

HEAL YOURSELF WITH

YOGA

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specific asanas
for
specific diseases

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BY E.R. RAM KUMAR



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E. R. RAM KUMAR

**HEAL
YOURSELF
WITH
YOGA**

**SPECIFIC ASANAS
FOR SPECIFIC DISEASES**

Foreword by
K. P. DAVE, M.D., D.P.M.

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FOREWORD

Yoga, especially Hatha Yoga, is now a craze both in India and abroad. Many books on the subject dealing with various aspects of Yoga and catering to a variety of needs and tastes have hit the stands during the past decade.

I have known the author, E. R. Ram Kumar, as an excellent writer, having read his many and varied articles, some of them falling in my area of professional interest: health. What indeed came as a surprise to me as I pored through the MS, was the refreshingly new angle and approach Mr. Ram Kumar has adopted for his book. I was impressed by the depth of knowledge he has acquired in the study of human anatomy and the many diseases our body is vulnerable to.

In fact, I should have thought that a more appropriate title for the book would have been "Yoga Therapy," for the author, while discussing each asana, also analyses the many common illnesses and suggests appropriate Yogic remedies for them.

The book is meant as much for the young as for the old, as much for the healthy as for the sick. I am convinced that it will go a long way in helping the reader who is interested not only in preserving but also promoting physical and mental health.

The hygienic principles of modern medicine are appropriately incorporated in the manual. One of the tragedies of modern education is that it pays scant attention to the human physiology and its marvellous working, leaving even the so-called educated class ignorant of their own body mechanism. This book dwells on the minute and delicate working of the different organs, especially the ductless glands, and suggests different postures for their healthy care.

The book demonstrates how food, clothes, habits, etc., have a bearing on health. There is a belief that Yoga should not be practised without the guidance of an able and experienced teacher. This book takes the role of such a teacher, leading the reader step by step to acquire mastery over Yoga asanas.

As a medical man and practising clinician, I very much appreciate and approve the medical concepts used by the author to explain the physiological and hygienic principles. I am sure *Heal Yourself With Yoga* will be a valuable addition to the more serious study of this fascinating subject.

—K. P. DAVE, M.D., D.P.M.
*Hon. Asst. Professor of Psychiatry, L.T.M.
Medical College and Hospital, Bombay*

PREFACE

I am not a professional exponent of Yoga or a guru peddling spiritualism. The reason for my writing this medico-yogic treatise was my father's 40-year bouts with asthma and the general ill-health of the family—afflicted by diabetes, rheumatism as age advanced and, of course, asthma, among others. Unfortunately, this heavy burden is carried on to the present day in the different branches of the family tree.

With some exceptions, like myself. If heredity has a say, I should be spending sleepless nights, wheezing and coughing, fighting with my bodily system for the supply of every ounce of oxygen down the trachea. Yet I enjoy blissful nights and zest-filled days.

Paradoxically, I owe my general good health—so far, what the future holds I know not—to my father's suffering and his final conquest of asthma. Ours was a very orthodox Brahmin family; yet I remember my father gulping down chicken soup, powdered crocodile liver, black-monkey *rasayana*—anything and everything which was rumoured to bring even temporary relief from those crippling asthmatic attacks. Needless to say, he had tried all systems of medicine—allopathy, ayurveda, unani, homoeopathy and, of course, quackery—all in vain.

He had resigned himself to those asthmatic attacks, when he came across a series of articles on Yoga asanas in a magazine. Believing that he could not lose—for his knowledge of Yoga then was confined to the belief that it should be strictly left to the world-weary and the weird living in Himalayan isolation or to the showman in the circus—he started practising the Yogic poses, with the magazine articles acting as guide and guru. Six months passed, and it seemed to him that the asthmatic attacks had become less frequent, less violent.

Asthma had so far not claimed me for itself, and father decided that notwithstanding my age — I was in my pre-teens — I should be started on Yoga practice immediately. Thus began my study and practice of Yoga.

He had by then got hold of many books on Yoga asanas. Among them I remember those by V. N. Kumaraswamy, Bangalore Sundaram and Swami Sivananda. We both avidly read them and practised the poses almost fanatically. Within two years, father could claim that he had finally controlled a 40-year-old demon which no medicine could kill.

If I can congratulate myself on anything in life, it is my sticking to Yogic practice like a leech despite the little inconveniences that cropped up occasionally. And I may claim that it is to this steadfastness that I owe my good health and energy.

Having gained something, I wanted to share. It is this desire which goaded me into this venture of writing. Though initially I wanted to serialise the

articles in a magazine, a casual reference about the manuscript to a friend led me to approach some publishers. To my pleasant surprise, more than one showed their interest in it.

It is my good fortune that the MS finally found itself in the able hands of Dr. R. J. Mehta of D. B. Taraporevala Sons and Co. Private Ltd. and Dr. K. P. Dave, Associate Professor of Psychiatry, both of whom have done a thorough job of revising the text. I owe them my sincere gratitude.

I should also mention my gratitude for the support extended by my wife Uma, a teacher, and my daughters Meera, a medical student, and Krishna, all of whom practise Yoga asanas.

My efforts will not have been in vain if this book helps alleviate the suffering of even one person.

Bombay

E. R. RAM KUMAR

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* The asanas suggested are the principal, and not the only, poses prescribed for specific ailments and complaints. For a speedy cure, other asanas should also be practised as suggested. For all-round health, all poses mentioned in this book should be practised regularly.

O P I N I O N S

ON THE FIRST EDITION

“A book on Yoga which is quite different from the run-of-the-mill books which try to combine physical culture with spiritual jargon.

“There are only a few books or teachers who are able to understand and interpret the medical significance of each ailment and then explain how each asana brings a healing touch and relief to the suffering. One such seeker is E. R. Ram Kumar, who has in his book described the nature of each ailment—in detail. His treatment is through Yoga asanas, mudras and pranayamas. His language and choice of words are closer to the practice of modern medicine and diagnostic symptoms.

“Wherever it is necessary to use Yoga jargon, it is properly explained. It is this aspect that may help doctors to recommend Yoga therapy.

“The detailed explanations of the diseases as well as the inner effects of Yoga practices.....

“The author has succeeded in explaining yoga therapy “not a peddler of spiritualism,” which is quite obvious from the content of the book.

“A book provides interesting material for the

Yoga therapist as well as the serious seeker. A book on Yoga which is quite different from the run-of-the-mill books which try to combine physical culture with spiritual jargon.”

—*The Times of India*

“The author does not make any exaggerated claims....Detailed instructions are given as to how the asanas are to be performed and their benefits explained. Written in simple, flowing, non-technical language, **HEAL YOURSELF WITH YOGA** will prove to be an eye-opener transforming the reader’s life with the realisation that in Yoga he has a master key to health and happiness.

“Illustrations...and the index to common diseases and complaints and their yogic cure enhance the value of the book. The book will be invaluable to those who have been alerted to the dangerous side-effects of modern medicines and are on the look-out for a safe alternative.”

—*Mid-Day*

“The medico-yogic publication should interest all those who care for good health or have been suffering from one disease or another... This is unlike the other books on yoga in the market, for it is written with a fresh, therapeutic angle, and is not packed with religo-spiritual abstractions. Written in a simple, gripping style, it explains what Yoga asanas do to the body and mind and emphasises the benefits

from each asana or mudra, with instructions on how to do each.

"A major part of the book is taken up by the causes and details of several afflictions and ailments which.... can be cured by Yogic exercises. An original contribution is the mixing of the exercises for the eyes with "sirshasana" and "vipareethakarani." Some useful hints on eye care are given with illustrations of eye exercises. The importance of pranayama is well stressed.... The book is valuable in the preventive aspect of diseases, alleviating suffering and improving the general health.... Correlating asanas to the functioning of different organs is a distinctive feature of the book."

—*Evening News of India*

"A valuable addition to the ocean of books on Yoga asanas.... 'a mini-encyclopaedia of Yoga medicine'.... The book analyses the methods of practising Yoga asanas and breathing exercises to cure diseases and preservation of health.... The method adopted in explaining medical terms is commendable.... The book takes on the role of a good Yoga teacher....'

—*Free Press Journal*

1

WHAT IS YOGA

It is easy to say that one must have good health — mental, physical and spiritual — for all-round happiness, but how is one to acquire it? For any serious work — be it studies, sports, occupation — or just to be at peace with life one needs to have the solid foundation of a healthy body. Only then can one expect the mental equilibrium, concentration and faculty needed to cope with the task of living.

Physical exercises are good to keep the body strong and trim, but while building up the physique superficially, they tend to ignore the mental, intellectual, spiritual and, most important of all, the therapeutic aspects.

What we need is a system of exercises which will help the all-round development of the body, mind and personality. It should also help the body resist diseases, should be capable of being practised by men and women, children and old persons, by the healthy and the sick. It should be non-tiring yet invigorating, and it should suit the rich and the poor.

Such a system is Yoga asanas.

Yoga means to yoke or unite (a spiritual union with God). The system was evolved by the inquiring and enterprising people of the Indus Valley

civilisation of the third millennium B.C. who realised the importance of a healthy body for intellectual and spiritual pursuits and developed and perfected it.

Later, around 1200 B.C., it was systematised. Yoga exercises consist of asanas (poses), mudras (postures which produce currents in the body) and Pranayama (breath control). Together, they tone up the body by supplying the bodily organs with plenty of fresh blood, rejuvenating the ductless glands and other important internal parts, regulating the rhythm of breathing and soothing the nerves. All these help prolong life. If we add meditation to these three, it will increase our power of concentration.

Yoga has come to be recognised as a scientific culture for physical and mental development. It is meant not only for seekers of spiritual knowledge but also for those who want to lead a healthy and intelligent life.

There are simple asanas which can be practised by all easily. Nehru said: "I find asanas to be useful because I feel fresh and light afterwards — the test of the usefulness of any exercise." They bring lightness of limbs, agility, balance, vitality and endurance.

These asanas build up those parts which are hidden inside the body, like the ductless glands (thyroid, pituitary, adrenals, etc.), the viscera in the abdomen and, most important of all, the nervous system and the brain. They reduce fatigue, soothe the nerves and discipline the mind.

Most other physical exercises ignore these vital organs. Yoga asanas, without straining the heart, tone up the muscles and nerves, give them fresh blood supply, harmonise breathing and improve mental power. Says Sage Patanjali in his "Yoga Sutra": "The Yogic methods of controlling the vital breath (Pranayama) and steady pose (asana) are intimately connected with the mind."

As Yoga asanas keep these important parts and organs of the body healthy, diseases do not afflict it, and so we grow old less fast. Yoga attacks the root causes of diseases which result in old age and death. The curative values of Yoga asanas, based as they are on scientific observations, are vast, varied and wonderful indeed.

For example, obesity, the root cause of many illnesses of today, is removed and the body made trim and fit. Again, even the so-called difficult diseases like high blood pressure, diabetes, epilepsy, social diseases, etc., can be tackled by a regular practice of asanas. To a practitioner of Yoga asanas, colds, constipation, headaches, tiredness and other common ailments will be unknown.

But unlike the allopathic system of medicine, in which you can swallow a pill and perhaps feel the headache vanish (though you may later acquire some side-effects), Yoga asanas cannot be expected to effect any instant cures in twenty-four hours. What is required is patience and perseverance if you suffer from diseases, but Yoga asanas are sure to bring about the magic cure which the most modern medicines despair of.

2

HOW TO DO YOGA ASANAS

Though there are hundreds of asanas of which nearly eighty are important, one need not do more than ten or fifteen poses daily to keep healthy. They are simple to learn, especially for young people whose backbone is generally supple.

Once you learn to do them, you will come to love them and their practice will become part of the daily routine. They will make you fresh and cheerful, smart and trim. And all they demand is just thirty minutes of your time each day.

The morning is the best time to practise Yoga asanas, as the stomach will be empty and the whole body will have rested during the previous night and will thus be fresh. At least six hours should elapse after a heavy meal and three hours after a light one before one may practise asanas. A stomach filled with food needs a good blood supply for digestion. Moreover, it should not be squeezed and pressurised, as it will be by doing certain asanas. If this happens, the food will not be digested and there will be complications, and no use blaming asanas for them !

And unlike other exercises which demand special implements to be practised, all that a Yoga practitioner needs is a clean, airy room. After a thorough

wash, especially of the nostrils, he should spread a soft piece of cloth on the floor and he is ready to practise asanas.

The dress should be comfortable. It should not be tight, preventing the free flow of blood and diverting concentration which should be directed towards the particular internal organs which each pose benefits.

Do not practise with the fan on as it will not only raise dust, which will be breathed in, but also because it will interfere with the bodily heat generated by the exercises.

The following important points should be borne in mind before learning to practise Yoga asanas :

1. Never practise asanas if you suffer from severe headaches, back or stomach aches, hernia, eye or ear troubles, without consulting a specialist in Yoga. The same is the case if you suffer from some other disease or have been operated on, especially in the stomach.
2. While practising asanas, always breathe through the nose and keep the mouth closed. *The basic rule is to breathe out when bending and breathe in when coming back to the normal position.*
3. Do not mix Yoga asanas with other exercises or games as they may do immense harm to the body. Allow a gap of at least two hours between the two. The reason is obvious : in physical exercises and games, the blood is made to flow mostly to the external muscles. In asanas, it is directed to the internal organs like the ductless glands, the brain, the parts of the digestive system, etc. Mixing the

two types of exercises will deny proper blood supply to all parts of the body. Yoga shuns violent muscular activity (common in other forms of exercise) that produces large quantities of lactic acid which causes fatigue.

Do not strain to the point of fatigue. If you feel tired, practise Shavasana.

4. Take a bath an hour after practising Yoga asanas, as the body must cool down to normalcy gradually.

5. Smokers had better give up smoking gradually. They should not practise some asanas like Sirshasana until they have given up the habit. For there is the danger of bleeding from the nose because the membranes, weakened by smoking, will be unable to stand the rush of blood in the head-down position.

Yoga asanas are simple postures. From these different postures, many have gained immense benefits, both physical and spiritual. Each pose is found to benefit a particular part of the body or *nadi*.

These poses do not involve any sudden jerks, pulls or jumps. There is a majesty about them. Most asanas are named after some animals (like *Bhujanga* or serpent) or flowers (*Padma* or lotus) which they resemble.

There is always a danger that the written description of how an asana is to be performed may be misread or misunderstood. As it is very important that an asana should be carried out absolutely correctly to reap its full benefit, it is advisable for a beginner to learn them under a Yoga expert,

especially the topsy-turvy poses which could be harmful in certain conditions or if wrongly carried out.

Beginners may start with the first six asanas and Sarvangasana and Matsyasana. After a week, gradually add more poses as also increase the duration in poses like Sarvangasana. A complete regimen of all poses described in this book will take half to one hour. Those who have no special health problems may do all the asanas and retain their health.

Women benefit a lot by a regular practice of asanas as they retain their youthfulness. However, avoid practice during the menstrual period.

During pregnancy, certain asanas may be practised, as instructed in each pose. But do not start asana practice once you are in the family way. Yoga asanas can be resumed five months after delivery.

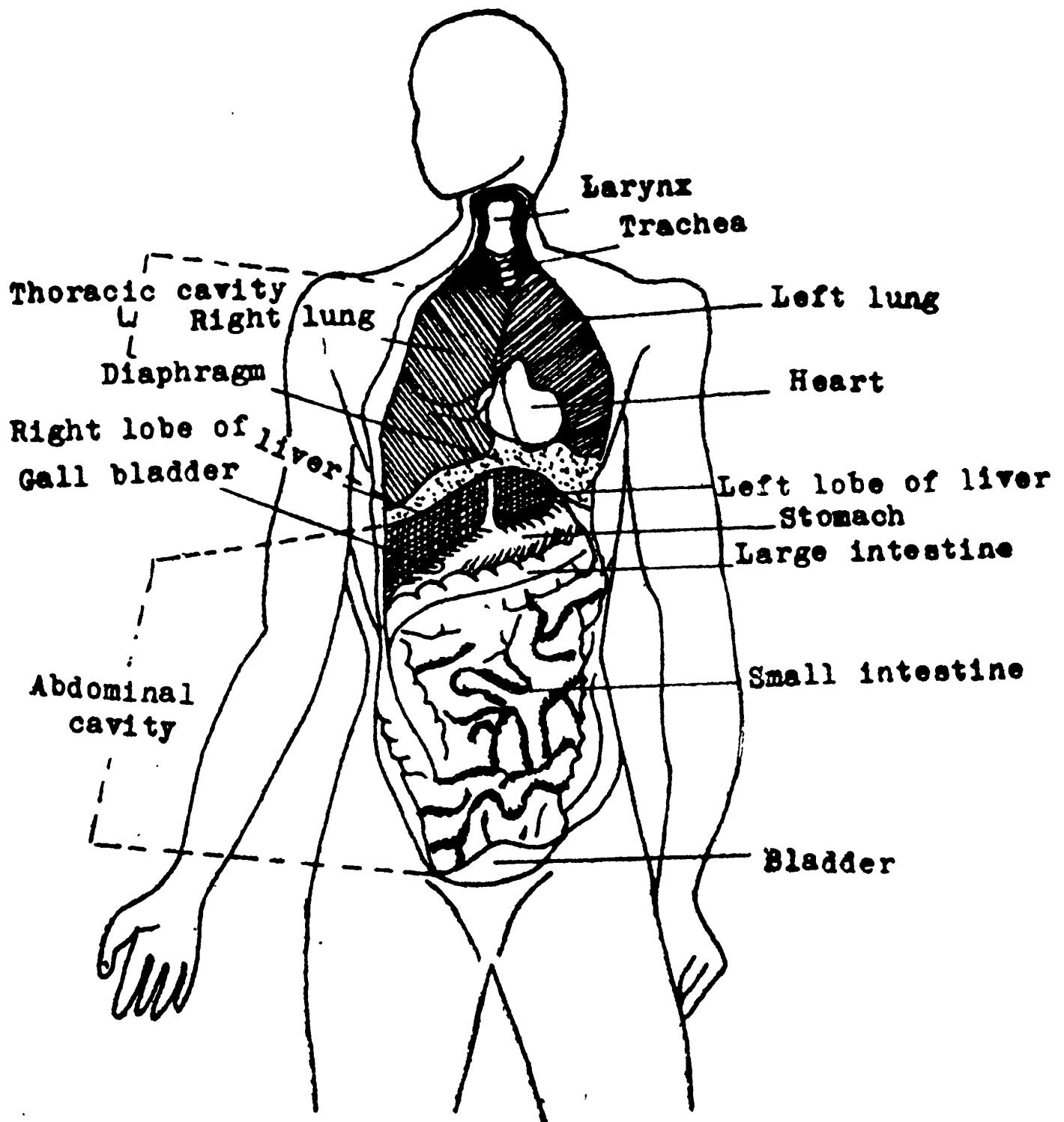


Fig. 1
The Organs of the Body — 1

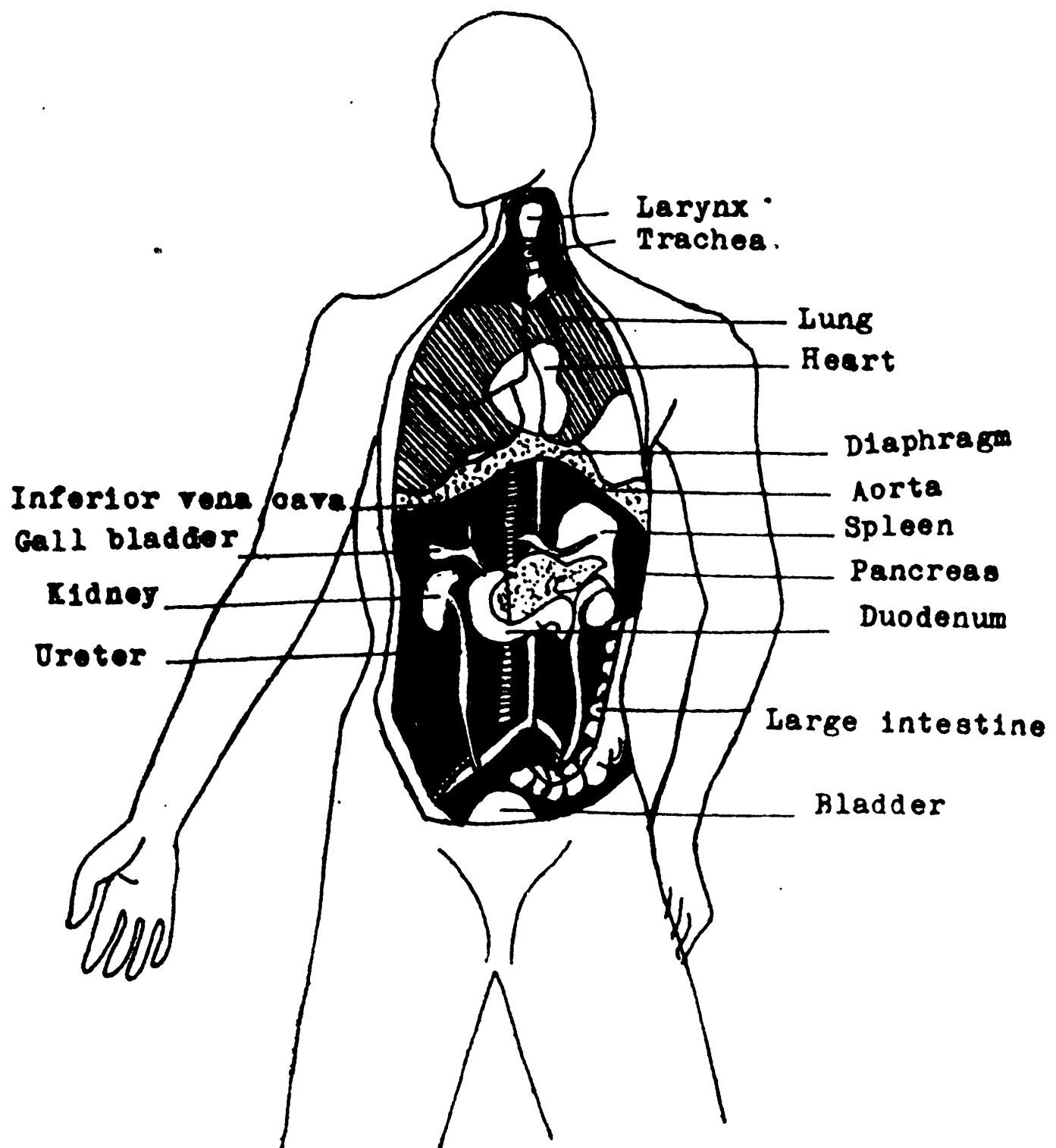


Fig. 2
The Organs of the Body — 2

3

THE BODY MACHINE

In this wonderful machine that is our body, not a single part is dispensable or superfluous. Every part has a crucial role to play, to make life healthy and happy. Even if one part breaks down and needs repair, the body feels uncomfortable and even falls sick. How can one keep all parts healthy?

External cleanliness, though important, will not alone lead to good health. The internal organs too should be kept clean by supplying them with fresh blood. This calls for a certain discipline in our way of life : regular exercise, nourishing food, proper rest. Hard work is no substitute for exercise. On the contrary, it tires the parts and ages them fast. A muscular body need not be a healthy body. Indeed, in the process of developing the muscles, the other vital parts may be ignored.

A student or an officer sitting at his desk all day long may give good exercise to his brain, but his other parts languish; one who breaks stones or builds a house will have strong limbs but little else. Similarly, if we take any job, we see only some parts of our body benefit. We do not get all-round exercise. This is especially the case with the internal organs that rarely get sufficient exercise and proper

nourishment. And that is the main reason for most of the illnesses we are subjected to. The other types of exercises help little in tackling this problem.

The opposite is the case with Yoga asanas. After a half-hour bout with them, we feel fresh and ready to face the world with a new zest. Asanas preserve and generate energy — not expend it as other exercises do. Yogic poses recharge our body cells. There is no appreciable sweating or running out of breath. Yoga asanas improve the functioning of every organ in the body, including the ears, eyes, brain, heart, lungs, liver, kidneys and the ductless glands. Supplying the tissues with proper and enough blood, Yoga keeps them healthy.

What Yoga asanas do to our body and mind can be summarised thus. They—

- —keep the vital bodily organs like heart, lungs and intestines healthy;
- remove impurities by increasing the blood circulation;
- make the ductless glands secrete their vital juices in proper quantities;
- mould the body to make it trim and beautiful in both men and women as extra fat is removed;
- assure longevity as the organs do not decay from frequent attacks of diseases;
- keep the brain sharp and keen and improve concentration and grasping power; and
- make the nerves tingle with health.

The power which activates the nerves is like electricity that flows through the wires in our house.

Unless this power energises the nerves, the body will be dead, or worse, will become a dumb doll —minus the doll's beauty.

This power is called *prana shakti*. As we can only see the manifestations of electricity, this *shakti* can only be felt as it gives life to the body.

This *shakti*'s main abode — and instrument — is the brain from where vital nerves originate and pass through the neurofibrils in the spinal cord to the different parts of the body. All our emotions and feelings and reactions to the outside world are conveyed to the brain through these nerves — and they also convey the orders of the brain to the different parts.

We have noticed how our eyes shut involuntarily when a fly comes buzzing towards them. We wake up to the fact that our eyes have been saved from damage in the nick of time, only after the danger is past. How and from where the eyelids get their orders so fast is something marvellous indeed. It is the ever-alert nerves which realised the danger, tipped off the central nervous system, received the orders and acted — all before we can shut our eyelids — literally !

So different are the ways in which the nerves control the organs that it is a mystery how they function. Yoga asanas seem to have gained the knowledge of keeping the nerves — and so the body — healthy and well functioning.

4

PADMASANA

(Plate 1)

We must remind ourselves time and again — that is, if we are conscious of the need to maintain good health — that we must sit and walk erect. But too often this resolution is forgotten in everyday work and worries.

Our backbone has a big say in the condition of the body. To be always erect means to have the backbone healthy and supple and the chest broad. The spinal cord carries all the main nerves from the brain to the various parts of the body. It is like a highway or a telephone exchange with very heavy traffic. Suppose a highway or a telephone exchange is clogged and jammed, traffic comes to a grinding halt or the telephone calls reach the wrong parties, if at all.

If the spinal cord and the nerves running through it are not healthy and supple, orders from the brain do not reach the different parts of the body smoothly and quickly, and there will be confusion and worse.

Similar is the need to have a broad chest. We can live without food and water for some days. But how long can we stay alive without air? The lungs will ache and cry out for air. If the chest is not

broad or if we have a permanent stoop, the lungs do not get the proper supply of the oxygen needed to keep the body healthy. The blood will get saturated with carbon dioxide if oxygen is not injected into it in plenty. This in turn will affect health.

How can we keep the spinal cord erect and the chest broad? Padmasana does it; it acts as the traffic policeman, the telephone operator and the oxygen supplier, all in one, keeping things in order in the body.

How to do : Sit on the floor and stretch out both legs. Fold the right leg and place it on the left thigh, with the heel pressing into the left of the abdomen. Similarly, place the left leg on the right thigh, the heel pressing into the right part of the abdomen.

Sit erect with the shoulders thrown back and the hands placed comfortably on the knees. Breathe deeply.

In the initial stages, naturally there will be some pain in the thighs and legs not accustomed to this kind of "rough" treatment of bending and stretching of muscles, joints and nerves. But soon you will find the pose so comfortable that you may prefer to be in this pose whenever you sit down for any purpose.

You may sit in this pose as long as you feel comfortable in it. This is also the best pose for doing Pranayama (breathing exercises)

Benefits : You may have noticed the stalk of a lotus; supple yet strong enough to hold the heavy flower above the water level. Padmasana, or the lotus pose, keeps the vertebral column erect, healthy

and flexible like the lotus stalk. Maybe that is why this name for the pose. Another reason given is that the knees in the pose resemble the petals of a lotus.

The pose massages the abdominal region as the heels press against it and stretches the nerves and muscles, removing stomach ailments like acidity, gas, etc. Thus, it increases the appetite.

It also strengthens the legs, pulling the nerves, muscles and bones taut, thereby massaging them thoroughly. As we grow older, our spine loses its tone and becomes less and less flexible because of calcification. Padmasana and other poses ensure that the ligaments do not stiffen; they delay the onset of old age.

By keeping the backbone erect and the diaphragm in position and active, the lungs are filled with life-giving, oxygen-rich air. Every nook and corner of them are "aired" and the musty, polluted air is driven out. While destroying the hidden bacteria, the oxygen also freshens the blood, thus bringing all-round benefit to the body. The blood floods the lumbar region.

The pose chases away the blues and brings new energy to the practitioner as the nerves are invigorated and enlivened. The mind is kept alert and attentive.

All persons, sick and healthy, young and old, men and women, can practise this pose to their great advantage.

Note: Pregnant women may continue practice up to eight months.

5

BHUJANGASANA

(Plate 2)

Padmasana, simple as it looks, works wonders to the spinal cord, lungs and stomach.

Bhujangasana is one of six poses which are specially meant to rejuvenate and invigorate the spinal cord. At the same time, these poses remove extra fat on the abdomen and back which forms into ugly folds like stacked tyres, especially in people like office-goers and modern housewives who lead a sedentary life.

These poses squeeze and strain the abdominal organs, infusing new life into them and in turn making them secrete their vital digestive juices in the required quantities

Bhujangasana is named after the serpent with its hood raised, which the pose resembles. But there is another, more important, reason for calling it the serpent pose. When a snake is in motion, it looks as though it has no backbone at all. So supple and pliant is its backbone that it allows the snake to writhe its way with astonishing speed. Yet, watch the same snake when it stiffens itself like an iron rod to strike at its tormentor. Bhujangasana

can give its practitioners such a supple yet strong backbone.

In Padmasana, we saw how a healthy backbone means healthy nerves. The more supple and healthy the backbone, the younger and more active we are. Our movements will be like that of a released spring. Laziness will be an unknown commodity and our actions will be as lightning fast as the striking cobra itself.

How to do : Lie on your stomach, with the legs stretched out straight and close together, and with the toes and heels touching each other. Bend the arms at the elbow with the palms placed near the armpits. Raise the head, slowly breathing out, and bend as far back as possible with the chin raised and the head and shoulders thrown back.

Now the portion above the navel will be above the ground and bent back. Watch out! The legs may try to spring apart. And keep the mouth closed !

Stay in this position for a few seconds and come down slowly, breathing in. Repeat six times.

Benefits : Have you noticed how your pet dog or cat, as soon as it gets up after a nap, stretches itself to its full length and bends its back into an arch as if doing its own Yoga asana? After that, how frolicsome it becomes ! No trace of sleepiness left in it.

Bhujangasana may have been imitated from the natural way of awakening. After doing the pose, one feels the same pleasure the pet does, as the spinal cord is stretched, the lungs are expanded and filled with fresh air and the nerves pulled taut and then relaxed.

In one who practises this pose, the backbone stops murmuring even after a long stretch of sitting in one position. The reason is that all parts of it and the spondyls are stretched, squeezed and bent. This process brings fresh blood supply even to those parts which had earlier languished for want of exercise and proper blood circulation. The pose strengthens the shoulders and removes aches in the neck, while stretching the Adam's apple where the vital thyroid gland is situated. It is good for a stiff back, lumbago and sciatica.

How versatile our backbone is ! It can bend, twist and swivel the head into a 180-degree arc as well as up and down, while supporting most of the body weight and providing security to the vital spinal cord.

Many people nowadays can be seen wearing a thick collar as a palliative for spondylitis, or inflammation of the neck vertebrae. For them, the answer to the problem is Bhujangasana. This pose also broadens the chest as does Padmasana, only more vigorously.

Similarly, the stomach is also stretched, with the intestines and other organs pulled and pressurised. The waste accumulated in the large intestine starts moving, and constipation disappears.

Note : Those who have problems of the backbone should consult an expert. Pregnant women can continue practice till the third month.

6

SHALABHASANA

(Plate 3)

Bhujangasana mainly concentrates on the upper portion of the spinal cord; its counterpart, Shalabhasana, takes care of the lower section. The former strengthens the muscles of the lower abdomen, thighs and legs; the latter takes care of the shoulders, neck, chest and hands.

Shalabhasana resembles a locust with its legs bent, ready to propel the body forward like a released spring. *Shalabha* means a locust. Regular practice of the asana will bestow to our body the power packed in those slender legs of that insect.

How to do : Lie on the stomach as for Bhujangasana. The legs should be kept straight and placed together. Keep the hands straight under the groin with the palms up and the fingers folded into fists.

In this pose, the general rule about breathing out when bending is broken : take a deep breath and raise the legs slowly till the portion from the lower abdomen to the toes is elevated. Take care that the legs are not bent at the knees and that they do not spread apart.

The purpose of inhaling at this time is to get the strength required to raise the legs with the added

leverage of the hands. Remain in this pose for a few seconds, holding in the breath, and bring the legs down slowly, breathing out. Repeat six times.

Benefits : The whole body will tingle, with the muscles and nerves pulled and stretched to the maximum. Unhealthy fat cannot survive this treatment. Fat accumulation is mainly caused by lack of exercise and rich food. Fat is an added strain on the heart as it has to pump blood fast enough to pass through the fat accumulation. The fat deposit also pulls down the stomach, and the diaphragm just above the intestines is unable to perform its duty of coaxing the organs to release their digestive juices by pressing them when the lungs expand. This makes matters worse as more and more fat accumulates on the stomach. It removes pain in the sacral and lumbar regions. The bladder and the prostate gland benefit.

For both fatty and skinny men and women, Shalabhasana is a boon. In the former, the unnecessary fat is removed; in the latter, the stomach muscles are massaged and made to work properly, making them absorb whatever is eaten. Both types become healthy with a good appetite and a bounce in their work.

Note: Those who have heart complaints, appendicitis or hernia, and pregnant women should avoid this pose.

OBESITY

The usual places where fat accumulates are the stomach, breast, arms, thighs, chin and back. There

is no age bar for this malady. Fat deposits make walking, sitting, getting up and even lying down a problem for these people. The victim puffs and pants; stooping and running are out of the question. And the vicious circle works relentlessly; the overgrown body hates exertion and this helps further fat accumulation.

The main causes for obesity are: wrong types of food (e.g., a desk job and oil-rich food do not mix, as the energy consumed is not used up), lack of exercise, etc. The thyroid gland, too, can upset the digestive system: the food consumed is not converted into energy, and it turns into fat. Along with obesity, lethargy sets in.

Fasts and dieting alone are of no help in the battle against the bulge. The thyroid gland should be kept healthy for a trim body.

The bodily system is like a clock: if one wheel stops work, the others also down tools. If one organ is sick, the others are burdened with its work and are in turn affected.

The overburdened heart, unable to pump blood through the fat to all parts, soon weakens. This slackens the blood supply to different parts and they eventually sicken and die. The normal pulse rate is 60 to 80 times a minute at rest, but it becomes erratic and the blood takes more than the normal time to travel all through the body after leaving the heart and return to it.

Some ailments that are the direct result of obesity are varicose veins, backache, rheumatism and arthritis, hernia, diabetes and heart trouble.

7

DHANURASANA

(Plate 4)

There are not a few whose chief pleasure in life is eating. They go on munching all the time and expect the digestive system inside to do its job round the clock. The stomach organs, obedient servants that they are, do their duty, though grudgingly.

Soon comes a time when they break down, and the result is stomach ache, headache, indigestion, constipation, and even something worse. Let us understand the reason for their strike: it takes the organs three to six hours of undisturbed work to handle the food eaten, depending on the size of the meal. After this work, they do need some rest. Only then are they ready for fresh work.

When food is not properly digested, it leads to poisoning of the whole body as the putrefying substance within gets into the blood stream. Bad breath results. No amount of brushing the teeth alone will help. The cure is in removing the waste from the stomach. Dhanurasana is the servant who literally bends backward to remove the accumulated waste and fat from the stomach.

How to do : Lie flat on the stomach, keep the legs close to each other and with the hands catch hold of the ankles and pull, bending the spine and throwing the head back. Now only the abdomen will touch the ground. Stay in this position for a few seconds, and repeat six times. This is the first stage.

The second stage is to rock backward and forward like a toy horse or a rocking chair. Breathe out when coming forward. The third stage is to rock sideways.

Benefits : The stomach muscles and organs, like the small and large intestines, the liver, the spleen, the kidneys and the pancreas, are massaged and fresh blood is supplied to them. The accumulated waste and fat are removed. Gastric juices are secreted profusely, and indigestion and constipation disappear. Urinary and other diseases are also cured as the bladder, uterus, rectum and the procreative organs are rejuvenated. Piles disappear as the rectum is cleaned out.

Those who have to sit bending at the table or spend long hours in the kitchen, and consequently suffer from backache, get relief.

Note : Those who have stomach ulcers or hernia and pregnant women should not practise Dhanurasana.

DIABETES

This ailment, considered hereditary, can afflict persons of any age, though mainly those who are inactive. When the pancreas fail, the sugar gets into the blood stream in excess quantities.

The bigger part of the pancreas sends its secretion to the small intestine. The smaller part — which is very minute and is full of tiny tissues — secretes insulin directly into the blood. The conversion of starch into glucose is called carbohydrate metabolism. Glucose is converted into glycogen in the liver. The muscles retain this glycogen as a fuel for bodily purposes.

When the starch is not converted into such fuel, because of excess sugar intake or insufficient production of insulin by a diseased pancreas, it enters the blood stream. The kidneys are then unable to strain the excess sugar, and excrete it through the urine. Thus a vital ingredient of our food, carbohydrates, which runs the body dynamo, is wasted.

In a diabetic patient, the pancreas swell, the tissues die and insulin production stops. That is why insulin has to be injected daily in severe cases.

The problem with diabetes is that it manifests itself only after it is far advanced. The initial symptoms are unusual thirst, frequent urination in large quantities, lethargy, tiredness, loss of weight, roughness of the skin, constipation, carbuncles, easy pus formation in injuries, prevention of healing of wounds and cuts, damage to vision and loss of the power to ward off diseases.

Yoga asanas, especially Dhanurasana, inject new life into the pancreas and kidneys, and these parts resume their normal activities, if practised for a sufficiently long time.

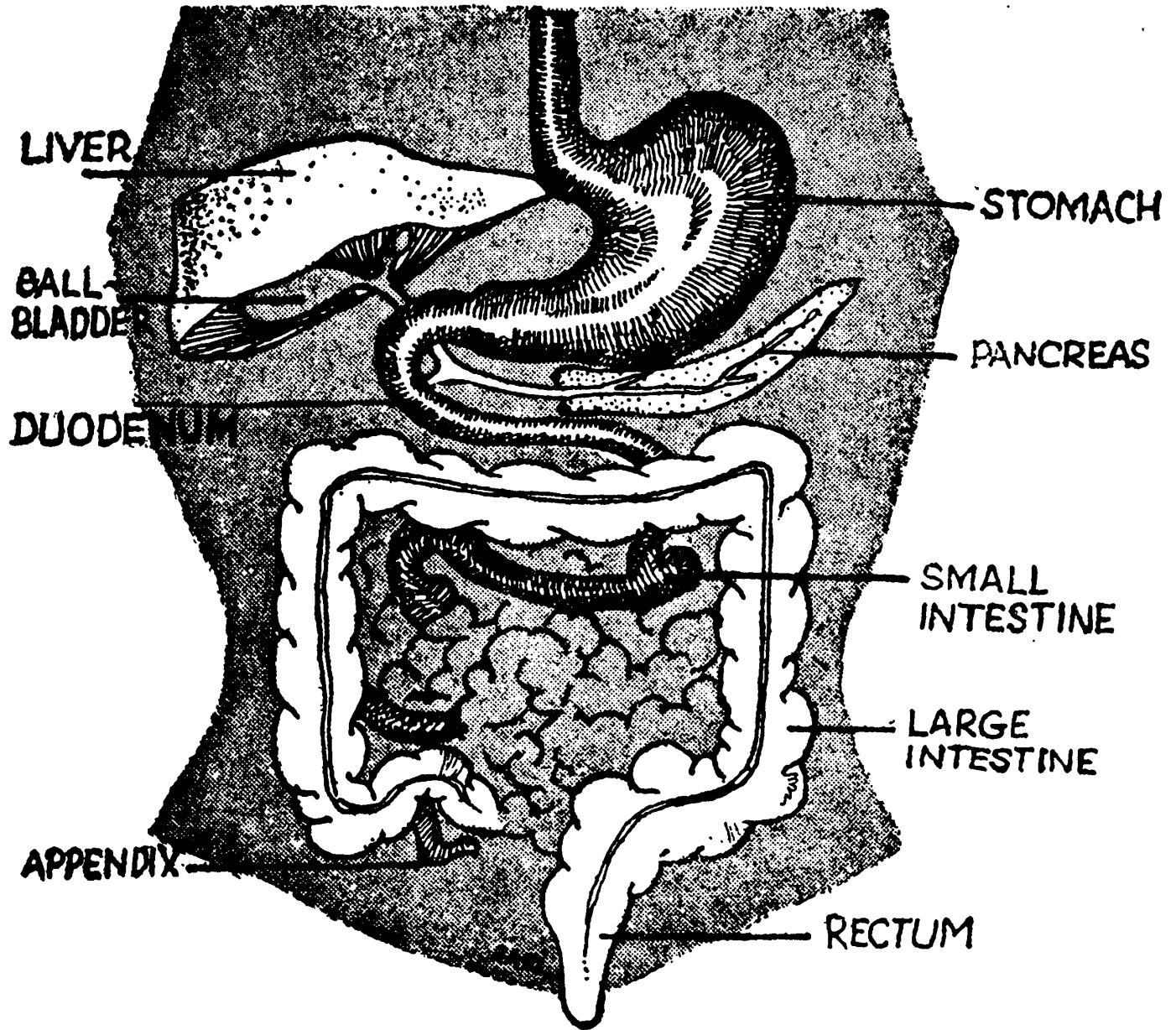


Fig. 3

The Digestive System

8

PASCHIMOTHANASANA — I

(Pate 5)

Bhujanga, Shalabha and Dhanur asanas concentrate on keeping the spine and the nerves passing through it in perfect health by bending them backward at the top, the bottom and the middle.

Many persons suffer from some stomach disorder or the other because of wrong food, bad eating habits, and lack of exercise. The answer to stomach ache, constipation, gas trouble, peptic ulcers, etc., is Paschimothanasana.

How to do : Lie on your back, with the arms stretched straight above the head. Keep the legs straight and close together.

Take a deep breath and raise the upper part of the body, with the arms still held in position, and bend forward to touch the toes with the hands. While bending forward, slowly breathe out. This is the first stage.

The second stage is to hold the toes (without bending the knees of course) and bring the head down between the knees. Now the arms will be bent, the elbows touching the ground on either side of the thighs.

Keep the pose as long as you can hold the breath out and come back to the supine position, slowly breathing in. The arms should be in position, now straight above the head. Repeat six times.

Do not exert to master the pose in a day, or your back will protest loudly. And do not plead that your legs are too long or your arms too short !

Benefits : Those who have a big paunch will soon find that by practising Paschimothanasana, the extra fat is dissolved and the body made trim. They will be able to touch their toes more easily then.

This does not mean that thin persons can do the asana with ease from the very beginning. Their spine may be like a stiff rod, not supple and flexible. After a few days, the spine will become supple and they will succeed.

The practitioner will gain a new zest and alertness as the nerves passing through the spinal cord get a fresh lease of life. A supple spine means youthfulness and vitality. Another advantage is that the pose rejuvenates the kidneys. The main function of the kidneys is to drain waste matter like uric acid, urea, sodium chloride and sulphate from inside the body. If the kidneys are inflamed or damaged as in nephritis, toxins will accumulate in the body, the blood will become impure, leading to headaches, nervous weaknesses, backache, palpitations of the heart, etc. Just as stones develop in the gall bladder, stones or gravel can form in the kidneys and bladder also.

The first six poses, and Sarvagasana, will do immense good in kidney problems.

Many women suffer from severe cramps during the periods. The pose is a boon for them. It also controls excess flow.

Note : Consult an expert if you have any abdominal problem. Pregnant women can practise up to two months.

THE LIVER

Of all the glands, the liver is by far the biggest. One of its many functions is the secretion of bile. In fact it is a veritable chemical factory, converting starch into glycogen and stocking it for future use.

Bile and the pancreatic juice mix in the small intestines, work on the food and help digestion. As the food reaches the intestine, the liver secretes the juice and, at other times, it stocks it in the gall bladder.

All unwanted poisonous elements from food rejected by the intestines reach the liver and this extraordinary organ destroys them and protects the body from harm. But too much of this poison affects even the liver and diseases like jaundice may result. A permanently bad stomach also affects the liver.

A sluggish liver means a sluggish digestive process, lack of appetite, lethargy. When the liver is stocked with glycogen, it does not fall sick so easily. That is why glucose is injected into a sick person.

The symptoms of a sick liver are yellowish eyes and skin, bloated stomach, loss of weight, a lifeless feeling and appearance.

A healthy thyroid rejuvenates the liver. Dhanurasana and Paschimothanasana help the liver to retain or gain health.

Thus we see that the main focus of Yoga asanas is on removing waste matter which, if retained, will inevitably affect the organs and finally the whole body.

9

PASCHIMOTHANASANA — II

JAUNDICE

Jaundice is a symptom of a diseased liver. As the liver is affected for various reasons (the most common being the drinking of polluted water), the bile produced in the liver joins the blood stream instead of going to the stomach to help digest food, especially fat.

The liver cells are destroyed by a virus which enters the body through polluted water and their function of removing bilirubin from the blood is affected. Bilirubin is a pigment produced by the breaking down of the haemoglobin in the red blood cells. That is why a jaundice patient has yellow tinted eyes and skin.

The symptoms are constipation, an itchy skin, a coated tongue with a sour taste, nausea, and pasty, whitish motions. The allopathic system seems to have no cure for jaundice, as it prescribes only rest and dieting.

Jaundice victims and other liver patients may practise Yoga asanas to their benefit, but without exerting themselves. Initially, Padmasana and Vipareethakarani should be practised. The wise thing to do is to practise asanas regularly so that the liver always remains healthy.

CONSTIPATION

Constipation, mainly caused by irregular and wrong food affects the large intestine, as waste accumulates there after digestion. This rotting mass oozes out toxins which are sucked into the blood stream, affecting the whole bodily system, just as a mounting garbage dump can affect the health of a whole community.

Headaches, lack of appetite, a coated tongue, appendicitis, lack of sleep, weak nerves, rheumatism, even TB, blood pressure, jaundice and piles are the result. Just as constipation can cause fever, fever too can lead to constipation.

The part called caecum, where the large intestine begins, is most prone to be affected. And here is where the appendix is situated. Moreover, the walls of the caecum have the power to suck in fluids fast, including all poisons, from the clogged waste, and let them into the blood stream.

Most asanas help remove constipation.

PILEs

The main cause of this trouble is the damage to the lower end of the large intestine, the rectum, due to chronic constipation. So the remedy lies in removing this condition.

The blood vessels burst and blood comes out when pressure is applied to expel the waste material from the large intestine. This is bleeding piles. Sometimes so profuse is the flow of blood that it creates alarm in the sufferer. Because of this fear of blood

loss, the patient even shuns to answer nature's calls, thus unwittingly aggravating the situation.

After a prolonged period, corn-like eruptions cover the inside walls of the rectum, and it becomes a torture to evacuate.

As medicines do little to help, an operation is resorted to, with its consequent handicaps and after-effects. The remedy lies in proper food (minus chilly and tamarind and more vegetables and milk) and healthy habits like regular exercise, especially asanas, which help remove constipation and so help the piles.

STONES IN GALL BLADDER

Many diseases like tonsils, typhoid, appendicitis, etc., in turn affect the liver. Eating too much, consuming liquor frequently, excessive intake of drugs and such other habits also harm it.

The gall bladder is the pear-shaped reservoir for bile on the posterior of the liver. It needs rest like other organs. If we go on sending food down the gullet like feeding a flour mill, it tires out and weakens. Fatty food especially throws extra burden on these two organs for proper digestion.

Bile at times stops flowing properly, stagnates on the way and forms into small stones. Only surgery can help remove them as no medicine can dissolve these stones.

Sometimes germs attack the gall bladder and pus forms. The pain will be excruciating; gas, a burning sensation and cramps follow. In the early stages of stone formation, asanas can help.

10

HALASANA—I

(Plate 6)

The central nervous system is situated in the head and the vertebral column. Every major nerve passes through the spinal cord and every section of the body is thus controlled by the brain through the nervous system.

This will indicate how important it is to keep the backbone in a healthy and youthful condition. As the strings of a violin or a veena must be tuned properly to produce melodious music, as the bow must be bent properly to make the arrow go far and fast, so should the spinal cord be kept supple and flexible for healthy and long life.

Keeping the nerves alone in good condition is only part of the job. The ductless glands that control the whole bodily system should also be healthy. These glands, which can be contained in one's palm, secrete hormones which virtually control our lives. Without these hormones, man would not be man, neither physically nor mentally: he would be abnormal. (The dwarf you see in the circus is a victim of this.) The growth of man's brain and body is controlled by these hormones. They are called

ductless glands because they have no separate passages through which to send their secretions to the blood: these juices join the blood as it passes by.

The king of these glands is called the pituitary which is placed inside the brain. Its prime minister is the thyroid, situated near the vocal cords in the neck. There are also the stomach and pancreas producing the gastric juice and insulin respectively (though the former is not a ductless gland), and the adrenal glands, the secretions of which virtually control the functioning of the heart and other glands. The heart beats faster when you get a fright or a shock; this is because then the adrenals secrete more of the juice.

Then there are the testes and ovaries, which help in procreation; the salivary, whose enzyme-rich secretion helps digestion; the liver, the large red gland in the upper abdomen which secretes bile and purifies venous blood; the spleen; the kidneys, which remove nitrogenous matter from the blood stream.

Halasana not only helps to keep the nervous system tuned to good health, but it also invigorates the pituitary and thyroid glands. The pose is so called because it looks like a plough (*Hala*).

How to do : Lie on the back, arms stretched on both sides, with the palms facing down, and legs straight. Breathe in and raise the legs without bending them. This is the first stage. When they are straight up, start breathing out and take the legs above the head to touch the ground with the toes.

Stay thus as long as you can comfortably hold

out the breath and come back to the original position, breathing in. Repeat six times.

There are variations in the final stage to benefit the different parts of the spine. They are :

- (a) when the toes touch the ground, the knees should be above the nose;
- (b) the knees should be above the forehead; and
- (c) the toes should touch the ground as far away from the head as possible. In the last the chin will press the chest hard and the back will be bent to the maximum.

Do not try all variations by pushing the legs to the different stages in one attempt. Do them separately

Benefits : As the backbone is bent more and more in these various poses of Halasana, all parts of it and the nerves passing through the spinal cord will get stretched and toned up. Lassitude will disappear; zest and youthfulness will take its place. All parts of the body will get a fresh blood supply. As the adrenal flow is controlled, we will be able to control our feelings. It relieves stiff shoulders and elbows, lumbago, arthritis and gas. The pose helps reduce enlarged liver and spleen.

The thyroid and parathyroid glands are massaged when the chin is pressed against the chest and the glands will get plenty of blood supply as the flow is dammed there. A healthy thyroid ensures all-round good health.

Note: Pregnant women can continue Halasana up to three months.

11

HALASANA — II

NERVOUS TROUBLES

What a marvellous mechanism the body is! So fantastically complicated is its structure that even now, after so much progress has been made in medical science, we are not able to understand the intricate working of its many parts.

Take the nerves, for example: so different are the ways in which they control the many organs that it is a mystery how they work or what their functions are.

Nervous ailments have become quite common nowadays because of the fast, competitive, mechanical, unnatural life many people are forced to lead. Lack of exercise, good food and rest makes them tense, moody, irritable and easily excited.

In some cases, parts of the body start twitching on their own. Massage and medicines or psychiatric treatment do not provide a permanent cure for these ailments. These only act like the whip which goads a sulky donkey into temporary activity. But Yoga asanas properly stretch and nourish the nerves with fresh blood, keeping them in a healthy condition.

INSOMNIA

This is another problem progress of civilisation has bestowed on mankind. The main culprit for insomnia is a bad gall bladder. A person is as active, alert and intelligent as his gall bladder is healthy. If this organ is sluggish and sickly, he follows suit.

In such a case, all that one can do is to stretch oneself on the floor and fall into fitful sleep, no matter what time of day. During the wakeful hours, too, one will be yawning and thinking only of sleep.

When a student gets poor marks in the school tests, the blame may well be placed on his gall bladder and not on his IQ. For him, time spent in exercises that benefit the gall bladder than in attending coaching classes will be more profitable as the exercises will bring about a dramatic improvement in his studies.

Some mothers thrust food down the throat of their children in the fond hope of making them bonny and healthy. Instead of the babies growing into healthy ones, the overworked liver and gall bladder make them dullards, with enlarged livers and skinny limbs.

You may have noticed Granny massaging the stomach of your baby brother; it is to goad and coax the abdominal organs, especially the liver, into action. Babies also, on their own, rock on their stomach, thus naturally practising Dhanurasana and benefiting by it!

At the other extreme, there are persons whose problem is sleeplessness. Far from being dull, they

are bundles of activity, ever jumpy and watchful. This is another “disease” of the liver. Even at night, they will be seen rolling on the bed without getting a wink of sleep.

You have guessed the reason: an overactive gall bladder. Everyone needs eight hours of sleep up to the age of thirty. But those who suffer from insomnia are denied this rest.

Such persons should not lie down immediately after a meal when the gall bladder will be active. At least two hours should elapse before they go to bed.

Halasana and Mayurasana help in controlling the activities of the liver and the gall bladder. Sound sleep and alert thinking will be bestowed on the practitioner through their means.

(We can train our mind to act as an alarm clock to wake us up at any time we want; it is a question of controlling the mind).

12

MAYURASANA

(Plate 7)

The first five asanas we have learnt — Bhujanga, Shalaba, Dhanur, Pashimothana and Hala — help rejuvenate the organs in the abdomen and bring youthfulness to the spinal cord and the nervous system.

Mayurasana (*Mayur* : peacock) almost exclusively helps to massage the digestive organs. It also strengthens the muscles of the arms and shoulders and reduces fat in the abdomen.

In this pose, the whole pressure of the elbows goes to the abdomen which is squeezed hard to make it give out its gastric juices and thus facilitate digestion.

The duodenum, the gall bladder, the liver, the small intestine, etc., are shaken out of their lethargy. As the proper quantity of bile is produced, this helps the digestive process. Some people suffer from too much of bile. The normal supply is two to three teaspoonfuls a day. For them also this asana is a boon.

Sometimes small stones form in the gall bladder and the connecting canal because of the sluggish

flow of bile. As Mayurasana helps in the proper flow of bile, the stones are removed. Jaundice is prevented and more red corpuscles are produced to enrich the blood.

How to do : Sit with only the knees and toes touching the ground; place the palms reversely in between the knees, the little fingers touching each other and the forearms up to the elbows close together.

Breathe out and lean forward bringing the elbows close to the abdomen. At the same time, stretch the legs straight out and raise them off the ground.

Now the whole body will rest on the elbows parallel to the ground, looking like a peacock about to peck a grain off the ground.

Watch out: you may take a nosedive! Initially place a pillow under the face so that even if you tilt down, the face will be saved. Stay in this position for a few seconds, as long as you can hold out the breath. Repeat six times.

Benefits : This asana removes constipation completely as the large intestine is pressed hard. Because constipation can lead to headaches and a score of other maladies, they are also eliminated. A new liveliness is infused.

Those suffering from severe constipation can benefit by adding more roughage in their food, like bran, cereals, fruit and vegetable fibres, as it acts as a stimulant for evacuation.

Time was when a regular laxative for both elders and children was considered a "must," but it has

now been found that the laxatives do more harm than good as they dehydrate the walls of the intestines. It takes days for the intestines to become normal again, by which time another dose of laxatives descends. And this goes on, perhaps for life.

As we bend forward to bring the knees to the abdomen in Mayurasana, the nerves, the muscles of the neck and the backbone are stretched. In this process, the spinal column is refreshed. More blood flows to the stomach and upper portions of the body. Fat disappears from the shoulders, arms, abdomen and thighs.

Note: Hernia patients and those who have abdominal disorders and pregnant women should not practise this pose.

ANAEMIA

The very first thing the doctor does, whatever your complaint, is to pull the eyelids down and peer into the eyes. Does he expect to read your health problem in your eyes?

Exactly. The eyes tell the state of your health. A pale, wan, watered-down eye means you are anaemic, lacking sufficient rich blood. The skin also will be pale owing to the depletion of red corpuscles. The doctor may prescribe some liver tonic or iron tablets, but your system may lack the power even to absorb these prescriptions.

The food we eat supplies the body's energy needs in the form of blood. Tissues, bone marrow, bones and muscles grow with the help of blood. Dead

tissues and carbon dioxide are carried away by the blood to be thrown out by the lungs and the waste materials excreted from the body by the kidneys.

One-twentieth of the body weight is formed by blood; one-third of it consists of red and white corpuscles and 20 to 25 per cent plasma (salts, soda, phosphorus, fat, acids, oxygen, albumin, etc.).

A drop of blood contains over five million red corpuscles; for every 500 of these, there is one white corpuscle, the soldier who fights marauding germs and bacteria.

When the essential ingredients decrease, one type of anaemia is the result. Other types are caused by damage to the liver, intestines, or shortage of certain vitamins and damage to the thyroid gland.

If the organs are capable of absorbing nutrients, healthy food is sufficient for the body; there would be no need for tonics. Asanas supply blood to the organs and keep them in trim. They help purify the body by producing the proper organic secretions as required for health.

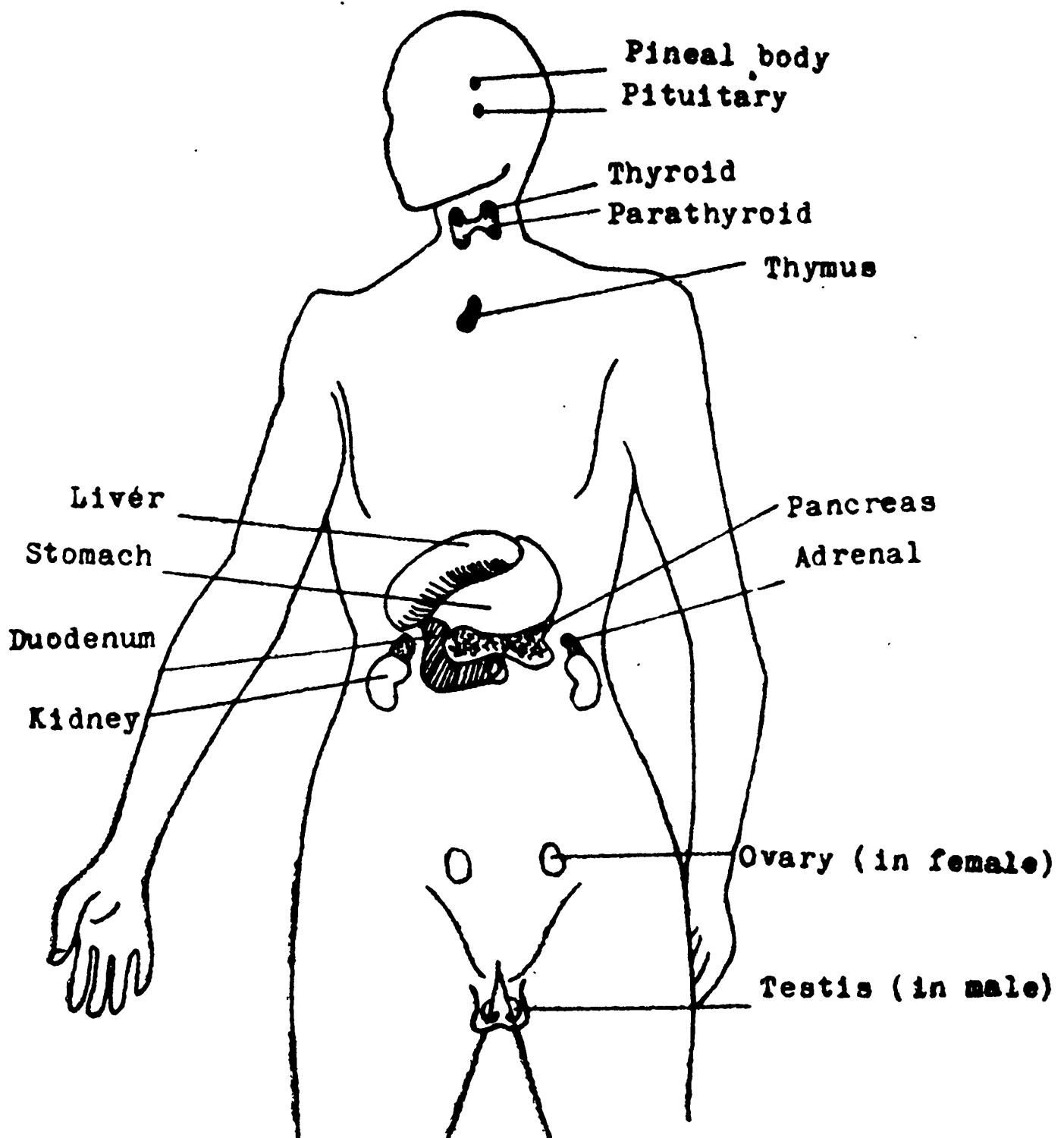


Fig. 4

Endocrinial and Other Glands.

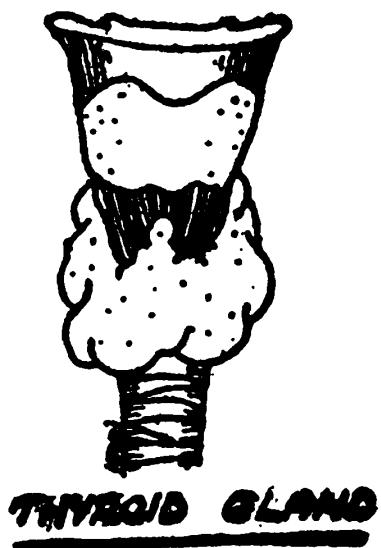
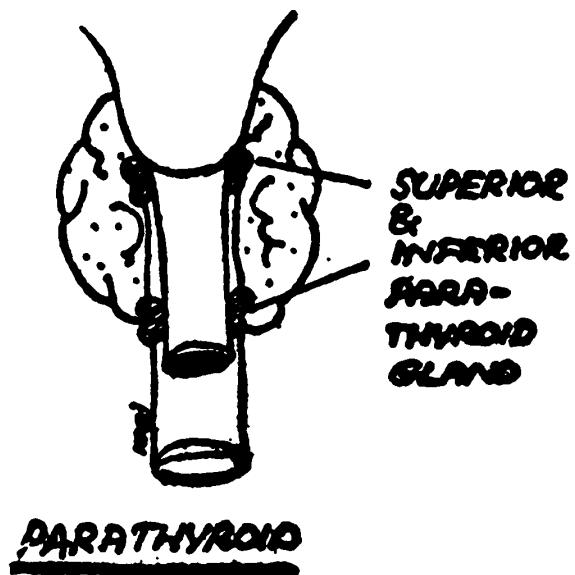
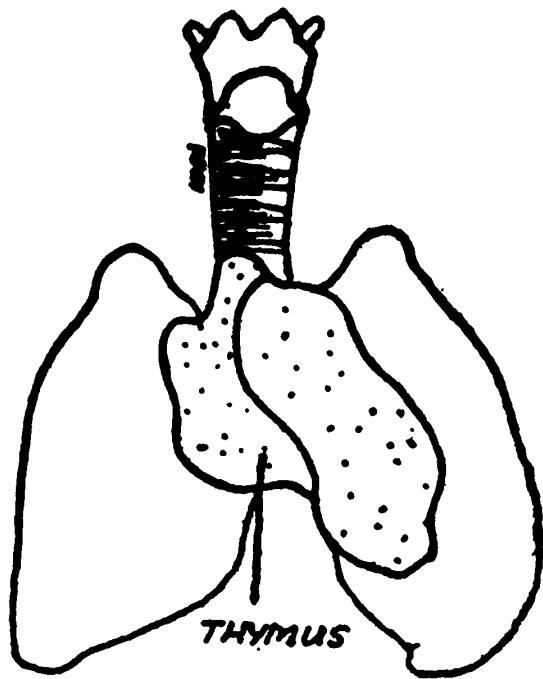


Fig. 5

The Ductless Glands

13

SARVANGASANA — I

GLANDS THAT GOVERN

It is a marvel that our ancestors in India, with no modern scientific aids, had known about the ductless glands, their extremely vital role in the bodily system, as also the ways to keep them healthy.

Nobody likes to grow old prematurely or fall ill, either physically or mentally. Though the human body is a marvellous mechanism, it is too prone to many diseases. Such an intricate machine is controlled and run by a handful of minute parts called ductless glands. These glands, as we saw when dealing with Halasana, secrete hormones without which the body will not work properly.

The chief ductless glands like the pituitary, the tiny pineal body, the thyroid and parathyroid, control the other endocrinal glands and other parts of the body. Though all these ductless glands are important for the proper running of the human machine, it is the thyroid which is very vital in fighting diseases and decay. It ensures growth and repair (anabolism) and energy formation (catabolism). It is so powerful that if it is removed the person will die a painful death, and if it does not function properly, man will not be man.

You may have seen dwarfs acting as clowns in a circus: we laugh at them, though they have nothing to be merry about in life. They are the victims of pituitary and thyroid malfunctioning. In some the body refuses to grow, in others the mind: they remain like a child, physically and mentally. Sex characteristics are also determined by these glands.

The thyroid gland, which has the power to bestow longevity and youthfulness, secretes its hormone straight into the blood stream. This hormone strengthens the blood corpuscles to fight off diseases and delay the process of ageing.

THYMUS FUNCTIONING

The ductless glands function in different ways and at different stages of a person's life. Some work from birth to death; some, like the thymus, only during the early years; and some during youth.

The thymus, a two-lobed ductless gland, is situated in the cavity of the chest just above the heart. As the child grows up, this gland's role decreases, and soon its work is taken over by the thyroid.

It is the thymus gland which prevents many of the diseases to which children are prone. It is like a guardian who looks after the welfare and growth of the developing child.

At times the thymus continues to be active even after the child has grown up, and this prevents the thyroid from functioning properly. Complications arise, and the person acts like a child.

Then there are children whose heads keep rolling, or who cannot check the flow of saliva or control the movements of their limbs, though outwardly they look almost normal. Here again it is the thymus malfunctioning.

For such persons, the answer lies in Sarvangasana. And the result will be a startling change within weeks.

POLIO

Some unfortunate children are incapacitated for life by polio. Even such cases, given up by the medical profession, have benefited by the practice of Sarvangasana with help from Yoga experts. They will regain quite a lot of their lost physical abilities.

This is no magic. The high fever during a polio attack affects the spine. Doing Sarvangasana, the thyroid is nourished, which strengthens the muscles and nerves, restoring life to the affected limbs.

The diseases that afflict us can be divided into three categories :

- those which we invite by carelessness: stomach ailments, some kinds of fevers and headaches;
- germ-carried diseases, like TB, leprosy, etc., especially while living in crowded localities;
- inherited ones like asthma, diabetes, hypertension, etc.

If we keep our body strong, we can not only prevent but also cure all these types of ailments by regular practice of Yogic exercises.

14

SARVANGASANA — II

(Plate 8)

The asanas we have learnt so far are mainly intended to keep the spinal cord supple and to maintain the internal organs of the abdomen in a healthy condition.

We will now learn a topsy-turvy pose, Sarvanga-asana, so called because it “affects” all parts of the body.

The Yogi who thought of this pose has chosen a method as simple as it is potent: he has just allowed gravitation to work wonders in the body. But instead of allowing the blood to rush to the head, he put a block at the neck, damming the flow and flooding the area with oxygen-rich blood. And this is where the vital gland, thyroid, is situated.

As we grow older, the heart becomes weaker and the blood vessels become narrower. The result is that the very important parts above the heart do not get a sufficient supply of blood, and the heart has to work harder, which further weakens it.

If the thyroid is starved of proper nourishment, its vital secretion is denied to the body and decay starts. By doing Sarvangasana, not only does more

blood flow to the upper parts of the body, but the heart also gets a much-needed rest from overwork. Again, a strong thyroid means a strong heart. These two parts collaborate in this pose to the immense advantage of the whole body.

How to do : Lie flat on a piece of soft cloth with the arms placed along the body. Hold the breath and raise the legs as in Halasana.

When the legs are at an angle of 45° above the body, support the back with the hands. Keep the legs straight up, but not stiff. The hands should hold the back as far down as possible, so that from the shoulders up, the body, hips and legs are vertically in a straight line. The chin should be pressed against the chest (*jalandra bandha*), but do not open the mouth. Breathe normally and relax during the whole pose.

Stay in the asana for a minute initially and come down slowly with the palms sliding along the body and easing it down. Gradually the time should be increased to five and then to ten minutes. Do not cough, sneeze or swallow the saliva, as this will pressurise the blood-congested area in the neck while in the upright pose.

Do not attempt to be perfect in the early stages itself as this will create unnecessary body strain and tension. Even if the pose is not perfect, the result will anyhow be the same: pure blood from the heart will flow straight to the thyroid gland.

Benefits: The white corpuscles which guard the body from bacterial and viral invaders will be pack-

ed with fighting power by a healthy thyroid. This is the secret of Sarvangasana's preventive and curative power against all diseases. It is the answer to breathlessness, palpitation, frayed nerves, tension, low vitality, varicose veins, premature ageing, etc.

The pose also increases the benefits derived from doing other poses.

Note: Pregnant women can continue Sarvangasana up to three months. Avoid in case of severe ear pain or headache. Consult a Yoga specialist in cases of high blood pressure, cardiac disorders, etc.

Now let us take up some of the common ailments and see how Sarvangasana helps to cure them.

TONSILLITIS

This infection of the throat affects almost every child living in congested and polluted areas, and many adults too. The two marbles-like fleshy parts on either side of the throat swell. When the tonsils turn septic, the patient will not be able to swallow, there will be fever and the body will become weak.

The tonsils are the gate-keepers which check the entry of grams. In children, these tonsils are very active in fighting any unwanted and harmful matter introduced from outside.

During the work of preventing harmful material getting into the body, the tonsils themselves are affected. Germs attack them and pus forms. Also, when the body is subjected to sudden severe cold or heat, the tonsils are affected.

When the body loses its power to ward off infection, almost the first victim in a child is this part in the throat. The remedy lies in building up the bodily resistance to diseases through Yoga asanas, especially Sarvangasana and Matsyasana. There is plenty of iodine in the thyroid hormone.

By practising Sarvangasana, tonsillitis can be avoided.

15

SARVANGASANA — III

ADENOIDITIS AND GOITRE

Adenoiditis attacks the junction where the inside of the nose and the mouth meet. The nose will be blocked and the ears will be affected. Prolonged attacks on the adenoids will cause deafness.

A sick thyroid can lead to many other diseases. Some persons may develop small swellings around the neck. In others, a big one may develop on one side of the neck. These goitres, apart from marring one's appearance, lead to frequent fever and loss of appetite. Iodine deficiency is one of the main causes of goitre, which is enlargement of thyroid. It can also sometimes become malignant.

The medical cure for goitre is ultraviolet rays which stimulate the thyroid. But this is a long drawn out treatment and not easily accessible to all. Neck exercises and iodine intake are also prescribed, but exercises can be a painful process. Adenoiditis stunts growth—both physical and intellectual. Lethargy sets in and the brain refuses to work. Sarvangasana can be practised to advantage for both adenoiditis and goitre.

FILARIASIS AND RHEUMATISM

Filariasis is spread by a micro-organism, especially by water in certain areas. Fever is common, and with it the legs will become swollen and heavy. Sometimes the hands are also affected. Sarvanga-asana will help, especially in the initial stages.

Rheumatism is supposed to be a hereditary affliction. Yet, it affects others also, especially after the age of forty.

The thyroid has a direct control over the kidneys which filter the waste and poisonous matter from the blood before it flows into the heart. When the kidneys fail, the blood becomes impure. This impurity collects in the knees and ankles, leading to rheumatism and arthritis.

Sarvangasana rejuvenates the thyroid which in turn strengthens the kidneys. Also, as the legs are raised in this pose, the impurities collected in them drain down and are filtered out by the invigorated kidneys.

LEPROSY

India has the largest number of leprosy patients. Surveys show that many children in schools too are victims of this dreaded affliction.

The disease starts with red or white patches on some parts of the body. These areas are less sensitive than the others. In the second stage, the skin, especially around the ears, nose and lips, thickens and folds develop. Small eruptions become visible

all over the body and the nerves swell up. There is frequent fever.

In the third stage, cracks develop and become ulcerous. Limbs are eaten away and they become mere stumps.

There are reports of Yoga asanas, especially Sarvangasana, helping in the initial stages. But this has yet to be confirmed.

APPENDICITIS

The main cause of this very common disease, or the function of the appendix, is not yet established. The blind finger-like organ at the beginning of the large intestine becomes swollen and filled with rotting food remains. There will be severe pain in the abdomen. Constipation always accompanies this ailment. One cause may be the eating of unhealthy and untimely food. Very soon, eating itself becomes a nightmare.

If the affected appendix bursts and lets out the poisonous pus into the body cavity, life itself is endangered. As medicines are of little help, surgery is resorted to. As the function of the organ itself has not yet been established, it is removed without qualms.

Here again, asanas help as they remove the probable root cause — constipation. In Sarvangasana, the principle of gravity works, bringing the stagnating food material out of the appendix. An invigorated thyroid rejuvenates the stomach organs, and within fifteen days or so the disease disappears.

16

SARVANGASANA — IV

PYORRHOEA

Pyo in Greek means pus. Pyorrhoea in a disease in which the gums start discharging blood and pus and loosen the teeth. The teeth should be used to bite, chew and masticate the food; but, though provided with all the equipment for the proper intake and digestion of food, seldom do we use them properly, and thus pay for this neglect in the form of tooth-ache and tooth decay.

Not many are aware that practically half the digestion is completed in the mouth itself where saliva is secreted profusely when food is masticated well. But, being in a rush, few persons spare enough time for a meal. Thus, teeth, for all the work they do, may as well not exist, and they soon suffer from lack of care and proper use.

To prevent this happening, Grandma used to make "chaklis" and other hard eatables so that we were forced to use the teeth to break and chew them. This also reduced the work of the stomach.

Along with exercises, the teeth need to be kept clean. Despite all advice, we care not to brush our teeth morning and at night. The result: an aching tooth, and by and by a new set to smile with !

The chocolates, ice-creams and other sweets we like so much are the worst enemies of our teeth as they attack the enamel coating, unless the mouth is washed immediately after eating them. With a little care, our teeth can be made to serve us for a lifetime — for they are made by nature to last, not decay.

Children should be taught not only to brush the teeth but to massage the gums as well. This brings the required blood flow to them, strengthening the roots and ensuring the even growth of the teeth as the child grows older.

Use of tobacco in different forms discolours and weakens the teeth. On the other hand, we reject vitamin B-rich grains as not tasty enough, such as unpolished rice and brown bread.

Pyorrhoea is caused by left-overs rotting in the crevices of the teeth. Germs and pus eat into the gums and weaken the roots. A good brush with neem or other germicidal sticks will help.

Yoga asanas help the thyroid gland whose secretion fights the germs in the mouth. In the topsy turvy poses, fresh blood is supplied to the area, thus benefiting the teeth.

A survey shows that 95 per cent of the population suffers from tooth troubles : this is symptomatic of the general fall in health. The earlier generations possessed very good teeth even in their advanced years. The strength of our teeth is the barometer of the strength of our bones. The organ responsible for the proper growth of the bones is the parathyroid

gland. In the topsy-turvy poses, this gland is toned up.

While practising certain asanas, like Sirshasana, you may give exercise to the teeth by biting them hard repeatedly. You will be surprised to notice the number of muscles and nerves which are set in motion near the ears, eyes and forehead in doing so.

If we pay a little attention to cooking wisely, we may get a lot of calcium and minerals which are now thrown away while preparing vegetables. Tragically, to make up for this loss, we swallow capsules and pills to cure cough, TB, pigeon chest, bow legs, skin eruptions, weak eyesight, indigestion and, of course, tooth decay. It would be ideal if vegetables are boiled and the water retained, and not cooked on the fire or fried. This is the most natural way of getting sufficient calcium for good health.

A bad tooth can lead to headache, ear and eye troubles, indigestion, stomach ache, fever, etc., for it is the repository of harmful germs.

17

SARVANGASANA — V

COLDS

The common cold is the most widespread of ailments which afflict man. Yet science has not succeeded in discovering a way to prevent or cure it.

Some persons are never free of this malady, whatever the weather. They have a blocked nose and congested throat and chest. This leads to sinus trouble in severe cases and results in a running nose, headache, throat irritation, ear ache, body pains, phlegm in the throat, etc.

If neglected, a cold can lead to more severe diseases like fever, sinus infection, asthma and even TB. Colds are caused when the delicate mucous membranes in the interior of the nose which secrete mucus are attacked by viruses or the body is affected by heat or cold. This sweat-like secretion and the hair in the nose are meant to filter out impurities from the air we breathe in. When affected, these membranes secrete more liquid than normal, which then runs down the nose.

Many take hot drinks to cure a cold. These drinks only help remove the accumulated mucus in the throat, thereby giving temporary relief, but no cure.

The main protection against colds is the development of resistance power. This is achieved by the regular practice of asanas, especially Sarvangasana and Sirshasana. Pranayama (deep breathing) will ensure the intake of plenty of oxygen which will fight any bacterial or virus infection.

PEPTIC ULCERS

Because of bad eating habits and, worse still, the wrong foods consumed, the power of the intestines to do their duty—digestion of food and absorption of nutrients—diminishes. Bad nerves, tension and worry also do not help the intestines in their task.

Hot acidic food corrodes the stomach walls and turns the gastric juice itself into acid. The intestines are very long—twenty-seven feet—and a part of them can be affected by ulcers, but mostly the mouth, the esophagus, the stomach and the duodenum are the main targets. Good food habits and healthy intestines will help cure ulcers. A bland, non-spicy diet is strictly advised.

GAS IN THE STOMACH

When, due to gas formation, the intestines bloat, the food and waste material stagnate and start giving pain in the stomach. Through food, eggs of worms may also get into the intestines and the worms start proliferating. This can lead to severe pain. The sufferer becomes thin, as all the nourishment is eaten away by the worms.

The main cause of gas formation is the damage to the stomach and the intestines. Starchy and

sugary foods and pulses which do not digest easily, and roots like yam should be avoided. Sarvangasana will greatly help.

HERNIA

The intestines can sag because of a rupture or weakness of the supporting muscles. At times they even protrude into the male sac, causing unbearable pain. The main cause is, of course, gravitation, and hernia can develop quite suddenly.

When the intestines are not in position, food and digested matter do not move and evacuate properly. This stagnation manifests itself in indigestion and constipation, leading to severe pain.

Operation is resorted to for ruptures, but in many cases the trouble recurs. Asanas will help, but poses which exert further pressure on the abdomen should be avoided as they will only aggravate matters.

The main asanas that will help are Vipareethakarani and after a few weeks' practice of this, Sarvangasana and Sirshasana. These being topsy-turvy poses will bring the intestines to their correct position through gravitation.

After some months, Bhujangasana, Paschimothanasana and Halasana may be added. They will tone up the general health and strengthen the abdominal walls, and also reduce unwanted fat in the stomach region and round the waist.

18

SARVANGASANA — VI

BLOOD PRESSURE

High blood pressure and heart trouble have fast caught up with tuberculosis for the top position as the No. 1 killer. The fast life we lead, the severe competition in all walks of life, the fight to make ends meet, all these go to make life full of tension and worries, with the result, even comparatively young persons are not spared.

Add to this the nutritionally poor food we have to eat, the number of cups of coffee or tea we gulp down and the cigarettes we smoke, altogether the unnatural life we lead, there is reason for even the toughest of organs, the heart, to grumble and finally give in.

One function of the heart is to pump oxygen-purified blood coming from the lungs to all parts of the body. The valves in the heart open and close and the blood vessels contract and expand to facilitate the smooth flow of blood.

From birth till death, the fist-size heart must go on working, pumping blood to all parts of the body. The heart has four sections. The impure blood comes via the vena cavae to the first section

and on to the second from where it is sent to the lungs for a fresh supply of oxygen and removal of the carbon dioxide. From here, the blood goes back to the other two sections of the heart and through the aorta to the different parts of the body.

The force exerted in the vessels is called blood pressure. There are periods of contraction, especially of the ventricles (systolic), and dilation (diastolic). In a normal young person, the pressure is about 120/80. (Half the age of the person plus 100 is the normal systolic blood pressure.) It will be much higher in a high blood pressure patient.

The heart is controlled by the thyroid and adrenal glands. When you get a sudden start, have you noticed the heart beating faster? It is because the pair of adrenal glands, situated above the kidneys, secrete more and this hormone makes the heart beat faster. In heart patients, the blood flow decreases more and more, and the symptoms are tiredness, headaches, giddiness, sudden bouts of bad temper, etc.

Accumulation of fat is not good for the heart as it has to work harder to pump the blood to areas covered by the fat. Again, fat congeals in the blood vessels and prevents the free flow of blood.

After the age of forty, the heart's size (of about one's fist), weight, speed, etc., tend to become reduced and the blood vessels also become constricted, affecting blood supply to the different parts, especially those above the neck. Age becomes apparent, accompanied by forgetfulness, tiredness, bad temper,

nervous exhaustion, palpitation, etc. The hair turns grey and even falls, eyesight and hearing are impaired, lines develop on the face and teeth fall out and the taste buds are affected. It is then the heart needs strengthening by proper exercise and rest, so that normal blood supply can be ensured to the different organs.

Blood must flow freely and get purified of carbon dioxide in the lungs and of unwanted salts in the kidneys. Only then will fat not accumulate. The thyroid should be healthy for the kidneys to work properly. Thus, all these vital organs are interconnected. For the lungs to be strong and healthy, Sarvangasana and other asanas should be practised.

In severe heart conditions, the patient should not attempt a Yogic cure on his own but consult an expert and his doctor. The cause of blood pressure differs from patient to patient. Those who suffer from obesity should avoid rich, fatty food and the daily calorie intake should not exceed 1,500.

Apart from reducing fat and the cholesterol content, which thickens the arterial wall and obstructs blood flow, Yoga asanas help bring a mental equilibrium, thus ridding the patient of tension and unnecessary worries. Shavasana, the rest pose, helps in this process very much.

19

SARVANGASANA — VII

ASTHMA

One of the major ailments afflicting mankind is asthma. It is an allergic condition leading to broncho-spasms. It is believed to run in the family.

During an attack, the patient suffers agonies : he pants, wheezes, coughs, expectorates — all for a litre of oxygen which cannot pass through the air passages constricted by swelling and sputum.

Such attacks alternate with symptom-free periods. There is practically nothing that cannot trigger an attack: hot, cold or wet weather, pollen or dust (that is why many get an attack when they go to bed, triggered by the dust from the pillow), everything and anything.

Sunshine, plain cold water for bathing or drinking, flowers, fruits, vegetables, even milk, may be taboo. The body becomes weak, unable to stand any kind of exertion. Even taking a rest or sleeping becomes impossible and the nights are spent sitting in a corner because the "attack" may come if the patient lies down. Even excessive emotions can be dangerous.

Drugs there are aplenty for asthma, but they give only temporary relief, if at all. The constricted air

passages are dilated, but once the effect of the drug wanes, the attack starts again. Thus, it becomes a life-long agony.

Asthma is not a disease that it can be cured: it is the reaction of the body to certain foreign matters. The answer lies in strengthening the system by practising Yoga asanas. Experiments conducted by many Yoga institutes have shown that asanas can help those with a prolonged history of asthma.

The main ingredients of most asthma drugs are the hormones of the pituitary and adrenal glands. These hormones work on the blocked bronchioles and bring temporary relief. When a well dries up, the accumulated mud is removed so as to open up the springs. Similarly, the dried up glands in the body should be infused with new life so that they will produce the necessary hormones to fight off asthmatic attacks. Just as a healthy pancreas prevents diabetes, healthy pituitary and adrenal glands will help ward off asthma.

So automatic is the function of breathing that we have come to neglect it. The lungs are like sacs which fill and empty at every breath. The chest expands and contracts to facilitate the intake and expulsion of more air. The greater the expansion, the more oxygen for the body. The diaphragm, which separates the lungs from the abdomen, also puts pressure on the lungs to empty the unwanted air.

The lungs are made up of small air tubes called bronchial tubes which end in air sacs. They are

covered with tiny blood vessels which suck in oxygen and let out carbon dioxide.

Unlike the heart whose beats cannot be controlled, the air intake can be controlled. Thus we see how important it is to have a broad chest for the intake of more air. Unfortunately, many develop a stoop of the shoulders and sport narrow chests.

The main Yogic exercises that will help asthma patients are Sarvangasana, Matsyasana, Vipareethakarani and Pranayama. These, apart from increasing the bodily resistance to diseases by strengthening the thyroid and pituitary glands, also supply more oxygen to help fight the bacteria which proliferate and congest the lungs and air passages, and rejuvenate the nerves which control breathing.

20

SARVANGASANA — VIII

SKIN DISEASES

Because of the poor sanitary conditions both in the urban and rural areas of the country, skin problems have become widespread. Eczema, allergy of different types, dry skin, eruptions of many kinds, leukoderma, etc., can be seen affecting almost every person at some time or other because of the increasing pollution, poor water supply and exploding crowds in the large cities.

Some suffer from dandruff so much that the hair falls out, revealing an angry red pate.

These are "minor" problems compared to some "major" ones in which drugs seem to have no effect, though some medicines do keep the disease in check as long as they are continued to be taken.

Skin diseases are not merely skin deep! They are manifestations of deeper maladies inside the body, the result of impure blood, and lack of vitamin A (which we wash away from our food even before we overcook it and thus kill whatever is left along with other vitamins).

The cure for skin afflictions lies in strengthening the vital glands like the pituitary and the thyroid

whose secretions act like powerful germicides. The kidneys also must properly filter out the impurities and poisons from the system. More oxygen should be supplied to the body by practising Pranayama so that the blood is purified to its maximum capacity.

ECZEMA

Eczema may be due to an allergy or a virus infection of the skin. But the victim suffers untold misery. The itching is so severe that sometimes the skin itself is ruptured and blood oozes out. Soon it turns septic and fever follows.

The kidneys filter out the impurities in the blood and pass them out as urine. (Urine is 95 per cent water and 5 per cent urea, uric acid, sodium chloride, sulphates, oxalates, etc.) Apart from the thyroid and pituitary, the pancreas and the liver also help in the proper functioning of the kidneys. These organs are helped by the practice of Yoga asanas.

RING-WORM

A very contagious skin ailment, this affects the scalp or other parts, especially the loins where clothes are worn tightly, as by women. The towels, dresses, bed, utensils, etc., used by the victims should not be used by others without proper sterilisation.

Itching will be unbearable and the affected parts will ooze out a watery substance. Less salt in the diet will help reduce the itching. The main asanas which will help are the first six poses we learnt as

also Sarvangasana, Matsyasana, Sirshasana and Pranayama exercises.

LEUKODERMA

The body loses the power of pigmentation and the skin turns white in patches. There seems to be no cure for this medically. More and more, especially among children, are falling victims to this skin problem. All asanas and Pranayama may help to a very slight degree.

SEXUAL DISEASES

The incidence of sexual diseases, STD (socially transmitted diseases as they are now politely called), is assuming alarming proportions, especially among the urban young. There are two major types — syphilis and gonorrhoea. Usually these contagious diseases are transmitted by germs during sexual contact with an afflicted person.

Because of the stigma and shame attached to them, the victims usually hesitate to consult a doctor in time and thus give free rein to the disease to spread not only in themselves but also to others. Worse, innocent children born to them carry on the "sins" of their parents.

Syphilis is a disease which can affect at a later stage any part of the body, like the eyes, the brain, the nerves, etc. In the initial stages, the disease can be checked by medicines, but Yoga asanas will help even in advanced cases when medicines may be helpless.

21

SARVANGASANA — IX

EPILEPTIC FITS

This is another disease for which the medical science has not yet found a cure, because the very reason why fits occur has not been established. One reason is believed to be abnormal activity of the brain cells. Apart from this, mental afflictions, brain diseases because of growths, irritation of the nerves or their damage, syphilis, etc., may be the causes that trigger fits.

The main symptoms are very perceptible — the limbs become stiff at the time of an attack, the patient bites his tongue (that is why a pencil is inserted between the teeth to prevent damage to the tongue), the eyeballs roll into the sockets, foam forms in the mouth, the patient falls to the ground and writhes with a hoarse cry and finally goes into a fitful slumber, which at times ends fatally.

Patients subject to fits must be very careful in the presence of water and fire, as many are the cases of drowning and burns among these people. They are a hazard, too, not only to themselves but to others while working with machines or driving vehicles. They cannot stand hard work.

The parathyroid seems to have a connection with the disease. The metabolic changes triggered by food and climatic conditions may also produce extra secretion in the brain cells, causing fits.

All asanas may be practised, improving the general health of the patient. Thus, there will be better control over the limbs even when there is an attack. There will also be no "catches" or cramps in the limbs which are very common during an attack. Constipation and indigestion, which effect the metabolic changes, will be prevented. Continued practice of asanas will cure the malady or at least reduce the frequency of the fits.

HEADACHES

A common problem, a headache can be triggered by almost any other disease. In fact, it may be a symptom of a more serious malady to follow. It can also arise out of a habit, like the absence of the usual cup of coffee or a smoke.

A headache can affect a part of the head or the whole head. Most of the pills taken for a headache contain caffeine, a stimulant of the central nervous system, and aspirin which is a pain-killing drug, and they relieve the headache to a certain extent, but not fully. Such continuous drugging of the central nervous system will have less and less effect. Naturally the dosage has to be increased, with decreasing returns.

The solution to frequent headaches is a sound central nervous system. The poisonous substances

(some of them ironically from the drugs taken) which join the blood stream because of the malfunctioning of the abdominal organs, especially the kidneys, are removed with the help of healthy thyroid and parathyroid glands.

Some headaches may be due to lack of sleep. This in turn is caused by strained nerves. The tension should be relieved by regular Yoga asanas. As we have seen, healthy adrenalin glands ensure an end to insomnia.

But if the headache is acute and long-standing, it is better that some asanas, especially Sirshasana, are not practised as they may lead to complications. The proper thing to do is to practise other asanas, like Shavasana, strengthen the nervous system and then go on to the topsy-turvy poses.

FEMALE COMPLAINTS

Girls and women benefit a lot by practising Sarvagasana and Sirshasana. The vital stages every woman has to pass through are puberty, child bearing and menopause. In each of these, the ductless glands, especially the thyroid and pituitary, play a very crucial role. Unless the pituitary is healthy, the very first phase — puberty — will be affected. Puberty, which comes around the thirteenth year in this country, is delayed, and some do not reach it even after the eighteenth year. For them, as for even those who are childless, Yoga asanas will prove a boon.

During delivery, breast feeding, menopause, etc., etc., also, the glands have a decisive part to play.

By keeping them healthy, these stages can be crossed over without any problems and without dependence on drugs and injections.

Note: Before practising the topsy-turvy asanas, consult your physician or an expert in Yoga to ensure that they are safe for you in your condition. Women can practise all asanas and Pranayama. But during pregnancy, follow instructions given for each pose.

22

MATSYASANA — I

(Plate 9)

We learnt how to practise the king of asanas, Sarvangasana, which nourishes the thyroid, thereby bringing all-round good health. Now we learn a pose which supplements the benefits accrued from Sarvangasana. It is Matsyasana, the fish pose.

Fish have some extraordinary powers of absorbing and digesting germs and bacteria. They swallow filth and sputum, but seem to be immune to diseases. In fact, it is believed a wound will heal faster if a fish nibbles at it.

Matsyasana does not resemble a fish, but it has this power of endowing resistance to the body to diseases. Just as fish eat away rubbish and keep their living place, the water, clean, so does this pose help remove disease-producing germs and keep the body healthy.

How to do : Sit in Padmasana and lean back till you lie flat face up, with the Padmasana pose intact. The knees should touch the floor sideways.

With the help of the palms placed near the shoulders, bend back so that the chest arches up, with the head thrown back as far as possible. Now

the two ends of the arch will be the top of the head and the thighs in Padmasana.

Hold the toes with the hands, the elbows touching the floor. See that the knees do not leave the floor, ensuring the maximum expansion of the chest. Keep the mouth closed and breathe in hard through the nose till the lungs fill up and then breathe out equally hard. Repeat the breathing for one-fourth the time spent on Sarvangasana (that is, 1-1/4 minutes in Matsyasana for 5 minutes spent in Sarvangasana).

This pose is a counterpoise to Sarvangasana. Standing on the shoulders for five to ten minutes may give a slight backache, especially initially. In Matsyasana, the backbone is bent in the opposite direction, thus removing the ache.

There is a variation of this pose. Instead of pushing the head back and arching the backbone, the hands may be folded above the head. As in the earlier pose, breathe hard. This pulls and stretches the nerves, especially on both sides and the abdomen. The poses can be practised one after the other. The lungs are filled to the maximum in the first, the nerves and muscles are pulled hard in the second.

Benefits : Every neglected nook and corner of the lungs is expanded and the 200 million minute air sacs, called alveoli, filled with oxygen to increase their vital capacity. It tones up the circulatory and respiratory systems. The nerves are pulled taut. The chest broadens and the pigeon chest condition disappears.

As the blood gets fresh air in plenty, it is purified of carbon dioxide. TB, cough, asthma, bronchitis, sinus troubles tonsilitis, etc., disappear.

Matsyasana brings a new personality to the practitioner. No more walking and sitting with a stoop: he walks erect, with the shoulders thrown back and the head held high. It gives him a new confidence to face the many challenges of life.

Note: Women may continue to practise this pose up to five months of pregnancy.

PIGEON CHEST

The main causes of the pigeon chest condition are lack of calcium, proper exercise and nourishing food and also erratic ways of walking and sitting. No amount of calcium tablets alone will rectify it unless accompanied by regular exercise. After all, no medicine can straighten a bent bone, even though it may strengthen it.

Broadening of the chest is best achieved in Matsyasana. The body needs fresh air as well as light to renew the tissues by making the blood oxygen-rich. Fortunately for us, there is no need for sunbathing. However, in our ignorance, we tend to imitate the customs of dress which are unnecessary and uncomfortable in our climate.

On the other hand, we sweat and suffocate ourselves by overdressing with coats and ties, leading to stooping shoulders and a constricted chest. Contrast the beauty of a broad chest, covered with a thin shirt, with a narrow chest with padded shoulders. The latter presents a pathetic picture, coughing all the time.

23

MATSYASANA — II

TUBERCULOSIS

Diseases attack us from many fronts: air, food, water, physical contact, etc. One dreaded disease common among us is tuberculosis (TB). The TB bacilli us air as their vehicle to enter our body. The air exhaled by TB patients contains the bacilli which spread to other persons. The patients' sputum, the vessels used by them, especially in hotels, all carry these disease-producers.

There were more than six million persons suffering from this disease in our country in the last count. Nearly a tenth of them used to succumb to the disease every year. The increase in air pollution and crowded, unhygienic living conditions, incessant smoking, have all worsened matters, and the number is ever on the increase.

TB mainly attacks the lungs. Man can live without food for weeks, without water for a few days, but hardly four minutes without air. It is a vital part of the body, the lungs, handling this important life-sustaining commodity, which is affected by this disease.

But the disease also attacks other parts like bones, the heart, kidneys, intestines, liver, the lymphatic system, and even the brain. The infection is carried through the blood to the other organs from the primary site of attack.

Once they enter the body, the bacilli proliferate in the congenial climate of the system. The red corpuscles in the blood are their first victims. Later, they eat up all the surrounding parts. Also whatever the patient eats only goes to sustain the bacilli at the expense of the sufferer. This is why the disease is called *kshaya* (degeneration)

In the lungs, the bacilli occupy such nooks and corners where oxygen, their worst enemy, does not penetrate. The accumulated waste, carbon dioxide, which the body rejects after using the oxygen, provides a congenial colony for them. That is why the stress on always walking and sitting erect so that air will penetrate into all parts of the lungs.

A TB patient gets frequent fever, especially in the evenings; there will be incessant coughs and he will bring out sputum teeming with bacilli. There will be pain in the chest and he will feel breathless; he cannot do hard work and the body is wasted away, becoming thinner by the week.

No one likes to take medicines or injections for long. But a TB patient must take them if he hopes to keep the disease under check. Many a patient has ended his life unable to stand the agony. A permanent cure is possible through Matsyasana done along with some poses like Sarvangasana.

SMOKING

A harmful habit youth develop early in life is smoking. What is it that attracts them so much to "having a puff"? Despite all the statutory warnings, smoking has become "mod." Not only can it lead to TB but also to cancer of any part through which the smoke is inhaled.

Another nauseating habit among our people is blindly spitting anywhere and everywhere. They have no thought of the harm they do to others' health. Spit carries millions of germs. When dried by air and sun, they mix with the air which is breathed in by others.

This germ-ridden air also blows on food carelessly kept in the open not only on pavements but in hotels and homes. People eat this disease-carrying food and promptly fall ill.

Speaking of hotels, the condition of some, especially the place where the food is prepared, is beyond belief. The utensils are never properly washed, the food is handled by dirty people and the surroundings are far from a model of hygiene. But for millions, there is no choice but to eat in them.

It is this lack of social consciousness and unawareness of the need for cleanliness and duty to others which are the basic causes of the widespread incidence of many diseases among us.

The only practical solution to the problem is to strengthen our body to resist diseases.

24

SIRSHASANA – I

(Plate 10)

THE BRAIN

Each part of the body has its specific function to perform and all go to make a person perfect. But controlling all these parts, and literally presiding over them, is the head (*sir*) which contains the brain. The brain receives information and gives out instructions to the different organs through the nervous system.

A person may have physical perfection, beauty and strength, but may lack intelligence. Such a person is not of much use to himself or to society. On the other hand, a person may be repulsive to look at, but he may have a phenomenal brain. He wields authority and he is respected or feared.

He becomes a leader as he has a magnetic power which attracts people to him. Socrates, Christ, the Buddha, Ramakrishna, Paramahansa, Ramana Maharishi, Gandhi are remembered and revered not for their physical beauty and bodily strength but for their intellectual, spiritual and moral power.

The face reflects one's intelligence or lack of it, the traits of kindness or cruelty, determination or

vacillation, a happy state or agony. The brain is so powerful that one's personality, reactive ability and mental capability are projected on the face like a film on the screen.

Intelligence is like a magnet; the keener it is the better it can attract and influence others. It shines in the face like electricity through a bulb.

Memory, reasoning, speech are all controlled by the brain. But what is fantastic is its potential of growth — e.g., from the caveman to the space scientist. In both, the brain cells are the same.

Among all creations in the world, man rules supreme because of his superior intelligence, though some other animals have keener senses. The brain is a mass of tissues, weighing about 1.5 kg., intertwined with innumerable blood vessels. There are twelve pairs of cranial nerves, with a staggering 30,000 million neurons and ten times that number of glial cells. The brain is encased in the bony skull, as the heart is inside the rib cage. All parts of the body are connected to the various sections of the brain that control their activities through the nerves travelling through the spinal cord to the different parts. Just two per cent of the body weight, the brain requires twenty per cent of the oxygen and blood used up by the body as well as a steady supply of glucose. If oxygen is denied for even ten minutes, the brain cells die.

The brain reacts to situations lightning fast and averts possible damage to any part. At times, we become aware of the danger only after it has passed.

The brain is a big library recording all that we see, hear and feel, and an attic containing old mementoes of a lifetime. These memories, if properly docketed, come to our aid when we require them. This is done by directing the blood flow to that section where it is filed. This is called experience or knowledge.

These memories will remain fresh and clear only as long as they are used properly and the brain is kept alert and young. This is achieved by replenishing the brain with fresh healthy blood over and above what it gets normally and naturally.

This supplement is necessary because the normal supply decreases as we grow older and the heart is unable to fight gravitation to pump blood to the head. That is why old people have a short memory, are tired easily, their reactions are slow, and they have ever-deteriorating senses.

To decelerate this deterioration, called ageing, we must aid the natural process by means of proper exercise which will increase the blood supply and rejuvenate the brain, at the same time easing the burden on the heart. One such exercise is standing on one's head (Sirshasana) which keeps the brain youthful, healthy and alert even as we grow older at a slower pace.

25

SIRSHASANA — II

PITUITARY AND PINEAL BODIES

We have seen how gravitation is put to good use in Sarvangasana. In that pose, the blood is made to flow to the thyroid gland situated in the neck by blocking the flow with a chinlock.

In Sirshasana, the same method is adopted to make the blood flow freely to the head, where not only the nerves and the brain itself, but also the very vital ductless gland, the pituitary, and its subsidiary, the pineal body, are situated.

A pea-sized, half-gram giant, the pituitary hangs on a stem from the brain. Its all-important hormone works wonders or wrecks havoc on the body, conducts the endocrinal orchestra, taking orders from the hypothalamus. It regulates the production of hormones by other glands, while it produces only one-millionth of a gram daily. But this secretion is the most complex substance known to man.

The pituitary's thyrotropic hormone manages the thyroid gland. Its lipotropin controls the body's fat deposits, its vaso-pressin acts as a brake on the kidneys and its growth hormone helps form new tissues. In fact, almost all activity inside the body

seems to have some connection with this mystery gland. So vital are the pituitary and its smaller-sized minister, the pineal body, that the heart stops dead if they are removed.

Their malfunction would mean a person is a giant or a dwarf. They help in child delivery and in supplying a new mother with breast milk to feed her infant. They give manliness to man and feminine charm to woman. Sex changes are made possible by the administration of their hormones.

In a normal person, these glands remain in a healthy condition only up to forty-five years. By practising Sirshasana, their healthy life can be prolonged as they will get fresh blood supply which they so badly require. This, in turn, helps the bodily system as a whole as the glands control it, by themselves functioning properly

A tension-ridden brain may cause the hypothalamus, part of the fore-brain in the anterior part of the floor and adjacent walls of the third ventricle, to overstimulate the pituitary which in turn overworks the thyroid gland, driving the victim to death — or worse. A man is an imbecile, a moron, dull-witted, puffy-faced, obese or match-stick thin, jittery or nervous, because his thyroid has gone haywire.

Similarly, the main symptom of ageing is the hardening of the arteries as they become narrow and inelastic, reducing the blood flow into the kidneys. This decreases the cleaning process. Toxic

wastes pile up and sodium and potassium salts get out of balance. The immediate result is puffiness of face, nausea, blurred vision, weariness, etc.

Again, as we grow old, cartilages of childhood give place to hardened mineral substances in the skeletal framework. Accumulation of sedimentary mineral deposits makes the arteries inelastic, leading to arteriosclerosis. In the muscular system, inelasticity causes stiffness with loss of tone and pliancy, and the deformation of the spinal column interferes with nervous impulses. Degenerated air sacs in the lungs hinder oxygenation of the system; the atrophy of glands leads to lessening of preventive powers and potency for self-preservation, and the heart wears out, affecting blood circulation.

PARALYSIS

One of the most crippling diseases faced especially by elderly people is paralysis. The afflicted person loses control of some limbs or even a whole side of the body, and his life becomes a burden not only to himself but also to others. In some, paralysis strikes suddenly like a stroke, with severe headache, and the person soon loses consciousness. It becomes apparent before long that he has lost control of a part of his body. Sometimes fever precedes the actual stroke.

The main cause of this disease seems to be wrong, untimely, excessive food, especially of dal. Dal is a nourishing food item, but within limits.

Gas trouble, indigestion, backache, pain in the joints, nervous exhaustion are the initial symptoms. The blood vessels get constricted and there is no free flow. Finally blood flow stops to some parts, especially the brain, leading to a paralytic stroke.

Sirshasana helps restore normal blood supply. At first, Sarvangasana should be practised for a few weeks with the help of others.

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SIRSHASANA — III

Sirshasana must be practised in a calm, unruffled state of mind. Beginners may practise it against a wall or with the help of a friend who has a lot of patience to hold them upside down! Place a piece of folded cloth as a cushion for the head and the arms.

How to do : Lock the fingers and place the forearms up to the elbows on the cloth. Place the head in between them, raise the legs and stand erect on the head, keeping the legs vertical and the toes together. Breathe normally. (See Plate 10.)

Stand in the pose for a minute initially. Increase the duration daily till you can maintain the pose comfortably up to five minutes. Later, it can be extended to ten, fifteen or even twenty minutes. Normally, ten minutes is sufficient for a day.

Do not come crashing down after the upright posture, but bend the knees and slowly bring the toes down to the ground and rest in that position for some time before raising the head.

See that you do not sprain the neck by sudden jerks. If you do this, stop practising the pose till it is back to normal. Also, if you feel like sneezing or coughing, come down slowly before that happens.

Those suffering from any disease of the parts

above the neck — like earache, eye trouble, severe headaches, mumps, etc. — should not attempt Sirshasana without consulting an expert. If you develop nausea or reeling of the head while in the pose, stop practising. Moreover, no asana, especially Sirshasana, should be practised one hour before or after doing other physical exercises as it may lead to complications. *This topsy-turvy pose should be learned under a Yoga expert and after consultation with a physician as it can be harmful in certain conditions.*

Sirshasana should not be practised from the very beginning; the bodily system should be made ready for it by doing other asanas for at least a month before attempting it.

The neck should be strong enough to bear the weight of the body and the head able to stand the onrush of blood into it. A topsy-turvy pose taken hurriedly may lead to giddiness, nausea, etc., in some persons.

Smokers especially should be careful, for the delicate membranes in their lungs and nostrils may not be able to stand the sudden rush of blood and may burst, leading to bleeding through the nose, scaring the wits out of them. No use blaming Yoga asanas for this !

One may ask why Sirshasana may not be practised against a wall even after one has gained mastery over the pose. It can be done, but the concentration will always be on the legs instead of on the brain. While in the pose, you must imagine that fresh blood is flowing to the head, bringing new life to all

its parts, as well as to the eyes, ears, gums, and to the nerves and the vital ductless glands. In fact, Sirshasana is as potent as Sarvangasana, and even more so.

Benefits : In Sirshasana, the brain, nerves, eyes, and ears will get good blood supply and so remain in excellent condition. Memory power will increase. And as the pituitary gland will be in top condition because it will get good nourishment, the whole body will in turn benefit.

In the upside-down pose, any prolapsed abdominal organs are replaced; the venous blood is drained from the abdomen, thereby reducing the congestion of the viscera; the contents of the intestines, normally pulled down by gravity on account of weak flabby muscles or distended abdominal viscera, are pulled back upwards. This helps cure constipation, indigestion, poor absorption of food and auto-intoxication, dyspepsia (whose symptoms are indigestion, pain, headache, depression, nausea, belching and vomiting), flatulence, obesity, gastric troubles, and hepatic, enteric, renal and other disorders.

The bodily system of those who practise Sirshasana regularly will always be a bit on the warm side. Therefore, they should avoid hot foodstuffs and spices like chillies, tamarind, mustard, etc., in excess.

Note : Women can continue Sirshasana upto two months after conceiving. Those who have problems of the neck, chest, heart, eyes or ears must first consult an expert. It is contra-indicated in the case of high blood pressure. (Also see pp 87-88)

27

SIRHASANA — IV

MYOPIA (SHORT SIGHT)

The power of the eyes depends on the general health of the body. When the body falls sick, the eyes are affected in different ways, like swollen and reddish eyes (because of infection), sty, blurring, colour blindness, night blindness, astigmatism, cataract, etc.

The basic need to ensure good eyesight is pure blood. Surprisingly, bad digestion, constipation, diabetes and other abdominal ailments can also lead to eye defects and poor vision.

The universal solution to eye problems like myopia and hypermetropia (long sight) nowadays is the wearing of glasses, whose numbers go on increasing and which have to be handled carefully. Many sports are barred to the spectacles-wearer although plastic contact lenses have made this possible these days.

Yet glasses are a boon, for without them modern man would be almost blind. How did the ancients manage, or did they not need them because of natural habits and a healthy environment? It seems eyes are not built to suit modern conditions.

The curse of spectacles is that once worn, they need to be worn always; there is no getting rid of

them except by improving the vision by eye exercises. Only those who wear spectacles really know their disadvantages.

Except during sleep, the eyes are in constant use, and they face many professional hazards. Women spend hours near hot stoves; workers are subjected to poisonous fumes from chemicals in factories and so on.

Those who use their eyes a lot for close-range work soon develop short sight and those employing them for long-range jobs may develop long sight, but not necessarily. This is because the muscles around the eyes are conditioned according to the use they are constantly put to and soon are unable to focus for all-round good vision. The depth of the eyeball also changes.

Improper ways of sitting and reading cause myopia. Too much or too little light harms vision as the iris which expands and contracts to let in the correct amount of light is affected. Yet our eyes can withstand almost any onslaught on them if proper rest, care, exercise and nourishment are given to them. The tense ciliary muscles must relax.

The eyes are placed above the heart, and so the blood supply to them decreases as the heart grows older and slower. That is why, after forty, presbyopia is quite common.

Short sight, of course, has no respect for age even children of ten nowadays have to wear glasses.

India has the largest number of blind people — many of them born blind, perhaps paying for the

bad ways of their parents. Some people suddenly find that the objects before them are blurred as if a veil has been placed before the eyes. This is because of lack of proper nutrition.

The cure for eye problems lies in proper food rich in vitamin A, and the supply of fresh blood to the muscles and nerves around the eyes. This latter is possible by doing Sirshasana and Vipareethakarani. The principle of gravity is put to good use in these two poses, and the oxygen-rich blood flows straight down from the heart to the eyes and the brain. But they are not advised in the case of a weak retina as they might precipitate retinal detachments.

If the eyes are rotated while doing these asanas, it is all the better, as the muscles focusing them are stretched and pulled and made more flexible.

Facing the tender sun at sunrise and sunset is also good. The eyelids should bat frequently, especially when reading. This freshens the eyes and keeps them from tiring. Never stare continuously at a fixed point. Let your eyes dance and jump from point to point. It is good exercise for them.

Palming (closing the eyes with the palms so as to shut out the light) will give the eyes a much needed rest. This can be done twice a day for five to ten minutes at a time.

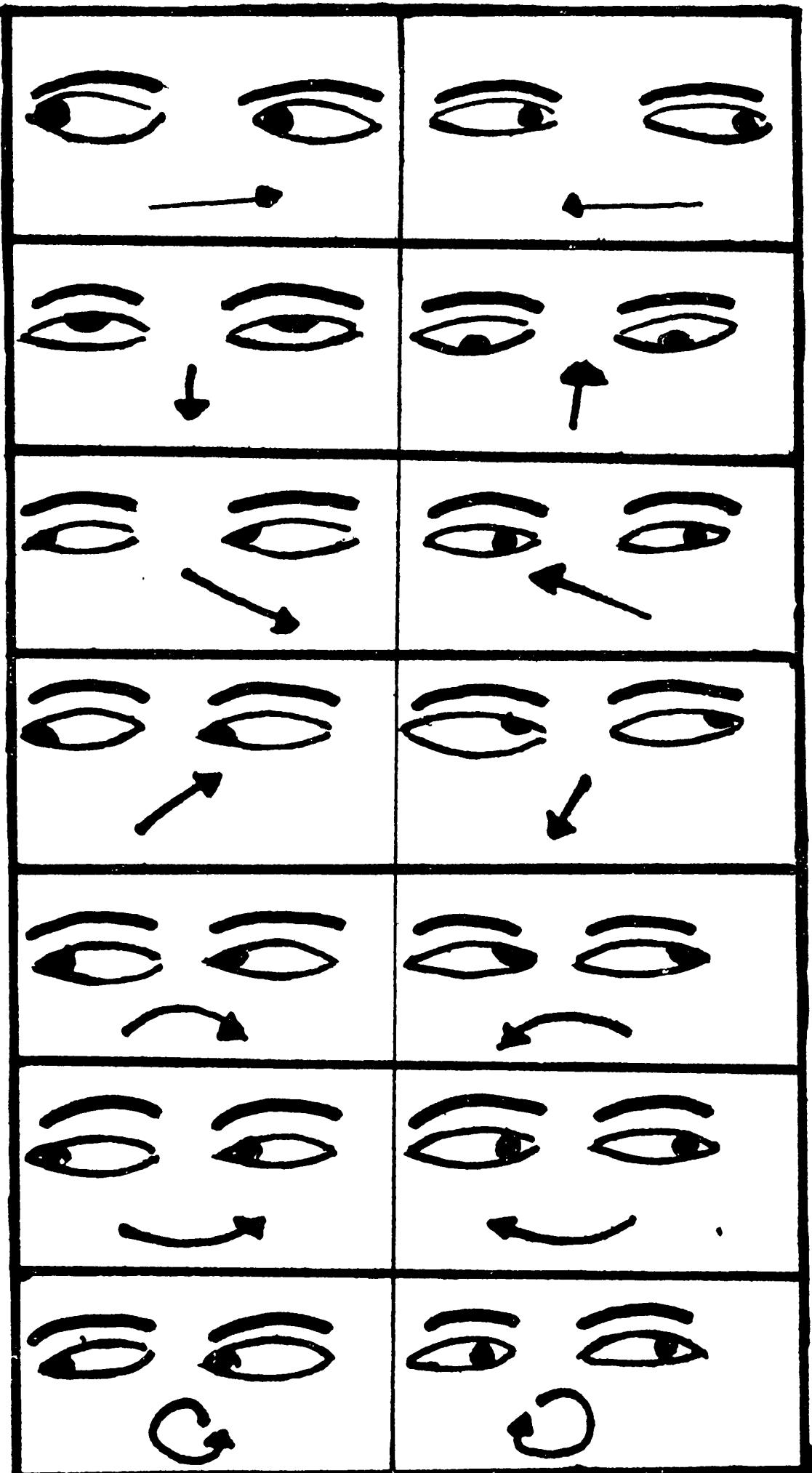


Fig. 6
EYE EXERCISES

28

SIRSHASANA — V

EYE EXERCISES (Fig. 6)

The eyes are the windows of the body: if they are closed permanently due to defects in the ocular system, nature's marvels become a closed book. But in a normal body, these vital parts, however well protected, may become weak, which is part of the ageing process affecting other organs too.

What a wonderful mechanism the eyes are! One marvels at the way they are constructed and the way they function. So much is packed in so little space (there are 137 million light-sensitive receptor cells in the retina). Yet nature has not all been perfect in its work, for the eyes are subject to many diseases and defects.

Asanas, especially Sirshasana, can help eyes which have become weak because of tired nerves or lack of proper blood flow in them. They especially help prevent short and long sight. There are certain exercises which should be practised while in Sirshasana which will improve the blood supply and tone up the nerves and muscles around the eyes, thus giving a new sparkle to them.

We have said that the muscles and nerves around the eyes can lose tone and become inflexible. They

have to move 100,000 times a day to bring objects into focus. To loosen them and nourish them with fresh blood, the following exercises should be done while performing Sirshasana.

These exercises consist of rolling the eyeballs in different directions — left to right; top to bottom; left corner up to right corner down and vice versa; in a semi-circle on all four sides; and finally round in both directions clockwise and anti-clockwise. Each exercise should be done ten to fifteen times.

After doing them in Sirshasana, at least three minutes more should be spent in the pose. This will ensure that the exercised eyes will continue to get good blood supply for some more time till they are relaxed.

These exercises will condition the eye muscles and nerves to the maximum and tone them up. Those who cannot practise Sirshasana may do these eye exercises in Vipareethakarani or even in Padmasana and benefit from them. Sit in Padmasana, facing the rising or setting sun, and do them, taking deep breaths all the time.

After the exercise, give rest to the eyes for a few minutes by placing the palms over them, shutting out the light completely. Even then the closed eyes will "see" grey. Try to imagine complete darkness. Usually tired eyes will find it difficult to bring pitch darkness before them when closed.

In some persons, especially after the age of forty, the eyes find it difficult to differentiate colours and everything takes on a more or less uniform grey shade. This is caused by lack of nourishing food

and consequent shortage of red corpuscles in the blood. Usually calcium, vitamins A and B and other nutrients and Sirshasana will set things right.

EAR TROUBLES

Next to the eyes, the ears are the most important of our five sense organs, with an array of 30,000 fantastically miniaturised electrical circuits in them. Like the eyes, the ears are also victims of the onslaughts of civilisation.

But, unlike the eyes, the ears cannot close shut, keeping out unwanted intrusions. Whether one likes it or not, they have to bear — and suffer — the high decibels which crash into them from all sides.

Because of the increasing noise pollution, this sensitive organ has been folding up, and more and more are finding themselves deaf, doomed to solitary sonic confinement. The whole world turns into a sound vacuum and the sweet strains of music as much as the harsh sounds of the world around are shut out.

Colds are another cause of ear defects. If the cause itself is eliminated by doing Yoga asanas, especially Sirshasana, the ears will remain safe from such disorders. Just like the eyes and other organs, the ears benefit from fresh blood supply which tones up the nerves and muscles.

Along with this is needed food rich in nutrients, especially by women who have had frequent deliveries, for they are more prone to deafness.

Note: Consult a physician and a Yoga expert if you suffer from vertigo or Meniere's Syndrome.

Those who have an ear trouble should not practise Sirshasana initially. They should condition and fortify the bodily system first by doing other asanas for nearly two months before starting on Sirshasana.

While doing Sirshasana sneezing and coughing can bring pressure on the delicate ear-drums and do them harm. The eustachian tube leading from the middle ear to microbe-infested throat is also a culprit. If you feel like sneezing or coughing, come down slowly.

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SIRSHASANA – VI

MENTAL DISORDERS

Mental disorders in different forms and stages have become common because of the present fast pace of life and the keen competition we face at every stage. Hysteria, nervous twitches, unfounded fears, even lunacy, are some of the forms we come across in daily life. The proliferation of psychiatrists and psycho-analysts underscores this fact.

Even in ordinary sane people, the brain does not work in a uniform manner. Some persons are very brilliant, while others are mental sluggards. Some are afflicted by a baseless fear, diffidence or shyness, while others are brazenly outgoing, intrusively social and domineering.

Many lack the ability to observe, analyse and hypothesise; they are slow on the uptake, while others are quick in these respects. Some have a phenomenal memory, while others cannot remember what they ate for lunch. There are also some who can reproduce minute details from their past.

The reason for the absence of quick grasping power is the tangled nerves in the brain which lack fresh blood supply and, therefore, are not sufficiently

active. The brain is like any other muscle in the bcdy : the more we use it, the "stronger and muscular" will it become. Nerves which are weak and defective lead to mental deficiencies and ailments

During the process of thinking, the blood flow to the brain increases. This blood flow is directed to the particular section of the brain where the information required is docketed. Suppose you are recalling a pleasant event in your past, remembering a beautiful song you have heard, a scene you have witnessed, that section of the brain which has stored this information starts "whirring" like a machine. A person is as intelligent as his brain power to recall events and the sensitivity of his sense organs.

Some cannot concentrate for long; they develop a headache, experience exhaustion and even shivering of the limbs. This is all because of weak nerves, poor blood supply and improper intake of nutrients.

The five sense organs are directly connected to the brain. The communication channels must clear the messages quickly. This is possible only if the nervous system is in perfect order. If due to some defect the connections are not smooth and fast, the brain becomes sluggish. Therefore, the nerves should always be in good condition. For this the pituitary should be healthy as this gland has a big say in the maintenance of the nerves.

Many are the cases of very intelligent men turning mental wrecks. A family of brilliant members sometimes harbours mental cases. The dividing line

between mental brilliance and lunacy seems thin indeed. What is the cause? It is the lack of power of the brain to carry the heavy workload because of poor nerves and improper blood supply. Therefore, even to protect a brilliant brain, it is necessary to keep it in a healthy condition. It is a great personal and social loss if such a person has to be confined to a padded cell.

The main treatment for psychiatric cases is electric shock. The object of bringing more blood supply to the brain is achieved in Sirshasana, which a patient can be made to practise with the help of others.

While doing Sarvangasana and Sirshasana, the pituitary and thyroid glands get a good supply of fresh blood and they in turn secrete their vital juices to make the nerves strong and healthy.

The blood, rich in nutrients and fortified with the secretions of the thyroid and pituitary glands, will strengthen the brain cells and cure the mental malady. Yoga asanas have been profitably used in many mental hospitals.

Of course, no mental case should be made to do Sirshasana straight away. The patient should be "conditioned" first by making him practise other asanas, especially Shavasana, which bring complete relaxation and thus get rid of all his tensions.

30

SIRSHASANA — VII

HAIR PROBLEMS

A major casualty of modern living is hair which prematurely greys, or worse, falls out. More and more young men nowadays can be seen wearing a "grandfather look." Greying and baldness are no more old people's problems. Many dye their hair or wear wigs in an attempt to hide the "bald" truth and gain a youthful look.

Magazines and newspapers are full of advice on how to keep healthy hair and ads claiming miraculous powers for patented hair oils. The latest "cure" is transplantation of hair. The truth is that science has not found the cause of these problems, and hence a remedy for them is still far away.

One working hypothesis is that baldness and greying are caused by the changes in the working of glands, especially the pituitary and the thyroid, due to the ageing process.

Because of the unnatural ways of present-day living, the use of adulterated oils, chemicals and creams, bathing in chlorinated and other chemically treated water, greying and loss of hair occur at an early age, especially among city folk.

The hair follicles are supplied with nutrition and gland secretions through the blood. As the blood flow slows down after the age of forty normally, the hair roots weaken.

Heredity also seems to have a say in the tendency to go bald and grey at an early age. The only solution lies in keeping the hair supplied with healthy nourishment through the blood stream by practising the proper Yogic exercises. But even asanas seem to have limited scope here.

Massaging the scalp does help to some extent. Bend forward and using the fingers of both hands massage the head for three minutes morning and evening. The skin on the head should move freely. Brush the hair briskly till the scalp tingles. Blood will rush into the hair follicles and invigorate them. The requirements of the hair can be supplied only through the blood and not so much by directly applying oils to it. Plenty of vegetables, especially green leaves, and vitamin B-rich grains in the food will be beneficial.

In Sirshasana and Vipareethakarani, blood rich in oxygen rushes to the head and nourishes the hair. The generally good all-round health a practitioner of Yoga asanas enjoys helps hair growth and maintenance.

STAMMERING

Many men and women are victims of stammering. For them, the tongue is not fast enough to give voice to their thoughts which form in their brain.

The cause is poor co-ordination because of improper nervous connections. These people can benefit by stretching, twisting and turning their tongue, "pulling faces" and turning their neck in different directions before and after doing Sirhasana.

In Vipareethakarani, too, these facial exercises may be practised.

GROWING TALL

Many a teenager faces another problem — how to grow tall. They stretch and strain, walk on toes, pull themselves up by the ventilator frame. The present generation is fortunate in that it is taller than the earlier one because of better food, rich especially in calcium and proteins.

While discussing Sarvangasana, we saw how the thyroid gland has a role to play in the creation of giants and dwarfs by its malfunctioning. Similarly, the pituitary too plays a part in the skeletal growth of the body.

The pituitary hormone and the calcium in the food we eat determine the height of a person. If the pituitary secretion is below normal, the growth will also be poor. No pull-ups will then help. Similarly, if the pituitary is over-active, there is no checking the upward growth and the person will have to face the opposite problem — being unnaturally tall.

By doing Sirshasana, the pituitary can be made healthy, resulting in proper growth of the body. This does not mean that hereditary traits can be off-

set completely. The height, or lack of it, is not a disease to be "cured" by practising Yoga asanas. Only abnormalities can be checked — that too within limits. The bone structure ceases to grow around the 18th year in girls and 20th in boys.

Sirshasana helps the bone structure in many ways. It gives the much needed pituitary secretion to the bones and helps in their proper growth. Also, the topsy-turvy pose gives relief to the bones as the weight is shifted to the upper part of the body. The lumbar vertebrae, which in the normal position carry the weight of the thoracic vertebrae, get relief. The leg and thigh bones, muscles and ligaments also get rest.

The cartilages, bone marrow, fibrous tissues, spongy sections, etc., also get relief and rejuvenation. Joint pains, spondylitis, backache, etc., will become unknown.

BACKACHE

The lubricating cushions between the vertebrae, called discs, have a tough envelope of cartilage. If the abdominal muscles get weak because of the development of a paunch, the back muscles will have to carry the extra load, causing backaches. Wrong postures also cause similar strains.

The bones need exact amounts of calcium, and this is controlled by the parathyroid. They contain ninety-nine per cent of the calcium and eighty-eight per cent of the phosphorus in the body and smaller amounts of copper, cobalt and other fringe elements.

31

ASWINI MUDRA — I

(Plate 11)

A mudra literally denotes a symbol. Aswini Mudra, practised while in Sirhasana, is quite useful for those suffering from constipation and uncontrolled emissions.

Aswah in Sanskrit means horse. Many of the poses resemble animals or objects, or emulate them and gain by the traits peculiar to them. For example, Matsyasana: though the pose does not resemble the fish, it does bestow the power of the fish to "digest" disease-producing germs.

Though man is the super-animal and has power over all others because of his intellectual superiority, animals excel in some individual traits that help them physically to survive. Take the elephant: to relax, it moves its head from side to side, beautifully swinging the trunk and alternately shifting its weight from foreleg to foreleg.

Similarly, dogs and cats stretch themselves to the maximum after a nap. This process immediately makes them completely awake and active; no yawning, no half-wakefulness for them!

The feline flexibility and agility, the eagle's power of vision, the speed of the cheetah, the power-pack-

ed shoulders of the lion and tiger, the dog's ability to sniff out are superior to those of man. By imitating them, man can acquire some of these powers nature has denied to him. Based on these superior qualities of the animals, Yogis of yore invented the different Yogic poses after long and minute observation of life around them.

If you watch a horse carefully, you will notice how it exercises its anal muscles after evacuation. In Aswini Mudra, the same practice is imitated to the great advantage of the intestinal, rectal and sexual muscles and nerves.

How to do : After doing Sirshasana and three minutes before coming down to the preliminary position, bend both the knees so that the toes and heels touch each other and the thighs are spread out.

In this position, make the anal muscles shrink and expand. While pulling in, breathe in, and while pushing out, breathe out. This can be practised up to five minutes, starting from one minute in the initial stage.

Benefits : Constipation, piles, nervous weakness, sexual disability, etc., can be got rid of easily by practising Aswini Mudra. The reason is that while pulling and pushing, the rectal muscles and the sex organs are rejuvenated. The sluggish rectum is activated, more blood flows into the area and the nerves are stretched and strengthened. The clogging waste in the intestines causing constipation is made to move out and any uncontrolled seminal flow checked.

The main reason for constipation is the retention of stagnant undigested food in the rectum which absorbs water from the waste matter making it hard and dry. This accumulates in the absence of a smooth peristaltic action of the intestinal organs.

One way to avoid constipation is to make it a habit to answer nature's call at a particular hour every day and also answer the call as far as possible whenever you feel the sensation for doing so, instead of putting it off.

A clogged rectum becomes a repository of many diseases. The stagnant food material poisons the blood stream, as the rectum goes on sucking in liquid from it.

The clogged waste is drawn out of its stagnation by the topsy-turvy pose, and Aswini Mudra then acts as a massage to rejuvenate the inactive nerves and muscles. Sirhasana itself is good for piles, but with Aswini Mudra added, we have a sure cure for this painful disease.

While doing this asana, you will notice that the adjoining urinary and sexual organs are also stretched. Night emissions in young age may be due to weak nerves. Though other asanas also help, Aswini Mudra is a specific for this problem of adolescence.

Apart from helping the nerves in the brain and rejuvenating the pituitary which also has a role to play in this, the Aswini Mudra strengthens the nerves and muscles in the pubic region, bringing to the practitioner the power of sexual control, both physical and emotional.

32

ASWINI MUDRA – II

STOMACH DISORDERS

Food adulteration has become a byword in modern living, assuming alarming proportions. With more and more mouths demanding a share of the food produced and the avarice of some to take advantage of the shrinking food stocks, the tendency is to mix cheaper and harmful items with the food sold.

The result is that stomach ailments have become a common problem. Add to this the insufficient, untimely and unnourishing food which many people are forced to have because of their life-style or economic stringency, the problem has turned into a chronic disease.

Again, evacuation is not attended to when the call comes, with the result the undigested food residue accumulates in the large intestine, poisoning the whole system. Constipation is thus an almost universal malady of our age.

Capping it all is the lack of any type of exercise. The stomach bulges out, the diaphragm is unable to squeeze out the different digestive juices, the person easily pants for breath as even a little exer-

tion is exhausting for him and the chest develops some pain.

Stomach disorders take different forms — indigestion, gas, lack of appetite, constipation (or its opposite, diarrhoea), pains and aches in different parts of the body, appendicitis, etc.

The stomach lining contains thirty-five million glands that secrete five pints of gastric juice every day — mainly hydrochloric acid. If a large amount of it is dumped into the stomach or duodenum, it eats its way into the intestinal walls. The result is peptic ulcer.

Dumping food any how, any time into the stomach will not help. Proteins have to be converted first into amino acids, and carbohydrates into glucose.

The secretion from the duodenum has to prod the pancreas to give out its alkaline digestive juice to neutralise the acids.

The liver alone produces some 1,000 different enzymes for chemical conversion and metabolic activity. The surplus acid not needed by the body is changed into urea and passed on to the kidneys. The various poisons like nicotine, caffeine and other drugs too are detoxified here.

Similarly, the kidneys should filter and cleanse the blood passing through them, ridding it of wastes, and encourage the production of red cells, control potassium salts, sodium chloride and other substances which can be deadly in wrong amounts.

For this, the kidneys contain millions of filtering units called nephrons, processing twice the quantity of blood in the body each hour.

The main cure for stomach ailments is control over the tongue! Only that will help end the vicious circle of diseases, doctor, drugs. No amount of exercise can completely offset the damage caused to a person who has no control over what, and when, he eats.

The poisonous substances, some of them ironically from the drugs taken to cure the maladies, which join the blood stream because of the malfunctioning of the abdominal organs, especially the kidneys, are removed by the thyroid and parathyroid glands.

33

VIPAREETHAKARANI

(Plate 12)

Next only to Sarvangasana and Sirshasana in its effectiveness in fighting and warding off disease is Vipareethakarani. This asana does not look all that powerful. But then that is the secret of Yoga asanas — simple but efficient.

Vipareethakarani can be practised by all — with or without the help of pillows according to one's strength — and as long as one desires. A half-hour stint daily while one reads the newspaper or a book will be highly rewarding.

Vipareetha means unexpected or opposite: this is exactly what happens — unexpected results from its practice. The sick who try all other "remedies" for their problems and finally come to Vipareethakarani as a last resort are surprised at the progress they make.

That is the great charm about this pose: even the very ill can practise and benefit by it. It needs no exertion, bending or twisting. What is more, this asana has some of the advantages of Sirshasana and Sarvangasana, too, as both the pituitary and the

thyroid glands are nourished back to health. That is why Vipareethakarani is so potent a "medicine".

How to do : Lie on the back and raise the legs together as in Sarvangasana. But instead of standing straight on the shoulders, the body remains at a 45° angle — the upper part remaining fixed to the ground.

Also, there will be no chinlock (*Jhalandra bandha*) as in Sarvangasana. Instead of placing the palms as far down as possible to support the body as in the shoulder pose, they should be placed at the hip joint. Thus the weight of the body will be mainly on the arms and not on the shoulders.

As there is no chinlock, the blood will flow to the thyroid and on to the head, where the pituitary is situated, pulled by gravitation because of the downward inclination from the heart.

At first the arms, especially the wrists, the biceps and the shoulders, may ache, but in due course they will become strong enough to carry the weight of the body.

If the pain is severe, or if the practitioner is old, weak or sick, there is no need to despair: in fact, this pose is meant for such persons. A pillow or two will serve the purpose of the arms support.

Sit on the pillows piled some two feet high, and slide back and raise the legs straight up: you are in Vipareethakarani. Keep the hands on the pillows, holding them in position. You may remain in this pose for any length of time. Don't doze off!

One thing that impresses the practitioner of this "exercise" is the calm and peace it brings to him. The regular breathing, the easy rhythm of the heart beat, the fresh regular supply of blood to the organs in the chest, neck and head, the relief which the lower limbs get because of the semi-topsy-turvy position, all these add to tremendous relaxation like that which one gets from meditation or Shavasana. No wonder this "pelvic" pose is so highly extolled in Yogic literature.

As we have said, this pose can be practised for any length of time, but normally five minutes daily will suffice. The sick may practise it for a longer time, even up to thirty minutes both morning and evening. It is best to come down to the prone position if you want to sneeze or cough.

Benefits : The main feature of Vipareethakarani is that even the very sick, who cannot do any other asanas, can practise it with the help of pillows. After gaining some strength, they will be able to go on to other poses.

One benefit from practising this pose, which even Sarvangasana and Sirshasana do not bestow, is that the lungs get a plentiful supply of blood. Blood, rich in oxygen straight from the heart, penetrates every far-flung bronchiole, destroying the bacilli hiding within.

That is why this pose is such a potent "medicine" for lung diseases, right from colds to asthma to TB.

Many persons suffer from colds, be it warm, wet or cold weather; for them it is a running or chocked

ncse always. Apart from being a nuisance, a cold is the harbinger of other major diseases like sinus infection, bronchitis, asthma, TB, etc. Vipareethakarani is the most successful cold-fighter ever.

This is made possible as both thyroid and pituitary, and in turn the adrenals and the nerves radiating to the lungs, are all rejuvenated. The hormones as also the increased supply of oxygen, enrich the blood, removing the impurities from the body.

34

ARDHA-MATSYENDRASANA

(Plates 13, 14)

Once again attention is focused on the spinal cord, indicating how much importance Yoga asanas pay to this vital part (literally backbone) of the body.

While in the earlier asanas we bend the backbone back and forward, stretching and contracting the abdominal and back muscles, the Yogis felt that this was not enough: it should also be twisted sideways, squeezing it as a wet cloth is wrung by powerful hands, they believed.

The pose which does this is Ardha-Matsyendrasana, named after its inventor, Matsyendra. *Ardha* means half, denoting that this is a variant of a full pose that is more difficult. But for those who seek health primarily, and not spiritual enlightenment through Yogic practice, the "half" pose serves the purpose fully.

Sage Matsyendra must undoubtedly have known the human anatomy inside out, the intricate functions of the parts and the way to control and make them work wonders for the body. One can only marvel how the Yogis could make such minute

studies with no “modern” instruments which are available to the scientist now.

Take the backbone, for example: it cannot be an exaggeration to say that a person’s very personality, let alone his health and power, radiates from it. That is why almost all asanas pay attention to some part of it or the other.

Thus Bhujangasana bends the upper part, Shalabhasana the lower, and Dhanurasana the middle section. Pachimothanasana and Halasana bend it forward and Matsyasana back.

In the topsy-turvy poses of Sarvangasana and Sirshasana, the backbone is fully exercised by giving relief, especially to the lower part which bears the weight of the body all the time..

So much attention is paid to the backbone not only because of its own intrinsic importance, but, more so, because of the thousands of nerves which pass through it. The one place where they congregate is the backbone and so if they are stretched, pulled, straightened and strengthened, the other parts to which they travel will also be infused with health and energy.

The backbone can be divided into three parts: the upper containing nerves that go to vital organs like the ears, eyes, mouth, etc.; the middle, the nerves from which go to the lungs, heart, hands, etc.; and the lower, whose nerves spread to the abdomen and reproductive organs, the legs, etc.

Ardha-Matsyendrasana mainly concentrates on the lower part where most people develop aches and

pains. So, by practising this pose, not only are the digestive and reproductive organs kept healthy, but backache is also eliminated.

How to do : Sitting on a folded piece of cloth, bend the right leg, bringing the heel under the pubic symphysis, just above the anus. Now take the left leg across the right and place the foot close to the right thigh.

Pull the left knee to the right armpit, and with the right arm across the left knee, hold the right knee on the ground. Breathing out, turn the trunk and head as far to the left as possible, and taking the left arm across the back, hold the left foot near the right thigh. Keep thus as long as you can comfortably hold the breath out. Come back to normal, breathing in.

This is on one side. Now repeat the same on the other side. That is: place the left heel over the anus, place the right foot near the left thigh, bring the right knee near the left armpit, and with the left arm across the right knee hold down the left knee; breathing out, turn the trunk and head to the right and with the right arm across the back hold the right foot which is near the left thigh.

Repeat six times on each side.

Initially, the thighs will protest, especially if the bones are rigid, the nerves and muscles inflexible, and the person older. But one cannot wait for these conditions to improve and then do this pose, because things will only become worse. Steady practice

alone, however imperfectly done initially, will make these parts co-operate.

Benefits: Watch how the abdomen is squeezed out: not a single organ inside can escape being jerked out of its lethargy; no nerve, tendon or muscle is left untouched. All accumulated waste is displaced and made to move on and out of the rectum.

The kidneys are pressed hard, with the result that urinary diseases are cured. As the kidneys work properly, the blood is purified, which in turn helps all the other systems of the body.

The adrenal glands situated immediately above the kidneys are also toned up, and this puts a new zest and fresh energy into the lethargic body. These glands are very vital as they can cripple, sicken, kill or even make a person insane. Each minute, six times their weight of blood passes through them.

The proper secretion of the adrenal glands acts like an energiser and helps the heart in its blood circulation work.

The intestines are also pulled, increasing their secretive and digestive powers. Indeed, no abdominal organ is spared, and they are better for the treatment. No stomach problem is left alone.

As the neck is also turned, the nerves and muscles there benefit. In fact, the eyes gain immensely because they are turned to the left and right extremes in turn, thus exercising the eye muscles.

Similarly, as the backbone is twisted, the nerves are toned up. The chest is broadened. The face acquires a new glow, radiating health and vitality.

Even asthma patients benefit as the lungs are squeezed like a sponge, thereby removing air from their remotest corners and refilling them with fresh air. With the adrenals healthy, the blood flow increases, and asthmatic attacks die out.

And, of course, the heart also benefits not only because of the adrenal juice but because the extra fat in the abdomen is progressively wrung out like water from a wet towel.

The heart pumps blood through 60,000 miles of arteries, capillaries and veins every living day. Every pound of fat is equivalent to 200 miles of capillaries. The normal blood pressure in an adult is 120/80 (120 while it contracts and 80 when it rests between beats.) The lower figure is important as it indicates the rest the heart gets. If this figure rises, it shows that the heart is working harder with less-than-normal rest.

The more the fat in the body, the more sloppy the blood circulation will be. This adds to the heart's work of pushing blood through the whole body. Ardha-Matsyendrasana helps remove unwanted fat and lessens the burden on the heart.

The liver, where the different elements of the food we eat are separated and which stores and supplies the energy needs of the body in proper quantities, also helps the spleen in removing dead cells from the blood.

If the liver goes on strike, digestion and appetite suffer, anaemia and weakness follow, the blood becomes impure, and the heart may be affected. If the liver is enlarged, it places pressure on the lungs, thus affecting breathing. Ardha-Matsyendrasana helps keep this vital organ in good condition and functioning well.

Splitting headaches, hip joint pains, lumbago are removed.

Note : Those who have had an operation in the abdomen should consult an expert.

Pregnant women should stop practice of this pose after the third month.

Heart patients should avoid this, at least till their heart gains strength.

35

YOGA MUDRA

(Plate 15)

Mudras are body postures which give the practitioner power to control not only the body but also the mind. "There is nothing in this world like mudras for giving success," says a sage.

The body — human or animal — is a marvellous mechanism as it has the built-in power to heal itself. Take saliva, for example: to see an animal licking its festering wound seems disgusting to us. But why does it do it? Because saliva is a powerful natural antiseptic. Sometimes our bodily wounds may not heal despite applications of the latest medicines, but a dog's worst injuries heal in days.

Similarly, the blood: it has the power to check wastage through coagulation.

There are many other such marvellous ways and means all over the body, like the ductless glands, to protect us from the onslaughts of diseases. It is up to us to see that these protective devices function normally, so that we can lead a long healthy life without resort to doubtful drugs.

We have seen how, for example, Sarvangasana helps to goad the thyroid gland into activity and how Mayurasana keeps the adrenal glands in trim.

Yoga Mudra is one way to keep the organs, especially the digestive ones, in good health. We know that to digest the different types of food, the digestive system produces various juices (gastric, pancreatic, bile, etc.). While digesting food, the digestive organs, in turn, take in the chemicals they need to produce their secretions.

This cycle must go on uninterruptedly so that there is no shortage of any secretion, nor the excessive production of any, which is also equally harmful.

To make the organs work normally, **Yoga Mudra** adopts a simple, yet effective, method: squeeze all parts. This ensures that they not only give out their juices but also get the raw materials (through the blood) they need. Also clogged intestines are cleared, eliminating unwanted waste matter.

How to do : Sit in Padmasana. Fold the palms into fists and place them between the heels and abdomen. Exhale and bend forward, touching the ground with the forehead first and later with the nose. Notice how the fists apply pressure on the stomach. Come back to normal, inhaling deeply. Repeat six times.

After a few days' practice, you may breathe in hard several times while in the pose itself. This adds to the pressure on the abdominal organs as the diaphragm is pushed down by the expanding lungs.

Benefits: In **Yoga Mudra**, not only is the abdomen supplied with fresh blood but the normally neglected nooks and corners of the lungs too get oxygen.

Also the backbone benefits as it is arched to a degree. This ensures its youthfulness and suppleness. The nerves passing through it also gain by the practice. All digestive organs are pressed into healthy activity.

Some persons may be thin but cannot bend because of a stiff backbone. Patience helps both in their case and in that of fat people. Extra superficial fat not only on the stomach walls but also on the thighs and chest is removed.

The main reason for appendicitis may be clogging of the intestines. As pressure is put where the appendix is located on the lower right side, no waste will remain to create any trouble.

Similarly, on the left side, the descending colon where constipation makes its appearance is also squeezed so that the accumulated partially digested matter is made to move down and out.

Piles, which thrive on constipation, will disappear after regular practice of Yoga Mudra.

Note : Hernia patients should avoid this Mudra. Consult experts if operated on in the abdomen. Pregnant women can practise up to two months.

MOUTH ULCERS AND BAD BREATH

Many suffer constantly from ulcers in the mouth. This is not any infectious disease but is indicative of the condition of their insides. If the stomach is in order, the ulcers automatically disappear.

Some people cannot be approached too close because of the foul smell that emanates from their mouth. No amount of pan chewing or mouth-

fresheners will cover up this nauseating smell. Here again a stomach in perfect order alone will help.

URINARY AND SEX DISORDERS

Urinary diseases can be cured by Yoga Mudra as these parts are rejuvenated. The nerves radiating to the legs especially are stretched, the kneecaps are exercised and hence joint pains, rheumatic complaints, etc., vanish.

Arthritis, or inflammation of joints, is checked. Sedimentary deposits in joints and valves because of blood impurity are removed.

Yoga Mudra especially helps young men who suffer from seminal problems. As the nerves are supplied with fresh blood and rejuvenated, they gain strength and the problem is solved.

For women, this pose is of immense help as it ends their particular problems during monthly periods, pregnancy, child-feeding, and later, menopause.

One of the curses modern women face is lack of exercise. Even the little bending and stretching involved in the daily chores have been done away with by mechanised household appliances. This exercise they used to get has not been replaced by another. It is thus imperative that women should practise Yoga Mudra and other asanas, which do not demand too much time, to lead a trouble-free life and to bring happiness to their family by keeping well and fit themselves.

36

PADAHASTHASANA

(Plate 16)

In this asana, the body is bent forward to touch the toes, while in the next pose, Trikonasana, the body is bent sideways, thus reducing the fat piled up like tyres on both sides.

In effect Padahasthasana is Paschimothanasana done while standing.

The whole world revolves round one basic idea: filling up the stomach ! If only there is no hunger, all activity may come to a standstill: no cut-throat competition, no rat race, no studies, no degrees to be acquired laboriously.

Yet consider a person with no hunger at all or with a very poor appetite — and there are not a few of them. How stale life becomes for him, how dull he feels. While others struggle to get a square meal and enjoy the food, these people cannot digest a morsel; they know not what hunger is. The very sight of food makes them throw up. There are many tonics and pills on the market claiming to make one ravenous for food. Despite all the goading, the stomach refuses to receive any food.

Ironically, the cause for their indigestion is over-indulgence in the past. Any time was mealtime for them, and no thought spared for quality or quantity. Like a grinding machine, their mouth would go on munching down snacks, followed by cups of hot and cold beverages.

Is it any wonder then that their stomach at last revolted? Self-control must start with food. If one were to be tempted into eating when one is not hungry, thus punishing one's own stomach, one will have to pay for this soon enough. This self-indulgence leads to misery and a shortened life.

No exercise or Yoga practice will help a person who cannot control his senses. The body, especially when young, needs good food at the proper time. Two full meals and a snack with an interval of five to six hours between are needed for the body: this time interval is vital for the body to assimilate the food and for the stomach to process it as also take a short much needed rest. Even the most tempting food should wait till the next appointed hour. As this rule is flouted joyfully, even young persons have been increasingly falling victims to dyspepsia, gas, "heartburn", ulcers, etc.

The golden rule is to fill only half the stomach with solid food and a quarter with liquids, leaving the rest empty. In fact, one should leave the dining table before one feels that one has had enough. In short, do not over-eat.

If rigidly followed, this rule will bring good health, longevity, and happiness. Only a knowledge of the

working of the digestive system, combined with will-power, can ensure that the stomach is not filled tight with food like a cotton bale, with no room for the muscles to flex and grind it.

Once the muscles lose their tone and strength and become flabby, the food will not be properly assimilated, and most of the vital nutrients needed by the body will go waste. Therefore, not only for a trim body but also for its proper "feeding," the stomach should not bulge out.

The stomach and intestines are like any other glands. They too secrete juices — gastric, pancreatic, insulin and others. And there is a limit to how much of these juices can be produced. Without them, no digestion can take place, no hunger can be felt.

The more one eats, the less the digestive juices available for digestion, and so problems arise. Like a draught animal goaded to more and more work, the stomach too finds itself unable to bear the burden and finally collapses.

Rest alone can do good. Only a proper supply of blood to the weakened stomach organs through proper Yogic exercises can infuse new life into them.

One such pose is Padahasthasana. It brings zest and youthfulness by toning up the small and large intestines, the liver, pancreas, kidneys, the duodenum, etc. Hence diseases connected with these organs will not arise.

How to do : Stand erect, keeping the feet close to each other. Raise the arms straight up, breathing in and bend back a little.

Now, slowly breathing out, bend forward and touch the toes with the hands. The legs should not be bent. Come back to normal. Repeat six times.

After practising this for a few days, catch hold of the toes and try to bury the face in the knees. If this is done properly, the hands will be bent at the elbows.

Remain in this pose as long as you can comfortably hold the breath. Those who have a big paunch will find it difficult to practise this pose. But they need not envy their thin brethren: perhaps, the latter cannot do better because of a stiff backbone. But both can gain by persistent practice without too much strain.

Benefits : Apart from the stomach organs, which are squeezed out of their chronic inactivity, the spinal cord too benefits from this pose. Digestive juices are produced and liver and spleen toned up. The backbone and the nerves in it are made flexible. Backache, spondylities, slipped disc, etc., will not afflict the regular practitioner of this asana.

The muscles and nerves of the legs and the arms too will be flexed and stretched. The deep breathing not only helps the lungs to fill up fully but also exhale carbon dioxide from their every nook and corner. Fresh blood rushes into the head and the parts above the chest. The face glows with life and health. It is good for those who get excited easily, as it soothes the brain cells.

Indigestion, lack of appetite, constipation, diabetes are suitably tackled, the last because more insulin is produced to keep the blood sugar in check.

Note : Hernia patients and those operated on in the abdomen must consult an expert. Pregnant women can practise up to two months.

BACKACHE IN WOMEN

Backache is a common problem faced by most women nowadays, especially during the menstrual period. Unfortunately, even young and active women are victims of this. Monthly periods and child delivery are natural phenomena and they should not be blamed for any problems. The blame lies in the way of life we lead now.

Gone are the days when women had to work really hard to prepare a meal. They had to grind grains, draw water, work long hours at the smoky hearth, wash clothes, serve the food bending double, though even these exertions are no substitute for Yoga practice as it keeps healthy those glands which have a vital say in a woman's life. Now everything is done by machines and there is no need to bend even a bit. And practically the whole day is spent at a desk, especially in cities, if the woman is an office-goer.

This lack of exercise and unnatural style of living are the main causes of women's maladies. Household chores in the city are no more exercises with all the labour-saving gadgets available today to those who can afford them. Women must learn to devote some time to Yoga practice to keep healthy and avoid unnecessary suffering. Padahasthasana especially removes back and stomach aches during periods.

MALARIA

This once dreaded disease which used to claim many lives was believed to have been eradicated like smallpox, but it has come back with renewed vigour. During the bouts of fever, the spleen gets swollen. The spleen, a large gland-like organ situated on the left side in the upper part of the abdominal cavity, is mainly responsible for the production of blood cells. It is closely connected with the thyroid gland. The two strengthen the bodily resistance to diseases. With the help of the kidneys, the spleen removes the dead cells, as well as the dead bacteria, from the whole system.

During malaria, the rapid proliferation of bacteria is so great that the spleen is unable to cope with it. The double task of producing new blood cells to fight the enemy and removing the slain cells becomes too much, and the spleen itself strikes work.

Once this happens, the body weakens, there is less blood supply, the stomach bulges out and the resistance to disease falls dramatically.

To help the spleen recover its power, Padahasthasana along with Sarvangasana goes a long way. The swollen organ is slowly brought back to normal and it starts its dual task of producing new blood cells and removing fallen enemies from the bodily system once again.

37

TRIKONASANA

(Plates 17, 18, 19)

One of the most commonly waged battles in the world is easily the "battle of the bulge." The losing warriors are the affluent with plenty of rich food to eat, the office-goer who has no time to move from his table, the modern housewife who leads a sedentary life, and even the young who should have a trim body and a slim waist but do not because of lethargy. Every extra pound of fat adds that much extra work on the heart. The digestive process is affected and the result is that there is no energy, vitality, zest left in the body.

To keep the fat under control, to inject life into the nerves and to drive away sloth, the limbs should be unlimbered. This is possible by practising Trikonasana.

How to do : Stand erect with the feet two to three feet apart. Stretch the arms up on both sides, parallel to the ground, with the palms downwards. Breathing out, lean straight sideways to the left to touch the ground near the foot with the left hand. Turn the head simultaneously and look at the right hand.

Now bring the right arm that is straight up over the head so that it is parallel to the ground. Watch how the nerves and muscles right from the shoulders down to the loins and the leg muscles are pulled hard. Come back to normal, breathing in. All through, the arms and legs should not be bent. Also avoid leaning forward while bending to the side.

Repeat, bending on the right side. Practise six times on both sides.

After this, practise a variation in which the hands cross and touch the opposite toes. Here the body is twisted in the middle. Repeat on both sides six times.

A third variation is more difficult, but certainly more beneficial. In this, instead of touching the toe across as in the second variation, the whole palm is placed flat on the ground on the other side of the foot. This demands a further bending and twisting of the trunk, thus squeezing the fat out of the stomach region to the maximum.

A fourth variation is to hold the hands straight above the head then bending and touching each foot; the nose will touch the knee alternately. Do not bend the legs.

Benefits : Simple though it looks, Trikonasana bestows many gains on its practitioner. The chest is expanded while the midriff is reduced to the maximum by removing the fat. The nerves on both sides as well as in the spinal cord get a healthy jolt and shed their lethargy. In fact, Trikonasana

drives away laziness so effectively that some practise it first before embarking on other asanas.

Those who suffer from aches of the back and sides, the latter especially among women, gain immensely. This is because the backbone is bent sideways, unlike in the other asanas where it is bent forward or back. This bending pulls and pushes the cartilages, supplying new blood to them and making them supple and elastic. Those who have to sit at the office table for long hours especially will benefit by this pose.

The leg muscles, nerves and bones are also limbered up, as also those in the shoulders, neck and arms. It relieves sciatica. As the stomach area is squeezed, the organs inside also benefit. The kidneys and adrenal glands benefit directly. That is why lethargy is driven away.

Note : Abdominal operations and hernia need expert study before practice of this pose. Pregnant women can continue it up to two months.

38

VAJRASANA

(Plate 23)

Padmasana is one of the sitting postures for meditation and Pranayama. Yet it also does a lot of good to the spinal cord.

Another sitting pose which makes the body as hard as *vajra* (diamond) is Vajrasana.

To make the body adamantine, the mind should also be developed into a strong force, ready to face any situation with calm, fearlessness and determination. Mind and body go hand in hand, each complementing the other.

Only a well-ploughed field yields the most: similarly, only a well-exercised body can withstand the onslaughts of disease. And only a mind which has experienced the pleasures and pains of life that leave upon it different impressions, called character, can summon the self-restraint — the greatest manifestation of power — to tackle any situation. This self-control is the mighty will-power which we witness in great men.

To develop such a body and mind, Yoga asanas, especially Vajrasana, help to lay the foundation.

Simple as it looks, Vajrasana is a power-pack which drives the physical motor.

How to do: Lay a folded piece of cloth on the floor. Lower yourself so that the legs from the toes to the knees touch the ground. Now you will be resting on the lower parts of the legs — on the shins.

Slowly push the buttocks down between the legs so that the posterior touches the ground. But see to it that the knees and the toes do not spring apart.

Place the hands comfortably on the knees and keep the body erect. Breathe deeply and look at the tip of the nose. Chant "Om" through the nose so that it sets off a vibration inside the head.

At first the nerves and muscles in the legs will protest loudly and there may be severe pain. But soon this will pass away and you may be able to sit in the pose for up to half an hour. You may also do some reading while in the pose.

After coming back to normal, you will notice how the blood rushes to the legs, turning them red. Stretch the legs and rotate the feet in, out, and sideways. The muscles and nerves in the legs will thus be fully exercised.

Relax for a few minutes, allowing the blood circulation to stabilise.

Benefits: The feet and legs gain most, giving them strength and keeping out diseases like varicose veins, elephantiasis, eczema and other skin problems, distorted growth, etc. In varicose veins, the veins enlarge, stretch and appear knotted as the venous blood is not returned from the lower limbs.

As the nerves and muscles are kept stretched while in the pose and new blood rushes in later, they become stronger. Checking the blood flow to the lower limbs ensures better supply to the stomach, the urinary and the reproductive organs. Alimentary disorders, especially lack of appetite and gas, kidney and bladder diseases and sexual problems will vanish.

We have said that long practice of Vajrasana gives strong nerves, determination and will-power. And the people who practise it most are Muslims during their Namaz ! Does this not explain their steadfastness and determination?

This is one asana which can be practised on a full stomach to good effect. The food will be digested fast because the blood flow to the stomach is increased as the flow to the legs is dammed. In fact, those suffering from indigestion, gas, lack of appetite, nausea, etc., will gain immensely from Vajrasana.

Note: Pregnant women can practise upto three months.

39

UDDIANA

(Plate 20)

For many, if not for the majority, regular evacuation has become a problem. Unless they take a hot cup of tea or coffee, have a "puff" or even resort to bed-time "salts," motion comes to a standstill.

Soon these goadings become a habit and without them, the large intestine becomes a depository of accumulated undigested waste, leading to many diseases and untold misery.

On the other hand, because of the regular goadings, the intestines lose their natural elasticity, requiring stronger and stronger doses of purgatives.

Time was when a weekly intake of a purgative like castor oil or some other nauseating concoction was considered imperative. Worse, tender babies used to be plied with these mild "poisons" regularly. For any kind of bodyache too the remedy was thought to be a laxative.

The untold harm this practice inflicted on the intestines has now mercifully been realised. Apart from losing their natural power, the intestines were dried of all fluids, leading to dehydration which even affected the brain. It would take the alimen-

tary canal days to regain its normalcy, by which time another dose of laxative or even a strong purgative would descend into it!

There are also those for whom a regular enema is a "must". The only redeeming feature about these habits is the diagnosis that a bad "stomach" can cause many illnesses. But the "cure" unfortunately is worse than the disease.

Evacuation indeed has become a headache because of the unnatural life, untimely, unhealthy and poor-quality food, ignoring to answer nature's call when it occurs and lack of exercise. The solution lies not in laxatives or purgatives, but in proper exercise of the stomach organs.

Uddiyana and Nauli Kriyas are the very answer for a healthy stomach, as they literally churn the stomach, removing the undigested food matter stuck in the crevices and epithelial linings of the intestines. One who practises these Kriyas just cannot suffer from constipation — and connected ailments — because of the "quake" they set off in the stomach region.

Remember the time grandma used to massage and prod the stomach when you complained of pain? These Kriyas are similar to that, only a thousand times more powerful. The sages of yore must have had an astonishingly accurate knowledge of the anatomy and working of the stomach organs for them to invent such a natural, scientific and fool-proof method to keep the digestive organs healthy.

Each time these Kriyas are practised, the stomach is cleaned: it is like removing the spectacles, clean-

ing and wiping them and wearing them again. The very outside shape of the abdomen is changed while these Kriyas are practised, making one wonder there are any intestines and other organs inside!

How to do: Stand at ease, keeping the feet two feet apart. Place the palms on the thighs by leaning a little forward. Keep the stomach muscles relaxed.

Now exhale fully and suck in the abdomen hard. The diaphragm will shoot up and in the vacuum created, the abdominal muscles will be pulled in. Only two bands like an inverted V will stand out, like two chords. The abdomen will stick to the back muscles.

Keep the pose as long as the breath can be held out and then come back to normal breathing slowly. After breathing normally twice or thrice, repeat. Uddiyana should be practised six times both morning and evening.

However, the stomach should be empty, i.e., six hours should elapse after a heavy meal and three after a light snack before the Kriya is done.

Initially, the stomach may not obey and "disappear". But constant practice will bring perfection. Yet even half success will yield tremendous results. Those who have a bulging stomach should practise other asanas and reduce the fat there before expecting a perfect Uddiyana.

Note : Persons who have undergone surgery of the stomach organs and those suffering from heart ailments should consult an expert before undertaking this Kriya. Pregnant women, children below

the age of fourteen and hernia patients should not practise these Kriyas.

Benefits : Uddiyana means "going up." The dia-phragm and the whole stomach set-up are elevated because of the suction created. The stomach is emptied of gas.

The lungs and the heart are massaged by the elevated stomach muscles. The lungs too are emptied of impure air. This benefits asthma patients. Thus, not only the stomach organs but other parts in the thorax also benefit.

The chest and shoulder muscles are pulled tight, bringing fresh blood supply to the whole area.

Another way asthma patients gain is by the increased secretion of the adrenal glands which goads the nerves and muscles into new activity. A regular practice of Uddiyana brings immediate relief to asthma sufferers. It acts like an injection of adrenalin into the blood stream.

Of course, indigestion, lack of appetite, gas, constipation, acidity, appendicitis, etc., are also cured by the practice of Uddiyana.

40

NAULI KRIYA

(Plates 21, 22)

Uddiyana and Nauli Kriyas are twins: they go together, complementing each other. But whereas the former compresses and squeezes the stomach organs, the latter gives them a thorough shake-up, goading them into healthy activity.

If a person masters these two Kriyas, he will conquer diseases, abdominal and many others, because they have their origin in a faulty stomach. Cent per cent health is guaranteed to a regular practitioner. And you will see how.

How to do : Stand as for Uddiyana. Relax the stomach, breathe out, and do Uddiyana. Now, while in Uddiyana, consciously project the stomach muscles and they will stand out in the middle like a pillar, with deep hollows on either side.

Stay in this pose as long as you can hold your breath and then back to normal, breathing normally twice or thrice. Repeat six times.

There are one or two points to note: you must be able to hold the breath out without effort and you should first be able to practise Uddiyana fairly well.

What we have just learnt is Madhya Nauli — the

middle one. Now by slightly changing the pressure on either side, we can practise Vamana (right) and Dakshina (left) Naulis.

Once this is possible, all three types may be repeated fast one after the other, so that it will look as if the abdominal muscles are being churned round and round.

Some may find it easier to practise Nauli by keeping the palms together in an inverted "namaste" between the thighs instead of placing the palms on the thighs.

It is not possible to do these Kriyas perfectly after only a few days' practice, so do not despair. But persistent efforts will bring the stomach organs under your control for the ultimate good of your whole body.

Benefits : As we have already said, Nauli sets off a "quake" in the abdominal region, shaking all organs out of their lethargy. No nerve, muscle, gland, organ escapes unscathed and they all end up revitalised and healthy and glowing with vigour.

Because of the hard kneading received during this pose, the blood supply increases, the organic secretions are squeezed out, the waste is removed and abdominal fat disappears.

Even the kidneys and the reproductive organs benefit, with the result that urinary and seminal problems are overcome.

Laziness, indigestion, acidity, constipation, headaches, nervous weakness, piles, foul breath, gas, asthma and other respiratory diseases are all con-

quered by a regular practice of Uddiyana and Nauli, as they strengthen the abdominal muscles, eliminate waste products and increase circulation.

Because of the better control over the stomach organs, obesity disappears. Lean persons, who are the despair of fat people because the former eat with a keen appetite and still look like a rake, can gain weight as there will be better digestion and assimilation. The problem with such persons is that however rich the food they gulp down, it is not absorbed by the body and is eliminated without proper absorbtion.

In the case of those tending to put on weight, the problem is that extra fat is not used up or eliminated as unwanted but is accumulated. Fat begins to pile up in the abdomen, especially around the liver, and then spreads to other parts. Uddiyana and Nauli do not allow fat to get a foothold and therefore the body stays trim and streamlined.

A regular practice of these Kriyas brings a glow of health and vigour to the face, memory and power of observation are increased, the brain is given a new sharpness, and the practitioners get a keen new pleasure in tackling intellectual problems.

Note : Those who have abdominal and heart ailments should practise simple asanas under guidance first. Pregnant women must avoid this Kriya altogether.

41

SHAVASANA

(Plate 24)

RELAXATION

It is a unique feature of the Yogic system of exercises that it does not concentrate exclusively on one aspect of bodily development to the exclusion, even detriment, of others. It does not focus only on physical health, ignoring the concomitant mental, intellectual, and spiritual values.

Similarly, Yoga is the only system which pays as much importance to relaxation as to exercise. That is why, whereas other physical exercises tire out the practitioner, a "bout" with Yoga asanas refreshes, invigorates and elevates the body and spirit.

Yoga believes that the organs need as much relaxation as exercise — if not more. Even a machine which is made to work ceaselessly fatigues and wears itself out. The body which is exercised and strained needs relaxation to restore the correct equilibrium.

Sleep is relaxation. But most people get up in the morning more tired, more grouchy, than when they went to bed. This is because there was no complete

relaxation during the night, which leaves the body exhausted.

Tension, worry, anger and other emotions too spend up energy as they tense the nerves: witness how a child with no such burden to carry relaxes naturally.

Yoga teaches us to relax consciously — letting each part and organ “go”. It uses auto-suggestion to make even the most obdurate part, like the mind, to shed its tension. The method adopted to achieve this is Shavasana, the “Corpse” pose.

Shava means a dead body. This pose resembles a corpse — with all limbs quietened, even the breath abated. But there ends the similarity. There is no rigor mortis, no pall of death on the face. On the other hand, all parts are relaxed and there is a look of calm and beatitude on the features.

Shavasana is practised last, after the bodily organs have been well exercised through other asanas. It is now time for the organs to relax and for the blood circulation to stabilise to normalcy.

Without Shavasana, Yoga practice cannot be complete. So, do not ignore Shavasana as a waste of time. Unless the practitioner feels too tired or sick to do the other poses, Shavasana should go hand in hand with the other asanas.

Also it should not be practised after each asana. Continue the other poses without lingering and relaxing in between. Then come to Shavasana.

This pose looks simple: but it is not just lying down. It calls for full concentration, meditation and

will power to relax. If just lying down as on the bed could relax, no man would get up in the mornings looking as if he has had a bout with his worst enemy

In fact, an average person may learn to practise other poses perfectly in a few weeks, but he will "struggle" to relax. In other Yogic poses, the body is bent, stretched and squeezed: in Shavasana, the parts are unbent and relaxed. No part, organ, nerve is left out in this blissful thawing process.

Relaxation, even of the different limbs, is mainly a mental exercise. Perfection in any field of activity is possible only by a relaxed approach as our reflexes respond better. The main hurdle faced here is the wavering mind which jumps from thought to thought. The mind should be made to concentrate, to learn to economise the use of energy, and relaxation will follow automatically.

Yet concentration is easier said than done. But nothing is impossible where there is the will and regular practice to back it.

This relaxation is like recharging the body with vital power, and that power enables the practitioner to conquer the world.

Before beginning to relax the different parts of the body, one should know what these parts are — and so a basic knowledge of our anatomy becomes imperative. It is one of the sad aspects of our education that we learn by rote the year in which Charles I was born or the length of the Mississippi, but we do not know how food is digested in our stomach and what parts are involved therein.

The human body can be broadly divided into head, chest, abdomen and limbs. In the head are the brain, the four sense organs, the ductless glands (pituitary, pineal body, thyroid and parathyroid); in the chest, the lungs and heart; in the abdomen, the stomach, intestines, gall bladder, liver, spleen, pancreas, appendix, kidneys, adrenal glands, etc. These organs and limbs have to be consciously relaxed during Shavasana.

How to do : Lie flat on the back with the arms on either side. Let the arms and legs go limp, with the fingers partly bent. Keep the head facing up (if you turn it to one side, there will be pressure). Close the eyes, partly or fully. After a few deep inhalations, let the breath come out softly, like a gentle breeze.

Let all strain, rigidity, stresses go. Even if a fly happens to land on your face, it should not disturb your equipoise. This is the first step.

Now we come to the mental part of the exercise. Think pleasant thoughts, memories that will gladden you, and shed all passions. After a few minutes of this, use the mental suggestion to relax the body. Start from the toe and work up to the brain calling each part to "relax, relax." Ask them to be strong and healthy.

Once this auto-suggestion is over, position the mind on the centre of the eyebrows and meditate on any object — like the flame of a lamp, a beautiful flower or a religious symbol like "Om" or one pertaining to your own religion.

You will physically feel peace descending on the

body, tiredness and lethargy falling away like dead leaves from a tree in winter. Stay in this blissful state as long as you want, but not for less than five minutes.

At the end, open the eyes, shake the limbs tenderly, roll from side to side slowly and sit up without a jerk. These precautions are necessary because the relaxed limbs may develop a catch or cramp from any sudden movement.

Benefits : You will feel after the practice that you are ready to face the world with a new zest. Not only the body but the mind and spirit will feel elevated and invigorated. The whole outlook on life will change. All nerves, muscles, even the heart, will have relaxed completely and thus gained immensely from the relaxation.

The mind is the most powerful force in the world. To control it and put it to good purpose is a task very very few can achieve easily.

The marvel of Yoga and other aspects of ancient Indian culture is that this mental power was fully realised long ago and with its help many unknown regions were traversed, explored and exploited. In Shavasana, this same power is harnessed to bring physical and mental health.

Even ailments can be cured by concentrating the mind on that part. Let us take stomach-ache: let the mind work on it, suggesting that the stomach is becoming healthy, that the ache is disappearing. This will bring a rush of oxygen-enriched blood to the area, and the pain will subside.

This demands power over the mind to prevent it from wandering to unwanted areas. This itself is a great step forward.

This control of the mind metamorphoses the face, wiping out the lines of fatigue, worry and passion and bringing a calm and repose that brighten it like a halo. We are thus able to control our emotions.

Shavasana is a good soporific too. When you roll on the bed struggling to get sleep, practise Shavasana for a few minutes. Sleep will come automatically. But when doing it after other asanas. one should not fall asleep, but meditate.

Those too sick to practise other asanas can do Shavasana alone and gain by it. When the limbs and the mind are too tired from physical and mental labour, a few minutes spent in Shavasana will bring new energy and relief. Worries, tensions, problems will be eased by its practice. There will be no need to seek the help of psychiatrists: we can be our own doctors, psychiatrists and healers.

42

PRANAYAMA

(Plate 25)

Another distinctive feature of the Yoga system, which is not found in other systems of physical exercises, is the special place assigned to breath control. Breath is the very life (*prana*), the bio-motor energy that pervades the body. Its control is Pranayama.

Pranayama makes breathing an art, a specialisation, from a mere automatic action of the body. In Pranayama, not only the lungs but also the diaphragm, the intercostals, the muscles of the trunk, the larynx and all the facial muscles are activated.

Unfortunately, we have taken breathing for granted, not sparing even a little thought to it, unaware perhaps of its importance to the body cells and therefore the general health. Proper breathing rejuvenates deteriorating body organs. Unless sufficient oxygen is supplied through the blood, the cells die and they are left to be absorbed by the body, leading to stiff joints, wrinkles, early old age, etc. In fact, the body gets most of its energy from air — more than from food and water.

The more oxygen absorption and better carbon dioxide removal, the more the arterialised blood, leading to sedative nervous effects, dynamic equilibrium and longevity.

And unlike in other exercises, Yogic breathing methods do not lead to oxygen debt in the body, as the input of carbon dioxide and the waste of body tissues and bioenergy are very limited. In Yoga, there are no violent movements to burn up energy and produce lactic acid in the muscles.. That is why Pranayama does not cause headaches, breathlessness, numbness of fingers, nervous instability, sleeplessness and other ailments which are often common in practitioners of other exercises because of muscle fatigue.

Though Pranayama itself is powerful enough to make a man healthy, in combination with other asanas, it leads to exuberant and exultant health, both of the body and the mind. As we have seen, the different asanas help remove diseases, purify external and internal organs and maintain the highest standard of physical and mental efficiency.

Pranayama aids in the above task by supplying high quality blood to the cells and eliminating disturbances in the circulatory, nervous and other systems. Thus asanas and Pranayama synchronise the working of all the bodily systems in a perfectly co-ordinated manner.

There are different stages in breath control. Some of the advanced ones are reputed to bestow supernatural powers. But ours is the humble, mundane aim of warding off diseases. For this there are some

simple Pranayama methods which take only a few minutes of our day but give in return a full life free of diseases. But, because of our perverted sense of values, some of us consider it a waste of time to spare half an hour to maintain or restore our bodily health, whereas we do not mind for waiting hours at the doctor's dispensary.

Cleansing of the respiratory system is the basic task of Pranayama. In this, it not only injects plenty of oxygen and expels the maximum carbon dioxide, but also supplies *prana*, the motor force, much above the normal. The more of this *prana*, the more complete a person; health, happiness, personality, knowledge, bliss are all his.

All living things have this *prana* but in a much less quantity. We spend it in every single activity. To restore it and build up a reservoir is what Pranayama does.

How to do: Before practising Pranayama, thoroughly clean the face, nostrils and hands. The nasal passages must be free of obstructions, allowing a smooth flow of air in and out.

Choose a well-ventilated place, preferably facing the rising or setting sun, and sit in Padmasana, keeping the body erect. Keep a handkerchief handy to clean the nose if necessary.

Use the right hand thumb and the last two fingers to block the right and left nostrils respectively. Keep the left hand on the left knee in Jnana mudra, the forefinger touching the tip of the thumb, with the other three fingers stretched and held together.

Now closing the right nostril with the thumb, slowly breathe in through the left one till the lungs are full. Close the left nostril with the last two fingers and removing the thumb slowly breathe out through the right.

The ratio between inhalation (*puraka*) and exhalation (*rechaka*) should be 1:2 — that is, if you take five seconds for *puraka*, allow ten for *rechaka*.

Now repeat the process the other way: inhale through the right and exhale through the left. This will complete one round. Practise up to 15 to 20 rounds both morning and evening.

At no time should exertion be used to pump in or pump out the air. No straining, but the shoulders should be expanded and contracted to facilitate the lungs to take in or squeeze out the maximum amount of air.

Slowly increase the time for *puraka* and *rechaka*, but all the time keep to the ratio of 1:2. After practice, relax for a few minutes in Padmasana meditating on the meeting point of the eyebrows.

This simple Pranayama can be practised several times a day, even while standing, walking or just lying down. But the stomach should not be too full at the time.

After a few weeks of this Pranayama, retention (*kumbhaka*) should be included. The ratio now is 1:4:2. The retention takes four times inhalation and twice exhalation. But never use force to keep the breath in. While in *kumbhaka*, practise the three bandhas — Jalandhara (chin lock), Uddiyana

(squeezing the abdomen and letting the diaphragm go up) and Mula (contracting the anal muscles). Bandhas, like electrical devices, regulate the flow of *prana* and prevent its dissipation.

The importance given to retention and exhalation is because in ordinary breathing we squeeze out very little of the impure air. In Pranayama the air right from the base of the lungs is exhaled. During this exhalation, the diaphragm plays a large part in pressing on the lungs to further help the process.

Note : Do not practise *kumbhaka* if you have eye or ear trouble or abdominal and coronary ailments.

Benefits: Pranayama, unlike other physical exercises, not only fills every nook and corner of the lungs with fresh oxygenated air but also removes carbon dioxide completely. Exhalation is as important as inhalation: otherwise it leads to emphysema or dilation of the lungs (as in the case of many athletes).

There is a rhythm in the process, and panting and puffing are scrupulously to be avoided. This harmony once developed soon becomes a habit, leading to mental harmony. A Pranayama practitioner's breath is always deep and regular and the rate per minute lower. One who does not know scientific breathing breathes faster, leaving much carbon dioxide in the lungs. Pranayama soothes the nerves and tones up the entire system.

In Pranayama, the lungs are expanded to the maximum, increasing their capacity; pigeon-chest disappears and the spinal column becomes erect,

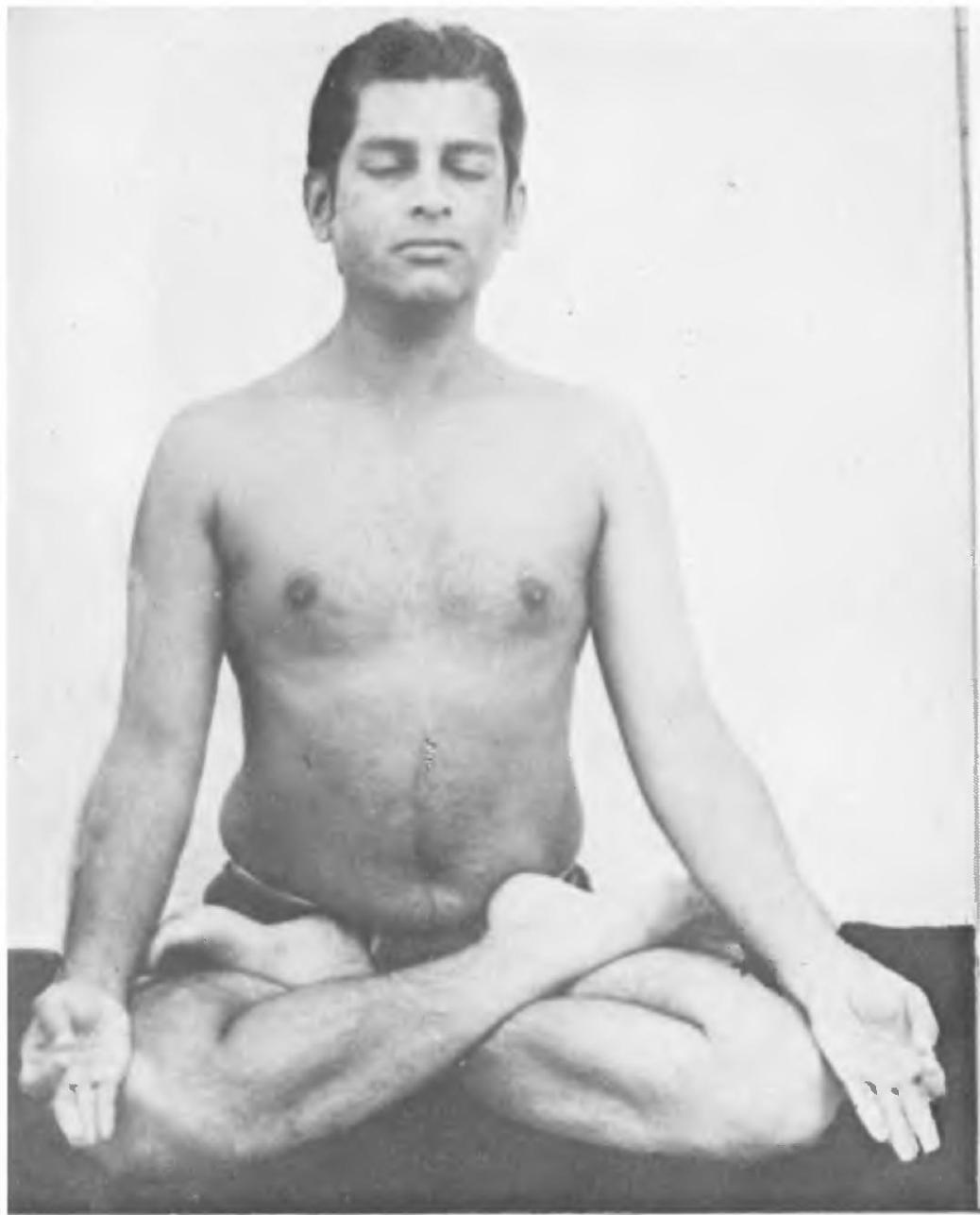
the nerves running through it gaining new vitality. The body is supplied with pure blood, which is the basic commodity needed for all-round health.

Pranayama quickly cures all respiratory complaints like colds, bronchitis, asthma and TB. As more oxygen fills in the neglected areas, bacteria hidden there are destroyed and removed. Acne and pimples are cured.

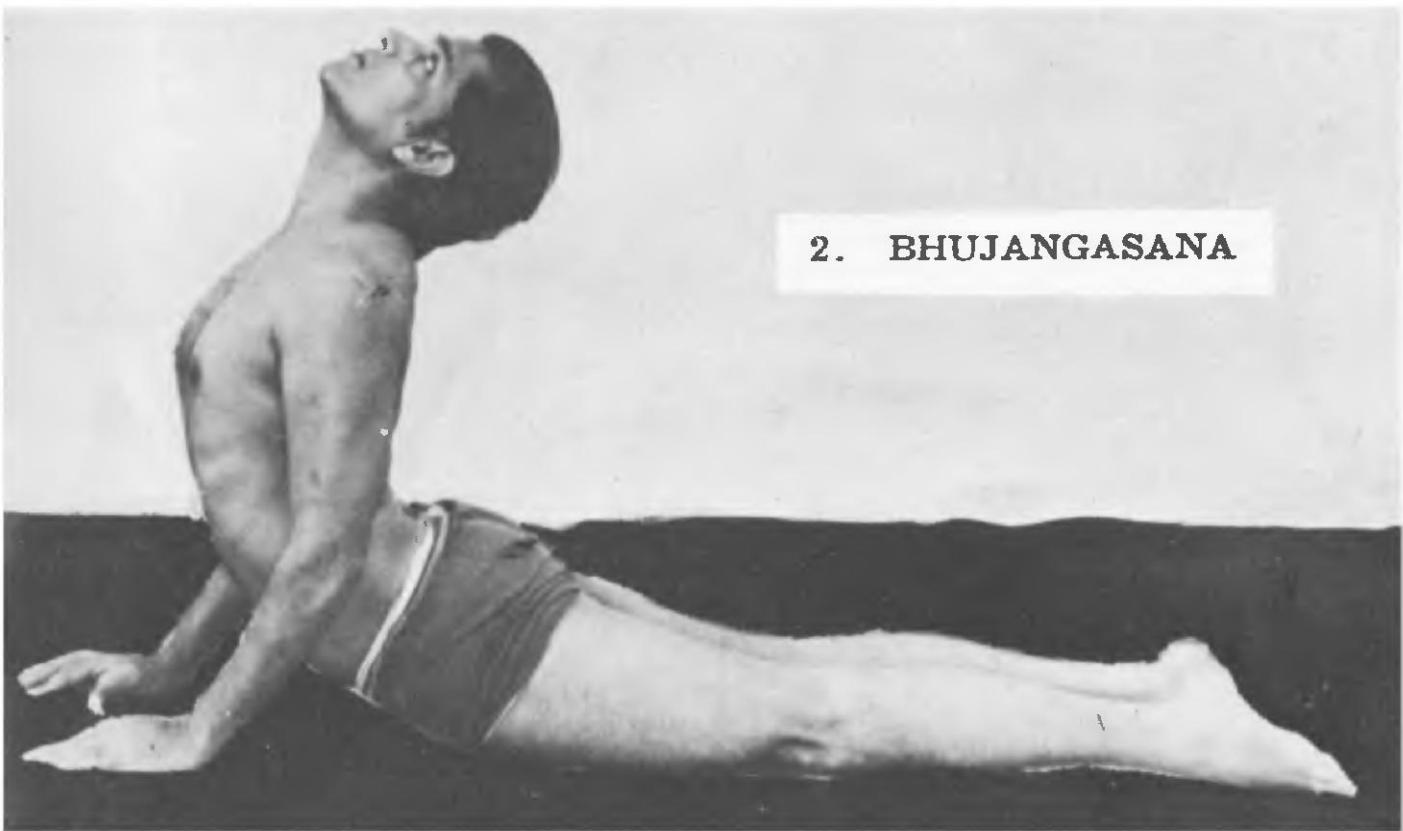
Breath is life: if breathing is controlled and perfected, longevity follows because of good health, slower degeneration of the body cells and less wastage of the vital bioenergy.

TIME SCHEDULE

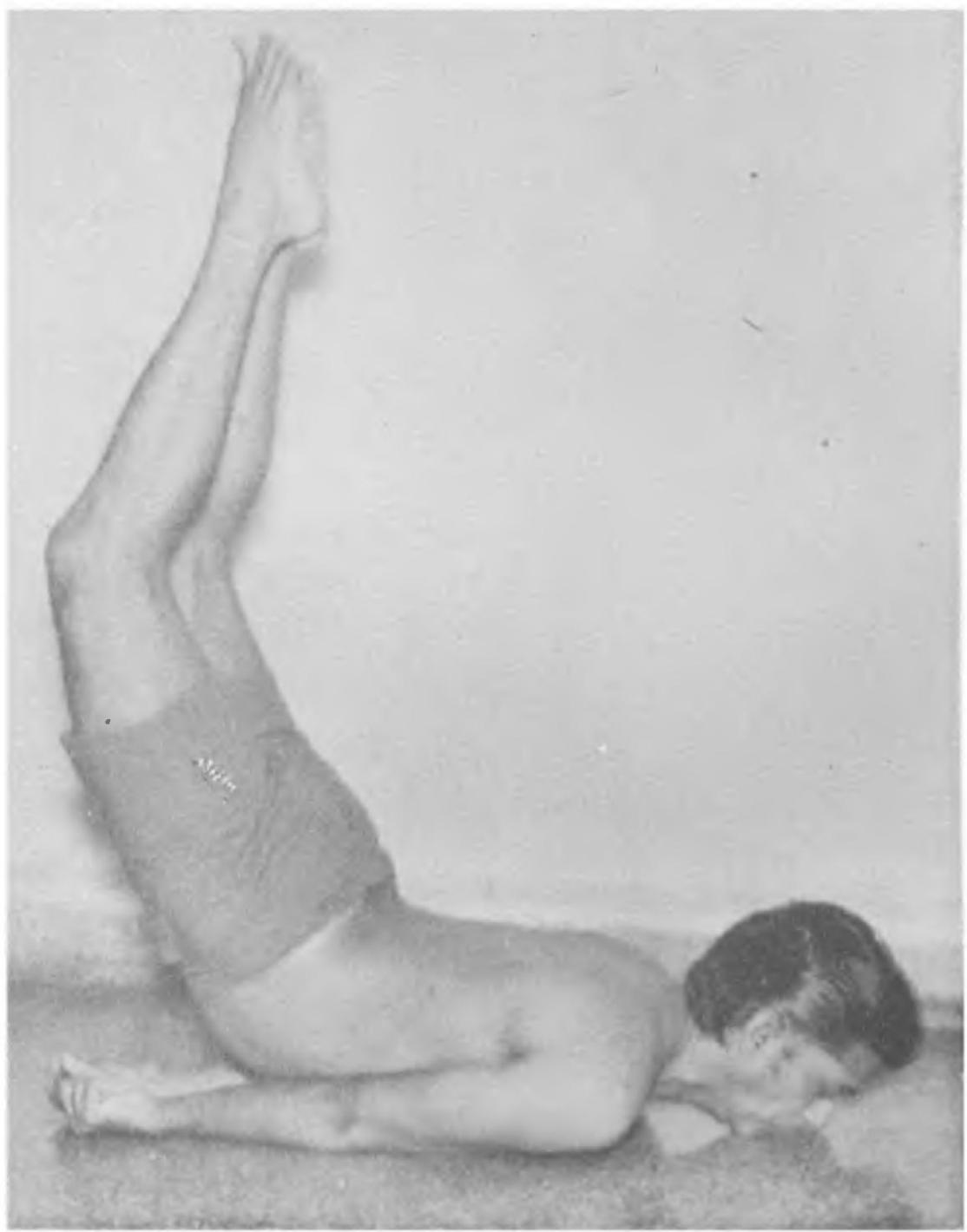
| Pose | Duration | No. of Times |
|----------------------------|--|--|
| 1. Padmasana and Vajrasana | No time limit | — |
| 2. Bhujangasana | Maximum half a minute each or till you can hold the breath | Six times each |
| 3. Shalabhasana | Five to ten minutes | Quarter the time spent in Sarvangasana |
| 4. Dhanurasana | Quarter the time spent in Sarvangasana | — |
| 5. Paschimothanasana | Five to ten minutes | — |
| 6. Halasana | “ | — |
| 7. Mayurasana | Till you can hold out the breath | Six times each side |
| 8. Sarvangasana | Two minutes | — |
| 9. Matsyasana | Half a minute each or till you can hold out the breath | Six times each side |
| 10. Sirshasana | — | “ |
| 11. Vipareethakarani | “ | “ |
| 12. Ardha-Matsyendrasana | “ | “ |
| 13. Yoga Mudra | “ | “ |
| 14. Padahasthasana | “ | “ |
| 15. Trikonasana | “ | “ |
| 16. Uddiyana | “ | “ |
| 17. Nauli | “ | “ |
| 18. Shavasana | Time to transition | — |



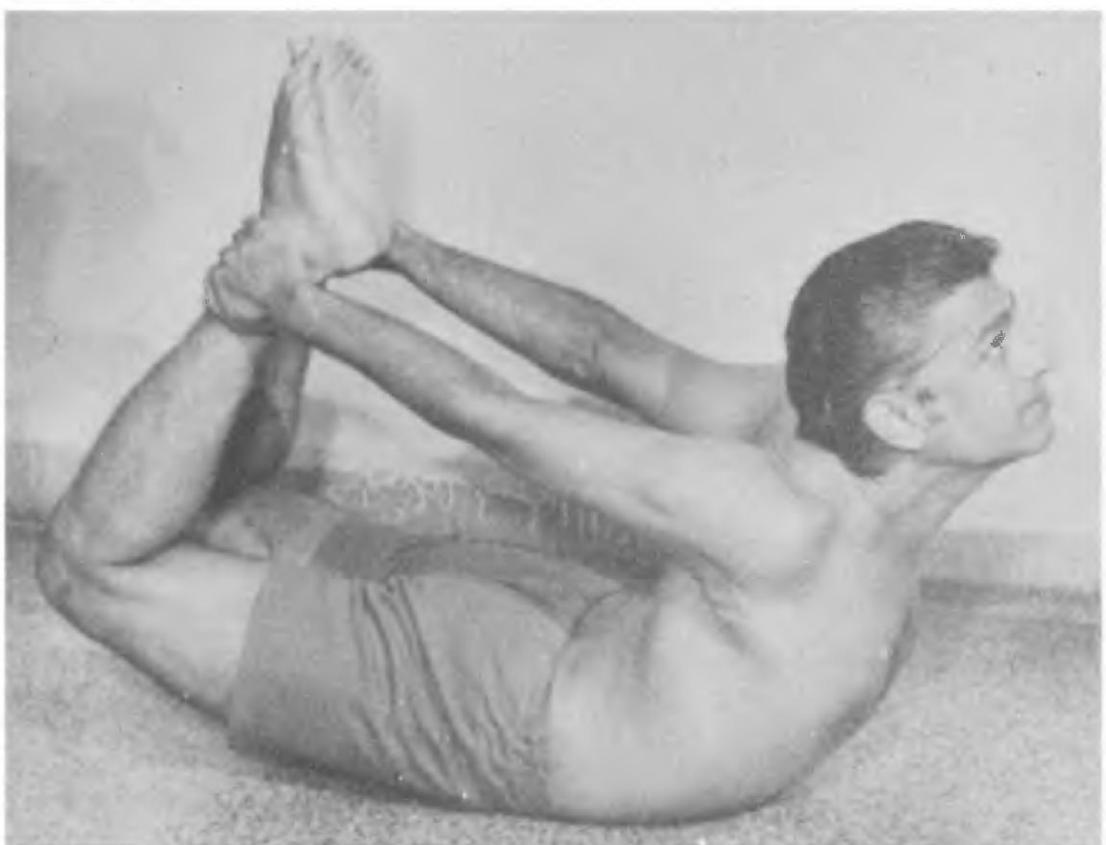
1. PADMASANA



2. BHUJANGASANA



3. SHALABHASANA



4. DHANURASANA



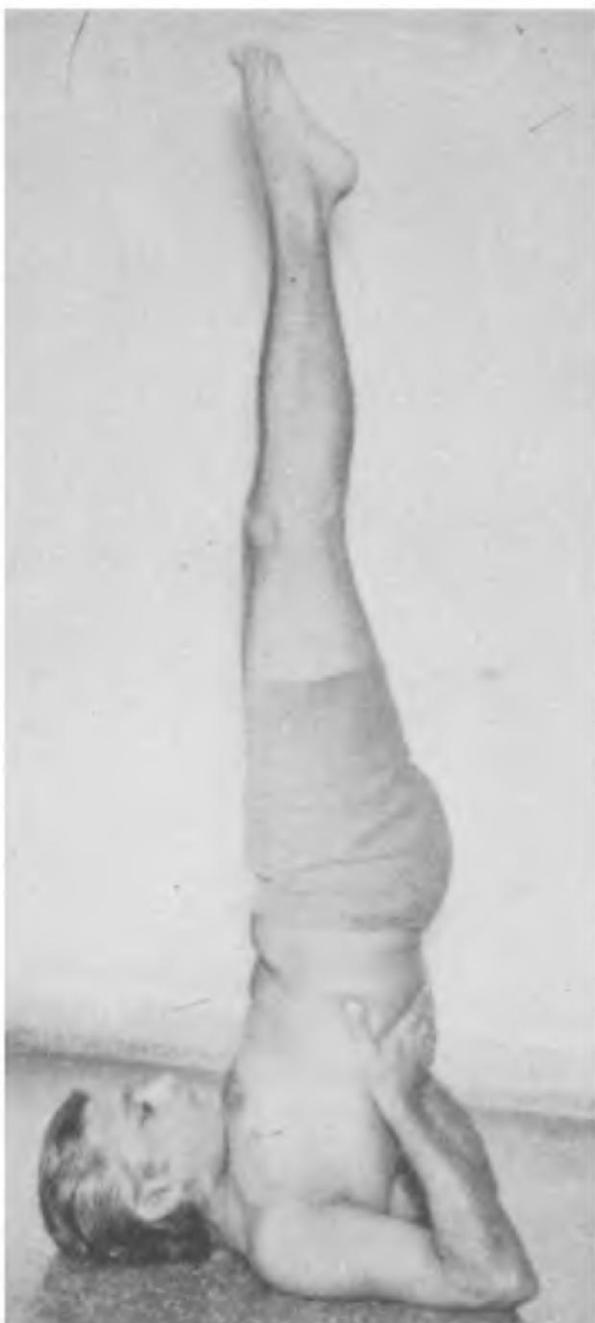
5. PASCHIMOTHANASANA



6. HALASANA

7. MAYURASANA





8. SARVANGASANA



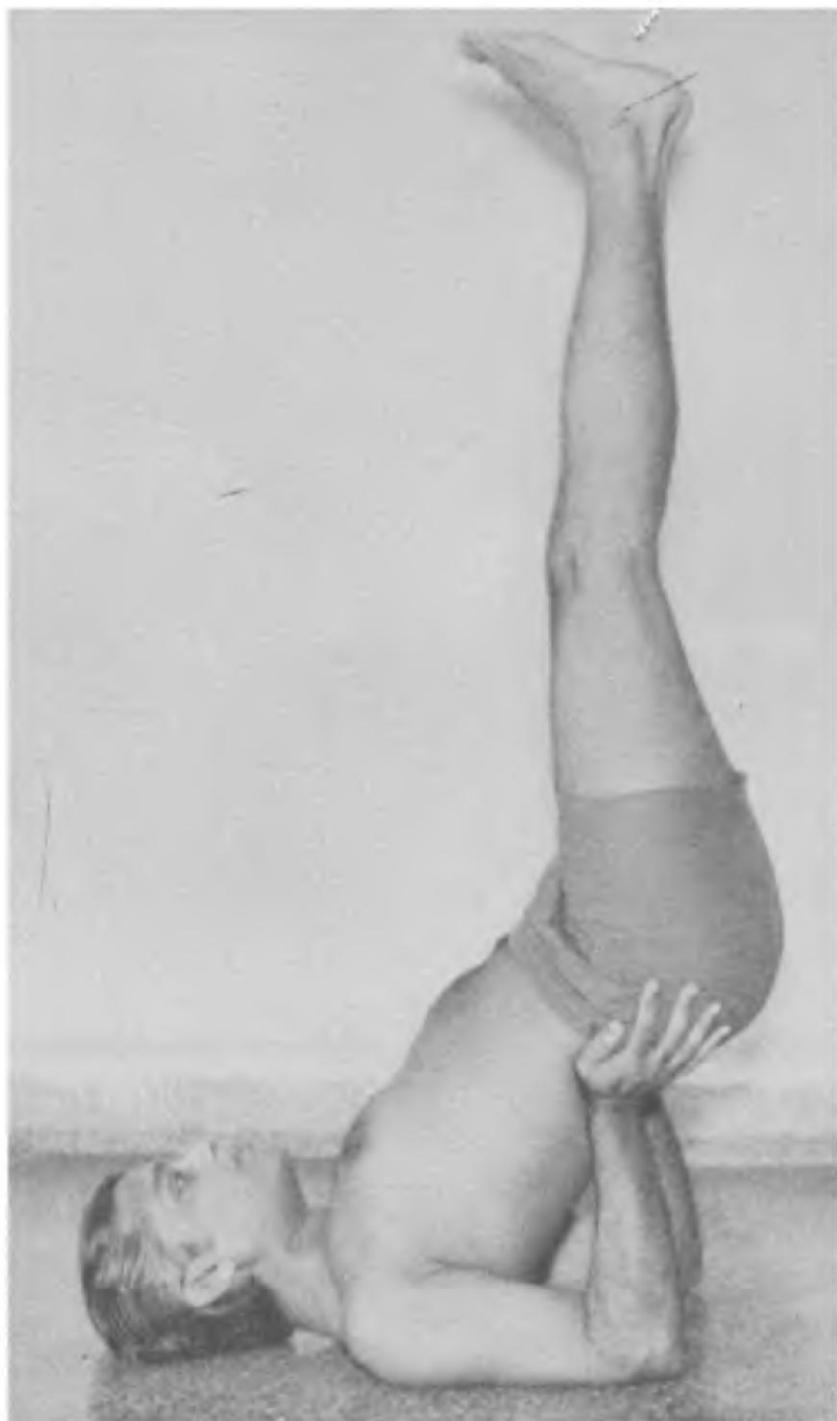
9. MATSYASANA



10. SIRSHASANA

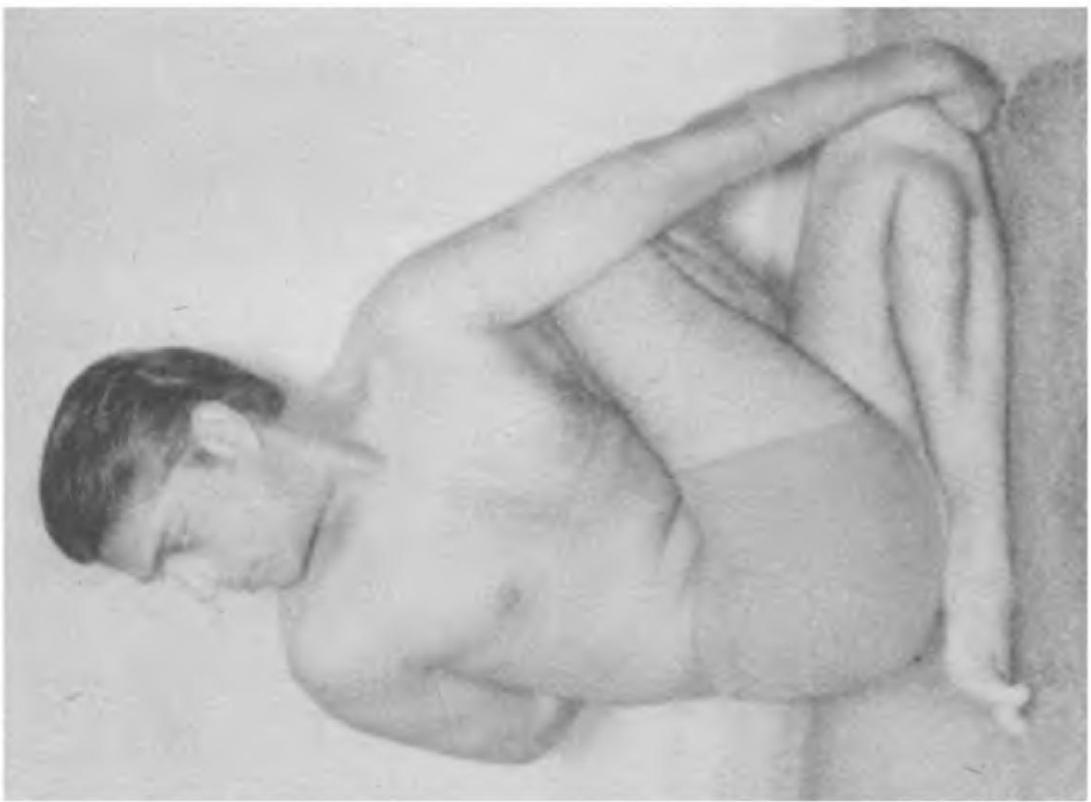
11. ASWINI MUDRA





12. VIPAREETHAKARANI

13. ARDHA-MATSYENDRASANA
(Front View)



14. ARDHA-MATSYENDRASANA
(Back View)

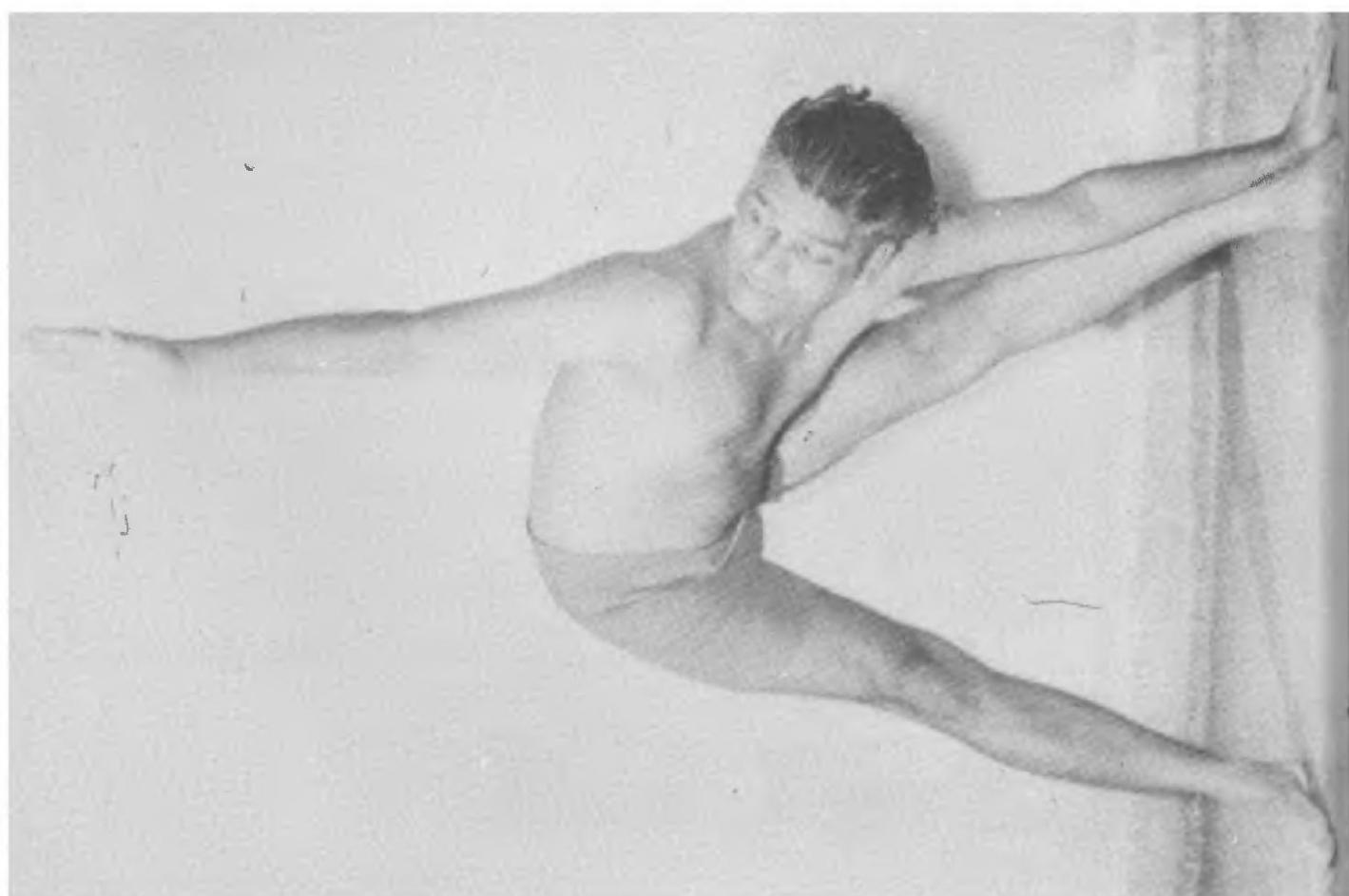
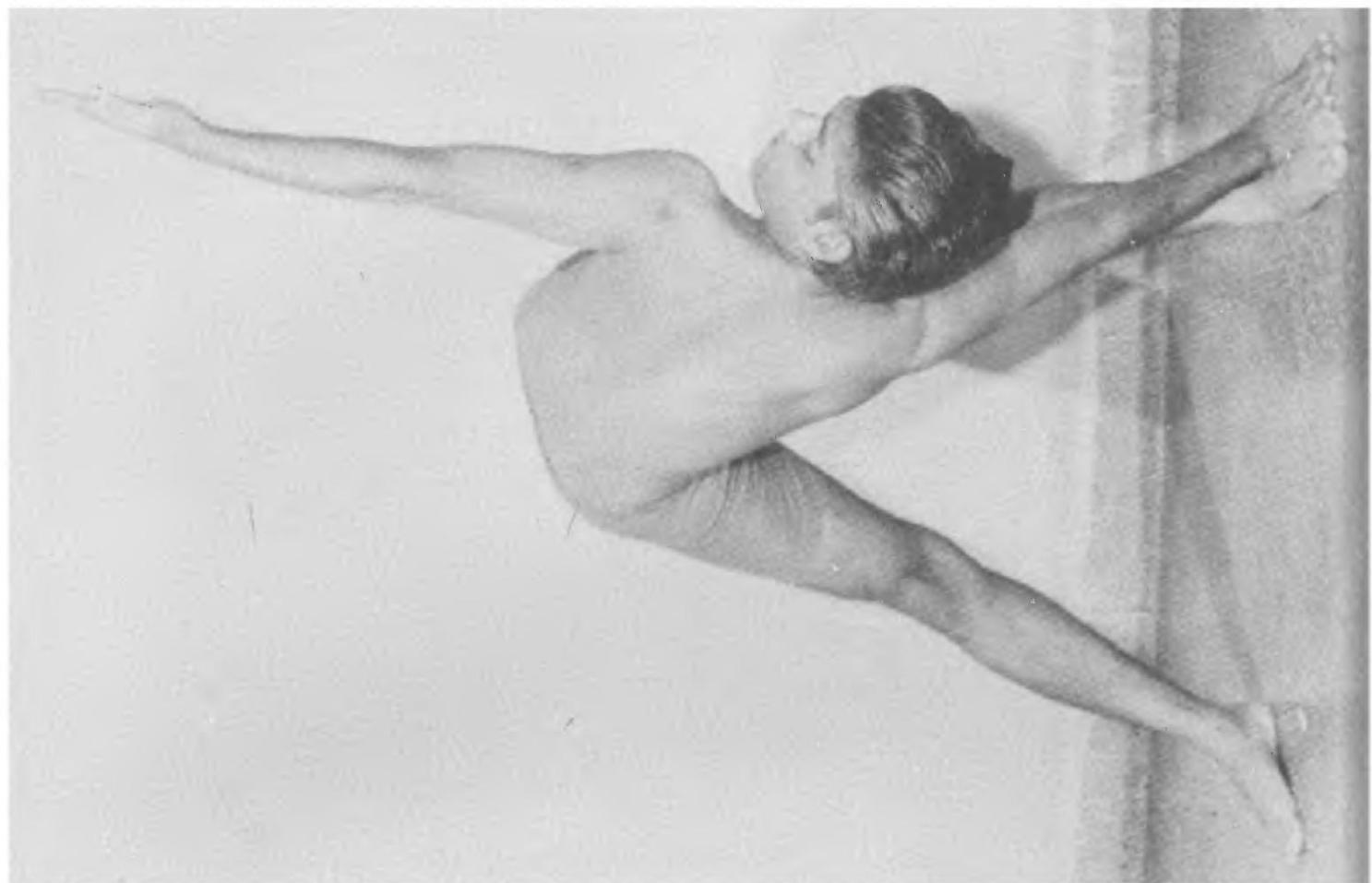


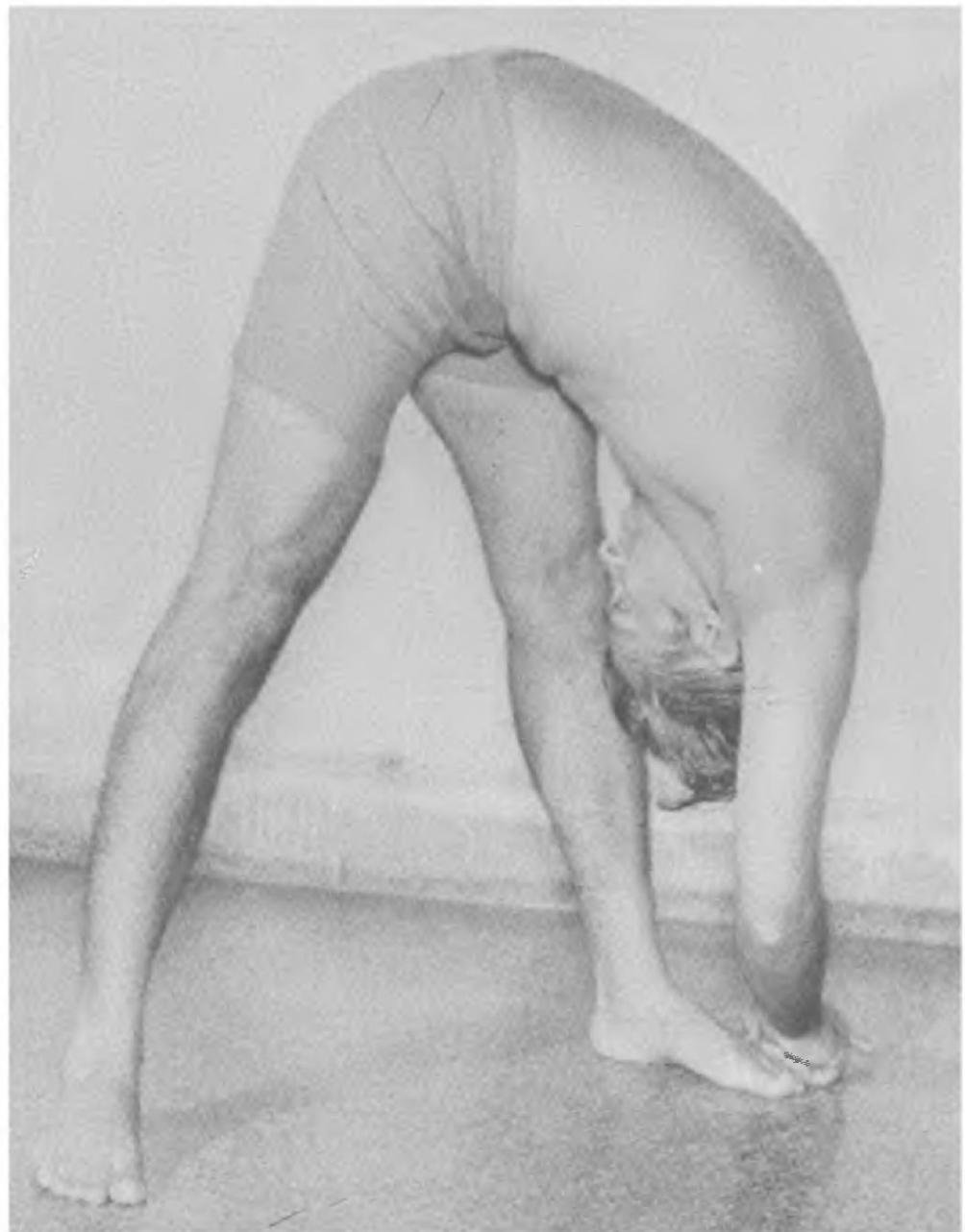


15. YOGA MUDRA



16. PADAHASTHANA





17, 18, 19, TRIKONASANA



20. UDHYANA

Opposite Plate

21, 22. NAULI KRIYA



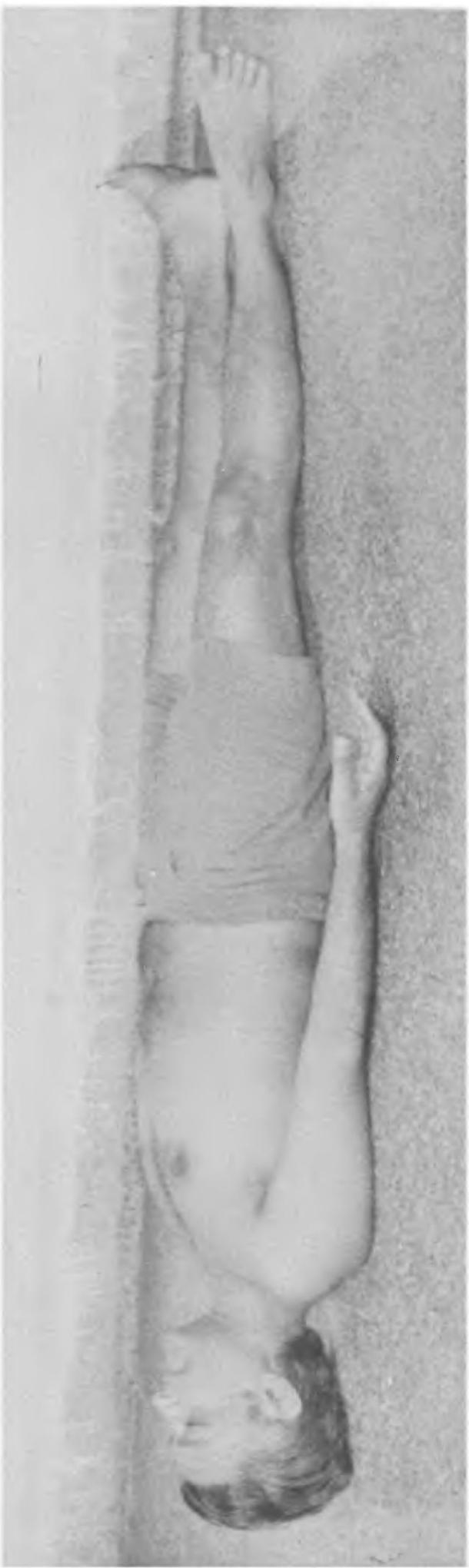
21



22



23. VAJRASANA



24. SHAVASANA



25. PRANAYAMA



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HEAL YOURSELF WITH YOGA

Based on personal experience and sound knowledge this is a book for everyone—men, women and children, the young and the old, the sick and the healthy. Here is information on how to cure diseases and disorders, on how to keep fit, free of physical troubles and stay for ever young. For the ill and the suffering, the author has described and explained the mode of practice of specific yogic asanas for many diseases, disorders and common complaints.

With the widening knowledge and appreciation of the physical and mental benefits that yoga can confer on humanity throughout the world, a book like this needs to be written. In it the author has laid emphasis on only one aspect of yoga — how to practise yogic asanas and breathing exercises to cure diseases and common ailments, aches and pains, and how to preserve good health, which alone can lead to a long happy life free of physical discomforts and mental peace.

The author writes not merely theoretically but from his own experience as a regular practitioner of yogic exercises, and so he is always practical in his statements, instructions and mode of doing the yogic poses. Besides, the book is based on ~~sound~~ medical facts which the author has explained in simple non-technical terms. He has convincingly co-related the value of asanas to the different parts of the body, the brain and the nerves, the circulatory, digestive and other systems, the all-important ductless glands and the endocrinal functions.

Here is a book for you and your whole family—for all those who not only wish to heal themselves of any disease or complaint they may be suffering from, but who desire to remain for ever free of all physical suffering and mental stresses, mild or severe, and thus lead a happy trouble-free life from childhood to a rejuvenated old age.