**Peacefulness Exercise No. 1: 5-Minute Calmness Stretch**

**Note:** This exercise should immediately follow our Kindness Meditation or prayer on peacefulness.

**Introduction:** *(Can be read or paraphrased)* While stretching can also be used to reinforce our work on being mindful in our day-to-day activities, stretching is also a wonderful way to de-stress and promote feelings of well-being.

The added benefits of stretching include better circulation, greater joint mobility, less muscle soreness, better balance and a healthier immune system. Not only does stretching help tone the outside of the body, but it helps massage internal organs as well, so that everything on the inside (heart, lungs, liver, etc.) functions more efficiently.

While you may exercise regularly, see if you notice a difference when stretching immediately following your meditation. Set an intention for this experience to relax fully and breathe peacefully. If it helps you relax, mentally say to yourself, “inhale peace” or “breathe peace” every time to take a deep breath.

**To Begin:** Facilitators, have each participant slide to the edge of their chairs, making sure their sit bones are still on the chair and that their feet are planted firmly on the ground. Pay special attention that the chair itself will not slide backwards during the exercise. You may want to line chairs up against a wall as an added safety measure. This entire stretching sequence will be performed from a seated position. Alternatively, you may decide to bring in a yoga instructor to lead a Hatha yoga class that includes standing poses.

**Instructions:** (To be paraphrased and demonstrated)

1. **Neck Rolls** – Sitting on the edge of your chair with your feet planted firmly on the floor, separate your feet so that your legs are approximately hips’ width apart. Lengthen your spine as if there were a string pulling from the crown of your head, up through the sky. Slowly bring your chin to your chest and rotate your head as if to bring your right ear to your right shoulder. Continue to circle your head back and around, bringing your left ear to your left shoulder before returning to where you began – chin to chest. Repeat this neck roll three times in one direction, and then reverse it for three revolutions.
2. **Side Bend** – Reach your right arm overhead as if you’d like to touch the ceiling. Remember that imaginary string suspending from the crown of your head to the sky? Gently arc your arm as if to touch that string and gaze up at your right hand. Feel the stretch along the right side of your body. Hold for 2-3 deep breaths and repeat on the left. Repeat both the right and left arm side bends once more on each side.
3. **Spinal Flexes** – Energize your body and create a more supple spine with spinal flexes. Put your hands on your knees and sit tall. As you inhale, draw your shoulder blades back as if you’d like to touch them together behind your back. Meanwhile, pull your chest forward in an exaggerated movement, arching your back. On the exhale, reverse the movement by drawing the shoulders forward as if to touch them in front of your chest. Tuck your chin and round your spine, hollowing out your belly as you exhale fully. Continue this back and forth breathing and movement about 6-8 times.
4. **Seated Spinal Twist** – Remember to lengthen your spine (by sitting tall) and inhale deeply. Place your left hand on your right knee as you exhale, twist and look over your right shoulder. Your right hand can hold onto the arm, the back or the seat of your chair to take the twist deeper. See if you can take 2-3 deep breaths even while in a seated twist. Inhale back to center and repeat the exercise on the left. Repeat this entire sequence, right and left, one more time.
5. **Forward Bends** – Keeping your left foot planted on the floor for support, stretch your right leg straight out in front of you with the heel on the floor, foot flexed. Inhale as you reach your arms overhead. Exhale and hinge at the hips, bringing your arms down to your extended leg and hold onto that leg (anywhere that is comfortable for you) with both hands. Take 2-3 deep breaths as you feel that stretch behind your hamstring. Slowly round the spine and roll up to sitting. Repeat with the left leg. Then, repeat this entire sequence on each side, one more time.
6. **Hip Opener** – Once again, separate your feet and knees about hips’ distance apart. Lift your right ankle and place it on top of the left thigh, just behind your left knee. Allow your right leg to open outward so that your ankle, shin and knee are parallel to the floor. Hold on to your right knee with your right hand, and your ankle with your left hand as you inhale. Exhale slowly as your hinge your hip and bend forward just until you can feel a stretch in your right hip. Hold for 2-3 deep breaths and repeat on the opposite side. Repeat the entire sequence one more time on each side.

\***Contraindication:** People who have a hip injury or have had a hip replacement should not perform this exercise. Alternatively, participants can cross one leg over the other, place both hands on their knee and gently bend forward on each side.

1. **Knee Hug** – Draw your knees and ankles together so that your legs are touching. Slowly bend forward and wrap your arms around your shins and rest your head (if possible) on your knees. Feel the gentle stretch of your low back. Take 2-3 deep breaths and roll back up to sitting.

**Conclusion:** Close your eyes and silently thank your body (or the Universe/God) for your ability to perform these stretches and for the peacefulness that you enjoy.