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# YOGA<sup>TM</sup> MAGAZINE

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Spring, Sunshine & Energy

**DEEP  
RELAXATION**

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# YOGA FOR DEEP RELAXATION

Words: Caroline Klebl

Photo Credit: Haik Katsikian

In Patanjali's Yoga Sutras, yoga is defined as "*chitta vritti nirodha*" or the cessation of the fluctuations of the mind. Stress can manifest in the body as tension or in the mind as unpleasant trains of thought. Meditation as well as the practice of yoga asana, can reduce tension in the body and mind.

The yoga sutras describe eight limbs of yoga, known as ashtanga yoga. The external limbs include the *yamas* (restraints), *niyamas* (observances), *asana* (posture) and *pranayama* (breath control). Ethics are an important aspect of yoga practice, which purify the mind, reduce negative *karma* and help to improve the circumstance of the practitioner of yoga.





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If the cause of tension is an unethical action, the opposite is to be cultivated. It is important to practice ahimsa (non-harming), *satya* (truthfulness) and *asteya* (non-theft) and increase friendliness, peacefulness and generosity.

Asana (yoga postures) and pranayama (breath control) are the third and fourth limbs of ashtanga yoga. The practice of asana and pranayama relax the body as well as strengthen and purify the body. Asana and pranayama prepare the body for the internal limbs of ashtanga yoga. The internal limbs include *pratyahara* (withdrawal of the sense organs), *dharana* (concentration), *dhyana* (meditation), *samadhi* (absorption). Asana increases flexibility and improves the posture, in preparation for pranayama and meditation practice.

*Asana* practice includes numerous techniques, which promote deep relaxation.

In yoga posture practice, *oujain pranayama* is emphasised. *Oujain pranayama* is practiced by breathing deeply through the nose and slightly contracting the throat to create an ocean-like sound on the inhaling and exhaling breath. By resting the awareness continuously on the breath throughout *asana* practice, a deeply meditative state is achieved.

Additionally, *drishti* (looking place) is practiced in each yoga posture. The nine *drishtis* are the thumb, foot, hand, navel, tip of the nose, to the left, to the right, to the centre of the forehead and upward. The practice of *drishti*, calms the mind and improves focus. Asana and pranayama promote peacefulness, health and longevity.

The following sequence of yoga postures, when practiced with *oujain pranayama* and *drishti* remove tension in the body, cultivate deep relaxation and prepare the body for seated meditation practice.

## Baddha Konasana The bound angle posture

Sit comfortable with a straight spine and the legs extended in front of you. Bend the knees and place the soles of the feet together, close to the hips. Drop the knees down to the floor. Relax the shoulders and breathe deeply through the nose for 10 breaths.





## Gomukasana

### Cow's face posture

Sit with a straight spine and extend the legs in front of you. Bend the left knee and reach the right foot, underneath the left knee to the outside of the left hip, placing the right knee on the floor. Then place the outside of the left foot next to the right hip and rest the left knee on top of the right knee. Place the hands on the knees, relax the arms and breathe deeply for 10 breaths.

Then switch the legs. Place the hands on the knees, relax the arms and breathe deeply for 10 breaths.

## Matsyendrasana

### Sage Matsyendra's posture

Extend the legs forward. Bend the right leg. Reach the left foot below the right leg to the right of the right hip. Step the right foot over the left knee. Twist the torso to the right, reach the left arm around the right knee and take hold of the right foot. Look to the right, relax the face and breathe deeply for 10 breaths. Then practice *Matsyendrasana* twisting to the left. Relax the face and breathe deeply for 10 breaths





## Padmasana

### Lotus posture

Extend the legs forward. Straighten the spine. Bend the right leg and place the right foot on the top of the left thigh, close to the left hip. Then bend the left leg and place the left foot on top of the right thigh close to the right hip. Extend the arms, with the palms of the hands facing upward and rest the back of the hands on the knees. Touch the first fingers to the thumbs for *jnana mudra*, the *mudra* of knowledge. Relax the eyes and breathe deeply through the nose for 10 breaths.

*Padmasana* is a wonderful posture for meditation. Meditation practice deeply relaxes the mind.

## Meditation

Sit in a comfortable position with a straight spine. On the floor with or preferable without a pillow underneath the hips. Relax the arms and place the hands on the thighs or the knees with the palms of the hands facing up.

Gentle close the eyes and relax the muscles in the hands and face. Direct your awareness to the breath and notice your body breathing, without changing your natural breath. Relax the entire body and rest your awareness on your breath for 5-10 minutes. If your thoughts drift away from your breath, return your awareness to the breath. Then slowly open the eyes.



## Shavasana Corpse posture

For additional relaxation lie on your back with your arms at your side and palms of your hands facing up for a few minutes. Gently close your eyes and relax your entire body.



## Yoga Nidra Yogic sleep

Yoga nidra is an ancient technique which induces very deep relaxation. Lie on your back in Shavasana with your eyes closed, without a pillow. Relax your arms down to your sides with the palms of your hands facing up. Begin scanning your body and relax each body part in sequential order. Begin with relaxing your right hand, right wrist, right forearm, elbow, upper arm. Relax your right shoulder, right side of the rib cage, right waist, hip, thigh, knee, lower leg, ankle and foot. Then relax the right side of your head and face and the right side of your neck. Relax the entire right side of your body. Then relax your left hand, left wrist, left forearm, left elbow, left upper arm and shoulder. Relax the left side of your rib cage, left waist, left hip, thigh, knee, lower leg, ankle and left foot. Relax the left side of your head, left side of your face and left side of your neck. Relax the entire left side of your body. Relax the entire body and remain in this position and state of relaxation for 5 to 10 minutes. Then begin breathing deeply and stretch into your fingers and toes. Reach your arms above your head and stretch down into your legs. Roll to your right side and push yourself up to sitting.

**Caroline Klebl** teaches yoga teacher training courses in Los Angeles and in beautiful destinations around the world. She wrote a book on ashtanga yoga and produced an instructional yoga dvd. For additional information and to sign up for one of her upcoming courses please visit her website [sourceofyoga.com](http://sourceofyoga.com)