

Foreword by Margaret J. Wheatley

The Fine Arts of
RELAXATION,
CONCENTRATION,
and
MEDITATION

Ancient Skills
for Modern Minds

JOEL & MICHELLE LEVEY

PRAISE FOR *The Fine Arts of Relaxation, Concentration, and Meditation* ▼ ▼ ▼

"An excellent primer for waking up. Practice these techniques and your life will change."—Richard Strozzi Heckler, Ph.D., author of *Anatomy of Change*

"By far the best plain-language and practical book on mental training."—*Mind-Body Wellness*

"What a beautiful book! We need so much in our world to focus on how to *be* instead of how to *do*, and [this book] shows the way."—Larry Dossey, M.D., author of *Healing Words*

"Skillfully weaves together contemporary insights into the value of and need for meditation in our lives with many extremely evocative suggestions for different ways to practice."—Jon Kabat-Zinn, author of *Wherever You Go, There You Are*

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"The methods included here work wonders. As a satisfied user of so many of them, I affirm that they truly deepen the appreciation of life."—Ram Dass, author of *Still Here*

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"Practical and down-to-earth, this is a remarkable and comprehensive workbook for mastering the stress of life."—NAPRA *ReVIEW*

"In this beautiful book, the Leveys condense two decades of study, experience, and teaching in the art of self mastery. Hopefully everyone who reads this book will make room in their life for the practices and growth program that it illustrates."—Dr. Elmer Green, Coauthor of *Beyond Biofeedback*, Director of the Voluntary Control Program, Menninger Foundation

"The Leveys are making inner quality control technology available to the West."
—Bill Veltrop, Founder, International Center for Organization Design

"What we are striving for, whether we know it or not, is to make our life a work of art, so that every move we make is both appropriate and contributes to our increasing satisfaction and mastery. This unique book opens the possibility for doing that. The Leveys provide the most up-to-date guide to living yet base it on techniques that have stood the test of centuries, even millennia."
—Michael Ray, Ph.D., Coauthor, *Creativity in Business*, and Professor of Creativity and Innovation and of Marketing, Graduate School of Business, Stanford University

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CONCENTRATION, AND MEDITATION**

THE FINE ARTS ▼ ▼
OF RELAXATION,
CONCENTRATION,
& MEDITATION

ANCIENT SKILLS FOR MODERN MINDS

Joel & Michelle Levey



Wisdom Publications • Boston

Wisdom Publications
199 Elm Street
Somerville, Massachusetts 02144
www.wisdompubs.org

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Levey, Joel.

The fine arts of relaxation, concentration & meditation : ancient skills for modern minds / Joel & Michelle Levey.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 0-86171-349-4 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Success—Psychological aspects. 2. Self—realization. 3.

Relaxation. 4. Attention. 5. Medication. I. Levey, Michelle. II.

Title.

BF637.S8 L447 2003

158.1'2—dc21

2002155615

ISBN 978-0-86171-349-3

eBook ISBN 978-0-86171-969-3

15 14 13 12 11

7 6 5 4

Cover design by Laura Shaw. Interior design by Gopa & Ted2, Inc. Drawing on page 35 by Andrew Campbell

Wisdom Publications' books are printed on acid-free paper and meet the guidelines for permanence and durability set by the Council of Library Resources.

Printed in the United States of American



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▼▼ To our many kind teachers
and to the awakening of wisdom
within us all

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FOREWORD ▼ ▼ ▼

You are holding in your hands a life raft—a generous, life-saving gift from Joel and Michelle Levey. In our daily lives, we all are forced to navigate turbulent seas. There doesn't seem to be any firm ground in sight, and at any moment in our day, we can be abruptly knocked off course from our plans and our ideals. But as the seas mount in strength and the winds of change become more fierce, there are ways to feel grounded and peaceful. Many of these ways are offered in this book; they are a strong, and very practical life raft.

It's important to realize how our modern techniques of goal-setting and planning—the techniques we learned to employ as we wrestle the world into the shape we wanted—don't work in turbulence. In fact, they do just the opposite of what we might hope: as our plans get tossed by the winds of change, we become more stressed, less effective. We don't know how to navigate in uncertainty and ambiguity.

And yet, this knowledge exists. For millennia, many great teachers and people struggled with their own fears, and they developed practices and ways of being that are absolutely relevant to our present situation.

This is the great gift of this book. It is a gentle and generous offering of practices and perspectives that have helped people find peace for thousands of years. But in receiving this gift, you must offer a gift to yourself: the gift of *time*—time to pause, to reflect, to practice what's offered here. For most of us, time seems to have disappeared. This is the Age of Frenetic Activity. Our lives are over-committed, our children's schedules match our own in craziness, and we feel pressure to be available 24/7. Most of us resent this hyperactivity and, if we ever have time to sit quietly, we wonder about the meaning of these frenetic lives we're leading. Is all this activity leading somewhere

worthwhile? At the end of our lives, will we feel satisfied with what we've accomplished? Will we have contributed to the greater good? Are we becoming more effective in our lives and more helpful, or are we just becoming increasingly and senselessly more busy?

Joel and Michelle provide expert guidance in three types of practices that have generally disappeared from our busy lives. We are guided from dynamic relaxation, to concentration, to meditation. My own experience with these practices is that once I experienced relaxation, I was eager to go to a deeper, quieter place. These exercises provide so much benefit that you only need to try one or two, and then your whole being will yearn for the next level of peace. When I do any one of these practices, I'm startled to realize what I've been letting pass me by—silence, breathing, reflection, calmness, centeredness.

We are each responsible for cultivating peace; no one will do it for us. The demands of the world—of work and family—constantly call me away from peace. It doesn't take much to pull me off center—it can be the first phone call of the morning, an angry driver on my way to work, a news report, a crying child. But having tasted peace, I now *notice* what it feels like to be pulled off balance. I notice the way it feels to be anxious, resentful, angry, or fearful. I feel the contrast between these emotions and inner peace; I hear it in my voice, feel it in my energy, see it in my thoughts. Having learned how to cultivate peace, I know now that I can consciously choose for peace, in any situation, at any time. But not if I haven't taken time to do some of the practices that lead me into peace.

Of course I'm too busy, and of course the time I spend on cultivating my peace varies widely with the circumstances of my life. But now, when I find myself slipping into impatience, or fear, or anger, I know it's time to pay attention to my practice, to the practices introduced in this book. I know another way of being in my life is possible, if I'm willing to exercise discipline and carve out the time for practice.

I hope you will give yourself the gift of time, experiment with a few of these practices, and discover how much more capable you become to deal with life once you know what inner peace feels like. This world certainly needs more peaceful people. May you contribute to that and so benefit many.

Margaret J. Wheatley

AWAKENING OUR FULL POTENTIAL ▼ ▼ ▼

A human being is part of the whole called by us “universe,” a part limited in time and space. We experience ourselves, our thoughts and feelings as something separate from the rest. A kind of optical delusion of consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from the prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.... We shall require a substantially new manner of thinking if mankind is to survive.

Albert Einstein

In each of our lives there have been times when we have experienced a deeper sense of connectedness, wholeness, and belonging than we ordinarily find. Most likely those extraordinary moments of deeper wisdom, love, and aliveness came unexpectedly. Pause for a moment to recall those special moments when you were most fully and joyfully alive...when you felt the exhilaration of performing at your best...when you allowed your heart to open to tenderly love and be loved...when you were in the *flow* and felt in perfect harmony with the world in which you live. Recall those quintessential moments in your life and work that stand out and sparkle...those times when you really helped someone or when you really allowed someone to care for you. If we examine the qualities of our minds during these special times we will probably find that our attention was wholly focused on what was happening and that our mind and body were operating as one. Remembering and appreciating such special moments in our lives serves to remind us of what is possible.

But why are these moments so rare? Generally speaking, our attention is quite scattered—we are lost in our thoughts and only superficially in touch with the reality and intensity of our inner and outer experiences. Our minds are so infrequently calm and clear enough to discern the play of inspiration and revelation that are a natural, though very subtle, part of our lives. How many valuable insights and breakthrough ideas have we missed because the noise level in our mindbody was simply too high to discern these sublime whispers that are an ongoing function of our human life?

Similarly, we all too often wait until the whispers of tension in our bodies, our relationships, and our world become heart-wrenching screams of pain before we wake up and fully acknowledge them or attempt to restore harmony and balance. How many moments of struggle, pain, and grief—how many billions of dollars in wasted time, energy, and resources—would be saved if we, as individuals and organizations, devoted more attention to refining and developing our capabilities for inner awareness and enhanced mental development? Though our bodies are really not very different from those of our ancestors, we live in a dramatically different and infinitely more complex and demanding world. In a single day we may be challenged to respond to more information and make more decisions than one of our ancestors faced in years. Given the accelerating rate of change and uncertainty, the immensity of personal and global crises, and the staggering variety of choices and decisions that are a part of our daily life, is it any wonder that we often feel overwhelmed and frustrated?

With so many people needlessly suffering and dying from preventable stress-related diseases, millions of people are searching for wiser, kinder, and less self-destructive ways of living in today's world. When we consider the enormous costs incurred by our bodies, our minds, our relationships, and our environment, it is no surprise that so many people are seeking to increase their resilience, deepen their wisdom, and get in touch with life-affirming forces. It is no shock that skills in relaxation, concentration, and meditation are being more widely embraced as vital for enhancing the quality of our health, work, relationships, and peace of mind.

DEVELOPING THE MIND

- ▼▼ The greatest revolution in our generation is the discovery that human beings by changing the inner attitudes of their minds can change the outer aspects of their lives.

William James

While many people regard the state of their mind as an unalterable condition, the world's ancient contemplative traditions and modern cognitive sciences have demonstrated that through proper training and discipline, we can radically enhance the quality of our attention, emotional intelligence, creativity, and intuitive intelligence. The development of these and other mental capabilities offers an advantage for increasing our resilience, health, vitality, effectiveness, and well-being in complex times like these.

Through training, individuals are capable not only of improving their health, but of enhancing creativity and creative problem-solving, extending the length and quality of their lives, awakening greater empathy and compassion, and expanding the scope of their contribution to the world. The multiple and complex dilemmas of modern life represent a need, and the inner sciences of mindbody development offer a variety of profoundly practical and compassionate solutions. Once learned, these inner skills are generative, self-reinforcing, inexpensive, portable, reliable, easily valuable, diffusible, and value-adding in virtually every personal and professional situation.

- ▼▼ We don't understand the operations of our minds and hence we don't operate them very well.

Charles Tart

To accomplish the inner work we must rely upon the primary tool of our own bodymind. This is a universal tool of infinite potential. With it we create and guide the use of all other tools. Yet, growing up, in school or on the job, few of us have learned even the most basic skills to ensure its optimal performance, maintenance, and fine-tuning.

Consider, did our parents, teachers, health care providers, or clergy ever teach you techniques to let go of stress and tension, to harness and focus the

power of your mind, or to gain deep insight through meditation? Did they themselves practice or even appreciate the value of these skills? Most likely not. Lacking such fundamental human training, we in modern times, have much to learn from the traditional inner sciences of mind.

▼▼ In this century, human knowledge is extremely expanded and developed but this is mainly knowledge of the external world.... We spend a large amount of the best human brain power looking outside—too much, and it seems we do not spend adequate effort to look within, to think inwardly.... Perhaps now that the Western sciences have reached down into the atom and out into the cosmos finally to realize the extreme vulnerability of all life and value, it is becoming credible, even obvious, that the Inner Science is of supreme importance. Certainly physics designed the bombs, biology the germ warfare, chemistry the nerve gas and so on, but it will be the unhealthy emotions of individuals that will trigger these horrors. These emotions can only be controlled, reshaped, and rechanneled, by technologies developed from successful Inner Science.

The Dalai Lama

TOOLS FOR INNER WORK

For simplicity of presentation in this book, we have organized the sequence of training into three progressively more encompassing domains: dynamic relaxation, concentration, and meditation.

By mastering the art of *dynamic relaxation* we learn to recognize and reduce unproductive tensions, anxieties, and struggles in our inner world and in our outer lives. By learning to free ourselves from the burden of accumulated tensions and inner conflicts, we are better equipped to think more clearly, reduce distress, increase our efficiency and productivity, and generally enhance our well-being.

Mastering the inner art of *concentration* we learn to harness and direct the power of the mind. Transforming the chaotic agitation of our ordinary thinking into a focused beam of awareness, we are able to direct our attention wholeheartedly and productively toward whatever we do. Free

from agitation and dullness, our mind grows more peaceful and more powerful. Concentration builds a coherence of mind like a laser beam of attention capable of penetrating the profound subtleties of our life and the world in which we live.

A successful practice of the powerful methods of *meditation* will be greatly enhanced by having learned to quiet the noise in the body through relaxation and to build power and peace of mind through concentration. Approached in this way, meditation techniques enable us to awaken the insight necessary to consciously recognize and transform the harmful or unproductive patterns of our lives, and to consciously strengthen the mind's potential for wisdom, compassion, and creativity. And as this happens, our appreciation for the true nature and potential of ourselves and others grows; inner and outer conflicts diminish; and we become more joyful and more empowered in helping others and the world.

Finally, this book contains a fourth section that offers some additional perspectives and strategies for integrating the fine arts of relaxation, concentration, and meditation into your daily life, work, and relationships.

RELAXATION, PEAK PERFORMANCE, AND BEYOND

This book is a mental-fitness manual for everyone interested in learning methods to enhance their health and performance, master stress, and deepen their appreciation of life. This is also a handbook for those who wish to understand and master these skills in order to teach them to others or to equip themselves to make a greater contribution to the world. Whatever your motivation, you will find that the ideas and techniques in this collection have been presented with an emphasis on their practical applications in our busy lives, while preserving a sense of the depth and sacredness associated with these traditional inner arts. We suggest that you explore these ideas with your intellect, contemplate their meaning and value in your heart, and test and confirm their profound practicality in the laboratory of your daily life and the playing fields of your work and relationships.

If you are primarily interested in physical relaxation or in learning to stay centered, calm, and focused amid chaos, you will find many of these techniques highly effective. If exploring the nature and potential of your

mindbody is important to you, these methods will help ripen your understanding. If improving your mental and physical performance, or building healthier and more harmonious relationships, is of significance to you, there are many strategies that will help you in these arenas as well. And if you approach this inquiry with a heartfelt sense of devotion, a sincere yearning to deepen your spiritual insight and empower yourself to be of greater service to others, many of these methods will serve as a vehicle of transformation, opening doors to new dimensions of wisdom, love, and inner strength.

FIELD TESTED

This book contains a distillation of over a hundred methods that we have found personally and professionally effective in our work with thousands of people over the past thirty years. During that time we have had the rare opportunity to train closely with many respected masters and researchers of the inner arts and sciences. From these remarkable men and women we have learned thousands of effective techniques for developing the full potential of the human mindbody. In many cases these methods have been practiced, cherished, and preserved by generations of people with inspiring results for millennia.

The contemporary renaissance of interest in matters of mental health and fitness, spirit, and consciousness has brought these methods of relaxation, concentration, and meditation out of isolated caves, remote monasteries, and foreign cultures and into the research institutions and mainstream of our modern lives. They have been scientifically studied and demonstrated to be effective at enhancing health and optimizing mental and physical performance. They are also effective antidotes to the epidemic of stress-related diseases, anxiety, hostility, dysfunctional behavior, and existential yearnings that plague so many in our complex and rapidly changing world.

For more than three decades we have relied upon these inner arts and disciplines as primary tools in our work. We've worked in many capacities: as mental fitness coaches for athletes and corporate peak performers; researchers investigating the nature of human consciousness; psychophysical therapists directing clinical programs in numerous medical centers, faculty members in graduate programs in medicine, psychology of consciousness,

holistic health, leadership and organization design; counselors for people facing terminal illness or grieving the loss of a loved one; teachers of the contemplative arts and sciences; and as guides to many people around the globe seeking to increase their vitality and resilience. It has always been our goal to help people live and work in a more integrated, authentic, and deeply spirited way, thereby making a greater contribution to their world.

HOW TO GET THE MOST FROM THIS BOOK ▼ ▼ ▼

The challenges of millennia and the inspiration of the human spirit have given rise to thousands of techniques of relaxation, concentration, and meditation. Over the past twenty years we have learned, practiced, and taught others many of these methods. In the pages that follow you will find the distillation of those methods that we have found most widely effective.

We suggest that you consider this book as an investment portfolio offering you a wide range of options. Your return will depend largely upon the sincerity and continuity of your investment of attention and aspiration. Though these methods are priceless you must make a personal investment in them in order call forth the power of which these words are merely shadows. The greater your personal investment in taking these principles and techniques to heart, the greater will be your return and the more you will have to offer to the world.

There are three steps in mastering these techniques. Reading or hearing about them is the first step. Contemplating and thinking about their meaning, value, and application in your daily life is the second step. Taking the meaning and value to heart and directly applying this to your life is the third step. All of these steps are important in discovering the power and profundity of each technique. Though benefits may be immediately apparent, the real fruits of these methods will only emerge gradually as you cultivate them with sustained effort. As your practice deepens, the fruits will grow sweeter, and your appreciation of life will grow.

How long will it take to master a technique? How long would it take you to learn to master the flute or a foreign language? The key to all learning is

commitment and discipline. While books, tapes, and teachers are invaluable, ultimately it is your own diligence that will assure your success. Have faith in your abilities to use these techniques. Let the difficulties and uncertainties in your life—and the beauty—provide a continual reminder of the vital importance of practicing these skills.

This book is arranged in five sections: *Relaxation*, *Concentration*, *Meditation*, *Wisdom in Daily Life*, and *Meditation in the World of Work*. Each of the first three sections has an introduction to the ideas and methods, a description of the guidelines for using these methods, and then the methods themselves.

We suggest that you first read the introduction and guidelines for each section. As you read, note those ideas and exercises that seem to speak most directly to you. Once you have identified them, begin to put them into practice by reading them slowly and thoughtfully. Proceed step by step to get the feeling behind the words. You may find it helpful to have a friend read the exercise to you, or to record it in your own voice to replay it at your leisure. Or you may feel inspired to change our terminology to better suit your own style or beliefs. As your familiarity with a technique grows, you will learn to progress through its various stages without needing to read or listen to the instructions. Though at first you may mentally talk yourself through an exercise, gradually cultivate the skill to move through the method as a progression of silent shifts in awareness, a series of mental images or feelings rather than mere words and concepts.

The following chart will help you to identify the techniques in this book that will speak most directly to your needs and interests.

<i>If you are interested in...</i>	<i>experiment with techniques on these pages</i>
Flow state, peak performance, and achieving breakthrough	29, 55, 68, 101, 113, 129, 131, 134, 151, 171, 173, 180, 182, 222
Enhancing creativity, innovative thinking, and intuition	29, 41, 55, 64, 98, 101, 104, 108, 111, 122, 124, 127, 129, 136, 138, 144, 154, 168, 173, 180, 190, 193, 212
Self-empowerment	27, 35, 64, 73, 82, 96, 104, 108, 111, 113, 117, 119, 122, 124, 134, 147, 155, 157, 164, 171, 203, 208, 223, 230

Mastering attention	29, 53, 55, 57, 59, 61, 62, 64, 66, 68, 71, 73, 96, 98, 101, 104, 108, 111, 113, 115, 119, 124, 138, 142, 157, 164, 168, 171, 173, 190, 193, 230
Mastering muscular distress (such as headaches, muscle pain, aches, tics)	27, 29, 33, 35, 36, 39, 41, 44, 61, 62, 142, 217
Mastering mental distress (such as anxiety, worry, intrusive or repetitive thoughts)	29, 36, 39, 62, 64, 104, 108, 111, 113, 124, 134, 164
Mastering emotional and autonomic distress (hypertension, migraine headache, eating disorders, addictive behaviors, etc.)	36, 55, 62, 64, 96, 111, 113, 138, 144, 147, 151, 154, 157, 171
Opening the heart: awakening love and compassion	29, 111, 113, 144, 147, 151, 154, 157, 164, 166, 168, 171, 173, 175, 177, 180, 182, 190
Strategies for working with pain and enhancing healing	27, 29, 33, 35, 36, 39, 55, 101, 111, 113, 134, 136, 138, 142, 144, 151, 157, 171, 217
Tapping the life-giving forces of the human spirit	29, 55, 59, 96, 98, 124, 138, 144, 157, 168, 171, 173, 182, 186, 243, 249, 259, 265, 267
Living in Dynamic Balance	29, 53, 59, 61, 62, 68, 73, 111, 113, 127, 136, 138, 143, 144, 147, 151, 157, 164, 166, 168, 171, 173, 180, 190, 195, 203, 220, 259

PART ONE

▼ ▼ ▼ RELAXATION

Do everything with a mind that lets go.

Do not expect any praise or reward.

If you let go a little, you will have a little peace.

If you let go a lot, you will have a lot of peace.

If you let go completely, you will know complete peace and freedom.

Your struggles with the world will have come to an end.

Ajahn Chah

DYNAMIC RELAXATION ▼ ▼ ▼

The relaxation described in the pages that follow is not a passive, limp, or ineffectual state, but one characterized by a dynamic, ever-adapting balance between a calm, clear, relaxed quality of presence and an alert readiness. This state of dynamic relaxation is finely tuned and responsive to the ever-changing circumstances and conditions of daily life. With practice you will learn to immediately feel when you are holding more tension than you need to perform at your best. By learning to release that extra tension, your brain and muscles will be vitalized with oxygen and nutrients, you will be able to think more clearly and make better decisions, and your ability to act will be enhanced.

Relaxation skills are the foundation for practicing concentration and meditation. You probably know from experience how difficult it is to harness and focus the power of your mind when your body is filled with tension and your mind clouded by fatigue and anxiety.

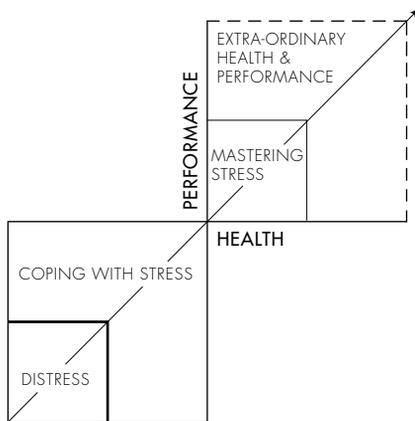
Once you begin to understand and practice the skills described here, the tensions and distress of your life can be met as opportunities to apply and refine your growing skills in relaxation. This requires the conscious cultivation of:

1. Self-awareness: the ability to know what you are experiencing—sensing, feeling, thinking, etc.—at any moment
2. Care and kindness: the authentic and heartfelt concern that deliberately chooses the paths that lead to greater harmony in your mental, physical, and personal relationships with the world
3. A joyful appreciation of the process: an attitude of gratitude and openness to learning and growing from life's unceasing challenges, a joyful

dedication to living life as a game to be mastered in the arenas of your own mindbody, and in your work and relationships

4. Commitment and courage: the willingness to do whatever it takes to continue to realize and nurture your own extraordinary potentials and help others do the same

Relaxation skills build the foundation for your practice of concentration and meditation. This is a dynamic process, leaving us at times immobilized by distress, at times simply coping with our tensions and anxieties, and at times energized, calm, and confident, having all the information and ability we need to master the stressful demands that life's changing conditions inevitably bring. Having learned to master stress, and to live more and more in the state of flow, we catch the upward spiral of continuous personal development. Breakthroughs to extraordinary levels of health, insight, and performance become more the norm than the exception.



Though stress and tension will always be a part of your life, when you know how to relax, there is no need to get tense about being tense, or feel anxious about feeling anxious. Stress will energize rather than destroy you. Change and challenge will provide every opportunity for growth, creative expression, and extraordinary levels of health, performance, and insight.

As you learn to reduce the noise in your system, physical vitality, mental clarity, calm, centered strength, and emotional well-being that are fundamental to the human spirit will naturally and effortlessly arise.

With this in mind, let's look at the guidelines and methods of practicing the fine arts of relaxation.

▼▼ Remember...

Relaxation is not something that you do.

It is a natural response that you allow to happen.

Relaxation is what is left when you stop creating tension.

GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING RELAXATION SKILLS ▼ ▼ ▼

1. MOTIVATION

When you start to practice relaxation or mental development skills it is important to understand why you are doing it and to generate a positive motivation toward this learning process. Actively choose to practice relaxation. Remember that it is not what you do but how and why you do it that matters.

2. REGULAR PRACTICE

Make these relaxation tools work for you. Regular, consistent practice is essential if you want to gain maximum benefit from these skills. Remember that when you learn to, say, ride a bicycle, develop marksmanship, or any other physical skill, you are using muscles you have never used before. So too when you learn how to relax: You will be stretching mental muscles that you may have never been aware of before.

Many people recommend that you practice twenty minutes in the morning and twenty minutes in the evening—and this ideal would be excellent. But more important is to consciously integrate these techniques into your daily activities. While standing in line, waiting on the phone, or sitting at a stop light, pause for a few moments to breathe away your tensions and bring calm and clarity to your mind. The more frequently you use these strategies, the more dependable they will be for you. Continuity of practice over time will, in the long run, be more important than duration of any one practice session.

3. A QUIET ENVIRONMENT

It is better at first to practice in quiet, comfortable surroundings. This will help you to zero in on the physical and mental qualities you are learning to develop.

Once you have become familiar with your internal controls, and how to access your target state of relaxation, you will be able to carry your practice over into more stressful environments. In fact, the world will continually provide you with opportunities to test and refine your skills in the face of challenge and the unexpected. Having mastered these skills, it is possible that at some critical moment, when it really counts, you will have the energy, balance, and clarity to touch somebody's life in a meaningful way—and this, of course, includes your own!

4. FOCUSING THE MIND

At the beginning of each session, it is helpful to employ a concentration technique to quiet, calm, and focus your mind. A simple method is to be mindful of the natural flow of your breathing as you inhale and exhale with full awareness. You might also experiment with the many excellent concentration techniques presented in Part Two: Concentration.

5. EFFORTLESSNESS AND VOLUNTARY SURRENDER

This state is characterized by an alert, receptive, and calm intensity of awareness. Initially, the challenge is to learn to develop a fine balance between an open, calm attentiveness and the more tightly focused mind that tries to change something or make something happen. This balance is learned through practice and attention to the feedback you receive from your attempts to relax your body and mind.

For best results, *allow relaxation to happen*. The harder you try, the tenser you will become. Release your tensions as you exhale. Relax into the gentle pull of gravity. Let your eyes be soft. In an easy, natural and effortless manner, just let go of the mindbody tensions that you no longer need.

Allow your internal RPMs to slow down, and find your natural rhythm.

If you are the type of person who has always been busy *doing* rather than *being*, this approach may at first be alien to you. With practice, however, you will discover a totally new type of inner strength and power when you are deeply relaxed. Don't worry about losing control. Whenever you need to apply effort or push harder you will be rested enough to do so. You are simply learning to have the choice of two operating modes rather than the compulsive limitation of one inefficient habit. Without this option you may struggle for the rest of your life to keep control rather than simply settling into the power of life naturally and effortlessly.

6. PROPER POSTURE

For best results, a comfortable upright position is recommended for practicing these relaxation techniques. It is important that your spine be straight. Lying down is discouraged if you have a tendency to fall asleep. With practice, you will find that you can tune in to an optimal balance between relaxation and activation while walking, talking, driving, or engaging in any activity.

7. EXTERNAL GUIDANCE, INTERNAL GUIDANCE

Initially, the external guidance of another person or a taped guided relaxation is useful as it is easier to just let go into the experience. As you become familiar with the stages of relaxation and the variety of mental and physical indicators, you will be able to enter these states at will and under your own guidance. The balance that you develop is similar to simultaneously driving a car and being free to enjoy the view, or playing music and being totally entranced by it at the same time.

For most of us, this is an unfamiliar state of awareness. With practice, however, you will expand your mental and physical awareness to allow you to easily guide your own relaxation sessions.

8. TIMING

Once you have become familiar with the relaxation techniques by practicing morning and evening, you will be able to apply them when you need to throughout the day as an antidote to stressful situations. You may wonder, however, just when the best time would be to actually apply them. Generally speaking, it is best to practice *before* you are mentally or physically exhausted. And try to avoid practicing on a full stomach or when you are extremely hungry.

If you wait until you just can't take any more, odds are your mind will be so agitated that it will be almost impossible to concentrate. And if you wait until you are exhausted or full from eating, you will probably fall asleep. As soon as the boat starts to take on water—use the bilge pump! Don't wait until you feel swamped or out of control before you use these techniques to dissipate stress.

Remember that your body-mind is your primary instrument. Monitor it carefully throughout the day. Consciously relax or fine-tune frequently.

If you are having difficulty settling down and tuning in, try scheduling your relaxation sessions immediately after periods of exercise or heightened arousal. At these times there is a tangible mental and physical release, a natural time of letting go. Just ride the wave of this shift from sympathetic-nervous-system activation to the parasympathetic relaxation response. At this time investigate and recognize the stages, feelings, and indicators of relaxation while they are most apparent.

9. OVERCOMING DIFFICULTIES

There are two main obstacles that you will inevitably encounter in your practice—distraction and drowsiness.

Distraction can be of two types: external, such as noise, heat, cold, and internal, such as physical sensations, pain, and mental wandering. The best strategy in both cases is to include the distraction in your awareness while minimizing your resistance to or identification with the distracting event. Just let it be, and keep your attention on what you are doing. Even if your mind wanders a thousand times, gently bring it back. Do not engage in

mental commentary on the process—just do it. Gradually, the agitated, wandering mind will be tamed and you will be able to stay focused on the task at hand.

As for *drowsiness* or mental dullness, it would be useful to check your posture to make sure you are sitting upright. You could take a few deep breaths, or even splash your face with cold water before continuing your practice.

You might find it helpful to contemplate the preciousness of your life and the unpredictability of your death, and to muster a firm resolve to make the most of each moment.

Don't allow your wandering, compulsive mind to control your life, and likewise, don't wait to wake up on your deathbed realizing that you have slept through most of your life. *Take charge! Be patient!*

10. CHOOSING A TECHNIQUE

As we begin our practice of these skills, our challenge is to recognize and to master our stress response. Dr. Alice Domar, M.D., explains, "The best antidote to stress—besides altering your life so it's less stressful—is learning to manage it through mind-body methods such as meditation, mindfulness, guided imagery, and deep breathing. Recent Harvard studies have found that these techniques can successfully treat a host of...health problems." Since each of us has a unique style of responding to the stressors of our daily life, different techniques geared to optimize psychophysical states will be effective for different individuals.

For example, if your symptoms of stress include neuromuscular signs, such as muscle aches and pain, tension headaches, backaches, spasms or tics, fatigue, then the methods of modified progressive relaxation, autogenic imagery, the flow sequence, mental massage, and numerous other methods may be quite effective.

If your symptoms of distress are primarily cognitive, such as anxiety, worry, intrusive or repetitive thoughts, then the concentration techniques and the meditations for listening, walking, investigating the mind and thought may be very helpful.

If your symptoms include autonomic-nervous-system symptoms or disease, including hypertension, migraines, gastrointestinal distress, poor cir-