

# Holding the Posture the Kripalu Way

## From the Kripalu Center archives

Long holding (of a posture) is a very integral part of the experience of Kripalu Yoga. It is not to be achieved by any form of undue force or struggle, but has to come more from learning how to consciously relax at every stage of the holding. Every time you feel like you've reached your toleration point for your holding time in a posture, you are extending your capacity to hold, and increasing your endurance. This is not from forcing or struggling, or willful actions against and over your body, but rather from listening to the language of the body and learning how to relax even more than what you are ordinarily able to do. Every time you think you have reached your endurance level or your toleration point and you go beyond, you are extending your limitations both physically and mentally, and this progression will continue through a regular practice of yoga.

But this holding is not to be achieved brutally or forcefully through believing "The more I hold, the better it is." It has to be a conscious process of recognizing where in your holding you are using fear and force as a way to hold more and longer, unconsciously inducing tensions. Then, even if you hold it, you are holding it against the tensions you have unconsciously produced in the name of holding. And such holding has no value, regardless of how long you hold.

The real value comes from becoming more and more conscious of not inducing any new tensions, from learning to relax your body where you ordinarily tense up or use force to hold it. And that is where the function of conscious awareness comes in.

First of all, be conscious about whether there is a fear in your mind that you will be hurt. That is your preconceived fear that has no reality base. If that is so, let go of it. And then, as you leave that, you are able to let go of some tensions. And then you bring in the next level of deepening, and that is deep breathing. And, as you breathe deeply, you'll see that those fears are usually relaxed. The grip of the fear is released as you go into deep breathing. And sometimes you may want to take more like Kapalabhati deep breathing to let go of fear. So, use the breath as a second stage for releasing the fear, or for releasing fear-induced tensions. And from there, as you practice longer, you can learn how to let go even deeper, by letting out the sounds and the fear based emotions that surface. If you let it out, right in that posture, in whichever way it wants to express its self, you will find that your tensions will go suddenly to such a minimum level that it may bring some kind of a very in-depth internal shift in your consciousness, dissolving some of the old, long-term blocks which were keeping your body (inhibiting your body from expressing) from reaching into this toleration level that you could not otherwise reach, what we might call a natural toleration level.

And this natural toleration level is not the ultimate toleration level- but what is natural at that time, because that is how far you could let go of the fear as consciously as you could. But each time you practice, you can reach into another level of fears that may come through the catharsis and the holding of the posture. And, as you let them go, you will reach the natural level of toleration for that day and that session.

## **Holding the Posture: Further Reflections**

When you come to the point when you want to let go of the posture, how is it possible to relax? Because the secret of going beyond that point where you want to come down out of the posture (either because of discomfort or fear or even pain) is to relax, and in relaxing you will be able to hold the posture much longer. Seemingly, a second wind will come and you'll be amazed at the capacity you have.

Every time we make that shift where we decide to hold beyond – and actually do that – we have to open our consciousness, to expand our concept of who we are and where our limits are. What happens at the point of wanting, to let go is that we experience physical pain or feel threatened mentally, or the mind creating all kinds of reasons why we should come down. What's happening at that point is that we're at the border of our believed limits, and our minds don't realize that we actually have a greater capacity than at this moment. We maintain those limits; every day we rebuild the walls of those limits through concepts about ourselves, about how much we can do, by old memories of pains and traumas that are no longer true in the present moment, but we use them to keep ourselves within those limits.

Corresponding to those concepts about our limitations, we have held tensions in the body. For every limiting concept there's a held tension in the body. And so, at the point of the posture becoming a challenge, there are three things we can do:

1. We can work at the physical level and consciously relax any part of the body that's not working in the posture that can just let go. It might be just the cheek or the back of the neck. Whatever place we can relax will let go of some of that tension connected with corresponding concepts. As soon as you let go of tension, there's a letting go of pain, because held tension creates pain. It's actually a lack of oxygen to the tissues that's creating pain. So, the first thing we can do is relax the body. We don't even have to do anything with the mind.
2. Sometimes the attempt to relax the body doesn't work. We can't let go of the concepts enough to relax the body to release the pain. So, another tactic is to speak right to the mind, saying something like, "I am more than this fear" or "I am more than this discomfort. This is not me", to affirm that I am a greater being than this small self that believes it has to come down right now. When I relax that fear, when I get a sense of my limitlessness, my body will let go, because a limiting concept just popped, so the corresponding tension will release in the body.
3. If it can't be done by either relaxing the body or getting the mind off the fear (because the signals of pain are just too much, or the signals of fear), then Gurudev at that point says, "Breathe deeply." And in breathing deeply, it gives a focus to the mind and it also heightens the sense of well-being in the body and enhances the amount of prana in the body. There just isn't as much pain because there's oxygen back in the tissues again.

At each point where you choose to hold the posture, you're consciously moving into evolution, beyond your limits toward your greater self.

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