

Heinz Grill

# A New Yoga Will



A cycle of exercises  
to promote individual strength

Stephan Wunderlich Verlag

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## Foreword

This cycle of yoga exercises has been taken from Heinz Grill's book "A New Yoga Will and the treatment of anxiety and depression" (Ein Neuer Yogawille und seine therapeutische Anwendung bei Ängsten und Depressionen). The complete book (not yet translated into English) contains more comprehensive information on soul-spiritual development in connection with mental illness as well as other approaches to treating anxiety and depression. As a yoga teacher I have found the thoughts about the exercises so useful that I wanted to make the cycle available as a separate publication which could be used by yoga teachers and students in general, as well as by those suffering from or treating anxiety and depression.

The use of yoga exercises to help relieve states of anxiety and depression is not new. Typically yoga works via the body, improving physical strength and flexibility, circulation and energy flow, and so enhancing a general feeling of well-being and a more positive outlook on life. What is unique about Heinz Grill's approach is that he directly addresses the soul forces – the thinking, the feeling and the will. With the description of each exercise he gives clear and precise instructions as to how these faculties should become involved. We are taught how to create clear thoughts with which we can guide our movements. We are made aware of the difference between emotions, which tend to weigh us down, and subtle, sensitive inner feelings, which enable a deeper and more artistic relationship to the poses. We learn to make clear decisions and to persevere in the positions until the desired goal is reached. For each exercise the learning step is explained so that we understand how what has been learnt can be carried over into life. Sufferers of anxiety or depression who so often feel powerless, weighed down by their emotions or unable to make and execute decisions are helped to strengthen precisely those faculties that are weakened in this illness. Thus they are encouraged to become independent thinking, creative and active individuals with an interest, sensitivity and enthusiasm for life.

The descriptions that follow are clear and simple, and yet at the same time because of their pertinence they have deep power to transform. Personally I have found the study of these inner qualities hugely valuable both for my own practice and in my teaching and have become aware that the development of these inner strengths is a core necessity not just for sufferers of anxiety and depression but for everyone.

Karen Patterson  
August 2012

## Notes on the translation:

I would like to mention two German terms which form a key part of the texts that follow and for which there is no direct English translation.

### Empfindung

This is a sensitive kind of feeling for the subtle quality of things. These kind of feelings need to be actively developed. They are to be distinguished from emotional feelings which are heavier and coarser in their nature and are not developed by choice, but "come over" people. Emotions are subjective and changeable in their nature, whereas the "subtle feelings" described here come from a deeper, more objective region of the soul. Once a subtle feeling for a certain phenomenon has been developed, it can be felt again and again. For "Empfindung" I have used the terms "subtle feeling" or "sensitive feeling".

### Gliederung

This refers to the subdivision or structuring of something into distinct members or components. The term appears regularly through the texts but in English it has seemed clearer to use a combination of different terms such as "structure", "subdivision", "division" or "separation". However, readers should be aware that it is one and the same concept which is a reoccurring theme in the various exercises.

## Author's Introduction to the book "A New Yoga Will and the treatment of anxiety and depression"

For the third edition of this book the individual concepts needed to be identified in more precise detail so that they can be better understood in the context concerned and their esoteric content does not present too great a contradiction to general scientific teaching. The earlier title "Anxiety as an illness from beyond" has also been changed to "A New Yoga Will and the treatment of anxiety and depression" to take it away from its previous mystical meaning and make it into something more concrete and graspable.

The changes to the descriptions of the exercises have been made in order to emphasise and stimulate specific learning steps. An exercise should not have a contained existence, just for itself. Specific processes of thought and consciousness come about through an exercise and these enhance the capabilities of the soul for social interaction.

Therefore, when yoga exercises are presented in this context, they take on the character of a New Yoga Will or a completely new expression, which is an artistic style or form and builds a bridge to a social consciousness. They differ quite fundamentally, in their content and in the way they relate to the whole of life, from the classical yoga exercises. Rudolf Steiner first spoke of the concept of the New Yoga Will and meant that yoga, as it was used in Indian culture over many thousands of years, is outdated today and therefore needs a new interpretation. (1) This attempt to enrich yoga with a content that can be understood by the souls of the Western culture and the contemporary time has already been undertaken in my work over many years, and this book demonstrates a few examples of the way the exercises can be applied in order to become a supporting, health giving accompaniment to life.

I must reject the criticism which is commonly made on the part of Anthroposophy, and generally implies that the statements of Rudolf Steiner have been cribbed and mixed up flimsily with a form of 'yoga'. The development of the New Yoga Will is neither a combination of different systems nor an imitation of somebody else. An independent thinking, feeling and willing and the resulting spiritual practice, has been developed in relationship with various spiritual streams, but it retains its independence, its uniqueness and is experienced in a new creative dimension. (2)

(1) The term "New Yoga Will" ("Neuer Yogawille") was coined by Rudolf Steiner in the lecture given on 30<sup>th</sup> November 1919 (GA194), "The ancient Yoga Culture and the New Yoga Will. The Michael Culture of the Future" From: The Mission of the Archangel Michael.

(2) For a synthesis of spiritual life two legs are always needed and not just one. When Anthroposophy claims that it is in possession of the New Yoga Will, then unfortunately on closer inspection the second supporting leg, which is knowledge of the far-reaching dimension of yoga, is missing. And when yoga claims it does not need Anthroposophy because it is already more "self-realised" than the latter, then it too lacks an essential supporting leg. The synthesis necessary in the New Yoga Will requires many steps into a creative dimension and doubtlessly it will not find absolute completion with the thoughts presented here either. A factual, constructive form of criticism is therefore desirable to enable this process of development to happen through mutual awareness.

## A Cycle of Yoga Exercises to Promote Individual Strength

The book itself can serve as study material and introduce a few basic points as guidance for taking up a spiritual path. In our time it is very important that there is enough information and material about an accessible spirituality, which exists without the need to belong or confess to a particular faith, or without subjugating oneself to a master. The individual consciousness today seeks spirituality more in the form of free decisions and in encounters with the outer world that are free from dogmas and creeds. People have a deep need for a spirituality in which they can be active in forming and creating, independent from overbearing authorities. To make this individual path possible, people today need suitable mental pictures, content and exercises which they can use to educate themselves and to develop a greater ability to relate outwardly.

It is particularly valuable for people suffering from anxiety to work with spirituality in the way described here, as in most cases the greatest uncertainties lie directly in how to approach spiritual disciplines. Indeed it is not uncommon for people to suffer mental disorders because they follow incorrect practices and totally unsuitable forms of meditation in life. (3)

A good and properly adapted form of spirituality stabilises people's soul life and improves their immunological state, whilst incorrect spiritual habits and practices interfere with the soul life and with time place a burden on mental and physical existence.

Please do not regard the supportive therapy with yoga *āsana* suggested here as an alternative method to orthodox medicine. Medical intervention is a basic recommendation in all mental illnesses. In severe cases and psychotic disturbances yoga exercises should not be practised.

Fundamentally the physical yoga exercises, the *āsana*, offer a very valuable help in overcoming depression, anxiety and states of alienation. Right from the start it should be noted that with these exercises it is not a case of passively surrendering the body but of actively, thoughtfully and consciously working with imaginative content, in other words with content that has been seen, experienced, and tried and tested through the spirit. This imaginative content speaks to the soul and if it is consciously developed with the aid of the exercises it can enrich life both inwardly and also in the ability to relate outwardly. (1)

The entity, with its many aspects, that is built out of thoughts and practical exercises is something that can be studied to develop the mental consciousness and it helps to strengthen the sensitive soul-life. In the cycle that has been put together here, the yoga does not primarily serve a path in life from which we might hope for happiness, it serves as an opportunity to begin to study the spiritual world and its laws. The exercises have been designed for artistic work, to engage with independently and creatively and to further develop abilities which give an interest in the whole of moral and social life. When we carefully consider the thoughts and also the pictures of the individual *āsana*, they give order to the consciousness and an inner expansion, as the pictures represent neither a self-surrender nor too great a self-dominance. They reveal an aesthetic centre and with this they express a realised experience of the soul. They uplift and inspire the mind through their clear form, which however is not fixed in the body, but remains alive and radiates an openness outwards. If the cycle of exercises given here is learnt and the content studied over a few weeks or months, some initial insights for life develop that open up ever greater perspectives in the consciousness. (2)

When studying the yoga-*āsana* and their content, perseverance, diligence and sustained interest form the basis for success. At the same time it must also be added that students must work as objectively as possible with the texts and make the thoughts that are written into their own thought content. Building strength in this independent, thinking way connected with a capacity for perseverance always takes people beyond the limits of their own subjective, previously existing inner life and opens up a greater breadth and perspective. The will power is strengthened through the perseverance and dedication to the study content, which is not understandable at a first glance, but

(1) The term "imaginative" has been taken from Anthroposophy. It describes a first level of metaphysical consciousness. It is that dimension which is hidden behind the sensory world as deep logic.

(2) The practice of yoga according to these interpretations does not serve to attain an experience of enlightenment. Each exercise is presented in a three-fold manner and will be depicted several times in the following way: The first step is always to practise the exercise aesthetically and with a natural activity. The second step is to work with the picture and content of the exercise. The third step finally is a direct learning step that leads into daily, social life. The picture of the exercise with its content becomes modified and used in life to enrich abilities and ways of approaching things. It is not a personal experience of enlightenment, but a heightened radiance of the soul that should be the goal of this practice.

(3) The path described is not a substitute for medical treatment, but it can give people a guideline for personal spiritual orientation.

becomes understandable through focused repetition and further objective work. The concrete thoughts assigned to the exercises give the mental consciousness joy when, through the contact with the teaching content, it experiences these thoughts in its own thinking process. In these processes of learning, the soul experiences a first step beyond the limits of its existing subjectivity into a greater, objective expansiveness. (3)

(3) The exercises can be practised at all levels, from very easy to very demanding degrees of difficulty.

To be more precise, it is not the exercises which lead to a better energy level and mental alertness; it is the attention, the involvement and the interest out of people's own activity, (4) which lead to that enlivening and liberating state of joy and a real, beneficial strengthening of their inner feeling. With the attention and inner relationship and by thinking the content independently, a space opens up for the technical field of shaping the *yoga-āsana*, of giving them form. At the same time a faint notion develops, and flourishes into a clear inner feeling, that these pictures, in the way they portray the exercises, strengthen the consciousness of self specifically out of a centre. This centre is neither related too strongly to the body nor too one-sidedly to an exclusive life of the spirit, distant from the world. As these exercises are approached and studied in a lively way, the idea awakens that the centre in a person comes about through an actual reality of the soul, a reality which is always in a dynamic process of becoming, and which expresses itself in contrast to the body and the world. (5)

(4) With the words attention and involvement it is not superficially coming into contact that is meant here, but a more conscious, more formed process of relating and sensing grounded in calmness.

Most people hope for help to overcome their suffering through medicines or outer means. Outer means however can only serve as a support to the positive and creative unfolding of the thinking, feeling and willing. Many people ask in their state of need: "What exercises do you recommend for me so that my illness will get better?" However there are no exercises that work like a remedy to strengthen the consciousness in its individual dynamic and in its creative individual sense. Those who choose this New Yoga Will with its various body, breath and soul exercises, should therefore develop a consciousness for the inner sense of an artistic and creative approach to exercises right from the start. For a process of spiritual development there are no material forms, and therefore no exercises, which can replace the activity in the soul forces. The eyes, the senses and the instruments of the will are guided to the expressions of the yoga, dedicating themselves in a lively way with interest, an intensive search for truth and an artistic feeling of sympathy (6). The individual exercises are studied and worked at in concrete, practical steps. The work leads into a vivid sphere of relationship and opens up the realm beyond the I we have developed so far, or the subjective inner life, to a greater outer experience and a consciousness of the various phenomena of the world. This yoga therefore does not lead out of the world, but into the world in an

(5) It is the I or the self which forms the centre of its creative existence.

(6) Translator's note: The term sympathy has a different meaning from that of empathy or pity used in common English, and is meant here more as a force of attraction and affinity in the soul.

ordered and guided way with individual sensitivity, consciousness and a foundation for our own I. (7)

The individual *āsana* need lengthy practice and repeated dedication, both mental and physical. This application may seem too arduous or difficult for the mentality common today. Working with the breathing and yoga exercises means working with one's own body and also definitely leads, via the body, to an inner energetic enrichment, as well as encouraging a strengthening of the spine, the muscles, the joints and the entire posture. Many good physiological effects come about through improving the tone of the body and above all also through developing more alert and focused attention. The consciousness should not get bogged down in an exercise but should more and more responsibly form and further develop the exercise. The discipline of working with the body in this way should not be rejected as something too difficult right from the start, as it is precisely through the demanding, artistic level required by a physical exercise that it offers a stimulation and a fascination with endless possibilities for active development. This fascination in the play of movement and in developing better flexibility as well as stability in the back already leads to an overall strengthening and so students feel regenerated in the face of life.

Sadly many people refuse this first discipline of working and think that at the first stage on their path they need relaxation and support to give them a boost in their energy levels and only then, once they have received something, so they think, are they then able to give something of themselves again. These strange ideas come through a thinking that is influenced by the current esoteric, religious or personal opinions that we have to practise the best exercises in order to gain the best possible results for ourselves. It is not an objective but a subjective feeling that forms the basis of these ideas. However this thinking leads to a consuming of yoga and neglects individual human creativity. Through its own subjectivity it ultimately prevents the development of an expanded mental consciousness. Human beings however are not consuming creatures, rather they live in the power and responsibility of the creative forces of their self.

The objection is often raised by opponents of this New Yoga Will that this way of practising yoga leads to personal dependency. The greatest reproach is towards my person, as according to today's materialistic principles people are only allowed to adopt a pure practice of yoga without studying the pictures of the teacher. Although in other orientations yoga often works with deeply emotional forms of veneration and these in fact often go hand in hand with a binding relationship between teacher and student, in the yoga taught here neither a

(7) When an exercise is rightly understood, both practically and also in its content, and when students work with the imaginations, picturing and thinking them, they learn the third step and that is to carry over content and forms of consciousness into life. An incorrect practice which accepts no criteria for practice, or only materialistic ones, and tries to penetrate the spirit starting from the body, cannot lead into this third step.

personality cult nor any sort of outer personal veneration ceremonies are tolerated in any way. Instead it is all the progressive and positive steps of development, all the aesthetic and true phenomena of life that should be venerated, and the veneration should grow as a fundamental component of the personal soul life. When it is suggested in this New Yoga Will that it is good to look carefully at the pictures because they express the clarity of a formed consciousness, which neither sinks too deeply into the body nor seems too distant from the world, then it should also be stated that with this careful looking, objective learning steps come about which can support a person's I in an individual way for the future. At the same time the pictures express how the will is formed in a very free and light way. This has not arisen through pure physical training, but has unfolded from a consciousness of realised "imagination", which will be explained later. Today people practising yoga need pictures which do not only guide them technically but stimulate them in their souls and move them to a lighter practice.

The accusation of dependency comes about because of a contradictory, self-fabricated fear and has no justification once we become aware that every observation that is objective and adaptive can only represent an expansion of the consciousness but not a possession of the consciousness. Suggestion and manipulation are not wanted on these paths, and they cannot take place either if students learn to use their own thinking and their own capacity for discerning awareness. The love and the inner sentiments which come about on this path depict the free and not the dependant person. (8)

The book "The Soul Dimension of Yoga" (9) can be used to expand the basis of these studies. The practice cycle suggested here is very good for starting to learn mental forms of consciousness which should ultimately be applied socially in life. More precise suggestions for further exercises and more extensive philosophical descriptions are consciously avoided because these elements are contained in the above mentioned book.

To learn the cycle it is best to practise a few *āsana* on their own at first and then eventually to complete the whole sequence according to your capability. Start by getting an overview of the content. Then move forwards step by step through the cycle, at first leaving out the more difficult positions like the balancing head-knee pose, the lying triangle, the bow and the sitting twist.

All these exercises, starting from the circle of the heart right through to the standing triangle, enable some first processes of the consciousness to open up, but the exercises also set free an energy. They awaken the energy described in Sanskrit as *prāṇa*, which is brought to flow

more strongly in specific centres through a particular kind of attention, connected with a focused and concentrated movement. These centres or so-called *cakrāḥ*, of which there are seven, describe the inner cosmos or the subtle body with all its energetic branchings, gathering points and channels. This energy should be observed, but not used, as the most essential aspect of the practice is to train the thinking, feeling and willing and to integrate these into life in an ordered way. (10)

A detailed account of all seven energy centres would be too lengthy for the scope of this text and probably also too difficult. However in this simplified and shortened presentation it seems important to mention the most essential centres that are enlivened and centred through the exercises. These are firstly the third centre, which is level with the pit of the stomach or duodenum, and the fourth centre, which can be equated approximately with the heart. The third centre corresponds to the strength and elasticity of the spine and gives the whole body a graceful posture and the mind a natural breadth and flexibility. It gives an experience of abundance and warmth and orders many of the metabolic processes in the abdomen. The heart centre on the other hand gives more of a calmness and inwardness, composure and serene, sunny joy. It is the centre that enables a close connection to others and grants an inner feeling of the tolerance of the free "I" and of consciously being in relationship. But to re-emphasise, the development of these centres does not happen through the exercises alone, but it happens through working thoughtfully and consciously with the contents of the texts, the pictures and also the exercises. (11)

The demanding positions like the sitting twist and the headstand carry within them a very subtle sensitive feeling which has a higher dimension of experience. In these exercises the sixth energy centre in the consciousness is supported. The exercises stimulate the breath to move freely and enable a sensitive awareness in the centre of the forehead, where the seat of the thinking lies.

The exercises done in this way are neither gymnastic exercises nor purely physiological or therapeutic exercises for the vitality of the body. Rather they are profound exercises for the consciousness, or aesthetic, artistic forms of movement and rest, in which the experience, awareness and the individual strength in developing concentration play a big role. It would be incorrect to make the trivial claim that a yoga exercise awakens the energies of the body and develops an energy centre with far reaching effects on the consciousness and the quality of life. Although the exercises do address the energies of the body, it is the task of the yoga discipline presented here to take these energies as they are and to apply a standard of conscious, artistic and social activation to them. The exercises then only have a supporting

(8) It is understandable and even desirable that a deep love should connect the teacher and students with each other. Nevertheless this should be carefully distinguished from an emotional relationship. Unfortunately there are many seductive emotional ideas about the term love which upon closer examination actually come from symbiosis and dependency and therefore weaken the independent activity of the consciousness rather than encouraging it.

(9) Heinz Grill, *The Soul Dimension of Yoga, a practical foundation for a path of spiritual practice*, published by Lammers-Koll-Verlag, ISBN 3-935925-57-3.

(10) The word *prāṇa* means life-energy. It is closely connected to the moving forms of the so-called etheric body referred to in Anthroposophy. The two chief forms are the ascending principle, *prāṇa*, and the descending principle, *apāna*.

(11) The 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> centres constitute the balancing centre of a person.

role, they bring to life an artistic sensitivity and offer the opportunity to become aware of the various energy centres that have been stimulated. They encourage a creative sense of working, a readiness to experience things with sensitive feeling, and they enrich the thinking with a natural concentration. They also encourage the development of an aesthetic sense for life and this is usually expressed in every social interaction. (12)

(12) An exercise motivates the soul to practical learning steps in life. It can also have a corrective function, for if it is properly practised it opens up possibilities for consciously building relationships to other people and social structures, while if it is used wrongly it chains people back into their own personal sphere too much and reinforces reticence.

## The relaxation position and free breathing

Harmonious abdominal breathing, or relaxed, expansive and gentle breathing of the whole organism, happens at its best when the body is relaxed and the consciousness maintains a clarity that is as alert as possible. This balance between alertness and relaxation, or mentally clear attentiveness and a free awareness of the body leads to the first and simplest form of I-consciousness. The I with its awareness and its thoughts does not disappear into the body, does not dream away in sentimental ideas, but observes the individual processes and guides them in a desirable direction.

The breathing is allowed to flow in a rhythm that is as free as possible and the quality of the inhalation and exhalation is then improved through focussed mental picturing and indirect concentration. (1)

Lie on your back. The body is placed symmetrically, the feet are about thirty centimetres apart. The hands face upwards. Move your thoughts consciously through the body in a careful order and become aware of the individual regions and limbs. Picture, for example, the feet and the ankles as they naturally look. These images happen quite naturally like pictures and should not show the slightest sign of suggestion, or changes imposed by presupposing a better, more ideal, more relaxed state. The body is taken as it is and a mental picture is created in a natural way in accord with the body. Through this mental activity of picturing, which can only happen briefly for each part of the body, the consciousness becomes slightly detached from the physical body. (2) Start with your mental awareness at your feet and move upwards along the limbs: the ankles, the shins and calves, the knees, the thighs, the hips, the sacrum which rests stable on the ground, the lumbar spine, the thoracic spine, the abdomen, the chest, the shoulders, the arms and hands, then proceeding to the neck, the back of the head, the skin of the head, the forehead and temples, the cheekbones, the jaw, the jaw muscles, the skin of the face and finally the skin of the whole body. After a few seconds you can get a slight picture of the appearance of the individual parts of the body. Forming these mental images needs some perseverance and also strength. Always take your thoughts through the body in this, or a similar, well-ordered sequence and then encapsulate the picture of the body in a whole mental image. (3) By forming these mental pictures and building them up following the sequence, mental consciousness is stimulated and also harmonised. Active relaxation done in this way leads to a better detachment. The relationship between consciousness and body is ordered in a new way and this leads to an active relaxation.

(1) A form of relaxation and detachment from the outer drives of the sense impressions was also known in Buddhist circles and yoga disciplines. Someone doing this kind of practice would be described as a vipasin.

(2) Building up mental pictures also follows a rhythmic order and structure. The thoughts are not put together in a random sequence but are thought and formed into pictures in an ordered relation to the body. This rhythmic picturing activity does not need constant, strict guidelines and sequences, but a well-ordered, understandable and clear coherence should be retained. Rhythmic thinking and picturing connects the different poles of physical life with the spiritual world of ideas.

(3) The better an ordered, logical sequence takes place with the observation of mental pictures, which are finally encapsulated into a whole mental image, the more a calmness and unification in the heart is encouraged. We could also say in esoteric terms that the so-called warmth ether is stimulated (a kind of life-force which exists in every human being and generates a harmonious penetration with warmth).

A second step takes place by observing the breathing. Remain in the conscious, yet relaxed alertness and direct your attention to the diaphragm which lies across the body between the abdomen and the chest. Concentrate on the waist and the region of the navel and let your breath flow freely and lightly without influencing it. The mental attention on a specific area of the body leads the breath in this direction gently and without strain. It is also helpful to give yourself to the mental picture that the body opens more and more to the incoming breath without resistance. If you concentrate on your kidneys, then the free breathing that comes towards you gives rise to a pleasant, gentle enlivenment in this region.

During this exercise, become conscious that the breath does not come primarily from the body, but from an infinite, indefinable cosmic space. This cosmic space moves from outside into the body and in a deep movement fills the lungs with its soft substance. The breath bestows an infinite abundance and free power of the universe. The body takes the breath in through the relaxation and through the clear attentiveness of the consciousness.

This exercise, which has two parts; the conscious guiding of mental pictures and the conscious opening for the breathing, can last for five to ten minutes, but preferably not longer as there is a danger of dreaming and of the mind wandering. If your concentration is lacking, you can either practise only the mental picturing or the idea of opening to the breath in sensitive readiness.

This free, light and deep breathing in the relaxation position may be very difficult to do during phases of anxiety, depression and unsettled states of nervous exhaustion. The motor function of the body is unsettled and the body cannot relinquish itself to the sensitive nerves. The source of the unrest and tension, as well as the agitating effects of thought-forces, usually lies more deeply in the psyche and therefore cannot be corrected so simply and quickly through the relaxation exercise. Nevertheless this first exercise helps you to mentally observe your own unrest and driving emotions. With a power that works through the motor nerves, these emotions choke any receptive sensitivity and normally, during the rush and business of everyday life, they take absolute possession of the consciousness.

When this relaxation exercise is carried out either with mental pictures of the body or with a conscious attention to the expansiveness of the breath, a heightened strength of will and of thought gradually develops and counteracts the unsettled current of life with new consciousness. Every time we can independently co-ordinate and practise the exercise in the right way, it strengthens our ability to steer

our own consciousness. Relaxation is not just simply letting go and sinking into calmness, but a focussed mental activity which works because it leads the forces bound to the body into a better relationship. Through the demands it makes on mental attention it is also an exercise for the will and for freeing the sensitive feelings. As long as excessive drives of the motor nerves predominate with their tendency to unsettle and possess, real feelings and sensitive perceptions can no longer be discerned. The exercise promotes order and reflection, sensitive realignment and a concentration that is detached from the will but created by the mentality. When the will with its motor impulses has to recede, it is trained particularly intensively. (4)

The relaxation exercise, which is usually done lying on the back, can also be carried out sitting up. Through this exercise the student gets to know and to value some essential laws of life: The more we construct our thought processes and mental images in a clear and organised way in life, the more the consciousness detaches from the body. Forming a good mental picture needs alertness and also a certain freedom in our observing. We should not sink into the body in the exercise. Also in life we should not sink into the emotions and dreams of the body, but accompany and steer our lives with clear mental pictures. Finally it is also of benefit to experience the breathing in the sense that it is more open for a greater space outside and so learn to experience the sensitive nerves receptively and calmly. Any motor activity that is too intensive prevents this real openness and beneficial sensitivity.

This learning step from consciously developed relaxation should be specifically targeted at life. Then the openness that develops becomes a strength. (5)

(4) The practical learning step also lies in the experience that any disordered or unconscious mental activity tends to cause nervousness, while any consciously ordered thought processes, particularly if they take place in a rhythmic sequence with a subsequent overview, pave the way for a natural contemplation and strength.

(5) Here we can begin to relate to the learning steps in the exercises on three levels:

1. Learning the exercise
2. Experiencing the active involvement of the soul in thinking, feeling and willing
3. Carrying over the subject matter that has been learned into life

## The circle of the heart

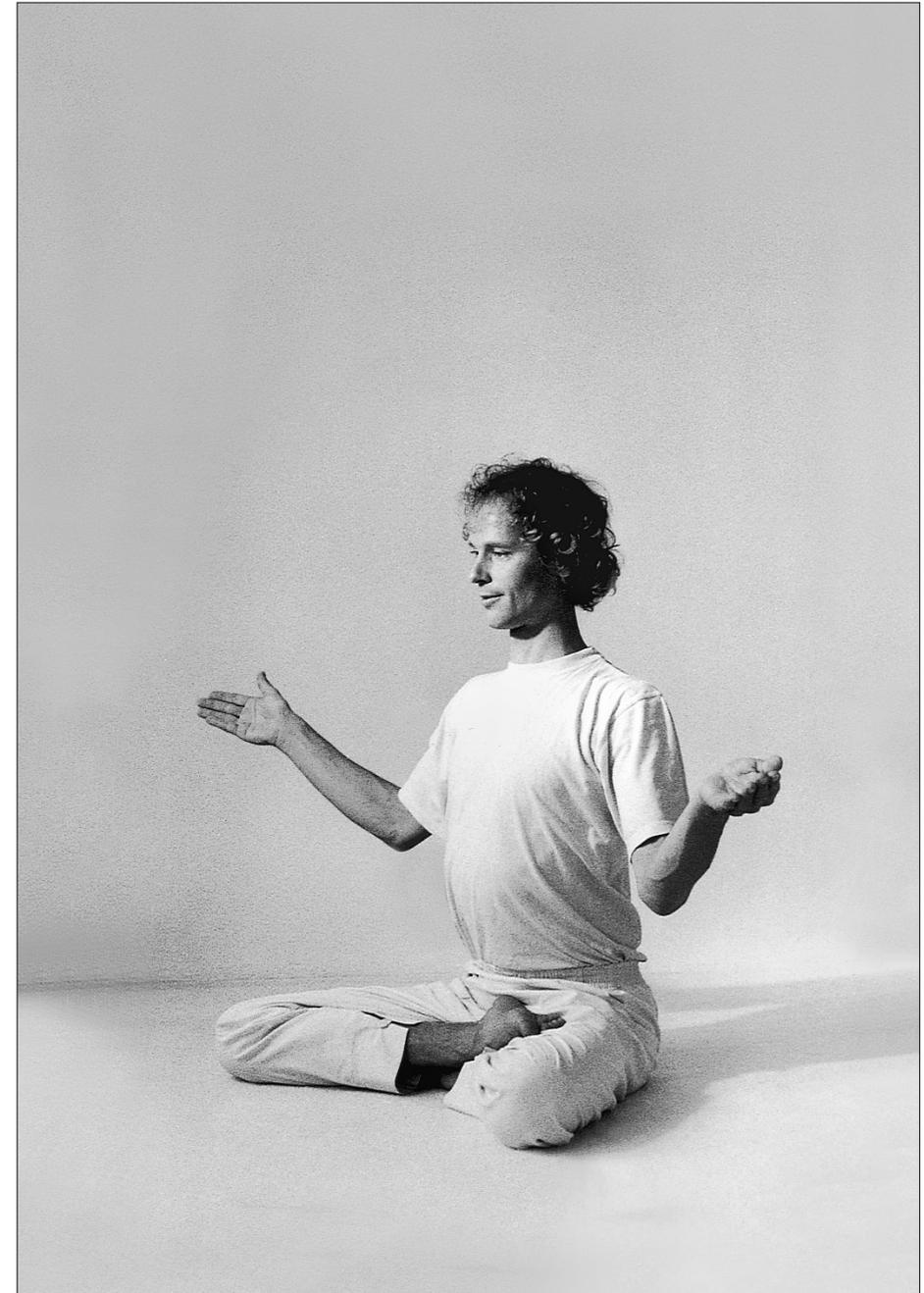
The first exercise, which is best done in a sitting position, is the circle of the heart. It starts in an upright position with crossed legs or else in the somewhat easier kneeling position. It is very important that the spine is straightened up in a really good dynamic right to the head, with the neck and shoulders remaining relaxed. Be mindful of this posture which should use as little force as possible and should come about more because of interest. When there is a real, active interest in something, or in an exercise, etheric forces develop which carry the spine naturally and lightly upwards. The breathing should remain free and relaxed. If needed cushions or a small stool can be used to help the sitting position on the floor. In all exercises, including this one, the eyes remain open, as the sense of sight always helps to give further shape and form to the exercise, which proceeds as follows: (1)

(1) The etheric forces can most simply be described as life forces.

Once you have developed a first feeling for the uprightness and your thoughts have calmed down, the next step is to actually build a form. Take your hands up above your head so that your fingertips touch. Form a circle with your hands until they meet down on your lap. Move smoothly back up along the mental image of the circle until the hands complete it above the head. Do this movement a few times. Pay attention to the roundness of the circle. This roundness is consciously felt with the hands while the circle lives in the thoughts as if it actually exists. With this exercise you develop a conscious mental picture of a conceptual or abstract circle that you yourself have created through your consciousness. A subtle sense of touching comes about with the hands, as if the roundness were tangible and perceptible. Thus this exercise stimulates the activity of developing a thought which becomes a concrete form, and awakens the sensitivity to actively experience what has been created as a reality.

The learning step for social life which is attained with this exercise exists in the insight that people possess a conscious, creative, ability to give form. The more they make use of this, not only in the exercises but also in general life, the more they will experience contemplation in their centre at the heart with calmness and stability. In this way the consciousness can bring something new to life through the creative forces. The circle did not previously exist, it was created and manifested through our own creative act. Creativity itself wants to be used in life through our own thinking, feeling and willing. (2)

(2) Creativity can be equated with the Anthroposophical term "the I". It uses the thinking, feeling and willing.



The circle of the heart

It is important to become conscious in life of creative power. The creative dimension in the human being lives in the self with its potential to unfold.

## The standing half moon and the standing head-knee position

The next exercise begins with dynamically alternating movements, which eventually flow into a concentrated and motionless final position. The movement is like lively breathing and the calmness is specifically characterised by a silent pause. (1) Straighten up into a standing position with closed legs and raise your arms above your head. Keep your shoulders relaxed and grow dynamically upwards and also gently backwards with your spine, starting from the middle, to form a half moon shape with your upper body. In this backward bend the hips should remain straight and a hollow back should consciously be avoided. From this upwardly directed movement, after a few flowing breaths, proceed with a wide movement far out forwards and place the hands or fingertips on the floor. In the extreme stretch the shoulders and neck remain relaxed and the breath flows in a natural rhythm.

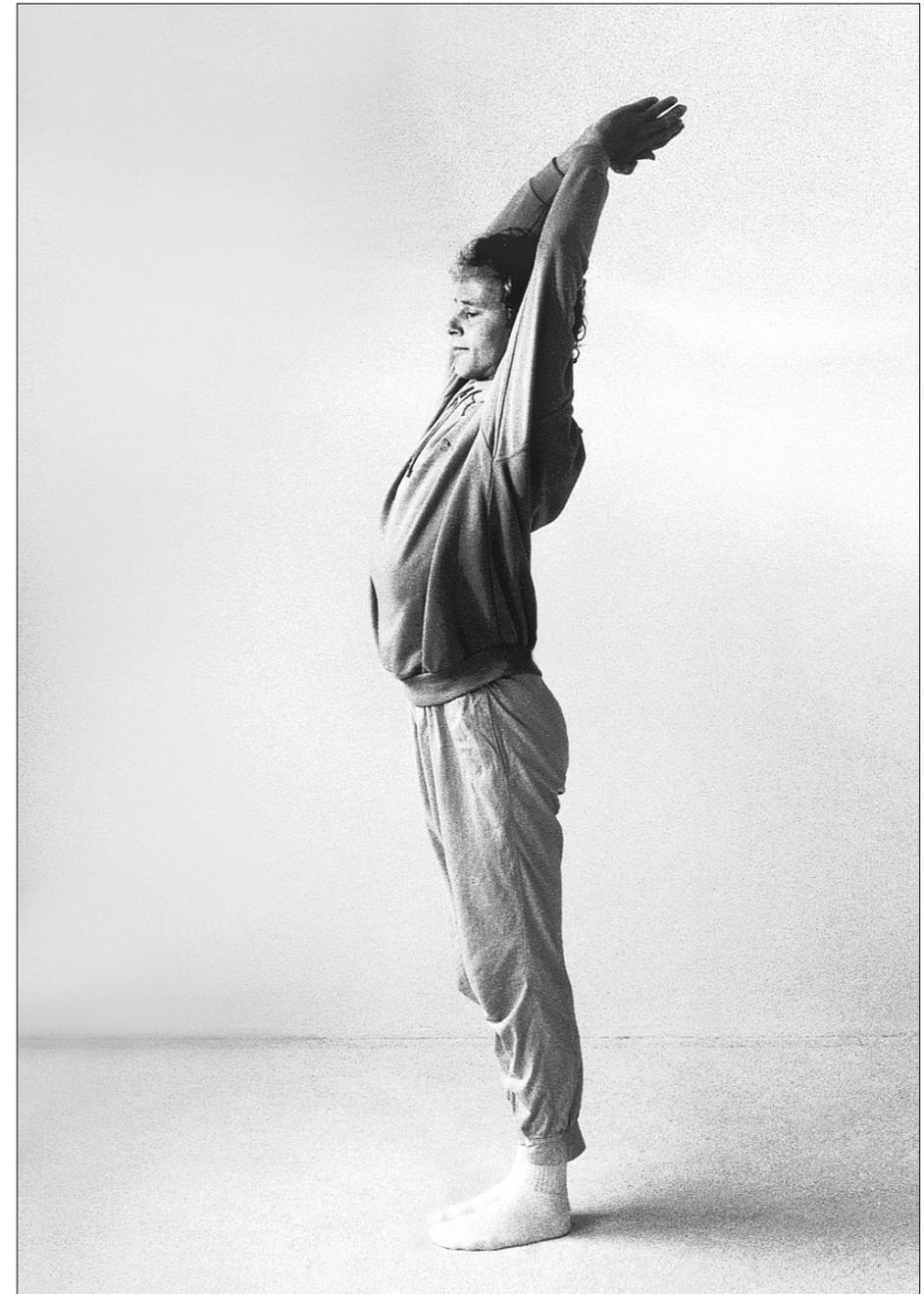
(1) An *āsana* is quite specifically characterised by its still phase. The original meaning of the term *āsana* is calm position.

Remain in this extended stretch for a short time and then with purposeful guidance, keeping the upper body relaxed, straighten your body up afresh into the standing half moon. Repeat these movements a few times. The body will become more dynamic and adapt to the unusual activity. The head, neck and shoulders remain as light and yet formed as a leaf swaying in the wind.

After this dynamic preparation, interlace your fingers behind your back, stretch your arms and turn your hands to face outwards. Carefully and with control bend your body forwards to the limit of your flexibility. Remain at this limit while the stretched arms are raised up over your back.

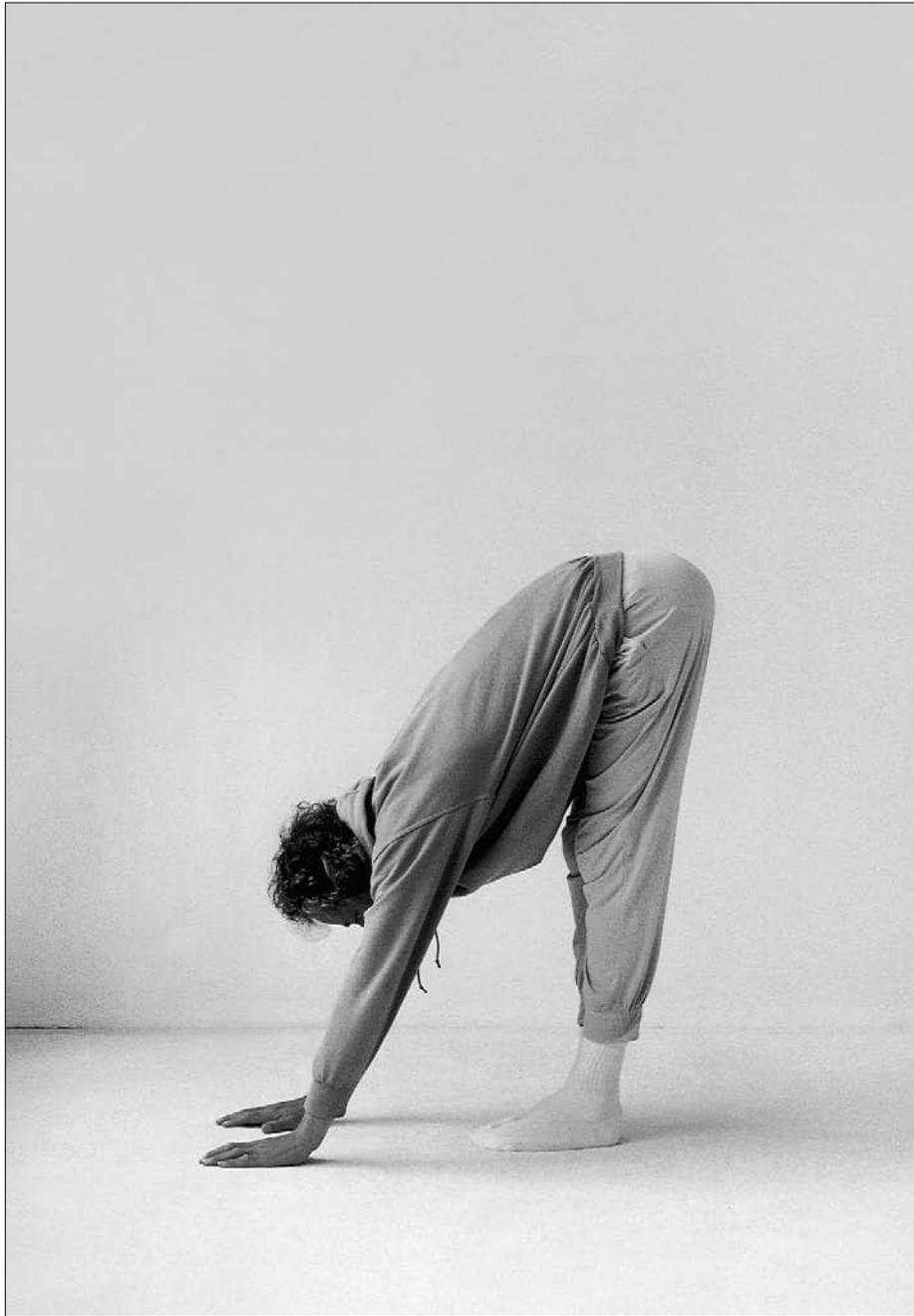
The learning step from this small sequence of exercises is that a movement should not be emotional but should be clearly guided and should remain free from emotion. The consciousness does not sink into the body but retains guidance through a mental overview at all times. Although the body glides out in a stretch, it opens more and more for the life of the breath. If students do not use the breath for the movement but leave it free, they learn to be aware of the surrounding space and yet leave this free. With free breath students get to know a state of consciousness free from the body. (2)

(2) The social learning steps which come from these exercises are assessed mainly through the aesthetic enrichment. A movement which is guided gently and yet clearly by the consciousness has a more beautiful and graceful expression than a movement which takes place with emotional attachment or through strong, wilful forcing.



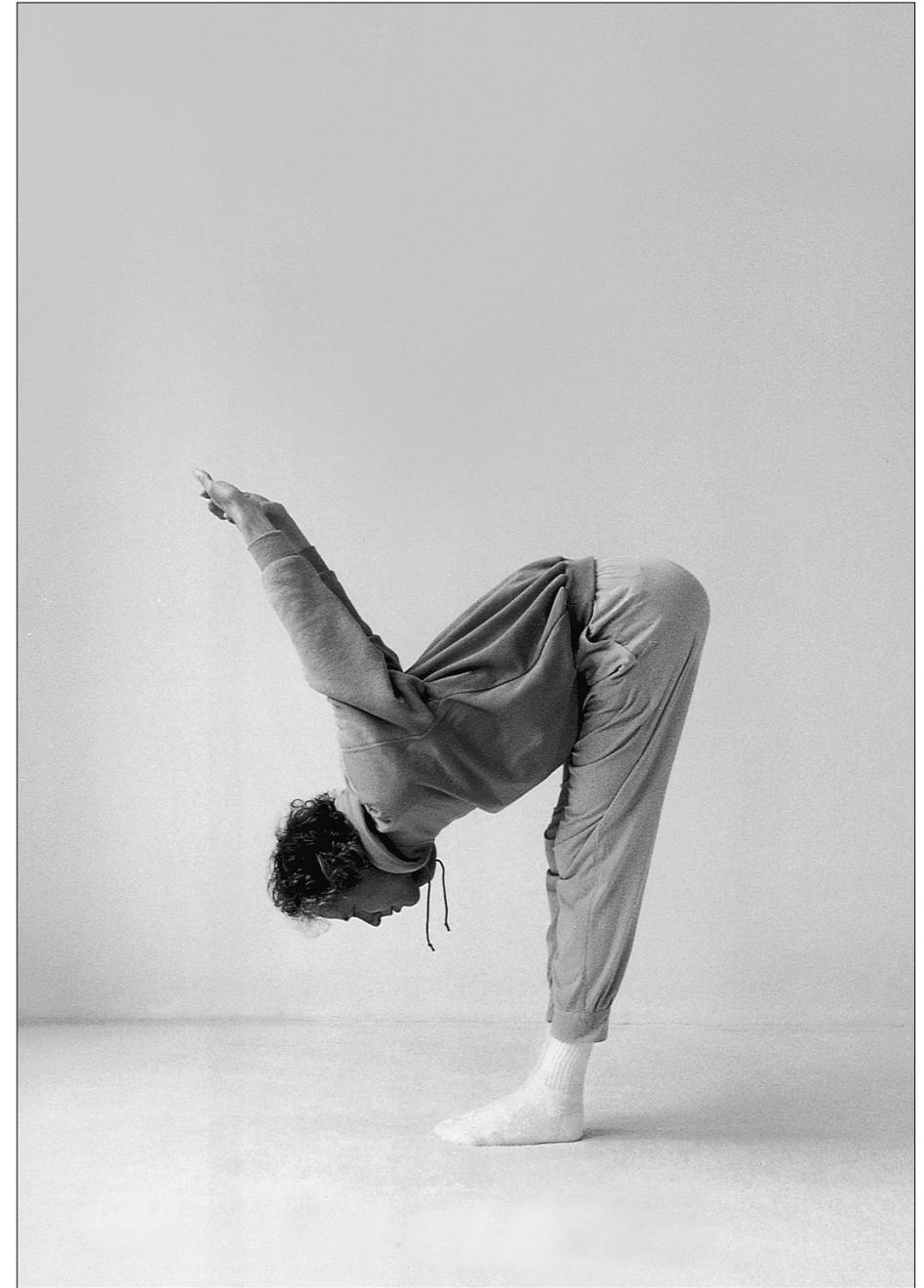
*candrāsana*, The standing half moon

The learning step exists in taking the usual emotions out of the movement and bringing the guiding order of the consciousness into the form.



*uttānāsana*, The standing head-knee position

How do students experience in themselves the shaped form in relation to the dynamic movement?



*uttānāsana*, The standing head-knee position – arm variation

The conscious and free experience of the body promote the ability to be aware of the most varied, unique forms in everyday life.

## The shoulderstand

The next position is the classical yoga *āsana*, the shoulderstand. This *āsana* already needs quite a high degree of discipline and a flexible spine. The exercise is normally quite safe and can be done by anyone who is physically healthy. (1)

(1) In Sanskrit the shoulderstand is called *sarvāṅgāsana* which means "the position of all parts".

Lie on your back with your legs closed and place the palms of your hands on the floor. Keeping your breath flowing, raise your legs without swinging them and straighten up your back from the thoracic spine. Support your back with your hands and find your way into a calm posture. The inverted body is erect, the head rests on the ground and the spine aspires upwards against gravity and against its usual direction. This position is bound to present some difficulties at first. Feelings of pressure develop and the breath seems to constrict, particularly before the body has adapted to this unusual inverted position. Only hold the position for a short time the first few times and then return to the relaxation position on your back. (2)

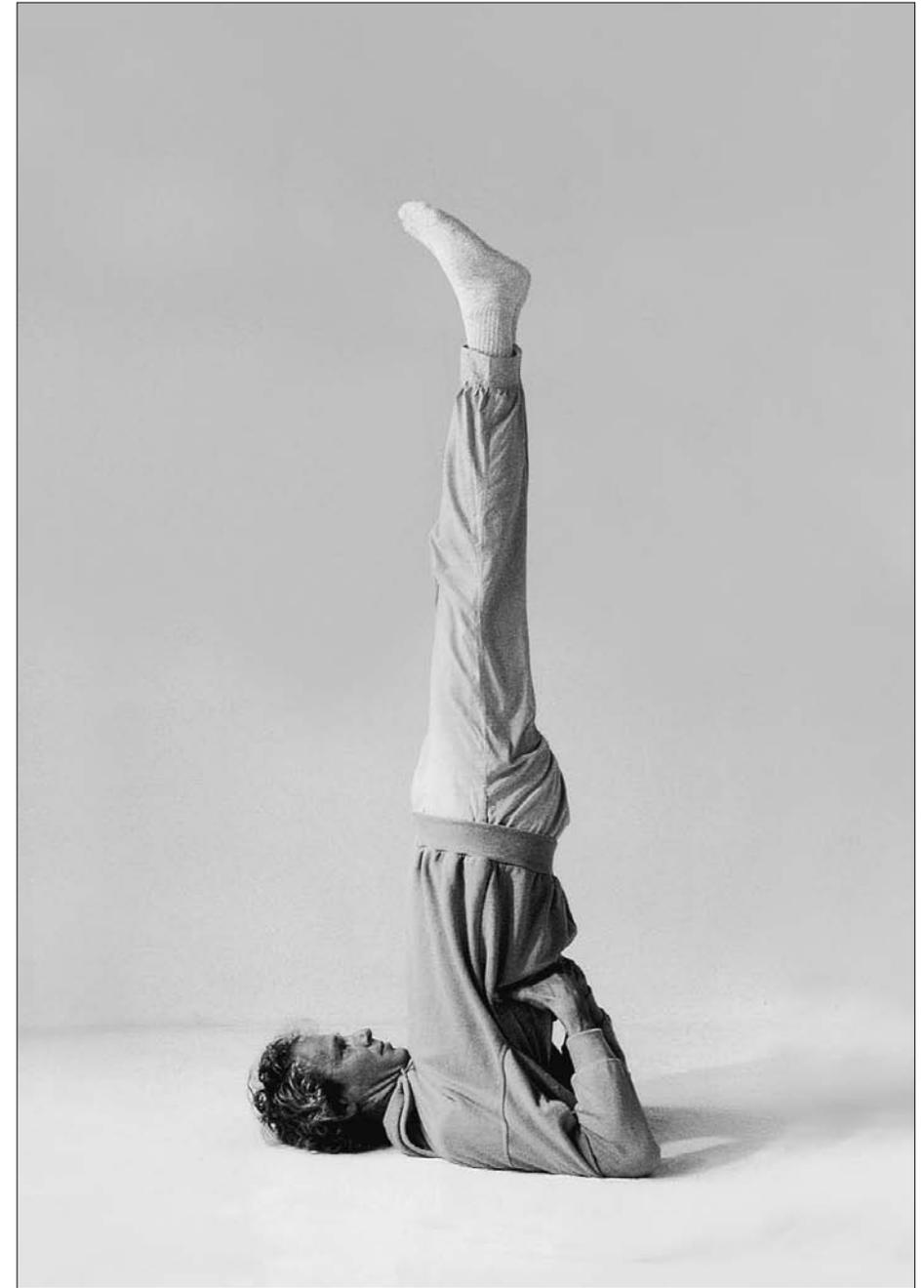
(2) Through repetition the etheric body attunes itself to the exercise. It then brings about the movement more and more easily.

At this point in the exercise cycle the practical question arises once again as to what role the consciousness takes during the practice of an *āsana*. The consciousness is a subtle instrument of the psyche and is involved in all phases of the exercise. It guides itself autonomously and can exert an influence on the motor movements through targeted concentration. However it also continues to receive through the senses in a subtle way, even once the exercise is familiar and there is a better ability to do it. Eventually the concentrated training of the consciousness leads to a free awareness of one's own bodily feelings. Through strength of spirit the consciousness takes on the position of an observing witness who is no longer involved in the state of affairs. Through this observation the ability also develops to gently improve the posture of the body and to relax individual regions through well-directed awareness. In the shoulderstand the abdomen should be relaxed and the back should remain dynamically straightened up from the thoracic spine. The face is also relaxed and even the shoulders rest on the floor in the exercise without being awkwardly fixed. (3)

(3) Initially it is recommended to hold the position for 15 to 30 seconds. With time it can be held for up to several minutes.

The learning step for life is that a movement does not unfold through strength and effort, but through an etheric flowing which develops by attuning and ordering the dynamic in a well co-ordinated way. This co-ordinating and etheric force can be recognised in the picture of the exercise. (4)

(4) The more people acquire a correct thought for the exercise, the more they bring their etheric body into the specific strengthening desired. Repetition is an aid that can always be used, both in the practice as well as in the mental preparation. Etheric forces gather through repeated conscious activities.



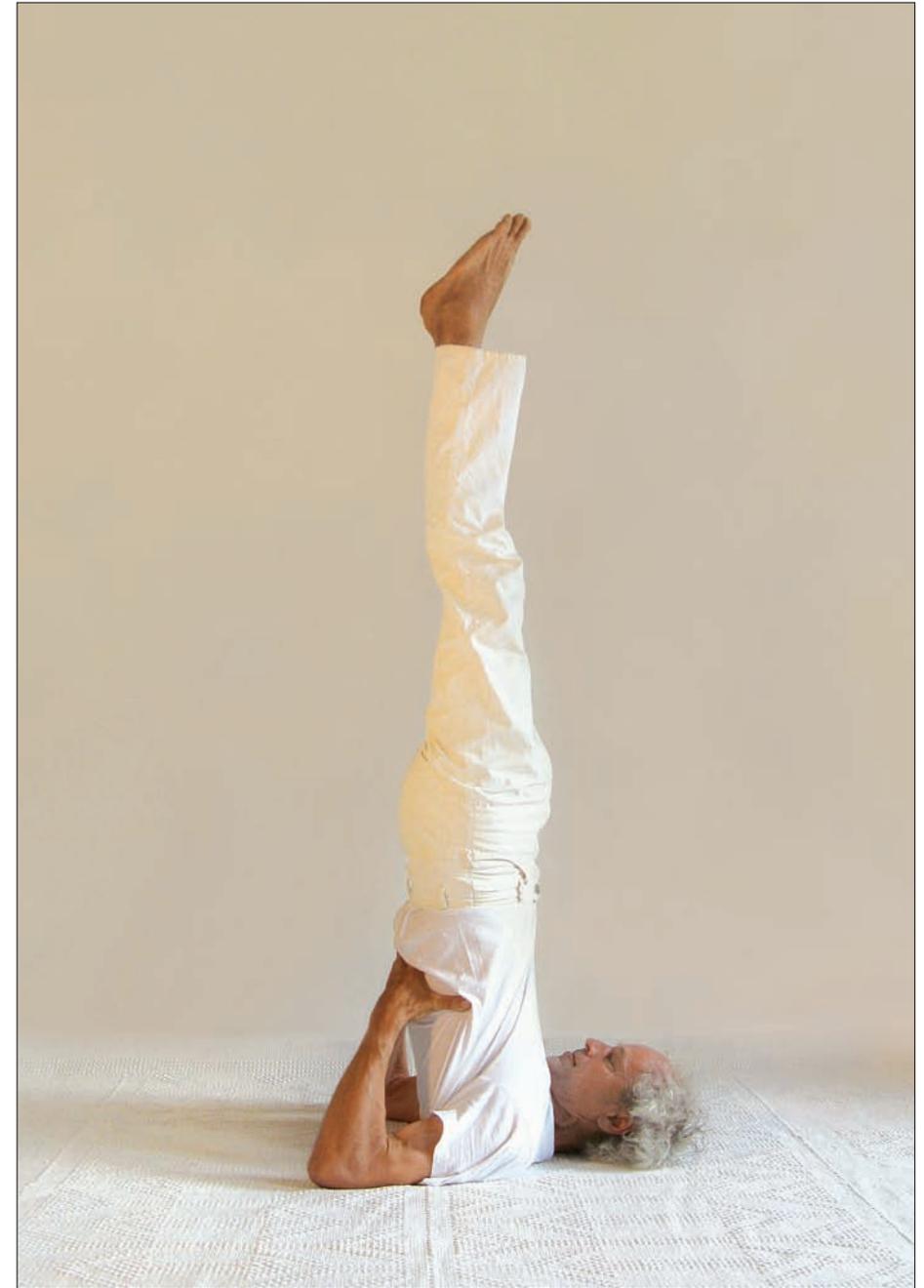
*sarvāṅgāsana*, The shoulderstand

The etheric force arises when students bring mentally pictured content into their practice.



*sarvāṅgāsana*, The shoulderstand – initial dynamic stage

By mentally picturing the position ideally required, the practice gradually approaches the sought-after ideal.



*sarvāṅgāsana*, The shoulderstand – final position

The learning step is that mentally pictured content is repeatedly thought, until it can eventually be carried into life and produce the sought-after ideal.

## The fish

The next *āsana* is a counter-pose to the shoulderstand. While in the shoulderstand the chest was more constricted and the breath automatically flowed deep into the body, now in the fish the chest opens out widely, and easily takes up the free breath despite the heightened tension.

Start on your back with your legs closed, place the palms of your hands on the floor and your arms under your body. Support yourself on your elbows and raise your chest by actively tensing your upper back. This curving of your back is strongest between the shoulderblades. Then move your head back until the crown touches the floor. At first only hold the position for a short time, then eventually for up to half a minute. In the fish it is important to maintain this tension in the thoracic spine actively and persistently. This frees the backwardly bent neck vertebrae from unpleasant strains and tensions. In accordance with the natural tension and persisting activity, the breath flow is a little shorter and quicker in this position. However, despite its liveliness it flows softly, rhythmically and unobtrusively. (1)

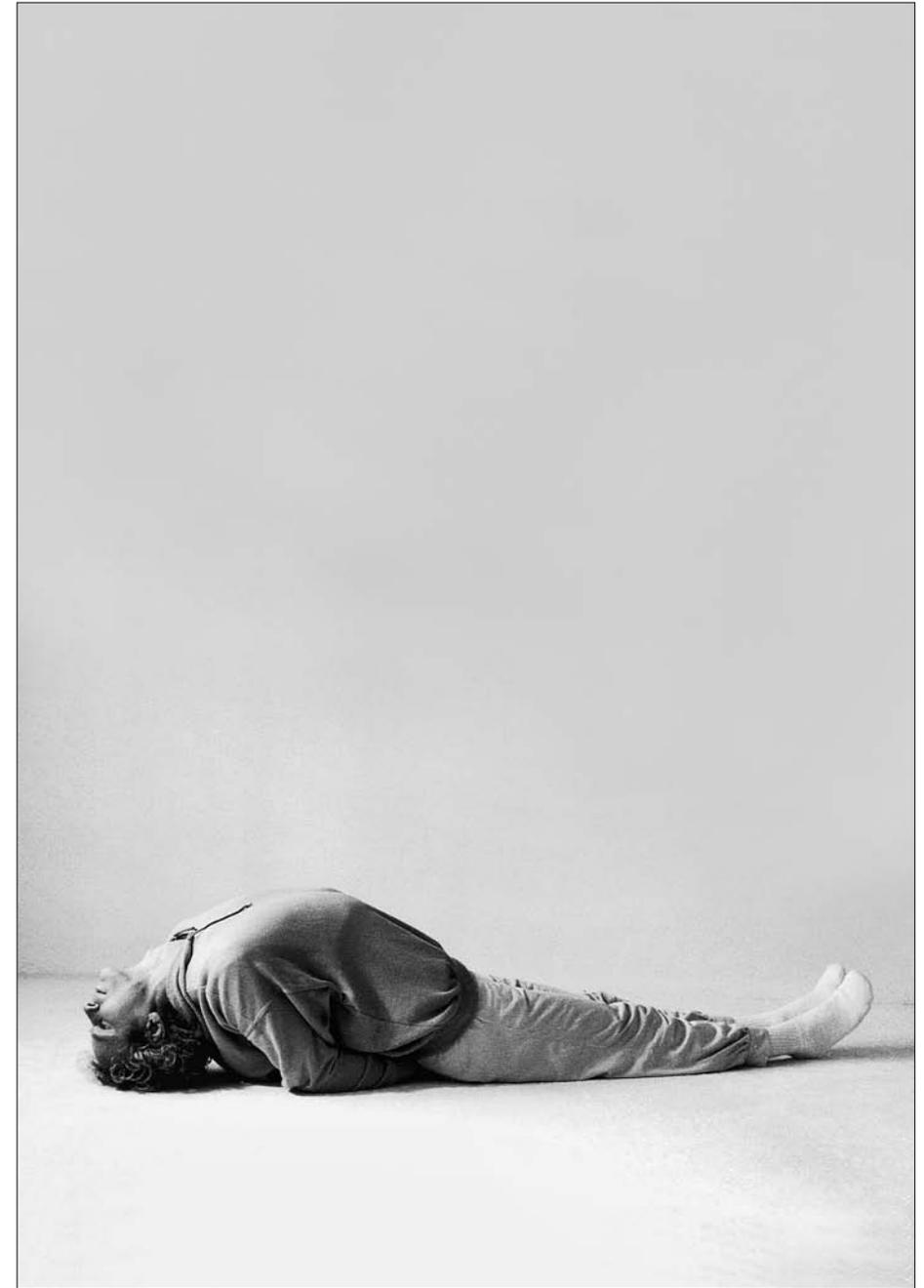
This position is a good example for conscious activity, which is absolutely essential in every *āsana*. The learning step for life which happens through the fish is as follows: All processes of consciousness, directed towards any object or idea of the world, lead to differentiated and clear thoughts and so give the entire atmosphere a calm, light shimmer. The consciousness itself wants to become differentiated so that it can embrace its opportunities in life. A consciousness which is not differentiated but only takes up concepts in a generalised way and uses these concepts with perceptions that have not been precisely structured, often becomes attached to the body and heavy. Any differentiated processes of the consciousness on the other hand help to shine light through the whole world of the body and feelings. (2)

In this backward-bending exercise it is helpful to get a conscious sense for the distribution of tension in the *āsana*. The imaginative dimension can emerge for the fish if you picture over the arching chest an arc, which complements the upwardly-moving dynamic with an impulse that works inwards from outside. The arc can be experienced like a cosmic picture. With this image the action gains rhythm from the cosmos to a certain extent. (3)

(1) It is also helpful to pay attention to the periphery of the skin in the fish. This periphery represents the readiness to have open contact with the environment. This is important as people should not feel within their physical inner world too much.

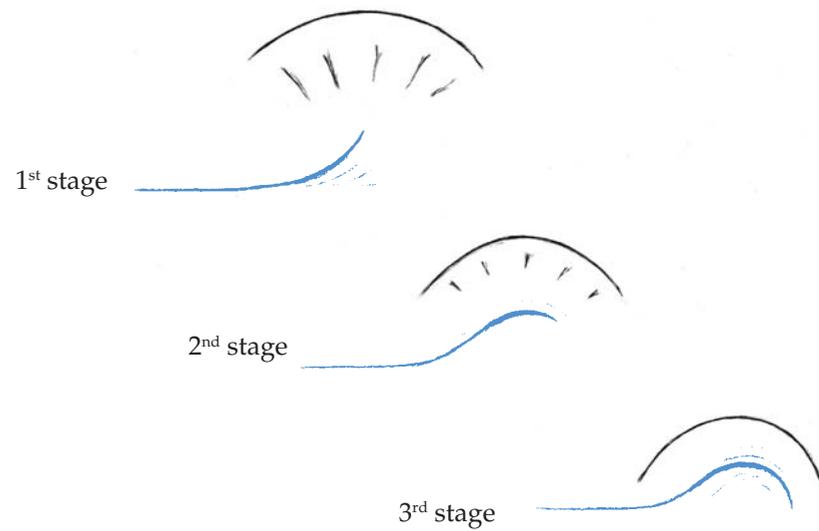
(2) Nowadays people very rarely have differentiated thinking as they form few thoughts themselves from their sense-impressions. For example, someone who looks at a mountain and does not merely surrender to the emotions of "beautiful" or "ugly", but builds a concrete image in the thoughts of the form of the mountain, sees and experiences this mountain in a way that is more intense and true to reality.

(3) When practising the fish, accuracy to the point of exact precision is called for.



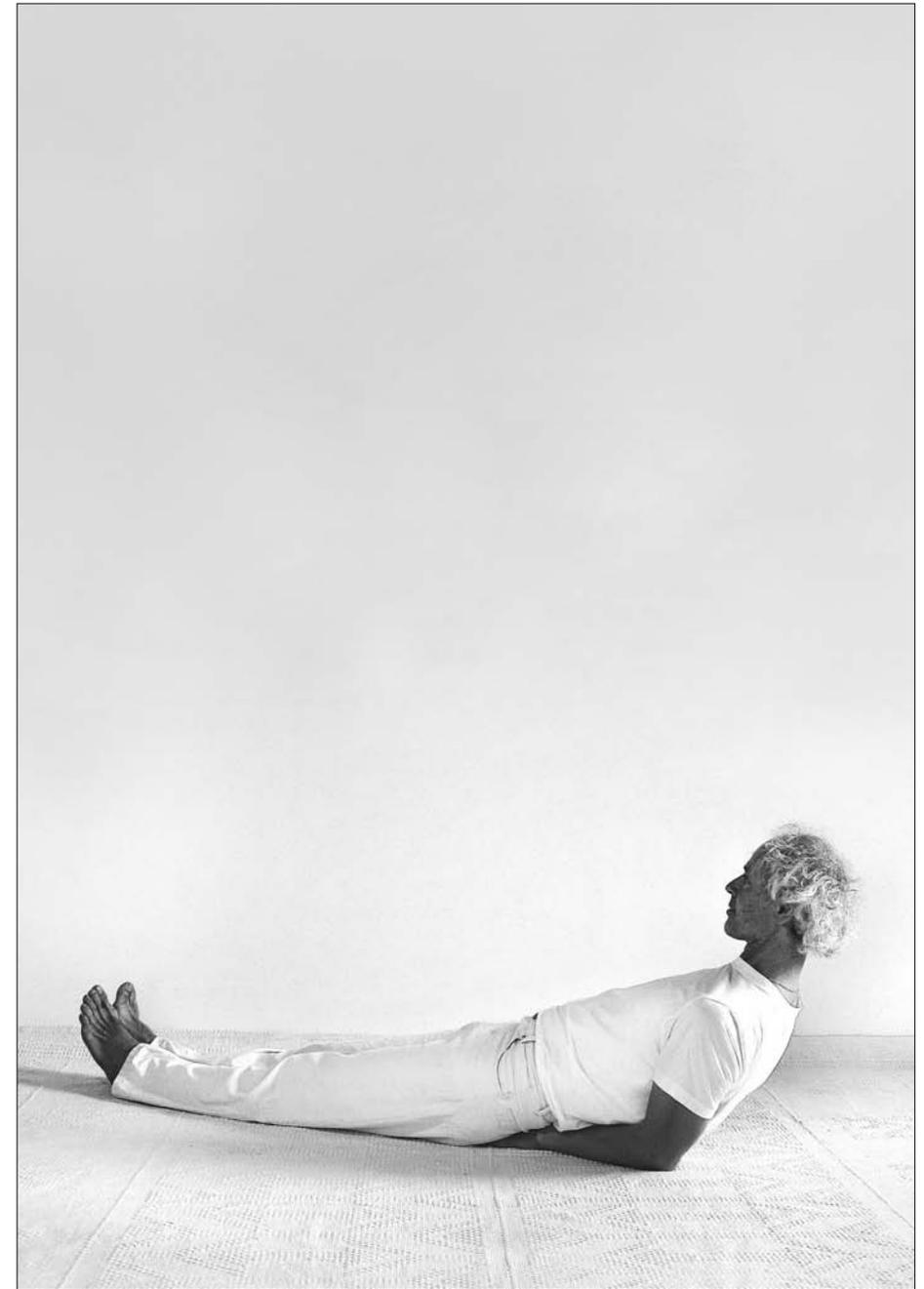
*matsyāsana*, The fish

The exercise expresses an interplay between a focused, centred tension and a finely tuned relaxation.



The experience of the movement rhythmically building up and the image of an over-arching, abstract arc.

Rhythmic sequences in the art of movement bring about balance in our sensitivity, while instructions that are too technical lead to fixed, body-dependent feelings. This drawing should sensitively bring the rhythmic development of the exercise closer. At the beginning the head is lifted up to get an overview, then the thoracic spine arches with growing concentration until the neck falls back relaxed and the head touches the floor. The rhythmic movement-sequences are artistic, stylistic-forms, attuned to each other in their expression and impression through developed feelings, sometimes round, sometimes long, resting close to the ground, rising into the vertical line, centring and releasing again, complementing and perfecting each other. They describe how each movement is differentiated in an elegant and unique way, is intelligently co-ordinated and how it develops in a gentle flow according to the ideal mental picture.



*matsyāsana*, The fish – relaxed preparation

To begin with the body is still completely relaxed.  
The mental preparation needs no physical effort.



*matsyāsana*, The fish – centred arching

In the fish the body is close to the ground. It is long and thin.  
The learning step is to complement the mental picture of the arc with the  
dynamic of the physical movement.



*matsyāsana*, The fish – final position

In the final resting stage, the form is centred and light, the distribution of tension  
in the body is differentiated and there is very alert consciousness.  
The mental picture of the over-arching arc continues to enable a cosmic feeling.

## The head-knee position

With the head-knee position, *paścimottānāsana*, we reach the middle of this exercise-cycle. This position has a central and important significance for developing a person's will. It is an image and symbol for lively effort with the body and for unreserved, diligent, patient and yet strongly active work in life. It describes a direct confrontation with the essence of activity. It is the pose of work or of activity.

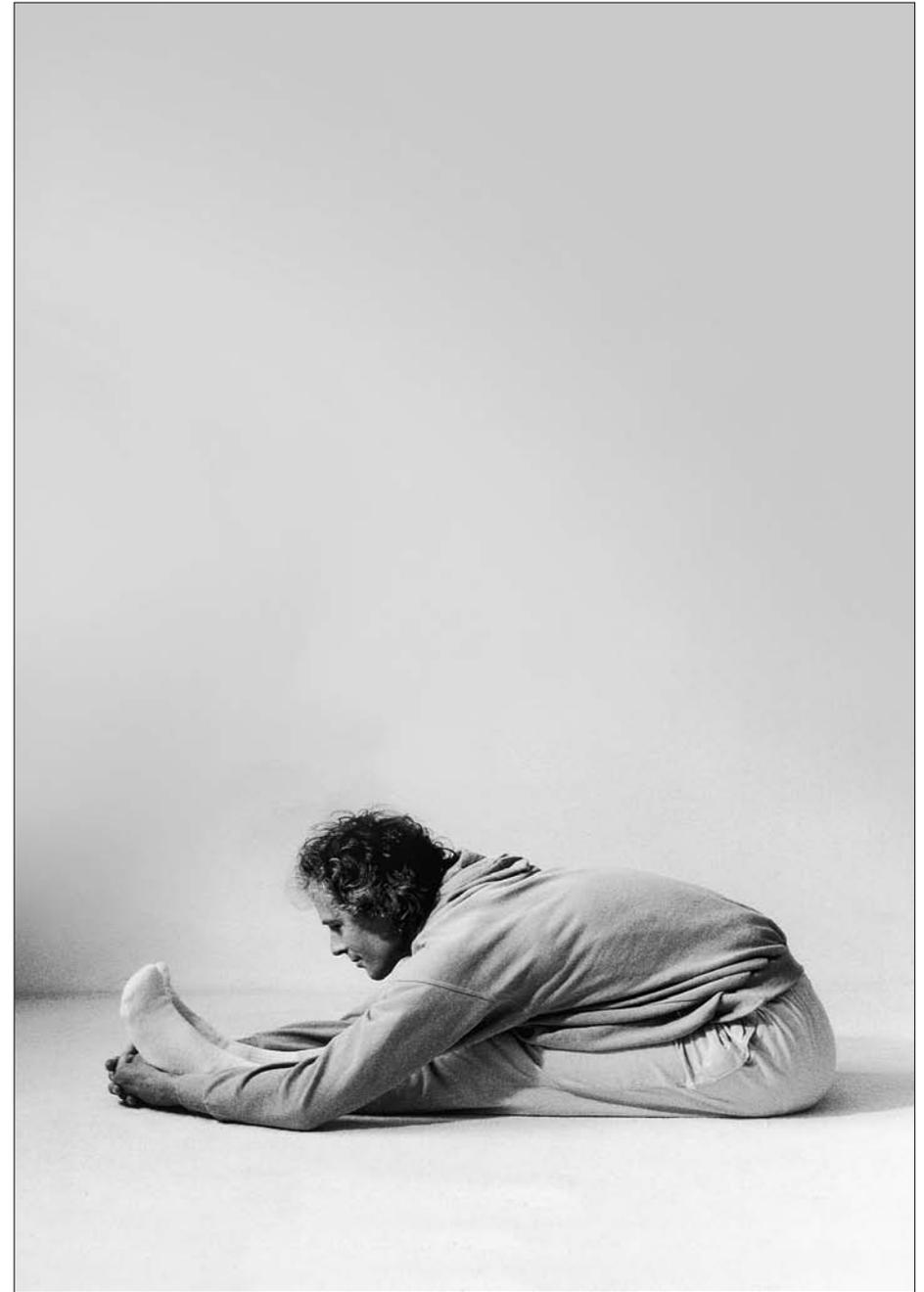
Take a sitting position with closed legs. Bring your arms straightened above your head with the palms together. Pay attention to the region corresponding to the solar plexus near the middle of the body. The solar plexus, which is an important energy centre, is around about level with the pit of the stomach. It is a subtle energy centre which gives expansiveness, stability, dynamism and a lively warmth, abundance and joy. While doing the *āsana*, this centre is brought into the light of observation and through this an inner sense develops for the starting point of this active movement. With this observation you can develop a better, more dynamic approach to the unforced extension which carries the body outwards. Glide dynamically forwards from the middle of your back and keep your shoulders as relaxed as possible. Hold this tension for some time in the preparatory stage until, after a far-reaching and intensified stretch you can finally take hold of your feet, ankles or shins. (1)

When doing the exercise it is important to reach for the greatest possible stretch and so to raise the limits of possibility. This overstepping of limits is an important part of the exercise and leads indirectly to an enrichment of mental strengths. That is why the position should be begun, right from the start, with a resolution to stretch as far as possible. Merely going into the position comfortably, according to the mood of the feelings but without lively intensity, is inappropriate in this *āsana*. It would lose its sense, which is to work at something independently, going against a comfortable disposition and an attachment to the body's own feelings. (2) Students learn that force is not a suitable means to develop activity. Activity needs our own decision and our own consciousness. Then the *āsana* becomes a joy. So students learn that with every beneficial activity which is accomplished through their own decision, the body becomes formed in a way that strengthens it. Hold the position, keeping the tension the same, for a short time to start with, but with increasing practice for up to several minutes. Activity directed to a clear and ordered goal always brings regenerative joy. (3)

(1) An activity is always divided into distinct components. The sensory system keeps an observing role, and in the spine and middle of the body the strength develops, while the body itself, as a calm basis, is used and viewed as an instrument.

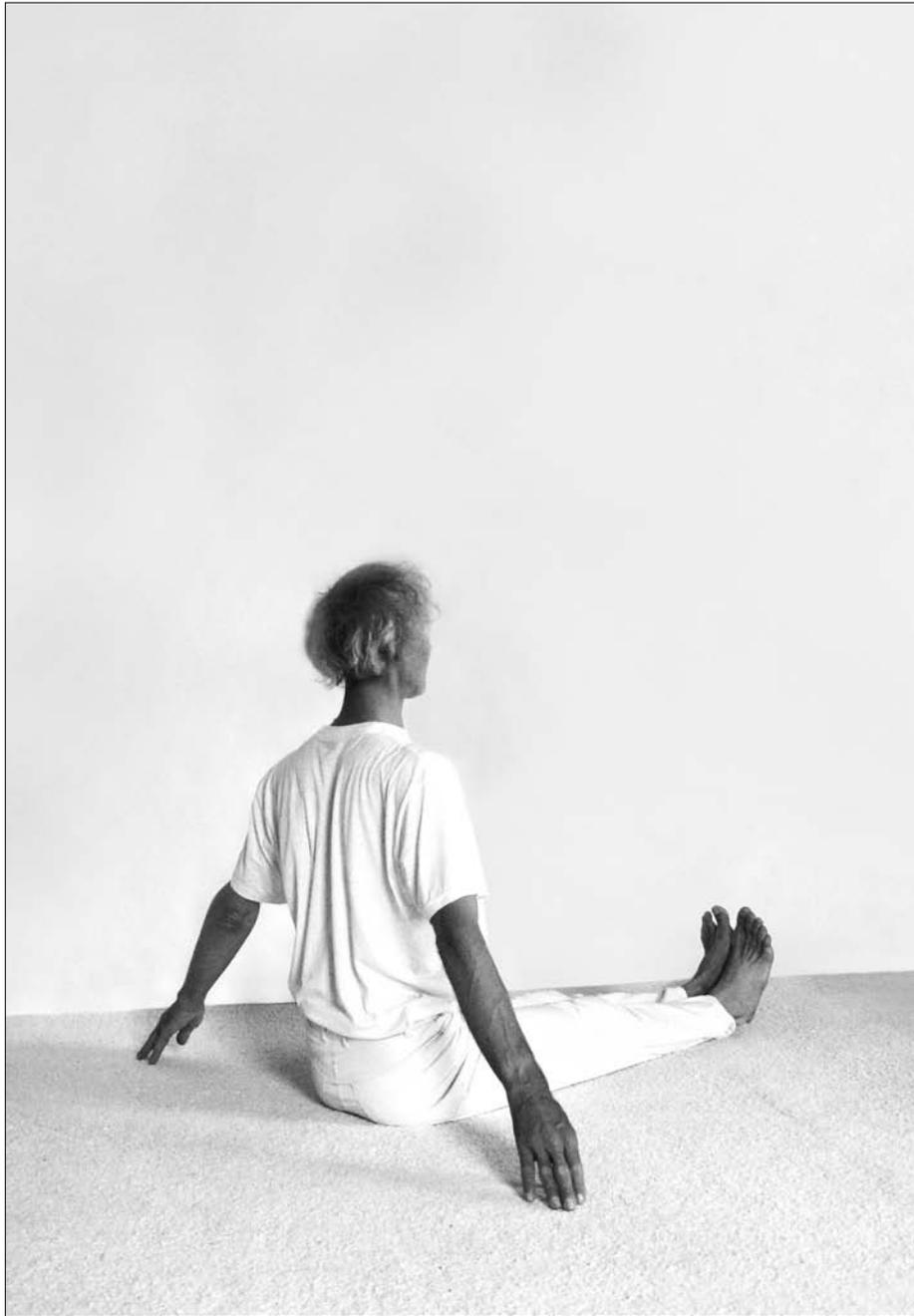
(2) Many people teaching yoga advise their students to feel into themselves, and after the exercise to feel the effects. This recommendation seems to be contra-indicated here because students should learn to use the body as an instrument and through clear decisions create meaningful activities which help build up their strengths in a rhythmical way.

(3) A learning step of this exercise is that we should make conscious decisions for all activities, even insignificant ones. Making one's own decision strengthens the active forces of the will and metabolism.



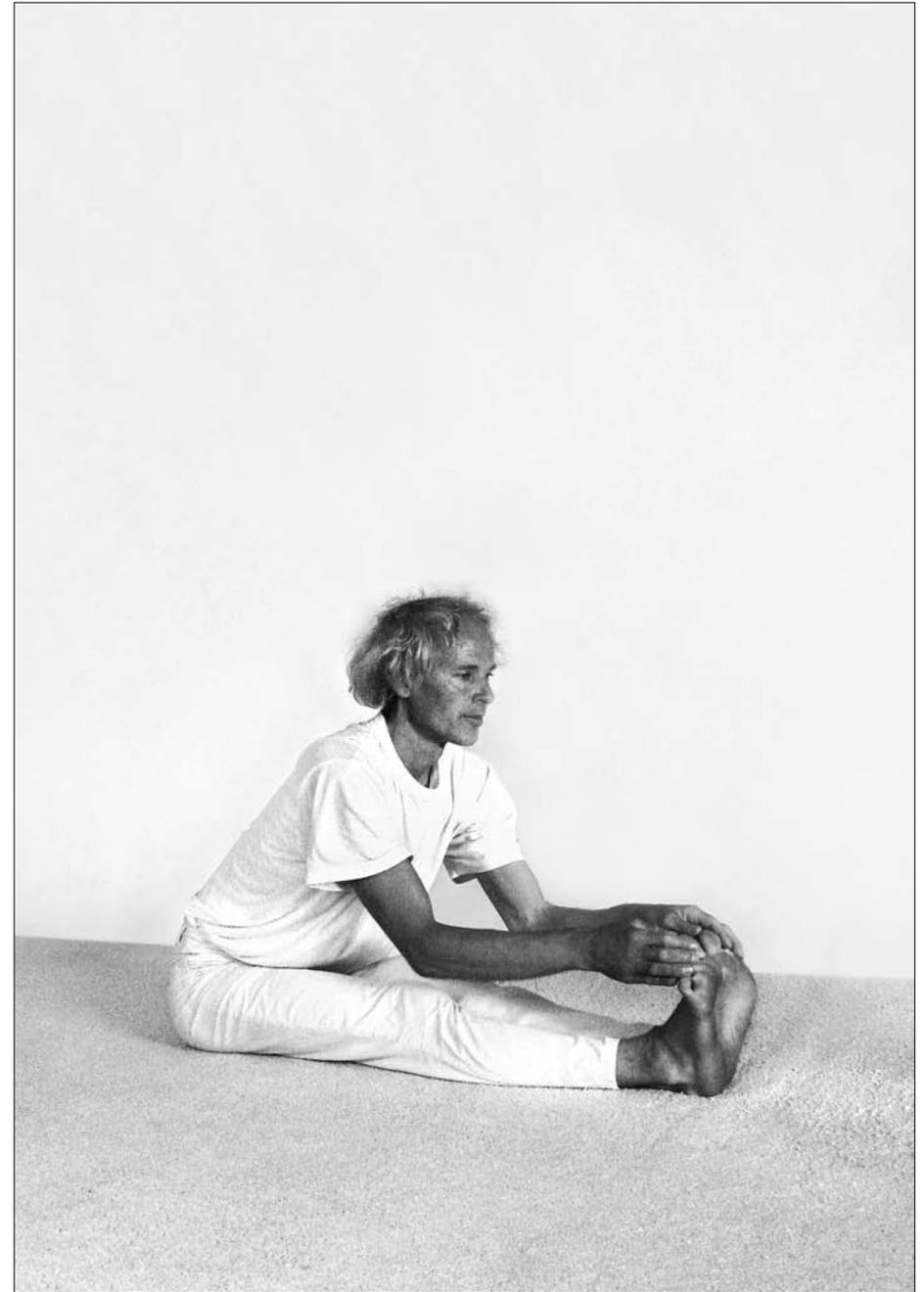
*paścimottānāsana*, The head-knee position

Purposeful activity is expressed in this exercise. The learning step is to recognise this autonomous activity.



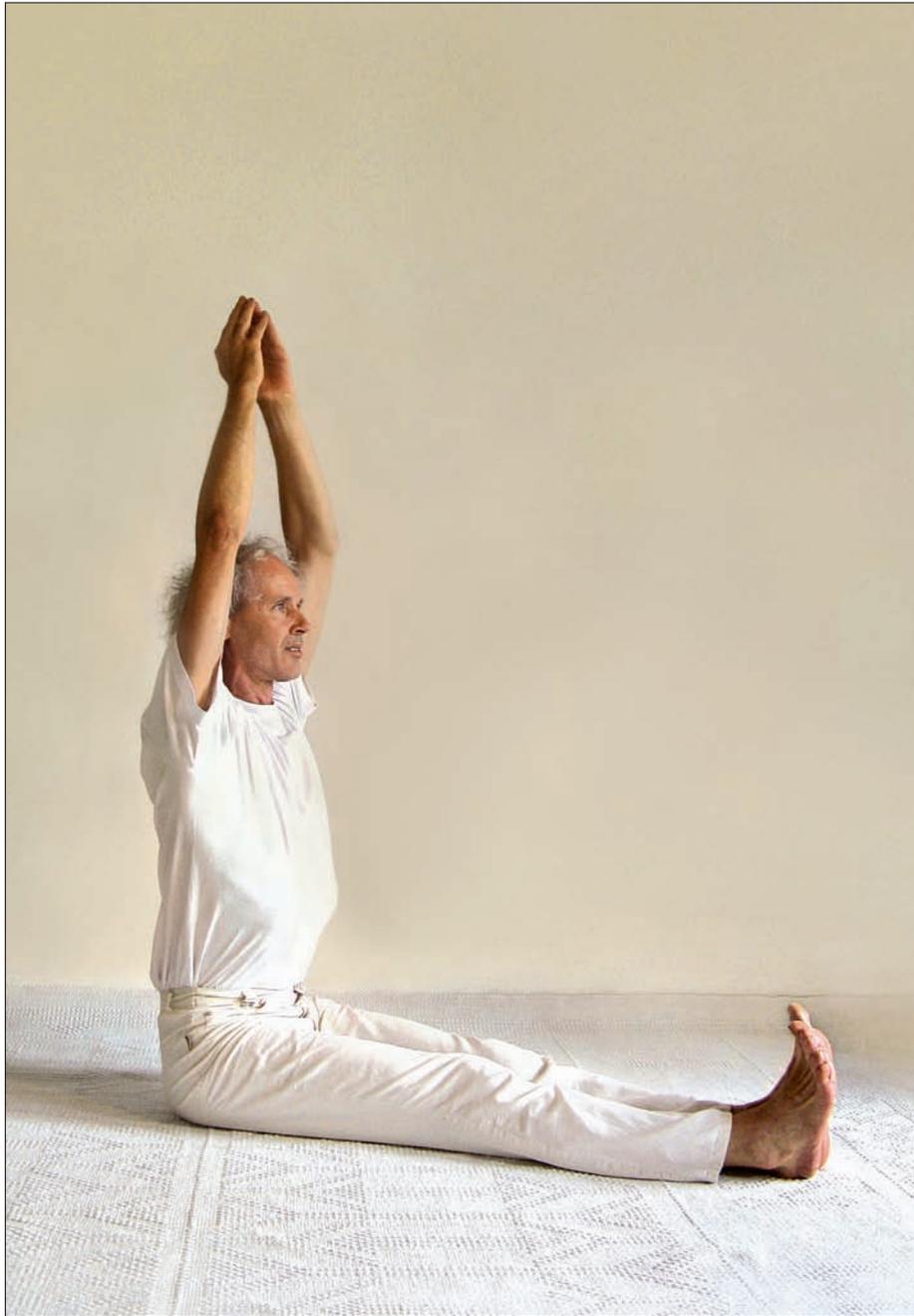
*paścimottānāsana*, The head-knee position – preparatory stage

This picture shows the back initially straightening up into activity.  
The movement is always divided into distinct components.



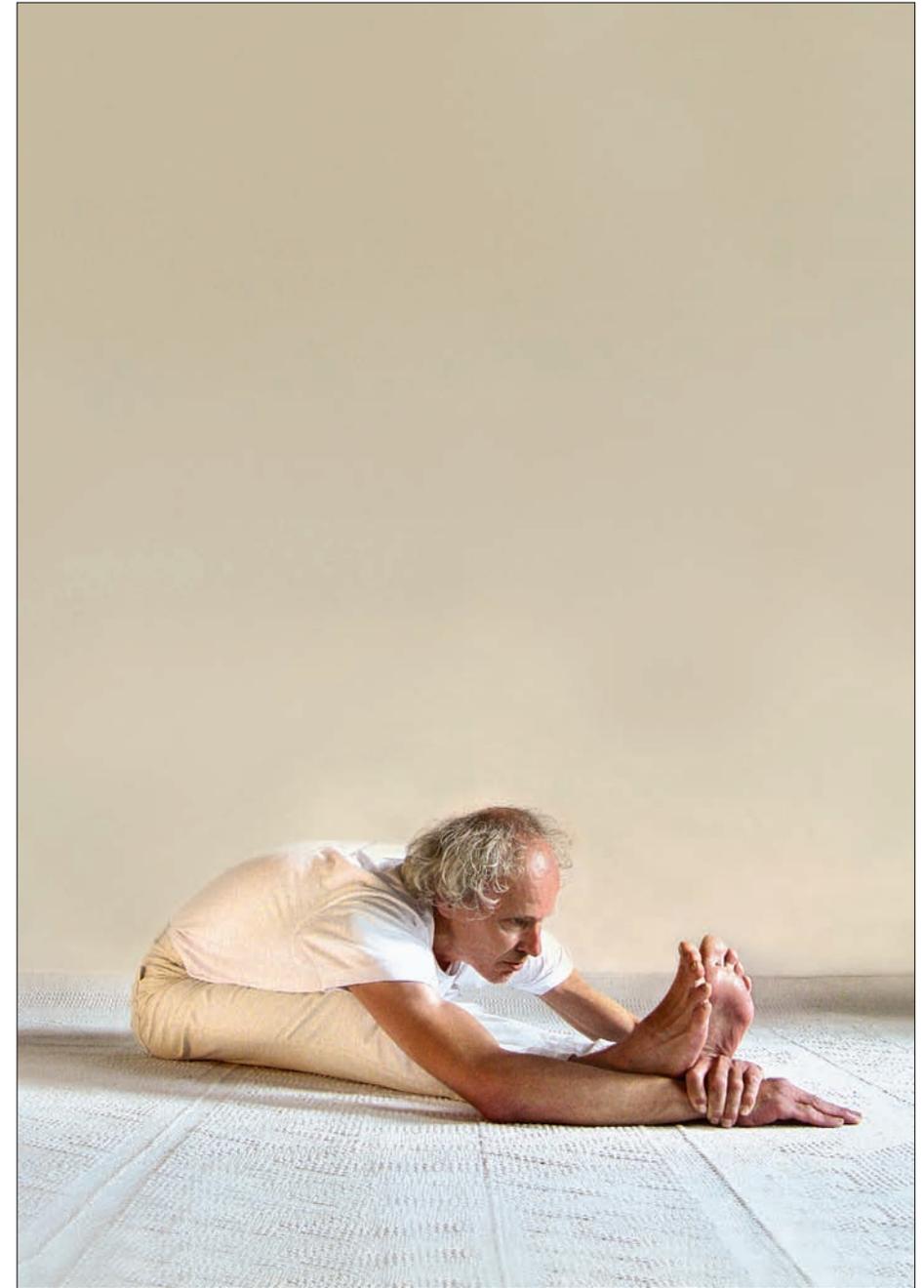
*paścimottānāsana*, The head-knee position – easier version

The shoulders remain relaxed while the back grows upwards. Keeping the  
active tensions distinct from each other promotes our perceptiveness.



*paścimottānāsana*, The head-knee position – mental preparation

The urge to move the spine forwards with our own dynamic, powerful effort and yet at the same time keep the components distinct from each other brings joy.



*paścimottānāsana*, The head-knee position – advanced final position

The effort comes from the back while the arms finish off the form around the legs. The practitioner does not settle into the forward bend but remains in the active centre of tension.

## The inclined plane

A thoroughly unpleasant, active exertion is required for the inclined plane, which physiologically represents a counter-pose to the head-knee position. It takes its name because the body forms an upwardly inclined plane. It is a position that does not allow any pleasant bodily feelings and can therefore be described more as a vital (1) exercise. In this exercise the body should become thoroughly warmed through and may even sweat.

(1) Translator's note: Vital is meant here in the sense of lively, energetic or vigorous.

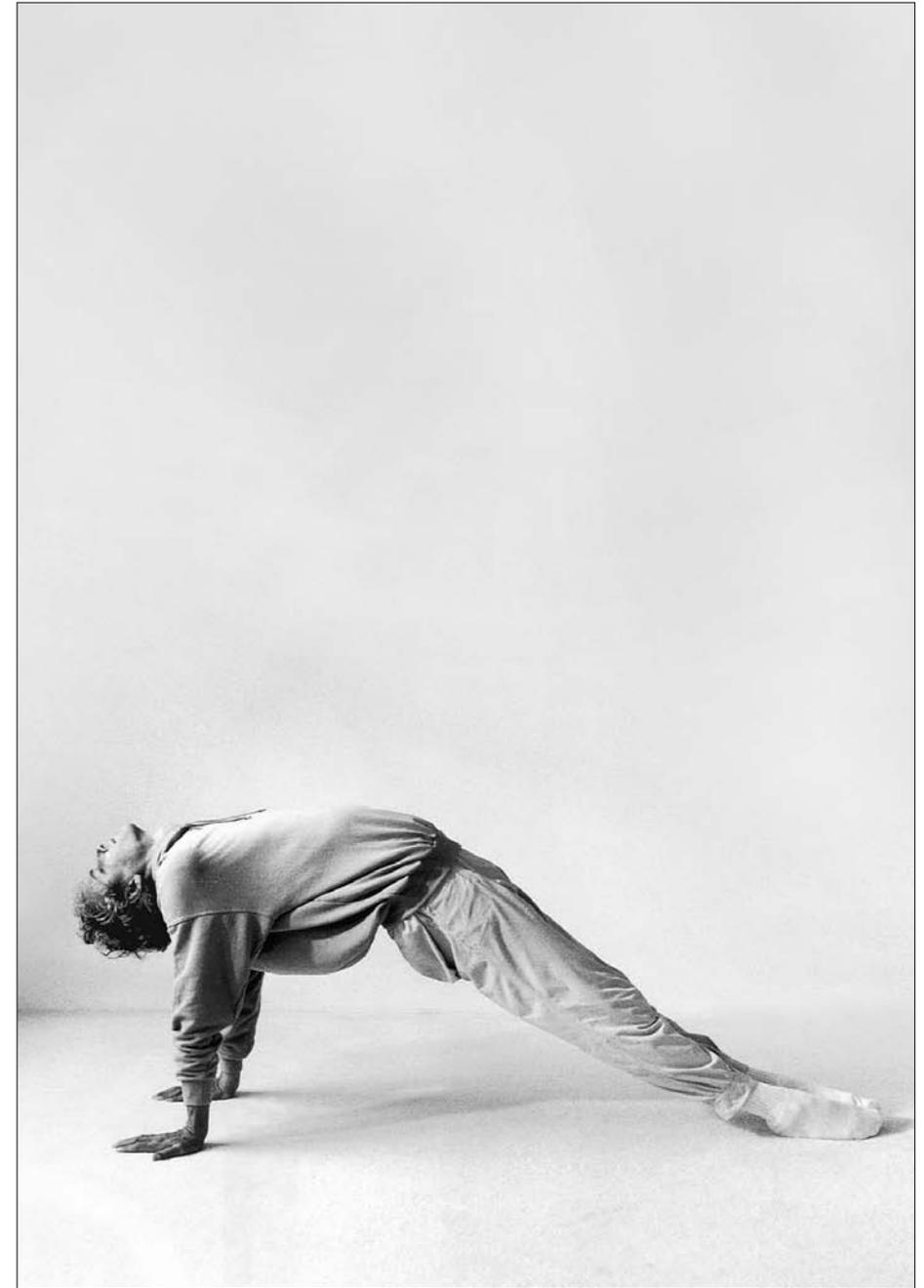
Place the palms of your hands stably on the floor. The fingers point backwards. Lift the body up as high as possible in a very clear and dynamic movement. Finally the head falls loosely back at the neck, the face remains relaxed. With some practice the soles of the feet can be brought onto the floor.

With this *āsana* it becomes clearer than with others that the aim of doing the exercise lies not in the development of a specific bodily feeling and a pleasant state of physical well-being, but in a sound and free unfolding of the consciousness. The consciousness we develop towards the body and towards a position is more important than pleasant feelings or an excessive vital ability. For this reason the mental work with the exercise is given more importance than the practice itself. If this work and the inner relationship to the meanings and pictures are lacking, this kind of practice would be no different from gymnastics. (2)

The learning step for life that comes from this exercise is that students experience the connection between mental intention and physical feelings. The better mental intentions, followed by decisions to carry out the exercise, are made, the freer the consciousness remains towards the body. If we undertake to hold the position for a minute we should not allow ourselves to be unsettled by bodily feelings and break off the exercise early. We should continue to hold the position as long as there is no urgent reason against it. Periods of tiredness or exhaustion should not cause the exercise to be broken off. Once a decision has been made in life then as long as it still proves to be right it should always be kept up and carried through to the end. Great strengths develop in life when people make decisions and also learn to persevere with these decisions rationally until the desired goals have been realised. The human life-forces, the etheric forces, are strengthened through this consistent and persevering activity of will. (3)

(2) In this exercise, as well as in others, it is helpful if the breath is quite specifically left free. For the sensitive feeling to develop, the body should not dominate but should recede. The more a detached, free relationship to the breathing and an observation of it takes place, the less obtrusive the nature of the body appears. The exercise ultimately becomes easier.

(3) Once a goal has been made and a decision taken, it should not be withdrawn due to lack of confidence or the influence of another. The opposite of withdrawal is a growing strength to envision and plan goals. These should bring encouragement.



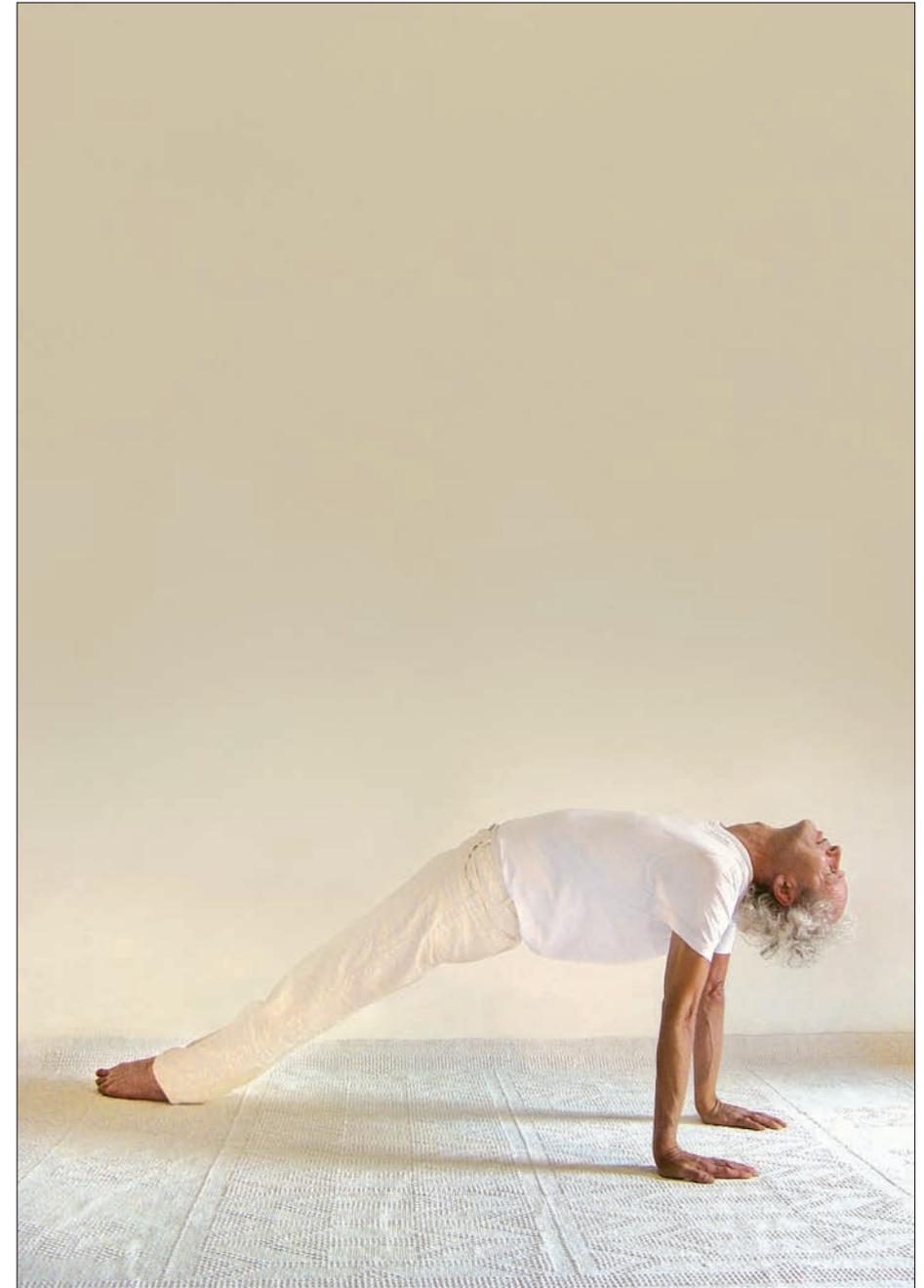
*pūrvoṭṭānāsana*, The inclined plane

It is a position that is powerful yet carried by rhythm. Rhythm always comes about when activities are shaped with a clear distinction between tension and relaxation.



*pūrvoṭṭānāsana*, The inclined plane – forming the movement

A rhythmic interplay between strengthening, active tension and a relaxed neck describes the dynamic stage, which enters into its graceful form in fluid, almost etheric lightness.



*pūrvoṭṭānāsana*, The inclined plane – final position

Different activities rhythmically complement each other: strength is applied and the neck released, heaviness is overcome and the form is preserved. This interplay allows even this unpleasant position to shine in a serene light.

## The balancing head-knee position

The *āsana* which now follows must be the most difficult in this cycle in terms of technical skill and the need for flexibility. However, for precisely this reason it represents a specific stimulus for students. The first stages of its practice might only be successful after several weeks. This position is a variation of the head-knee position in which the far-reaching stretch is combined with balance. Through this a higher energy centre, which is situated directly above the solar plexus at the heart, is incorporated into the exercise and comes into conscious experience. The balancing head-knee position is one of the best exercises for combining the sensitive calmness and inwardness of the feeling heart with the lively, fiery and dynamic strength of the solar plexus.

Begin in a sitting position with your legs drawn up towards you. Orient yourself mentally towards the balance in the final position. Take hold of the outsides of your feet and move your legs upwards in the most continuous stretch possible. Initially it can be helpful to sit on the support of a cushion to prevent yourself from falling backwards.

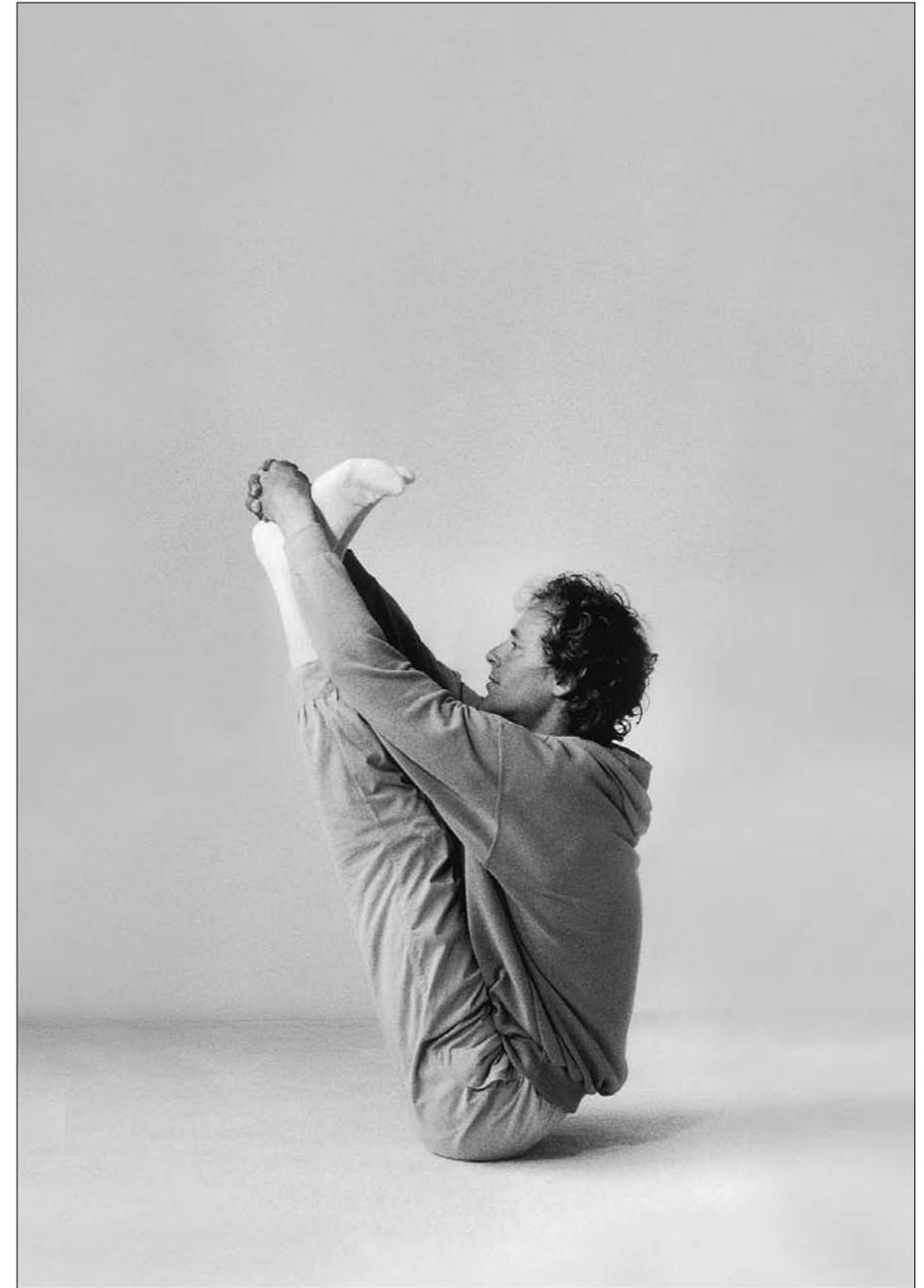
This position is a little more difficult to do than the basic head-knee position. Gravity must be overcome by straightening up intensively from the lower and middle back. If possible stay in the final position for a short time leaving your breath free. (1)

In this exercise the learning step for life is that personal goals and intentions must be determined in balance with the surroundings. Active strength and balance unite harmoniously in this exercise. Those who want to realise goals in life must perceive the world around them in the right way and must choose their individual steps according to the balance that is possible. The balance comes about through a sense of the outer space, while the dynamic of straightening up comes from the inner, co-ordinated will. Social Interaction with others and the unfolding of one's own will inevitably belong together in life. They need to be actively developed. (2)

An easier preparation can also be done before this position to give variety. For this, lie on your back. The arms are stretched above the head and the legs are closed. In a dynamic spring raise your legs, trunk and arms at the same time so that you briefly touch your feet with your fingers in rapid sit-ups. Repeat this simpler variation with some mental focus several times.

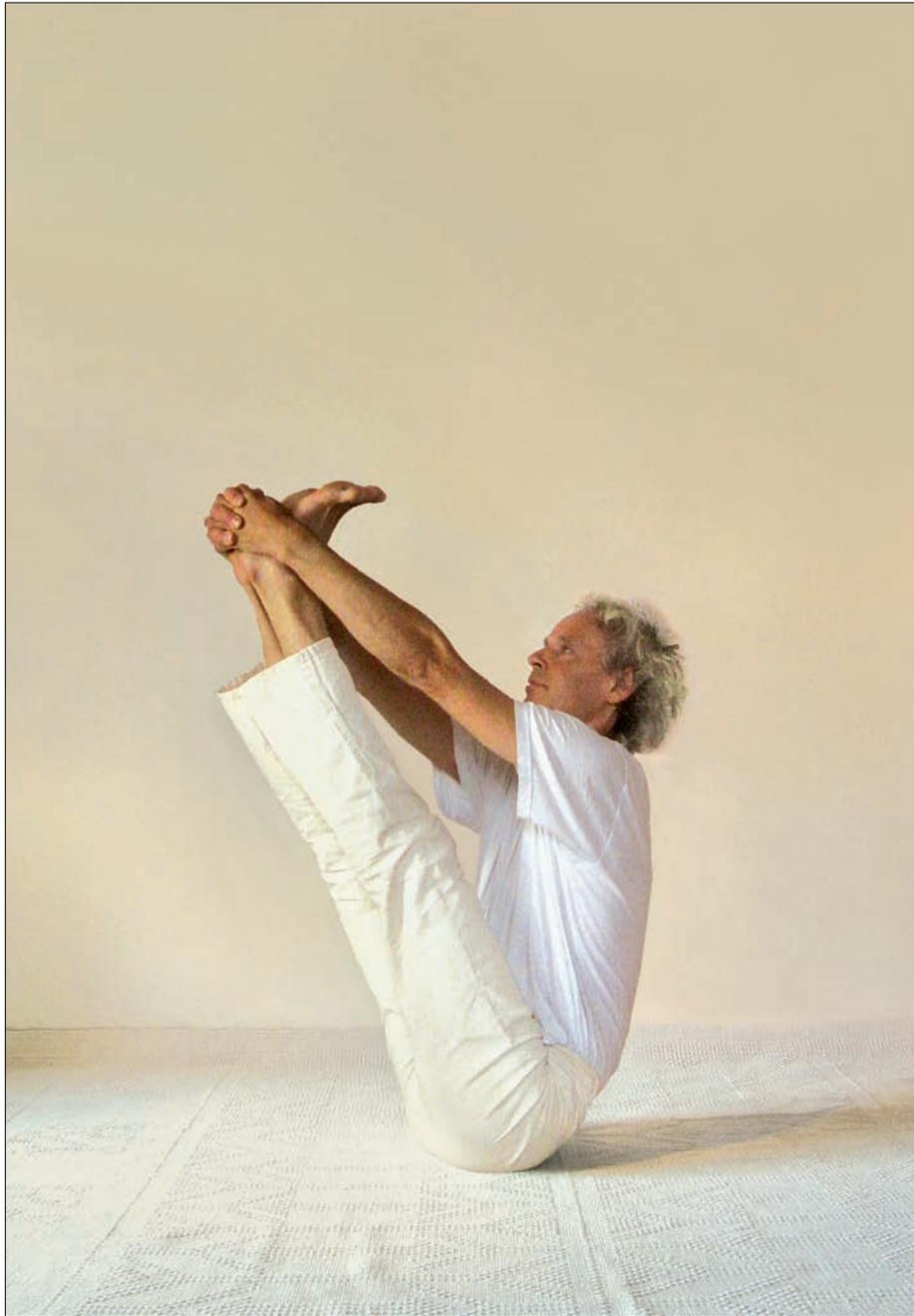
(1) During the exercise students also experience themselves straightening more and more into the vertical line. However they must carefully determine this themselves in a sensitive, alert way, always keeping the balance, a sense of the space around them and also co-ordinating the tensions within the body. The feeling of being able to straighten up into this cautious balance prompts an inner feeling for oneself.

(2) At this point it seems worth mentioning the social process that is comprehensively described in the book "The hidden essence of the soul" ("Das Wesensgeheimnis der Seele", not currently available in English). People's will-activities need a kind of etheric balance in the social process.



*ūrdhva mukha paścimottānāsana*, The balancing head-knee position

A certain amount of strength must be used to straighten up, and this must be carefully determined. Balance and active strength combine to form a harmonious unity.



*ūrdhva mukha paścimottānāsana* – middle stage

The back is straightened up from the base and the final position to be reached is mentally pictured. This mental preparation is an essential part of the exercise and it accompanies the form in the further course of the exercise.



*ūrdhva mukha paścimottānāsana*, The balancing head-knee position – advanced final position

The balance and the growing, active strength can be coordinated with each other and heightened to the extent that the head touches the shins.

## The lying triangle

The lying triangle is a relatively demanding *āsana*, which can however be simplified to start with by bending the lower leg. The centre of this position is the solar plexus in the upper region of the abdomen. It forms the mid-point of the movement and becomes consciously experienced. The body depicts a base, which lies on the floor, and a triangle, which points upwards. All limbs are outstretched and yet held together in one unit from the mid-point, the solar plexus. Roll from your back on to your right side and stretch the body lengthways. Lift up your left leg until you can take hold of your foot or shin with your left hand. The body should not sink backwards. This can be corrected by stretching intensively into both legs. The upper body is as relaxed as possible during the position and the head rests on the right, outstretched arm. (1)

This position is called *anantāsana* in Sanskrit and this means something like “the infinite *āsana*”. In earlier times the yogis described the cosmos as infinite space and sought this as their home. What kind of experience can people today acquire in practising this *āsana*? They can become aware that their body is an expression of a greater world of spirit, and that their limbs, their arms, their legs, are closely linked to physical life. In the life after death however, all the forces which condition and constitute the body leave the body and go back into the infinite space of the cosmos. There they take on an unlimited dimension within the worlds of the stars. There they will be truly classified according to what really lives in them. In *anantāsana* the student can therefore acquire a first idea that the microcosm of the body cannot exist for itself in isolation. All the bodily forces will one day receive their clear and correct order in the world after death. (2)

The elegance with which the body is structured represents an extensive learning step in this lying triangle position. It is very important that things are structured with distinct components in life, as this harmonises, orders and connects life harmoniously with a whole. The body also seems more accessible to the light when it is structured. Efforts to structure things meaningfully in life, not only in relation to the body but in relation to all human behaviour and activity, gives a great openness and new dynamic possibilities. For example, what would a language be if it were not structured into different sentences, words, syllables and resulting rhythms? (3)

(1) Practise the lying triangle on both sides and hold the position for about half a minute. This position is a preparation for the backward bending *āsana* which follows.

(2) Both the legs and the arms carry etheric forces within them during our lifetime. Upon death these etheric forces leave the limbs and enter into the cosmos. The path someone treads with their legs can either connect or divide people. Similarly, the hands can grasp and fix, or refine and shape things. These “results” of the limb movements enter into the cosmos and promote good or bad conditions for the future. We should therefore pay attention to the harmony and openness of an *āsana*.

(3) Separating out different components as a means of giving form and shape offers the simplest basis for organising life in an ordered way. Those who want to develop insights in life must separate their thinking, their feeling and their will from each other in the right way.



*anantāsana*, The lying triangle

The stretched up leg is joined by the arm to form a triangle. It is a play of the limbs in the most effortless and light form possible.

## The bow

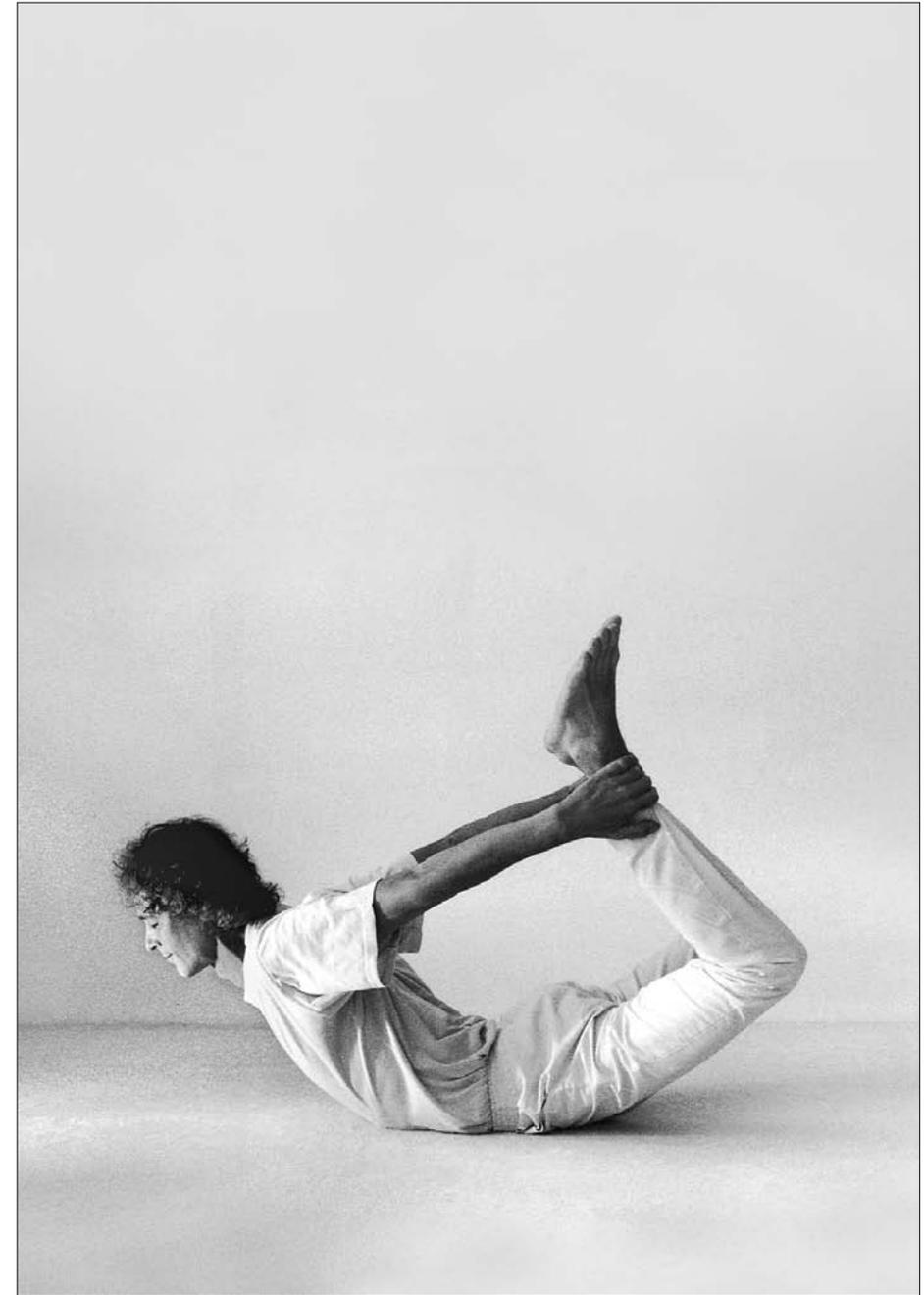
The bow depicts lively, elastic strength in the spine, a strength which ideally is flawless in all parts of the spine. Just as a bow has a mid-point and there is a centre to the tension, there is also a centre in this *āsana*. This is the solar plexus, which is situated in the middle of the body like a blossoming flower. It is from the solar plexus that the upwardly directed dynamic comes.

Begin lying on your front. Bend your lower legs up behind you and take hold of your ankles with your hands. Take a few more moments to prepare before you then lift your thighs up behind you with a lively, powerful effort. The dynamic happens quite specifically from the muscles of your back, without pulling with your hands and arms. Finally the upper spine and head are lifted up. The arms continue to have a purely connecting role. They do not actively pull. The whole dynamic flows out of the middle of the spine into the periphery. The bow is a lively, powerful exercise in which the spine is highly active and it usually needs short, rapid breathing. (1) Hold the position for as long as possible in the final stage. This may at first be for only a few seconds, but these seconds should be consciously experienced. Once you are able to hold the position for a little longer, maybe for up to half a minute, it proves to be advantageous if the tension in growing is constantly kept as high as possible. The increasing effort enlivens the metabolism and the necessary overstepping of limits develops, which enables a pleasant expansion in the consciousness. In contrast to this active, growing effort of the physical will and mental resolve, by comparison, is the image of gradually sinking down, in which students eventually sink into exhaustion as they finally let themselves fall. This should not generally happen with this position, as the mental resolve should exceed the physical capacity.

The learning step in the bow is to develop concentration, but this is not an action that comes purely from the physical will. The senses observe, the will centres itself and sensitive feeling unfolds with a joy that regulates and balances. Differentiating these forces of observing, willing and feeling from each other strengthens people both inwardly and outwardly. The bow has a regenerating effect because it demonstrates the lively implementation of concentrated and clearly distinct forces. If people were only to concentrate with their will in one solid mass of strength, without a point of reference in the body, ignoring the more subtle sensitivity and mental overview, they would be biased towards the bodily sphere. Concentration does not come about primarily by over-exerting the will, but by developing each soul-force specifically at the right place. (2)

(1) The bow is one of the best exercises for encouraging a concentration in the third centre, the solar plexus. The attention is therefore taken to a central point in the middle of the spine from which the movement flows in both directions.

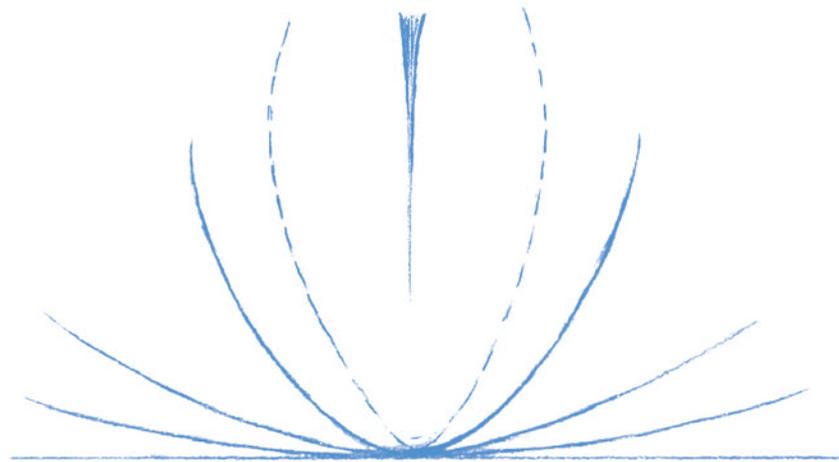
(2) The ability to concentrate, which should be developed as a learning step for the whole of life, always needs a targeted object towards which people can orient themselves. In the bow this is the middle of the spine, the third energy centre.



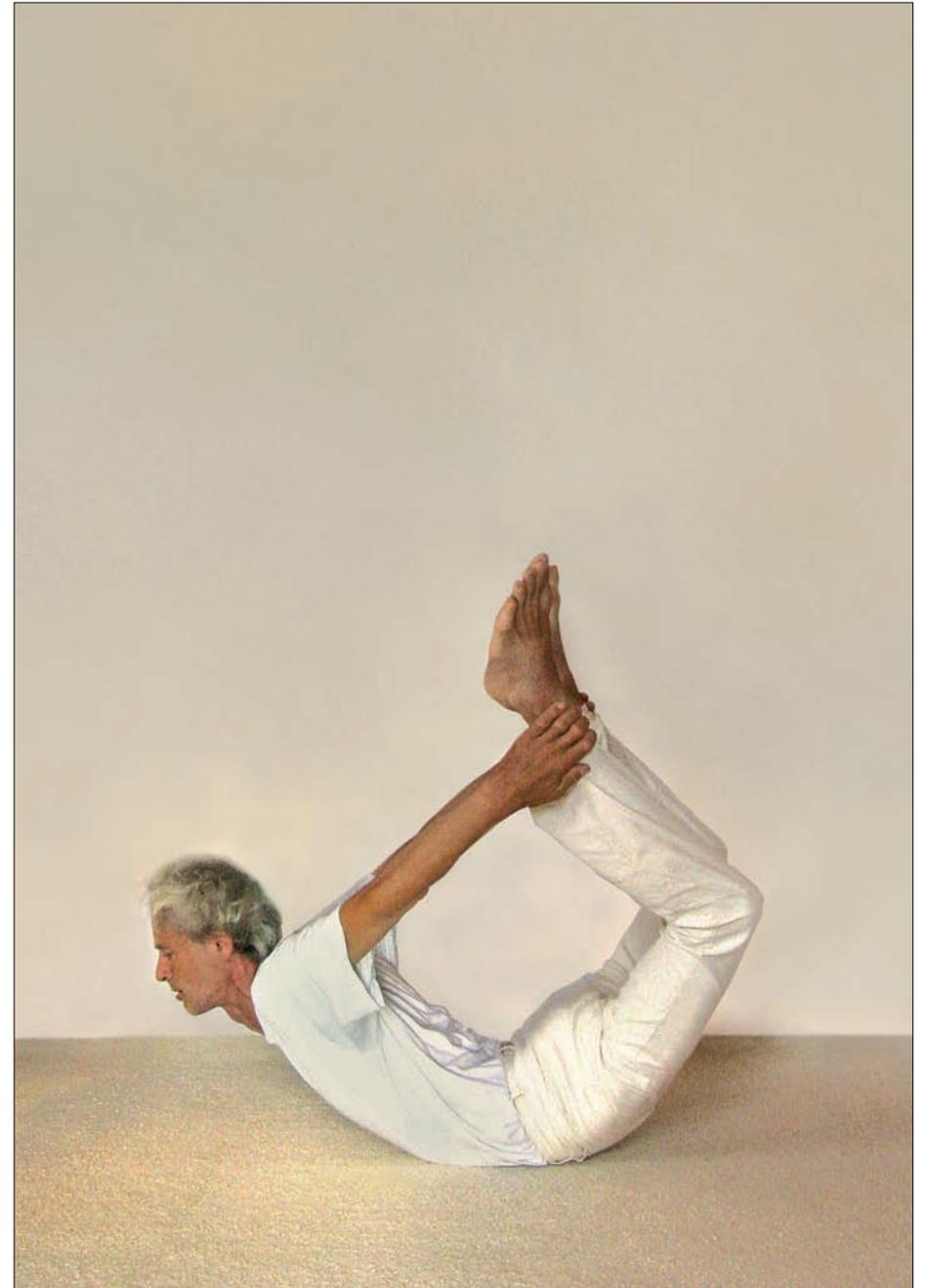
*dhanurāsana*, The bow

The tension is centred on the back where it streams out centrifugally from one point. It flows both upwards into the thoracic spine and downwards into the legs.

One of the verses from Patanjali's *yoga sūtra* goes as follows: *deśa bandhaś cittasya dhāraṇā* (3.1). "When the attention of the consciousness is directed to a chosen field, without being dissipated – that is concentration." This maxim of concentration which comes from the tradition of the *yoga sūtra* can be interpreted in many ways. At that time there was a much stronger cosmic feeling for the life of the soul than there is by comparison today. What we can learn from the exercise is that essentially concentration does not come about from the body but from the expanse of the mental consciousness, which always descends from light heights into the world of the body. Concentration is therefore not something that comes purely from the earthly sphere, but an ordered discipline that comes about through the thought when it is grasped by the will in the right way. If the mental picture is kept in mind, that a thought actually becomes centred and this centred thought is expressed through the body, then concentration regains its cosmic dimension.



This illustration shows the way in which concentration is transferred to the body. In the same way that the vertical line pushes onto the centred apex, the movements ascend in dynamic energy out of this apex in both directions. It is the thought that works downwards from above and motivates the will so that it aspires upwards from below. Concentration in the bow is developed from this rhythmic interaction of thought forces and will forces.



*dhanurāsana*, The bow – final position

If we create the picture of concentration in the bow, we will also soon be able to carry it over into life. Concentration forms the basis for a growing activity of the will, the thinking and the feeling.

## The balance position

If the bow and the balancing head-knee position are too difficult, you can always continue the cycle with this slightly easier balancing exercise. It requires no particular skill, merely perseverance and strength in the abdominal muscles. It is a very suitable position to follow the bow. The centre is now the heart. That is where the attention should be directed.

Take a sitting position with your legs drawn up towards you and bring your arms up above your head. Take the body into the balance by straightening your legs upwards. In this position it is helpful to put some effort and enthusiasm into raising the chest so that the thoracic spine is actively involved. This gives rise to an inner feeling of cheerfulness distinct to this *āsana*, which is associated with the heart in its meaning and impression. Hold the position in this smiling composure for as long as possible. The body will tremble vigorously while the consciousness, in its sunny temperament, nevertheless remains joyful. (1)

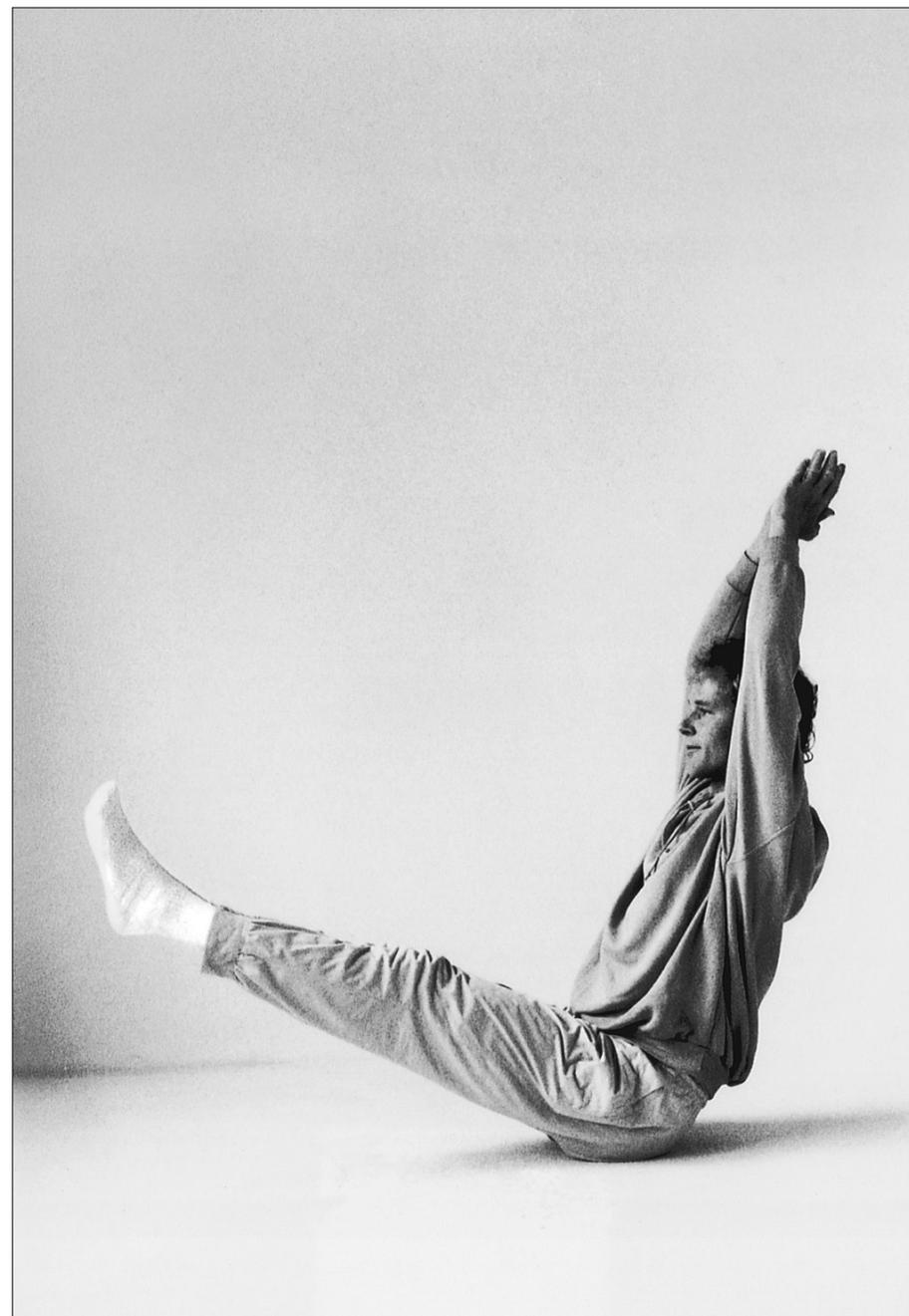
Overall this *āsana* shows the joy of freedom from the body, which awakens in particular in this exercise through consciously persevering. While the limbs begin to tremble more and more and the trunk of the body even begins to vibrate vigorously, students keep the cheerfulness of the centre. They do not care about the body because they have in their minds a sense of the irony of limited matter. They even maintain geometric proportions by continuing to lift the toes up to the level of the heart and also by guiding the thoracic spine actively upwards.

The shape an individual forms in the exercise is not unimportant. The better a shape is proportioned and developed, the more harmonious an effect it has on the whole life of inner feeling and also on the heart. Non-aesthetic *āsana* should never be practised because a purely physical exercise has very little sense in itself. However, if an aesthetic figure is formed, and if the person carrying out the exercise is conscious of this, this creativity works back onto one's own heart afterwards and strengthens it.

As a basic principle, exercises should never be practised without subtle feelings (2). If when carrying out the *āsana* individuals acquire a clarity about the aesthetic forms, they begin to assimilate the subtle feelings of these forms more easily. It is good if subtle feelings are not confused with emotions. The emotions which come up while practising are very short lived, and are therefore not suitable for pursuing further.

(1) If the chest is constantly raised, the back will not round and the body will not tip back with the heaviness of the sinking sacrum. This conscious and active straightening up needs some effort, but this can be experienced with a smile at the body.

(2) See "Notes on the translation" at the beginning of the book.



*saumukhyāsana*, The balance position

The movement starts centred in the thoracic spine. The learning step in this exercise is to override body-dependent emotions and retain perseverance.

## The sitting half spinal twist

To make it easier, the sitting twist should be started with a simpler play of movements which accustoms the spine to the flexibility of the twist. This preparation is reminiscent of playful gestures which then gradually move into a silent and carefully chosen resting period. Sit on the floor with straightened legs and your arms by your sides. Twist the spine to the right, back to the centre and then to the left. The twist happens about the axis of the trunk, one hand is taken behind your back and the other next to the knee. Make sure your shoulders are relaxed and the breath moves freely in the head. The centre of this position is the forehead. For this reason in the static period the greatest attention is on the head-area and on the free movement of the breath which, coming from outside, is experienced in the region of the forehead. The trunk and the shoulders are forgotten in relaxation. (1)

This exercise should be repeated several times until the relationship between the head and the trunk becomes conscious, resulting in a better uprightness in the body. For older people it is harder to straighten up the back in the sitting position and this must gradually be trained. The twisting movements about one's own axis, supporting the body with one hand behind the back and the other next to the knees, are helpful for this. Wait with every twist until a clear consciousness and an ordered perception of the body come about and then change to the other side again. The twist can be repeated up to five times on each side.

This classic yoga-*āsana* is quite difficult at first and should be worked at in gradual steps. From a kneeling position, sit on the floor to the right of your feet. Take your left foot over your right knee. The twist is to the left. To come into it straighten up your spine and take the arms in to the expanse above your head. Grow systematically upwards from the sacrum, along the lumbar and thoracic spine, until it is possible to be fluidly upright, without strain. This might need a few minutes. Take the left hand backwards in a wide arc and support yourself a little. The right arm then reaches around the bent up leg in a sweeping counter-movement until the foot is taken hold of with the hand. Finally the head is twisted gently to the left. After the initial dynamic phase, observation follows from the head towards the position that has been formed.

It is advantageous, and in keeping with the meaning of the exercise, if the practice of the sitting twist starts with an expansive consciousness of the thought and of the head. That is why the back is straightened up before the twist takes place. Only once the spine has straightened up

sufficiently and the centre in the forehead is clearly in the consciousness, does the wide, dynamic stage with the arms begin, finally moving into the fixed and resting motionlessness of the *āsana*. When the position is practised correctly, the trunk can dwell in self-oblivious calm while the forehead shines, almost lofty, alert and present to the breath.

The practice would be unfavourable if the spine did not find its vertical and dynamic uprightness right from the beginning and students were to try to straighten up further after doing the twist, once the *āsana* had become fixed. The movement would then no longer be carried by the thought, beginning from the free head, but we could picture it as coming from the spine and from the attempt to come up higher. This attempt to grow higher is usually unsatisfactory, shown by tense shoulders and a mental fixedness to the body.

The sitting twist is an important *āsana* because it is geared to alertness and to the centring in the sixth energy centre. This centre is a symbol for forming concrete thoughts. The *āsana* pictorially describes the expansiveness of the thought which exists right from the start and is retained in the head despite the difficulty of the exercise. (2) Thus a movement begins in a secure and well-ordered rhythm and finally leads to a fixed form. It is the concrete thought itself which guides the *āsana* and reveals the pure expression of alertness. The result however is always a form in the body.

This position is particularly suitable as therapeutic support for depression as it shows how the thought is there at the start and how out of it the appropriate forms then develop. Therefore the most attention should be paid to the picture of the exercise. From a physiological perspective the nerves of the sympathetic trunk on the spine are used to a high degree in the systematic activity of straightening up rhythmically in a spiral form about one's own axis. In addition the twist has the pleasant effect of unblocking the metabolic organs like the liver, spleen and kidneys which are usually overloaded.

The learning step for social life from this exercise is that the thought, which exists above the head as an actual existence, can be shaped and formed. Just as an exercise with aesthetic proportions is formed from a thought, students can also shape further forms, feelings and impulses in life out of the best possible thoughts. (3)

(1) In the sitting twist attention should be paid to the relationship between the head, which represents thought, and the rest of the body. Although thought represents a pure spiritual essence, nevertheless it has hidden and potential power.

(2) The position is recommended in depression because it encourages activity which should originate from the head and involves the thought in its actual existence. It is really important not to doubt the actual existence and reality of the thought.

(3) An additional learning step is to recognise the connection between the etheric force which gathers in the second centre, somewhere in the region of the sacrum, and the thought life. The thoughts should be sensed freely, animatedly, consciously and as a reality. They produce the best etheric force when they are experienced consciously in the thinking without being fixed or strained.



*ardha matsyendrāsana*, The sitting half spinal twist – simple preparation

This simple twist can be done at any age. In this exercise the concentration is retained in the forehead at every stage.



*ardha matsyendrāsana*, The sitting half spinal twist – final position

The sitting half spinal twist already presents a certain challenge to the flexibility. The clear form of the position develops out of the mental expansiveness.

## The triangle

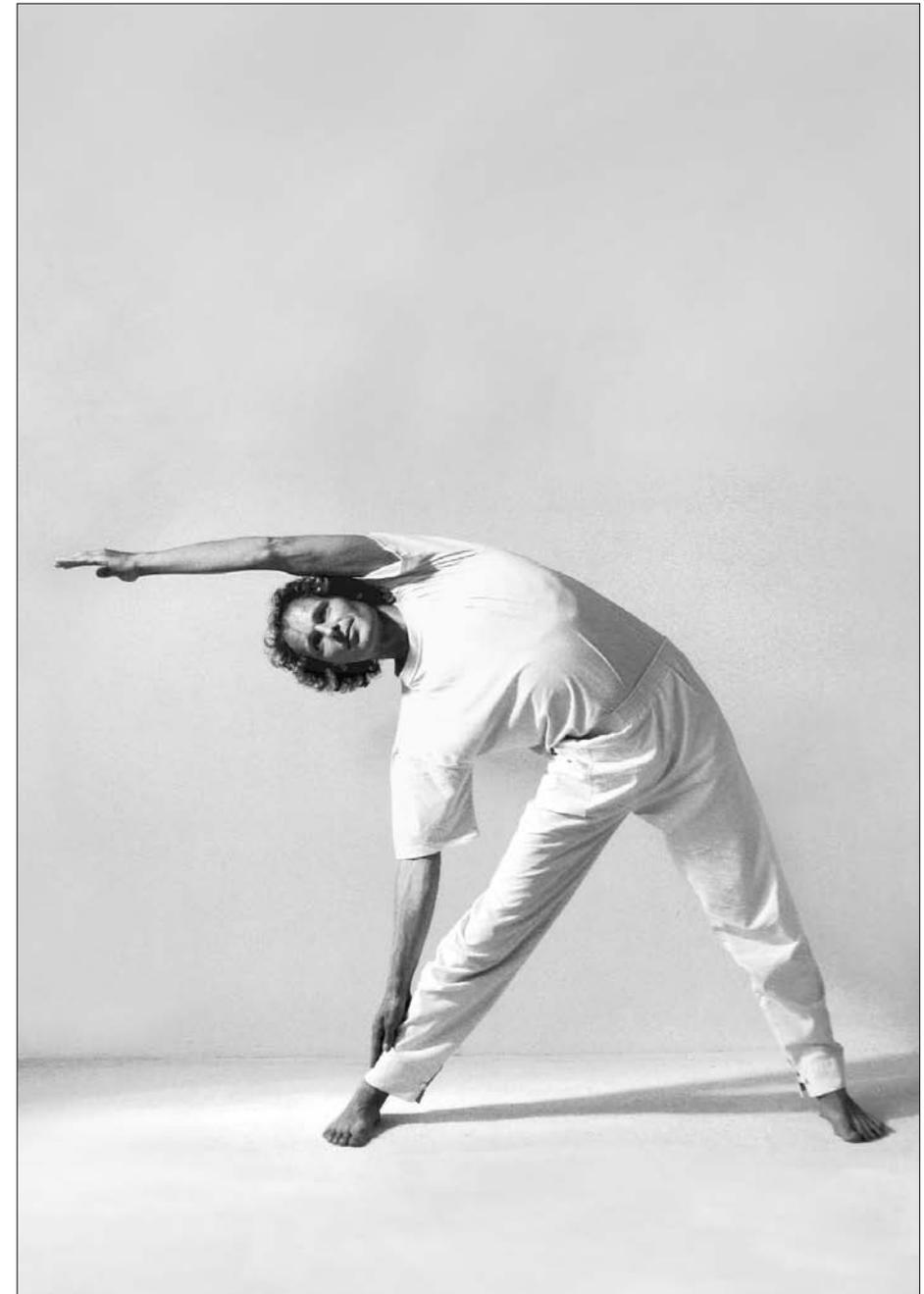
This standing *āsana* closes the cycle of exercises. It should be done three times on each side. Students move alternately far out to the left and then far out to the right, remaining on each side for a short time with free breath, before finally straightening up in the centre. Reaching out to the sides represents polar opposites or duality and remaining in the centre represents unity. After the tension has been experienced on both sides, a period of calm observation follows in the centred standing position. Here the legs form a base, the centre is in the solar plexus and trunk, and the head and shoulders form an upper section.

Form a stable base with your legs. Pictorially this base is an equilateral triangle. Straighten up your upper body and relax your shoulders. At the beginning of the exercise it is helpful to observe the breathing in its free rhythm and in its depth. The triangle is a simple and effective breathing exercise. The breath flows into the region of the solar plexus, which in turn is also the centre of the movement that goes out and returns. Place your hands at your waist and breathe a few times in a relaxed way, deeply and without strain. You will experience a first natural expansiveness in your sides. Release your hands and take your right arm up alongside your head and the left arm horizontally out to the side. Your attention should remain on the centre at the solar plexus during the exercise. This centre forms the mid-point in the body, between the resting base and the moving upper body. In a free way, stretch sideways to the left in one plane. The direction of movement should not avoid the tension in the sides and should not veer forwards. Hold the final position for about fifteen seconds and then change to the other side. (1)

After you have practised on both sides, it makes sense to remain in the upright standing position. Observe the shoulder region. It should remain light like the wind. Then take your thoughts to the middle of the body, to the solar plexus. This centre brings the active and impulsive fire for the individual movements. Finally become conscious of the legs and feet which form the resting, stable base. The triangle is a symbol for calmness, centre and movement. The learning steps are to experience subdivided structure. If life is correctly structured, any will-forces can be applied in life in a gentle and ordered way. If the will were to represent just one single mass of energy without subdivision or structure, it would take space from the environment and would become intrusive. But when the thinking, the feeling and the will are separated out from each other the whole personality radiates gracefulness and joy. (2)

(1) The more individuals become conscious of the openness in the sides and the more they develop an interested feeling for their outer world, the more lightness and free breathing unfold.

(2) The number three, which appears in the triangle, is a number that represents animated articulation reflected in a rhythmic relationship within the body. By separating out their thinking, feeling and willing and by relating to the world, people develop greater lightness and freedom.



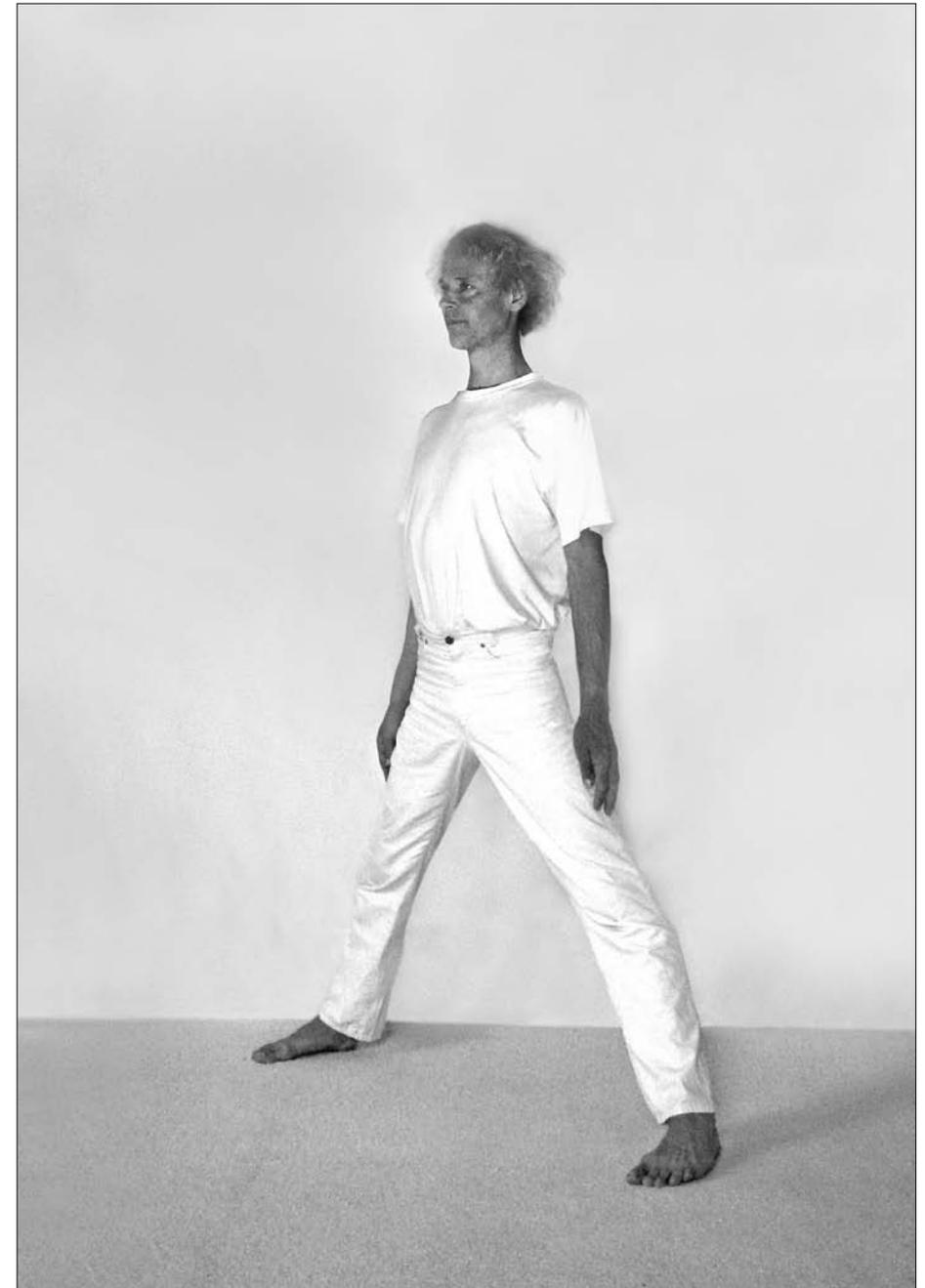
*trikoṇāsana*, The triangle

In the triangle, students experience the space around them by consciously moving out to the side. It is a picture of expansiveness and extension.

It is helpful to become aware of the learning step the exercise brings for social and spiritual life. This is that any insight that is sought can best unfold when the three members, the thinking, the feeling and the willing are arranged in the right order. If the will takes hold of a thought too intensively, then the light nature of the thought becomes darkened or distorted. For this reason, to develop their will seekers of insight must use the unusual method of holding a thought in clear observation, form and concentration and keeping it free from the clutches of rising urges. For this they need a flexible, dynamic and strong centre which keeps the balance.

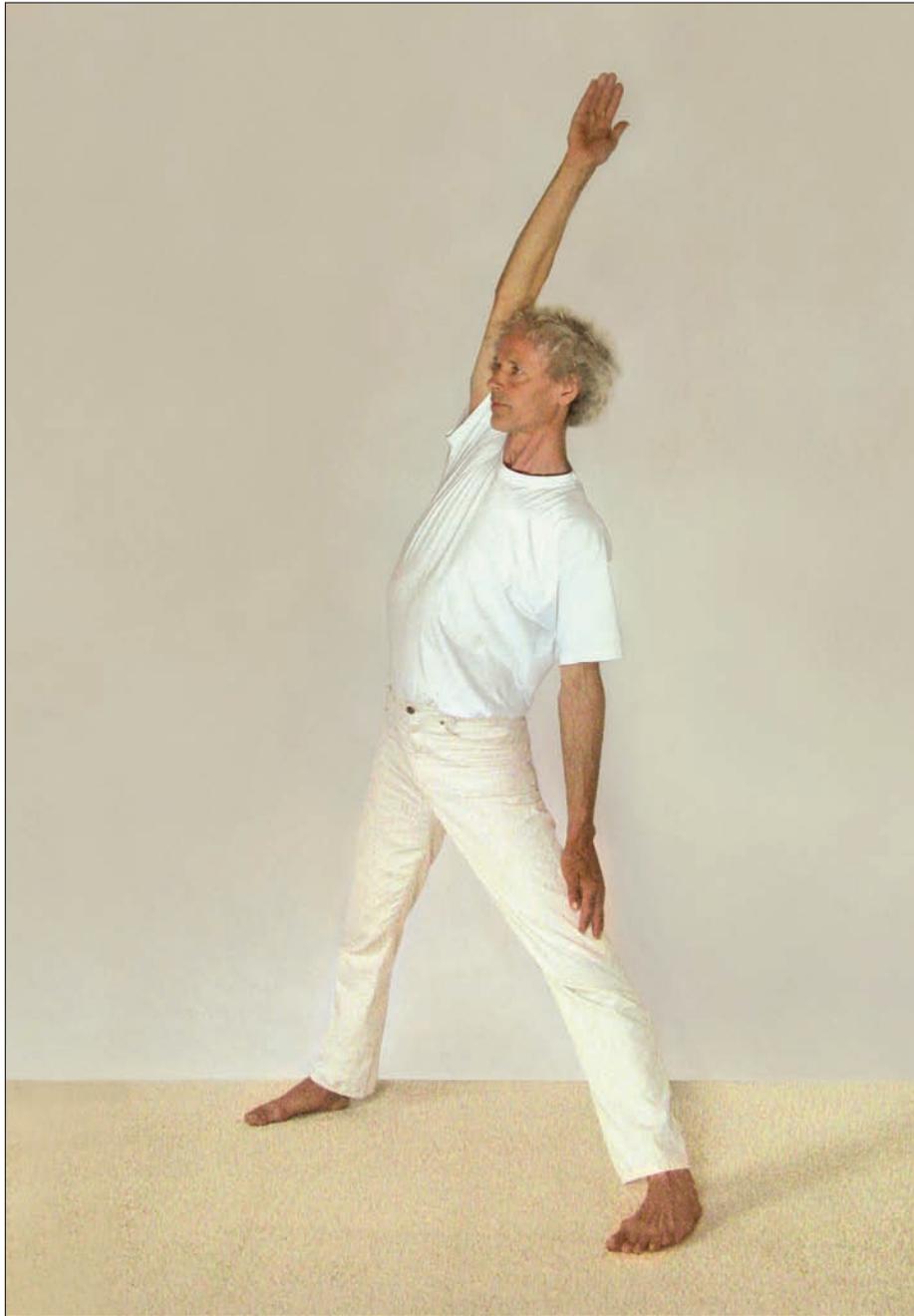


This sketch conveys the imaginative experience in the triangle pose. The upper half of the body remains relaxed, yet retains its clear form during the exercise. The centre, which is the starting point for the dynamic activity, becomes more and more centred into a secure point that is able to give support. The base, the legs and hips, remain like the earth itself, resting and steadfast.



*trikoṇāsana*, The triangle – starting position

In the starting position, students become conscious of the threefold division into top, middle and base. A calm perception of these three elements marks the beginning of the exercise.



*trikoṇāsana*, The triangle – stretching the side of the body

In the first dynamic stage of the exercise the chest is already lifted and brought sideways. As the activity begins, the tension remains distributed in an ordered way.



*trikoṇāsana*, The triangle – advanced final position

The dynamic is retained in the centre without any support from the hand. Through subdivided structure, dynamic activity and an ordered relationship with the will, expansiveness results.

## The headstand

This classic *āsana* is amongst the admirable and also difficult yoga exercises. It is one of the best therapeutic aids for depression and so it has been added to the descriptions here independently of the previous cycle. The particularly beneficial effect of the headstand in treating depression can be explained by the energy distribution with its resulting experience of consciousness.

The sixth energy centre has a central role in all processes of consciousness and so it should be developed as carefully as possible. This sixth centre represents the seat of the consciousness and with the forehead it symbolises alertness, clarity, logic and also the existence of the thought. From a physical perspective, the sixth centre is represented by the pituitary gland, an internal endocrine gland. The pituitary gland with its hormones governs most of the metabolic processes via the thyroid gland, the pancreas, the adrenal cortex and the reproductive glands. It is the smallest organ in the body and weighs only half a gram, while the liver, its polar counterpart, is the heaviest organ. Both organs, the liver and the pituitary, govern the body's generative metabolic processes in an intricate collaboration.

We could describe the pituitary gland, which can be seen as a physical carrier of the inner consciousness soul (1) and which intervenes very deeply into the metabolic processes, as a gland which takes up all the receiving and shaping impulses coming from the nervous system and reproduces and organises these impulses, passing them on to further places in the autonomic nervous system and in the endocrine system with its interacting hormones. In depression, this reproductive activity of the pituitary gland is disturbed. It works disharmoniously and to some extent in a very subtle, immeasurable hyper-function. Although from a medical perspective one would assume precisely the opposite, and a deficiency of thyroid hormone and of the sex hormones is even diagnosed, nevertheless in depression it is more the opposite that is true. The pituitary gland needs the direct influence of centredness and harmonising calmness. The best exercise that brings this is the headstand. Although most people today find it very difficult to learn this *āsana* and to do it regularly, it proves to be beneficial in every respect. During the exercise attention is given to the forehead and the sixth energy centre located there. A pleasant centring already develops through this attention on the sixth centre in the headstand. Ultimately the headstand needs a lively willingness to apply oneself, strength in the back and in the lower part of the trunk, and a great ability to overcome oneself. Personal commitment leads to better posture and greater alertness as well as to concentration in forming thoughts.

The headstand can be done several times a day in a gradual build-up, increasing the holding time.

To do the position the help of a second person is sometimes useful. Begin in a kneeling position and place your forearms on the floor shoulder width apart. Interlace your fingers and put your head down precisely in the middle on the crown. Support the back of your head with your interlaced fingers and now straighten up your spine until it is as vertical as possible. Now strength, skill and courage are all needed to bring the legs up vertically. To start with you must expect to fall over. Sometimes it is helpful to take first one leg up and then let the other one follow. Do not practise the headstand with high blood pressure, problems in the region of the head or damage to the neck vertebrae. (2)

The learning step that results from the headstand comes from the exact placement of the head on the floor. The action of placing the head is done very consciously. Figuratively it corresponds to the placing of a thought. In life a thought always needs to be placed correctly. Those who observe their own existence precisely and self-critically will discover that this placing of a thought in the right position succeeds in the rarest of cases. In situations of depressed moods individuals usually surrender too much and so they no longer find the courage to lead a thought into life and to pursue it over a longer period of time with activity and the perspective of a goal. Depression is therefore an illness showing despondency and a lacking ability to place thoughts. In doing the headstand an understanding should come about as to what it means to bring a thought into life and to organise this thought so that it is in the right place.

You can practise the headstand as part of a short cycle, along with the standing head-knee position and the scales. The scales is an energetic standing *āsana* which encourages a dynamic activity right through the body and stabilises the trunk of the body and the hips. To do it take a standing position, bring your arms up above your head and transfer your weight onto your right foot. Then in a decisive movement take your body into a horizontal line and relax your neck. After a short holding time repeat the exercise changing the legs around.

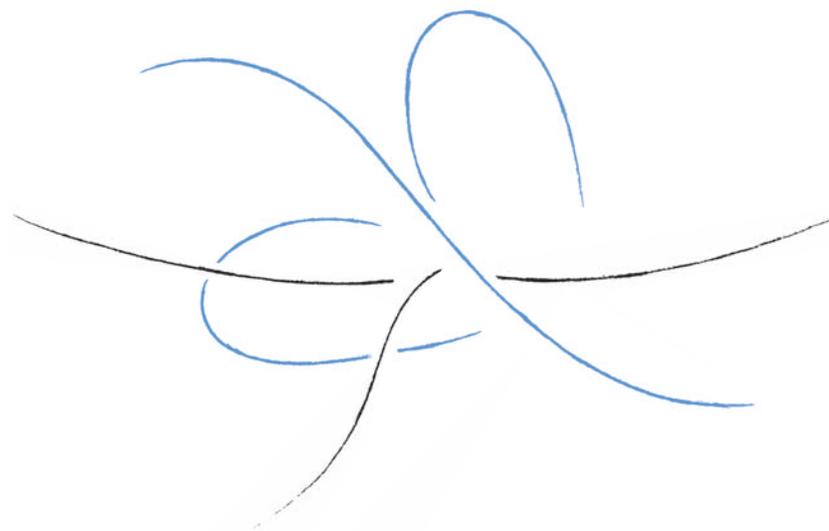
(2) The vertical, upright line is very significant in the headstand. It is an expression of human aspiration. This aspiration is obtained from the thought and its practical application. Usually people do not experience the vertical line consciously enough because during their waking life they are used to it. However by turning upside down in the headstand students can once again become more conscious of being vertical.

(1) Translator's note: The term "consciousness soul" was coined by Rudolf Steiner. In his book "Theosophy" he describes it as "the very core of human consciousness... that part of the soul in which truth lives".

This short stabilising cycle then runs as follows:

1. The scales, on both sides
2. The standing head-knee position (see page 22)
3. The headstand

The following sketch explains how the movement happens in the scales in an ideal situation, through wide, forward-directed movements. The arms seem almost like butterfly wings, coming from the space around and helping the body to insert itself into the horizontal line. The neck and shoulders remain free from fixedness right from the outset through this superb, far-reaching dynamic in the movement. Finally the body enters more and more into the stretch of the horizontally moving limbs.



Vertical line

T-line

The flow cannot be maintained in this form.

If the scales were to be done in a rigid way, instead of approaching it with a dynamic and free swing, then the picture would look like a vertical line which simply turned into a T.



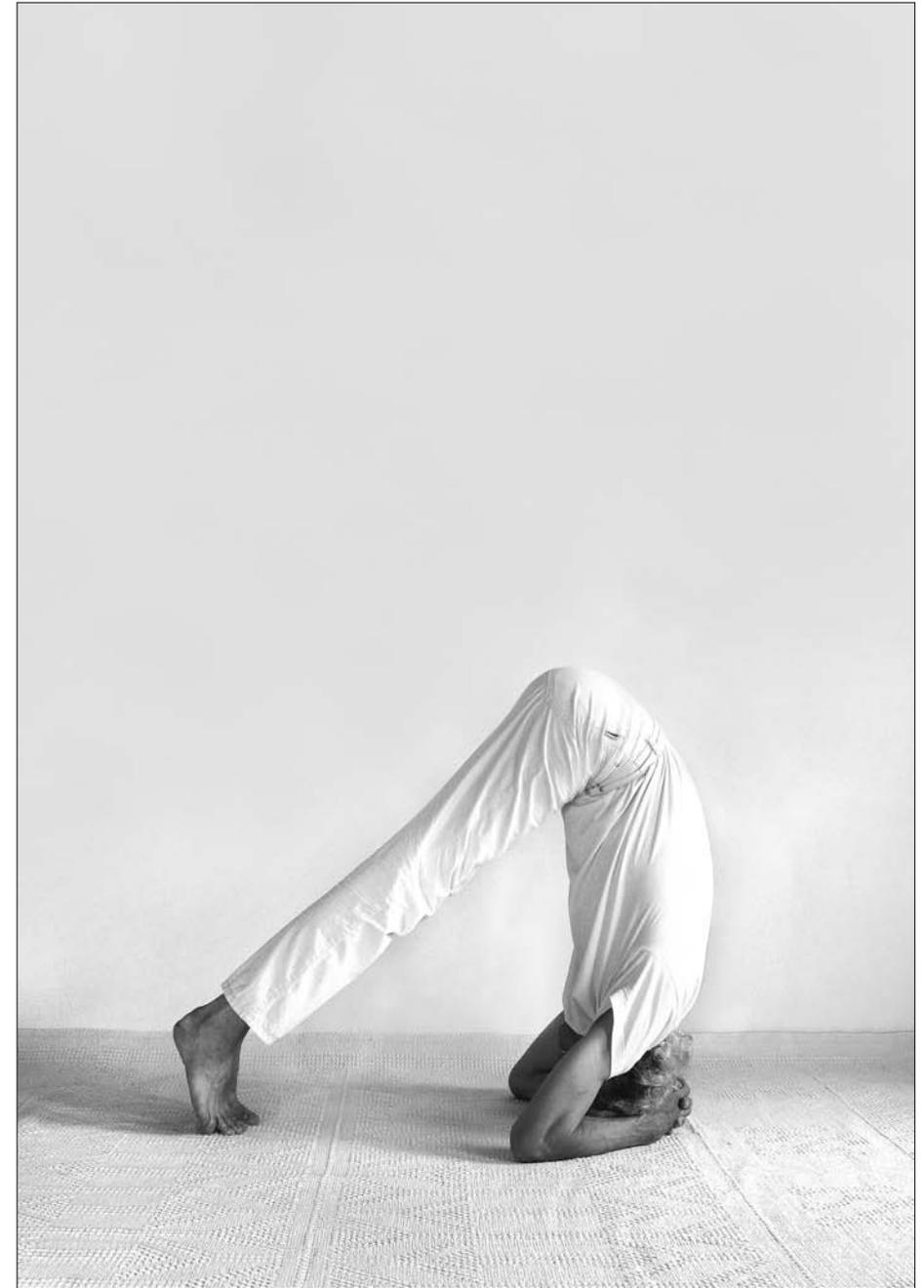
*tuladaṅḍāsana*, The scales – final position

The movement develops from the first step like a great movement of breath, entering freely and full of energy into the horizontal line. The neck remains detached, yielding to the movement.



*śīrṣāsana*, The headstand – preparation

Placing the head corresponds to placing a thought in life.  
Just as a placed thought forms a basis for the future, so the placed head forms  
a basis for constructing the position.



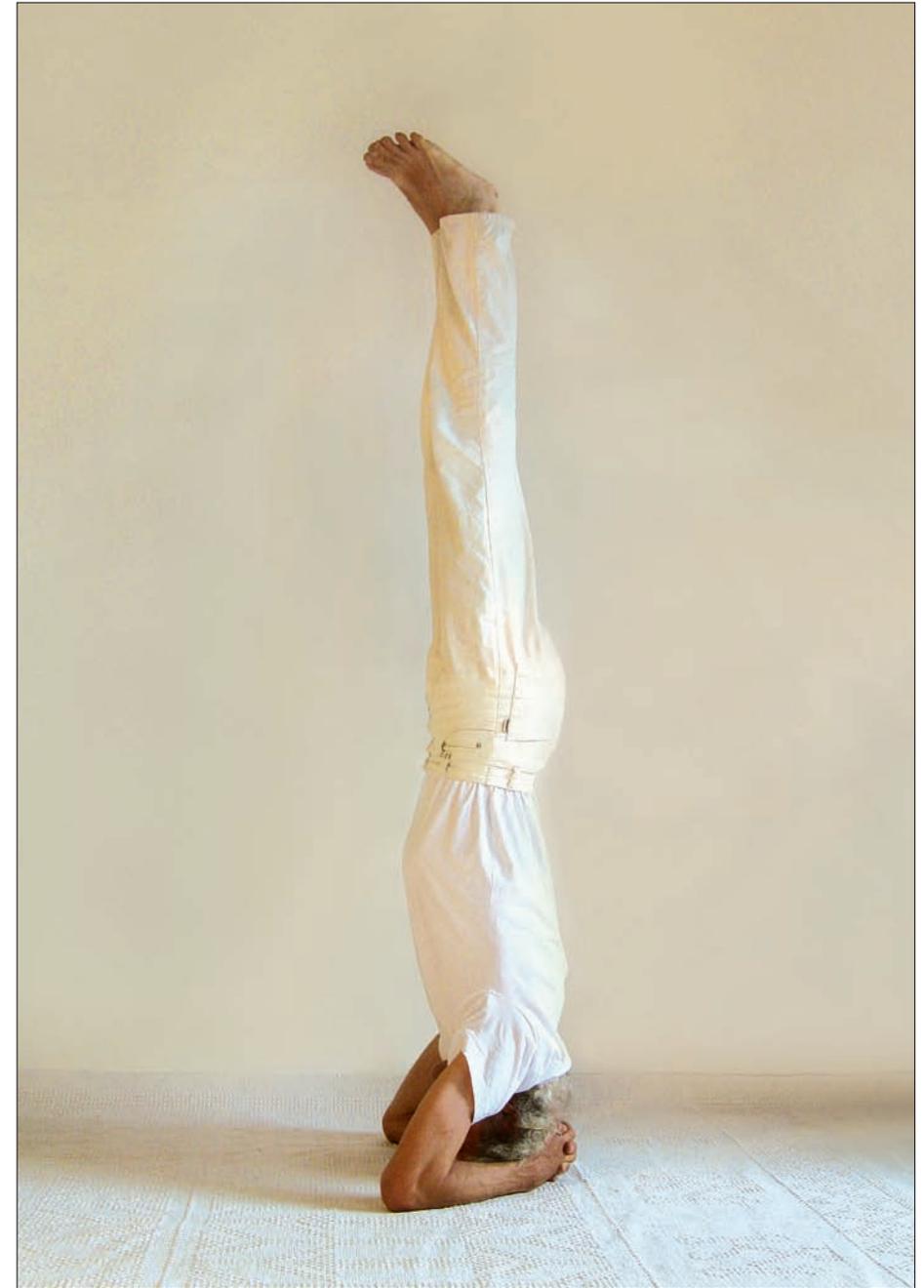
*śīrṣāsana*, The headstand – straightening up dynamically

Because the body enters into a vertical line the headstand  
increasingly becomes an expression of the I.



*śīrṣāsana*, The headstand – straightening up further

There are various ways in which the body can move into the vertical line.



*śīrṣāsana*, The headstand – final position

To a certain extent, through being vertical, the body becomes a symbol of the thought itself.

## About the author

Heinz Grill, born 1960, is a spiritual teacher, natural health practitioner and founder of a contemporary yoga and culture encompassing all areas of life. He currently lives in Arco in northern Italy. He has become known through his many years of research into medicine and natural medicine based on spiritual insights. This holistic, spiritual understanding sees human beings as individuals integrated into a higher lawfulness. A deeply founded understanding of health and illness, illuminated by the light of the soul, has led to a completely new approach to medicine and self-development, one which is appropriate for people of our time and opens up an expanding vision for the future.

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