

Breathing and relaxation exercises

For asylum seekers and refugees

Sarah Strauven & Johan Op De Beeck

PREFACE

The idea

For many years we have been meeting and working with asylum seekers and refugees offering our service as clinical psychologists. It often happens that we suggest breathing and relaxation exercises during a counselling session and that people are interested in hearing more about them. People have expressed how much they valued these exercises however they have also shared with us that they struggled to integrate them into their daily life or to apply them when they most needed them. These experiences prompted the idea to record breathing and relaxation exercises in different languages and to make them accessible in digital format to asylum seekers and refugees. Considering that most people nowadays own a phone that allows them to download digital files, we have shared both the texts and audio files on our website.

For whom

Because we strongly believe it's important that the exercises are accessible to anyone who might benefit from them, independently of their legal status or financial means, we are happy to share the translated texts and the digital recordings for free. The exercises can be used both by those who wish to take advantage of the resources themselves as well as by those looking for materials to complement their work in supporting or counselling others.

Important information

Many of the exercises originate or are related to traditions of faith or wisdom from the different corners of the world. It is important to be aware and acknowledge that many of those traditions, like yoga, were once the object of persecution. We thank the people who have given us permission to use their versions of these sorts of exercises in this project. Some exercises come forth from specific sources of which we added the references. For a couple of exercises it was impossible to determine their origin and they are considered part of the common good. The exercises lacking references are our own versions of those.

We want to emphasise that we don't pretend to believe that these exercises are the solutions to the the multiple suffering experienced within seeking refuge. For some, they offer relief; to others they are not helpful. We are committed to avoid enactments of Western colonialism that has us imposing our own understanding of difficulties and particularly the idea of the correct solutions on other people's experience. Moreover, we are aware that the problems faced by refugees often arose in a broader socio-political context and human rights violations. Our vision therefore resists the tendency to individualise, pathologise and medicalise this kind of suffering. With this in mind, we hope that these exercises will be integrated with much care and respect in a comprehensive support that seeks to find helpful ways forward collaboratively.

The unique approach of our project is the fruit of our own work and we would highly appreciate it for you to respect our work, make honest use of it and refer to it correctly.

This project was carried out with little resources. In those cases where we couldn't accomplish the translations of all parts, we have kept the English versions for those missing parts. This is to strive for as much uniformity as possible across all texts.

Feedback

We would love to hear (team@care4refugees.org) from you in case:

- the exercises have been of value to you or others in any way,
- you notice mistakes or have suggestions for improvement,

- you have exercises that have proven to be particularly helpful for asylum seekers or refugees and that we could possibly share on the website in the future,
- you would wish to make a donation to support this project.

Warmly,

Sarah and Johan

Sarah Strauven
www.skyma.be
[@StrauvenSarah](https://www.instagram.com/StrauvenSarah)

Johan Op De Beeck
www.psycholoogjohanopdebeeck.be

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This project wouldn't have been possible without the contributions and support of some people. We would like to thank them here explicitly.

This project was initiated by Sarah Strauven in her former workplace. Her supervisor at that time, **Ellen Goeleven** was immediately interested in the project and saw its potential for many. In the context of her job as a psychologist at Fedasil, Sarah got the time and the financial resources to realise the first part of the project.

Just like Sarah, Johan Op De Beeck was a member of the Refugee Committee of the Belgian Institute for Psychotraumatology (BIPe) and he was immediately interested in co-managing the project. We turned to other members of BIPe for additional help. We thank **Manoëlle Hopchet** and **Nicole Ruyschaert** who supported us with careful advice and suggestions about the selection of the exercises. Their expertise in stabilising exercises in trauma counselling have endowed this project with a greater clinical validity.

We owe it to **Joke Impens** that a collaboration with Mindspring became possible for this project. She stood behind this project with a firm belief that asylum seekers and refugees benefit from high quality psychoeducation and envisioned the use of our exercises in the Mindspring courses. Mindspring also provided trainers who have worked intensively in this project.

Of course, there wouldn't be a project if we wouldn't have been able to rely on the people who have translated the exercises with great care and attention and whom we consulted with about the cultural appropriateness of the selection of exercises: **Mohamad Al Adawi** and **Esra'a Mohamed** (Arabic), **Malika Amarkhail** (Russian), **P.** (Servo-Croatian), **Najeeb Basharmal** (Pashtu), **Naylufar Mir** (Dari), **Christine Van der Heyden** (French), **Antje Urbahn** and **Helge Fester** (German) and **Liu Costa Goncalves** (Portugese).

We admire the people who have committed themselves to record the exercises. A lot of courage was needed to venture out into the unknown and move out of their comfort zone. This was particularly the case for those who weren't previously familiar with this sort of exercises. We thank each and every one of them for the dedication, the patience and the care they have shown: **Mohamad Al Adawi** and **Esra'a Mohamed** (Arabic), **Malika Amarkhail** (Russian), **P.** (Servo-Croatian), **Najeeb Basharmal** (Pashtu), **Naylufar Mir** (Dari), **Géraldine Lienart** (French), **Helge Fester** (German), **Tine Mathijs** (Dutch), **Liu Costa Goncalves** (Portugese) and **Caitlin Mullin** (English).

We also greatly appreciate **Sofie Meelberghs**, whose role was essential and invaluable to this project. She was in charge of the audio recordings and the editing of the recordings. Equally great is our admiration and recognition for her work which, due to the complexity of the many languages, proved to be a great ordeal.

We also thank **Anik Serneels**, **Myriam Iliano** and **Poh Lin Lee** for proofreading some parts of the written text.

Finally, we want to express our heartfelt thanks to the benefactors, who wished to remain anonymous, for their support to bring this project to a successful conclusion. We were moved to learn about how much they care for people seeking refuge. We hope to do justice to their intentions and wishes with the end result.

INTRODUCTION

Stress can be a good thing. For example, if you are attacked, stress will enhance your muscle strength and blood flow so that you are able to run away or defend yourself, bringing yourself into safety. Or perhaps you might be facing a very difficult conflict between people. Stress will help maintain your focus and keep you feeling energetic so that you can mediate the conflict successfully. Stress can generally lead to better performance, more satisfaction and a greater sense of competence. When you take on a challenge, you can be proud of yourself: “Thanks to my efforts, I’ve achieved this goal. I’ve been dedicated and it has paid off”. Despite all of these benefits, stress can become harmful when it is persistent and/or when we have the impression of being powerless and/or when we don’t reach any results in spite of great efforts.

There are several ways that you can help deal with stress. For instance, setting yourself achievable goals, focusing your attention on what you can change, feeling gratitude for the things that go well, doing sports, listening to music or playing an instrument, passing time with friends, reading and spending time in nature, are all activities that can help to manage your stress.

Unfortunately, engaging in these activities is not always possible. The question is, what you can do to cope with stress in those circumstances? This question is especially important because prolonged and harmful stress affects many systems in your body and mind putting you under great pressure.

Some examples of long-term effects of stress are:

During the day, persistent ruminative thoughts or worries prevent you from enjoying social contacts and activities. As a result, you can less easily retrieve happy memories and focus on the positive. In addition, you may experience difficulty concentrating and you are suffering from forgetfulness.

At night, ruminative thoughts or worries prevent you from falling asleep peacefully and in good time. While dreams usually help to reduce difficult emotions or to process events spontaneously, your high levels of stress create agitated or anxious dreams. This results in you waking up several times a night or waking up early without being able to fall asleep again. You don’t get deep, refreshing sleep anymore and after a while you get physically exhausted. There is a greater risk of ending up in a negative, downward spiral because the physical and emotional exhaustion tends to isolate you, which results in experiencing less social support and understanding. You get the feeling of even being more alone. Your body cannot relax anymore and the muscles of your chest, neck, shoulders and jaw are constantly tense. You get headaches, back or stomach pains that will not pass easily. You have no energy left and you don’t feel like yourself anymore. In the face of prolonged stress, your body no longer has the natural strength to recuperate and recover. Your defensive and immune systems are weakened and you become sick more easily.

In these examples it is clear that stress doesn’t always help us to cope. These examples illustrate the harmful effects of ongoing stress on our body and mind. This kind of stress doesn’t strengthens us to take action, instead it undermines our natural systems making it more difficult for us to endure difficult times in powerful, creative and hopeful ways.

Sometimes our resources fall short. For instance, perhaps we are far away from family and friends, we have no money for relaxing activities such as a day trip or going to the movie, we can’t exercise because we don’t have the right equipment, we can’t feel safe or our faith is shaking. Sometimes circumstances feel too heavy and hopeless that they overwhelm our resources. Yet, it is important to actively cope with stress in precisely these situations. Look for things that give you piece of mind, small islands of satisfaction and hope and try to maintain or increase them in your daily life.

We know that everyone has an inner resource that we can call on always and everywhere: our breathing. For most people, this may seem strange at first because we breathe without thinking about it or without any efforts.

And yet, for centuries, all major religious traditions and life philosophies have been interested in our breathing. Science confirms the positive effects of a conscious breathing practice. By calmly breathing in and out, with great care and attention, our body reacts in ways that are opposite to the stress response: our heart rate decreases, muscle tension drops, etc. Conscious breathing seems to cause a chain reaction in all systems and to bring about a relaxed body and a calm mind. Deliberate, slow and deep breathing stimulates the relaxation response. The more we master this practice, the more we will draw benefits from it. Especially in situations of prolonged stress it is useful and helpful to practice regularly and carefully.

We have collected 12 breathing and relaxation exercises that can be used as a foundation to start a practice. These exercises have been recorded digitally and can easily be downloaded and saved on a mobile phone, a laptop, or any other audio enabled device. This makes them available anywhere, and at any time.

REVIEW OF THE EXERCISES

We divided the exercises in four groups.

The first group includes exercises that are specifically focused on the **breathing**. The basis for these exercises is conscious and quiet breathing. All other exercises build to a greater or lesser extent upon the skill to breath quietly, consciously and naturally. The level of difficulty increases in the first three exercises. To achieve the best results, continue working on the first exercise until you have mastered it before proceeding to the next.. Give yourself time to learn and to apply the exercises. At first, most people experience difficulties becoming aware of their breathing and some struggle with the transition from a shallow and rapid breathing into a deep, slow breathing. Persevere, give your body and mind a chance to reprogram. After some time it will become easier and you will easily be able to apply it wherever and whenever you want. Feel free to start with short exercises and build up your endurance steadily. As your ease and confidence grow, you will feel free to spend more time on the practice.

- Abdominal breathing
- Breathing exercise 4-4-4-4
- Breathing exercise 4-7-8
- Alternate nostril breathing

The second group are exercises that help bring your awareness to the **'here and now'**. In stressful situations, we are often seized by painful memories of the past or worries about the future. Sometimes even the present is heavy to carry. Exercises that 'ground' us can assist in dealing with intense or overwhelming feelings and memories. By bringing our awareness back to the present moment and to anchor it in reality, we renew our feelings of calmness.

- 54321 exercise
- Re-orientation in here and now
- Tapping exercise

The third group of exercises focuses on the **body**. Stress can sometimes demand all our attention and cause us to retreat into our own world. When this happens we worry about what has happened, we try to understand what is going on, we try to find solutions, we analyze possibilities and weigh off alternatives, we think all the time, etc. These exercises help you to listen to your body again and to be aware of any the tensions. By focusing on your body, both through activation and relaxation, you can bring more balance and create more space in your head.

- Stand in your power (standing breathing exercise)
- Body scan
- Muscle relaxation according to Jacobson

The exercises in the last group call on the **imagination**. Some people like to relax by means of images or a story. The evoked images and impressions help them to breathe calmly and to break free from the worries that occupy them.

- Near the stream
- Forest visualization

WHICH EXERCISES ARE USEFUL FOR PARTICULAR COMPLAINTS?

The 12 exercises that we offer here are only just a small selection from a huge range of breathing and relaxation exercises that exist in the world. We hope to help you undertake a practice where you can rely on your inner resources. This short list of exercises is just a start.

We invite you to explore further and to try other techniques and exercises. Develop your own practice with exercises that are useful and helpful to you. Try to be aware of the effects of different exercises. Do you feel immediate results from the breathing exercises? Are the exercises focused on the here-and-now a great support during difficult times? Do you particularly benefit from body-focused exercises? Are the imagination exercises offering you precious moments of peace? Trust your own judgment and intuition to feel what exactly works best for you in different circumstances. Below, we give you some suggestions about exercises that could possibly bring you some sense of relief in certain situations.

If any of the exercises are disagreeable or make you feel restless, tense or uncomfortable, then please stop. Try to find what may be the reason for this and adapt the exercise or look for another one.

If your thoughts don't let go and completely exhaust you mentally. When the mind becomes a burden and you just need to have some peace:

- Abdominal breathing
- Breathing exercise 4-4-4-4
- Breathing exercise 4-7-8
- Alternate nostril breathing
- 54321 exercise

If you have trouble falling (back) asleep. If you want to prepare your body and mind for a good night's sleep:

- Abdominal breathing
- Alternate nostril breathing
- 54321 exercise
- Body scan

If you feel like you are disconnecting or losing yourself in the past. If memories are about to overwhelm you and you'd like to avoid this. If you want to feel safe and solid, fully present in the here and now :

- Re-orientation in here and now
- Tapping exercise

When images intrude and you can't easily shake them off. If they prevent you to do the things you want and what you want to change this:

- 54321 exercise
- Body scan

If you feel very tense or haunted by continuous pain. If you want to be able to relax and to reduce the experience of pain. If you want a break:

- Abdominal breathing
- Breathing exercise 4-4-4-4
- Breathing exercise 4-7-8
- Alternate nostril breathing

Stand in your power (standing breathing exercise)
Muscle relaxation according to Jacobson

If you are nervous or irritable and you quickly lose your composure. If you would like to respond more calmly to situations and to have more control over your emotions:

Alternate nostril breathing
Stand in your power (standing breathing exercise)
Muscle relaxation according to Jacobson

If you experience difficulties concentrating and remembering things. If you want to free your mind and sharpen your focus:

Abdominal breathing
Alternate nostril breathing
54321 exercise

If you feel low, hopeless and desperate. If you need a moment of renewed strength, confidence and hope:

Near the stream
Forest visualization

ABDOMINAL BREATHING

Breathing is the essence of life. We can breathe consciously and unconsciously. By breathing consciously, we can influence the other systems in our body which often operate unconsciously. For example, by deliberately breathing slower and deeper, our heart rate slows down, our blood pressure lowers, our muscles relax, we sweat less, etc. By paying conscious attention to our breathing we can thus reduce the effects of stress and relax more easily.

We can breathe in two different ways. If the respiration mainly takes place in the upper portions of the lungs, the breast moves up and down, this is the chest breathing. If the respiration goes deep into the lungs, the belly moves up and down, this is the abdominal breathing. To see if you have a chest or abdominal breathing pattern, place your right hand on your chest and your left hand on your belly. Look at which hand goes up more when you breathe. If your right hand moves principally, then you have a chest breathing pattern. If on the contrary your left hand moves primarily, then you have an abdominal breathing pattern.

People who deal with chronic stress, usually have a chest breathing. This kind of breathing is often faster and more superficial than the abdominal breathing. If we want to breathe consciously, we will concentrate on deep, slow abdominal breathing associated with the relaxation response. The relaxation response is opposite to the stress response which results in a decrease of tension in the body and a sense of general relaxation. The abdominal breathing provides immediate benefits for the physical and emotional health. If you practice abdominal breathing regularly and accurately, long-term improvements will also occur.

If you usually have a chest breathing, it is important to carry out abdominal breathing consciously. At first it may be a bit difficult, especially if you are suffering from a lot of stress for a long time. The message is to persevere and to keep practicing. With time you will notice that the abdominal breathing becomes easier! This is important as the abdominal breathing is the basis for all subsequent exercises.

Put one hand on your chest, the other on your belly. Take a few calm breaths in and out. In ... and out. Inhale slowly and deeply through your nose and exhale gently through your mouth. In ... and out. In ... and out. Observe your breathing.

You are aiming for successful abdominal breathing. This means that the hand on your belly goes up more with each deep breath. Inhale, your belly goes up ... and exhale, your belly goes down. Again. Inhale, your belly goes up ... and exhale, your belly goes down.

Inhale deeply through your nose, your lungs fill up with air completely allowing your abdomen to rise. Hold a moment. And exhale quietly and slowly through your mouth. Let your lungs deflate entirely, but do not force it. You can gently tighten your abdominal muscles to blow out the remaining air in your lungs. Try it. Take a deep breath... and breathe out slowly and quietly. Remember that you relax more because of the full and slow exhalation rather than through the deep inhalation. So inhale ... and exhale slowly and completely. Try to make your exhalation longer than your inhalation.

We'll be doing this a few times now. Inhale deeply ... hold for a moment and exhale slowly and calmly. In ... and out (phew). In ... and out (phew). In ... and out (phew). One last time ... In and out (phew).

Well done, this is the abdominal breathing.

BREATHING EXERCISE 4-4-4-4

If you master the abdominal breathing, you can try to lengthen your breath. To help us do this, we count. This allows greater control over our breathing and prepares us for more difficult breathing techniques. The exercise is a simple counting exercise from the yoga tradition. It may be that you initially have some difficulty but that doesn't matter. Persevere and try again. After a while it will get better.

Sit down comfortably. Let your eyes rest or close them if that feels right. Inhale deeply and exhale quietly and slowly a couple of times. Think of using your abdominal breathing.

I'll first describe the exercise. Try to count quietly to four as you inhale, hold your breath naturally for 4 counts, then breathe out gently while you count to four again and finally pause with empty lungs for four counts. This is one cycle. Continue to breathe evenly and quietly. Do not force anything. If you find counting to four is difficult, first try to count to three. The idea is mainly to become aware of your breathing and pauses and to gradually lengthen them so that you acquire the ability to breathe deeply and slowly. If counting to four feels comfortable for you, then increase the number of counts gently.

We now do it together:

In-2-3-4

Hold-2-3-4

Out-2-3-4

Pause-2-3-4

We repeat this cycle three times now:

In-2-3-4

Hold-2-3-4

Out-2-3-4

Pause-2-3-4

In-2-3-4

Hold-2-3-4

Out-2-3-4

Pause-2-3-4

In-2-3-4

Hold-2-3-4

Out-2-3-4

Pause-2-3-4

Use this exercise for a couple of minutes twice a day in order to experience the longer-term benefits.

This exercise is based on the work of BEARD Elizabeth, see her website <http://joythruyoga.com/>

BREATHING EXERCISE 4-7-8

This exercise is a bit more complex and requires you have some control over your breathing. Considering the count is a bit complicated, it can help to practice first with the 'breathing exercise 4-4-4'. While this exercise is a little harder, it allows for a deeper relaxation, because we deliberately exhale longer than we inhale. Remember that it is the slow exhalation in particular that ensures the relaxation response, rather than the deep inhalation. Let's practice this now.

The exercise is called 4-7-8 because you inhale while counting to 4, you hold your breath for 7 counts and exhale for 8 counts. You always inhale through the nose and exhale through the mouth. While doing this you keep your tongue in the following position: you place the tip of your tongue against the back of your front teeth, just on the edge of your palate. It means that the air of exhalation will go around your tongue in order to go out. You can purse your lips slightly if that helps to keep your tongue in place. Remember you can place your hands on the abdomen and chest if you want to be aware of the abdominal breathing.

I will now describe the exercise. First exhale completely through your mouth and don't be afraid to make some noise (pew). Now inhale quietly through your nose, mouth closed. Keep this for 4 counts. Hold your breath for 7 counts. Then exhale through your mouth and do this for 8 counts. Watch your air! This is one cycle. How long it exactly lasts doesn't really matter as long as you maintain the ratio properly: inhale 4 counts, hold 7 counts and exhale 8 counts.

We will do it together now three times.

Breathe out all the air in your lungs (pew)

In -2-3-4, hold -2-3-4-5-6-7, out -2-3-4-5-6-7-8.

In -2-3-4, hold -2-3-4-5-6-7, out -2-3-4-5-6-7-8.

In -2-3-4, hold -2-3-4-5-6-7, out -2-3-4-5-6-7-8.

How do you feel? Do you feel a sense of calm and relaxation come over you? You may feel a bit light headed. That can happen when you're learning this exercise. Over time it will disappear! If you want to fully enjoy the benefits of this breathing exercise, it is recommended that you do 4 cycles 2 times a day .

Were you able to be aware of your abdominal breathing during the exercise? What was the position of your tongue, did it touch the back of your front teeth? We will do the exercise again. Try to pay attention to these details as you are guided by my voice and the counts in the meantime.

Breathe out all the air in your lungs (pew)

In -2-3-4, hold -2-3-4-5-6-7, out -2-3-4-5-6-7-8.

In -2-3-4, hold -2-3-4-5-6-7, out -2-3-4-5-6-7-8.

In -2-3-4, hold -2-3-4-5-6-7, out -2-3-4-5-6-7-8.

This exercise is based on the work of Dr. WEIL Andrew, see his website <http://www.drweil.com> (also video)

ALTERNATE NOSTRIL BREATHING

This exercise comes from the yoga tradition and focuses on breathing through the nose. Breathing through your left or right nostril activates other qualities in the brain. The right nostril is linked with thinking and generating energy, the left nostril is connected with feeling and soothing energy. Breathing consciously through your left and right nostril alternatively, will activate the entire brain and harmonize both systems. It is a good exercise to bring about balance.

Put your left hand gently on your lap. Take your right hand and block off your right nostril by putting gentle pressure on it with the thumb. Keep the rest of the fingers straight and pointing up. The fingers look like little antennas that pick up cosmic energy. Inhale deeply, slowly and gently through your left nostril. Then release the thumb and, using the index finger on the right hand, block off the left nostril and exhale slowly and completely, through the right nostril. The other fingers stand straight. Keeping the left nostril blocked with index finger, inhale slowly and fully through the right nostril. Let go of the index finger and use the thumb again to block off the right nostril. Exhale completely through the left nostril. This is one cycle. Remember, the thumb for the right side, the index finger for the left side. You only switch fingers to exhale on the other side. This means you inhale through the same nostril before exhaling through the other nostril.

Together, we will do two more cycles successively:

Close the right nostril with your thumb, inhale through the left nostril

Let go of the thumb, close the left nostril with your index finger, exhale through the right nostril

Keep the left nostril blocked, inhale through the right nostril

Switch fingers, right nostril blocked by your thumb, exhale through your left nostril

Close the right nostril with your thumb, inhale through the left nostril

Let go of the thumb, close the left nostril with your index finger, exhale through the right nostril

Keep the left nostril blocked, inhale through the right nostril

Switch fingers, right nostril blocked by your thumb, exhale through your left nostril

Keep breathing this way for a few minutes or for as long as you feel the beneficial effects.

Another little piece of advice. If you particularly need to calm your mind, just breathe through your left nostril. So, do the same but do not alternate. Keep closing your right nostril with your thumb while stretching the fingers upwards. Relax your body and imagine releasing all tension and stress with each exhalation. However, if you're in need of energy, clarity and focus, just breathe through your right nostril for a while. Keep your left nostril blocked by the index finger. Keep the other fingers extended in upward position. Relax and feel how the energy slowly and subtly builds up in your body.

This exercise is based on the work of BEARD Elizabeth, see her website <http://joythruyoga.com/> and on the work of Dr. KHALSA Gurusahay, see his website <http://www.grdhealth.com>

54321 EXERCISE

This exercise helps you to bring your attention to the here and now, to be alert, to reduce tension and to stop worrying. You can also use this exercise to fall asleep or to fall asleep again. It can be a pleasant exercise to get your attention out of your head and to bring it to your senses, "What do I see here and now? What do I hear, here and now? What do I feel here and now?"

I will explain the exercise now. Unlike other exercises, my voice will not guide you step by step through the entire exercise. I will just give the instructions.

In this exercise you describe, what you see, what you hear, what you feel in or with your body with detailed attention and with care for features.

At the start of the exercise you can rate the amount of tension you feel in your body, from zero to ten. Zero being totally relaxed, ten the maximum tension. Give a number to gauge your stress and remember it or write it down.

First round.

Describe attentively 5 things that you **see**. I see, for example: a plastic bottle with a red cap on it. There is a red, transparent liquid in the bottle. The bottle is wider at the bottom and at the top and narrow in the center. It stands on a brown table. You articulate sensory qualities of what you see such as the color, the size, the shape, the nature of the surface and the materials. Describe **five things you see** in a similar way.

Then, describe five things you **hear**. I hear, for example, the sound of an engine accelerating. There usually aren't many sounds. However you may distinguish similar sounds. For example, a car accelerating, a car slowing down, a car with a gasoline engine. You could also make a sound yourself. It is particularly important to be attentive to the sound that you are naming. Note the sensory qualities of the sounds like the loudness, the duration, the tone, the rhythm, the distance. Be aware of the obvious sounds and the more subtle sounds. In this way, you describe in the second part of this first round, **five things you hear**.

Finally, you describe five things you **feel** in or with your body. I feel, for example, some pressure on my feet of the shoes I'm wearing. My feet clearly feel that they are contained by my shoes. This is about physical sensations and not about emotions such as being happy, angry or scared. Note sensory qualities of touch such as softness, pressure, or temperature. Describe in this third part of the first round **five things you feel in or with your body**.

So each round has three parts, one for seeing, one for hearing, one for feeling.

In the second round you describe **four** things you see, **four** things you hear and **four** things you are aware of in or with your body. Preferably you describe new things each time, things you haven't described before.

In the third round you describe **three** things you see, **three** things you hear and **three** things you are aware of in or with your body. In the next round describe each time **two** things you see, hear, feel.

In the final round describe just **one** thing you see, hear, feel.

Now you understand why this exercise is called the 54321!

At the end of the exercise, establish how much tension you feel in your body, from zero to ten. How much tension do you feel? Is there a difference with the start of the exercise?

Check carefully what changes you notice by doing this exercise.

The act of measuring and comparing of the physical tension before and after the exercise is especially important in learning the exercise. When you feel confident with the 54321 you can quit doing these measurements.

The 54321 takes 20 to 45 minutes. If you do it in less than 20 minutes, I suggest you name more details during each observation.

If you use the exercise at **bedtime** or when **falling asleep again**, it can be dark and you can keep your eyes closed. You can describe the things that you see in broad daylight in your room. In this instance you call on your memory. What would you observe in broad daylight? It may even be in a different place. When you are trying to fall asleep, you don't have to complete the exercise, falling asleep is fine! If you lose count during the exercise, just pick up where you think to have stopped or start again. It doesn't matter as long as you can fall asleep.

Now you know the instructions of the 54321 and you may try to do the 54321 by yourself or with someone else. The actual practice will make you familiar with this method and its effects on your attention and relaxation.

RE-ORIENTATION IN THE HERE-AND-NOW

This is an exercise you can do when you suffer from painful memories, disturbing thoughts or unpleasant feelings that you can't seem to stop. This exercise aims to give you a sense of security and control (that's why it is important to do this exercise only if you are not in real danger). It can help you to bring your attention back to the here and now and not lose yourself in the past.

It is preferable to sit in a chair for this exercise. I would like for you to become aware of your body and your connection to ground. Place both feet firmly on the ground, straighten your back. Rest your hands on your thighs and keep your head upright. Focus your attention on the contact between your body and the seat. How does it feel to sit in this chair? Where exactly do you feel the support of the chair? In your legs? Your buttocks? Your back? Feel how your feet touch the ground and how firm the earth is that supports you.

While you feel supported, focus your attention to where you are. Look around and describe the environment and yourself. What do you see? What do you recognize? Try to do this as accurately as possible. Where are you? Tell yourself where you are: 'I'm in ...'. Do you have an idea of the time? What time is it? How did you get here? Tell yourself what time it is. Try to do this as accurately as possible: year, month, day, hour. 'It is now e.g. May 1st 2014, it is exactly ... e.g. quarter past nine'. Tell yourself that the memories and thoughts that overwhelm you now are part of the past. Know that the past is no longer at play right now. Now you are safe ... you are safe when there is no real danger in the present moment. What do you feel now? How do you experience the temperature? Are you cold or hot? Do you feel the back of your seat? The clothes you're wearing? What sounds do you hear right now? Are there any smells that you are aware of? Tell yourself what you notice exactly. 'I hear now ... e.g. my own breathing and the rain on the window'.

Check how you feel right now. Do you still feel restless, tense or anxious? Can you tell why this is? Has something happened? Are there things around you that are bothering you? Notice what is going on. Focus your attention on your breathing. Calmly breathe in and out. Feel how your breath is flowing into your body and fills your lungs. Is the air cool? Do you inhale through your nose? Can you breathe deeply and slowly? Feel how your breath leaves your body. Is the air hot? Do you exhale through your mouth? Notice your breathing for a few moments. Calmly breathe in and out. Do this for a while. As you breathe gently in and out, feel, see, hear, smell ... what you can. Repeat to yourself where you are, what time it is. Tell yourself that you are safe now and that there is no more danger.

'TAPPING' EXERCISE

Another exercise, focused on the here-and-now is the 'tapping' exercise. It allows you to get back in touch with your body by gently tapping on your limbs and skin. Through the increased tactile awareness, you bring wandering thoughts back to the here-and-now. The increased body awareness brings you all the way back into your body.

To begin, gently tap the palm of your left hand with the fingers of your right hand. Do this as many times as you need to get a sense of your left hand palm. Then stop tapping and take time to notice the sensation in the palm of your hand. What do you feel? Do you feel tingly? Do you feel a vibration? Do you feel numb? Hot or cold? Just take a few moments to notice whatever you feel.

Now, look at your hand and say: 'this is my hand, my hand belongs to me, my hand is part of me'. Use whatever words that help you feel as one.

Next turn your hand over and tap on the back of your left hand with the fingers of your right hand. Again, notice any sensation. Follow the sensation for a moment, noticing how it changes. If you like, you can look at your hand and say with awareness, 'this is my hand, my hand belongs to me, my hand is part of me'. Or anything that could help you now.

Now gently tap on the palm of your right hand with the fingers of your left hand. Do this as often as you need to get a sense of your right hand palm. Then stop tapping and take the time to notice the sensations in your palm. What do you feel? Just take a moment to be aware of whatever you might feel. If it helps you, then look at your hand and say: 'this is my hand, my hand belongs to me, my hand is a part of me'. Or anything else that could help you now.

Turn your hand now and tap the back of your right hand with the fingers of your left hand. Notice again any possible sensation. Follow the sensation for a while, noticing how it changes. If you want, you can look at your hand and say with care 'this is my hand, my hand belongs to me, my hand is a part of me'. Or anything else that could help you now.

Take a few moments to notice how present you are here-and-now. How strongly are you aware of your body, your body parts and the person you are? How strongly are you aware of the location, time and space at this moment? If necessary, continue tapping gently and softly. You can do this on your hands again or you can choose to tap on other body parts. Maybe there is a part of your body that you can't feel very well now or that seems less real to you. In that case, you could choose to tap gently on this part of your body. Or you can also tap successively on the various parts of your body: after your hands, your arms, your legs, your feet, your chest, your neck, your face, your head It is important not to hurt yourself. Tap gently and after a while you will notice that the feeling is getting stronger. Take time to reflect on the sensations and the limits of your body .

This exercise is based on the work of LEVINE Peter, see his book Healing Trauma, p40-41

STANDING STRONG (STANDING BREATHING EXERCISE)

This is an exercise you can do to feel more solid. If we feel really tense, it can sometimes be more helpful to be reconnected with our strength instead of trying to relax. Some people feel more confident and energetic with this kind of exercise.

Go stand and observe how you stand.

Now stand taut, knees straight, abdomen tight, shoulders pulled up.

Do you recognize this posture? Do you ever stand like this? How does this work for you? How is your breathing?

How solid are you, standing like that?

Now we'll stand in a different way. Feet slightly apart, about hip width, feel what is a comfortable distance for you.

Knees slightly bent, back straight, relaxed and long, abdomen soft, shoulders relaxed, neck straight and chin slightly withdrawn. This allows your jaws to relax. This is important because the jaw muscle is a powerful muscle which often holds a lot of tension. Breathe well.

There you are! Solid and not easily out of balance. Feel the difference between the previous posture and this one. In this position we'll do a breathing exercise.

Make sure you're standing solid.

Put your hands on your belly or belly button. Breathing in, bring your hands up at an angle, while you simultaneously stretch your legs.

Breathing out, bring your hands back to your belly button and relax your knees .

Repeat this movement at a quiet pace five times . 1-2-3-4-5 .

Check if you're still standing solid.

Lift your left arm to the side as you inhale and put your right hand on your heart center.

Lift your right arm to the side while exhaling and place your left hand on your heart center.

Repeat this movement at a quiet pace five times . 1-2-3-4-5

Now bring your arms in a wide circular motion up. Inhale and stretch your legs at the same time. Finish the inhalation when the arms reach the highest point of the circle.

Next, exhaling softly, bring your arms in a circular motion down and come back in the starting posture.

Do these movements slowly and smoothly. Repeat this five times . 1-2-3-4-5 .

Feel the effects of the exercise in your body. Don't judge, just notice.

This exercise is based on the work of PHAROS (www.pharos.nl), see their book Gezond blijven in moeilijke situaties

BODY SCAN

The body scan is designed to help you become aware of how your body feels in the present moment. Prolonged stress or pain can result in us paying too little attention to our body. In this exercise, you bring your attention back to your body and it doesn't matter if you notice tension or relaxation.

If you do this exercise at bedtime it doesn't matter what happens: you fall asleep, your attention weakens, you think about other things, you feel nothing ... it's all ok. These are the experiences of the moment.

Notice the experiences and keep your attention on the exercise. Even if you observe less pleasurable sensations, feelings or thoughts it's ok. Be aware of what is happening in this moment, here and now.

Sit, stand or lie in a comfortable position. Take a posture that feels comfortable enough to focus your attention for some time on your body.

Take a few moments to get in touch with the movement of your breathing and the sensations in your body. When you feel ready, bring your awareness to the physical sensations in your body. Feel how your body makes contact with the outside world, your chair, your bed. It helps to focus your attention on the inhalations and let go on the exhalations.

Now bring your awareness gently to your chest. Be aware of the things that you can feel in your chest: motion, temperature, pressure, weight,... Focus on your lungs, your ribs and your heart. Notice your heart rate. Feel how your chest fills up with air with each breath you take. With each exhalation you let the used air out. Continue to inhale deeply and slowly, exhale quietly. In ... and out ... in ... and out ...

Now focus your attention to your neck and head. Be aware of every detail in your chin, your lips, your mouth, your tongue, your jaws, your cheeks, your nose, your eyes, your ears, your forehead, your scalp and the back of your head. Take your time to carefully feel the qualities. How heavy are your eyelids, how tense is your jaw, how warm is the air in your nose when you inhale, how warm is the air in your mouth when you exhale?

Now take your attention to your left shoulder. Descend carefully along the left upper arm and lower arm to your left hand. Determine how your fingers and thumb feel. Note hereby qualities as movement and temperature. Are there other details you can feel?

Now bring your attention to your right shoulder. Descend carefully along the right arm and lower arm to your right hand. Determine how your fingers and thumb feel. Note hereby qualities as movement and temperature. Are there other details you can feel?

Now bring your awareness to the physical sensations in your belly. Notice the changes in your belly that occur every time you inhale and exhale. Take a few moments to experience how this feels for you. Maybe you notice other things in the area of your belly? Continue to inhale deeply and slowly, exhale gently. In ... and out ... in ... and out ...

After you have made contact with the sensations in your belly, bring your attention to your left leg and descend gently to your left foot and the toes of your left foot. Focus consecutively on each toe of your left foot. Research with curiosity the quality of the feelings that you notice. Perhaps it is the contact between the toes, tingling or warmth or perhaps nothing at all.

Now bring your attention to your right leg and descend gently to your right foot and the toes of your right foot. Notice how these areas of your body feel. Focus successively on each toe of your right foot. Stay curious.

Bring your attention to your buttocks and back. Notice the different sensations. Maybe you feel the fabric of your clothes on your skin, the back of your chair against your spine or tension in certain muscle groups. Notice with care and precision.

We have scanned the entire body. Breathe a few times deeply and slowly in and out. In ... and out . In ... and out. Feel your entire body. Allow your breath to flow freely in and out of your body.

This exercise is based on the work of SIVAK Katya, see 'Grounding exercises, Progressive Muscle Relaxation, Meditation, Visualization and Guiding Imagery' or her website <http://www.heartfulness.ca/>

MUSCLE RELAXATION ACCORDING TO JACOBSON

In this exercise we will first contract certain muscles (or muscle groups, such as the arm or shoulder muscles) to learn how tension feels. After holding this tension for a while, you let it go again. Just as with the tense feeling, it is just as important that we learn how muscle relaxation feels.

Don't be afraid to relax too deeply, that's not possible. Relax as deep as you can. You don't have to strain your muscles to the limit, mild to moderate tension is sufficient. Don't make any movements that cause pain. If any of the exercises causes discomfort, easy up or stop to prevent cramps or injuries. Notice the difference between contraction and relaxation of the muscles. The effect of the exercise increases if you breathe in while contracting and breathe out while relaxing the muscles.

Sit comfortably. Make sure you have enough space. Sit with your feet together flat on the ground, arms loosely on your lap or on the arm of the chair. Feel the pressure of your body against the backrest and the seat of the chair. Feel your feet make contact with the ground. Now make yourself as empty as possible: let all thoughts go, focus on yourself and the exercise. Close your eyes if you find it pleasing.

We start with the basics, our breathing. Breathe in forcefully and deeply. Hold this breath. Hold it... hold it... and now release. Let all the air go out slowly and release all tension. Take another deep breath in. Hold it... and then exhale slowly, allowing the tension to leave your body with the air. Now breathe even more slowly and gently. Breathe in. Hold it. Breathe out.

Breathe in. Hold it. Breathe out.

Continue to breathe slowly and gently. Allow your breathing to relax you

We focus now on relaxing the muscles of your body.

Start with the large muscles of your legs. Tighten all the muscles of your legs. Tense the muscles further. Hold onto this tension. Feel how tight and tensed the muscles in your legs are right now. Squeeze the muscles harder, tighter... Continue to hold this tension. Feel the muscles wanting to give up this tension. Hold it for a few moments more... and now relax. Let all the tension go. Feel the muscles in your legs going limp, loose, relaxed. Notice how relaxed the muscles feel now. Feel the difference between tension and relaxation. Enjoy the pleasant feeling of relaxation in your legs.

Now focus on the muscles in your arms. Tighten your shoulders, upper arms, lower arms and hands. Lift your arms up. Squeeze your hands into tight fists. Tense the muscles in your arms and hands as tightly as you can. Squeeze harder... harder... hold the tension in your arms, shoulders and hands. Feel the tension in these muscles. Hold it for a few moments more... and now release. Let the muscles of your shoulders, arms and hands relax. Feel the relaxation as your shoulders and arms lower into a comfortable position and your hands relax at your sides. Allow the muscles in your arms to relax completely.

Focus again on your breathing. Slow, even, regular breaths. Breathe in relaxation... and breathe out tension. In relaxation... and out tension. Continue to breathe slowly and rhythmically.

Now focus on the muscles of your buttocks. Tighten these muscles as much as you can. Hold this tension... and then release. Relax your muscles.

Tighten the muscles of your back now. Feel your back tightening, pulling your shoulders back and tensing the muscles along your spine. Arch your back slightly as you tighten these muscles. Hold... and relax. Let all the tension go. Feel your back comfortably relaxing into a healthy posture.

Turn your attention now to the muscles of your chest and abdomen. Tighten the muscles firmly by pushing the chest forward and pulling the shoulders back. Tighten them further... Tighten the muscles of your abdomen. Hold this tension... a little bit longer... and release. Relax the muscles of your trunk.

Finally, tighten the muscles of your face. Scrunch your eyes shut tightly, wrinkle your nose, frown your eyebrows, press your lips together and tighten your jaw .Hold this tension in your face... and relax. Release all the tension. Feel how relax your face is. Notice the difference between contraction and relaxation.

Notice all of the muscles in your body. Notice how relaxed your muscles feel now. Allow any last bits of tension to drain away. Enjoy the relaxation you are experiencing. Notice your calm breathing... your relaxed muscles... Enjoy the relaxation for a few moments.

When you are ready to return to your usual level of alertness and awareness, slowly begin to re-awaken your body. Wiggle your toes and fingers. Swing your arms gently. Shrug your shoulders. Stretch if you like.

This exercise is based on the work of SIVAK Katya, see 'Grounding exercises, Progressive Muscle Relaxation, Meditation, Visualization and Guiding Imagery' or her website <http://www.heartfulness.ca/>

NEAR THE STREAM

This exercise allows you to let your mind wander in a controlled way using a guided imagery exercise. Some people experience pleasure and relaxation in activating and stimulating their imagination. It allows them to take a break from everyday worries and stress. This exercise is about a stream, such as a brook or river . If you have negative memories linked to a steam or water, then please choose a different imagination exercise.

Sit or lie down quietly, make yourself comfortable. Make sure you'll not get disturbed during the exercise. Perhaps you know a quiet place in the woods or in the plains, in the mountains or in the countryside, where a stream or river flows. I invite you to walk in your imagination to that quiet place where you can sit near the stream or river and ponder.

If you don't know such a place, you can create one in your mind. Imagine what this stream will look like. It's all up to you: a large river or a small stream, in the mountains or countryside, in the hot summer or in wintertime. However, it's important that the water is flowing, that you can see the water flow. If you don't have such a place like that yet, search now for a place of your own, near a stream.

You're in your quiet spot. Settle here. Make yourself comfortable. You might sit on the moss or a flat stone and you can let your feet dangle in the water. You might be supported in your back or you might find it completely unnecessary and you find it very comfortable to sit up straight. Do as you like.

You can then see the motion of the flowing water. You see the water flowing towards you, you see the water flowing in front of you and you see the water flowing away from you. It's so lovely, that movement! It doesn't seem to stop.

What is the theme for you today? Feel what is important now to dream about, what is important to address, to strengthen in your life. Take your time. Explore the theme gently. If possible, feel what is important move in your body. Well done.

Notice what you feel when you see the water flowing in front of you. Now feel what the stream in you could be, what the movement is in you. What do you feel flowing now? What would you like to feel flowing just as well in your life tomorrow, the day after tomorrow , next year, in your body, in your environment, among the people you love ?

This strength you want to hold on to, where do you feel it in your body? What exactly do you feel in that place in your body? What feelings accompany it? This is what you want to preserve and strengthen, this is what you would like to keep on flowing in yourself.

No doubt there are also things that hinder you in this task. Things you would like to let go of, those things that free up life once you released them. Where do you feel them in your body? What exactly are they? What do you want to give to the water flowing away? What obstacles do you want to let go? What concerns would you like to get carried away? What do you give to the river or stream?

Ok, collect them. Put them in a bowl that floats like a raft or put them in a small boat. They might float on their own, before dissolving in the water. Go ahead, dispose of the things you would like to let go, the things you want to say goodbye to, lay them down in the stream. See them being taken away by the water and notice your feelings about this .

What feelings come up? Does something move? What is released in your body? Is there less tension? Can your muscles relax? Does your head feel lighter? Do you feel your heart again? Find out what happens when you see these things drift with the current further and further away. You say goodbye to them, you no longer need them, you let them go. The stream takes them until you don't see them anymore. They aren't your worries anymore, the stream has taken them and you received space. You realize (deep breathing) ...

Look, look upstream now, in the direction of where the water flows towards you. You might see something floating on the water in the distance, something that comes your way. It is still far away and small. You can't immediately discern what it is but you know it feels good. You might not see something immediately, imagine then what it could be or what you would like it to be. It gives you a jubilant feeling, you know it could help to make you stronger. It's something will come in handy, right now, today, tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, next week, next month.

Yes, you feel the jubilation in your body even though you do not know exactly what it is yet. It comes closer and closer on the stream. Receive the gifts from the stream, gifts that strengthen the powers in yourself, wake them up, enable them and let them flow. Feel these powers and feelings, the emotions evoked. Notice how these powers are also felt in your body. Think and imagine what you could do with them tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, next week, next month.

Take what you want from these gifts. They might come in handy. You might want to receive nice fruit, or some courage or maybe peace of mind... Whatever you think might help you. Receive the gifts from the stream that have come to you.

Maybe the stream is very precise, very focused and it brings you something that you really need. It is however possible, that the stream is very generous and brings you different gifts. Maybe something enigmatic flows towards you, something that isn't immediately obvious and of which you will have to figure out the significance later. You can take it and see what it brings you. Deep sigh Phew ... (deep breathing)

Feel again the powers and qualities that you want to keep and add the extra resources the stream has brought you. Feel the energy and how it manifests itself in your body. You receive images of how these powers enrich you, how you can use them even more, how they enable you to shine more and act accordingly to your values.

Enjoy your wishes and your qualities. It's ok. These gifts you radiate to others in the world, you can also share them. Maybe there is someone waiting a few kilometers downstream waiting for your gifts to come. Maybe they are a source of inspiration, hope and strength for that person. Mmm , a deep sigh (deep breathing).

You become more alert again. If your eyes were closed, then open them again now, slowly, at your own pace. You look around, make yourself ready to leave this spot near the stream. You stand up and you go back to everyday life with renewed vigor to use your skills when you face challenges. You turn one last time to look at the spot near the stream and you know you can come here again, to let things go, to feel the powers and to be inspired. Now, go ahead, back to your daily life, energized and alert.

FOREST VISUALIZATION

This imagination exercise takes you on a walk through the forest. You can set the forest according to the images that you have of one. It can be a forest or jungle, a young birch forest in the plains or a pine forest in the mountains. Again, if you have negative associations with a forest, choose a different imagination exercise. If you notice that you become more tense or restless during the guided exercise, stop and do another exercise.

Sit or lie comfortably. Ensure, if possible, that you will not be disturbed during the exercise. If you can, close your eyes gently. Let your body relax while you start to bring an image to mind. Let the image of a forest emerge...

Imagine yourself walking on a path through a forest. The path is soft beneath your shoes, a mixture of soil, fallen leaves, pine needles and moss. As you walk, your body relaxes and your minds clears... more and more... with each step you take.

Breathe in the fresh air, filling your lungs completely. Now exhale gently. Breathe out all the air. Feeling refreshed. Take another deep breath in... revitalizing... and breathe out completely, letting your body relax further and further. Continue to breathe slowly and deeply as you walk through the forest.

The air is cool but nice. The sun filters through the trees, making a moving dappled pattern on the ground before you.

Listen to the sounds of the forest. Birds singing, a gentle breeze blowing, the leaves of the trees rustling in the soft wind.

Your body relaxes more and more as you walk. Count your steps and breathe in unison with your strides.

Breathe in-2-3-4. Hold-2-3. Breathe out-2-3-4-5.

Breathe in-2-3-4. Hold-2-3. Breathe out-2-3-4-5.

Breathe in-2-3-4. Hold-2-3. Breathe out-2-3-4-5.

Continue to breathe like this, slowly and deeply, as you become more and more relaxed.

As you walk through the forest, feel your muscles relaxing and lengthening. As your arms swing in rhythm with your walking, they become loose, relaxed and limp.

Feel your back relaxing as your spine lengthens and your muscles relax. Feel the tension leaving your body as you admire the scenery around you and take it in with all your senses. Your legs and lower body relax as well, feeling free.

As you continue to walk, you begin to climb up a slight incline. You easily tread along smooth rocks on the path and the air around you is calm. Small saplings grow at the sides of the path.

Around you is an immense array of greens. Some leaves of the trees are delicate, light green. Some leaves are deep, dark green. Many trees have needles that look very soft and very green. The forest floor is thick, soft, green moss. You notice tall trees growing on either side of the path. Some have smooth, white bark. Others are darker with coarse, heavy and deeply grooved bark. Enjoy the colors of the different barks: white, brown, red, black... all colors and hues. You admire the rough, brown bark of pine trees and you enjoy the fresh pine scent.

Smell the forest around you. The air is fresh and filled with the scent of all the elements of the forest. You can smell the dark soil where beautiful mushroom grow. You smell the blooming scent of forest flowers. Notice the butterflies and bees buzzing around them

As you near the top of the slope the path curves up ahead. You can see sunlight streaming onto the path. As you round the corner, you see a clearing in the forest. A beautiful look out point awaits.

You are growing tired from your journey. Your body feels tired and heavy... you feel pleasure and satisfaction. Imagine yourself walking to the clearing. Up ahead is a large, smooth rock... like a chair waiting for you to rest. The rock is placed perfectly, high up on this beautiful vantage point.

Sit or lie down on the rock if you wish. It is very comfortable. You feel very relax and at ease. The sun warms your cool skin. You look around. Behind you the nice, green forest... in front of you tall and amazing mountains. Faint and blue. Looking down from your vantage point, you see a valley with trees and a brilliant deep blue lake. It looks like a vibrant energy rises up from the lake.

The clearing is made up of rocks, soil, moss and high grass. The grass tickles and feels soft. Wild meadow flowers sway gently in the breeze. A deer quietly emerges from the edge of the forest to graze in the clearing. As the deer raises its head to look at you, you can see its nostrils moving to catch your scent. The deer emanates power and peace. It continues to eat gently before hopping back into to the forest. Squirrels dart in and out of sight as they romp through the trees and race across the clearing.

Feel the sun warming your body as you relax more and more. Every now and then a soft breeze provides cooling. Enjoy the majestic landscape around you and feel your body relaxing even more. You cherish the peace and calmness of the place.

Your body becomes warm and heavy...

Continue to breathe the clean, fresh air...

You feel so relaxed...

Calm...

Peaceful...

In unity with the nature around you...

Enjoy the sounds and smells of the forest behind you...

Feel the sun, warm on your skin...

Listen to the birds singing and chirping...

Hear the leaves rustling in the breeze, squirrels chattering...

See the beautiful colors of the flowers, the green valley and the tall mountains...

Feel the strong, smooth rock beneath you and look up to the clear blue sky...

You see small, white clouds floating across the sky. Watch them drift by slowly, ever changing shapes...

Enjoy this peaceful place...

When you are ready to leave this peaceful place, slowly begin to reawaken your body. Know that you can return to this forest and clearing in your imagination, whenever you like.

As you reawaken, keep with you the feelings of calm, peace and relaxation.

Wiggle your fingers and toes.

Shrug your shoulders, stretch if you want to.

When you are totally ready, open your eyes and feel awake, alert and refreshed!

This exercise is based on the work of SIVAK Katya, see 'Grounding exercises, Progressive Muscle Relaxation, Meditation, Visualization and Guiding Imagery' or her website <http://www.heartfulness.ca/>