). Findings reveal numerous examples of the benefits of the practice as well as insights into integrating Falun Gong with professional practice.

Several key themes unfolded from the literature review. Firstly, the review recognizes and focuses on the beneficial effects of Falun Gong. It also highlights Falun Gong as a potential self-care and self-improvement strategy that counselors and other health professionals could consider adopting into their work practice. Thirdly, the review sparks a new awareness and an interest about integrating Falun Gong within the Western model of counseling and psychotherapy.

Case Examples

Presented in this paper are three case examples from three different situations. The first describes a health professional who suffered from burnout and how integrating Falun Gong into his life put him on the path back to health and wellness (Lau, 2001b). The story is retold here from the lived experience of an individual in a single-case study that highlights how Falun Gong helped buffer him from the negative effects of stress and burnout.

The second case unveils the compelling story of Barbara, a Melbourne artist who started practicing Falun Gong after sustaining a 23-foot fall. Her story and journey to mind-body wellness was depicted in *The Mindful Practice of Falun Gong: Meditation for Health, Wellness, and Beyond* (Trey, 2016b). After starting Falun Gong, Barbara completely recovered from her injuries as well as from a host of other health issues.

The third case example, *With Wings, Will Fly*, traces April's recovery from general anxiety disorder (GAD) using an integrated Falun Gong counseling approach based on the 6-step approach to wellness (Trey, 2016b, p. 186). Of the three selected examples, April is the only one who was introduced to Falun Gong as a counseling client from a clinical practice at a medical center where medical doctors would refer their patients for counseling.

Falun Gong, Buffer Against Burnout

Andrew (not his real name) was 44 years old, single, and had 20 years of experience as a social worker. He suffered from stress and long-term burnout. He was a

kind and helpful person, giving and caring for others—both in his professional and private life. This was probably what had led him to become burned out to the point where he eventually had to take leave from his work to heal himself.

Andrew grappled with multiple stressors. At work, there was pressure from the introduction of computerized counseling that bothered him and his colleagues. There was stress from physically violent clients and coping with the threats from clients. Andrew worked half of the week as a social worker, but it was an emotionally draining job, given the nature of his responsibilities. It was common for Andrew to experience being threatened with knives and even with shotguns when he visited clients in their homes. As he held a senior role in the state's social workers' union, Andrew spent the other half of the week working for the union, representing all members in their relations with their employers. This added to his stress load, as he had to help co-workers cope with their stress.

At home, Andrew shouldered more stress. He moved home to care for his father, a war veteran suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder, dementia, and kidney failure. Three times a week his father had to be taken to the center for dialysis. Besides the burden of caring for his invalid father, Andrew endured stress from unsupportive siblings. To top all this off, tension was rife at home with his live-in sister and nephew. Both lacked understanding about giving quality care for the ailing father. Hence, sparks flew at times and Andrew had to step in to be the moderator.

For a long time, Andrew was living on the brink of collapse. At one time “they told me that I have six months to live.” He paused. “I’m still here . . . and I have dealt with a lot of different health issues,” he continued, without elaborating on what specific health problems he had. “Every day I get up is a good day” (Lau, 2001a, p. 9), said Andrew with a smile and the voice of one who had been there in that no man’s land and come out more resilient. When asked how he was able to see light at the end of the tunnel, Andrew mentioned a number of ways he had tried to help ease the adverse effects of stress and burnout. Instead of resorting to medication, Andrew opened himself to alternative coping strategies that focused on self-care, including different types of meditation.

The turning point in Andrew’s recovery path to wellness was when he discovered Falun Gong. A friend had introduced him to it, and Andrew mentioned that he had read the Falun Gong main book, *Zhuan Falun* (H. Li, 2001b) and was drawn to the teachings and the principles of truthfulness, compassion, and forbearance. Realizing that this must be something good for him, Andrew went with his friend to attend a 9-day Falun Gong seminar in which they watched the video lectures and learned to do the exercises for nine consecutive evenings. Andrew found Falun Gong to be particularly beneficial for him and thus began to practice it consistently.

Falun Gong was more than just a burnout buffer, said Andrew. As he integrated the principles of the teachings into his daily life, he began to notice that Falun Gong transformed his life in several ways. The peaceful meditative movement practice helped him to stay calmer and elicited the most positive experience by changing his attitude toward life and all matters in general. “I am the calmest I’ve ever been in my entire life and I attribute this to the practice of Falun Gong” (Lau, 2001a, p. 10; Lau, 2001b, p. 11), Andrew reiterated.

What was significant for Andrew was that “I feel that this practice is helping me to get to the point where I’m actually happy, joyous, and free” (Lau, 2001a, p. 10). Besides reading the book and doing the exercises, another factor that contributed toward his journey to mind, body, and spiritual health and wellness was the community of Falun Gong friends. After starting the practice, Andrew met many like-minded people who provided a supportive network. Community making, exercise practice, and reading the Falun Gong book provided the antidote for Andrew’s recovery from burnout and put him on the path to wellness and resilience.

Barbara² and a ‘Magical’ Book

Polish-born Barbara studied fine arts in her birth country before venturing to New Zealand and later settling in Australia. At 50, she was basking in her career as an art conservator, a job she had loved doing for more than 20 years. Then an accident happened at work that changed her life completely. She fell 23 feet and sustained multiple injuries. In her written responses for the Australian study (Lau, 2010a; Trey, 2016b), Barbara³ wrote that she was “in a coma for eight days, had multiple injuries—a fractured skull, spinal fluid leakage, compound fractures in her cheekbones, nose, jawbone, wrists, and right knee, and a host of other health problems” (Trey, 2016b, p. 3). Her skull was cracked in several places, her nose and sinuses crushed, and her upper jaw completely broken in three places. “My hands were shattered and the bones were sticking out,” (Trey, 2016b, p. 6) Barbara noted, as she described the gravity of her injuries from the 23-foot fall.

Doctors at the Royal Melbourne Hospital put all her broken parts together. Shortly after she regained consciousness from the first surgery, Barbara had to undergo another surgery to stop leaking spinal fluids. But the fluid was still trickling down the back of her throat after the second surgery. Barbara reported loss of hearing in her left ear and no feeling in her left hand. She could not see clearly to read because her eyes were out of focus after the accident. Each night she would wake up her spouse every few hours to apply more cortisone cream all over her back, arms, and hands to ease the pain. The relief was short lived. Additionally, there was no respite from the tinnitus that sounded like heavy machinery noises inside her head. When doctors told her that she would never fully recover, Barbara lost hope. Upon learning that her memory lapses would worsen, Barbara was devastated.

Faced with debilitating pain, the inevitability of memory loss, and four pages of medical complications for the rest of her life, Barbara immediately leaped at a friend’s suggestion of giving Falun Gong a try (Trey, 2016b). She started the exercises about seven weeks after the second surgery. With over 100 stitches on her head, numerous metal screws, plates, and wires placed in her head, face, and hands, she had little mobility. Nonetheless, she gave Falun Gong a try and was astounded at how good she felt after the exercises. “I couldn’t believe it . . . Gosh, I want more of this Falun Gong” (Trey, 2016b, p. 7). The exercises eased pain and sparked hope for Barbara. Rather than resorting to painkillers and cortisone creams, Barbara continued with Falun Gong.

² Barbara chose to use her real name. Her story was featured in book, *The Mindful Practice of Falun Gong*.

³ She participated in the Australian study (Lau, 2010a; Trey, 2016b) that investigated the effects of Falun Gong on health and wellness of the people who practice it.

The turning point in her journey to complete recovery came from reading “a magical book” (Trey, 2016b, p. 8). This is the book titled *Zhuan Falun* (H. Li, 2001b), which holds the complete teachings of Falun Gong. Barbara had the most extraordinary experience as soon as she started reading the book. At the time, she could not fathom why it was essential to read the book. Since doing the exercises felt so good, Barbara thought she would give reading the book a try, despite her poor vision. As soon as she started reading, not only did her vision improve after the first day, on the second day, Barbara noticed that she could read faster and she became fascinated with the contents of the book. By the end of the third day of reading *Zhuan Falun*, something extraordinary happened. Barbara felt warm sensations, like an electric current coming up from her fingertips, to her hands, arms, and body. The impact was amazing. “Falun Gong literally took away everything that was hurting or bothering me—all my post surgery pain, complications—and facilitated my complete recovery” (Trey, 2016b, p. 7). Even all of Barbara’s other health problems from before the accident disappeared. Four months after her fall, Barbara was back at work, up on the scaffolding, doing what she loves—restoring old buildings.

In 2013, on the tenth anniversary of her accident, Barbara was in New York, looking a picture of serene health and inner peace. During a follow-up interview, Barbara stated that she never felt any pain in her head, nor had a headache ever since she started practicing Falun Gong. The only giveaway sign of the accident was a faint line across her forehead indicating her once-fractured skull. She spoke of her continuing mind-body and spiritual health and wellness and gave examples of how Falun Gong has made her more resilient. The practice offers answers for her life’s challenges. It gives her a sense of purpose in life, a reason for living, and for sharing her journey to wellness. “Falun Gong is magical. It’s something you cannot explain with words,” (Trey, 2016b, p. 60) said Barbara.

With Wings, Will Fly

April (not her real name) was a Caucasian woman in her early fifties. She first came for counseling to seek help with her general anxiety disorder (GAD). She and her husband were city folks who had moved from Melbourne, Victoria, to a small, sleepy country town in South Australia to care for her ailing father-in-law. The transition from city to country life gradually took its toll. A stranger to the town, April’s social life came to a halt. Her life gyrated solely around cooking, performing house chores, or taking her father-in-law for frequent medical appointments at the town’s only medical center.

Not wanting to take any medication, April agreed to come for therapy provided at the medical center. The first time she came, she sat stiffly on the edge of the seat, looking nervous. “My doctor suggested that I come to talk to you,” she said. When asked the reason for her visit, April replied that she felt anxious easily. During the session, she mentioned that she was able to continue with her everyday life, like driving a car, going to the shops, and taking her father-in-law for his medical appointments.

In a subsequent session, April disclosed that the GAD and constant vigilance had become part of her personality. Unable to pinpoint the root of her needling anxiety, April felt troubled. Caring for her father-in-law was not the issue, she said, even though it was time-consuming and emotionally demanding at times. She recognized that living in a

remote country town with few local friends had made her life more introspective. She had more time to dwell on her past.

Applying an integrated counseling approach with a focus on the Rogerian person-centered approach of accurate empathy, congruence, and unconditional positive regard (Elliott & Freire, 2007; Mearns & Thorne, 2007; Merry, 2002; C. R. Rogers, 1951) helped April to externalize her feelings and thoughts. She spoke about the ‘demons’ that haunt her, how she grew up being repeatedly told that she was not good. There was the trauma of domestic violence and neglect during her childhood. During therapy, April recognized that she strove all her life to be good and to constantly seek approval from others. She decided to receive ongoing counseling to heal herself, weed out the negative self-talk, and eliminate her anxious thoughts and feelings.

Therapy went through two phases. The first phase involved trust and rapport building in the counselor-client relationship. Person-centered counseling, art therapy, and simple visualization techniques were introduced. Preferring to work more intuitively, April was not keen with the behavioral method of using self-observation charts. When the impact of the above-mentioned approaches reached a plateau, with April’s consent, Falun Gong was considered and integrated into the counseling sessions. April had never heard of Falun Gong; it sounded foreign. Upon learning more about it, she agreed to give Falun Gong a try and chose to start with the sitting meditation.

She found the meditation music soothing and was able to sit in stillness for 20 minutes during her first endeavor. “I feel more relaxed, less anxious, and less stuff buzzing in my head” (Trey, 2016b, p. 176), said April. The calming effect encouraged her to continue with Falun Gong. She sat for 30 minutes during the next session, and the next. Falun Gong eased her anxiety level and soon GAD became a non-issue. At her request, we spent a good portion of each counseling session doing Falun Gong exercises until she was ready to practice the exercises in a large group at the local community center.

April started to smile and talk more. Then she started reading *Zhuan Falun*, first by herself at home and later at the local small Fa-study group. (Fa-study refers to reading or studying Falun Gong teachings by oneself or with other practitioners. It is considered one of the most fundamental aspects of the practice.) Reading the teachings of the practice helped April to understand certain key concepts. Whenever the tsunami of traumatic childhood memories hit her again, April felt resilient to overcome them. One by one, she dealt with the cobwebs from her past. Negative self-talk was replaced with positive thoughts. Whenever negativity surfaced, April remembered the teachings from Falun Gong—that these thoughts were not her true self. She realized that her main consciousness must stay strong and learn to mentally reject the negative thoughts that were dragging her down.

Soon, her self-confidence and self-esteem returned. With wings, April soared. Soon she joined the weekly local Falun Gong practice and Fa-study group. Our counseling sessions became fewer and gradually tapered out upon mutual agreement. With wings, will fly, April ended the counseling sessions and we continued to see each other at the big practice and study groups.

It was a tremendous learning curve working with April and to have the honor of integrating Falun Gong with counseling. Her case was unique in that the lasting impact of the integrated therapy could be documented, with April’s consent, more than 10 years

later. During the follow-up telephone interview in 2014, April summarized her experience. “When I first started learning Falun Gong, I felt really good physically and mentally. It was something to focus on and it gave me a sense of purpose in my life. Falun Gong calms my mind and body. . . . Whenever emotional stuff resurfaces, it [Falun Gong] helps me to stay calm” (Trey, 2016b, p. 174).

Discussion

These three case examples not only demonstrate the beneficial effects of Falun Gong but also imply that the integration of Falun Gong with counseling is viable. Though the stories are unique, they offer a compelling motivation and inspiration to seriously consider the possibilities of integrating Falun Gong into professional practice. Andrew’s case carries an extra implication because of its significance to counselor self-care. The risk of burnout, particularly for those working with demanding clients, is high. Self-care is important for counselors and other health professionals. Meyers (2016) stated that meditative practices can be “a source of counselor clarity” (p. 6) and illustrated with examples to show its beneficial effects on counselors. Falun Gong can be a self-care strategy for both the counselor and counselee.

For best practice toward an integrated Falun Gong counseling approach, it is essential to have a sound knowledge and understanding of Falun Gong. Clients will ask if the counselor practices Falun Gong. It is best to be honest and upfront and to refer clients to the nearest practice sites where they can learn the meditative movement practice and come for the talk therapy.

Furthermore, a yet-to-be-published study explores the extent in which Falun Gong practitioners who are counselors or health professionals integrate the practice with their work (Trey & Milner, 2017). The study unveils different ways and varying degrees in which counselors and other health practitioners integrate Falun Gong into their professional work. According to the raw data, one of the simplest ways for most of these health practitioners is to place Falun Gong literature in their waiting room (Trey & Milner, 2017). Others noted that they mentioned Falun Gong and its benefits to clients or handed them a flier and suggested that they try this meditative practice for its beneficial effects.

Another implication is that the more you know about Falun Gong, the easier it is to blend it with your counseling practice. You can show clients how to do the exercises, talk about relevant aspects of Falun Gong teachings, and help to organize a practice site nearby where your clients could attend as a group activity. You will know the right time to introduce Falun Gong to your clients and how much of the cultivation practice to integrate with a client—depending on his or her presenting issues.

One of the biggest implications for integrating Falun Gong with counseling involves an ethical issue. Falun Gong is free of charge. Unlike other meditative practices, no one is allowed to charge a fee for teaching Falun Gong (H. Li, 2001b). Hence, counselors need to be aware of this and not charge any fee when running a group Falun Gong practice site in their professional work setting. As counselors offering an integrated model of counseling with Falun Gong, we have to make it very clear to our clients that we are charging a professional fee for counseling and not for teaching Falun Gong. Since improvements usually happen quickly, integrated counseling sessions are usually short to

medium term. As soon as improvement occurs, it is time to encourage the client to join an external group practice site (Trey 2016a).

Finally, for a spiritually integrated approach with Falun Gong (Trey, 2017b) to develop, there is a need for training to prepare those interested in such collaborative practices. Currently, many university counseling programs are already offering meditation and/or mindfulness training in their curriculum. It is strongly suggested that counselor educators consider including the mindfulness practice of Falun Gong training⁴ in counselor education as a course subject or for continuing professional development.

Conclusion

Integrating Eastern meditative movement approaches with counseling has gained popularity and wider acceptance in recent years. Falun Gong, an ancient Chinese mind-body and spiritual meditative discipline, has a place in the counseling room. The three case examples offer insights into the relevance and feasibility of using Falun Gong in an integrative counseling approach. Andrew, Barbara, and April's stories highlight the beneficial effects of Falun Gong, making it an ideal choice as a self-care and self-intervention strategy. Finally, the three case studies illustrate and endorse how the integration of Falun Gong with counseling can be achieved in different scenarios.

Acknowledgement

The author greatly appreciates the commitment of Andrew, April, and Barbara for participating in the author's studies on the effects of Falun Gong.

References

- Ackerman, S. E. (2005). Falun Dafa and the new age movement in Malaysia: Signs of health, symbols of salvation. *Social Compass*, 52(4), 495–511.
- Answers to commonly asked questions about Falun Gong. (2004, September 1). Retrieved from <http://en.minghui.org/html/articles/2004/9/1/52070.html>
- Astin, J. A. (1998). Why patients use alternative medicine: Results of a national study. *Journal of American Medical Association*, 279(19), 1548–1553. doi:10.1001/jama.279.19.1548
- Atwood, J. D., & Maltin, L. (1991). Putting Eastern philosophies into Western psychotherapies. *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 45(3), 368–382.
- Baer, D. (2013, June 21). 3 reasons everyone at Google is meditating. *Fast Company*. Retrieved from <http://www.fastcompany.com/3013333/unplug/3-reasons-everyone-at-google-is-meditating>
- Bendig, B. W. (2013). *Cognitive and physiological effects of Falun Gong qigong* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). University of California, Los Angeles.
- Bogart, G. (1991). The use of meditation in psychotherapy: A review of the literature. *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 45(3), 383–412.

⁴ Dr. Trey was invited to give two Falun Gong mindfulness-training seminars in January 2017 at Xavier University of Louisiana, in collaboration with the Center for Traumatic Stress Research.

- Brief introduction to Falun Dafa. (2012). Retrieved from <http://www.falundafa.org/eng/introduction.html>
- Bruseker, G. (2000). *Falun Gong: A modern Chinese folk Buddhist movement in crisis* (Unpublished honors thesis). University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada.
- Carpenter, J. T. (1977). Meditation, esoteric traditions: Contributions to psychotherapy. *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 31(3), 394–404.
- Cheung, M. (2016). The intersection between mindfulness and human rights: The case of Falun Gong and its implications for social work. *Journal of Spirituality and Religion in Social Work–Social Thought*, 35(1-2), 57–75.
- Clearwisdom Editors. (2005). *Life and hope renewed: The healing power of Falun Dafa*. Gillette, NJ: Yih Chyun Corporation.
- Clearwisdom Editors. (2006). *Hearts and minds uplifted: The power of Falun Dafa* (1st ed.). Taipei City, Taiwan: Broad Press International Co. Ltd.
- Congleton, C., Hölzel, B. K., & Lazar, S. W. (2015, January 8). Mindfulness can literally change your brain. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2015/01/mindfulness-can-literally-change-your-brain>
- Dan, L., Pu, R., Li, F., Li, N., Wang, Q., Lu, Y., et al. (1998). Falun Gong health effect survey of ten thousand cases in Beijing. Retrieved from http://www.clearwisdom.net/eng/science_eng/survey98_eng.htm
- Delmonte, M. M. (1985). Meditation and anxiety reduction: A literature review. *Clinical Psychology Review*, 5(2), 91–102. doi:10.1016/0272-7358(85)90016-9
- Dong, Y., Huang, C.F., Liao, J., Chen, A., Liu, J. G., & Hsu, K. H. (2016). An observational cohort study on terminal cancer survivors practicing falun gong (FLG) in China. *Journal of Clinical Oncology*, 34(e21568).
- Easton, M. (2005, Spring). What makes us happy? *University of Toronto Magazine*, 32, 20–26.
- Elliott, R., & Freire, E. (2007). Classical person-centered and experiential perspectives on Rogers (1957). *Psychotherapy: Theory, Research, Practice, Training*, 44(3), 285–288. doi:10.1037/0033-3204.44.3.285
- Essig, T. (2012, April 30). Google teaches employees to “Search Inside Yourself.” *Forbes*. Retrieved from <http://www.forbes.com/sites/toddessig/2012/04/30/google-teaches-employees-to-search-inside-yourself/>
- Falun Dafa Information Center. (2015a). *Falun Gong FAQ*. Retrieved from <http://www.faluninfo.net/topic/23/>
- Falun Dafa Information Center. (2015b). *Teachings and beliefs*. Retrieved from <http://www.faluninfo.net/topic/25/>
- Goleman, D. (1976). Meditation and consciousness: An Asian approach to mental health. *American Journal of Psychotherapy*, 30(1), 41–54.
- Gordon, J. S., & Edwards, D. M. (2005). Mind body spirit medicine. *Seminars in Oncology Nursing*, 21(3), 154–158. doi:10.1016/j.soncn.2005.04.002
- Huffington, A. (2015, April 1). Mindfulness, meditation, wellness and their connection to corporate America’s bottom line. *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/arianna-huffington/corporate-wellness_b_2903222.html

- Krisanaprakornkit, T., Sriraj, W., Piyavhatkul, N., Laopaiboon, M. (2006) Meditation therapy for anxiety disorders. *Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews*, Issue 1. doi:10.1002/14651858.CD004998.pub2
- Kutolowski, M. (2007). Transcending the mundane. Retrieved from <http://www.faluninfo.net/article/503/Transcending-the-Mundane/>
- Lau, M. M. (2001a). *Exploring counselors' burnout and alternative coping strategies: Falun Dafa as the alternative coping strategy* (Interview transcript). The University of South Australia, Adelaide, Australia.
- Lau, M. M. (2001b). *Exploring counselors' burnout and alternative coping strategies: Falun Dafa as the alternative coping strategy* (Unpublished case study for master's thesis). The University of South Australia, Adelaide, Australia.
- Lau, M. M. (2010a). *The effect of Falun Gong on health and wellness as perceived by Falun Gong practitioners* (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). The University South Australia, Adelaide, Australia.
- Lau, M. M. (2010b). *The effect of Falun Gong on health and wellness: Executive summary of research findings* (Unpublished executive summary of findings). The University of South Australia, Adelaide, Australia.
- Lazar, S. W., Kerr, C. E., Wasserman, R. H., Gray, J. R., Greve, D. N., Treadway, M. T., . . . Fischl, B. (2005). Meditation experience is associated with increased cortical thickness. *NeuroReport*, 16(17), 1893–1897.
- Li, H. (2001a). *Falun Gong*. Gloucester, MA: Fair Winds Press.
- Li, H. (2001b). *Zhuan Falun*. Gloucester, MA: Fair Winds Press.
- Li, Q., Li, P., Garcia, G. E., Johnson, R. J., & Feng, L. (2005). Genomic profiling of neutrophil transcripts in Asian qigong practitioners: A pilot study in gene regulation by mind-body interaction. *Journal of Alternative and Complementary Medicine*, 11(1), 29–39. doi:10.1089/acm.2005.11.29
- Lio, M., Hu, Y., He, M., Huang, L., Chen, L., & Cheng, S. (2003). The effect of practicing qigong on health status: A case study of Falun Dafa practitioners in Taiwan (Unpublished research article).
- Lowe, S. (2003). Chinese and international contexts for the rise of Falun Gong. *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, 6(2), 263–276. doi:10.1525/nr.2003.6.2.263
- Marlatt, G. A., & Kristeller, J. L. (1999). Mindfulness and meditation. In W. R. Miller (Ed.), *Integrating spirituality into treatment: Resources for practitioners* (pp. 67–84). Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- McCown, D. (2004). Cognitive and perceptual benefits of meditation. *Seminars in Integrative Medicine*, 2(4), 148–151. doi:10.1016/j.sigm.2004.12.001
- Mearns, D., & Thorne, B. (2007). *Person-centred counselling in action* (3rd ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.
- Merry, T. (2002). *Learning and being in person-centred counselling* (2nd ed.). Llangarron, Bath, UK: Bath Press.
- Meyers, L. (2016). Cultivating a practice of mindfulness. *Counseling Today*. Retrieved from <http://ct.counseling.org/2016/12/cultivating-practice-mindfulness/>

- Mindfulness in the corporate world: How businesses are incorporating the Eastern practice. (2013, January 7). *The Huffington Post*. Retrieved from http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/08/29/mindfulness-businesses-corporate-employees-meditation_n_1840690.html
- Monk-Turner, E. (2003). The benefits of meditation: Experimental findings. *The Social Science Journal*, 40(3), 465–470. doi:10.1016/S0362-3319(03)00043-0
- Nania, J. (2013). Falun Gong, popular and serene meditation. Retrieved from <http://www.theepochtimes.com/n3/21898-falun-gong-popular-and-serene/>
- Ospina, M. B., Bond, K., Karkhaneh, M., Buscemi, N., Dryden, D. M., Barnes, V., . . . Shannahoff-Khalsa, D. (2008). Clinical trials of meditation practices in health care: Characteristics and quality. *Journal of Alternative & Complementary Medicine*, 14(10), 1199–1213. doi:10.1089/acm.2008.0307
- Ownby, D. (2001). Falungong and Canada's China policy. *International Journal*, 56(2), 183–204
- Ownby, D. (2003). The Falun Gong in the new world. *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, 2(2), 303–320.
- Ownby, D. (2008). *Falun Gong and the future of China*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Palmer, D. (2007). *Qigong fever*. New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Palmer, S. J. (2003). From healing to protest: Conversion patterns among the practitioners of Falun Gong. *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religions*, 6(2), 348–364. doi:10.1525/nr.2003.6.2.348
- Parker, N. (2004). What is Falun Gong? An introduction to the practice and how it developed in China and around the world. *Compassion*, 5, 40–43.
- Penny, B. (2001). *The past, present and future of Falun Gong*. Retrieved from <http://www.nla.gov.au/benjamin-perry/the-past-present-and-future-of-falun-gong>
- Perez-De-Albeniz, A., & Holmes, J. (2000). Meditation: Concepts, effects and uses in therapy. *International Journal of Psychotherapy*, 5(1), 49–58. doi:10.1080/13569080050020263.
- Porter, N. (2003). *Falun Gong in the United States: An ethnographic study* (Master's thesis). Parkland, FL: University of South Florida.
- Porter, N. (2005). Professional practitioners and contact persons: Explicating special types of Falun Gong practitioners. *Nova Religio: The Journal of Alternative and Emergent Religion*, 9(2), 62–83. doi:10.1525/nr.2005.9.2.062
- Pullen, L. C. (2000). *CBS health watch: Three part series on Falun Dafa*. Retrieved from <http://www.clearwisdom.net/emh/articles/2000/4/17/8467p.html>
- Report on 235 cases of a Falun Gong health survey in North America. (2003). Retrieved from <http://www.clearwisdom.net/emh/articles/2003/3/31/33996.html>
- Research finds Falun Gong practice improves cancer survival rate. (2016). Retrieved from <http://en.minghui.org/html/articles/2016/6/16/157437.html>
- Rogers, C. E., Larkey, L. K., & Keller, C. (2009). A review of clinical trials of Tai Chi and qigong in older adults. *Research Western Journal of Nursing*, 31(2), 245–279. doi:10.1177/0193945908327529
- Rogers, C. R. (1951). *Client-centered therapy: Its current practice, implications, and theory* (1965 paperback ed.). Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.

- Russia: Report on the healing effects of Falun Gong from the Moscow business committee. (2003, February 23). Retrieved from <http://clearharmony.net/articles/200302/10494.html>
- Schaufenbuel, K. (2014). Bringing mindfulness to the workplace: UNC Executive development. Retrieved from http://www.kenan-flagler.unc.edu/~media/Files/documents/executive-development/unc-white-paper-bringing-mindfulness-to-the-workplace_final.pdf
- Schopen, A., & Freeman, B. (1992). Meditation: The forgotten Western tradition. *Counseling and Values*, 36(2), 123–134.
- Shallcross, L. (2012). Where East meets West. *Counseling Today*, 55(4), 28–37.
- Singer, R. (2006). *Mindfulness meditation in Western society*. Retrieved from <http://ezinearticles.com/?Mindfulness-Meditation-in-Western-Society&id=228788>
- Summary of health surveys conducted in mainland China to assess Falun Gong's effects on healing illness and maintaining fitness. (2002). Retrieved March 13, 2002, from <http://www.pureinsight.org/node/841>
- Summary of results from the 1999 health survey of Falun Gong practitioners in North America. (2003). Retrieved from <http://www.pureinsight.org/node/1533>
- The journey of Falun Dafa. (2002). A photo exhibit of ten years since the introduction of Falun Dafa to the public. *Compassion Magazine*, 40–49.
- Trey, M. (2016a). The study of the health-wellness effects of Falun Gong: Applications to counseling. In *Ideas and Research You Can Use: VISTAS 2016*. Retrieved from <http://www.counseling.org/knowledge-center/vistas/>
- Trey, M. (2016b). *The mindful practice of Falun Gong: Meditation for health, wellness and beyond*. Middletown, NY: Turquoise Publishing, Inc.
- Trey, M. (2017a). *Hearts Uplifted Project: Documenting lived experiences of Falun Gong practitioners to examine their health, wellness, and resilience*. (Unpublished ongoing research).
- Trey, M. (2017b, March). *With wings, will fly: A spiritually integrated approach with Falun Gong*. Paper presented at the second annual International Conference on Spirituality and Psychology, Bangkok, Thailand.
- Trey, M., & Milner, C. (2017). *A preliminary study exploring the extent Falun Gong practitioners who are health professionals integrate the practice with their work*. Unpublished raw data.
- Walsh, R. (1989). Asian psychotherapies. In R. J. Corsini & D. Wedding (Eds.), *Current psychotherapies* (4th ed., pp. 547–559). Itasca, IL: F. E. Peacock Publishers, Inc.
- Walsh, R., & Vaughan, F. (Eds.). (1993). *Paths beyond ego: The transpersonal vision*. New York, NY: Jeremy P. Tarcher/Perigee.
- Wang, Q., Li, N., Zheng, L., Qu, E., Tian, X., & Jing, L. (1998). The effect of Falun Gong on healing illnesses and keeping fit: A sampling survey of practitioners from Beijing Zizhuyuan Assistance Center [Electronic version]. Retrieved from http://www.clearwisdom.net/eng/science_eng/survey98_2eng.htm
- What is Falun Dafa? (2002). *Compassion*, 70–71.

- Wong, K. (2014, April 8). There's no price tag on a clear mind: Intel to launch mindfulness program. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/price-intel-mindfulness-program-employee>
- Wu, P., Fuller, C., Liu, X., Lee, H.-C., Fan, B., Hoven, C. W., Mandell, D., . . . Kronenberg, F. (2007). Use of complementary and alternative medicine among women with depression: Results of a national survey. *Psychiatric Services*, 58(3), 349–356. doi:10.1176/appi.ps.58.3.349
- Xie, F. T., & Zhu, T. (2004). *Ancient wisdom for modern predicaments: The truth, deceit, and issues surrounding Falun Gong*. Paper presented at the American Family Foundation Conference, October 17–18, 2003. Retrieved from <http://franktianxie.blog.epochtimes.com/article/show?articleid=4511>
- Yahiya, A. P. D. H. N. (2010). Effectiveness of the Falun Dafa exercises on some psychological skills, and the level of performance in the sport of judo. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences*, 5, 2394–2397. doi:10.1016/j.sbspro.2010.07.469
- Yang, J. D., & Nania, J. (2001). Falun Dafa: Health benefits, anti-aging, and beyond. Retrieved from <http://www.pureinsight.org/node/154>
- Zhang, R., & Xiao, J. (1996). *A report on the effect of Falun Gong in curing diseases and keeping fit based on a survey of 355 cultivators of Falun Gong at certain sites in Beijing, China*. Retrieved from http://www.falundafa-pa.net/survey/survey96_e.pdf

Note: This paper is part of the annual VISTAS project sponsored by the American Counseling Association. Find more information on the project at: <http://www.counseling.org/knowledge-center/vistas>