

Practices of the
Himalayan Tradition
as taught by Swami Rama

Volume 1: Breathing & Relaxation
Recorded by Prakash Keshaviah, Ph.D.



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Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| 1. Introduction | 5 |
| 2. Diaphragmatic Breathing in the Crocodile Posture, or Makarasana | 7 |
| 3. Diaphragmatic Breathing in the Corpse Posture, or Shavasana | 11 |
| 4. Tension Relaxation Exercise | 16 |
| 5. Complete Relaxation Exercise for the Muscles of the Body | 20 |
| 6. Complete Relaxation Exercise for the Joints of the Body | 23 |
| 7. 31 Points Exercise | 26 |

Introduction

This is volume 1 of an audio CD series which will guide you through some of the basic practices of the Himalayan tradition as taught by H. H. Swami Rama of the Himalayas. In this volume, the following practices are included:

- Diaphragmatic breathing practicum in the crocodile posture, or makarasana
- Diaphragmatic breathing practicum in the corpse posture, or shavasana
- A tension-relaxation exercise
- A systematic relaxation exercise, relaxing all the muscles of the body, from head to toe
- A systematic relaxation exercise, relaxing all the joints of the body, from head to toe
- And the 31 point exercise.

Allow about 2-3 hours after a meal before you begin the practice. Empty your bladder before you begin. Try to find a place for your practice which is quiet and free from disturbances and interruptions. The room should be made dark. If the room cannot be darkened, use a dark colored handkerchief placed over the eyes. Spread a blanket or mat on the floor. Use a small, soft pillow to support your head. Cover yourself with a light blanket or shawl to shield your body from drafts.

During these exercises, try to keep your mind alert and

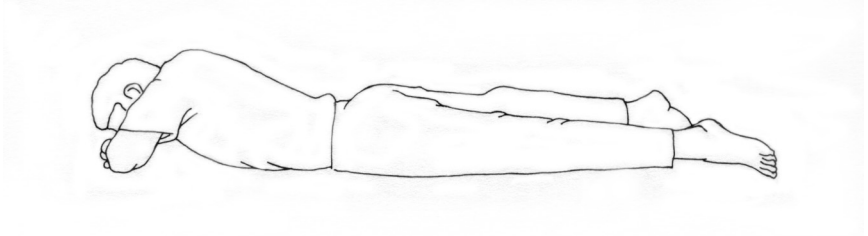
focused on your breath as you progressively relax. In the beginning, none of these exercises should be done for more than 10 minutes, because beyond that time, the mind usually begins to wander or you might find yourself drifting off to sleep.

Notes on the Introduction:

These practices require a quiet place and solitude. A small, simple, uncluttered room which is free of disturbances and distractions and has a good supply of fresh air is desirable. Too much humidity promotes lethargy. The room should be neither too warm nor too cold. Too warm a room is debilitating. If the room is too cold, there will be disturbances in pranic flow.

Regularity in practice cannot be stressed too much. Even if only a short time can be devoted to practice, if the practice is consistent and regular, a firm foundation will be created and many benefits will be reaped. The practice of more advanced practices of pranayama and meditation will be facilitated.

Diaphragmatic Breathing in the Crocodile Posture, or Makarasana



You can learn to breathe diaphragmatically in the crocodile posture which allows you to observe the effects of the movement of your diaphragm as you exhale and inhale and helps to strengthen the diaphragm.

Now, lie on your stomach, with your feet about shoulder width apart.

Point your toes outward.

If this is not comfortable, you may point your toes inward.

Fold your arms in front of your body, resting each hand on the opposite upper arm.

Rest your forehead on your forearms.

Position the elbows and lower arms so that your chest is off the floor.

Become aware of your breathing. Observe the effects of diaphragmatic breathing.

As you exhale, feel the pressure of your abdomen against the floor decreasing.

As you inhale, feel the pressure of your abdomen against the floor increasing.

Let the body relax completely.

Continue to exhale and inhale with full awareness.

If your mind begins to wander, come back to awareness of your breathing, observing the pressure against the floor decreasing as you exhale, and increasing as you inhale.

Relax completely as you continue to exhale and inhale.

Let your breathing be smooth and even.

Let there be no pause between exhalation, inhalation and the next exhalation.

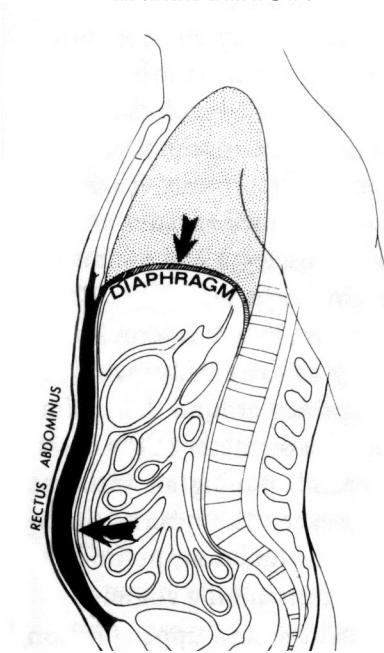
Be completely relaxed as you continue to exhale and inhale.

Om shanti, shanti, shantihi. Om, peace, peace, peace.

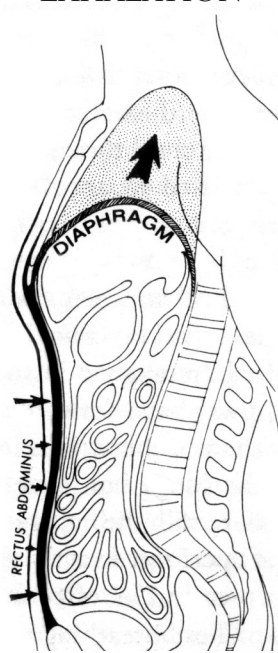
Notes on Diaphragmatic Breathing:

Breath is life and life is breath. Breath links body and mind and when that link is broken, we call it death. As Swami Rama often reminded us, inhalation and exhalation are two guards guarding the palace of life. One of the first aims of yoga is to re-establish good breathing habits, thus improving both physical and mental health. When the breath is regulated, the heart pumps well, the brain functions well and the nervous system is coordinated. Regulation of breath includes making the breath deep, free of jerks and noise, equalizing the duration of inhalation and exhalation and eliminating the pause between exhalation, inhalation and the next exhalation. This pause is not healthy and could contribute to heart disease. Even, smooth, rhythmic breathing promotes the health of the heart and circulation,

INHALATION



EXHALATION



the right vagus nerve and the entire digestive system including the liver. One can learn to regulate the breath by practicing deep, rhythmic, diaphragmatic breathing. Diaphragmatic breathing is an essential preliminary practice, which precedes all other practices of pranayama. Diaphragmatic breathing is best learnt in the crocodile posture (makarasana) as the contact of the abdominal area with the floor, with the chest off the floor, promotes diaphragmatic breathing. The increasing pressure against the floor during inhalation and decreasing pressure against the floor during exhalation provides feedback for improving diaphragmatic breathing.

The many benefits of diaphragmatic breathing are listed below:

- Improves the efficiency of transfer of oxygen and carbon dioxide between blood and the inspired air in the lungs

With chest breathing, the lower lobes of the lungs are well perfused with blood, whereas the inspired air is in the upper lobes. Thus gas transfer is less efficient. With diaphragmatic breathing, the inspired air is pulled down into the lower lobes where the blood is, thus improving the efficiency of gas transfer.

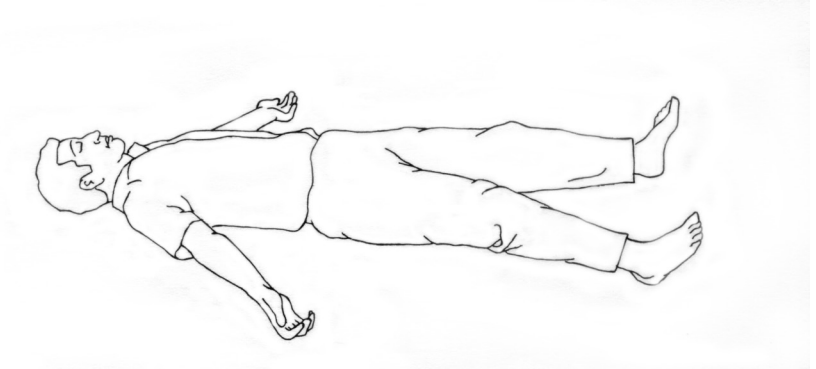
- Reduces heart rate and load on the heart

Diaphragmatic breathing increases the suction pressure in the chest cavity, thus improving the venous flow returning to the heart. This reduces the load on the heart and improves the circulation.

- Improves coronary circulation
- Lowers blood pressure
- Increases volume inhaled with each breath and reduces the breaths/minute (respiration rate)
- Massages abdominal organs
- Stimulates lymphatic circulation
- Reduces sympathetic tone and increases parasympathetic tone
- Body becomes relaxed, mind becomes calm and fatigue is reduced

Diaphragmatic breathing is very therapeutic for anxiety states and restoring emotional balance. Chest breathing is a part of the fight – flight syndrome which is evinced when danger is perceived or when there is stress. As there is reciprocity between breath and mind, chest breathing is associated with increase of sympathetic tone and anxiety. With diaphragmatic breathing, parasympathetic tone is increased producing a relaxed body and calm mind.

Diaphragmatic Breathing in the Corpse Posture, or Shavasana



Lie on your back with a small, soft pillow under your head.

Cover yourself with a sheet or blanket.

Place your heels about shoulder width apart.

Place your arms about six inches out from the sides of your body.

Have your palms facing upwards with the fingers gently curved and relaxed.

Gently close your eyes.

Let the floor support your body. Mentally observe your body. Be aware of the weight of your body where it touches the floor.

Allow the body to relax completely.

Mentally check if your head, neck and trunk are in a straight line.

If required, adjust your head and neck to get into this alignment.

Create a balance between the two sides of your body.

Relax the weight of your body onto the floor. Be comfortable.

Become aware of your breathing.

Breathe through both nostrils with the lips lightly closed.

Breathe deeply, smoothly, quietly and evenly.

Let there be no pause between exhalation, inhalation, and the next exhalation.

Let your breathing be quiet, free of noise.

Let the depth of your breathing be within your capacity.

Exhale and inhale deeply, smoothly and evenly.

Now place one hand on your abdomen below the ribcage. Place the other hand on your chest.

Exhale and inhale through both nostrils.

As you exhale, be aware of the downward movement of your abdomen. Let there be no movement of your chest.

As you inhale, be aware of your abdomen rising upwards. Let there be no movement of your chest.

Let your mind follow the flow of your breath.

Exhale slowly and completely.

Inhale slowly and completely.

Stay within your capacity.

Between your chest and abdomen lies the diaphragm. It is

a dome shaped muscle separating the chest cavity from the abdominal cavity.

When you exhale, pull the navel down towards your spine.

When you have completely exhaled, relax your abdomen and inhale.

As you inhale, be aware of your abdomen rising upwards. As you inhale, the diaphragm contracts and flattens, creating space and a vacuum for drawing in fresh air.

Your breath should be as deep as you can achieve comfortably within your capacity. Do not strain your lungs.

Do not feel any tension or the need to hurry up.

Your breathing should be quiet, free of noise.

Let your mind be aware of the calm and serene flow of your breath.

Your breath should be smooth, free of jerks.

Don't force the breath. Make the breath quiet and smooth. This helps relax the mind.

Make your inhalation the same duration as your exhalation. This helps balance the sympathetic and parasympathetic nervous systems.

Breathe deeply, smoothly, silently, and evenly. Stay within your capacity.

Observe the moment between exhalation and inhalation, and the moment between inhalation and the next exhalation.

Observe how the exhalation merges into inhalation, and how the inhalation merges into exhalation.

Make this transition quietly, gently and smoothly, with no noise or jerks and without a pause.

Now, bring your arms back down to the floor alongside your body.

Keep your arms about six inches away from the sides of your body, with the palms upward and the fingers gently curved.

Maintain breath awareness.

As you exhale, you are expelling all toxins, worries and fatigue from your mind and body. As you inhale, you are absorbing the cosmic light and energy that surrounds you.

Continue to exhale and inhale diaphragmatically.

Let there be no noise, no jerks, no pause; slow, deep and even diaphragmatic breathing.

Now gently wiggle your fingers and toes.

Move your arms and legs side to side and stretch.

Rub your palms together, bring them up to your eyes and gently open your eyes to the darkness of your warm palms.

Raise your left arm overhead, roll onto your left side.

Gradually come into a sitting position.

Practice diaphragmatic breathing for 3-5 minutes each day.

Gradually increase the practice until diaphragmatic breathing becomes a habit.

Om, shanti, shanti, shantihi. Om, peace, peace, peace.

Notes on Corpse Posture:

The corpse posture is ideally suited for practicing relaxation. Deep, slow, rhythmic breathing is facilitated in the corpse posture. When practiced after a regimen of asanas or stretches, the corpse posture integrates and consolidates the

benefits of all the exercises of the regimen. Muscle tension is relieved, fatigue is reduced, the load on the heart diminishes, the nervous system is toned up and the mind is calmed.

Tension – Relaxation Exercise

Lie in the corpse posture, or shavasana.

Keep your arms about six inches out from the sides of your body and your heels about shoulder width apart.

Become aware of your breathing. Breathe deeply and evenly as you relax completely.

Keep your eyes wide open. Open your mouth and stretch your tongue out and down.

Now retract the tongue, close the mouth, and relax.

Tense all the muscles of your face, pulling them towards the tip of your nose.

Now release the tension and relax.

Breathe deeply and evenly.

Gently close your eyes, and keep them closed through the rest of this exercise.

Roll your head gently side to side several times.

Pull your shoulders forward. Now gently release and relax.

Breathe deeply and evenly.

Consciously tense your right arm. Do not make a fist or lift the arm off the floor. As you tense your arm, make the fingers straight and stiff. Hold the tension and feel the tension moving upwards from the fingers, all the way up to your shoulders.

Now consciously release the tension and relax.

Take a few relaxing breaths, breathing deeply, quietly, smoothly and evenly.

Now repeat with your left arm. Consciously tense your left arm without making a fist or lifting the arm off the floor. Hold the tension, feeling the tension moving upwards from your fingers all the way up to your shoulders.

Release the tension and relax.

Breathe deeply and evenly.

Again tense your right arm, without tensing any other part of your body. Hold the tension, feeling the tension moving upwards from your fingers all the way up to your shoulders.

Now consciously release the tension and relax the right arm.

Now repeat the same process of tensing, holding the tension, releasing and relaxing with the left arm.

Breathe deeply and evenly and relax.

Now tense your hips and buttocks. Briefly hold the tension.

Release the tension and relax. Breathe deeply and evenly.

Again, tense the hips and buttocks, and hold briefly and then release the tension.

Relax, breathe deeply and evenly.

Now tense only your right leg by pointing your toes away from the body. Keep the rest of your body relaxed.

Release the tension and relax.

Breathe deeply and evenly.

Now tense only the left leg by pointing the toes away from the body. Keep the rest of the body relaxed.

Release the tension and relax.

Breathe deeply and evenly.

Repeat the tensing of the right leg a second time, holding briefly and then releasing and relaxing.

Now tense the left leg, hold the tension and release and relax.

Relax, breathe deeply and evenly.

Starting at your toes, relax your body upwards from the toes, through your legs, torso, arms, neck and head.

Exhale from your head to your toes.

Inhale from your toes to your head.

Breathe deeply, evenly and smoothly.

Take three more relaxing whole body breaths.

Now gently wiggle your fingers and toes.

Move your arms and legs side to side and stretch.

Rub your palms together, bring them up to your eyes, and gently open your eyes to the darkness of your warm palms.

Raise your left arm overhead, and roll onto your left side. Gradually come up into a sitting position.

Om, shanti shanti shantihi. Om, peace, peace, peace.

Notes on the Tension – Relaxation Exercise:

To derive the maximum benefit of this exercise, the tension – relaxation process should be carefully observed. There are two boundaries of the muscles and nervous system encountered in this exercise. The first boundary is when tension cannot be increased any further and the limb that is being tensed

begins to shake. The other boundary is when the limb is fully relaxed and there can be no further release of tension. Both these boundaries should be observed in the practice of this exercise. In this process, muscles of the body that are normally not exercised are stimulated and the capacity to tense and relax these muscles is expanded. Through consistent practice, the optimum muscle tone for a healthy body is achieved.

Complete Relaxation Exercise for the Muscles of the Body

Lie in the corpse posture with your eyes gently closed. Exhale and inhale through both nostrils slowly, deeply, smoothly, and evenly. There should be no noise, jerks, or pauses in the breath. Let the breath flow naturally without exertion in one continuous movement.

Become aware of your body. Keep your body still. Keep your mind alert and focused on your breath as you begin to progressively relax your muscles.

Mentally relax the top of your head. Relax your forehead, eyebrows and the space between the two eyebrows.

Relax your eyelids, eyes, cheeks, nose and nostrils.

Now exhale and inhale completely four times.

Relax your lips, mouth and corners of your mouth.

Relax your jaw and chin.

Relax your neck and shoulders.

Relax your upper arms, elbows and lower arms.

Relax your wrists, hands, fingers, and fingertips.

Now exhale and inhale completely four times. Feel as if you are breathing out and in through your fingertips.

Relax your fingertips, fingers, hands and wrists.

Relax your lower arms, and upper arms.

Relax your shoulders, upper back, and chest.

Bring your awareness to the center of your chest. Exhale and inhale completely four times, as if you're breathing through the center of your chest.

Relax your stomach, lower abdomen, lower back, and hips.

Relax your thighs, knees and calves.

Relax your ankles, feet, and toes.

Exhale and inhale completely four times. Exhale as though your whole body is exhaling through your toes.

Inhale as though your whole body is inhaling through your toes.

Expel all your tension, worries, and anxieties as you exhale.

Inhale vital energy, peace, and serenity.

Relax your toes, feet and ankles.

Relax your calves, knees, thighs and hips.

Relax your lower back, lower abdomen, stomach, and chest.

Exhale and inhale completely four times as if you are breathing through the center of your chest.

Relax your upper back, neck and shoulders.

Relax your upper arms and lower arms.

Relax your wrists, hands, fingers, and fingertips.

Now exhale and inhale completely four times, as if through your fingertips.

Relax your fingertips, fingers, hands and wrists.

Relax your lower arms and upper arms.

Relax your shoulders and neck.

Relax your chin, jaw, corners of your mouth, mouth, lips and nostrils.

Now exhale and inhale completely four times.

Relax your nose, cheeks, eyes and eyelids.

Relax your eyebrows and the space between your eyebrows.

Relax your forehead and the top of your head.

Let your mind be aware of the calm and serene flow of your breath.

Let your mind make a gentle, conscious effort to guide your breath so that it remains smooth, deep, calm, and even, without noise or jerks.

Gently wiggle your fingers and toes. Slowly move your arms and legs side to side.

Rub your palms together and bring them up to your eyes.

Gently open your eyes to the darkness of your warm palms.

Stretch your body. Raise your left arm overhead and roll on to your left side. Gradually come up into a sitting position. Try to maintain this calm, peaceful feeling throughout the day.

Om shanti shanti shantihi. Om, peace, peace, peace.

Complete Relaxation Exercise for the Joints of the Body

Lie in the corpse posture with the eyes gently closed.

Exhale and inhale through both nostrils slowly, deeply, smoothly, and evenly.

There should be no noise, jerks, or pauses in the breath.

Let the breath flow naturally without exertion in one continuous movement.

Become aware of your body. Keep the body still.

Keep the mind alert and focused on your breath as you begin to progressively relax the joints of your body.

Mentally relax the top of your head, your forehead, and face.

Relax your jaw and the vertebrae of your neck.

Relax your shoulder joints, elbows, wrists, and finger joints.

Exhale and inhale completely four times, as if you are breathing out and in through the tips of your fingers.

Relax your finger joints, wrists, elbows and shoulder joints.

Relax the vertebrae of your neck.

Continue to relax the vertebrae of your spine, starting from the neck and moving down to the base of your spine.

Now exhale and inhale completely four times.

Relax your hip joints, knee joints, ankles, and joints of your toes.

Exhale and inhale completely four times, as if you are breathing out and in through the tips of your toes.

Expel all your tension, worries, and anxieties as you exhale.

Inhale vital energy, peace, and serenity.

Relax the joints of your toes, ankle joints, knees, and hip joints.

Slowly and consciously relax all the vertebrae of your spine starting from the base of the spine and moving upwards all the way up to your neck.

Relax your shoulder joints, elbows, wrists, and finger joints.

Exhale and inhale completely four times, as if through the fingertips.

Relax the joints of your fingers, wrists, elbows, and shoulders.

Relax the vertebrae of your neck.

Relax your jaw and face.

Relax your forehead and the top of your head.

Let your mind be aware of the calm and serene flow of your breath.

Let your mind make a gentle, conscious effort to guide your breath so that it remains smooth, deep, calm and even, without noise or jerks.

Gently wiggle your fingers and toes. Slowly move your arms and legs side to side.

Rub your palms together and bring them up to your eyes. Gently open your eyes to the darkness of your warm palms.

Stretch your body. Raise your left arm overhead and roll on to your left side. Gradually come up into a sitting position.

Try to maintain this calm, peaceful feeling throughout the day.

Om, shanti, shanti, shantihi. Om, peace, peace, peace.

Notes on Relaxation:

Relaxation must be learnt systematically and must progress naturally. Relaxation is the art of letting go. The corpse posture is ideally suited for practicing relaxation. When relaxation in the corpse posture is practiced systematically, anxiety is reduced, blood pressure is normalized, heart ailments are alleviated, digestion improves and the tendency for mental depression is reduced.

The 31 Point Exercise

Lie in the corpse posture or shavasana, with a pillow supporting your head.

Become aware of your breathing. Breathe deeply, smoothly and evenly, without any pauses or noise.

Starting with the top of your head, relax your head and face. Relax your neck and shoulders. Relax the upper arms, lower arms, palms and fingers.

Relax your finger joints, wrists, elbows, shoulder joints and neck.

Relax your chest, navel, lower abdomen and hips.

Relax your thighs, calves, feet and toes.

Relax your toe joints, ankles, knees and hip joints. Relax the whole pelvis.

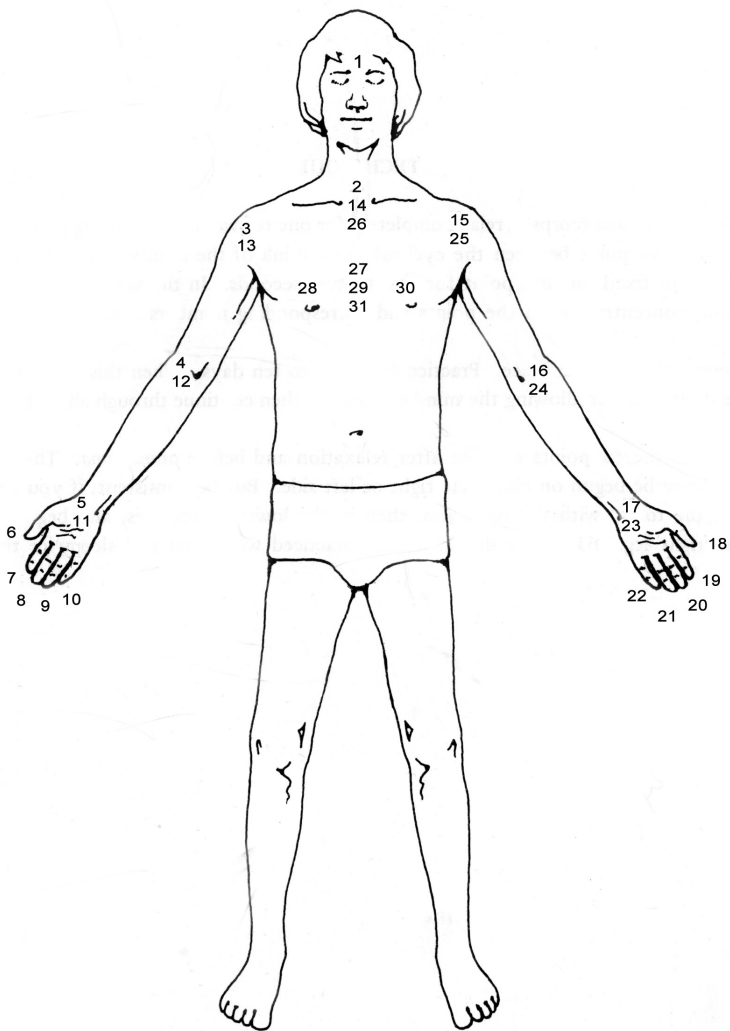
Relax your chest, shoulders and neck. Relax the face and head.

Continue to breathe deeply, smoothly and evenly without pauses or noise.

In this exercise you will pay attention, sequentially to 31 special points of the body.

Now, bring your attention to the space between the eyebrows, the eyebrow center.

Keep your attention at this point and think of the number "1."



We will now proceed through the remaining 30 points of this exercise.

Bring your awareness to the center of your throat, 2.

Right shoulder joint, 3.

Right elbow joint, 4.

Right wrist joint, 5.

Tip of the right thumb, 6.

Tip of the right index finger, 7.

Tip of the right middle finger, 8.

Tip of the right ring finger, 9.

Tip of the right little finger, 10.

Now back up to the right wrist joint, 11.

Right elbow joint, 12.

Right shoulder joint, 13.

Bring your awareness to the center of your throat, 14.

Now go across to the left shoulder joint, 15.

Left elbow joint, 16.

Left wrist joint, 17.

Tip of the left thumb, 18.

Tip of the left index finger, 19.

Tip of the left middle finger, 20.

Tip of the left ring finger, 21.

Tip of the little finger of the left hand, 22.

Back up to the left wrist joint, 23.

Left elbow joint, 24.

Left shoulder joint, 25.

Bring your awareness to the center of the throat, 26.

Now bring your awareness down to the center between the two breasts, 27.

Now across to the right nipple, 28.

Back to the center between the two breasts, 29.

Across to the left nipple, 30.

And finally back to the center between the two breasts, 31.

This concludes the 31 point exercise.

Continue to breathe deeply, smoothly and evenly, without any pauses or noise.

After you have practiced this exercise for seven to ten days with numbers, you can visualize a blue light or a golden light at each of the 31 points, instead of the numbers.

When this exercise can be done without the mind wandering, you are ready for the 61 point exercise.

Om, shanti, shanti, shantihi. Om, peace, peace, peace.

Notes on the 31 Point Exercise:

The 31 point exercise is practiced as a preliminary to practicing the 61 point exercise. These two exercises are subtle, yet profound exercises for getting access to the sheaths of prana (vitality) and mind. Disturbances in the body are preceded by disturbances in the pranic flow which are in turn preceded by disturbances in the mind. Scanning the body through the 31 point and 61 point exercises helps uncover

the root cause of disturbances that manifest ultimately in the body. Such bodily disturbances can be preempted by dealing with these disturbances at the mental level. High blood pressure, high blood sugar, peptic and gastric ulcers, circulatory problems and stress can all be significantly alleviated by the regular practice of the 31 point/61 point exercise.

Next in this series:

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Included in this next volume are:

61 Point Exercise
Shitali Karana
Om kriya

Notes