

# CHAPTER TEN

## RELAXATION AND MEDITATION

Relaxation in yoga means lying down, most commonly in the corpse posture, and it means settling yourself in a circle of quiet, emptying the mind of all outside concerns, and relaxing from head to toe. Meditation is a stage beyond. It means sitting straight, most commonly in one of several classic meditative postures, and it means schooling your psyche and quickening your existence in consciousness. Relaxation is a concentration exercise for the body-mind; meditation is an experience for the mind-body. Both complement the rejuvenating effects of hatha yoga—relaxation because it releases deep tensions, and meditation because it pulls the mind inward and introduces it to higher states of yoga. We'll look at relaxation first because meditation cannot begin without a relaxed body.

Relaxation takes us beyond simply letting go of tension in skeletal muscles. It is a multifaceted process involving conscious control of the somatic nervous system and its innervation of skeletal muscle (chapters 1 and 2), regulation of the autonomic nervous system and its control over smooth and cardiac muscle (chapters 2 and 10), and the reining in of emotion and mental activity. The plan of this chapter is to look at how skeletal muscles relax and to examine the postures that are best suited for this. Next we'll turn to the role of the autonomic nervous system in relaxation, and then we'll look at advanced relaxation practices whose physiological correlates are unknown. Finally, we'll consider the six meditative postures, leaving discussion of meditation itself to the experts in that field and to the many texts that delve into that topic.

Figure 10.6. A generic meditative sitting posture (in this case the accomplished pose), with a right tetrahedron superimposed on the model. The base triangle rests on the ground, with its back corner underneath the coccyx. The middle upright line extends to the top of the head at a right angle ( $90^\circ$ ) from the plane (and back corner) of the base triangle.

