

19. *Pādahastāsana* Six* (Plate 46)

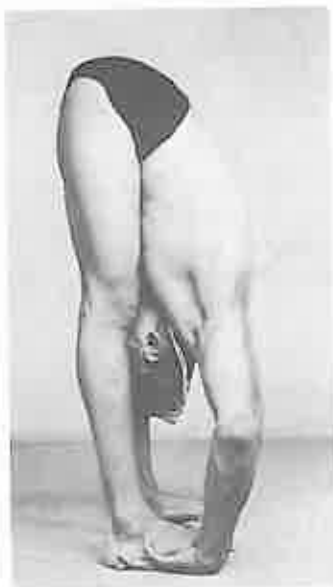
Pāda means the foot. Hasta means the hand. This posture is done by bending forward and standing on one's hands.

Technique

1. Stand in *Tāḍāsana*. (Plate 1.) Spread the legs a foot apart.
2. Exhale, bend forward and without bending the legs at the knees insert the hands under the feet so that the palms touch the soles. (Plate 45)



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3. Keep the head up and make the back as concave as possible. Do not slacken the grip at the knees and take a few breaths in this position.
4. Now exhale, and move the head in between the knees by bending the elbows and pulling the feet up from the palms. (Plate 46.) Stay in the pose for about 20 seconds with normal breathing.
5. Inhale, raise the head and come back to position 2 (Plate 45), with the head well up. Take two breaths.
6. Inhale, stand up and return to *Tāḍāsana*. (Plate 1)

Effects of Pādāṅguṣṭhāsana and Pādahastāsana

The second āsana is more strenuous than the first, but the effects of both are the same. The abdominal organs are toned and digestive juices increase, while the liver and spleen are activated. Persons suffering from a bloating sensation in the abdomen or from gastric troubles will benefit by practising these two āsanās.

Slipped spinal discs can only be adjusted in the concave back position as in Plates 43 and 45. Do not bring the head in between the knees if you have a displaced disc. I have experimented with persons suffering from slipped discs and the concave back position proved a boon to them. It is imperative to get guidance from a guru (master) before trying this pose, because it may not be possible to achieve the concave back position immediately. One has to master other minor poses before attempting this one.

20. *Uttānāsana* Eight* (Plate 48)

Ut is a particle indicating deliberation, intensity. The verb tāt means to stretch, extend, lengthen out. In this āsana, the spine is given a deliberate and an intense stretch.

Technique

1. Stand in Tādāsana (Plate 1), keeping the knees tight.
2. Exhale, bend forward and place the fingers on the floor. Then place the palms on the floor by the side of the feet, behind the heels. Do not bend the legs at the knees. (Plate 47)
3. Try to hold the head up and stretch the spine. Move the hips a little forward towards the head so as to bring the legs perpendicular to the floor.
4. Remain in this position and take two deep breaths.
5. Exhale, move the trunk closer to the legs and rest the head on the knees. (Plate 48)
6. Do not slacken the grip at the knees, but pull the knee-caps well up. Hold this position for a minute with deep and even breathing.
7. Inhale and raise the head from the knees, but without lifting the palms from the floor. (Plate 47)
8. After two breaths, take a deep inhalation, lift the hands from the floor and come back to Tādāsana. (Plate 1)



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Effects

This āsana cures stomach pains and tones the liver, the spleen and the kidneys. It also relieves stomach pain during menstrual periods. The heart beats are slowed down and the spinal nerves rejuvenated. Any depression felt in the mind is removed if one holds the pose for two minutes or more. The posture is a boon to people who get excited quickly, as it soothes the brain cells. After finishing the āsana, one feels calm and cool, the eyes start to glow and the mind feels at peace.

Persons who feel heaviness in the head, flushing or any discomfort while attempting Śīrṣāsana (Plate 184), should do Uttānāsana first; then they will be able to do Śīrṣāsana (the head stand) with comfort and ease.

21. *Ūrdhva Prasārita Ekapādasana* Six* (Plate 49)

Ūrdhva means upright, above, high. Prasārita means extended, stretched out. Eka means one, pāda means the foot. This posture is done by standing on one leg, bending forward and lifting the other leg high up.

Technique

1. Stand in Tāḍāsana. (Plate 1)
2. Exhale and bend the trunk forward. With the left hand catch the back of the right ankle. Rest the right hand on the floor by the side of the right foot and the head or the chin on the right knee.
3. Lift the left leg as high up in the air as possible. Tighten both knees. Keep the toes of the lifted leg pointed upwards. The legs should remain straight so that the toes point straight ahead and do not tilt sideways. (Plate 49)



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4. Stay in the pose for about 20 seconds, with even breathing. Inhale, bring the left leg down to the ground and come back to Tāḍāsana. (Plate 1)
5. Repeat the pose on the other side, keeping the left leg on the ground and the right leg up in the air. Stay in the pose for the same length of time on both sides.

Effects

This āsana tones the leg muscles and reduces fat around the hips.

22. *Ardha Baddha Padmōttānāsana* Nine* (Plate 52)

Ardha means half. Baddha means bound, restrained, caught, withheld. Padma is a lotus. Uttāna is an intense stretch.

Technique

1. Stand in Tādāsana. (Plate 1)
2. Inhale, raise the right leg from the floor, bend the right knee and rest the sole of the right foot on the left thigh.
3. Hold the right foot with the left hand, bring the right arm round the back and catch hold of the big toe of the right foot with the thumb and the fore and middle fingers of the right hand. (Plate 50)



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4. Release the left hand. Exhale, bend the trunk forward, place the left hand on the floor by the left foot (Plate 51), and keep the head up. Make the back as concave as possible. Take a few breaths.
5. Exhale, rest the head or the chin on the left knee. (Plate 52)
6. If the whole left palm cannot be placed on the floor, start with the tips of the fingers, then gradually place the fingers and lastly the whole palm on the floor. Similarly with the position of the head, first place the forehead on the left knee, then extend the neck to place the tip of the nose, then the lips and lastly the chin on the left knee. The progress from the head to the chin shows that the body is becoming more and more elastic.
7. After taking a few deep breaths in this pose, inhale and raise the trunk to position 4. (Plate 51.) Take two breaths.



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8. Inhale, lift the left palm from the floor and come to position 3. (Plate 50)

9. Release the left foot from the grip of the right hand and return to Tāḍāsana. (Plate 1)

10. Repeat on the other side, keeping the right leg on the floor, bending the left leg, placing the left foot on the right thigh, catching the left toe with the left hand from behind, bending forward and placing the right palm on the floor. (Plate 53)

11. If you cannot hold the toe with the hand from behind, place both the palms on the floor and follow the above technique. (Plates 54 and 55)



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Effects

Stiffness of the knees is cured by this āsana. As the abdominal organs are contracted, digestive powers increase and the peristaltic activity helps to eliminate toxin creating waste matter. The pose helps one to move the shoulders further back. This expands the chest and helps in breathing freely and deeply.

23. *Garuḍāsana* One* (Plate 56)

Garuḍa means an eagle. It is also the name of the king of birds. Garuḍa is represented as the vehicle of Viṣṇu and as having a white face, an acquiline beak, red wings and a golden body.

Technique

1. Stand in Tāḍāsana. (Plate 1.) Bend the right knee.
2. Bring the left leg over the right thigh above the right knee and rest the back of the left thigh on the front of the right thigh.
3. Then move the left foot behind the right calf so that the left shin touches the right calf and the left big toe hooks just above the inner side of the right ankle. The left leg is now entwined around the right leg.
4. You are balancing on the right leg only; this will take some time to learn.
5. Bend the elbow and raise the arms to the level of the chest. Rest the right elbow on the front of the left upper arm near the elbow joint. Then move the right hand back to the right and the left hand back to the left and join the palms. The left arm will now be entwined around the right arm. (Plate 56)
6. Remain in this position for a few seconds, say about 15 to 20 with deep breathing. Then release the arms and legs and come back to Tāḍāsana. (Plate 1)
7. Repeat the pose, standing on the left leg and entwining the right leg around the left leg and the right arm around the left arm. Stay for an equal length of time on both the sides.

Effects

This āsana develops the ankles and removes stiffness in the shoulders. It is recommended for preventing cramps in the calf muscles. For removing cramps in the legs and for relieving pain the poses recommended are Garuḍāsana, Virāsana (Plate 89) and Bhekāsana, also called Maṇḍukāsana (Plate 100), described later.



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24. *Vātāyanāsana* Eleven* (Plate 58)

Vātāyana means a horse. The pose resembles a horse's face hence the name.

Technique

1. Sit on the floor, and place the left foot at the root of the right thigh in half *Padmāsana*.
2. Place the hands on the floor by the side of the hips. Exhale, raise the trunk off the floor and place the top of the left knee on the floor. Place the right foot near the bent left knee and keep the right thigh parallel to the floor. (Plate 57)
3. Stretch the pelvis forward, keep the left thigh perpendicular to the floor, raise the hands, straighten the back and balance the body. Do not stoop forward while maintaining the balance, but keep the back erect.
4. Bend the elbows and raise the arms to the level of the chest. Place the back of the upper right arm near the elbow on the front of the upper left arm above the elbow joint. Entwine the forearms round one another and join the palms. Hold this position for about 30 seconds with normal breathing. (Front view: Plate 58. Side view: Plate 59)
5. Release the arms, sit on the floor and straighten the legs.



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6. Repeat the pose on the other side. Here, place the right foot at the root of the left thigh, place the left foot near the bent right knee on the floor and entwine the arms in front of the chest so that the left arm is over the right near the elbow joint, and balance, keeping the left thigh parallel to the floor. Maintain the pose for an equal length of time on both sides. Then release the pose and relax on the floor.

7. In the beginning, it will be difficult to balance and the knees will be painful. With practice the pain disappears and the balance is achieved.

Effects

In this pose the hip joints receive proper circulation of the blood and minor deformity in the hips and thighs is corrected. The pose is also good for stiffness in the sacroiliac region.

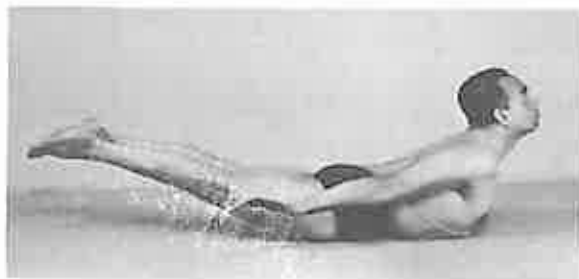
25. *Śalabhāsana* One* (Plate 60)

Śalabhā means a locust. The pose resembles that of a locust resting on the ground, hence the name.

Technique

1. Lie full length on the floor on the stomach, face downwards. Stretch the arms back.
2. Exhale, lift the head, chest and legs off the floor simultaneously as high as possible. The hands should not be placed and the ribs should

not rest on the floor. Only the abdominal front portion of the body rests on the floor and bears the weight of the body. (Plate 60)



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3. Contract the buttocks and stretch the thigh muscles. Keep both legs fully extended and straight, touching at the thighs, knees and ankles.
4. Do not bear the weight of the body on the hands but stretch them back to exercise the upper portion of the back muscles.
5. Stay in the position as long as you can with normal breathing.
6. In the beginning it is difficult to lift the chest and the legs off the floor, but this becomes easier as the abdominal muscles grow stronger.

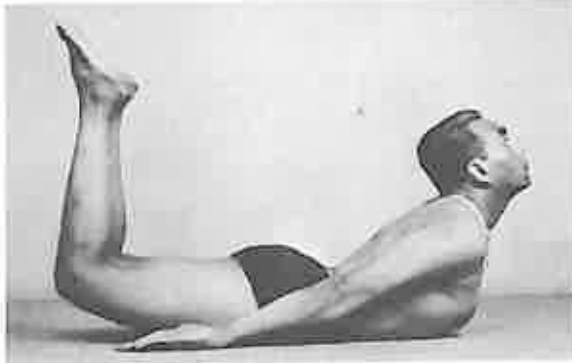
Effects

The pose aids digestion and relieves gastric troubles and flatulence. Since the spine is stretched back it becomes elastic and the pose relieves pain in the sacral and lumbar regions. In my experience, persons suffering from slipped discs have benefited by regular practice of this āsana without recourse to enforced rest or surgical treatment. The bladder and the prostate gland also benefit from the exercise and remain healthy.

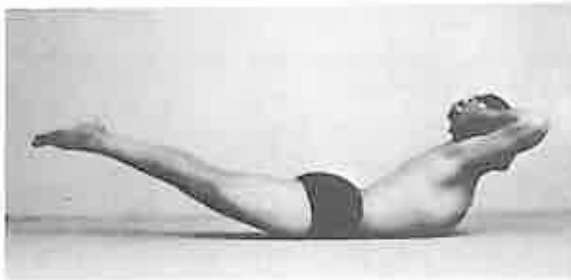
A variation of the pose may also be tried to relieve aches in the lower part of the back. Here, the legs are bent at the knees and the thighs are kept apart while the shins are kept perpendicular to the floor. Then with an exhalation, the thighs are lifted off the floor and brought closer together until the knees touch, the shins still being kept perpendicular. (Plate 61)

Verse 40 of the second chapter of the Gheraṇḍa Saṁhitā describes 26. *Makarāsana* (Plate 62) thus:

'Lie on the ground face down, the chest touching the earth and both legs stretched out: catch the head with the arms. This is the Crocodile Posture which increases bodily heat.' It is a variation of Śalabhāsana.



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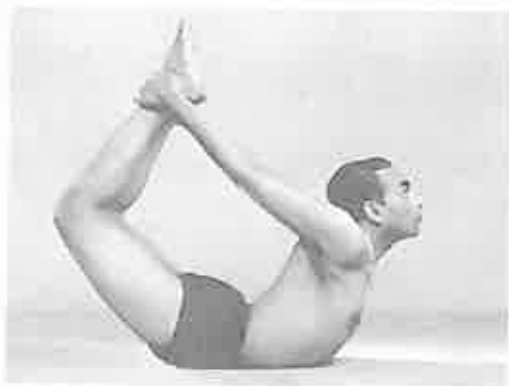
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27. *Dhanurāsana* Four* (Plate 63)

Dhanu means a bow. The hands here are used like a bow-string to pull the head, trunk and legs up and the posture resembles a bent bow.

Technique

1. Lie full length on the floor on the stomach, face downwards.
2. Exhale and bend the knees. Stretch the arms back and hold the left ankle with the left hand and the right ankle with the right hand. Take two breaths.
3. Now exhale completely and pull the legs up by raising the knees above the floor, and simultaneously lift the chest off the floor. The arms and hands act like a bow-string to tauten the body like a bent bow. (Plate 63)
4. Lift up the head and pull it as far back as possible. Do not rest either



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the ribs or the pelvic bones on the floor. Only the abdomen bears the weight of the body on the floor.

5. While raising the legs do not join them at the knees, for then the legs will not be lifted high enough. After the full stretch upwards has been achieved, join together the thighs, the knees and the ankles.

6. Since the abdomen is extended, the breathing will be fast, but do not worry about it. Stay in the pose to your capacity from 20 seconds to one minute.

7. Then, with an exhalation, release the ankles, stretch the legs straight, bring the head and the legs back to the floor and relax.

Effects

In this posture the spine is stretched back. Elderly people do not normally do this, so their spines get rigid. This āsana brings back elasticity to the spine and tones the abdominal organs. In my experience, persons suffering from slipped discs have obtained relief by the regular practice of Dhanurāsana and Śalabhāsana (Plate 60) without being forced to rest or to undergo surgical treatment.

28. *Pārśva Dhanurāsana* Four* (Plates 64 and 65)

Pārśva means sideways. In this variation of Dhanurāsana, one performs the posture lying on one's side.

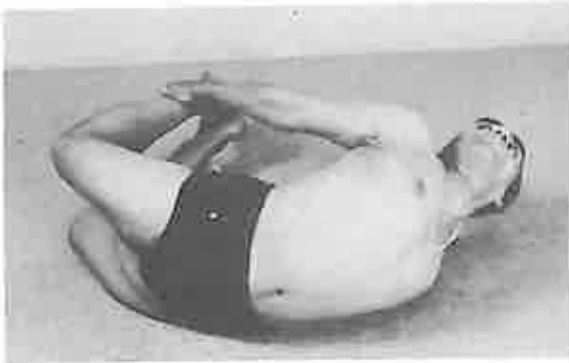
Technique

1. Perform Dhanurāsana. (Plate 63)

2. Exhale, roll over to the right side and stretch the legs and chest. (Plate 64)
3. Inhale and come to position 1. Then exhale, and roll over to the left side. (Plate 65)



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4. Stay on either side for the same length of time according to your capacity with normal breathing. Inhale, come back to Dhanurāsana, release the legs and relax.
5. In this pose, which is a more strenuous version of the earlier one, the ankles are inclined to slip from the hand grip. Therefore, grip the ankles more firmly.

Effects

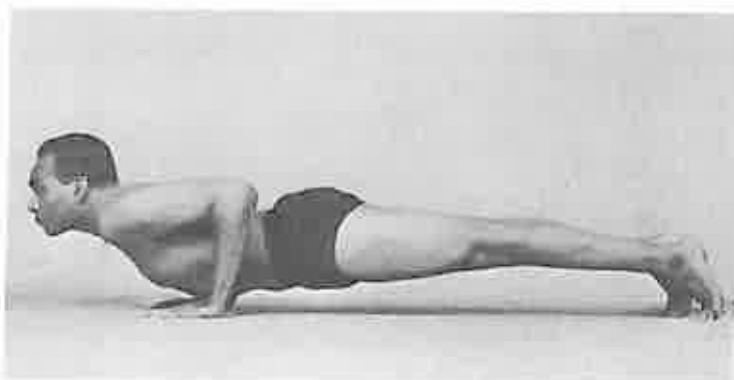
The sideways roll in this posture massages the abdominal organs by pressing them against the floor.

29. *Chaturāṅga Daṇḍāsana One** (Plate 67)

Chatur means four. Aṅga means a limb or a part thereof. Daṇḍa means a staff. Lie flat on the floor, face down and take the weight of the body on the palms and toes, exhale and keep the body parallel to the floor, stiff as a staff. The four limbs supporting the body are the hands and feet. The pose is similar to dips in western gymnastics.

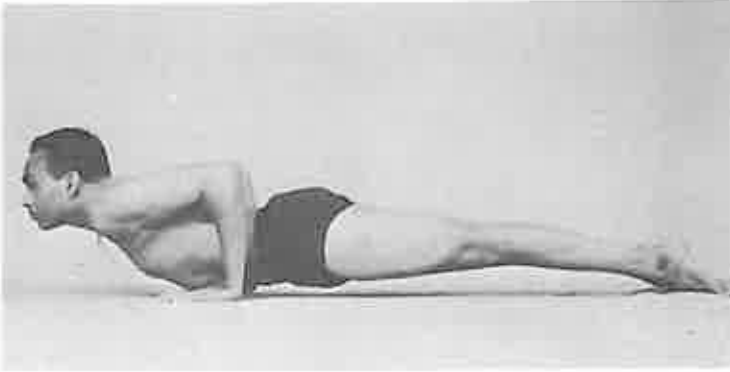
Technique

1. Lie flat on the floor, face downwards.
2. Bend the elbows and place the palms by the side of the chest. Keep the feet about a foot apart.
3. With an exhalation, raise the whole body a few inches above the floor, balancing it on the hands and the toes. (Plate 66.) Keep the body stiff as a staff, parallel to the floor from head to heel and the knees taut. Stay for some time with normal breathing.



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4. Then gradually extend the whole body forward so that the feet rest on the upper portion of the toes on the floor. (Plate 67)
5. Stay in the pose for about 30 seconds with normal or deep breathing. The movement may be repeated several times. Then relax on the floor.



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Effects

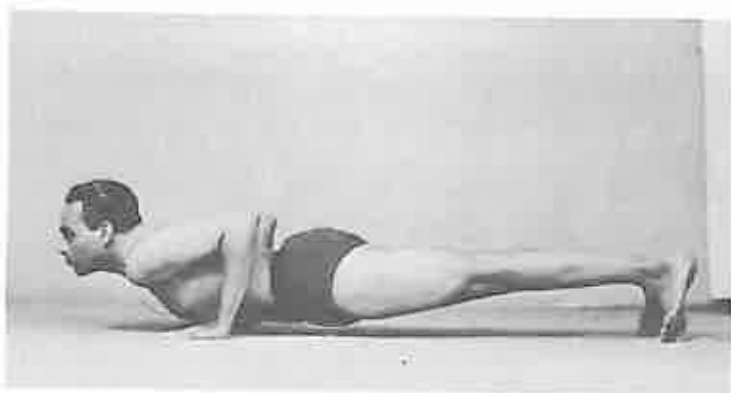
The pose strengthens the arms and the wrists develop mobility and power. It also contracts and tones the abdominal organs.

30. *Nakrāsana* Six* (Plates 68 to 71)

Nakra means a crocodile. This posture consists of several dynamic movements resembling those of a crocodile stalking its prey, hence the name.

Technique

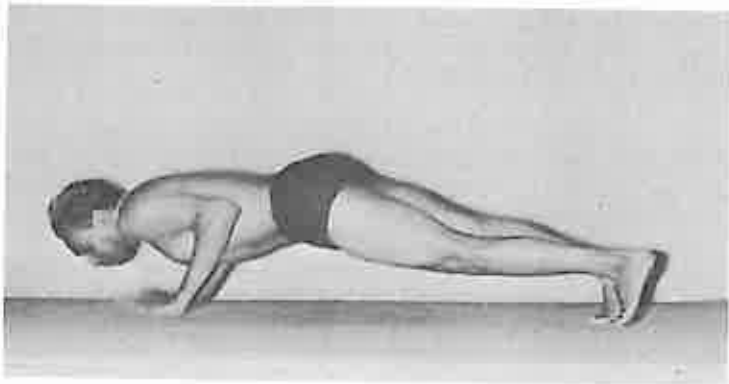
1. Lie flat on the floor, face downwards.
2. Bend the elbows and place the palms by the side of the waist.
3. Keep the feet about one foot apart. Exhale, raise the whole body a few inches above the floor, balancing it on the palms and the toes. Keep the body stiff as a poker and the knees taut. The body should remain parallel to the floor. (Plate 68)
4. Take a few breaths and with an exhalation lunge the whole body a foot forward, lifting the hands and feet simultaneously off the floor. (Plates 69, 70 and 71.) After going a foot forward, take a few breaths. Then exhale and lunge forward again.
5. Repeat the forward lunges four or five times. At the end of each lunge, the position of the body should be as described in position 3 above. These movements resemble the lunges made by a crocodile stalking its prey. After each lunge, rest a few seconds taking deep breaths.



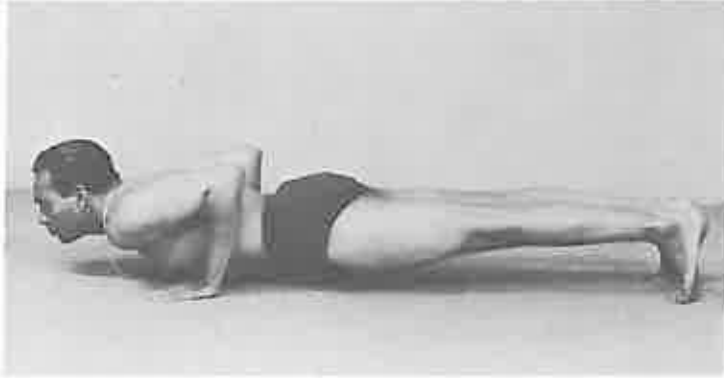
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6. Now reverse the movements and with exhalations jump back about a foot at a time until you return to the position from where you started.
7. Rest the trunk on the floor and relax.

Effects

This āsana develops powerful wrists, throws off lethargy of the body and fatigue of the brain, rejuvenates the entire body and makes one feel lively and vigorous. Since the movements bring great pressure on the wrists, it is recommended that they be tried gradually, otherwise one is apt to sprain the wrists.

31. *Bhujangāsana I One** (Plate 73)

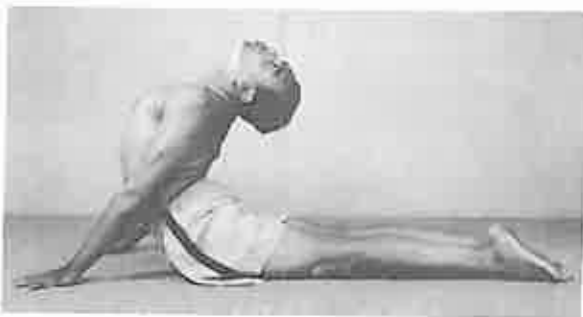
Bhujāṅga means a serpent. In this posture, lie flat on the floor, face downwards, lift the body up from the trunk and throw the head back like a serpent about to strike.

Technique

1. Lie on the floor face downwards. Extend the legs, keeping the feet together. Keep the knees tight and the toes pointing.
2. Rest the palms by the side of the pelvic region.
3. Inhale, press the palms firmly on the floor and pull the trunk up. (Plate 72.) Take two breaths.
4. Inhale, lift the body up from the trunk until the pubis is in contact with the floor and stay in this position with the weight on the legs and palms. (Plate 73)



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5. Contract the anus and the buttocks, tighten the thighs.
6. Maintain the pose for about 20 seconds, breathing normally.
7. Exhale, bend the elbows and rest the trunk on the floor. Repeat the pose two or three times and then relax.

Effects

The posture is a panacea for an injured spine and in cases of slight displacement of spinal discs the practice of this pose replaces the discs in their original position. The spinal region is toned and the chest fully expanded.

32. *Ūrdhva Mukha Śvānāsana* One* (Plate 74)

Ūrdhva Mukha means having the mouth upwards. *Śvāna* means a dog. The pose resembles a dog stretching itself with the head up in the air, hence the name.

Technique

1. Lie on the floor on the stomach, face downwards.
2. Keep the feet about one foot apart. The toes should point straight back. Place the palms on the floor by the side of the waist, the fingers pointing to the head.
3. Inhale, raise the head and trunk, stretch the arms completely and push the head and trunk as far back as possible, without resting the knees on the floor.
4. Keep the legs straight and tightened at the knees, but do not rest the knees on the floor. The weight of the body rests on the palms and toes only. (Plate 74)



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5. The spine, thighs and calves should be fully stretched, and the buttocks contracted tight. Push the chest forward, stretch the neck fully and throw the head as far back as possible. Stretch also the back portions of the arms.
6. Stay in the pose from half a minute to a minute with deep breathing.
7. Bend the elbows, release the stretch and rest on the floor.

Effects

The pose rejuvenates the spine and is specially recommended for people suffering from a stiff back. The movement is good for persons with lumbago, sciatica and those suffering from slipped or prolapsed discs of the spine. The pose strengthens the spine and cures backaches. Due to chest expansion, the lungs gain elasticity. The blood circulates properly in the pelvic region and keeps it healthy.

33. *Adho Mukha Śvānāsana* Five* (Plate 75)

Adho Mukha means having the face downwards. *Śvāna* means a dog. The pose resembles a dog stretching itself with head and forelegs down and the hind legs up, hence the name.

Technique

1. Lie full length on the floor on the stomach, face downwards. The feet should be kept one foot apart.
2. Rest the palms by the side of the chest, the fingers straight and pointing in the direction of the head.
3. Exhale and raise the trunk from the floor. Straighten the arms, move the head inwards towards the feet and place the crown of the head on the floor, keeping the elbows straight and extending the back. (Side view: Plate 75. Back view: Plate 76)



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4. Keep the legs stiff and do not bend the knees but press the heels down. The heels and soles of the feet should rest completely on the floor, while the feet should be parallel to each other, the toes pointing straight ahead.
5. Stay in the pose for about a minute with deep breathing. Then with an exhalation lift the head off the floor, stretch the trunk forward and lower the body gently to the floor and relax.

Effects

When one is exhausted, a longer stay in this pose removes fatigue and brings back the lost energy. The pose is especially good for runners who get tired after a hard race. Sprinters will develop speed and lightness in the legs. The pose relieves pain and stiffness in the heels and helps to



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soften calcaneal spurs. It strengthens the ankles and makes the legs shapely. The practice of this āsana helps to eradicate stiffness in the region of the shoulder-blades, and arthritis of the shoulder joints is relieved. The abdominal muscles are drawn towards the spine and strengthened. As the diaphragm is lifted to the chest cavity the rate of the heart beat is slowed down. This is an exhilarating pose.

Those who are afraid to do Śīrṣāsana (Plate 184) can conveniently practise this position. As the trunk is lowered in this āsana it is fully stretched and healthy blood is brought to this region without any strain on the heart. It rejuvenates the brain cells and invigorates the brain by relieving fatigue.

Persons suffering from high blood pressure can do this pose.

34. *Paripūrṇa Nāvāsana* Two* (Plate 78)

Paripūrṇa means entire or complete. The posture here resembles that of a boat with oars, hence the name.

Technique

1. Sit on the floor with the legs stretched straight in front. Place the palms on the floor by the hips, the fingers pointing to the feet. Stretch the hands straight and keep the back erect. This position is called:



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35. *Daṇḍāsana Two** (Plate 77) (Daṇḍa = a staff or rod)

2. Exhale, recline the trunk slightly back and simultaneously raise the legs from the floor and keep them stiff as a poker with the knees tight and the toes pointing forwards. Balance is maintained only on the buttocks and no part of the spine should be allowed to touch the floor, from which the legs should be kept at an angle of 60 to 65 degrees. The feet are higher than the head and not level with it as in *Ardha Nāvāsana*. (Plate 79)

3. Remove the hands from the floor and stretch the arms forward, keeping them parallel to the floor and near the thighs. The shoulders and the palms should be on one level, and the palms should face each other. (Plate 78)

4. Stay in the pose for half a minute, with normal breathing. Gradually increase the time to one minute. One feels the effect of the exercise after only 20 seconds.

5. Then exhale, lower the hands, rest the legs on the floor and relax by lying on the back.

Effects

This āsana gives relief to persons who feel a bloating sensation in the abdomen due to gas and also to those suffering from gastric complaints. It reduces fat around the waistline and tones the kidneys.

36. *Ardha Nāvāsana Two** (Plate 79)

Ardha means half. *Nāva* is a ship, boat or vessel. This posture resembles the shape of a boat, hence the name.



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Technique

1. Sit on the floor. Stretch the legs out in front and keep them straight. (Plate 77)
2. Interlock the fingers and place them on the back of the head just above the neck.
3. Exhale, recline the trunk back and simultaneously raise the legs from the floor, keeping the knees tight and the toes pointed. The balance of the body rests on the buttocks and no part of the spine should be allowed to touch the floor. (Plate 79.) One feels the grip on the muscles of the abdomen and the lower back.



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4. Keep the legs at an angle of about 30 to 35 degrees from the floor and the crown of the head in line with the toes.

5. Hold this pose for 20 to 30 seconds with normal breathing. A stay for one minute in this posture indicates strong abdominal muscles.

6. Do not hold the breath during this āsana, though the tendency is always to do it with suspension of breath after inhalation. If the breath is held, the effect will be felt on the stomach muscles and not on the abdominal organs. Deep inhalation in this āsana would loosen the grip on the abdominal muscles. In order to maintain this grip, inhale, exhale and hold the breath and go on repeating this process but without breathing deeply. This will exercise not only the abdominal muscles but the organs also.

7. The difference between Ardha Nāvāsana and Paripūrṇa Nāvāsana should be noted; in the latter, the legs are moved higher and the distance between them and the stomach is less than in the former.

Effects

The effects of Ardha Nāvāsana and that of Paripūrṇa Nāvāsana (Plate 78) differ due to the position of the legs. In Paripūrṇa Nāvāsana the exercise is effective on the intestines; whereas, Ardha Nāvāsana works on the liver, gall bladder and spleen.

In the beginning, the back is too weak to bear the strain of the pose. When power to retain the pose comes, it indicates that the back is gaining strength. A weak back is a handicap in many ways, especially to women as they need strong backs for child-bearing. These two āsanās coupled with lateral twistings of the spine will help to strengthen the back.

The importance of having a healthy lower back can be realised if we watch old people when they sit down, get up and walk, for consciously or unconsciously they support their backs with their hands. This indicates that the back is weak and cannot withstand the strain. As long as it is strong and needs no support, one feels young though advanced in age. The two āsanās bring life and vigour to the back and enable us to grow old gracefully and comfortably.

37. *Gomukhāsana* Two* (Plate 80)

Go means a cow. Mukha means face. Gomukha means one whose face resembles a cow. It also means a kind of a musical instrument, narrow at one end and broad at the other like the face of a cow.

Technique

1. Sit on the floor with the legs stretched straight in front. (Plate 77)
2. Place the palms on the floor and raise the seat.
3. Bend the left knee back and sit on the left foot. Remove the hands

from the floor, raise the right leg and place the right thigh over the left one. Raise the buttocks and with the help of the hands bring the ankles and the back of the heels together till they touch each other.

4. Rest the ankles, keeping the toes pointing back.

5. Raise the left arm over the head, bend it at the elbow and place the left palm below the nape of the neck between the shoulders. Lower the right arm, bend it at the elbow and raise the right forearm up behind the back until the right hand is level with and between the shoulder-blades. Clasp the hands behind the back between the shoulders. (Front view : Plate 80. Back view : Plate 81)



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81

6. Hold this position from 30 to 60 seconds breathing normally. Keep the neck and head erect and look straight ahead.

7. Unclasp the hands, straighten the legs and repeat the pose on the other side for the same length of time by inserting 'left' for 'right' and vice versa. Then unclasp the hands at the back, straighten the legs and relax.

Effects

The pose cures cramp in the legs and makes the leg muscles elastic.

The chest is well expanded and the back becomes erect. The shoulder joints move freely and the latissimus dorsi are fully extended.

38. *Lolāsana* Six* (Plate 83)

Lola means tremulous, moving to and fro or dangling like an ear-ring. In this posture the legs and feet are kept as in Gomukhāsana. (Plate 80.) The hands are placed on the floor by the side of the hips and the body is raised up and supported only by the hands and wrists. Then one balances swaying slightly forward and backward, the movement resembling that of a dangling pendant.

Technique

1. Sit on the floor with the legs stretched straight in front. (Plate 77)
2. Place the palms on the floor by the side of the hips.
3. Raise the seat, bend the right knee back, place the right sole beneath the left buttock and sit on it.
4. Bend the left knee back and again raising the seat, place the left sole beneath the right buttock and sit on it.
5. The feet will be crossed so that the right shin is above the left calf. Keep the toes pointing backwards. (Plate 82)
6. Take a few breaths. Exhale, raise the trunk and legs off the floor and balance on the hands, stretching out the arms. (Plate 83.) Gently rock the trunk and legs forwards and backwards. Breathe normally.
7. Rest on the floor and uncross the legs.
8. Recross the legs the other way and again balance on the hands.
9. Balance as long as possible.

Effects

This āsana strengthens the wrists and hands, the muscles of the back and the abdominal organs. It makes the leg muscles elastic and the minor muscles of the arms will be developed and toned.

39. *Siddhāsana* One* (Plate 84)

Siddha means a semi-divine being supposed to be of great purity and holiness, and to possess supernatural faculties called siddhis. Siddha means also an inspired sage, seer or prophet.

‘The Siddhas say that as among niyamas, the most important is not to harm anyone, and among the yamas a moderate diet, so is Siddhāsana among the āsanās.’



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83

‘Of the 84 lacs of āsanās, one should always practise Siddhāsana. It purifies 72,000 nāḍīs.’ (Nāḍīs are channels in the human body through which nervous energy passes.)

‘The yogin practising contemplation upon Ātman and observing a moderate diet, if he practises Siddhāsana for twelve years, obtains the yoga siddhis.’ (Ātman means the Self and the supreme Soul. Siddhīs are supernatural faculties.)

‘When Siddhāsana is mastered, the Unmanī Avasthā (Samādhi) that gives delight follows without effort and naturally.’

The soul has three avasthās or conditions which are included in a fourth. They are waking, dreaming, sleeping and what is called Turīya. ‘The first condition is that of wakefulness, where the self is conscious of the common world of gross objects. It enjoys gross things. Here the dependence of body is predominant. The second condition is that of dreaming, where the self enjoys subtle things, fashioning for itself a new world of forms from the material of its waking experience. The spirit is said to roam freely unfettered by the bonds of the body. The third condition is that of sound sleep, where we have neither dreams nor desires. It is called suṣupti. In it the soul is said to become temporarily one with Brahman and to enjoy bliss. In deep sleep we are lifted above

all desires and freed from the vexations of spirit. . . . The soul is divine in origin, though clogged with the flesh. In sleep it is said to be released from the shackles of the body and to regain its own nature. . . . But this (that is, the eternal dreamless sleep) is likely to be confused with sheer unconsciousness. . . . The highest is not this dreamless sleep, but another, a fourth state of the soul, a pure intuitional consciousness where there is no knowledge of objects internal or external. In deep sleep the spirit dwells in a region far above the changeful life of sense in absolute union with Brahman. The *turiya* condition brings out the positive aspect of the negative emphasised in the condition of deep sleep.' – Radhakrishnan in *Philosophy of the Upanishads*. This fourth condition has been thus described in the *Māṇḍūkya Upanishad* as follows: 'The fourth, say the wise, is not subjective experience, nor objective experience, nor experience intermediate between the two, nor is it a negative condition which is neither consciousness nor unconsciousness. It is not the knowledge of the senses, nor is it relative knowledge, nor yet inferential knowledge. Beyond the senses, beyond understanding, beyond all expression, is the fourth. It is pure unitary consciousness, wherein all awareness of the world and of multiplicity is completely obliterated. It is the supreme good. It is One without a second. It is the Self. Know it alone!'

'Rāja-Yoga, Samādhi, Unmanī, Manomanī, Immortality, Concentration, Śūnyāśūnya (void and yet non-void), Parama Pāda (the Supreme State), Amanaska (suspended operation of the mind), Advaita (non-duality), Nirālamba (without support), Nirāṇjana (pure), Jīvanmukti (emancipated state), Sahajāvasthā (natural state) and Turiyā (literally the Fourth), all mean the same thing. As a grain of salt thrown into water unites and becomes one with it, a like union between the Mind and the Ātman is Samādhi. When Praṇa and Manas (mind) are annihilated (absorbed), the state of harmony then arising is called Samādhi.' – *Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā*, chapter IV, verses 3 to 6.

There is no āsana like Siddha, no kumbhaka like Kevala, no mudrā like Khecharī, and no laya (absorption of the mind) like Nāda.

(Khecharī Mudrā, literally roaming through space, is described in the *Gheraṇḍa Samhitā* as follows in verses 25 to 28 of the third chapter: 'Cut the lower tendon of the tongue and move the tongue constantly; rub it with fresh butter, and draw it out (to lengthen it) with an iron instrument. By practising this always, the tongue becomes long and when it reaches the space between the eyebrows, then Khecharī is accomplished. Then (the tongue being lengthened) practise turning it up and back so as to touch the palate, till at length it reaches the holes of the nostrils opening into the mouth. Close those holes with the tongue (thus stopping inspiration), and gaze on the space between the eyebrows.

This is called Khecharī. By this practice there is neither fainting, nor hunger, nor thirst, nor laziness. There comes neither disease, nor decay, nor death. The body becomes divine.’)

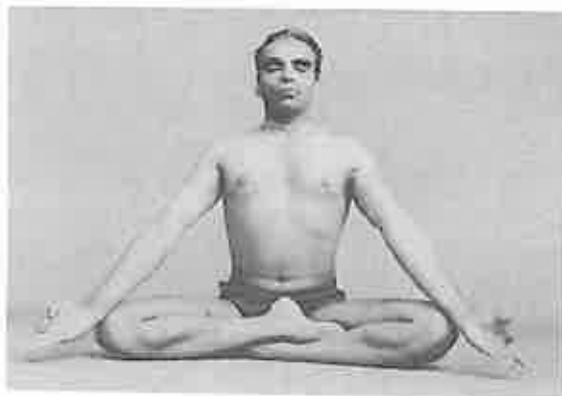
(Nāda is the inner mystical sound. Verses 79 to 101 of the fourth chapter describes it in great detail with a variety of similes. Yoga is defined as control over the aberrations of the mind. In order to control the mind it is necessary that it should first be absorbed in concentration of some object, then it is gradually withdrawn from that object and made to look within one’s own self. This is where the yogi is asked to concentrate upon the inner mystical sounds. ‘The mind is like a serpent, forgetting all its unsteadiness by hearing Nāda, it does not run away anywhere.’ Gradually as Nāda becomes latent so does the mind along with it. ‘The fire, catching the wood, is extinguished along with it (after burning it up); and so the mind also, working with Nāda, becomes latent along with it.’)

Technique

1. Sit on the floor, with legs stretched straight in front. (Plate 77)
2. Bend the left leg at the knee. Hold the left foot with the hands, place the heel near the perineum and rest the sole of the left foot against the right thigh.
3. Now bend the right leg at the knee and place the right foot over the left ankle, keeping the right heel against the pubic bone.
4. Place the sole of the right foot between the thigh and the calf of the left leg.
5. Do not rest the body on the heels.
6. Stretch the arms in front and rest the back of the hands on the knees so that the palms face upwards. Join the thumbs and the forefingers and keep the other fingers extended. (Plate 84)
7. Hold this position as long as you can, keeping the back, neck and head erect and the vision indrawn as if gazing at the tip of the nose.
8. Release the feet and relax for some time. Then repeat the pose for the same length of time, now placing the right heel near the perineum first and then the left foot over the right ankle as described above.

Effects

This posture keeps the pubic region healthy. Like Padmāsana (Plate 104), it is one of the most relaxing of āsanās. The body being in a sitting posture is at rest, while the position of the crossed legs and erect back



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keeps the mind attentive and alert. This āsana is also recommended for the practice of prāṇāyāma and for meditation.

From the purely physical point of view, the āsana is good for curing stiffness in the knees and ankles. In it the blood circulates in the lumbar region and the abdomen, and this tones the lower region of the spine and the abdominal organs.

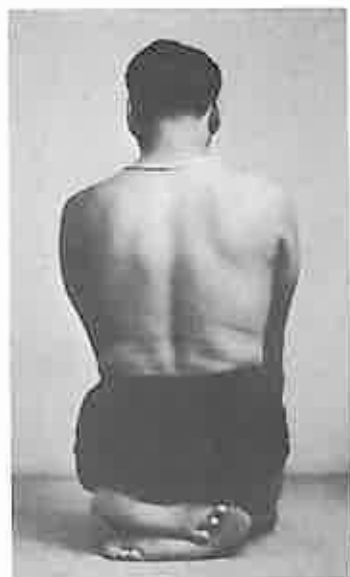
40. *Virāsana* One* (Plate 89)

Virā means a hero, warrior, champion. This sitting posture is done by keeping the knees together, spreading the feet and resting them by the side of the hips.

The pose is good for meditation and prāṇāyāma.

Technique

1. Kneel on the floor. Keep the knees together and spread the feet about 18 inches apart.
2. Rest the buttocks on the floor, but not the body on the feet. The feet are kept by the side of the thighs, the inner side of each calf touching the outer side of its respective thigh. Keep the toes pointing back and touching the floor. Keep the wrists on the knees, palms facing up, and join the tips of the thumbs and forefingers. Keep the other fingers extended. Stretch the back erect. (Back view: Plate 88. Front view: Plate 89)
3. Stay in this position as long as you can, with deep breathing.
4. Then rest the palms on the knees for a while. (Side view: Plate 90)



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88

5. Now interlock the fingers and stretch the arm straight over the head, palms up. (Plate 91)
6. Stay in this position for a minute with deep breathing.
7. Exhale, release the fingerlock, place the palms on the soles, bend forward and rest the chin on the knees. (Plate 92)



89



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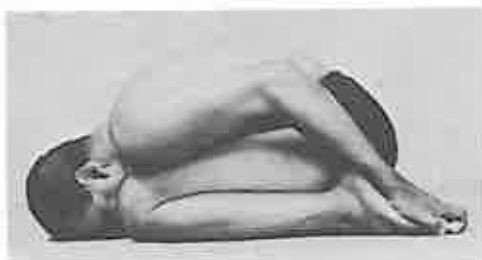
8. Stay in this position for a minute with normal breathing.
9. Inhale, raise the trunk up, bring the feet forward and relax.
10. If you find it difficult to perform the pose as described above, try placing the feet one above the other and rest the buttocks on them. (Plate 85.) Gradually move the toes further apart, separate the feet (Plates 86 and 87) and bring them to rest outside the thighs. Then, in time the buttocks will rest properly on the floor and the body will not rest on the feet.

Effects

The pose cures rheumatic pains in the knees and gout, and is also good for flat feet. Due to the stretching of the ankles and the feet, proper arches will be formed. This, however, takes a long time and requires



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daily practice of the pose for a few minutes for several months. Those suffering from pain in the heels or growth of calcaneal spurs there will get relief and the spurs will gradually disappear.

The pose can even be done immediately after food and will relieve heaviness in the stomach.

41. *Supta Vīrāsana* Two* (Plate 96)

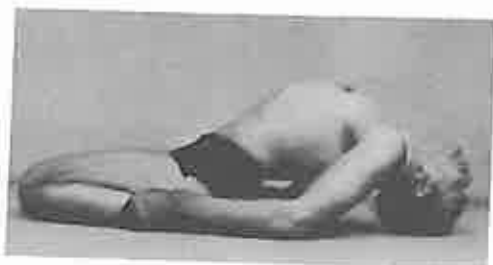
Supta means lying down. In this āsana one reclines back on the floor and stretches the arms behind the head.

Technique

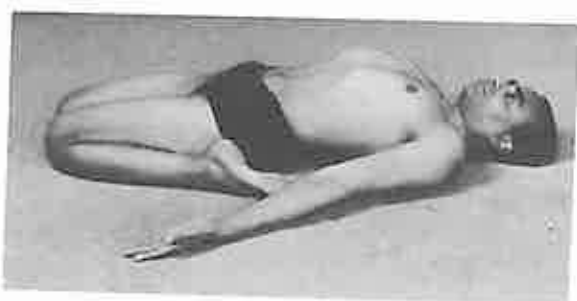
1. Sit in *Vīrāsana*. (Plate 89)
2. Exhale, recline the trunk back and rest the elbows one by one on the floor. (Plate 93)
3. Relieve the pressure on the elbows one after the other by extending the arms.
4. At first rest the crown of the head on the floor. (Plate 94.) Gradually rest the back of the head and then the back on the floor. (Plate 95.) Take the arms over the head and stretch them out straight. (Plate 96.) Hold this pose as long as you can while breathing deeply. Then place the arms beside the trunk, press the elbows to the floor and sit up again with an exhalation.



93



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96

5. The hands may be stretched over the head or placed beside the thighs. When they are stretched over the head, do not raise the shoulder-blades from the floor.

6. Beginners may keep the knees apart.

Effects

This āsana stretches the abdominal organs and the pelvic region. People whose legs ache will get relief from holding this pose for 10 to 15 minutes and it is recommended to athletes and all who have to walk or stand about for long hours. It can be done after meals and if before retiring at night the legs feel rested next morning. Several of my pupils who were cadets at the National Defence Academy after long route marches found great relief by combining this āsana with Sarvāṅgāsana I. (Plate 223)

42. Paryankāsana Two (Plate 97)*

Paryanka means a bed, couch or sofa. This āsana is a continuation of Supta Virāsana. (Plate 96.) In it the body resembles a couch, hence the name.

Technique

1. Sit in Virāsana. (Plate 89)
2. Exhale and recline on the back. (Plate 93.) Lift the neck and the chest and arching the back up rest only the crown of the head on the floor. (Plate 94.) No part of the trunk should be on the floor.
3. Bend the arms at the elbows. Hold with the right hand the left upper arm near the elbow and with the left hand the right upper arm near the elbow. Rest the folded arms on the floor behind the head. (Plate 97)
4. Stay in the pose for a minute with even breathing.



5. Inhale, rest the trunk and neck on the floor, release the hands and sit up in *Vīrāsana*. (Plate 89)
6. Then straighten the legs one by one, lie flat on the back and relax.

Effects

As in *Matsyāsana* (Plate 113) and *Paryankāsana* the dorsal region is fully extended so that the lungs are well expanded. The neck muscles are stretched and the thyroids and parathyroids are stimulated so that they function properly. Those who cannot perform *Matsyāsana* will derive the same benefit from this exercise.

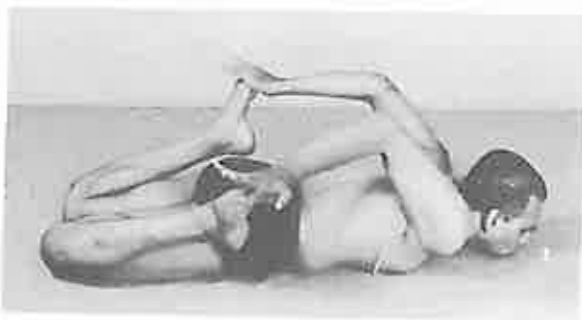
Whereas *Vīrāsana* (Plate 89) and *Supta Vīrāsana* (Plate 96) can be done at any time, even immediately after taking food, *Paryankāsana* cannot be done immediately after a meal.

43. *Bhekāsana* (also called *Maṇḍūkāsana*) Four* (Plate 100)

Bheka means a frog. The action in this āsana resembles that of a frog, hence the name.

Technique

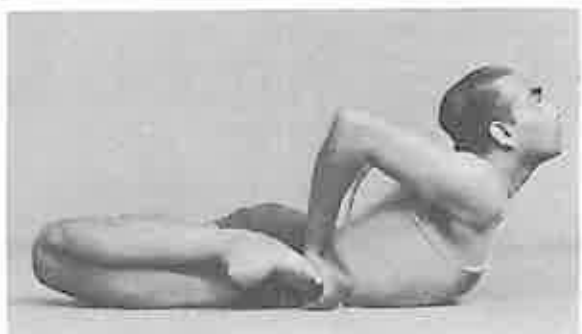
1. Lie full length on the floor on the stomach, face downwards. Stretch the arms back.
2. Exhale, bend the knees and move the heels towards the hips. Hold the sole of the right foot with the right hand and the sole of the left foot with the left hand. (Plate 98.) Take two breaths. Exhale, lift the head and trunk from the floor and look up.
3. Now turn the hands so that the palms touch the upper part of the feet and the toes and fingers point to the head. (Plate 99.) Push the



hands further down and bring the toes and heels closer to the ground. Keep the arms from the wrists to the elbows perpendicular. (Plate 100.) When the knees and ankles become flexible, the heels can be made to touch the floor.



99



100

4. Remain in the pose from 15 to 30 seconds, but do not hold the breath. Exhale, release the palms from the feet, stretch the legs and relax.

Effects

The abdominal organs benefit from the exercise as they are pressed against the floor. The knees become firmer and the pose relieves pain in the knee joints due to rheumatism and gout. It also gives relief when there is any internal derangement of the knee joints. The pressure of the hands on the feet creates a proper arch and so cures flat feet. It helps sprained ankles and strengthens them. The pose also relieves pain in the heels. By continued practice of this āsana, the heels become

softer. Persons suffering from calcaneal spurs in the heels benefit from it as well as from *Vīrāsana*. (Plate 89)

44. *Baddha Koṇāsana* Three* (Plate 102)

Baddha means caught, restrained. *Koṇa* means an angle. In this posture, sit on the floor, bring the heels near the perineum, catch the feet and widen the thighs until the knees touch the floor on either side. This is how Indian cobblers sit.

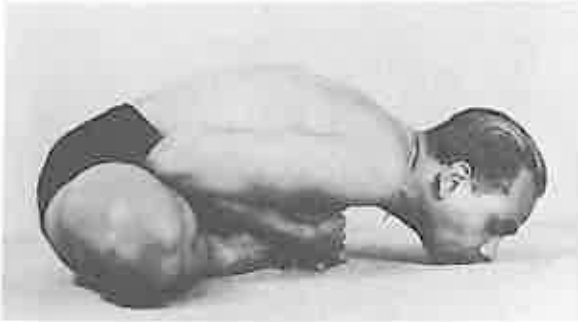
Technique

1. Sit on the floor with the legs stretched straight in front. (Plate 77)
2. Bend the knees and bring the feet closer to the trunk.
3. Bring the soles and heels of the feet together and catching the feet near the toes, bring the heels near the perineum. The outer sides of both feet should rest on the floor, and the back of the heels should touch the perineum.
4. Widen the thighs and lower the knees until they touch the floor.
5. Interlock the fingers of the hands, grip the feet firmly, stretch the spine erect and gaze straight ahead or at the tip of the nose. (Plate 101.) Hold the pose as long as you can.



101

6. Place the elbows on the thighs and press them down. Exhale, bend forward, rest the head, then the nose and lastly the chin on the floor. (Plate 102.) Hold this position from half a minute to a minute with normal breathing.



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7. Inhale, raise the trunk from the floor and come back to position 5. (Plate 101)

8. Then release the feet, straighten the legs and relax.

Effects

The pose is specially recommended for those suffering from urinary disorders. The pelvis, the abdomen and the back get a plentiful supply of blood and are stimulated. It keeps the kidneys, the prostate and the urinary bladder healthy. It is well known that diseases of the urinary tract are rarely found among the Indian cobblers and the reason for that is that they sit all day in this pose.

It relieves sciatic pain and prevents hernia. If practised regularly, it relieves pain and heaviness in the testicles.

The pose is a blessing to women. Coupled with Sarvāṅgāsana I (Plate 223) and its cycle (Plates 235 to 271) it checks irregular menstrual periods and helps the ovaries to function properly. It is found that pregnant women who sit daily in this pose for a few minutes will have much less pain during delivery and will be free from varicose veins. (It is recommended for pregnant women in Dr Grantly Dick Reed's book *Childbirth Without Fear*.)

Along with Padmāsana (Plate 104) and Vīrāsana (Plate 89) this āsana is recommended for Prāṇāyāma practice and for meditation. When sitting in meditation in this pose the palms should be folded in front of the chest (Plate 103), but to do this with the back erect requires practice. This āsana can be done without fear even after meals as long as the head is not rested on the floor.

45. *Padmāsana* Four* (Plate 104)

Padma means a lotus. This is the lotus posture, one of the most



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important and useful āsanās. It is the posture for meditation and the Buddha is often depicted in it.

Verse 48 of the first chapter of the *Haṭha Yoga Pradīpikā* describes the posture and the practice of breath control while seated in it thus:

'Assuming Padmāsana and having placed the palms one upon another, fix the chin firmly upon the breast and contemplating upon Brahman, frequently contract the anus and raise the apāna up; by similar contraction of the throat force the prāna down. By this he obtains unequalled knowledge through the favour of Kuṇḍalinī (which is roused by this process).'

Kuṇḍalinī is the Divine Cosmic Energy in bodies. It is symbolised by a coiled and sleeping serpent in the lowest bodily centre at the base of the spinal column. This latent energy has to be awakened and made to go up the spine to the brain through Suṣumnā Nāḍi, a channel through which nervous energy passes, and through the six chakrās, the subtle centres in the body, the fly-wheels in the nervous system of the human machine. The awakening of Kuṇḍalinī is discussed in detail in Arthur Avalon's (Sir John Woodroffe's) book entitled *The Serpent Power*.

This is one of the basic postures and is often used in the variations of Śīrṣāsana and Sarvāṅgāsana.

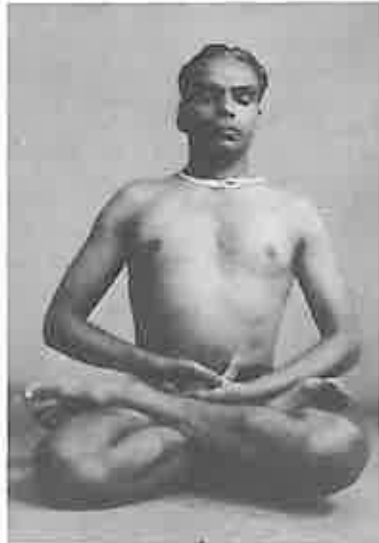
Technique

1. Sit on the floor with the legs straight. (Plate 77)
2. Bend the right leg at the knee, hold the right foot with the hands and place it at the root of the left thigh so that the right heel is near the navel.

3. Now bend the left leg, and holding the left foot with the hands place it over the right at the root, the heel being near the navel. The soles of the feet should be turned up. This is the basic Padmāsana pose. (Plate 104)



104



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4. People not used to sitting on the floor seldom have flexible knees. At the start they will feel excruciating pain around the knees. By perseverance and continued practice the pain will gradually subside and they can then stay in the pose comfortably for a long time.

5. From the base to the neck the spine should remain erect. The arms may be stretched out, the right hand being placed on the right knee and the left hand on the left knee. The forefingers and the thumbs are bent and touch each other. Another way of placing the hands is in the middle where the feet cross each other with one palm upon the other. (Plate 105)

6. Change the leg position by placing the left foot over the right thigh and the right foot over the left thigh. This will develop the legs evenly.

Effects

After the initial knee pains have been overcome, Padmāsana is one of the most relaxing poses. The body being in a sitting posture, it is at

rest without being sloppy. The position of the crossed legs and the erect back keeps the mind attentive and alert. Hence it is one of the āsanās recommended for practising prāṇāyāma (breath control).

On the purely physical level, the pose is good for curing stiffness in the knees and ankles. Since the blood is made to circulate in the lumbar region and the abdomen, the spine and the abdominal organs are toned.

46. *Ṣaṇmukhī Mudrā* Four* (Plate 106)

Ṣaṇ means six and mukha means the mouth. Ṣaṇmukha is the name of the six-headed god of war, also known as Kārtikeya. Mudrā means a seal or closing up.

The posture is also called Parāṅgmukhī Mudrā (facing inwards), Sāmbhavī Mudrā (Sambhu is the name of Śiva, father of Kārtikeya. Hence, Sāmbhava is the progeny of Śiva), also as Yoni Mudrā. Yoni means the womb, the source. The mudrā is so called because the aspirant looks within himself to find the very source of his being.

Technique

1. Sit in Padmāsana. (Plate 104.) Keep the spine erect and the head level.
2. Raise the hands to the face. Lift the elbows to the level of the shoulders, place the thumbs on the ear-holes so as to cut off external sounds. If the thumbs in the ear-hole cause pain, push the tragus (the small prominence at the entrance of the external ear) over the ear-holes and press it with the thumbs.
3. Close the eyelids, but turn the eyes up. Place the index and middle fingers on the closed lids so that the first two phalanges only press the entire eyeball. Do not, however, press the cornea. Pull the eyelids down with the middle finger. Push the upper part of the eyelids below the eyebrow upwards with the index fingers. Gently press the eyes at both the corners.
4. Equal pressure should be maintained on the ears and the eyes.
5. With the tips of the ring fingers press both nostrils equally. The nasal passages are thus narrowed for slow, deep, steady, rhythmic and subtle breathing.
6. The little fingers are placed on the upper lip where they can check the rhythmic flow of the breath.
7. Stay in this position as long as you can, drawing the vision inwards. (Plate 106)



106

Effects

The senses are turned inwards and the rhythmic breathing calms the mind's wandering. This brings a feeling of inner peace and one hears the divine voice of his self within, 'Look here! look within! not outside, for the source of all peace is within yourself.' The posture thus prepares the practitioner for the fifth stage of yoga, Pratyāhāra, where he attempts to free himself from the thralldom of the senses and to prevent them from running after their desires.

47. Parvatāsana Four (Plate 107)*

Parvata means a mountain. In this variation of Padmāsana the arms are stretched over the head with the fingers interlocked.

Technique

1. Sit in Padmāsana. (Plate 104)

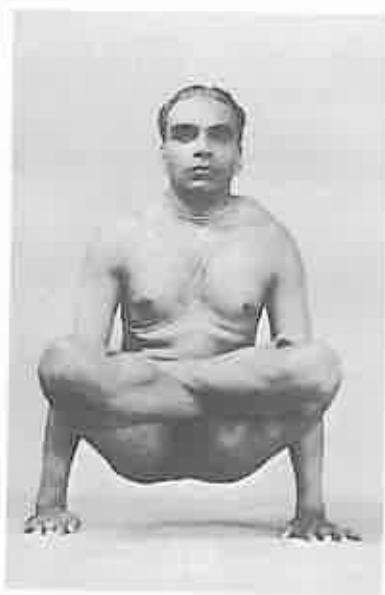
2. Interlock the fingers, and stretch the hands vertically up over the head. Keep the head bent forward with the chin on the breast bone.

3. Stretch the arms up from the latissimus dorsi (near the floating ribs at the back) and the shoulder-blades. The palms should face upwards. (Plate 107)

4. Hold the pose for a minute or two with deep and even breathing. Change the crossing of the legs and the interlock of the fingers and repeat the pose, keeping the back erect.



107



108

Effects

The āsana relieves rheumatic pains and stiffness in the shoulders. It helps free movement and to develop the chest. The abdominal organs are drawn in and the chest expands fully.

48. *Tolāsana* Four* (Plate 108)

Tola means a pair of scales. This pose resembles one pan of the scales, hence the name.

Technique

1. Sit in Padmāsana. (Plate 104)
2. Rest the palms on the floor beside the hips. Exhale, raise the trunk and balance only on the hands, stretching out the arms (Plate 108)
3. Rest on the floor, uncross the legs, recross them the other way and again balance on the hands.
4. Balance as long as possible.

Effects

This āsana strengthens the wrists, hands and abdominal walls.

49. *Simhāsana I* One* (Plate 109)

Simha means a lion. This āsana is dedicated to Narasiṃha (Nara = man: Siṃha = lion), the Man-Lion Incarnation of Viṣṇu. It is related that the demon king Hiraṇya Kaśipu had obtained a boon from Brahmā ensuring that he would not be killed by day or night, in or out of his house, on land or water, by God, man or beast. The demon king then persecuted both gods and men, including his pious son Prahlāda, who was an ardent devotee of Viṣṇu. Prahlāda was subjected to a variety of cruelties and ordeals, but by the favour of Viṣṇu he remained unscathed and preached with greater faith and vigour the omnipresence, omniscience and omnipotence of Lord Viṣṇu. In a fit of exasperation Hiraṇya Kaśipu asked his son why, if Viṣṇu was omnipresent, he could not see Him in the pillar of his palace hall. The demon king contemptuously kicked the pillar to convince his son of the absurdity of his faith. When Prahlāda called upon Viṣṇu for help, the Lord burst from the pillar in a fearful form, the top half being a lion and the lower half a man. It was then dusk, when it was neither day nor night. The Lord lifted Hiraṇya Kaśipu in the air, seated Himself on the threshold, placed the demon king on His thigh and tore him to pieces. Narasiṃha Avatār is often depicted in Indian sculpture and one such powerful group can be seen in the Ellora caves.

There are two variations of this āsana. The first, described in the technique given below, follows the texts, whereas the second variation, which is more strenuous to perform but which has greater beneficial effects, is described later as *Simhāsana II*. (Plate 110)

Technique

1. Sit on the floor, with the legs stretched straight in front. (Plate 77)
2. Raise the seat, bend the right knee and place the right foot under the left buttock. Then bend the left knee and place the left foot under the right buttock. The left ankle should be kept under the right one.
3. Sit on the heels with the toes pointing back.
4. Then bring the weight of the body on the thighs and knees.
5. Stretch the trunk forward and keep the back erect.
6. Place the right palm on the right knee and the left palm on the

left knee. Stretch the arms straight and keep them stiff. Spread the fingers and press them against the knees.

7. Open the jaws wide and stretch the tongue out towards the chin as far as you can. (Plate 109)



109

8. Gaze at the centre of the eyebrows or at the tip of the nose. Stay in the pose for about 30 seconds, breathing through the mouth.

9. Withdraw the tongue into the mouth, lift the hands from the knees and straighten the legs. Then repeat the pose, first placing the left foot under the right buttock and then the right foot under the left buttock.

10. Stay for an equal length of time on both sides.

Effects

The pose cures foul breath and cleans the tongue. After continued practice speech becomes clearer so this āsana is recommended to stammerers. It also helps one to master the three Bandhas (see Part III).

50. *Simhāsana II Six** (Plate 110)

Technique

1. Sit in Padmāsana. (Plate 104)
2. Extend the arms in front and place the palms on the floor, fingers pointing forward.
3. Stand on the knees and then push the pelvic region to the floor.
4. Stretch the back by contracting the buttocks, keeping the arms fully stretched. The weight of the body rests on the palms and knees only. Open the mouth and stretch the tongue out towards the chin as far as you can. (Front view: Plate 110. Side view: Plate 111)



110

5. Gaze at the centre of the eyebrows or at the tip of the nose and keep the pose for about 30 seconds. Breathe through the mouth.
6. Sit in Padmāsana (Plate 104) and lift the hands off the floor. Then interchange the position of the legs, perform Padmāsana again and repeat the pose for the same length of time.

Effects

The pose exercises the liver and controls the flow of bile. It cures



111

foul breath, the tongue becomes cleaner and words are enunciated more clearly. It is, therefore, recommended to persons who stammer.

The āsana relieves a painful coccyx and helps to set it when displaced.

51. *Matsyāsana* Five* (Plate 113)

Matsya means a fish. This posture is dedicated to *Matsya* the Fish Incarnation of Viṣṇu, the source and maintainer of the universe and of all things. It is related that once upon a time the whole earth had become corrupt and was about to be overwhelmed by a universal flood. Viṣṇu took the form of a fish and warned Manu (the Hindu Adam) of the impending disaster. The fish then carried Manu, his family and the seven great sages in a ship, fastened to a horn on his head. It also saved the Vedas from the flood.

Technique

1. Sit in *Padmāsana*. (Plate 104)
2. Lie flat on the back with the legs on the floor.
3. Exhale, arch the back by lifting the neck and the chest, take the head back and rest the crown on the floor. Drag the head further back by holding the crossed legs with the hands and increase the back arch. (Plate 112)
4. Now take the hands from the legs, bend the arms, hold the elbows with the hands and rest the forearms on the floor behind the head (Plate 113)



112



113

5. Stay in this position from 30 to 60 seconds while breathing deeply.
6. Rest the back of the head on the floor, lie flat on the back, inhale and then come up to Padmāsana, release the legs and relax.
7. Recross the legs the other way and repeat the pose for the same length of time.



114

8. If positions 3 and 4 are difficult to achieve, lie flat on the back with the arms stretched straight over the head. (Plate 114)

Effects

The dorsal region is fully extended in this posture and the chest is well expanded. Breathing becomes fuller. The thyroids benefit from the exercise due to the stretching of the neck. The pelvic joints become elastic. The āsana relieves inflamed and bleeding piles.

52. *Kukkuṭāsana* Six* (Plate 115)

Kukkuṭa means a cock, which this posture resembles.

Technique

1. Sit in Padmāsana. (Plate 104)
2. Insert the hands in the space between the thigh and calf near the knees. Start with the fingers and gradually push the hands down up to the elbows.
3. Exhale, raise the body off the floor and balance on the palms keeping the thumbs together. Maintain the balance as long as you can with normal breathing. (Plate 115)



115

4. Rest on the floor, release the hands, change the crossing of the legs and repeat the pose.

Effects

This posture strengthens the wrists and abdominal walls.

53. *Garbha Piṇḍāsana* Seven* (Plate 116)

Garbha Piṇḍa means an embryo in the womb (garbha = womb; piṇḍa = embryo). In this variation of Padmāsana, insert the hands and arms in the space between the calves and thighs until the elbows are bent. The arms are then bent up and the hands brought close to the ears. The pose then resembles that of a human foetus in the womb, the differences being that the embryo's head is down, while the legs are up and not folded in Padmāsana. The name of the posture indicates that the ancient sages knew about the growth of the human foetus in the mother's womb though the medical instruments at their disposal were limited.

Technique

1. Sit in Padmāsana. (Plate 104)
2. Insert the hands in the space between the thighs and calves, each on its own side.
3. Push the arms forwards till the elbows can be easily bent.
4. Then, with an exhalation, lift the thighs off the floor, balance the body on the coccyx (the tail bone) and catch the ears with the fingers. (Plate 116)



5. Remain in the pose for about 15 to 30 seconds with normal breathing. Lower the legs, release the arms from between the legs one by one, straighten the legs and relax.

6. Change the crossing of the legs and repeat the pose.

Effects

In this posture the abdominal organs are contracted completely and the blood is made to circulate well round the organs. This keeps them in trim.

54. *Gorakṣāsana* Ten* (Plate 117)

Gorakṣa means a cowherd. It is a difficult balancing pose and one feels elated even if one can only balance for a few seconds.

Technique

1. Perform *Padmāsana* (Plate 104), stretch the arms forward and place them on the floor.

2. Rest on the hands and raise the hips from the floor.

3. Stretch the trunk up vertically and stand with the top part of the knees on the floor.

4. Stretch the thighs and balance gradually by lifting the hands one by one from the floor.

5. When balance is secured, fold the hands in front of the chest and hold the position as long as you can. (Plate 117)

6. Place the hands on the floor, sit down and release the legs.

7. Change the leg position and repeat the pose for the same length of time.

Effects

In addition to the benefits of *Padmāsana* (Plate 104), one achieves a sense of balance. The coccyx (the tail bone) gets elasticity by the practice of this pose.

55. *Baddha Padmāsana* Six* (Plate 118)

Baddha means caught, restrained. In this position the hands are crossed at the back and the big toes are caught from behind. The body is caught between the crossed legs in front and the crossed hands behind, hence the name.



117

Technique

1. Sit in Padmāsana. (Plate 104)
2. Exhale, swing the left arm back from the shoulders and bring the hand near the right hip. Catch the left big toe, hold the position and inhale.
3. Similarly, with an exhalation, swing the right arm back from the shoulder, bring it near the left hip and catch the right big toe. (Front view: Plate 118. Back view: Plate 119)
4. If the toes are difficult to catch stretch the shoulders back, so that the shoulder-blades are brought near each other. A little practice in swinging the arms back with an exhalation will enable one to catch the big toes.
5. If the right foot is placed first over the left thigh and then the left foot over the right thigh, catch the left big toe first and then the right big toe. If, on the other hand, the left foot is placed over the right thigh first and then the right foot over the left thigh, catch the right big toe first and then the left big toe. Catch first the big toe of the foot which is uppermost.



118



119

6. Throw the head as far back as possible and take a few deep breaths.

7. Inhale deeply, and then with an exhalation bend the trunk forward from the hips and rest the head on the floor, without releasing the toes from the hand grip. Bending the head forward in Baddha Padmāsana (Plate 118) and touching it on the floor is called:

56. *Yoga Mudrāsana Six** (Plate 120)

This āsana is especially useful in awakening Kuṇḍalinī.

8. Also move the head on to the right and left knees alternately with an exhalation. (Plates 121 and 122)

Effects

Crossing the hands behind the back expands the chest and increases the range of shoulder movements. Yoga Mudrāsana (Plate 120) intensifies the peristaltic activity and pushes down the accumulated waste matter in the colon and thereby relieves constipation and increases digestive power.



120



121



122

57. *Supta Vajrāsana* Twelve* (Plate 124)

Supta means lying down. Vajra means a thunderbolt, the weapon of Indra, king of the gods. This is a difficult āsana and requires great practice.

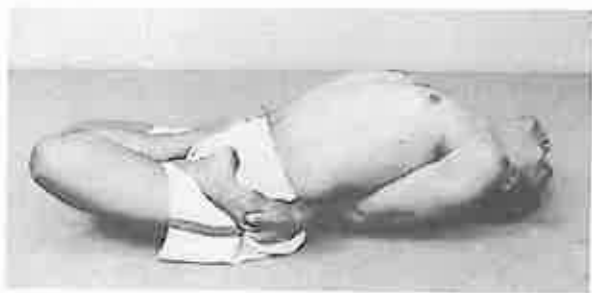
Technique

1. Sit in Padmāsana. (Plate 104.) Then perform Baddha Padmāsana. (Plate 118)
2. Exhale, raise the knees and thighs off the floor and recline back on the floor. (Plate 123.) Take two breaths.



123

3. Stretch the neck back to rest the crown of the head on the floor, and arch the chest and trunk up.
4. Without releasing the grip on the toes throughout, exhale and lower the knees and thighs back to the floor. (Plate 124.) Then the crown of the head, the elbows and crossed arms behind the back and the buttocks will be the only parts of the body touching the floor.



124

5. Stay in the pose for a few seconds. Exhale, release the grips on the toes, uncross the hands at the back and sit up again in Padmāsana. (Plate 104.) Then straighten the legs and relax.
6. Change the leg position and repeat the pose.

Effects

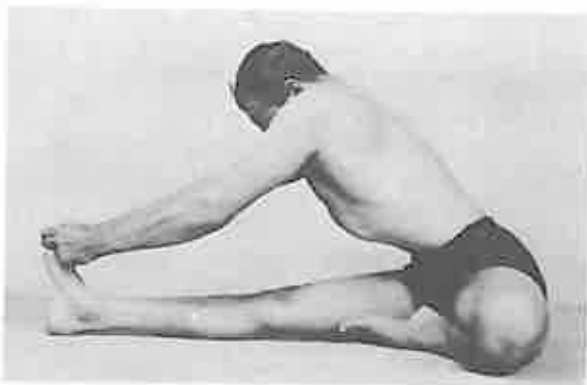
The dorsal region is fully extended in this posture and so the chest is expanded fully. Due to the stretch of the neck the thyroids benefit by the exercise. The pelvic joints become elastic. Once the pose is mastered, Matsyāsana (Plate 113) will appear to be child's play.

58. *Mahā Mudrā* Five* (Plate 125)

Mahā means great or noble. *Mudrā* means shutting, closing or sealing. In this sitting posture the apertures at the top and bottom of the trunk are held fast and sealed.

Technique

1. Sit on the floor with the legs stretched straight in front. (Plate 77)
2. Bend the left knee and move it to the left, keeping the outer side of the left thigh and the left calf on the floor.
3. Place the left heel against the inner side of the left thigh near the perineum. The big toe of the left foot should touch the inner side of the right thigh. The angle between the extended right leg and the bent left leg should be a right angle of 90 degrees.
4. Stretch the arms forward towards the right foot and hook the big toe with the thumbs and forefingers.
5. Lower the head to the trunk until the chin rests in the hollow between the collar bones just above the breast-bone.
6. Keep the spine fully stretched and do not allow the right leg to tilt to the right.
7. Inhale completely. Tighten the entire abdomen from the anus to the diaphragm. Pull the abdomen back towards the spine and also up towards the diaphragm.
8. Relax the abdominal tension, then exhale, again inhale and hold the breath, maintaining the abdominal grip. Hold this posture as stated above from one to three minutes. (Plate 125)
9. Relax the abdominal tension, exhale, raise the head, release the hands and straighten the bent leg.



125

10. Repeat on the other side, keeping the left leg straight and the right one bent for an equal length of time.

Effects

This āsana tones the abdominal organs, the kidneys and adrenal glands. Women suffering from a prolapsed womb find relief as it pulls the womb up to its original position. Persons suffering from spleen ailments and from enlargement of the prostate gland will benefit by staying in this pose longer. It cures indigestion.

'This Mahāmudrā destroys death and many other pains.' 'There is nothing that one cannot eat or has to avoid (if one has practised it). All food regardless of taste and even when deadly poisonous is digested.' 'He who practises Mahāmudrā, overcomes consumption, leprosy, piles, enlargement of the spleen, indigestion and other complaints of long duration.' (*Hat̥ha Yoga Pradīpikā*, chapter 3, verses 14, 16 and 17.)

59. *Jānu Śīrṣāsana* Five* (Plate 127)

Jānu means the knee. Śīrṣa is the head. In this posture sit with one leg stretched out on the ground and the other bent at the knee. Then catch the extended foot with both the hands and place the head on that knee.

Technique

1. Sit on the floor, with legs stretched straight in front. (Plate 77)
2. Bend the left knee and move it to the left, keeping the outer side of left thigh and the left calf on the floor.

3. Place the left heel against the inner side of the left thigh near the perineum. The big toe of the left foot should touch the inner side of the right thigh. The angle between the two legs should be obtuse. Do not keep the left knee in line with the left thigh at a right angle to the extended right leg. Try and push the left knee as far back as possible, so that the body is stretched from the bent leg.

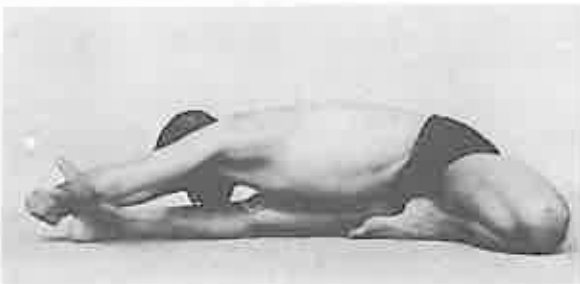
4. Extend the arms forward towards the right foot and hold it with the hands. First catch the toes of the right foot, then gradually catch the sole, then the heel and finally extend the arms and catch the wrist of one hand with the other, beyond the outstretched foot. (Plate 126)



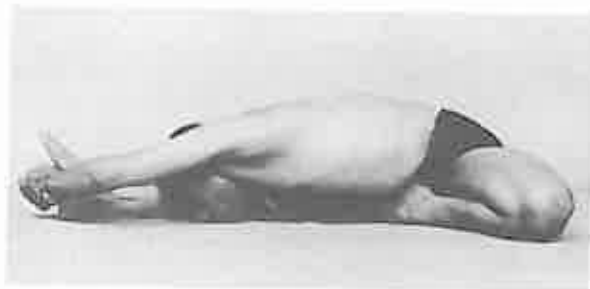
126

5. Keep the right leg stretched throughout by tightening the knee. See that the back or the right knee rests on the floor.

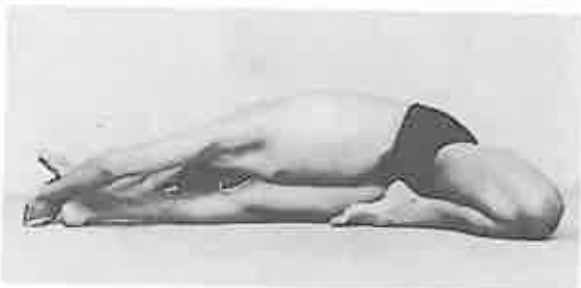
6. Exhale, move the trunk forward by bending and widening the elbows, and rest first the forehead, then the nose, then the lips and lastly the chin beyond the right knee. (Plate 127.) Then rest on either side of the right knee. (Plates 128 and 129.) The right foot will tilt to the right in the beginning. Do not allow the leg to tilt.



127



128



129

7. Stretch the back fully, pull the trunk forward and keep the chest against the right thigh.
8. Stay in this position with deep breathing from half a minute to a minute. One can also do the pose holding the breath after each exhalation.
9. Inhale, raise the head and trunk, straighten the arms and gaze up for a few seconds, extending the spine and trying to make it concave. (Plate 126)
10. Release the hand grip on the right foot, straighten the left leg and come back to position 1.
11. Repeat the pose keeping the left leg stretched out and bending the right leg at the knee. Stay in the pose for the same length of time on both the sides.

Effects

This āsana tones the liver and the spleen and thereby aids digestion. It also tones and activates the kidneys, the effect on which can be felt while one is performing the pose as explained above.

Persons suffering from enlargement of the prostate gland will benefit by staying longer in this pose. They should practise this āsana along with Sarvāṅgāsana. (Plate 223)

The pose is also recommended for people suffering from low fever for a long time.

60. *Parivṛtta Jānu Śīrṣāsana* Nine* (Plate 132)

Parivṛtta means turned round, revolved, jānu means the knee and śīrṣa the head. In this variation of Jānu Śīrṣāsana one leg is extended on the ground, the other is bent at the knee, the trunk is twisted round, the extended foot is caught with both hands and the back of the head is placed on the knee of the extended leg by bending the spine back.

Technique

1. Sit on the floor with the legs stretched straight in front. (Plate 77)
2. Bend the left knee and move it to the left, keeping the outer side of the left thigh and the left calf on the floor.
3. Place the left heel against the inner side of the left thigh near the perineum. The big toe of the left foot should touch the inner side of the right thigh. The angle between the two legs should be obtuse. Extend the left knee as far back as possible.
4. Twist the trunk to the left.
5. Stretch the right arm towards the extended right leg. Turn the right forearm and wrist so that the right thumb points to the floor and the right little finger points up. Then, with the right hand hold the inner side of the right foot. (Plate 130)

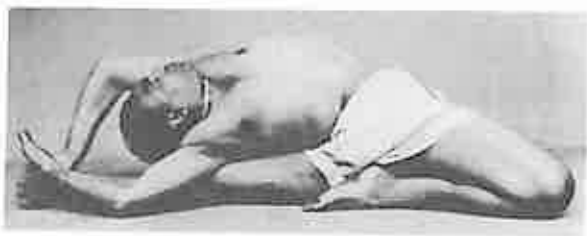


6. Throw the trunk back, stretch the left arm over the head keeping the wrist up, and with the left hand hold the outer side of the extended right foot. Here also the left thumb points to the floor and the little finger points up. (Plate 131)



131

7. Bend and widen the elbows. Exhale, turn the trunk up, move the head in between the arms and rest the back of the head on the right knee. Try to touch the inner side of the right knee joint with the back of the right shoulder so that the back of the ribs on the right side rests on the right knee. Extend the bent left knee still further and stretch the left side of the ribs. (Plate 132)



132

8. Maintain the pose for about 20 seconds. The breathing will be short and fast due to the contraction of the abdomen.

9. Inhale, release the hands, move the trunk back to its original position so that you face the extended right leg, raise the head and straighten the left leg to come to position 1.

10. Repeat the pose on the other side. Here bend the right knee and keep the left leg straight. Twist the trunk to the right until you face the bent right knee and extend the left arm towards the left foot. Then

turn the left forearm and the left wrist so that the left thumb points to the floor. With the left hand catch the inner side of the left foot, bring the right arm over the head and catch the outer side of the left foot near the heel. Then rest the back of the head on the left knee and try to touch the inner side of the left knee with the back of the left shoulder so that the back of the left side ribs rests on the left knee and stretch the right side of the ribs. Remain on this side for the same length of time.

Effects

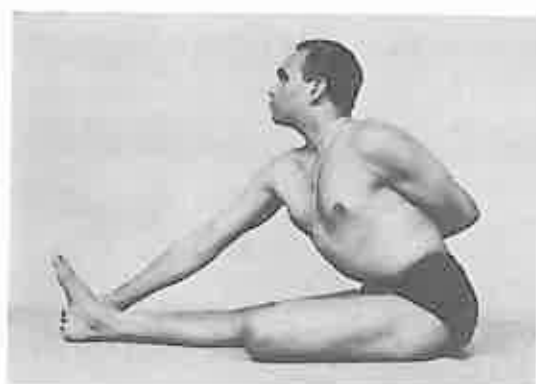
In addition to the effects stated in the note on Jānu Śīrṣāsana (Plate 127), this pose stimulates the blood circulation to the spine and relieves back-aches. In Jānu Śīrṣāsana the abdominal organs are contracted, here they are stretched on both sides. This is a very invigorating pose.

61. *Ardha Baddha Padma Paschimottānāsana* Eight* (Plate 135)

Ardha means half, baddha means caught, restrained and padma a lotus. Paschimottānāsana (Plate 160) is the posture where the back of the whole body is intensely stretched.

Technique

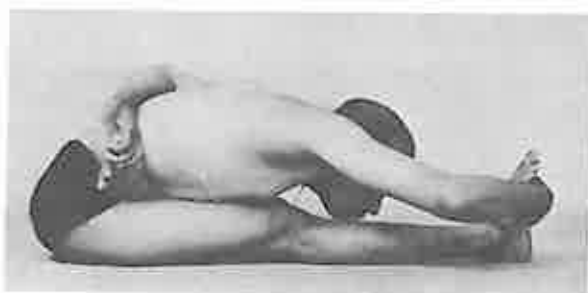
1. Sit on the floor, with the legs stretched straight in front. (Plate 77)
2. Bend the left leg at the knee, and place the left foot over the right thigh. The left heel should press the navel and the toes should be stretched and pointing. This is the half lotus posture.
3. Bring the left arm round the back from behind and with an exhalation catch the big toe of the left foot. If the toe cannot be grasped easily, swing back the left shoulder.
4. After holding the left big toe, move the bent left knee nearer to the extended right leg. Stretch the right arm forward and catch the right foot with the right hand, the palm touching the sole. (Plates 133 and 134)
5. Inhale, stretch the back and gaze up for a few seconds, without releasing the grip on the left big toe.
6. Exhale, move the trunk forward by bending the right elbow outwards. Rest the forehead, then the nose, then the lips and lastly the chin on the right knee. (Plate 135)
7. In the initial stages, the knee of the extended leg will be lifted off the floor. Tighten the thigh muscles and rest the entire back of the extended right leg on the floor.
8. Stay in this position from 30 to 60 seconds, breathing evenly.



133



134



135

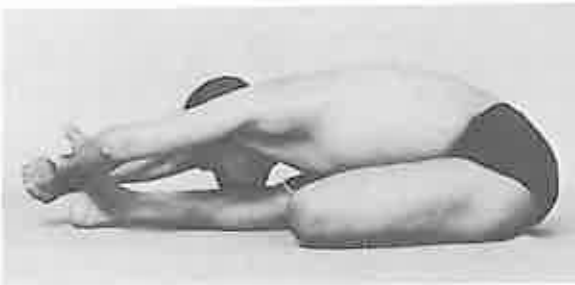
9. Inhale, raise the head and trunk, release the hands, straighten the left leg and come to position 1.

10. Repeat the pose on the other side, keeping the left leg stretched out on the ground, bending the right knee and placing the right foot on the left thigh. Stay for the same length of time on both sides.

11. If you cannot hold the toe with the hand from behind, hold the extended leg with both hands and follow the above technique. (Plates 136 and 137)



136



137

Effects

Due to the half lotus pose, the knees become flexible enough to execute the full lotus pose. While placing the chin on the knee of the extended leg, the bent knee is brought close to the stretched leg. This gives a good pull to the navel and abdominal organs. Blood is made to flow round the navel and the genital organs. The navel is considered to be a nerve centre, and the Svādhiṣṭhāna Chakra, one of the purificatory fly-wheels

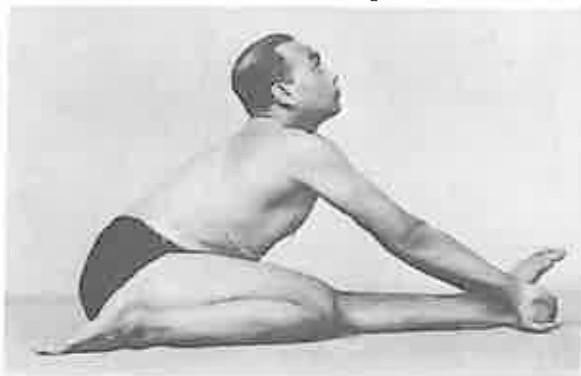
in the human nervous system, is situated there. This chakra corresponds to the hypo-gastric plexus. The pose is recommended for persons with rounded and drooping shoulders.

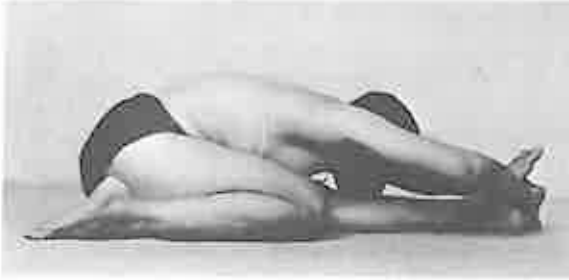
62. *Triṅgā Mukhaikapda Paschimotānāsana* Five* (Plate 139)

Triṅga means three limbs or parts thereof. In this posture the three parts are the feet, knees and buttocks. Mukhaikapāda (a compound of three words, mukha = face, eka = one, and pāda = leg or foot) corresponds to the face (or mouth) touching one (extended) leg. In Paschimotānāsana (Plate 160) the back of the whole body is intensely stretched.

Technique

1. Sit on the floor, with the legs stretched straight in front. (Plate 77)
2. Bend the right leg at the knee and move the right foot back. Place the right foot by the side of the right hip joint, keep the toes pointing back and rest them on the floor. The inner side of the right calf will touch the outer side of the right thigh.
3. Balance in this position, throwing the weight of the body on the bent knee. In the beginning, the body tilts to the side of the outstretched leg, and the foot of the outstretched leg also tilts outwards. Learn to balance in this position, keeping the foot and toes stretched and pointing forward.
4. Now hold the left foot with both the palms, gripping the sides of the sole. If you can, then extend the trunk forward and hook the wrists round the outstretched left foot. (Plate 138.) Take two deep breaths. It usually takes several months before one can hook the wrists in this way, so do not despair after the first few attempts.





139

5. Join the knees, exhale and bend forward. Rest first the forehead, then the nose, next the lips and ultimately the chin on the left knee. (Plate 139.) To achieve this, widen the elbows and push the trunk forward with an exhalation.
6. Do not rest the left elbow on the floor. In the beginning, one loses balance and topples over to the side of the extended leg. The trunk should, therefore, be slightly bent towards the side of the bent leg and the weight of the body should be taken by the bent knee.
7. Stay in this position from half a minute to a minute, breathing evenly.
8. Inhale, raise the head and trunk, release the hands, straighten the right leg and come to position 1.
9. Repeat the pose on the other side, keeping the right leg stretched out on the ground, bending the left knee and placing the left foot by the left hip joint. Stay for the same length of time on both sides.

Effects

This āsana is recommended for persons suffering from dropped arches and flat feet. It cures sprains in the ankle and the knee, and any swelling in the leg is reduced.

Along with Jānu Śīrṣāsana (Plate 127) and Ardha Baddha Padma Paschimottānāsana (Plate 135), this āsana tones the abdominal organs and keeps them free from sluggishness. We abuse our abdominal organs by over-indulgence or by conforming to social etiquette. Abdominal organs cause a majority of diseases and ancient sages emphasised that their health was essential for longevity, happiness and peace of mind. These forward bending āsanās keep the abdominal organs healthy and in trim. Apart from keeping the muscles in shape, they work on the organs as well.

63. *Krounchāsana* Ten* (Plates 141 and 142)

Krouncha means a heron. It is also the name of a mountain, said to be the grandson of Himālaya and to have been pierced by Kārtikeya, the god of war, and by Paraśurāma, the sixth incarnation of Viṣṇu. In this sitting posture, one leg is bent back at the knee and the foot is placed against the side of the hip joint, while the other leg is raised up vertically, its foot being held by the hands. The chin is then placed on the knee of the vertical leg. The raised leg resembles the outstretched neck and head of a heron, also a precipice. Hence the name.

Technique

1. Sit on the floor, with the legs stretched straight in front. (Plate 77)
2. Bend the right leg at the knee and move the right foot back. Place the right foot by the side of the hip joint, keep the toes pointing back and rest all of them on the floor. The inner side of the right calf will touch the outer side of the right thigh. Join the knees together.
3. Exhale, bend the left knee, hold the left foot with both hands and raise the left leg up vertically. (Plate 140)



140

4. Stretch out the left leg fully and keep the back erect. After a few breaths in this position, exhale, move the head and trunk forward and at the same time try and bring the left leg nearer and rest the chin on the knee of the left leg. (Plates 141 and 142)

5. Hold this position for 20 to 30 seconds, with deep breaths. Do not lift the bent knee off the floor while the chin is touching the knee of the lifted leg.

6. Inhale, move the head and trunk back (Plate 140), lower the left leg, release the hands, bring the right leg straight forward and return to position 1.

7. Repeat the pose on the other side, bending the left knee and placing



141



142

the left foot by the left hip joint and raising the right leg up. Stay for an equal length of time on this side also.

Effects

The pose can be done as a continuation of Triang Mukhaikapāda Paschimottānāsana (Plate 139). It is harder to do than Paschimottānāsana (Plate 160) and therefore its effects are greater. It gives a full extension to the leg and exercises the muscles of the legs. The abdominal organs are also rejuvenated.

64. *Marīchyāsana* / Five* (Plate 144)

This āsana is dedicated to the sage Marīchi, son of the Creator, Brahmā. Marīchi was the grandfather of Sūrya (the Sun God).

Technique

1. Sit on the floor with the legs stretched straight in front. (Plate 77)
2. Bend the left knee and place the sole and heel of the left foot flat on the floor. The shin of the left leg should be perpendicular to the floor and the calf should touch the thigh. Place the left heel near the perineum. The inner side of the left foot should touch the inner side of the outstretched right thigh.
3. Stretch the left shoulder forward till the left armpit touches the perpendicular left shin. Turn the left arm round the left shin and thigh, bend the left elbow and throw the left forearm behind the back at the level of the waist. Then move the right hand behind the back and clasp the left hand with the right at the wrist or vice versa. If that is not possible then clasp the palms or the fingers. (Plate 143)
4. Now, turn the spine to the left, keeping the outstretched right leg



143



144

straight. Remain in this position gazing at the outstretched right big toe and take a few deep breaths.

5. Exhale, and bend forward. Rest the forehead, then the nose, next the lips and lastly the chin on the right knee. (Plate 144.) While in this position, keep both shoulders parallel to the floor and breathe normally. Stay in the pose for about 30 seconds and see that the back of the entire extended leg rests on the floor throughout.

6. Inhale, raise the head from the right knee (Plate 143), release the hands, straighten the left leg and come to position 1.

7. Repeat the pose on the other side for an equal length of time.

Effects

The fingers gain in strength by the practice of this āsana. In the preceding āsanās (namely, Jānu Śīrṣāsana (Plate 127), Ardha Baddha Padma Paschimottānāsana (Plate 135) and Triang Mukhaikapāda Paschimottānāsana (Plate 139) the abdominal organs are made to contract by gripping a leg with the hands. In this pose the hands do not hold the legs. To bend forward and to rest the chin on the knee of the extended leg the abdominal organs have to contract vigorously. This creates a better circulation of blood round the abdominal organs and keeps them healthy. In the beginning it is very difficult to bend forward at all after gripping both hands behind the back, but it comes with practice. The dorsal region of the spine is also exercised in this pose.

Note. The four poses, Jānu Śīrṣāsana, Ardha Baddha Padma Paschimottānāsana, Triang Mukhaikapāda Paschimottānāsana and Marīchyāsana I, are preparatory poses for the correct Paschimottānāsana. (Plate 161.) It is difficult for many to get a good grip on the feet in Paschimottānāsana (Plate 160) even after several attempts. These four āsanās give one sufficient elasticity in the back and legs so that one gradually achieves the correct Paschimottānāsana (Plate 161) as described later. Once this is done with ease, these four āsanās can be practised once or twice a week instead of daily.

65. *Marīchyāsana II* Six* (Plates 146 and 147)

Technique

1. Sit on the floor, with the legs stretched straight in front. (Plate 77)
2. Bend the left leg at the knee and place the left foot at the root of the right thigh. The left heel should press the navel and the toes be stretched and pointing. The left leg is now in half Padmāsana.
3. Bend the right leg at the knee. Place the sole and heel of the right foot flat on the floor. Keep the shin of the right leg perpendicular, so that

the right thigh and the right calf touch each other and the right heel touches the perineum.

4. Bend slightly forward, stretch the right shoulder forward until the right armpit touches the perpendicular right shin. With an exhalation, curl the right arm round the right shin and thigh, bend the right elbow and turn the right forearm behind the back at the level of the waist. Then move the left hand behind the back and clasp the right hand with the left at the wrist. (Plate 145)



145

5. Stretch the spine up and hold this position for a few seconds, breathing deeply.

6. Exhale, move the trunk and head forward and rest the head on the bent left knee. Then extend the neck and rest the chin on the left knee. (Plates 146 and 147.) Repeat this movement three or four times, inhaling while coming up and exhaling while going down.

7. Inhale, move the head and trunk up, release the hands, straighten the legs, and then repeat the pose on the other side for the same length of time.

Effects

As this pose is an intensified form of Marichyāsana I (Plate 144), its effects are greater. The heel at the navel puts extra pressure on the abdomen so that the abdominal organs are toned better and grow stronger and digestive power increases.



146



147

66. *Upaviṣṭha Kōṇāsana* Nine* (Plate 151)

Upaviṣṭha means seated. Kōṇa means an angle.

Technique

1. Sit on the floor with the legs stretched straight in front. (Plate 77)
2. Move the legs sideways one by one and widen the distance between them as far as you can. Keep the legs extended throughout and see that the back of the entire legs rests on the floor.
3. Catch the big toes between the respective thumbs and index and middle fingers.

4. Keep the spine erect and extend the ribs. Pull the diaphragm up and hold the pose for a few seconds with deep breaths. (Plate 148)



148

5. Exhale, bend forward and rest the head on the floor. (Plate 149.) Then extend the neck and place the chin on the floor. (Plate 150)



149



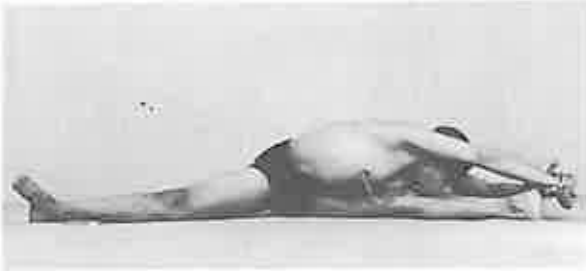
150

6. Then, clasp the feet with the hands and try to rest the chest on the floor. (Plate 151.) Stay in this position from 30 to 60 seconds with normal breathing.



151

7. Inhale, raise the trunk off the floor (Plate 148) and release the hold on the feet, bring them together and relax.



152

8. Hold the left foot with both hands, exhale and rest the chin on the left knee. (Plate 152.) Inhale and raise the head and trunk. Now catch the right foot and with an exhalation rest the chin on the right knee. Inhale, raise the head and trunk, release the hands, bring the feet together and relax.

Effects

The āsana stretches the hamstrings and helps the blood to circulate properly in the pelvic region and keeps it healthy. It prevents the development of hernia of which it can cure mild cases and relieves sciatic pains. Since the āsana controls and regularises the menstrual flow and also stimulates the ovaries, it is a boon to women.

67. *Paschimottānāsana* Six* (Plate 161)

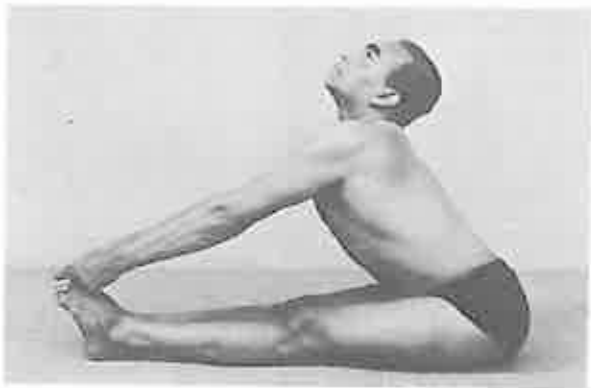
(Also called *Ugrāsana* or *Brahmacharyāsana*)

Paschima literally means the west. It implies the back of the whole body from the head to the heels. The anterior or eastern aspect is the front of the body from the face down to the toes. The crown of the head is the upper or northern aspect while the soles and heels of the feet form the lower or southern aspect of the body. In this āsana the back of the whole body is intensely stretched, hence the name.

Ugra means formidable, powerful and noble. *Brahmacharya* means religious study, self-restraint and celibacy.

Technique

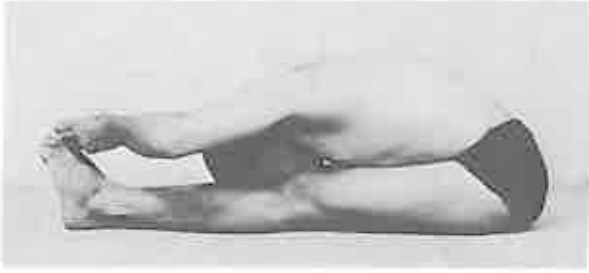
1. Sit on the floor with the legs stretched straight in front. Place the palms on the floor by the side of the hips. Take a few deep breaths. (Plate 77)
2. Exhale, extend the hands and catch the toes. Hold the right big toe between the right thumb and the index and middle fingers and likewise the left big toe. (Plate 153)



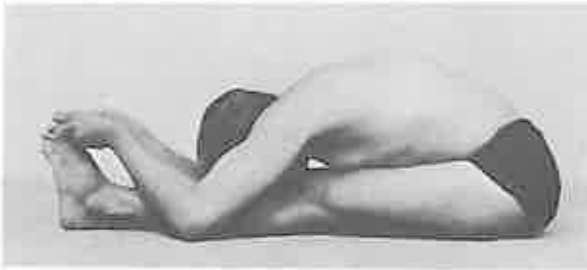
153

3. Extend the spine and try to keep the back concave. To start with the back will be like a hump. This is due to stretching the spine only from the area of the shoulders. Learn to bend right from the pelvic region of the back and also to extend the arms from the shoulders. Then the hump will disappear and the back will become flat as in Plate 153. Take a few deep breaths.
4. Now exhale, bend and widen the elbows, using them as levers, pull the trunk forward and touch the forehead to the knees. (Plate 154.)

Gradually rest the elbows on the floor, stretch the neck and trunk, touch the knees with the nose and then with the lips. (Plate 155)

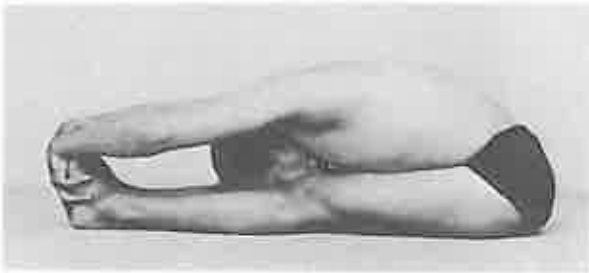


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155

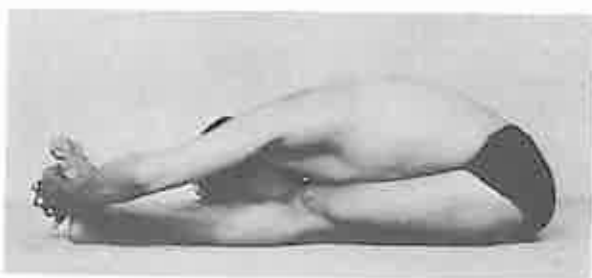
5. When this becomes easy, make a further effort to grip the soles and rest the chin on the knees. (Plate 156)



156

6. When this also becomes easy, clasp the hands by interlocking the fingers and rest the chin on the shins beyond the knees. (Plate 157)

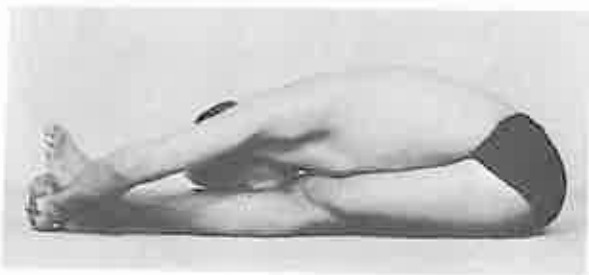
7. When position 6 becomes easy, grip the right palm with the left hand



157



158

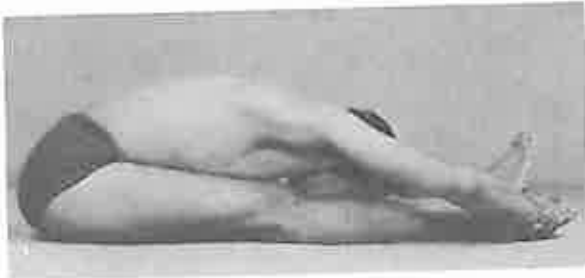


159

or the left palm with the right hand beyond the outstretched feet and keep the back concave. (Plate 158.) Take a few deep breaths.

8. Exhale and rest the chin on the shins beyond the knees. (Plate 159)

9. If position 8 also becomes easy, hold the right wrist with the left hand or the left wrist with the right hand and rest the chin on the shins beyond the knees. (Plate 160)

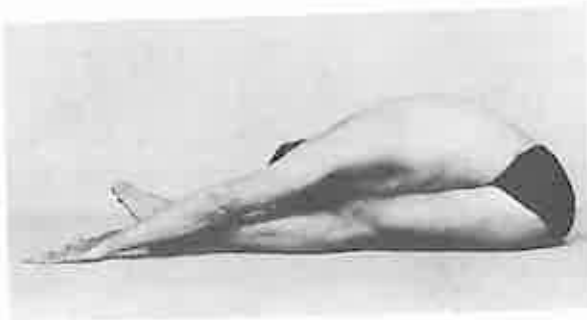


160

10. See that the back of the legs at the knee joints rests firmly on the ground. In the initial stages the knees will be lifted off the floor. Tighten the muscles at the back of the thighs and pull the trunk forward. Then the back of the knee joints will rest on the floor.

11. Try and stay in whichever of the above positions you can achieve from 1 to 5 minutes, breathing evenly.

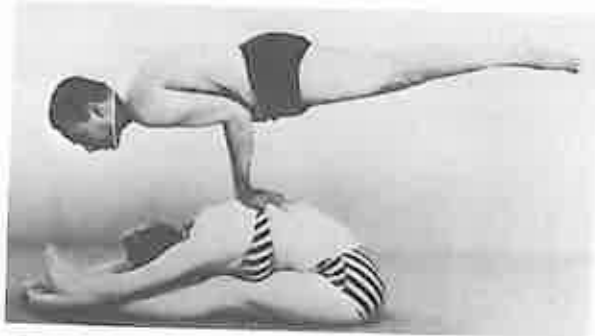
12. Advanced pupils may extend the hand straight, rest the palms on the floor, join the thumbs beyond the outstretched feet and rest the chin on the shins beyond the knees. (Plate 161.) Stay for a minute or two with even breathing.



161

13. Inhale, raise the head from the knees and relax.

14. One does not feel any weight on the back in correct Paschimot-tanāsana. (Plate 162)



162

Effects

This āsana tones the abdominal organs and keeps them free from sluggishness. It also tones the kidneys, rejuvenates the whole spine and improves the digestion.

The spines of animals are horizontal and their hearts are below the spine. This keeps them healthy and gives them great power of endurance. In humans the spine is vertical and the heart is not lower than the spine, so that they soon feel the effects of exertion and are also susceptible to the heart diseases. In Paschimottānāsana the spine is kept straight and horizontal and the heart is at a lower level than the spine. A good stay in this pose massages the heart, the spinal column and the abdominal organs, which feel refreshed and the mind is rested. Due to the extra stretch given to the pelvic region more oxygenated blood is brought there and the gonad glands absorb the required nutrition from the blood. This increases vitality, helps to cure impotency and leads to sex control. Hence, this āsana was called Brahmacharyāsana. Brahmacharya means celibacy and a Brahmachāri is one who has controlled the sex appetite.

68. *Parivṛtta Paschimottānāsana* Nine* (Plate 165)

Parivṛtta means turned around, revolved. Paschima literally means the west and refers to the back of the entire body from the head to the heels. Uttāna means an intense stretch. In this variation of Paschimottānāsana the trunk is twisted on one side.

Technique

1. Sit on the floor with the legs stretched straight in front. Keep the

knees tight and the legs touching each other at the knees, ankles, heels and big toes. (Plate 77)

2. Exhale, extend the right arm towards the left foot. Twist the right forearm and the right wrist so that the right thumb points to the floor and the right little finger points up. Then with the right hand hold the outer side of the left foot. Take a breath.

3. Now, exhale, extend the left arm over the right forearm keeping the left wrist up. Twist the left forearm and the left wrist so that the left thumb points to the floor and the left little finger points up. Hold the outer side of the right foot (Plate 163) and take a breath.



163

4. Exhale, twist the trunk about 90 degrees to the left by bending and widening the elbows. (Plate 164.) Take a breath. Exhale again, move the head between the arms and look up. The back portion of the upper right arm near the armpit will rest across the left knee. Try and rest the right side ribs on the left thigh. (Front view: Plate 165. Back view: Plate 166.) Due to the lateral twist of the trunk, breathing will be fast. Hold the pose for about 20 seconds.

5. Inhale, release the hands and move the trunk back to its original position. (Plate 163)

6. Now twist the trunk to the right and repeat the pose for the same length of time, following the technique given above, but substituting the word 'left' for the word 'right' and the word 'right' for the word 'left'.

Effects

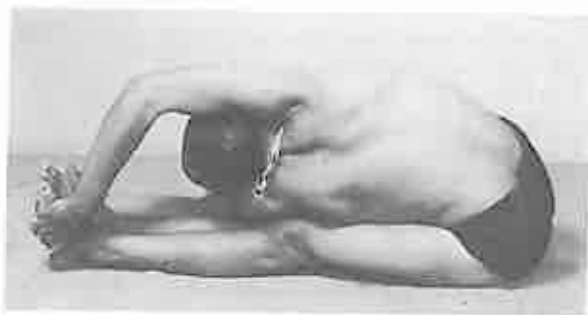
This invigorating posture tones the abdominal organs and keeps them



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166

free from sluggishness. It also tones the kidneys and rejuvenates the entire spine, while the digestion is improved. The lateral twist stimulates blood circulation in the spine and relieves backaches. Due to the stretch of the pelvic region, more oxygenated blood is brought there and the

gonad glands absorb the required nutrition from the blood. This increases vitality, helps to cure impotency and promotes sex control.

69. *Ūrdhva Mukha Paschimottānāsana I Ten** (Plate 168)

Ūrdhva (upwards) and Mukha (face, mouth) when used together mean having the face upwards. Paschimottānāsana is the intense posterior stretch.

Technique

1. Sit on the floor with the legs stretched straight in front. (Plate 77)
2. Flex the knees and bring the feet closer to the buttocks.
3. Catch the toes with the hands, exhale and stretch the legs up in the air, straighten them at the knees, pull the knee-caps towards the thighs and balance on the buttocks, keeping the spine as concave as you can. This position is called:

70. *Ubhaya Pādānguṣṭhāsana Three** (Plate 167)

(Ubhaya = both, pādānguṣṭha = big toe)

To start with one rolls over backwards to the floor, and it takes some time and practice to learn to balance on the buttocks alone. Stay in the pose from 30 to 60 seconds with normal breathing.



4. After securing the balance, release the toes and hold the heels.
5. When this becomes easy, interlock the fingers behind the extended feet and balance. Then without disturbing the position of the legs, move the head and trunk nearer to them, stretch the neck up and with an exhalation rest the forehead on the knees. (Plate 168.) Now stretch the legs up to the full extent and also the spine. Hold the pose for about 30 seconds with normal breathing.



168

6. Inhale, release the hands, bend the legs, rest them on the floor and relax.

71. *Ūrdhva Mukha Paschimottānāsana II* Ten* (Plate 170)

Technique

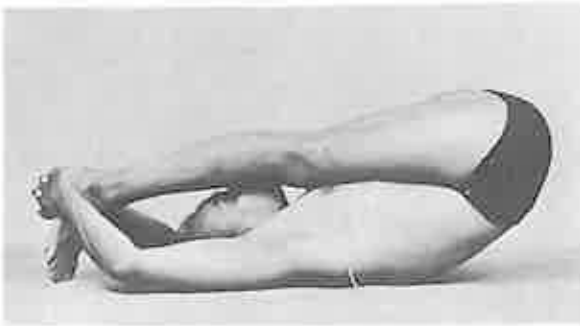
1. Lie flat on the floor or carpet and place the hands straight over the head. (Plate 276)
2. Stretch the legs straight, tighten the knees and take a few deep breaths.
3. Exhale and slowly raise the legs together and bring them over the head.

4. Interlock the fingers, clasp the soles and stretch the legs straight up with the knees kept tight. Rest the entire back on the floor. (Plate 169.) Take three deep breaths.



169

5. Exhale, lower the legs towards the floor beyond the head by widening the elbows. Try and keep the pelvis as near the floor as possible. Keep the legs tightened at the knees throughout. Rest the chin on the knees. (Plate 170)



170

6. Stay in the position from 30 to 60 seconds, breathing evenly.
7. Exhale and move the legs to the original position. (Plate 169)
8. Inhale, release the hands, bring the legs straight to the floor (Plate 276) and relax.

Effects

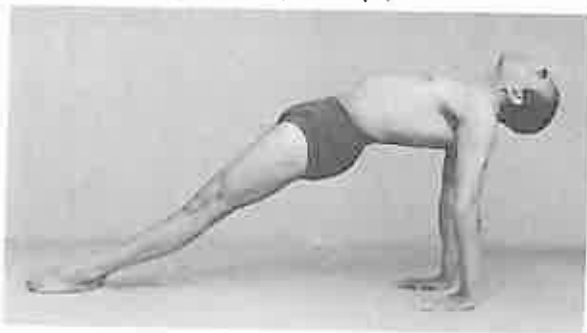
The pose helps balance and poise. The legs stretch fully which makes the thighs and calves shapely. The benefits are the same as those of *Paschimottānāsana* (Plate 160), and in addition this pose prevents hernia and relieves severe backaches.

72. *Pūrvottānāsana* One* (Plate 171)

Pūrvā literally means the East. It means the front of the whole body from the forehead to the toes. *Uttāna* means an intense stretch. In this posture, the whole front of the body is stretched intensely.

Technique

1. Sit on the floor with the legs stretched straight in front. Place the palms on the floor by the hips, with the fingers pointing in the direction of the feet. (Plate 77)
2. Bend the knees and place the soles and heels on the floor.
3. Take the pressure of the body on the hands and feet, exhale and lift the body off the floor. Straighten the arms and the legs and keep the knees and elbows tightened. (Plate 171)



171

4. The arms will be perpendicular to the floor from the wrists to the shoulders. From the shoulders to the pelvis, the trunk will be parallel to the floor.
5. Stretch the neck and throw the head as far back as possible.
6. Stay in this posture for one minute, breathing normally.
7. Exhale, bend the elbows and knees, lower the body to sit on the floor and relax.

Effects

This posture strengthens the wrists and ankles, improves the movement of the shoulder joints and expands the chest fully. It gives relief from the fatigue caused by doing other strenuous forward bending āsanas.

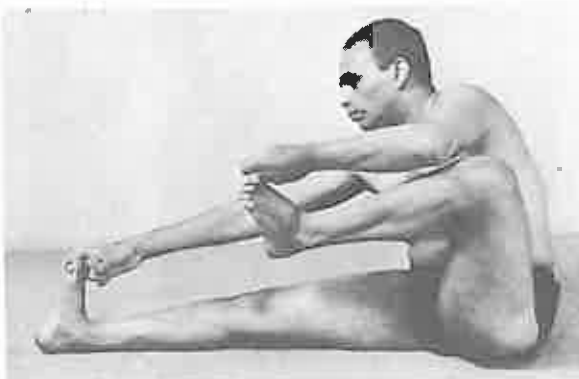
73. Ākarṇa Dhanurāsana Eleven (Plates 173 and 175)*

Karṇa means the ear. The prefix ā expresses the sense of near to, towards. Dhanu means a bow. In this posture, the left foot is pulled up till the heel touches the ear as an archer pulls the bow-string, while the other hand holds the right big toe, this leg lying straight on the floor. In the second movement the raised leg is straightened up until it is almost perpendicular, the big toe being held throughout by the hand like an extended bow.

The āsana is given below in two movements.

Technique

1. Sit on the floor with the legs stretched straight in front. (Plate 77)
2. Hold the right big toe between the right thumb and the index and middle fingers. Similarly hold the left big toe. (Plate 153)
3. Exhale, bend the left elbow and lift the left foot up by bending the knee. (Plate 172.) Take a breath. Now exhale and pull the left foot up until the heel is close to the left ear. At the same time draw the left arm back from the shoulder. (Plate 173.) Do not let go of the right big toe. Keep the right leg extended throughout and see that the back of the entire leg rests on the floor. The extended right leg should not bend at the knee.





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4. Hold this position from 15 to 20 seconds with normal breathing. This is the first movement.

5. Now exhale and stretch the left leg up vertically. (Plate 174.) Take a breath. Exhale, draw the leg further back until it touches the left ear. (Plate 175.) Continue to grip the toes of both feet and fully extend both legs. Do not bend them at the knees. It takes some time to learn to balance in this second movement. Remain in this position from 10 to 15 seconds, breathing normally.



174

6. Exhale, bend the left leg at the knee and bring the left heel to the left ear as in position 3 above. (Plate 173.) Then lower the left leg to the floor and keep both legs stretched on the floor. (Plate 153)



175

7. Repeat the pose on the right side, pulling the right foot towards the right ear and raising it up vertically near the right ear, while keeping the left leg straight on the floor. Do not relax the hand grip of the toes. Maintain the position on both sides for an equal length of time. Then release the hands and relax.

Effects

The practice of this posture makes the leg muscles very flexible. The abdominal muscles are contracted and this helps to move the bowels. Minor deformities in the hip joints are adjusted. The lower portion of the spine is exercised. The pose is full of grace. It should be practised until it comes effortlessly and gives the appearance of a trained archer discharging arrows from his bow.

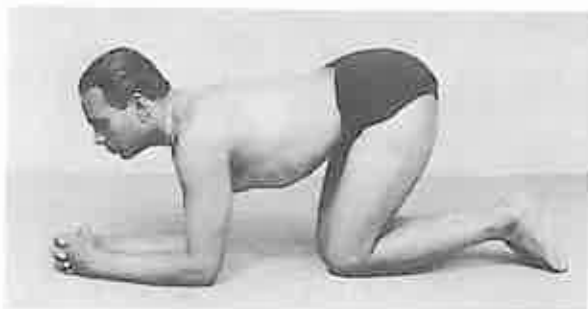
74. *Sālamba Śīrṣāsana I* Four* (Plates 184, 185 and 190)

Sālamba means with support. *Śīrṣa* means the head. This is the head stand pose, one of the most important Yogic āsanās. It is the basic posture. It has several variations, which are described later as the *Śīrṣāsana* cycle. Its mastery gives one balance and poise, both physically and mentally. The technique of doing it is given at length in two parts; the first is for beginners, the second for those who can remain balanced in the pose. Attention is specially directed to the hints on *Śīrṣāsana* given after the two techniques.

Technique for beginners

1. Spread a blanket fourfold on the floor and kneel near it.

2. Rest the forearms on the centre of the blanket. While doing so take care that the distance between the elbows on the floor is not wider than the shoulders.



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3. Interlock the fingers right up to the finger-tips (Plate 176), so that the palms form a cup. Place the sides of the palms near the little fingers on the blanket. While going up on to your head or balancing, the fingers should be kept tightly locked. If they are left loose, the weight of the body falls on them and the arms ache. So remember to lock them well.



177

4. Rest the crown of the head only on the blanket, so that the back of the head touches the palms which are cupped. (Plate 177.) Do not rest the forehead nor the back but only the crown of the head on the blanket. To do this move the knees towards the head.
5. After securing the head position, raise the knees from the floor by moving the toes closer to the head. (Plate 178)



178



179



180



181

6. Exhale, take a gentle swing from the floor and lift the legs off the ground with bent knees. (Plate 179.) Take the swing in such a way that both feet leave the floor simultaneously. When once this position is secured, follow the various stages of the leg movements as in Plates 180, 181, 182 and 183, step by step.



182



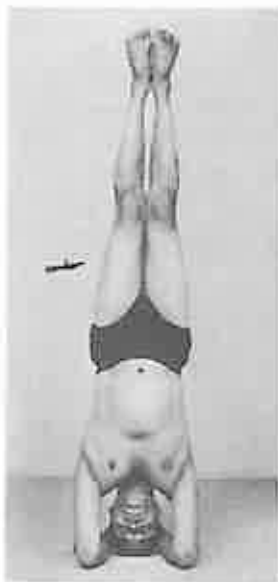
183

7. Stretch the legs and stand on the head, keeping the whole body perpendicular to the floor. (Front view: Plate 184. Back view: Plate 185. Side view: Plate 190)

8. After staying in the final position to capacity, from one to five minutes, flex the knees and slide down to the floor in the reverse order as in Plates 183, 182, 181, 180, 179, 178 and 177.

9. A beginner must have the assistance of a friend or do the āsana against a wall. While practising against a wall, the distance between it and the head should not be more than 2 or 3 inches. If the distance is greater, the spine will curve and the stomach will protrude. The weight of the body will be felt on the elbows and the position of the head may change. The face will appear to be flushed and the eyes either strained or puffed. It is, therefore, advisable for a beginner to do the head stand in a corner where two walls meet, placing the head some 2 to 3 inches from either wall.

10. While doing the head stand against a wall or in a corner, the beginner should exhale, swing the legs up, support the hips against the side of the wall and move the feet up. In a corner, he can touch the heels to either side of the walls. He should then stretch the back vertically up, gradually leave the support of the wall and learn to



184



185

master the balance. While coming down, he can rest the feet and hips against the wall, slide down and kneel, resting his knees on the floor. The movements of coming down and going up should be done with an exhalation.

11. The advantage which the beginner has of balancing in a corner is that his head and legs will be in the right angle formed by the walls, and he will be sure of his right position. This will not be the case if he balances against a straight wall. For while his balance is insecure he may sway from the wall, or his body may tilt or swing to the stronger side, while his legs may rest against the wall with a bend either at the waist or the hips. The beginner will not be in a position to know that he has tilted to one side, much less to correct it. In time he may learn to balance on the head, but by habit his body may still tilt or his head may not be straight. It is as hard to correct a wrong pose in the head stand as it is to break a bad habit. Moreover this wrong posture may well lead to aches and pains in the head, neck, shoulders and back. But the two walls of a corner will help the beginner to keep the āsana symmetrical.

12. When once balance is secured, it is advisable to come down to the floor with the legs straight (that is, without bending the knees

at all) and with a backward action of the hips. At first, it is not possible to go up and come down without bending the legs, but the correct method should be learnt. Once the beginner has confidence in the head stand, he will find it more beneficial to go up and down with the legs together and straight, without any jerks.

13. It takes time for the beginner to become oriented to his surroundings while he is balancing on his head. Everything will seem at first to be completely unfamiliar. The directions and instructions will appear confusing and he will find it an effort to think clearly or to act logically. This is due to fear of a fall. The best way to overcome fear is to face with equanimity the situation of which one is afraid. Then one gets the correct perspective, and one is not frightened any more. To topple over while learning the head stand is not as terrible as we imagine. If one overbalances, one should remember to loosen the interlocked fingers, relax, go limp and flex the knees. Then one will just roll over and smile. If the fingers are not loosened they will take the jerk of the fall which will be painful. If we do not relax and go limp while falling we hit the floor with a hard bump. If we flex the knees, we are unlikely to graze them in the fall. After one has learnt to balance against a wall or in a corner, one should try the head stand in the middle of the room. There will be a few spills and one must learn the art of falling as indicated above. Learning to do Śīrṣāsana in the middle of a room gives the beginner great confidence.

*Technique for those who can balance Eight**

1. Follow the technique described for beginners from positions 1 to 4.
2. After securing the head position, stretch the legs straight by raising the knees from the floor. Move the toes nearer to the head and try to press the heels to the floor, keeping the back erect. (Plate 186)
3. Stretch the dorsal or middle region of the spine and stay in this position for about 30 seconds while breathing evenly.
4. Exhale, raise the heels and take the toes off the floor with a backward movement of the hips. Raise both legs simultaneously, keeping them poker stiff. (Plate 187.) Take a breath.
5. Again with an exhalation move the legs up until they are parallel to the floor. This position is called:

75. *Ūrdhvā Daṇḍāsana Eight** (Plate 188)

(Ūrdhvā = up, daṇḍa = a staff)

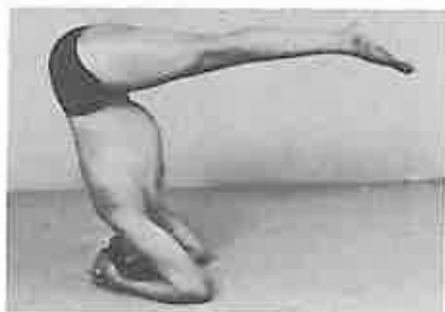
Stay in this position for 10 seconds with normal breathing.



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6. Exhale, move the legs up as in Plate 189, and then pull them up to the vertical position. (Side view: Plate 190.) Stay in this pose from 1 to 5 minutes while breathing evenly.



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7. Come down gradually, observing the above technique in a reverse order. (Plates 189, 188, 187 and 186.) Rest the feet on the floor, bend the knees and raise the head from the floor or blanket.

8. While coming down, it is advisable to stay in Ūrdhvā Daṇḍāsana according to capacity up to one minute while breathing normally. In this position, the neck and trunk will not be perpendicular to the floor but will sway slightly backwards. The neck, shoulders and spine will be put to a very great strain and in the initial stages one cannot stay with the legs parallel to the floor for more than a few seconds. The stay will become longer as the neck, shoulders, abdomen and spine become stronger.

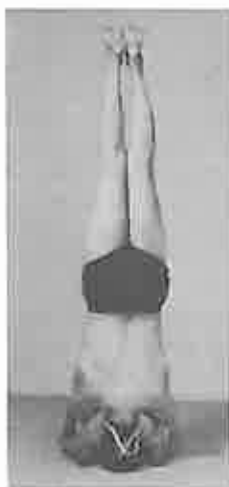
Hints on Śīrṣāsana

1. In Śīrṣāsana the balance alone is not important. One has to watch from moment to moment and find out the subtle adjustments. When we stand on our feet, we need no extra effort, strength or attention, for the position is natural. Yet the correct method of standing affects our bearing and carriage. It is, therefore, necessary to master the correct method as pointed out in the note on Tāḍāsana. In Śīrṣāsana also, the correct position should be mastered, as a faulty posture in this āsana will lead to pains in the head, neck and back.

2. The whole weight of the body should be borne on the head alone and not on the forearms and hands. The forearms and hands are to be used only for support to check any loss of balance. In a good pose you feel a circle, about the size of an Indian rupee, of the head in contact with the blanket on the floor.

3. The back of the head, the trunk, the back of the thighs and the heels should be in a line perpendicular to the floor and not inclined to one side. The throat, chin and breast-bone should be in one line, otherwise the head will tilt to one side or move forward. As regards the interlocked hands behind the head, the palms should not be stuck into the head. The upper and the lower sides of the palms should be in a line, otherwise the crown of the head will not rest on the floor correctly.

4. The elbows and the shoulders should be in a line and the elbows should not be widened. The shoulders should be kept as high above the floor as possible by moving them up and stretching them sideways. In order to learn the correct shoulder stretch, release the interlocked fingers and remove the hands from behind the head and widen the wrists from the forearms, keeping the elbows stationary. Place the wrists on the floor with the palms facing up, touch the shoulders with the fingers, keeping the wrists on the floor and maintain the balance. (Plate 191.) This will not only improve the balance but also prepare you for the other Śīrṣāsana poses described later.



5. As to the position of the trunk, the dorsal region should be pushed forward as well as up. The lumbar (waist) and pelvic regions should not be pushed forward, while the trunk from the shoulders to the pelvis should be kept perpendicular. If the pelvic area juts forward, it means that you are bearing the weight of the body not on the head alone but also on the elbows for you have not stretched the dorsal region (the chest) correctly. When viewed from the side, the body from the neck to the heels should appear straight.

6. As far as possible try and join the thighs, knees, ankles and toes. Stretch the legs fully, especially the back of the knees and thighs. If the legs swing back tighten the knees and the lower median portion of the abdomen above the pubes. This will keep the legs perpendicular. Keep the toes pointing up. If the legs swing forward, stretch the dorsal region and push the pelvic area slightly back until it is in line with the shoulders. The body will then feel light and the pose will be exhilarating.

7. While going up or holding the head stand the eyes should never become bloodshot. If they do, the pose is faulty.¹

8. The time limit for *Śīrṣāsana* depends upon individual capacity and the time at one's disposal. One can hold it comfortably from 10 to 15 minutes. A beginner can do it for 2 minutes and go up to 5 minutes. It is always difficult for a beginner to balance for one minute, but once he succeeds he can be sure that from then on he will be able to master *Śīrṣāsana* soon.

9. While going up or coming down, move both legs together, inch by inch. All the movements should be done with exhalation. Inhale while waiting in a position. The effect of going down and coming up straight without bending the legs at the knees is that harmonious slow movement is gained and the flow of blood to the head is controlled. The face does not flush from jerky and fast movements, as the flow of blood to the waist and the legs is also controlled. Then there is no danger of losing balance from giddiness or numbness of the feet when one stands up immediately after the head balance. In course of time the whole movement of going up, staying and coming down should become as effortless as possible. In a perfect *Śīrṣāsana* your body feels completely stretched and at the same time you experience a feeling of complete relaxation.

¹ I have taught this pose to a lady of 65 who was suffering from glaucoma. Now she finds the eyes are completely rested and the pain in them is much lessened. Medical examination revealed that the tension in the eyeballs had decreased. I am mentioning this to prove the value of the correct head stand.

10. It is always safe to perfect Sarvāṅgāsana (Plate 223) first before attempting Śīrṣāsana. If the standing poses described earlier (Plates 1 to 36) and the various movements of Sarvāṅgāsana and Halāsana (Plates 234 to 271) are mastered first, Śīrṣāsana will come without much effort. If these elementary āsanās have not been mastered, the period taken to learn Śīrṣāsana will be longer.

11. After one has learnt to balance in Śīrṣāsana, however, it is preferable to perform Śīrṣāsana and its cycle (Plates 190 to 218) first before practising any other āsana. This is because one cannot balance or hold the head stand if the body is exhausted by doing other poses or if the breathing becomes fast and shaky. Once the body is tired or the breathing is not free and easy, the body will shake and it will be difficult to maintain the balance. It is always better to do Śīrṣāsana first when one is fresh.

12. Śīrṣāsana and its cycle should always be followed by Sarvāṅgāsana and its cycle. It has been observed that people who devote themselves to Śīrṣāsana alone without doing the Sarvāṅgāsana poses are apt to lose their temper over trifling things and become irritated quickly. The practice of Sarvāṅgāsana coupled with Śīrṣāsana checks this trait. If Sarvāṅgāsana is the Mother, then Śīrṣāsana may be regarded as the Father of all āsanās. And just as both parents are necessary for peace and harmony in a home, so the practice of both these āsanās is essential to keep the body healthy and the mind tranquil and peaceful.

Effects of Śīrṣāsana

The ancient books have called Śīrṣāsana the king of all āsanās and the reasons are not hard to find. When we are born, normally the head comes out first and then the limbs. The skull encases the brain, which controls the nervous system and the organs of sense. The brain is the seat of intelligence, knowledge, discrimination, wisdom and power. It is the seat of Brahman, the soul. A country cannot prosper without a proper king or constitutional head to guide it; so also the human body cannot prosper without a healthy brain.

The *Bhagavad-Gītā* says: 'Harmony (sattva), mobility (rajas), inertia (tamas), such are the qualities, matter-born; they bind fast, O great armed one (Arjuna), the indestructible dweller in the body.' (Fourteenth Discourse, verse 5.) All these qualities stem from the brain, and sometimes one quality prevails and sometimes the others. The head is the centre of sattvic qualities which control discrimination; the trunk of Rājasic qualities which control passion, emotion and actions; and the region below the diaphragm of tāmasic qualities which control sensual

pleasures like the enjoyment of food and drink, and the thrills and pleasures of sex.

Regular practice of Śīrṣāsana makes healthy pure blood flow through the brain cells. This rejuvenates them so that thinking power increases and thoughts become clearer. The āsana is a tonic for people whose brains tire quickly. It ensures a proper blood supply to the pituitary and pineal glands in the brain. Our growth, health and vitality depend on the proper functioning of these two glands.

People suffering from loss of sleep, memory and vitality have recovered by the regular and correct practice of this āsana and have become fountains of energy. The lungs gain the power to resist any climate and stand up to any work, which relieves one from colds, coughs, tonsillitis, halitosis (foul breath) and palpitations. It keeps the body warm. Coupled with Sarvāṅgāsana movements (Plates 234 to 271), it is a boon to people suffering from constipation. Regular practice of Śīrṣāsana will show marked improvement in the haemoglobin content of the blood.

It is not advisable to start with Śīrṣāsana and Sarvāṅgāsana when one suffers from high or low blood pressure.

Regular and precise practice of Śīrṣāsana develops the body, disciplines the mind and widens the horizons of the spirit. One becomes balanced and self-reliant in pain and pleasure, loss and gain, shame and fame and defeat and victory.

The Śīrṣāsana Cycle

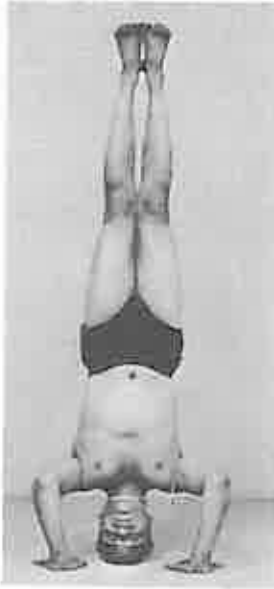
In Śīrṣāsana there is a variety of movements which can be practised at one stretch after staying in Sālamba Śīrṣāsana I (Plate 184) for not less than 5 minutes according to one's capacity. One may practise for 5 to 15 minutes and then perform these various movements for 20 to 30 seconds on each side at a time.

76. *Sālamba Śīrṣāsana II Five** (Plate 192)

Technique

1. Spread a blanket fourfold on the floor and kneel near it.
2. Place the right palm on the floor just outside the right knee, and the left palm just outside the left knee. The palms should be parallel to each other and the fingers should point straight towards the head. The distance between the palms on the floor should not be wider than the width of the shoulders.
3. Move the knees towards the head and place the crown on the centre of the blanket.

4. After securing the head position, stretch the legs straight by raising the knees from the floor. Move the toes still closer to the head and press the heels to the floor, keeping the back erect.
5. Stretch the dorsal region of the spine by pushing the chest forward and hold this position for a few seconds. Take 3 to 4 breaths.
6. Exhale, take a gentle swing from the floor and lift the legs off it by flexing the knees. Both feet should leave the floor together. When this position is secured, stretch the legs up, exhale, keep the toes pointing up, tighten at the knees and balance. (Plate 192)



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7. In the balancing position only the crown of the head and the two hands are on the floor. From the wrists to the elbows the forearms are to be kept perpendicular to the floor and parallel to each other. From the elbows to the shoulder the upper arms should be kept parallel to the floor and to each other.
8. Follow the rest of the technique and hints given under *Sālamba Śīrṣāsana I* for those who can balance.
9. Mastery of this variation of the head stand is essential for learning the other advanced āsanas like *Bakāsana* (Plate 410), *Ūrdhva Kukku-*

āsana (Plate 419), Gālāvāsana (Plates 427 and 428) and Kouṇḍinyāsana (Plate 438), etc.

The Śīrṣāsana Cycle (continued)

77. *Sālamba Śīrṣāsana III Eight** (Plates 194 and 195)

Technique

1. Kneel on the floor near the blanket. Widen the knees about one foot.
2. Invert the palms and place them on the blanket between the knees so that the fingers point to the feet. The forearms from the wrist to the elbow should be kept perpendicular to the floor and parallel to each other. The distance between the palms should not be wider than that between the shoulders.
3. Rest the crown of the head on the blanket just behind the wrists. The forehead will face the inner side of the wrists. The head should be placed in the centre of the two hands, so that the crown is equidistant from the palms on the floor.

