

# Instinct Yoga



## Creating a Haven

For many years now, I've carried in my head the image of a place to which I can take my mind when I need to relax and to be at peace. For me it is a very specific place from my past, a beach in Devon. I'm lying on the beach on a summer afternoon many years ago. I can hear the sound of waves breaking gently; there are children's voices and laughter as they splash in the turning waves. I can feel the sun warming my back, I can smell sun tan oil, it makes my skin slightly greasy and sticky, but it's a good sensation. My hair is still wet from swimming and drops of seawater run down my arms. If I move, the grains of sand on the beach move under my body. All of my senses have made that memory very special to me. I recall at the time realising that this particular afternoon on that beach was something that I would long remember and it has proved to be the case. When I need to relax and be at peace, I close my eyes and use all of my senses to recreate that time and place in my mind. I can shift my consciousness there to that place and enjoy real quiet, peace and stillness. I felt a wonderful sense of peace and contentment in that experience at that time and I can regain those feelings by taking my mind back to that place. That memory is a haven to which I can return when I need peace, stillness and positive memories.

In relaxation sessions at the end of my Yoga classes I often encourage students to recall or to create their own special place, their own haven, to which they can take their mind when they need to relax. The technique is very simple, but very effective.

Let's look at what's involved in creating a haven of your own. Your haven might be a room, a garden, maybe a beach, maybe a riverside park - it needs to be somewhere that is special to you, somewhere that you're familiar with, somewhere where you can relax and be at peace for a while. Just for a moment rummage through your

memory and use your imagination and identify your special place. You don't need to have too much detail of the image now, you can work on the detail later, just identify where you're going to go to take your mind to relax as we move through the process.

Once you've an idea of the place you're going to take your mind, store that image away and begin to relax. To begin, lie down, or if you prefer sitting, that's fine as long as you're comfortable. Then just take a moment to make yourself comfortable, settling down and when you're ready, closing your eyes. Let your body soften and relax and as your body relaxes, so let your breathing start to slow. Your mind starts to become more still and more calm. If your mind drifts off elsewhere, just bring it back to an awareness of how your breathing is slowing and how your body is becoming ever more relaxed. Take a minute or so to just let your body settle and relax and your mind to become more calm and more still.

Then we can use a simple technique to clear from your mind the image of the place you are currently, and for a period shift your consciousness to that somewhere that is special to you, your haven.

When you are relaxed and comfortable, slowly count down from 10 to 1 and as you start the counting, let the image of where you currently are fade from your mind, as if a mist were descending over it. Maybe by the time you reach 7, the image of the room has disappeared. Then as you continue counting down, maybe around 5, the mist begins to clear and the image of your haven starts to form in your mind's eye. As you continue to count downwards, the image becomes ever more clear and vivid and as you reach 1 your mind is there, in that place. You feel relaxed there; you feel at peace there and you can enjoy relaxing in that place.

Initially, try to make the image of your haven ever clearer. Go beyond just creating a visual image. Use all of your senses to make it ever more realistic. Hear the sounds that you associate with that place, maybe there are smells, particular textures, maybe there are particular emotions. Use all of your senses to make the image incredibly real. Then when you are happy that you have created an image that satisfies you, relax there for a few minutes. It's a place that's special to you. It's a place where you feel comfortable and where you feel at peace. Enjoy just being, just savouring the moments that you spend there. There's nothing for you to do in that place, nobody for you to please whilst you are there. It is a place for you to enjoy and for you to be at peace. Stay there for a while.

When its time to bring your consciousness back into the present, simply reverse the counting process, slowly start counting up from 1 to 10. At 1, store away a memory of a visual image of your haven. As you count up maybe at 2, create a memory of the sounds that you associate with you haven. As you count slowly upwards, create a memory of the way your other senses contribute to the quality of your special place. Maybe around 5, store away a memory of just how good your relaxation there

was and leave yourself a marker to return to that place to relax when you need to relax in the future. Make your memories clear, strong and vivid – make them memorable. As you continue to count upwards, at around 6, when you're happy that you've stored away a strong image of your haven, let a mist gradually fall over the image. Then as you reach around 8, let the mist begin to clear and start to form an image in your mind of the place where you are currently. At 9, start to bring your mind back to the place in which you are relaxing and at 10, bring your consciousness back to that place.

Give yourself plenty of time to emerge from your relaxation, slowly opening your eyes, deepening your breathing, gradually moving and stretching. Eventually bring your consciousness back to the present.

I hope the exercise has worked for you. The aim is to create a place to which you can escape to relax time and again in the future when life becomes busy and stressful, your own special haven in your mind.

Peter Hunter

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