



THE HOLY LIGHT ACADEMY



STEPPING STONES ALONG THE PATH



Relaxation and Breath Control

Relaxation and breath control are preliminary in practicing spiritual exercises and meditation properly. Ask yourself, how can you begin any discipline if your body is full of tension, and your mind is too busy with an array of thoughts running through it? Here are basic steps to Relaxation.

1. Sit in a straight-back chair, place your legs straight out, feet on the floor, and do not cross your feet. Rest your hands either in your lap or one hand on each upper leg. Sit up straight in your chair, as slouching and bad posture in any meditative process is not beneficial. Make sure you are reasonably comfortable. Now close your eyes.

2. Now, take a slow, deep breath, deep into your lungs, and down to your diaphragm. Hold it for five counts, then let it out, completely. Repeat this three times at least, but be careful that you do not hyperventilate. If you are familiar with the technique of chanting the AUM, you can do this instead, for this is very conducive to bringing about peace of mind.

3. Now, you want to continue breathing in the same way, yet not as heavily, but still breathing slow and deep, not shallow, but more gently. Just repeat this rhythmic breathing for a few minutes and relax into it. Many people have unfortunately conditioned themselves to breathe from the chest up, and do not get into the habit of bringing fresh air down into the bottom of the lungs. It is healthier to get into a habit of breathing more deeply, down toward the diaphragm. Doing this breathing process more often will begin this new habit. This will help you to learn to relax your body.

4. As you keep a steady, rhythmic pattern of breathing as you sit, this will be the beginning of concentration as well. You can think to yourself, “*in* as I breathe in, and *out* as I breathe out,” to help you mentally focus and avoid being distracted by your miscellaneous thoughts. Or you can recite a simple affirmation as you breathe; for example, as you breathe in, think, “I live in the Light,” and when you breathe out, “I shine the Light to others.” Or create your own affirmation.

You should do this simple relaxation process for just a few minutes before you begin your regular exercise or meditation. In fact, let it be a part of your regular exercise and let the relaxation and breathing pattern blend into it. The breath is very spiritually significant, for the ancients declared that this is the vital life-force that the physical body is drawing upon. For within breath is the Spirit, the Spirit of life itself. This is the key to bringing God’s Presence into you during such meditative methods. The fact is, it is already within you; however, the breath technique activates this reality and brings in a fuller depth of God’s Spirit within you.

Realize that the key to success in any exercise or meditation is repetition. Doing such

practices daily, or even twice in a day, will create a pattern of genuine well-being and spiritual upliftment, which are beneficial to your spiritual growth.

We will give an additional exercise for retiring, which helps relieve tension in your body. In this exercise, we precede relaxation with the application of a tension technique throughout the body. The tension applied arouses and activates motor nerve centers which control muscles. In this case, relaxation controls nerve-force that energizes muscles, and this includes the brain center which distributes these nerve-forces.

1. Be sure you turn your lights out as you prepare for bed. Lay flat in your bed, and make sure you are comfortable.
2. Begin with your toes; tense them a little. Then relax all the muscles in the feet.
3. Next, tense up the muscles of the leg, between the knees and the ankles, then relax them.
4. Continue this way for further parts of your body as you move upward, knees to hip, abdomen, chest, back, shoulders, arms, hands, neck, and face. Always tense each part for a few seconds, then relax it completely.
5. Finally, feel your whole body relax completely, as you have ceased the tension process altogether. Relax gently into sleep.

Here is an additional step if your eyes are tired or strained. While you take a deep breath, place your fingertips upon the closed lids of the eyes, allowing a little pressure, yet not much. Use right fingers for the right eye and left fingers for the left eye. The way you do this is to hold close together the index finger, second finger, and the thumb. You may try this at first while holding your breath for thirty seconds (or thirty counts), then releasing it. You can do this for up to two minutes for best results, which would be four separate periods of holding your breath. Afterwards your eyes will feel relaxed and less tense, and also invigorated. If you have trouble holding your breath for too long, hold it for a much less period of time, fifteen or twenty seconds then.

Proper breathing and relaxation are beneficial to your general health, physically, mentally, and spiritually, for the three are interconnected. This is likewise true with any of the spiritual exercises and methods of meditation. Hence, the repetition of such techniques is the key to the upliftment of your entire being. Your continued spiritual growth is genuinely enhanced and further development is perpetually guided.

Stepping Stones Along the Path

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