

Relaxation: Go on a Mental Trip!

Prepared for: T.U.C.K

October 22, 2009

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Foundational Yoga Teacher – 200 Hour Level

This session is meant to relax, rejuvenate and revitalize you! I have facilitated many relaxation and visualization sessions with participants of various ages (from elementary students up to adults over 65 years of age), all of whom have enjoyed and benefited from the experience.

Equipment:

This session requires a mat. (pillows, bolsters, blankets are optional but definitely add to the comfort).

Preparing the body:

Although Sun Salutations are not required to meditate or relax I find by incorporating them regularly you can allow your meditation/relaxation practice to become a slow dance of conscious movement dedicated to energized presence.

Sun salutations:

Sun Salutations, or Surya Namaskar, can be a complete practice in and of itself. These 12 or so poses linked in a series can lengthen and strengthen, flex and extend many of the main muscles of the body while distributing the prana flow throughout the system. There are many sun salutation variations, but I prefer the lunge salute the most because it lengthens and contracts the psoas muscle, our major hip flexor. The psoas connects in the groin at the lesser trochanter to all the lumbar vertebrae and up to T12, giving important flexion and length to the lower back. The lunge also stretches the musculature of the upper and inner thighs while also stimulating the stomach, spleen, and liver meridians.

The cycle goes as follows: stand in **Tadasana (Mountain Pose)**, find the center of your breath, alignment, and balance. Inhale and reach up (metaphorically kissing the sun, representing our source of sustenance as well as the light within that burns continuously for awakening). Exhale and fold down to **Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)**, bowing to the earth, while stretching the hamstrings, calf muscles, and lower back. Inhale, keeping the hands down, and lift the chest. Exhale and step the right foot back and lower the back knee and foot down into a **low lunge**.

In the lunge, inhale and lift the arms up; keep the left buttocks strong while slightly hugging in the inner groins toward each other. Keep the neck in neutral as you look forward. **Stay for five breaths**, then exhale and lower the arms. Inhale and step the left foot back into **Plank Pose** (both hands under the shoulders, arms and legs straight), and then exhale and lower to **Chatarunga Dandasana (Four – Limbed Staff Pose)** with legs straight or knees on the ground to strengthen

the arms and trapezius, drawing the belly back as you lower. Lower the pelvis, tuck the toes, and inhale as you lift the chest and legs in **Salabhasana (Locust Pose)** strengthening the lower back. Alternate between having the legs together and bringing them apart each round. Stay in Salabhasana for five breaths. Exhale and lower the feet and head. Inhale up to Plank, and exhale to **Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward Facing Dog Pose)**, lengthening the hamstrings, calves, and torso, while strengthening the upper body.

After five breaths inhale and step the right foot forward into a **lunge on the other side**. Exhale there. Then inhale and lift the arms for **five breaths**. On the fifth exhalation, lower the arms, and on the inhalation, step the back foot forward to meet the front one. Lift the chest and exhale; fold into **Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend)**.

On the next inhalation, lift the arms, leading from the sternum, and come up to standing (bend the knees if the lower back is weak). Exhale, standing tall with the hands in Namaste. Feel the effects. Notice the flow of energy (prana) moving within as you stand vibrantly steady; the body enlivened, the mind steadied.

See what it's like to repeat this for five rounds or 15 to 30 minutes. This can be the beginning of your practice or a full practice in and of itself. (Sarah Powers, Yoga Journal)

yoga JOURNAL

Meditation 101

In the classical yoga tradition, hatha yoga is practiced as preparation for seated meditation. So over time, you might naturally find yourself drawn inward toward more contemplative practices.

By Claudia Cummins

To give meditation a try, sit comfortably, set a timer for 10 minutes, and explore one of the following strategies. And consider yourself forewarned: Meditation is a delightfully simple practice, but that doesn't mean it's easy!

Just sit. Commit to doing nothing more than sitting quietly and watching what happens. Don't pick up the phone, don't answer the doorbell, don't add another item to your to-do list. Just sit and observe the thoughts that arise and pass through your mind. You will likely be surprised by how difficult it is to sit quietly for 10 minutes. In the process, though, you may learn something important about the qualities of the restless mind and the ever-changing nature of life.

Listen to the sounds of life. Close your eyes and tune in to the sounds percolating both within and around you. Open your ears and adopt a receptive attitude. At first, you'll likely hear only the most obvious noises, but over time, you'll discover new layers of sounds that you had previously tuned out. Challenge yourself to observe what you hear without clinging to it or resisting it. Notice how the world feels more alive as your awareness of the present deepens.

Practice bare attention. Notice the raw sensations of the present moment—feelings of warmth and coolness, hardness and softness, pressure and ease. Which parts of your body are in contact with the earth? How does the shape of the body shift with each inhalation and exhalation? How

does your experience change over time? Cultivating an awareness of the present moment will foster a more serene and attentive mind, one that is able to settle into the here and now.

Follow the breath. Attach your mind to the breath. While you're breathing in, note that you're breathing in, and while you're breathing out, focus on the exhalation. Don't manipulate the breath in any way; simply watch it with your mind's eye, just as you would follow a tennis ball bouncing from one side of the court to the other during a particularly engrossing match. When you find that your mind has strayed, as it inevitably will, gently refocus it on the breath and begin again.

Use a mantra. Choose a favorite word, phrase, prayer, or fragment of a poem, and repeat it slowly and softly. Let its rhythm and meaning lull you into a quiet, contemplative state of ease. When you notice that your mind has wandered off to other thoughts, simply redirect it back toward the words you've chosen as your touchstone and rededicate your awareness to them.

Practice kindness. As you sit quietly, focus your inner attention on someone you know who might benefit from an extra dose of kindness and care. In your mind's eye, send this person love, happiness, and well-being. Soften your skin, open the floodgates of your heart, and let gentle goodwill pour forth.

Claudia Cummins practices happiness and teaches yoga in central Ohio. A selection of her essays can be found at <http://www.claudiacummins.com/>.

You can find this article at the site address below.

Return to <http://www.yogajournal.com/practice/1307>

Thank you for your participation, interest and attention.

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