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Teacher to the teachers.

Mastering Simplicity

Theme: Sedate, Neutralize, Stimulate, Integrate
Physical Focus: Restorative Yoga & Yoga Nidra
Special Equipment: 2 bolsters, two towels (one should be plush and soft) and wash cloth.
Poetry/Extracts/Resources: none
Music: *Living Room Songs* by Olafur Arnalds (Set each track to repeat twice; this album is very soothing for quiet practice)

Introduction

• To understand the potential effects of Restorative Yoga practices on the nervous system it's helpful to have a basic understanding of the **Tonic Labyrinthine Reflex** which is one of the first reflexes to develop and underlies our connection with the earth.

". . . it draws us towards the Earth by increasing the postural tone (a sense of aliveness and weightedness" of the muscles of the body. For example, if we are lying on our bellies, flexor tone is facilitated or increased; if we are lying on our backs, extensor tone is facilitated; and if we are lying on our sides, the tone on the underside is facilitated."[1]

• Whenever a part or surface of our body touches the earth that surface increases in tone.

• **Prone:** When we lay prone on the belly there is increased tonus of the front body and the contents of the body (the internal organs).[2] The flexor tone of the muscles on the front of the body increases. This increased tonus can both stimulate and activate the physiological function of the internal organs. When laying prone many people experience a shift into the support of the parasympathetic nervous system and the enteric nervous system (the abdominal brain). Variations of prone movements such as supported Child's Pose (*Salamba Balasana*) tend to **sedate.**

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[1] *Sensing, Feeling and Action: The Experiential Anatomy of Body-Mind Centering* by Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen, Contact Editions, Northampton, MA 1993

[2] Bonnie Bainbridge Cohen defines postural tone as ". . . the resultant tone of the various physiological tones occurring in all our tissues and provides the foundation for our muscle tone. It manifests as the readiness in our muscles to act, before the muscles actually contract to move our body." From *Basic Neurocellular Patterns: Exploring Developmental Movement*, Burchfield Rose Publishers, El Sobrante, CA, 2018

• **Supine:** When we lie supine on the back, there is increased tonus of the back body. This increased tonus can stimulate the spinal muscles moving us towards extension. The overall effect is a shift into the support of the sympathetic nervous system and a heightened sense of vigilance and alertness. Variations on supine movements, especially with the spine in extension and/or the body in some gradient of inversion, tend to **stimulate.**

• **Side-Lying:** When we lie on the side, there is an increased tonus on the underside of the body. The front and back of the body must come into balanced tonus to prevent us from rolling forward into a prone position or falling backward into a supine position. The overall effect is a balanced tonicity that brings about a unique exchange between the parasympathetic, sympathetic and enteric nervous system. We could call side-lying the "plane of mediation" between the two sides of the autonomic nervous system. We become "attentively relaxed." Variations on side-lying movements tend to **balance** and **neutralize.**

Experiential

Sedating

You will need:
2 bolsters, a blanket, a bath towel and a wash cloth.

1. **Supported Child's Pose** (***Salamba Balasana***). Place two bolsters in a T-shape in front of you. Kneeling with your buttocks supported on a block, fold forward so that the front of your trunk is completely supported by the bolster. You may wish to add another folded blanket on top of the bolster so that there is a comforting pressure against the front of your body. Roll a bath towel into a narrow cylinder and place this just below the collar bones (clavicles) to provide support for the shoulders. Fold a wash cloth to support the head in a neutral position/ or turn the head to the left or right. Drape the arms over the horizontal bolster. Stay here for 5-10 minutes.
2. ALTERNATIVE (for those with knee issues): **Downward Facing Corpse** (***Adho Mukha Savasana***). Place a bolster lengthwise on your mat. Place a folded blanket (as wide as the distance from your navel to your pubic bone) across the bolster. Roll a bath towel into a narrow cylinder and place this just below the collar bones (clavicles) to provide support for the shoulders. Fold another towel as a support for your head on the floor. Position yourself with the top of your sternum on the edge of the bolster, your head resting on the towel support, and your legs draped either side of the bolster. Adjust the abdominal blanket support until you feel the pelvis either in a neutral position or with the tail slightly lower than the sacrum. Stay here for 5-10 minutes.

Balancing/Neutralizing

You will need:
One bolster, a blanket, a bath towel and a yoga block (or chair).

3. **Side-Lying Restorative** (***Salamba Parigrasana***)

a. Cover your yoga mat with a soft blanket.
b. Place a bolster across your mat.
c. Fold a blanket into 3-pleats to form a narrow bolster shape about 8 inches (20 cm) wide and about 4 inches (10 cms) thick. Place this parallel to your bolster, with a gap between the bolster and the blanket.
d. Using the width of your hand as a guide, roll the towel into hand-width folds. This will create an oval shape that supports your cervical spine.
e. Have a block close at hand.

Lying on your right side, position your thoracic spine over the apex of the bolster with your shoulder resting on the floor. Your right shoulder will rest on the floor between the bolster and your blanket fold. Now drape your neck and head over the towel roll, adjusting the diameter so that the neck is fully supported in lateral extension. Extend your arm over your head and rest your hand on the yoga block (or use the seat of a chair). Stay for 7 minutes; spiral 1-2X *towards your back* focusing on releasing your diaphragm and then returning to the side-lying position. Repeat on the left side.

Stimulating

You will need:
One bolster, one blanket, and one bath towel.

4. **Rolling Brook Pose** Place a bolster across your mat to support the back of the knees and the upper thighs. Now create your **Accordion Pleat Back Fold**.
   a. Fold a blanket in half-width wise.
   b. Fold the blanket in half-length wise.
   c. Flip the blanket over so that the folded side is away from you and the open edges are close to you.

   d. Slide your hands between the two blanket folds about 1 foot (30 cm) from the front edge and pull the two layers of blanket towards you. Repeat, sliding another fold towards you

and placing it slightly back of the first fold. Continue until you have a staircase that will create a gradual support for your back to extend over. If the support is too extreme, make the folds wider (more than a foot apart) or use a thinner/softer blanket.

Shoulders, neck and head on this side. Lower ribs and mid-back on this side.

Now create your **Dog-Bone Neck Fold**

a. Fold a bath towel in half length-wise.
b. Fold the left and right sides towards the center of the towel, leaving a 2 inch (5 cm) gap.
c. Using the width of your hand as a guide, roll the towel into hand-width folds. This will create an oval shape that supports your cervical spine.
d. When complete, scrunch the center of the towel to form an indentation. Lay over the roll with your neck centered over the gully of the towel. Adjust by unfolding to reduce the diameter.

Put the bolster under your knees and lower thighs. Lie back over the **Accordion Pleat Back Fold** so that the nipple line of your chest is over the highest point of the mound with your shoulders resting comfortably on the floor. Place the **Dog-Bone Neck Fold** under your neck, adjusting the diameter so that your neck is in slight extension with your head resting comfortably on the your mat.

Your arms can be extended to the sides or in a cactus shape with the lower arms perpendicular to the upper arms. Alternatively, you can rest your hands on your upper chest. Stay for 7-13 minutes.

Relaxation

5. **Supported Corpse Pose** (***Salamba Savasana***)
   You will need:
   2 bolsters, a blanket, two bath towels and an eye pillow or scarf.
   a. Place your yoga mat and blanket at right angles to a wall.
   b. If you wish to fold a **Head Won Ton** for your neck and head use click this link https://samloe.yoga/origami-head-support/ Once folded, place the towel where your head will be.
   c. Place one bolster against the wall and position the other bolster so it rests under your knees and lower thighs.
   d. Recline back with the soles of your feet pressing against the wall bolster, your knees supported by the second bolster. Before you lie down all the way.
   e. Fold the blanket width-ways into a long narrow strip about 10 inches (25 cm) wide. Place the center of the blanket over your lower abdomen with the two ends extending out to the sides.
   f. Now recline back with your neck and head supported on a folded bath towel or inside the Head Won Ton. Draw the tips of the Won Ton under your shoulders either side of your neck and press the towel firmly against the sides of your head.
   g. **Anatomical neutral arm/hand position:** Extend your arms away from your hips, turning the thumbs towards the sky. Use the blanket to raise your wrists and hands slightly higher than your elbows. Experiment with the distance between your body and your arms until the shoulders are resting in a neutral position (neither rolling in or out). Now you are ready to practice Yoga Nidra.

6. **Self-Guided Yoga Nidra**
   The objective of this Yoga Nidra is for the student to gradually learn a protocol that they can practice on their own. The steps are:
   Out
   In
   Body Awareness
   Breath Awareness
   Being Awareness
   Return

   • **Exteroception (Sensing Outwards):** Become aware of sounds outside your body. As soon as you identify a sound find another sound. Name these sounds without labelling them pleasant or unpleasant. (e.g. refrigerator humming, birds singing, people talking, dog barking etc. .)
   • **Interoception (Feeling Inwards):** Become aware of sensations inside your body. As soon as you identify a sensation, search for another one. Name these sensations without labelling them good or bad. (e.g. moist tongue, tight right shoulder, rumbling stomach, warm feet, tingling left side of neck etc . .)
   • **Body Awareness**: Now have a clear intention to move your awareness throughout your body. You will start with your feet moving **up the back of the body to the head**. Then moving **down the front of the body to the feet.** Take a moment to repeat: up the back of

the body to the head, down the front of the body to the feet. At the end you will join all the parts of the body together.

- Right foot
- Left foot
- Right calf
- Left calf
- Back of the right knee
- Back of the left knee
- Right thigh
- Left thigh
- Right hip
- Left hip
- Right buttock
- Left buttock
- Right lower back
- Left lower back
- Lower back
- Right waist
- Left waist
- Mid-back
- Right shoulder blade
- Left shoulder blade
- Upper back
- Right shoulder
- Left shoulder
- Right neck
- Left neck
- Back of the head
- Top of the head
- Forehead
- Right eye
- Left eye
- Right nostril
- Left nostril
- Right ear
- Left ear
- Right jaw
- Left jaw
- Upper lip
- Lower lip
- Chin
- Throat
- Notch at the base of the throat

- Right collar bone
- Left collar bone
- Right shoulder
- Left shoulder
- Right upper arm
- Left upper arm
- Right elbow
- Left elbow
- Right forearm
- Left forearm
- Right wrist and hand
- Left wrist and hand
- Right thumb, index finger, third finger, ring finger and little finger
- Left thumb, index finger, third finger, ring finger and little finger
- The right arm and hand
- The left arm and hand
- Right chest
- Left chest
- Upper abdomen
- Lower abdomen
- Pubic bone
- Genitals
- Right hip
- Left hip
- Right thigh
- Left thigh
- Right knee
- Left knee
- Right shin
- Left shin
- Right ankle
- Left ankle
- Right foot
- Left foot
- Right big toe, second toe, third toe, fourth toe, little toe.
- Left big toe, second toe, third toe, fourth toe, little toe.
- The right leg and foot
- The left leg and foot
- Both legs and both feet.
- The whole of the trunk
- Both arms and hands
- The whole head
- The whole body, the whole body, the whole body.

Breath Awareness

• Now bring your awareness to your breath. Notice where you feel your breath moving most distinctly. This could be anywhere in your body. Begin a count: Inhaling five, exhaling five, inhaling four, exhaling four . . . until you reach the count of one. When you reach the count of one, shift your awareness from the rise and fall of the breath to the moments of stillness in between. Relax into the pause at the end of the exhalation feeling the body breathing itself. Effortlessly.

Being Awareness

• Now simply rest in the spaciousness of yourself. Relax even the effort of paying attention so that your awareness also becomes spacious. Rest here for as long as you wish.

Returning

- **Exteroception:** Awareness of sounds outside the body.
- **Interoception:** Awareness of sounds inside the body.
- Gently moving and awakening the body.
- Rolling onto the side and sitting up.

Transition to Everyday Life

• Notice as you move through your day what would bring balance to your body. Do you need more stimulation, sedation or do you need to find the middle ground? If you are feeling lethargic, would active exercise enervate and enliven you? If you are feeling exhausted, would a short nap revive you? If you've been surrounded by people all day, would a few minutes of solitude help you to transition gracefully (e.g. taking a shower and changing your clothes when you come home from work).

Resources

• *Relax & Renew: Restful Yoga for Stressful Times* by Judith Lasater, PH.D., P.T. Rodmell Press, Berkeley, California, 1995