

At the end of the session, rest for a few minutes in open awareness of the whole body and the space around the body. Don't try to create anything or block anything. Let any lingering sensations and feelings spread out and fade away on their own.

Rise slowly and gently. As you go about your day, return again and again to the breathing body, letting it be your home base.

Inhale fresh energy and strength. Exhale relaxation, letting go of tension and holding.

Gradually, over weeks and months, you can do the whole sequence several times in a session. But don't do it too many times, and not too fast. Blocks and numb areas will be dissolved over many sessions. Let the magic butter do the work.

Adapted from *Wild Ivy: The Spiritual Autobiography of Zen Master Hakuin*, translated by Norman Waddell

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## The Soft Butter Method of Hakuin

Too much sitting, whether in front of a computer or on a meditation cushion, can result in an imbalance of the bodymind that manifests in many ways, including stagnant energy, pain, or tension. Sitting with strained posture can bury tension and holding patterns in the nervous system. When you're exhausted or out of balance, toughing it out and trying harder often makes things worse.

Instead, here's a gentle exercise that can release tension and rebalance energy, body and mind. It was taught by a Taoist to the Zen practitioner Hakuin when he was sick from tension and exhaustion.

Stand with feet shoulder width apart, lower body rooted into the ground, head aligned over the feet, torso settling in line with gravity, head gently floating up. (Or you can sit if you need to, or lie on the ground).

Resting in the breathing body for a few minutes, settle in and let gravity take over.

Then imagine a lump of butter the size of a large chicken or duck egg on the crown of your head. This pure fresh

butter is mixed with fragrant medicinal herbs and has magical properties. The butter, due to the warmth of your body, slowly begins to melt (yet it always remains the same size).

Warm butter slowly runs down your head, your face and neck, shoulders and chest and back, down your arms all the way to the fingertips. The warm butter slides down over your torso, softening your shoulder blades, spine, pelvis, and hips. Everywhere the melting butter touches, the soft warmth is pleasant, relaxing, and soothing.

Warm fragrant butter is absorbed into the skin. Everywhere the butter touches, feel it softening, rebalancing and rejuvenating the body, painlessly dissolving any congestion, tension, aches, and pains. Tension and pain and disease loosen and dissolve and flow down with the butter.

The butter gradually flows down over the lower body, running down the legs, knees, and ankles, enveloping the feet, flowing on down, carrying pain and tension and anything else it accumulated along with it down through the soles of the feet into the ground.

Repeat the meditation once or twice more if you wish, but this time the butter penetrates the skin and into the body like water penetrates sand, running between and through each cell of skin, muscle, bones, organs and any other tissues.

When you're done, just rest a while, comfortably relaxed, imagining that from the base of the ribs down to the soles of the feet your body is immersed in an exquisite, warm bath of fragrant oil suffused with precious medicinal herbs.

In the beginning, don't try to go too deeply into the body. Let the butter flow slowly down on the skin. Over time, you can imagine the butter is absorbed more deeply into the skin, into muscles and tissue, gradually penetrating the body completely.

Let the butter-energy melt gently but relentlessly, flowing down slowly, around and through you. Don't stop or push when you feel blocks or odd sensations. Let gravity and the butter do the work. In an ordinary way, feel the whole body all at once and gently include whatever sensations arise in awareness, but let the butter keep going, from the head all the way to the soles of the feet.

Any emotions and thoughts can just flow down with the butter and don't need to be dealt with separately. The only effort in the practice is to relax and let warm energy flow downwards from the top of the head to the feet and then out of the bottoms of the feet. Over time, gentle, persistent awareness gradually and naturally dissolves blocks and opens energy channels.

