

## Introduction to Meditation: Basic Relaxation and Breathing



The following meditation exercise is designed to help relax, focus, and place you in right frame of mind for any other meditative endeavours that you may be attempting, or can be used as a stand-alone exercise to aid in relaxation in general. It is recommended that you practice these techniques several times before attempting any visualizations.

### Step One

You need to find a quiet and dimly lit place in which you can sit comfortably. Although low lighting is not absolutely necessary, it is usually helpful when first starting with these kinds of exercises. One thing that many forget is to turn off their phones and phone ringers. These can be quite distracting and it will never fail that that will be the time when you are inundated with telemarketing calls.

### Step Two

Where and how you sit isn't overly important, so long as you are comfortable and will be able to remain in this position for an extended period of time. Whether you choose the couch or the floor, legs bent, straight, or crossed, is entirely up to you. The key component is your comfort. If you are in a position that will eventually lead to cramping or body parts falling asleep, that will disrupt what you are attempting and end up drawing all of your focus. On the other end of the spectrum, I advise against lying down, as once you have completely relaxed, it can become exceptionally easy to fall into sleep, and again, not have accomplished what it is you have set out to do (unless that is a good night's sleep!).

### Step Three

Once you are comfortable and ready to begin, close your eyes, and take a moment to adjust, and come to terms with the idea that you will not be opening your eyes again for a little while. It may seem silly, but it is much easier to keep our eyes closed if we tell ourselves that we are going to at the beginning of these exercises.

#### **Step Four**

Now pay close attention to the muscles along your forehead and brow, and purposefully tense these muscles for a good count of three. Now relax them. They will be more at ease than they were prior to the tensing. The difference should be most noticeable. Whether aware of this or not, people usually tend to subconsciously tense various muscle groups regularly even when in seemingly non-stressful situations. This is called bracing, and this exercise will help bypass that response. This is a technique that we will apply all the way down your body, one area at a time. Tense and release your jaw, throat and neck, shoulders, arms and hands, back, buttocks, thighs and calves, and finally your feet and toes. This step can be repeated if necessary, and it will all depend upon the amount of tension that you are carrying within as to whether repetition will be required.

#### **Step Five**

Now that your body is relaxed, we can focus on breathing. In the previous stage it is pretty easy to keep your mind focussed on task because you are asking your body to do something physical that takes conscious effort. Here with the breathing exercises it becomes much easier to let the mind wander and lose focus. Through this technique, try to keep your mind solely attentive on your breathing. Should you find yourself wandering a bit, don't get worked up over this (that can bring back some of the physical tension). Just note that you are doing so, and gently bring your mind back to where it needs to be. Here we must control our breathing. Breathe in gently, but fully, for a count of four or five and exhale just as slowly on the same count. Hear nothing but your breath, and feel nothing other than the air coming and going from your lungs and diaphragm. This exercise helps to fully oxygenate your system. Should you notice that you start to feel a little 'light' while doing this, return yourself to your normal breathing pattern until it subsides, and then attempt again once you are comfortable doing so. At first you may find that you need to do this exercise in small bursts to maintain your comfort level. That is completely acceptable. Everyone's physical condition is different. Do only as you feel is comfortable for you.

#### **Step Six**

Once you have completed this exercise, if you are not continuing on with a visualization, return yourself to your normal breathing pattern, away from the controlled one. There is no

rush to stand, and it is recommended that you give yourself a few minutes, so as no lightheadedness occurs. Once you are breathing normally, open your eyes and move gently in your seated position. Wiggle your fingers and hands, toes, etc.... Allow everything else to 'wake up' with you before you stand.

As mentioned above, this simple exercise can be used on its own to aid in centering, relaxation, stress, what-have-you, and/or used as the precursor for your visualizations.

