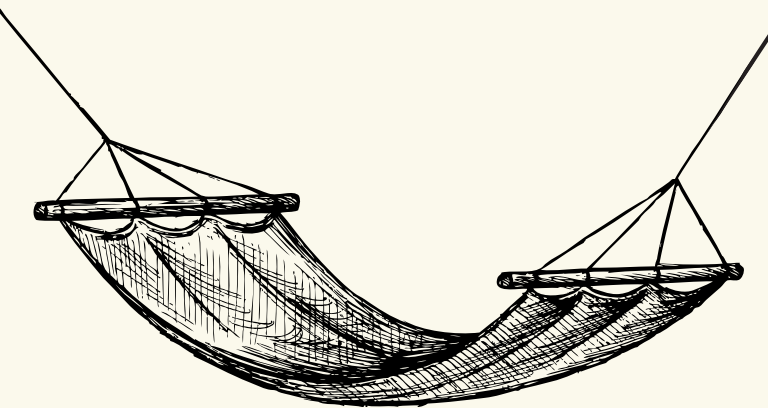


HOW TO

RELAX

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PARALLAX
PRESS

Berkeley, California

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You don't need to set aside special time for resting and relaxing. You don't need a special pillow or any fancy equipment. You don't need a whole hour. In fact, now is a very good time to relax.



You are probably breathing in and out right this moment. If you can close your eyes for a moment, do so. This will help you pay attention to your breath. Your body is doing so many things right now. Your heart is beating. Your lungs are inhaling and exhaling air. Blood is traveling through your veins. Without effort, your body is both working and relaxed.

**NOTES
ON RELAXING**

RESTING

Whenever animals in the forest are wounded, they rest. They look for a very quiet place and just stay there without moving for many days. They know it's the best way for their body to heal. During this time they may not even eat or drink. The wisdom of stopping and healing is still alive in animals, but we human beings have lost the capacity to rest.



HEALING

We human beings have lost confidence in the body just knowing what to do. If we have time alone with ourselves, we panic and try to do many different things. Mindful breathing helps us to relearn the art of resting. Mindful breathing is like a loving parent cradling a baby, saying, “Don’t worry, I’ll take good care of you; just rest.”

AWARENESS OF BREATHING

Your breathing is a stable, solid ground where you can take refuge. No matter what thoughts, emotions, and perceptions are going on inside you, your breath is always there, like a faithful friend. Whenever you're carried away by thinking, overwhelmed by strong emotions, or feeling restless and dispersed, return to your breathing. Bring body and mind together and anchor your mind. Become aware of the air coming in and going out of your body. With awareness of the breath, our breathing naturally becomes light, calm, and peaceful. At any time of the day or night, whether you're walking, driving, working in the garden, or sitting at the computer, you can return to the peaceful refuge of your own breath.

RESTING POEM

At any moment, we can say this small poem to ourselves and take a mini-rest. This poem is like a tiny vacation, except that it brings you back to your true home instead of taking you away from it.

Breathing in, I know I am breathing in.

Breathing out, I know I am breathing out.

You can even shorten this poem; it works just as well:

In.

Out.

FOLLOWING THE BREATH

To increase your mindfulness and concentration, gently and easily follow your in-breath and out-breath all the way through. Just sitting and following your breathing can bring a lot of joy and healing.

Breathing in, I follow my in-breath all the way through.

Breathing out, I follow my out-breath all the way through.

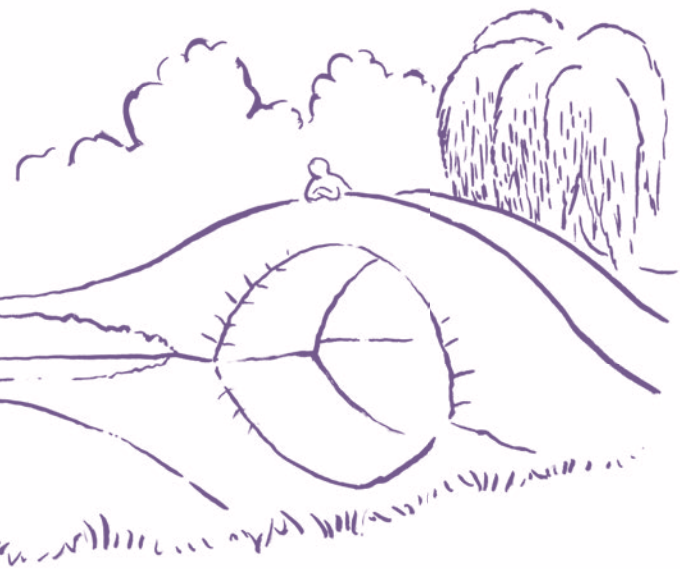
CALM WATER

Each of us is like the waves and also like the water. Sometimes we're excited, noisy, and agitated like the waves. Sometimes we're tranquil like still water. When water is calm, it reflects the blue sky, the clouds, and the trees. Sometimes, whether we're at home, work, or school, we become tired, agitated, or unhappy and we need to transform into calm water. We already have calmness in us; we just need to know how to make it manifest.



MEDITATION

To meditate means to pay full attention to something. It doesn't mean to run away from life. Instead it's an opportunity to look deeply into ourselves and into the situation we're in.



STOPPING: THE FIRST ASPECT OF MEDITATION

Meditation has two aspects. The first is stopping (*shamatha* in Sanskrit). We run throughout our whole life, chasing after some idea of happiness. Stopping means to stop our running, our forgetfulness, and our being caught in the past or the future. We come home to the present moment where life is available. The present moment contains every moment. Here we can touch our ancestors, our children, and their children, even if they haven't been born yet. We calm our body and emotions through the practice of mindful breathing, mindful walking, and mindful sitting. Shamatha is also the practice of concentrating, so we can live deeply each moment of our life and touch the deepest level of our being.

STOP FIRST

If we can't rest, it's because we haven't stopped running. We began running a long time ago. We continue to run, even in our sleep. We think that happiness and well-being aren't possible in the present. If you can stop and establish yourself in the here and the now, you will see that there are many elements of happiness available in this moment, more than enough for you to be happy. Even if there are a few things in the present that you dislike, there are still plenty of positive conditions for your happiness. When you walk in the garden, you may see that a tree is dying and so you feel sad and aren't able to enjoy the rest of the garden that is still beautiful. If you look again, you can see that the garden is still beautiful, and you can enjoy it.