

ART OF RELAXATION

by Avadhutika Ananda Mitra Acarya

Watch a baby asleep on a bed. It gives up its weight entirely to the bed, without any muscular tension. Nomadic peoples all over Asia, journeying night and day, reach an oasis or camping place and at once throw themselves on the ground and lie there limp, apparently lifeless from head to foot. One hour of this rest refreshes them with as much new vitality and energy as a night's sleep for the average person. These wanderers are able to undertake surprisingly long journeys with very little rest.

Babies and so-called primitive people have not yet forgotten the art of relaxation, the ability to completely rest at will. This art has been practiced by yogis since ancient times. They began their experimentation on this state by watching animals in deep relaxation during sleep, and especially during hibernation.

During even a few minutes of deep relaxation, there is a rapid fall in blood pressure and pulse rate; and the strain on the heart is reduced. The overtaxed nerve centres are revitalised and muscle tension drops even below the basal muscular tension level. Since during deep relaxation only a very small amount of vital energy is being consumed, the remaining energy which is being constantly produced by the cells of the body can be conserved and accumulated for future use.

Yoga practitioners do not need to go on vacation to relax. They can remain seated in a room open to the traffic of a busy metropolis and can transform themselves to the point that they hear no sounds, being relaxed and quickly self-possessed on a chair, just as if they were in a green Swiss valley. Translated into medical language, this capacity of voluntary sensory--motor inhibition is achieved through a gradual and conscious inversion of biological current: no longer a flux from the interior to the exterior, but a flux from the exterior to the interior

To give an example, again taken from electricity, yoga practitioners can voluntarily put themselves in the position of a telephone or radio operator who wants rest, and so switches off all the live contacts of his or her sets; impulses still reach the sets, but are no longer perceived as active, and therefore, do not disturb the operator, but are certainly there and may be recorded. Lying thus in a state of perfect and conscious peace, yoga practitioners can,



through respiration, connect themselves with vital energy or pranic energy. Now they are like batteries put into contact with a source of electrical energy, whereas the average person is like a battery working continuously, unable to recharge itself.

POISE IN ACTION

When this deep relaxation is carried over to the state of activity, the muscular reflexes respond more rapidly to stimuli and every task can be performed more efficiently, more effortlessly.

A cat crouches before a mouse-hole, gracefully motionless. It exhibits tremendous strength and vitality in repose. The machinery of action is not strained in waiting, but all is ready ... and when it darts forward, action bursts like a flash of lighting from its stillness.

Every genius consciously or unconsciously relaxes during the process of creation, and for this reason is so efficient in his or her art. Contrast this poised grace to the movements of today's hurried business people, who with their exaggerated, wasteful movements, fidget and fume, and wear themselves out before the hour for action has arrived.

Through the regular practice of deep relaxation, yoga practitioners develop the ability to keep their minds and bodies in perfect equilibrium in all situations. Learning how to relax and maintain "grace and poise" in this age of rapid change - when high blood pressure and heart disease are the number one killers in technological societies - is one of the most valuable abilities of human life.

DEAD POSE

Shavasana or "Dead Pose" can be done anytime, even at times when most other yogic postures (asanas) cannot be done, such as during sickness, menstruation, or pregnancy. In this pose, the body remains completely motionless and becomes recharged with vital energy or pranic energy, and the mind's attention is gradually withdrawn from the body and surroundings to be absorbed in a state of deep inner tranquillity. The body and mind together attain a perfect blissful repose.

To receive the complete benefit from the practice of yogic postures (asanas), the Dead Pose should be performed for about ten seconds to one minute between two postures. The proper rest in Dead Pose completely calms the body and prevents the overstraining of muscles and the over-stimulation of the glandular, circulatory and respiratory systems. One should rest at least until the breathing and heartbeat have become calm. Asanas and massage should always be followed by the deep relaxation pose for at least three minutes. Those with high blood pressure should do at least five or ten minutes of deep relaxation daily; for as we have seen this is one of the best treatments of hypertension.

To perform the Dead Pose lie down on your back, covering yourself with a sheet if you feel a chill. Stretch the arms and legs gently apart and aim the palms up; the fingers will naturally curl in. Close the eyes. Do not move any muscle of your body, even your eyeballs. Remain as motionless as if you were dead. Immerse your mind in the flow of your breathing, in a state of refreshing peace.

Relax your feet and your toes ... your calves, knees and thighs ... feel that both your legs are completely relaxed - there is no tension or pressure anywhere. Now relax all your internal organs - your digestive system, your lungs, your heart ... relax your back and spine ... Now feel your fingers: relax your fingers and hands, your wrists, your lower arms and elbows, your upper arms and shoulders, and your neck ... Now you should feel that your entire body from the neck down is completely relaxed; there is no tension anywhere.

Feel that flow of relaxation now moving up into your face, relaxing your cheeks, your mouth and lips, your ears, your nose, and your eyes - feel all the tension around your eyes completely dissolving - your forehead and head are completely relaxed ... Feel your brain inside your skull ... your brain is also completely relaxed. Now your whole body from the tips of your toes to the top of your head, is completely relaxed. You feel as light as a feather, and very comfortable.

Now be aware of your breathing. Breathe slowly and deeply, from the diaphragm. As you inhale, imagine that you are inhaling cosmic energy into every cell of your body; your mind and body are becoming completely recharged. Feel the energy from the cosmos flowing through you, washing away all the tensions and negativity, cleansing you inside and out ...

Feel yourself full to overflowing with this purifying energy, radiating from every pore of your body ... filling your whole being with joy and love ...

Remain in this position for as long as you like. Afterwards you will feel completely refreshed in body, mind and spirit.

*** To develop the mind requires a scientific technique with a spiritual outlook and this is what meditation will develop in you. To train the mind development of ethics/morality is required because before moving you should decide how you are going. Morality develops proper use of your mind and organs and is necessary to the practice of spiritual meditation and if mind is to go beyond layers of distortion, so that it is able to be concentrated and focused during meditation. ***

*** More when you learn meditation ...

Meditation and Yoga is very comprehensive. Meditation and Yoga offers something for everybody irrespective of health, age, size, flexibility, or beliefs. Although it originated in India, Yoga is for all. It is no longer just a spiritual tradition from India.

You would expect quite a bit from a tradition that's been around for over 7,000 years. Yoga includes physical postures to help you stay fit and reduce your stress level, as well as increase your energy. Yoga also offers a range of meditation practices to strengthen the mind, and breathing techniques for calmness of your nervous system and clarity of thought. Along with proper diet it is a very efficient system of health care, and for restoring and maintaining health.

Meditation looks at the world and universe from a broad, holistic perspective. This perspective appreciates the enormous influence of the mind and your psychological attitudes in relation to all actions, thoughts and spiritual well being. Its expansive nature and cultivation of higher ideals and thoughts makes it ideal for all of humanity.

Yoga seeks harmony and unity at various levels. However, yoga and meditation does not deny challenges and these are seen to be beneficial to personal growth. First, yoga and meditation seeks to harmonise your body and mind. Second, it seeks to unify mind and spirit or Self so that Oneness is experienced in daily life. This ideational approach is what allows the mind to grow and gain strength and wellbeing, not from a materialistic perspective, but from what is deeply meaningful from an emotional and spiritual perspective.

These aspects are explored and developed as one learns meditation for self-development and liberation.