

The Third Breathing Theme Step-by-Step Relaxation

Step-by-Step Relaxation is a key part of your yoga training. To be a master yogi, you'll have to work very hard at relaxing.

Relaxation is a matter of hard, persistent training. Drill. Drill. Drill.

I'm actually serious about this. Relaxation is something we have to remember how to do. We have to relearn how to relax. We can become masters at it, with a little persistent training. First we learn to notice that *Relaxation Response* that is already pre-programmed into us. Then we apply it, deliberately and systematically, to letting go and relaxing. As we get better at the *Breathing Themes*, we're also learning tools to relax more and more deeply. So, by the end of the book, I expect you to be asleep.

Working with the Third Breathing Theme

Most people have forgotten what being relaxed feels like. A great way to start remembering is to work your body very hard for a short period of time, such as enjoying your favourite stretches – and then lie back and feel the tension dissolving.

Give your body a really good stretch, one that demands the most from you, so that you can't pay attention to anything else except the stretching. This will focus you. (You won't be paying attention to any of your other problems while you're trying to keep that stretch under control!) And a good stretch will take the knots and tension out of your body. That's what the stretches are for.

Then lie back.

If you're the kind of person who likes detailed instructions on how to do things like lying down – there are many yoga manuals that go into the *Corpse* pose in detail. The library of information we have on this pose is, of course, gleaned by interviewing many corpses for their first hand experience. However, you can intuitively feel your way into this posture next time you're dead tired.

Lie back. Find the position on your back that you're most likely to fall asleep in. This position is, coincidentally, the one that will make your body the most comfortable for the longest period of time, while exerting the least amount of energy. It is the position that opens up your air passages the most for easy air flow. It's the position that makes you the least interested in moving. Which is good, because one of your main goals here is to lose all interest in moving.

Try the following position. It works really well. People who normally can't get comfortable on their backs will find the tip about the pillows really helpful:

- Lie on your back.
 - Neck, spine, hips and legs lined up with each other.
 - Your thighs supported with a pillow. (Optional)
 - Your chin pointing pretty much upward toward the ceiling. (That and lining up your body, gives you good air flow.)
 - Stretch your legs away from your hips and let them drop lightly down.
 - Stretch your upper body away from your hips and let it drop lightly down.
- Take a breath to settle into place.

For the first minute or so, simply notice your breathing.

Notice the flow of the air as you breathe in.

Feel your body sinking down as you breathe out.

Now your body is settled and your breathing is settled. You might feel your mind is starting to settle down and focus. Let's go deeper with this.

Start taking a little longer to breathe out.

You'll feel your body sinking down even more when you take longer to breathe out. (Remember, the longer you take to breathe out, the more time your body has to let go and relax.)

Notice how much more relaxed your body is after a minute or two of this.

Now, we can go even deeper.

You're going to relax your body, step by step, addressing each part of your body, one part at a time, starting with your feet, going all the way up to your head and face. To do this, you're counting on *The Big Yoga Secret* – that your body relaxes when you breathe out. This *Big Yoga Secret* goes with *The Big Relaxation Secret*.

The Big Relaxation Secret

Your body relaxes when you breathe out.

- Whatever part of your body you're paying attention to when you breathe out, will especially let go and relax.

Now you're ready to begin...

To relax step by step, you would start like this:

1. As you breathe in

- Notice your feet.

When you breathe out

- Feel your feet dissolving, feel their weight dropping down.
- Let go of their weight as you let go of your breath.

Do this for about 6 breaths.

Then go on to the next area of your body.

2. You can parcel up the rest of your body like this:

- your lower legs
 - knees
 - thighs
 - hips
 - spine & body
 - right arm & hand
 - left arm and hand
 - head & face.
- especially paying attention to
- forehead
 - eyes
 - jaw

This will take about 10 – 15 minutes. If you can't remember the sequence, that's OK. Just address your whole body, bottom to top, bit by bit.

Step-by-Step Relaxation is especially helpful at night
when you're trying to get to sleep.

You can also work this into your busy daytime schedule.

Several times a day, take a minute and do this exercise wherever you are. Standing, sitting, lying down. Do *one breathe* for each area of your body. It will slow you down, focus you and help you feel less stressed! (It's great in the car when you're in a traffic jam, or when you're on hold on the phone.)

Step-by-Step Relaxation is one of the most important parts of yoga to master! (I know, I'm a task master.) This exercise will remind you what it feels like to be relaxed. It will give you moments in your day when you drop stress. It will prepare you for the *Ninth Breathing Theme*, (Green Level). It's going to make the more demanding aspects of yoga easier for you.

The more you practice *Step-by-Step Relaxation* throughout your day, the more you're going to be able to quickly drop stress.

If you're in a rush to relax you can resort to the short cut. You can use *Puddle Theory* from *The Second Breathing Theme* as a relaxation fast track. Cats can relax their whole body all at once, instantly. They do it naturally and are loath to share the secret with us until we've gotten to it by the long route of complex, intricate exercises, such as *Step-by-Step Relaxation*.

Use this *Breathing Theme* When

- You are fairly comfortable with a pose but have not mastered it yet.
 - You want to learn to relax into a pose more deeply.
 - You want to build strength and endurance without straining.
 - You are learning how to be more relaxed throughout the day.

