

# Yoga – Routine

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By Khun Reinhard

<https://www.khunreinhard.com>  
KR.emailcontact@gmail.com

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## 1. Introduction

This yoga routine has been taught by the author of this paper over many years to more than 2.000 male participants of the meditation retreats at the Suan Mokkh International Dharma Hermitage in Thailand. Women have separate yoga classes, taught by a female instructor, but the routine is similar to this.

There are many different postures in yoga and many different schools which teach postures in different ways to achieve different results. Building up strength may require doing the same posture in a slightly different way than if one wants to increase flexibility.

It is quite difficult and lengthy to describe in writing the details of postures. Many more details are given orally during practising the exercises.

This routine is designed to help participants get through a 10-day meditation retreat which requires hours of sitting each day. The focus is on strengthening the abdominal and back muscles and on opening hips and groins to some extent. This helps participants to sit with straight backs more and more comfortably. As neck and shoulder pain is a quite common experience during meditation retreats, some exercises to release tensions in this area are implemented as well.

The classes usually have 30 to 60 people. The participants come from all walks of life, aged between 17 and 70 years. Some have not done any exercise for years, others are used to doing some kind of bodily training regularly. The average participant is not very flexible – touching the floor with the fingertips when bending forward with straight legs is for many beyond reach when they start the class. Therefore the exercises have to be simple, so that nearly everybody can take part without getting injured or frustrated. Age and health limitations like back, heart and blood circulation problems, have to be taken into account as well.

During the meditation retreat the mind should become calm and peaceful and the participants should become aware of what is going on in their body and mind. The yoga class is designed to accomplish just that and so there is no jumping into the postures and there is a lot of relaxation between the exercises and at the end of the class.

The routine has evolved over the years to include

- Very simple loosening exercises that everybody can do for a start,
- followed by an easy variation of the sun salutation as a warm-up.
- We then work the abdominal muscles and the muscles of the back and
- try to bring more flexibility to the back, spine, hips and groin.
- We end with relaxing body and mind, thus preparing it for meditation.

The average participant gains a lot during the 10 days of the yoga class and many continue with the routine or parts of it after the retreat.

**Three general guidelines** should be observed when practising the exercises:

- Do it slowly
- Do it with awareness (many postures can be done with eyes closed to increase your awareness)
- Be stable (do not move) in the final posture

The purpose of the following description is to help participants, who have taken part in the yoga class at the International Dharma Hermitage, to remember the routine and some of its details. It cannot serve as a manual for people who have not taken part in our yoga class.

## 2. Overview

### 2.1 Time frame

#### A) STANDING POSTURES (loosening exercises)

1. Tadasana – Mountain posture  
(Starting position while standing)
2. Neck
3. Shoulders
4. Stretch the sides of the body.
5. Backward bend
6. Forward bend
7. Spinal twist
8. Hip rotation
9. Loosening joints and muscles of the legs and balancing exercise

30 min.

#### B) SUN SALUTATION (warming up)

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#### C) POSTURES WHILE LYING ON THE BACK (work abdominal muscles)

1. Learn how to come up from lying on your back to a sitting posture (explained 1<sup>st</sup> day only, practised every day)
  2. Sarvangasana – Shoulder stand
  3. Learn Savasana – Corpse posture (explained 1<sup>st</sup> day only, practised every day)
  4. Matsyasana – Fish posture
  5. Paschimottanasana - Forward bend (sitting)
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15 min.

#### D) POSTURES WHILE LAYING ON THE FRONT (work muscles of the back)

1. Learn relaxation postures while lying on the front  
(explained on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day only, practised every day)
2. Diagonal arm and leg lifting
3. Bhudschangasana – Cobra posture
4. Salabhasana – Locust posture
5. Dhanurasana – Bow posture
6. Pose of a child (relaxation posture after strong backward-bends)

15 min.

Tiger breathing (Cat & Cow postures)  
Folded legs spinal twist (lumbar stretch) breathing

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15 min.

#### E) SITTING POSTURES (hip openers)

1. Butterfly
  2. Exercise the right/left groin and hip
  3. Burmese sitting forward bend
  4. Butterfly (relaxing)
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15 min.

#### F) FINAL RELAXATION

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10 min.

**Total 85 min.**

## 2.2 Postures

<p><b>Standing postures</b></p> <p>(repeat on opposite side, in reverse direction, with opposite arm or leg, if suitable)</p>	
<p><b>Sun salutation - basic -</b></p>	
<p><b>Supine postures</b></p>	
<p><b>Prone postures</b></p>	
<p><b>Kneeling and twisting postures</b></p>	
<p><b>Sitting postures</b> (repeat with right leg) <b>and Final Relaxation</b></p>	

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### 3. Yoga – routine

#### 3.1 Standing postures (loosening exercises)

##### 1. Tadasana – Mountain posture – starting position while standing

Stand straight, feet together or a little apart, inside of the feet parallel, thighs a little tensed, weight evenly distributed on the feet, shoulders slightly rolled back, ankles, knees, wrists, hips, elbows, shoulders and ears in line.

##### 2. Neck (5B = 5 breaths in and out)

- Look up to the ceiling and raise the chin high, stretching the throat (5B)
- Look down to the floor and bring the chin between the collar bones, stretching the neck (5B)
- Look over the left shoulder (5B), back to centre and look over the right shoulder (5B)
- Lower the left ear towards the left shoulder and pull right shoulder down (5B), back to centre, lower the right ear towards the right shoulder and pull the left shoulder down (5B), stretching the sides of the neck
- Rotate the head until the resistance in the neck and reverse the direction (5 times in each direction)

##### 3. Shoulders

- Alternately lift left and right shoulder (6 times each shoulder)
- Lift both shoulders at the same time (8 times)
- Alternately rotate left and right shoulder forward (6 times each) and reverse (6 times each)
- Rotate both shoulders forward at the same time and then rotate backwards (8 times each)

##### 4. Stretch the sides of the body

- Raise the right arm sideways up to the vertical, biceps close to the ear, palm of the right hand pointing to the left, the left arm hanging loosely by the side. Bend to the left stretching the right side of the body from the foot to the toe. (To intensify the stretch, look up to the right arm.) (8B)
- Return to Tadasana and be aware of the sensations in the right side of the body (compare with the left side) (8B)
- Do the same towards the opposite side

##### 5. Backward bend

- Place hands on the left and right side of the hip, thumbs and fingertips pointing to the front. Starting from the neck, bend backwards. Stretch of abdomen, chest and throat, with compression of the back (10B)
- Inhaling straighten up again and focus on the sensation at the front side of the body and in the back (10B)

##### 6. Forward bend (be careful if you have lower back problems)

- Inhaling, raise both arms to the vertical, palms pointing to the front. Straighten up and bend forward from the lower back. Interlock thumbs and elbows, relax the back and try to bend further down with every exhalation (10B)
- Bring the arms to the legs and slowly, sliding the arms along the legs stand straight again. Inhaling raise the arms above the head, straighten up and exhaling drop the arms to the side.
- Feel the sensations in the hamstrings, lower back and abdomen (10B)

##### 7. Spinal twist

- Swing the arms around the body, keep the legs and feet firm, twist only above the waist, look back over the shoulders to twist the entire spine (10 times each direction)

### 8. Hip rotation

- Place hands on the left and right side of the hip, thumbs next to the spine, fingers pointing to the front. Keep feet and legs firm, rotate the hip without moving the shoulders (**10 times each direction**)

### 9. Loosening joints and muscles of the legs and balancing exercise

- Raise the right foot off the ground and rotate the foot outwards (**12 times**) and inwards (**12 times**)
- Raise the right leg higher until the thigh is parallel to the floor and rotate the lower leg in the knee (**10 times outwards/inwards**)
- Now rotate the entire leg at the hip (**6 times outwards/inwards**)
- Do the same with the left foot, lower leg and entire leg

## 3.2 Sun salutation (warming up)

### 1. Inhale

Stand straight, palms together in front of the chest.

### 2. Exhale

Drop the hands to the sides of the body.

### 3. Inhale

Raise the straight arms above the head, palms pointing to the front, straighten up, bend back.

### 4. Exhale

Bend forward from the lower back and bring the hands next to the feet on the floor. If necessary bend the knees.

### 5. Inhale

Step right foot far back, bring right knee on the floor, keep the toes tucked under (no relaxation of the calf muscles) or rest the top of the right foot on the floor (calf relaxed). Look up to the ceiling.

### 6. Exhale

Step the left foot back next to the right foot (toes of both feet tucked under) in the Plank position.

### 7. Inhale

Do nothing, hold the posture

### 8. Exhale

Drop both knees to the floor and sit on the heels, stretch the spine (don't slide the hands back).

### 9. Inhale

Slide forward (nose close along the floor) and push up to Upward Dog

### 10. Exhale

Slide the knees slightly forward, tuck the toes under and push up to Downward Dog. Try to bring the heels to the floor.

### 11. Inhale

Come up on your finger tips and step your right foot forward in between your hands, sole of the right foot completely on the floor. Place left knee on the floor. Look up to the ceiling.

### 12. Exhale

Step left foot forward next to the right foot, straighten the legs, try to bring the forehead to the knees.

### 13. Inhale

Straighten up, bring straight arms first to the vertical and then bend back. Bring the hands together with palms in front of the chest.

This ends the First Half. In the Second Half step the left foot back (no. 5) and forward (no. 11) and bring the appropriate knees to the floor. Both halves together make one Round. **Do 3 rounds.**

Rest in Corpse position for **20B.**

### 3.3 Supine postures – lying on the back

(Strengthening the abdominal muscles, working the back and spine)

#### 1. Learn how to come up from lying down on your back to a sitting posture

(explained on the 1<sup>st</sup> day only, practised every day)

- a) Bring straight left arm on the floor behind the head, bend right knee and rest the sole of the right foot next to the buttocks on the floor. Roll over to the left side, bring right hand in front of the chest on the floor and push up to a sitting posture (or right arm behind your head, left knee bend).  
**Or**
- b) Place the hands next to your armpits on the floor, come up on your fingertips and push up to a sitting posture.

#### 2. Sarvangasana – Shoulder stand

This exercise has a dynamic part (raising the legs 3 times) to strengthen the abdominal muscles before we enter the final static posture.

Starting position: Legs straight, feet and knees together, arms by the side of the body, palms down. In case of back problems, make sure the lower back is in contact with the floor, bend the knees and rest the soles of the feet next to the buttocks on the floor.

- Press the hands against the floor, slowly raise the (straight) legs to the vertical. People with back problems start with bent knees, will raise the feet off the floor and straighten the legs, so that the lower back stays in contact with the floor. The straight legs then are about 45° off the floor. Then raise the legs to the vertical.
- Slowly lower the (straight) legs back towards the floor, keeping the tension, without resting the feet on the floor. People with back problems lower the legs back to 45°, bend the knees and lower the feet towards the floor without resting them on the floor.
- Do this 3 times
- On the 3<sup>rd</sup> time in the vertical position, push up with your hands to the shoulder stand, either supporting your back next to the hips (half shoulder stand) or close to the shoulders so that you can come up high.
- Straighten the legs, do not point the feet. Do not move the head in this position. (10B)
- Open the legs to a V-shape, relax your groins (10B). Bring the feet together and straighten up again.
- Lower the straight legs towards the floor behind the head until the legs are about parallel to the floor. Take the arms away from the body, rest them on the floor and support the body by pressing the arms against the floor, return the body vertebrae by vertebrae in a controlled movement to the floor. Try to keep the head on the floor.
- Return the legs to the floor, rest in Corpse Posture and be aware of the sensations in legs, neck and throat.

#### 3. Savasana – Corpse posture

(explained 1<sup>st</sup> day only, practised every day)

- Lay on your back, legs straight, feet a little apart, feet dropped relaxed to the sides.
- Arms by the sides of the body, a little apart, palms facing towards the body or towards the ceiling
- Neck comfortable without tension
- In case of back problems, make sure the lower back is in contact with the floor, bend the knees and rest the soles of the feet next to the buttocks on the floor.
- Relax, let the body sink into the floor (for more details see page 12).

#### 4. Matsyasana – Fish posture

Starting position: Legs straight, feet and knees together, arms by the side of the body. Bring both hands under the buttocks, palms down and the elbows as close together as possible.

- Lift the head off the floor and look towards the feet
- Push up on forearms and elbows and raise the chest high
- Arch back and let the head drop backwards towards the floor, if possible until the head is touching the floor, but don't put weight on your head
- Breathe deeply into your upper lungs (10B)
- Lower the body back to the floor, bring the arms to the side of the body and rest in Corpse posture. Be aware of the sensations in the back, neck and throat

#### 5. Paschimottanasana – Forward bend (sitting)

This exercise has a dynamic part, which we'll do 3 times, to strengthen the abdominal muscles before we enter the final static posture.

Starting position: Legs straight, feet and knees together, straight arms back behind the head on the floor, thumbs interlocked.

- Raise both straight arms to the vertical and lower them towards the thighs, following the fingertips with the eyes. There will be a point, where you cannot see the fingertips any longer. Lift the head off the floor and follow the fingertips with the eyes. By doing so we start bending the neck.
- As the hands are touching the thighs, the shoulders are still in contact with the floor
- Slide the hands along the thighs and sit up straight  
(If this is too difficult, drop the elbows on the floor, tuck the hands under the thighs and sit up by pressing the hands upwards against the thighs and at the same time putting pressure on the elbows.)
- Slide the hands along the legs, bend forward from the lower back as far as possible and try to lower the chest towards the thighs (pocket knife position). Do not bend the neck and try to bring the forehead to the knees.
- Once you have reached out towards the feet as far as possible, do not hold the posture but return the body in a controlled movement to the floor (use hands and elbows in the same way as getting up if necessary). Bring the straight arms behind the head and when the hands are touching the floor behind the head, start a 2<sup>nd</sup> time and a 3<sup>rd</sup> time.
- After bending forward from the lower back as far as possible for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time, release a little so that you are comfortable in the posture and then hold this position and breathe deeply into the abdomen (20B)
- Slowly return the body in a controlled movement, vertebrae by vertebrae, to the floor and rest in Corpse position. Be aware of the sensations in the hamstrings, lower back and abdomen.

(If you have serious difficulties in sitting up, start from the sitting posture to bend forward and return to sitting up straight without lowering the body and arms to the floor.)

### 3.4 Prone postures – lying on the front

(Strengthening the muscles of the back, working the back and spine)

#### 1. Learning relaxation postures (explained on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day only, practised every day)

- a) Make a cushion with the hand (one on top of the other) in front of the chest and rest the head on the hands, looking into the direction of the fingertips of the top hand. Legs straight, feet a little apart **or**
- b) Crocodile posture: Place right hand on the left shoulder and left hand on the right shoulder. Head is resting on the forearms where they cross each other. Legs straight, feet shoulder width apart.

#### 2. Diagonal arm and leg lifting

Starting position: Legs straight, feet knees together, straight arms in front of the head on the floor, forehead on the floor.

- Inhaling raise straight right arm and left leg off the floor, forehead stays on the floor
- Exhaling return arm and leg to the floor. Next inhalation rise left arm and right leg etc.
- **Do 5 times** with each arm-leg combination

#### 3. Bhudschangasana – Cobra posture

This exercise has a dynamic part, which we'll do 3 times, to strengthen the back muscles before we enter the final static posture.

Starting position: Legs straight, feet and knees together, hands underneath the shoulders, palms down, fingertips in line with the top of the shoulders, forehead on the floor.

- Sliding forehead, nose and chin along the floor, curve the spine backwards, starting from the very top
- Continue the movement and raise the chest as high as possible without pressing up with the hands. Keep the arms still and engage only the back muscles
- Once the highest point is reached, slowly return the body to the floor, slide chin, nose and forehead along the floor, rest on the forehead, relax the buttocks and start again. **Do 3 times**
- After raising as high as possible for the 3<sup>rd</sup> time (without using power of the arms) support the body by putting weight on the arms, open the legs a little, relax the back and push up, bending the body further back. Keep the shoulders down, elbows close to the body, hips on the floor **(10 B)**
- Slowly return the body to the floor and relax. Be aware of the sensations in the lower back.

#### 4. Salabhasana – Locust posture

This exercise has a dynamic part called the Half Locust, which you do twice to strengthen the back muscles before you enter the final static posture of Full Locust.

Starting position: Legs straight, feet and knees together, arms and hands by the sides of the body, "cup hands", chin and shoulders resting on the floor.

- Shift the body weight to the left side of the hip (but keep the right side on the floor) and raise the straight left leg as high as you can without lifting the left side of the hip off the floor. Do not bend the left knee. Extend the left foot backwards. Hold for **3B** and slowly return the leg to the floor.
- Shift the body weight to the right side of the hip and do the same with the right leg
- Repeat a 2<sup>nd</sup> time with left and right legs
- Now make fists with your hand and by pressing the fists against the floor and contracting the back muscles try to lift both thighs at the same time off the floor **(5B)**
- Slowly return the legs to the floor and relax. Be aware of the sensations in the lower back.

## 5. Dhanurasana – Bow posture

Starting position: Legs straight, feet and knees together, arms and hands by the sides of the body, forehead resting on the floor.

- Bend the knees (soles of the feet towards the ceiling) and get hold of the ankles, fingers and thumbs pointing in the same direction on the outside of the ankles.
- Open the knees, bring the big toes together and keep them together to bend the spine symmetrically
- Keep the arms strong. Pushing the feet upwards and backwards, lifting the thighs off the floor (10B)
- Release, return the thighs to the floor, get hold of the toes and push the heels into the buttocks (2B)
- Release, straighten the legs, bring the hands next to the shoulders on the floor, palms down. Push up on the hands and sit on the heels - Pose of a Child posture.

## 6. Pose of a child (Relaxation posture after strong backward-bends)

Starting posture: Sit on your heels (if you have strong calves, pull them outwards before you sit down) and place the hands in front of the knees on the floor – Japanese sitting posture.

- Walk the hands away from the knees, keeping the buttocks on the heels and resting the chest on the thighs, straight arms in front of the head, palms on the floor
- (Variation: Bring the arms alongside the legs, hands next to the feet, palms up)
- Relax back and spine. If the head is touching the floor do not put weight on it (otherwise you can not relax the neck) (20B)
- Bring the hands next to the shoulders on the floor, palms down. Push up on the hands, sit on the heels ready for the next exercise, Tiger breathing.

## Tiger breathing (Cat and Cow posture)

Starting posture: Japanese sitting (sit on your heels)

- Lean forward and place the hands flat on the floor in line with the shoulders, fingers pointing forward. Hands, knees and heels should be about shoulder width apart. The arms and thighs are perpendicular to the floor.
- While exhaling arch the spine upwards and bend the head downwards bringing the chin towards the chest, look towards your navel – Cat posture.
- Inhaling raise the head and look at the ceiling, thus curving the neck downwards
- Continue the movement by curving the spine vertebrae by vertebrae downward, thus making it concave – Cow posture.
- Exhaling, starting at the lower back, vertebrae by vertebrae curve the spine upwards, finally bend the neck, suck the stomach in and look to your navel. Do not drop the head immediately when starting to exhale.
- Do not bend the arms or move the thighs forwards and backwards
- This is one round of Tiger breathing. **Do 10 rounds**
- Rest in Corpse position

## Folded legs spinal twist (lumbar stretch) breathing

Starting position: Lie on your back with the legs together and arms spread 90° sideways at shoulders level. Hands resting on the floor and palms should be facing towards the ceiling.

- Fold legs at the knees and place the feet on the floor close to the buttocks and inhale
- While exhaling lower the knees to the right towards the floor as far as comfortable and simultaneously turn the head to the left, looking to your left hand. It is not important that the knees touch the floor, but it is important, that both hands and both shoulders and at least one foot stay in contact with the floor all the time.

- Then, while inhaling, raise the knees up to the vertical and bring the head to the centre.
- While exhaling lower both the knees to the left towards the floor and turn the head to the right, looking to your right hand.
- While inhaling, bring the knees and the head back to centre (to the starting position)
- This is one round. **Perform 10 times**
- Rest in Corpse position for a short time

### 3.5 Sitting postures (Hip openers)

#### 1. Butterfly

- Sit straight, bring the soles of the feet together. Hold toes with hands. Pull the feet closer to the groin
- Slowly bounce the knees up and down simultaneously **(20 times)**
- Press the forearms against the lower legs to bring the knees closer to the floor **(10B)**
- Straighten and shake the legs, relax

#### 2. Exercise the left and right groin and hip

- Sit straight, place the left foot just above the right knee on the right thigh, bounce the left knee towards the floor **(20 times)**
- Tuck the left heel into the right groin (or on the floor), bring the left knee on the floor if possible, keep the right leg straight, face the right foot and bend forward from the lower back. Reach out towards the right foot, get hold of the right leg wherever you can and with every exhalation try to bring the chest a little closer to the right thigh (Pocket knife posture). **(10B)**
- Slowly release and sit up straight
- Take the left foot with the left hand and rest it in the right arm bend. Bring the left arm under the left knee and join left and right hands in front of the left lower leg. Cradle the left leg. **(20 times)**
- Take the left arm and bring it in between left lower leg and left thigh. Hold the left foot with the left hand, with the right hand supporting. Try to pull the left foot to the face (big toe towards the nose, not nose towards the big toe) **(5B)**
- Slowly move the left foot up and down and on the way down try to pull it closer to the face. **(8 times)**
- Straighten the leg, shake the legs and relax
- Do the same with the right foot

#### 3. Burmese sitting forward bend

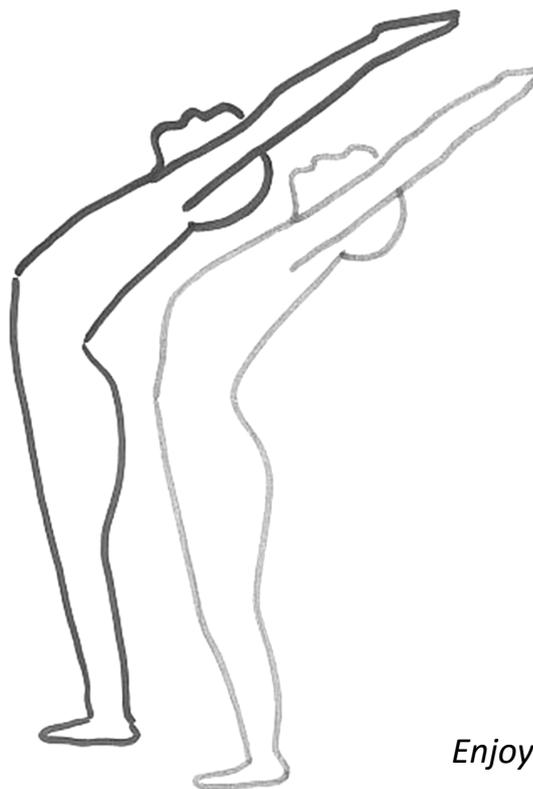
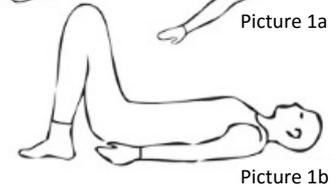
- Sit straight, fold legs in front of the body with the left leg in first, the right leg in front of it and neither on top of the other. Try to bring the knees on the floor.
- Place the hands on the floor in front of the legs and walk the hands forward, away from the body.
- Try to bring both elbows or even the forehead to the floor, keep the buttocks on the floor **(10B)**
- Slowly walk the hands back towards the body, sit up straight, straighten and shake the legs
- Do the same with the other leg position (right leg in first, left leg in front)

#### 4. Butterfly (to release remaining tensions in hips, groin and lower back)

- Sit straight, bring the soles of the feet together. Get hold of the toes. Pull the feet closer to the groin
- Slowly and effortlessly bounce the knees up and down simultaneously **(20 times)**
- Straighten and shake the legs, relax into corpse posture

### 3.6 Final relaxation – Corpse posture

- Lie on your back, legs straight, feet a little apart and dropped relaxed to the sides. Arms by the sides of the body, a little apart, palms facing towards the body or towards the ceiling. Keep the neck comfortable without tension (Picture 1a).
- In case of back problems, make sure the lower back is in contact with the floor, bend the knees and rest the soles of the feet next to the buttocks on the floor (Picture 1b).
- Relax the body part, by part, from the toes to the skull.
- Mindfully relax feet, ankles, lower legs and knees, front and back of the upper legs, buttocks, and pelvis.
- The lower part of the body from the navel to the toes should now be totally relaxed and without tension. If there are still some tense parts, try to relax them.
- Mindfully relax lower back, middle back, shoulders, abdominal muscles, muscles of the chest, muscles around the collar bones, fingers, palms, wrists, forearms and elbows, upper arms, the shoulders, neck and throat.
- Middle and lower part of the body should now be totally relaxed and without any tension. If there are still some tense parts, try to relax them again.
- Mindfully relax chin, jaw, mouth, cheeks, ears, temples, eye-regions, nose, forehead, and skull.
- The entire body from the top of the head to the tip of the toes should now be totally relaxed and without any tension, with your breathing going smoothly and slowly and your mind being calm.



*Enjoy your practice!*

