

Some Additional Relaxation Practices and Script from Jaime

Relaxation

Relaxation is often the thing left off of the “to do” list. It is often by-passed for other pleasures, a movie, time on the phone with a friend, snacking in front of the TV for some downtime. And while these pastimes are good for us in measure, relaxation practice done systematically can restore us at an energetic level that may surpass even sleep!

Relaxation is a skill that can, like other skills, be acquired through practice. The more regularly and frequently it is practiced, the more likely the skill of relaxation is learned.

Systematic relaxation is something to be practiced—even by children. A typical practice lasts from about 8 -12 minutes, however for those pressed for time, even a two minute or 30 second practice is useful and has benefit! Relaxation gives rest to the body, especially to any areas of chronic tension, rest to the nervous system, and rest to the mind. Here are some of the main methods of relaxation we use.

Relaxation Poses

1. Corpse Pose (*Shavasana*) – place a folded blanket under head or neck and under knees if needed for comfort
2. Crocodile Pose (*Makarasana*)
3. Child’s Pose (*Balasana*) – relax for shorter length practice here
4. Flapping Fish Pose (*Matsya Kridasana*)
5. Simple Standing Pose (*Tadasana*)
6. Friendship Pose (*Maitriasana*) – simple sitting pose with head neck and trunk aligned

Relaxation Practice Scripts

Head-to-Toe Systematic Relaxation

Head-to-Toe-to-Head Systematic Relaxation

Abbreviated Head-to-Toe Systematic Relaxation

Complete Relaxation

Tension-Relaxation

Energetic Cleansing Relaxation Practice

Yoga Nidra (A Bihar School practice)

Below are several scripts for relaxation practice. Systematic relaxation from head to toes is a good practice for class use. Relaxation can be given as a practice on its own, in conjunction with meditation and as a part of any yoga class. Typically, it is done at both the beginning and ending of the class. If there is less time, then done at the end only.

Head-to-Toe Systematic Relaxation

Lie supine in Corpse Pose/Shavasana

The diaphragm is a dome-shaped muscle located at the bottom of the ribcage. It runs horizontally and attaching down the front of the spine in your low back. When you breathe in this dome

flattens down like a plate or shallow saucer. When you breathe out it relaxes and domes back up to its resting position.

Feel the breath in the nostrils, cooler as it comes in, warmed by the body as it goes out. Make this flow of breath even by moving the diaphragm steadily without pause.

Notice the ends of the breath cycle the end of the exhale, the end of the inhale. See if you can smooth out the transitions so that the breath is continuous without pause at either ‘end.’

Place one hand on your stomach just below the bottom of your breastbone. As you breathe in this area should move upward toward the ceiling, as you breathe out this area should gently fall back toward your spine and the floor. Take your other hand and place it on the chest just above your heart. See if this area is moving more, or less, than the stomach area. It may move a little but if it is moving more, then see if you can move the breath more from the diaphragm. Now place the hand that was on the chest on your lower abdomen and observe the amount of movement. This area may move a little but if it is moving more direct your awareness to the stomach area and move the breath from there.

Bring awareness to your head. Allow the weight of the head to relax into the floor. Notice the muscles of your face, flatten the forehead, allow the eyes to fall back into the head, relax the cheeks, allow the jaw to hang, relax the lips. Allow the tongue to relax back into the throat.

Relax the neck, allow the neck muscles to soften and widen. Allow the tubes in the neck to release. Relax the roots of the neck the muscles that spread into the upper torso. Relax out to the shoulders. Allow the weight of the upper body to release into the floor through the shoulder blades. Travel through the arms and relax the arms. Relax the palms of the hands and the fingers. Relax the fingertips.

Relax the entire upper torso from the neck to the waist. Allow the back muscles to relax. Relax the heart and lungs, relax whatever you notice is not fully releasing its weight into the floor.

Relax the waist area and the low back. Allow the weight of the body to release into the floor.

Relax the pelvis, the pelvis floor and the hips. Allow the bowl of the pelvis to rest against the floor and relax the contents of the pelvis. Travel down through the legs. Relax the thigh, knees, lower legs. Relax the ankles, and feet and toes. Relax the tips of the toes.

Return to the feeling of breathing. Allow the breath to move in a slow even steady circle.

Head-to-Toe-to Head Systematic Relaxation

Lie in Corpse or Crocodile or Flapping Fish Pose. Breath diaphragmatically.

Feel the head, scan for any tension in the head area: check your eyes, cheeks, jaw muscles, tongue. Feel the entire weight of the head rest on the floor.

Travel to your neck and throat. Allow this area to soften, and widen a bit, like the cords of muscles are becoming lax and softening. Relax your voice.

Relax, drop the weight of your shoulder blades and collar bones. Soften the muscles that hold them. Feel the weight of your arms and allow them to rest fully on the floor. Relax your palms fingers and finger tips. (The fingers curl as they relax. You do not have to hold them flat.)

Allow the eight of the upper torso to relax into the floor. Feel the cords of the back flatten. Relax the muscles between the ribs. Relax the chest area. Feel the heart and lungs and let them have their own weight. Let that eight rest into the floor.

Feel the waist, low back and abdomen. Allow its weight to fall into the floor. Relax the contents of the pelvis into the pelvic bowl. Allow the muscles on the back of the pelvis to soften. Allow the weight of the pelvic, pelvic floor and hips to drop.

Allow the legs to release into the floor. Relax through the feet and all ten of the toes.

Relax your legs and hips. Scan for any remaining tension and release the weight into to floor.

Relax through the pelvic area, allowing its full weight to rest on the floor.

Relax the waist area and low back.

Relax the chest, upper back, and shoulder.

Relax the arms, hands and fingers.

Relax the neck and throat.

Relax the mask of the face and the entire head.

Breathe evenly.

Abbreviated Head-to-Toe Systematic Relaxation

Travel through each area of the body with your awareness. Bring you attention to one area at a time and direct your body to relax. One way to relax tension is to allow the body's weight to release into gravity. If you find an area very resistant to simply letting go, try tensing it when you inhale and then releasing when you exhale. Relax:

Head – scalp and face

Neck

Shoulder blades and shoulders

Arms, wrists, hands and fingers

Ribcase area

Low back and abdomen

Pelvis, pelvis floor and hips

Legs, ankles, feet and toes

Complete Relaxation

Lie in corpse pose breathing evenly with eyes closed.

Relax the top of the head, forehead, eyebrows. Relax the space between the eyebrows, the eyes, the eyelids, the cheeks, and the nose. Take four (diaphragmatic) breaths.

Relax the mouth, jaw, chin, neck. Relax the shoulders, upper arms, lower arms, wrists, hands, fingers, and fingertips. Exhale from the fingertips, up the arms, shoulders, and face to the nostrils. Now inhale from the nostrils out the shoulders and arms back to the fingertips. Take four diaphragmatic breaths.

Relax the fingertips, fingers, hands, wrists, lower arms, upper arms, shoulders, upper back and chest. Concentrate your attention at the center of the chest and exhale and inhale completely four times.

Relax the stomach, abdomen, lower back, hips, thighs, knees, calves, ankles, feet, and toes. Exhale as though your whole body is exhaling, and inhale as though your whole body is inhaling. Expel all that you wish to let go of, and inhale vitality, nourishment, peace. Repeat this four times.

Relax the toes, feet, ankles, calves, thighs, knees, hips, lower back, abdomen, stomach, and chest. Bring awareness to the center of the chest, exhale and inhale four times.

Relax the upper back, shoulders, upper arms, lower arms, wrists, hands, fingers, and fingertips. Exhale and inhale four times.

Relax the fingertips, fingers, hands, wrists, lower arms, upper arms, shoulders, neck, chin, jaw, mouth, and nostrils. Then exhale and inhale four times.

Relax the cheeks, eyelids, eyes, eyebrows, space between the eyebrows, forehead, and top of the head. Now, for 30 to 60 seconds, let your mind be aware of the serene flow of breath; let your mind make a gentle conscious effort to guide your breath so that it remains smooth, calm, and deep, without any noise or jerks.

Slowly open the eyes and stretch.

Tension-Relaxation

Tension-relaxation practice is a classical relaxation method that brings awareness to the energetic aspect of each body area. Once the area is tightened and then released, greater relaxation can be experienced in that area. It is a valuable practice for releasing chronic muscular tension. However, pregnant women and persons with un-medicated high blood pressure should avoid this method. It is important to breathe evenly, fully and diaphragmatically during this practice.

Lie in Corpse Pose breathing evenly.

Open the eyes and mouth wide and stretch out the tongue. Then relax and return all.

Tense the facial muscles squeezing them toward the nose. Then release.

Roll neck from side to side several times.

Draw shoulders forward and up. Release.

Tense the right arm and release it.

Tense the left arm and release it.

Tense the hips and buttocks. Then release.

Tense the right leg and release it.

Tense the left leg and release it.

Starting at the toes, relax successively upward: toes, legs, lower, middle and upper torso, arms, neck and head.

Energetic Cleansing Relaxation Practice

Lying on your back in a relaxation pose, inhale from the toes up to the top of your head. Then follow by exhaling with your attention flowing from the crown of your head to your toes. There is no need to force the breath or ‘muscle’ through it. Breathe in an easy, relaxed way with attention to your body’s energy.

As you inhale, imagine you are taking in light, clarity nurturance, serenity, and really anything positive you would like to take in. As you exhale, imagine you are throwing out all your worried and negativity. Let go of what you don’t want.

Yoga Nidra (Yogic Sleep)

This practice script is based on a practice from the Bihar School of Yoga, Munger, Bihar, India

Yoga Nidra is a very powerful relaxation method for people experienced in yogic relaxation practice. This practice can be as restorative as sleep. Accomplished yogis may use this technique remaining conscious as they rest. The Menninger Foundation ran an experiment on Swami Rama during which equipment recorded his brains waves indicating he was asleep. At the conclusion of the session, Swami Rama was able to retell verbatim the conversations going on in the room while he was “asleep.”

Yoga Nidra is used to re-pattern mental and emotional conditioning sometimes associated with psychosomatic illness and addiction. Because deep levels of the mind can be reached during the practice, behavioral modifications such as resolutions (*sankalpa*) can be suggested by the practitioner at this time. A resolve is thought of and held in mind at the beginning and/or end of a Yoga Nidra exercise.

Preparation

Lie in Shavasana with eyes closed, body covered for warmth and head on a small cushion. Relax from head to toes. Become aware of the subtle movements of the breath. Make a short, terse resolution material, mental, or spiritual. Fix the language so it will be the same words when you say it again.

Rotation of Consciousness

Visualize each part of the body as it is named and move the consciousness into that part. Go with the speed of my voice. Follow with your awareness, but do not move the body.

(Right Side)

Visualize the right hand thumb, second finger, third finger, fourth finger, fifth finger. Visualize all five fingers together palm of the hand, back of the hand, wrist, forearm.
Visualize the right elbow, upper arm, shoulder, armpit, right chest, side, waist, hip, buttock, thigh, hamstring, knee, calf, ankle, heel, sole, top of the foot, right big toe, second toe, third toe, fourth toe, fifth toe, all five toes together.

(Left Side)

Now take your consciousness to the left side. Visualize the left hand thumb, second finger, third finger, fourth finger, fifth finger. Visualize all five fingers together palm of the hand, back of the hand, wrist, forearm.

Visualize the left elbow, upper arm, shoulder, armpit, left chest, side, waist, hip, buttock, thigh, hamstring, knee, calf, ankle, heel, sole, top of the foot, left big toe, second toe, third toe, fourth toe, fifth toe, all five toes together.

(Right/Left)

Now from toes to crown of the head. Visualize the right big toe, second toe, third toe, fourth toe, fifth toe, all five toes together. Visualize the left big toe, second toe, third toe, fourth toe, fifth toe, all five left toes together. Now move the consciousness right and left as I say the parts alternately. Right sole, left sole, both soles together. Right heel, left heel, both heels together. Right ankle, left ankle, both ankles together. Right calf, left calf, both calves together. Right thigh, left thigh, both thighs together. Right hamstring, left hamstring, both hamstrings together. Right buttock, left buttock, both buttocks together. Right hip, left hip, both hip together. Waist, lower abdomen, upper abdomen, whole of the abdomen. Right side of the chest, left side of the chest, whole chest. Right collarbone, left collarbone, center of the collarbones, throat.

Right shoulder, left shoulder, right arm, left arm, right elbow, left elbow, right hand, left hand. Right thumb, second finger, third finger, fourth finger, fifth finger, all five fingers together, palm of the hand, back of the hand. Left thumb, second finger, third finger, fourth finger, fifth finger, all five fingers together, palm of the hand, back of the hand.

Shoulders, upper back, middle back, lower back. Right side of the back, left side of the back. Whole of the spine. Back of the neck, front of the neck, the whole neck.

Chin, lower lip, upper lip, both lips together, teeth, tongue. Right nostril, left nostril, both nostrils, tip of the nose, whole of the nose. Right eyelid, left eyelid, right eyeball, left eyeball, both eyeballs together. Right eyebrow, left eyebrow, eyebrow center. Right temple, left temple, forehead, back of the head, crown of the head. Whole face, whole head.

(In Parts)

Whole right arm, whole left arm, whole right leg, whole left leg, whole front, whole back, whole right side of the body, whole left side of the body. Whole body together, whole body together, whole body together.

Body/Floor Contact

See the whole physical body lying on the floor. Become aware of the points touching the floor. Become aware of the parts of your whole physical body receiving energy from the floor. Be aware of the front of your body deriving prana from the air. Feel the vibrations of prana moving through your body. Become aware of the environment around your body and of others here. Please do not sleep. Listen carefully to the instructions.

Awareness of Sensations

Now visualize the whole body lying on the floor relaxed and tranquil. Feel the body become very hot. Try to experience the sensation of heat throughout the body. Create the experience of heat now.

Try to feel the sensation of being very cold. Remember a very cold experience, the icy cold wind, experience that here and now. Create the sensation of cold with your consciousness.

Now experience heaviness in the physical body. The body is becoming heavier and heavier. It has become so heavy you are unable to move any parts. You are not even able to raise one eyelid.

Now experience the sensation of becoming very very light. Experience lightness throughout the body, as if the body is completely weightless. Try to experience the lightness of the phsyical body.

Chakra Visualization

In this light physical body visualize the chakras. These centers are the junctions for branches of the nervous system. They are symbolic, and are always represented by different colored lotus flowers. Try to remember the location of each chakra as it is named. Visualize a lotus flower of **Muladhara** at the bottom of the spinal cord. **Swadhisthana** at the third disc of the sacrum, **Manipura** behind the navel at the spinal cord, **Anahata** at the back of the heart, **Vishuddhi** behind the throat, **Ajna** at the top of the spinal cord, and **Sahasrara** at the crown of the head. The light body you are experiencing is able to see the subtle body within, and the places where the charkas are situated.

Ending

Remember your sankalpa, your resolution. Repeat it mentally. Without opening the eyes, sit up and turn towards my voice. Place the palms over your eyes and keep them there for a bit of time. Bring them down and move the physical body. Please do not talk or make contact with anyone. Sit with head, neck and trunk aligned. We will chant Om three times. Breathe in deeply . . . Om, Om, Om.

Coming Out of Supine Relaxation Poses

Come out of any practice slowly. Move peripherally, wiggle toes and fingers, circle wrists and ankles. Perhaps take a long symmetrical stretch, like a morning stretch with arms reaching

overhead along the floor. Bend each knee to place the feet on the floor. Hug knees to chest if you like. Before sitting up roll to one side. Then sit up from there.

Coming Out of Crocodile

Find a comfortable way to round or flex the back. This could be by folding into a fetal position on one's side, or by gently pushing back into child's pose.