HOLLOW BODY MEDITATION

One of the most effective techniques for dissipating accumulated stress and tension is to experience your body as hollow, open, and filled with clear space. Experience this space as neither solid nor empty, but rather as an inner openness within which feelings and sensations can freely come and go. This inner openness and spaciousness is devoid of any obstruction or any sense of solidity and denseness.

This deceptively simple method has been used for thousands of years and has recently been extensively documented to promote the integration and optimization of neuromuscular, autonomic, and central nervous system functions, as well as to reduce pain and enhance endurance and overall mind-body coordination.

Begin by sitting comfortably with your spine straight and your body relaxed. Now, bring your attention to your breath, and as you inhale imagine drawing your attention into your head. It may be helpful to imagine the breath like a luminous crystal mist that completely fills your head. As you breathe out, let go of the image or feeling of denseness or solidity and imagine this region as completely open and filled with space. Sense and feel the sensations and vibrations that come and flow freely within this open space inside your head. With your next breath, draw your attention into your neck and throat, filling this region similarly with a sense of space—open to the flow of life energy, vibration, and sensation.

Continue now to breathe your awareness region by region into each part of your body. One region at a time, breathe this sense of luminous open space into your hands, arms and shoulders, your chest, abdomen, hips and buttocks and genitals, and finally your legs and feet. As you exhale, feel and vividly imagine that each region is left feeling utterly open to the flowing streams of sensation and vibration that knit the fabric of your experience. Amidst this flow of vibration and sensation, experience the inner quiet stillness and peacefulness that accommodate all these myriad changes and vibrations.

Now simply rest in this experience of your hollow body without conceptualization or analysis. Simply allow thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and images to arise and dissolve like luminous bubbles and streams flowing within this inner space of awareness. Experience your body as unified and whole, completely open to equalizing and diffusing the accumulated pressures of your body and mind. Allow each breath to deepen this inner harmony and to energize the calm intensity of your awareness.

Initially you may find that some regions feel dense, solid, and impregnable. You may be unable to get a clear feeling for these regions. Many people have cut themselves off from parts of their body due to past injuries, surgery, abuse as a child, or other conscious or suppressed trauma. So long as there are parts of your body cut off from your sense of wholeness, parts of your brain and mind potentials are blocked as well. These "locked closets" of your body leave you vulnerable as they are often the breeding ground for degenerative disease and cancer. In this case, combine your practice of this technique with Mindfulness of Your Body: Mental Massage (page 105).

Gradually, you will easily be able to imagine and actually feel that your whole body, from the top of your head to the tip of your toes, is completely open, unobstructed, unified, and radiant. This inner sense of your wholeness will enable you to reclaim those lost regions of your body, brain, and mind. Eventually you will be able to access this unified, open and luminous sense of your entire body with a single breath.

Variations on the basic method

The following variations on the hollow body technique will further enhance your mind-body coordination and self-healing abilities.

VARIANT 1 Having dissolved your whole body into a unified sphere of empty openness, imagine your body in different sizes. Gradually allow your sense of your body to grow smaller and smaller. Reduce it to the size of a sesame seed and then expand it until it contains the room, the building, the globe, the Milky Way, and the universe. Take as much time as you need to vividly sense and flex these undeveloped capacities of your mind. Alternate between tiny and vast as you feel comfortable, maintaining a feeling of hollowness and luminous openness throughout.

VARIANT 2 Allow your body to appear and feel hollow and radiant, and expand this awareness to fill the universe. Then gradually imagine the entire universe dissolving down to absorb into your body. Next, imagine your body dissolving from top and bottom into a small sphere of light at the center of your chest. Imagine this tiny luminous sphere growing smaller and smaller until your mind simply dissolves into a state of lucid openness.

Now rest in this state of clarity and openness. As the first thought arises in the stillness of your mind, immediately generate yourself as your hollow body again, yet this time feel as though all of your old limiting thoughts, negative habits of perception and behavior, and physical congestions have completely dissolved into space and that you are arising fresh, clean, clear, radiant, and purified—in a sense reborn.

As you move throughout your day, carry this inner sense of unified openness and wholeness with you. Frequently use the breath to help you renew this awareness.

*Source: Simple Meditation & Relaxation By Joel Levey. Michelle Levey pp 188-191*