Play dead

Shavasana is not an inane exercise at the end of the yoga practice. It has a lot of benefits to offer

BY ARATHI MENON

After an invigorating practice of yoga with a group in a studio, there is often at least one person who drifts off to sleep as soon as the instructor signals for shavasana or the final relaxation lying down on the mat. "Thank him, for it is because of the sonorous quality of his sleep that you are not doing the same," says Ramesh, who used to go to a studio to practice where he invariably fell asleep during shavasana. "Now I practice yoga twice every week at home and I skip shavasana," he says. Many practitioners like Supriya find shavasana to be the most difficult asana to perform because it is not natural for humans to relax. The body needs to be trained to do that and the mind that often drifts from one thing to the other needs to be reined in.

Understanding shavasana

Shavasana (shant means dead body and asana translates to posture) is one of the most important relaxation techniques in yoga. Shavasana is also known as "corpse pose." The body needs to be trained to do that and the mind that often drifts from one thing to the other needs to be reined in.

Right time to do it

Shavasana can be practised any time but is particularly beneficial after the asana practice. "The body, which is stretched during the asanas, needs to relax so it can return to its original state and resume regular activity. Coordination of our body, mind and breathing rhythm (called yogendra..."
How to get into shavasana

Hansaji J. Yogendra, director, The Yoga Institute, Mumbai explains how to do shavasana effectively.

Shavasana is a seemingly easy and yet most challenging of all asanas. To achieve holistic relaxation, one has to persevere and sustain the practice even though one does not feel the benefits initially. The art or mastery of this practice does not happen overnight but rather, over time.

It starts with initial relaxation of the external body. Later, the mind relaxes, which in turn brings about physiological relaxation and emotional quietude. Shavasana is the most beneficial asana for the regular practitioner.

Shavasana is best performed on an empty stomach, in loose comfortable clothing. One must consciously refrain from falling asleep.

**Step 1:** Lie down on a rubber mat or a carpet on firm base, and spread your arms a few inches away from the body, with fingers relaxed and slightly curled up.

**Step 2:** Part your legs about two to three feet and flop down the feet.

**Step 3:** Close your eyes. This is important to get away from external stimulations.

**Step 4:** Breathe easy and focus on your eyeballs. As they relax, so does the body.

**Step 5:** In the mind’s eye, observe your feet. If there is any tension in the area, relax the feet and move up towards the ankles, shins, calf muscles, knees, thighs, pelvis, waist, stomach, chest, shoulder, neck, and face (most important area) up to the crown of your head. If your teeth are clenched, relax them. If there is a frown, relax the brows. If you sense tension in any part of the areas mentioned above, consciously relax that part. Observe your whole body from top to toe once again. Stay relaxed.

**Step 6:** Gently but firmly take your mind off the body and focus on your normal inhalation and exhalation. If the mind wanders, which it will for sure, gently bring it back to your breath. Stay relaxed and observe the normal inspiration and expiration as a witness. Do not open your eyes. A dead body does not do this. Since you are pretending to be one, experience the optimum benefit of relaxation. Ward off incoming or outgoing thoughts that distract you from observing your breath. Maintain this posture for 10 minutes at least. With regular practice, you can go up to 20 minutes or even half an hour.

rhythm) leads to a multitude of beneficial changes, both physiological and emotional. To derive optimum benefits, one should always practice shavasana after physical or mental exertion,” says Hansaji.

“Generally, if you do any exercise, you will feel a little tired. But if asana and relaxation are properly mixed, you should feel energised at the end of the asanas, not tired. Before you go into the next asana, the metabolic activity and breath should be settled,” adds Sadhguru Jaggi Vasudev of Isha Yoga.

Bengaluru-based Sharada Shetty is an avid yoga practitioner and looks forward to shavasana at the end of a class. “It’s my favourite asana,” she says. “After stretching every part of the body with breath awareness, getting into shavasana results in deep relaxation and calms my mind. There is a meditative quality to this asana since the awareness turns inwards and we let go physically, we become even more aware of the breath and the subtle state of mind,” she says. A good shavasana never fails to increase her energy levels, she says, or give her a deep, sound sleep at night. ☑️