

# Learning to Relax

by Irina Georgieva



These days very often you can hear: "Relax, just relax".

But how does one do that?

One hundred years ago the American philosopher and psychologist William James suggested an experiment to

illustrate the mind-body connection. Relax on your back and become calm. Once you have succeeded in relaxation then try to make yourself angry without straining or altering your body position. In other words, try to become angry without tensing your muscles, changing your breathing, clenching your teeth, raising your blood pressure or your heart rate or manifesting any other physical sign. Impossible! Every thought, every emotion leaves its imprint on our physical being.

In our highly intellectual, "head-oriented" world many of us are physically stressed without knowing it because we wrongly imagine our mind and body are separate. If we are more aware of the physical beating our body takes from our mental and emotional lives we might take more precautions against undesirable mental states. This is one reason why classic Yoga texts include moral and ethical training among other disciplines.

Learning to relax in poses like *shavasana* (corpse pose) helps us to feel and release tensions that are deep within us. Not only the tensions in gross skeletal muscles but also subtle tensions in the eyes, heart, diaphragm, stomach and skull can be identified and released. This healthy habit helps us to distance ourselves from negative tensions and deal with them more effectively, a valuable skill in our heart-attack-prone society.

