

# Yoga For Your Health

Contents

## CHAPTER ONE

### *What Yoga can do*

YOGA at last is coming into its own in the Western world. After many years of being dismissed as a bizarre cult attractive only to eccentrics, it is today recognized as a fundamental art and skill. More than that, many of its most bitter opponents, people who were among the first to cry down Yogic culture, have now embraced it as a way of life.

The ancients who formulated the science of Yoga were way ahead of us in our modern world of stress and hurry. Recognizing, thousands of years ago, man's basic need for discipline to counteract the physical and spiritual deterioration caused by the mere fight for survival, they evolved a science which is at once as ancient as India herself and as modern as the space age.

The law of Yoga is the law of Life. Yoga embodies the secrets of successful living and combines profound and age-old truths with a way of life acceptable to the modern mind. It was evolved from the Veda, one of the most ancient scriptural books known to mankind in which Indian saints and sages taught that the Universe is one and that all religions are paths ascending the same mountain towards Eternal Truth. The great modern saint, Sri Ramakrishna, is often quoted as saying, 'As many faiths, so many paths.'

But Yoga is not a religion, nor is it a mystic cult. It is a Hindu system of philosophic meditation and asceticism designed to effect the reunion of the devotee's soul with God. It is a philosophy which integrates the individual life and the world surrounding us to achieve a basic harmony and equilibrium in the heart and mind of man.

How is physical health a part of so spiritual a philosophy as Yoga? Simply that the trichotomy of our lives, divided into body, soul and spirit, is echoed in the complete Yogic philosophy whose three approaches—*asana* (posture), *pranayama* (breath control), and meditation—are unified as one approach to self discovery.

One of the fundamental doctrines of Yoga is that God is within each one of us but He reveals Himself only in conditions of purity, both spiritually and physically. To function on a higher level, either mentally or physically, the first step must always be to rid the body of the impurities that cause disease and which impede spiritual development. One can draw the analogy of the window which must be cleaned before one can see the light clearly through it.

This basic principle of purification underlines all Yogic practice and at the same time it aims at establishing a balance in the body so that it functions, as it were, like a perfect machine. When this state of physical balance is achieved the mind can then be controlled and can realize the ultimate in pure thought and reason. I have yet to meet anyone who can successfully employ the techniques of mind control while plagued with indigestion,

asthma, a thumping headache or any other of the ills and stress symptoms which plague modern man. So first things first. Physical ills drag one downwards and the disciplinary science of Hatha Yoga was evolved that the body would be freed from pain and disease.

This book is primarily concerned with this Yoga of the physical body known as Hatha Yoga. While the body and the mind cannot be separated and the health of one affects the health of the other, I have laid stress on the day to day problems and ailments of the average person who wishes to improve his general health. Not everyone has the mystic vocation to achieve union with God, the Universal Spirit, which is the primary aim of all Yoga, but everyone would like to know how to improve his health.

Many Westerners, moving as they do in a world of hurry and stress, feel that Yoga holds nothing for them and that the whole philosophy is rather remote, vague, and impractical. In this book my aim is to show readers how the ancient system of Yoga provides an effective answer to the many problems of our modern life. You can take an active part in the hurly burly of everyday living and Yoga will act as a protection from the numerous stresses of your environment. While best results are obtained by exercising and practicing breathing and relaxation alone, nevertheless you need not become a hermit to achieve success and improved health through Hatha Yoga.

Recognizing then that you are not a mystic and you do not wish to spend years in meditation and mental discipline to find the true meaning of God and Life, how then can Yoga help you? Let us consider your problems. Are you overworked and tense and do you find it impossible to relax even in bed at night? Are you overweight yet lack the will-power to diet? Do you sometimes find yourself unable to cope with the dash and tumult of everyday life? Are you irritable, worried, nervous? Are you plagued by indigestion and other stress symptoms? Or simply do you seek something, you know not what, which goes above and beyond the superficial level of everyday living?

Yoga awaits your interest, your inspection, your first hesitant experiments. It is here, it has always been here, it is yours for the taking. Those who have delved into its profound philosophy and studied for years with patience and devotion to learn more and more have found something unique, priceless, and indestructible.

The uninformed often speak of Yoga as some dark, hidden practice of magical rites for attaining wondrous powers. While it is an indisputable fact that some advanced Yogis are indeed possessed of such powers, they reached their state of heightened consciousness, not by bell, book, and candle, but by the disciplining of the mind for which the first step is the perfecting of the physical body, through Hatha Yoga.

The inner power of Yoga becomes apparent when one realizes that it has something to offer every thinking person, here and now, yet it is an ancient Hindu philosophy, its beginnings shrouded in the mists of time. The idea may sound fanciful but the proof is manifold.

Hatha Yoga is the preparation for all the higher forms of Yoga and, because of its benefits to the body and the mind, it is the most popular form of Yoga and the most acceptable to Western habits of thought. At the same time it is the most misunderstood science on the face of the earth. Many well-meaning, but misguided individuals have a disparaging attitude towards Hatha Yoga, because its special province is the physical

body. But the sages who formulated the disciplinary science of Hatha Yoga recognized that the first thing man desires and needs is health, so they devised the best means of attaining and preserving it. While Hatha Yoga is the cause of much apprehension among people who effect to despise things physical and concentrate on higher matters, it has always been a source of interest to me how anyone can meditate on Higher Things while doubled up with pain or suffering any kind of physical discomfort.

Having declared then that Hatha Yoga can help you towards better health and calm your mind so that you can solve your personal problems, I do want to stress two facts. Firstly, that the aim of Hatha Yoga is not the acquisition of a superior muscular physique but the discipline and the purification of the body that we may forget our earthly shell enough to reach a state of heightened awareness through the control of the mind. Secondly, that Hatha Yoga is neither the easiest nor the fastest system of physical culture to show results. Why then Hatha Yoga for your health? Why not weight lifting, club swinging, athletics, or even dancing? All of these will improve the circulation, the figure, and strengthen the muscles. What has Hatha Yoga to offer in addition to this? Simply that Hatha will provide an extraordinary control over the body and awaken the mind and spirit, the higher self if you like, as no purely physical culture system could possibly do. Also, the above-mentioned activities are beyond the capabilities of a large section of the community, the aged, the infirm, the lame, and the physically frail. Those activities involve violent movement whereas Hatha Yoga is essentially a static science. Basically one gets into a Yoga posture or asana and remains so for as long as possible. Stress is laid on pressure of certain organs, glands and muscles rather than on movement. When movement is necessary in Hatha Yoga it is always gentle and graceful, therefore anyone can benefit from Yoga regardless of age, sex, race, walk of life, or religious belief. It is a universal science. It can lead to more abundant living and a new awareness of higher things through ridding your body of the pains and diseases which drag your mind back into the earth when it wants to wing its way upwards towards the light.

It is reported that Lord Buddha, whose philosophy is based on the Veda from which Yoga was evolved, said that the first step on the way to spiritual freedom and salvation is perfect physical health. So if you are drawn towards Hatha Yoga do not be put off by others who might tell you that you will never reach a state of heightened consciousness by turning your body upside down or sitting in various leg-breaking postures. Tell them that if the blood is impure then the brain, the nerves, the psycho-spiritual life, yes even the thoughts, cannot but be affected. Tell them that a man cannot control his mind until his body is made pure and healthy. Even if you do not aim at mental discipline, and many of you I know do not, you can with persistent practice improve your general health beyond belief.

You will find that Yoga knowledge, once accumulated, will begin to influence and help you in your daily life, whoever you may be. It will gradually invade every part of your life, from your attitude towards your fellow men to the way you sleep, breathe, think, and even eat. Did I say eat? What has eating to do with Hatha Yoga? It has very much to do with it. It is a strange fact that Yoga's doctrine of non-violence very soon influences even the most enthusiastic meat-eater to think again about a vegetarian diet. As the senses become more acute through the practice of Yoga, one begins to experience a distaste for all forms of killing and violence. Meat becomes unpalatable because many devotees of

Yoga are actually able to see the astral bodies of the slaughtered animals as they tuck into a thick, juicy steak. Their senses gradually becoming awakened, they think on things that never occurred to them before and in the case of slaughtering helpless animals they begin to understand and revolt at the hideous practices that go on in abattoirs all over the world. So you have been warned! You, who are reading a book on Yoga for perhaps the first time in your life, you who have eaten and enjoyed meat and fish for many years and intend to go on doing so, you will suddenly discover, if you practice Yoga, that meat is not quite so delicious as you hitherto thought and that other foods, cheese and vegetables and fruits, taste much better.

You see it is impossible to practice Hatha Yoga as a kind of hobby and hope to keep it aside from your everyday life, like knitting or woodwork. Inevitably it must influence your whole life and thought and make you, not a different person or even a better one, but into your real self 'denuded of all false pretence, of false values, and of unreasonable fears and inhibitions. If I have alarmed you in any way or made you feel that Yoga is going to prove far too complicated a thing in your orderly life, let me hasten to assure you that the influence of Yoga cannot be otherwise than beneficial. While Yoga is not, as I stressed at the beginning, a religion, nevertheless those men who devote their whole lives to it become saintly and intensely spiritual. This applies to devotees of Hatha as well as the other Yogas which proves conclusively that though Hatha's province is the physical body and its perfection, in the last analysis Hatha Yoga is a spiritual discipline.

You may consider Hatha Yoga either as a special subject in itself or as an adjunct to other forms of Yoga. Whatever your reason (and there can never be a bad reason for doing something good) Yoga can help you with your everyday problems on all levels. As you grow healthier and more relaxed you become more gentle, less inclined to fits of irritation and temper. Yoga provides the counter-weight so urgently needed to the ever increasing nervous, mental and physical tensions of our modern life.

All the exercises or asanas of Hatha Yoga are based on the formula of stretching, relaxing, deep breathing and increasing the circulation of the blood and the powers of concentration. Yogic culture is divided into eight sections.

Yama—ethics.

Niyama—religious observances.

Asana—postures.

Pranayama—breathing exercises and control of the breath.

Pratyahara—withdrawing of the senses from external objects.

6. Dhyarana—concentration.

7. Dhyana—meditation.

8. Samadhi—super-consciousness.

It is with 3 and 4 that this book is primarily concerned for these sections are the beginning of all Yoga without which you cannot hope to gain mastery over yourself and learn the secrets of the Universe. According to the Yoga Shastras the Yoga asanas total the staggering number of 840,000, but the important ones number only 84. Of these I have described all but the most difficult. This is a book primarily for the Westerner and

the beginner in Yoga and as such it does not contain postures suitable only to advanced students who are able to practice many hours a day. The asanas included in this book will suffice to bring the health of the average person to a far higher level than hitherto experienced and, combined with the other practices described in this book, will open out a new horizon beyond the banalities of everyday existence.

Let me warn you that Yoga is another word for hard work, indeed some say it is all work and no play. That may be so, but all the same if you have read thus far your mind must be searching for something and if that something is Yoga then you will not be deterred by the mere thought of hard work. Rather you will glory in it for there is a sense of great achievement in self-discipline. Yes, Hatha Yoga is discipline all the way. I can show you the path up the mountain but it is up to you to climb. With the best will in the world I cannot do the hard work for you. But if you choose this path all you need to follow is determination. If you have it you cannot fail. If you lack it you cannot begin.

“There is an innermost center in us all Where Truth abides in fullness; and to know Rather consists in opening out a way Whence the imprisoned splendor may escape . . .’

(BROWNING)

## **CHAPTER TWO**

### Relaxation and stretching

No one, I think, would disagree with me when I say that the pace of modern life, especially in the big cities, is destructive. Why, but why is everyone intent on doing something all the time ? Do they imagine they are missing something if they go to bed with a book, or sit and think, or just sit? Some people cannot tolerate being alone. Their own company is inexpressibly boring and depressing. But why? If only these unfortunates could catch even a solitary glimpse of the rich inner life of the spirit, and the awesome power of clear thought.

People who rush about in a frenzy are often not the ones who get the best results. What about the man who has had the time to think ? Who has made the time to think ? While others rushed dizzily past him he has been evolving ideas, building and planning in his slow but constructive mind. It has been said that much of the good work of the world has been done by the dull man who has done his best.

Yoga will not teach you to be dull, rather the contrary it will teach you to be more magnetic, but it will show you the importance of knowing when to slow down. The ancient Chinese believed in the theory of ‘masterly inactivity’ and this served to lay down the foundation of a unique civilization. By ‘inactivity’ I do not mean idleness, laziness or mental inertia. Yoga is not for the lazy. No, Yoga’s inactivity serves as a breathing space among the bustle of everyday life so that one can recharge the batteries of one’s physical and mental processes to pursue life with renewed energy and clearer thought.

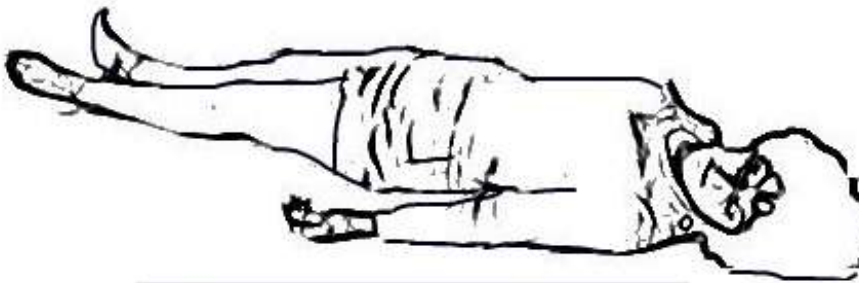
Yogis realized, centuries ago, that the mind always functions better in a state of relaxation. Force yourself to work and the result is a headache, weariness, and a lack of spontaneity. In those fields of work where creative ability is constantly called into play

this spontaneity is of vital importance. No one wants to read, hear, or look at something dragged from a fogged and tired brain. Yoga's first lesson, then, is how to relax. I do not wish to be an alarmist but the sheer inability to relax sends many millions of people to their graves ten, twenty, sometimes forty years before their time. So let us first consider how you are, here and now, going to cheat the undertaker of those precious years of your valuable time.

First of all do not confuse relaxation with inertia. Relaxation has been defined as 'a conscious transfer of energy from one department of nature to another after an extreme tension of body and brain'. A mere change of occupation is a form of relaxation. This is why many office workers play football or tennis at weekends, why many manual workers sit and watch television, why many 'brain' workers have hobbies that involve working with the hands.

For your first lesson in relaxation let us consider that mid-morning cup of tea that most people look forward to. What do you do when it arrives? Stand and gulp it down and maybe throw another one down your throat after it? Try again. No matter who you are, a busy housewife and mother, a secretary, a company director, a cabinet minister, or a ballet dancer, stop when that cup of tea arrives. Stop, whatever you are doing, sit down quietly even if all hell is let loose around you, and enjoy that cup of tea. Drink it slowly. Try to forget, even if you have only five minutes to do so, all your immediate cares—the shopping, the laundry, that lost letter, that copy your editor is screaming for, that order you forgot to push out. Let it wait. What is the very worst thing that can happen if you drink a cup of tea in peace and quiet? Why nothing. And how much better you will feel for it, how much easier things will seem after your few moments' respite. Relax periodically and you double your efficiency. If you doubt me then try it and see.

But this is a book about Hatha Yoga so you will want to know the Yoga way to relax. Lie down on the floor and let go. That is all. And that is Yoga? It is indeed. It is called SAVASANA or the CORPSE POSTURE. Not a very pleasant name I agree but all the same it is one of Yoga's most valuable and powerful weapons against ill health and stress. It is pictured in figure 1.



**Figure 1. Corpse Posture**

Try it. Lie down on the floor, no pillows, just a rug or the carpet. Leave off your shoes and wear as little clothing as possible. Whatever you wear must be light and loose fitting. Now stretch your arms above your head and stretch out your legs and feet. Go on, have a good stretch like your cat does before it settles down to sleep. Close your eyes and let your head roll to one side. Let your hands flop where they will and imagine that your

body has no bones and that you are giving your whole weight to the floor. Imagine you are on a cloud and that your body is slowly sinking through it. Keep your eyes closed and think of something peaceful, a lovely piece of music perhaps or the sound of the sea. Put on a soothing record if you like or open the window and listen to the birds. Tell yourself that you are drowsy and comfortable over and over again.

Now then, what about those knots of tense muscles around your mouth, your eyes, your stomach and your legs? Go over all! areas of your body and locate any knots of tension there might be. Be stern with them. Make them loosen up. Very likely they will tighten up again as soon as your back is turned so to speak but keep your mind's eye open and consciously and repeatedly relax any clenched muscles. The worst offenders by far are the muscles of the face. You are clenching your teeth and your jaws right now are you not? You would be surprised at the number of people who do that, even in their sleep. The counter measure is yawning. Do it as often as you can but do please choose appropriate times as yawning is not socially acceptable in many circles and your commendable efforts to teach your facial muscles to relax might be misinterpreted! Open your mouth as wide as you can, stretch your jaws, tense your facial muscles and then suddenly relax them. Keep practicing that movement and you will soon rid yourself of teeth clenching. That in itself is a good start.

So you are lying on the floor in the Corpse Posture and you are finding that it isn't as easy as it looks to relax. It is easy to lie down on the floor but you think I am unreasonable to ask you to relax every muscle, do you not ? But it can be done. I can do it and so can many other people. It takes constant practice but how worthwhile is time spent towards this end for Savasana is one of the greatest vitalizers known to man. Perform it whenever you are tired, angry, upset, or brain-fagged. Perform it whenever things get on top of you. It is not time wasted. It is Yoga's 'masterly inactivity' working for you.

No one is too madly busy to be quite unable to practice the art of relaxation at least once a day. Give to it a little of your time and it will repay you a thousandfold. What about those few minutes before you get into bed at night? Are you too busy then?

When you have made some progress with Savasana your feet will be set firmly on the Yoga path. Its great influence will begin to work for you. As you grow more and more able to smooth away the tensions in your body you will find that the tensions in your mind will also become less. Problems which seemed mountainous will, if you practice and perfect the art of relaxation, be reduced to a size whereby you can cope with and overcome them.

But to return to you lying on the floor and thinking yourself into relaxing those tense muscles. What about that mind of yours running round in circles? What about that eye of yours on the clock ? What about that nagging worry at the back of your mind that you should be up and about doing things? No, you are not really relaxing at all. Let us try again. Let us approach Savasana from another angle.

I want you to learn to stretch. A simple enough request but, you may ask, is this Yoga too? Just—stretching? It is indeed. As you read this book it will become more and more apparent to you that although Yoga is a Hindu science three thousand years old, a spiritually based way of life, a contemplative philosophy and a profoundly dedicated art,

nevertheless it has a real and vital place in modern everyday life, your life. A simple thing like stretching is as much a part of Yoga as any of the more complicated postures which I will describe during the course of this book.

Stretching then. Lie down as before on your back with your legs and feet together and raise your arms above your head with the fingers interlaced. Now turn your hands palms upwards and you will immediately feel the increased stretch along your ribs and back. Stretch your arms as far above your head as you can and at the same time point your toes and push them forward so that you feel the tension in every part of your legs, arms and shoulders.

Concentrate on stretching thus far and when, after practicing a few times, you can fully tense your arms, shoulders and legs simultaneously, try at the same time to pull in your stomach muscles, arch your spine, and to complete the picture open your mouth in a gigantic yawn. You will not make a particularly aesthetic picture at this moment but remember that Yoga should always be practiced alone and in silence, if possible in secrecy. It is not a science for the extrovert. So you can go ahead and pull faces to your heart's content and if no one is any the wiser you and your health will be all the better for it.

Having stretched every part of your body, suddenly let go. Remember that you must stretch everything you can to the utmost, before you let go, so that the ensuing relaxation will be all the more complete. And when you let go you are once more in Savasana but this time you should feel much more relaxed. But keep a wary eye open for those persistent offenders—eyes, lips, teeth, and tongue. Are you clenching them again? Train your mind to watch these key points throughout the day not only when you are practicing Savasana, and if you discover that you are clenching any of your facial muscles be stern with them. As I have reiterated, they need constant watching but your persistence will soon be rewarded not only in a new feeling of relaxation but also in your appearance. For Yoga is a beauty treatment too. Those little tension lines around your eyes, lips, and between the eyebrows will not be given a chance to develop into deep, ineradicable wrinkles. Yoga, and particularly Savasana is the simple secret of how devotees of Yoga remain miraculously young looking even when well advanced in years, for nothing is so ageing as stress. It puts lines on to the face, sends the eyes back into their sockets, and gives an ageing droop to the figure. Having approached Savasana from two different angles, let us try a third. Yoga, while based on a set of unchanging principles, is not dogmatic and there is much room for personal preference and capabilities. Yoga's greatness lies in its ability to recognize every individual and not lump humanity together as so many other sciences do. Savasana, then, from a third angle. This one is rather more difficult but you may find it rather fun. It is called the Angle Balance and you will see an illustration of it in figure 33. It is not as easy as it looks but it is well worth your perseverance.

### ***Angle Balance***

Lie flat on your back with your hands at your sides, and legs together. Now raise your head and shoulders off the floor and at the same time raise your legs with your knees bent until you can grasp your toes. Now very carefully straighten your knees still holding your toes until you are in the position illustrated in figure 33. Hold this position for as long as



you can and then suddenly flop back on to the floor. Again you are in Savasana and the ensuing relaxation will be more complete after the preceding tension and concentration required by the ANGLE

## **BALANCE.**

This first Yoga asana, the Corpse Posture, is one of the most important and although you may be itching to learn something a little more spectacular I do want to impress on you that stretching and relaxation is the beginning of all Yoga. It calms the mind and renews the body with energy and the life force which is known as PRANA. SO do practice Savasana wherever and whenever you possibly can.

Many people make their first mistake of the day the moment they open their eyes in the morning, and they start a chain reaction which echoes throughout the day. They open their eyes, look at the clock, and leap out of bed in a frenzy. The poor human body is built to withstand an appalling amount of abuse but to subject it to this kind of punishment, day after day, is simply courting trouble. Think what happens to your nervous system when you wake up and hurl yourself out of bed in the morning. Shock and an unspeakable buffeting. Is it necessary? Give yourself a little time to return to this world from the threshold of another. Set your alarm clock just five minutes earlier than usual, try this Yoga waking up routine, and see the difference to your whole day.

### ***Waking up Routine***

The word stretching is reiterated throughout this book and it crops up here too, first thing in the morning. Stretch up your arms with your fingers interlaced and palms upwards, stretch your legs, open your mouth wide and yawn several times. As you lie in bed, still half asleep, keep on yawning and stretching like a cat and then finally relax your body and do the following leg stretching exercise.

### ***Leg stretching exercise***

This is very simple. While lying in bed with your feet together push one of your legs down towards the bottom of the bed as though you were trying to lengthen it. Point your toes and you will feel a pull from your hip right down to your heel. Hold this position for one minute only and then relax. If you haven't a clock with a minute hand then simply count to sixty as you push your leg forward. After a moment's rest repeat the exercise with the other leg. As this is a very potent exercise for the nerves do not repeat it more than once at a time for each leg. It may be repeated when you go to bed at night if you so wish.

After the Leg Stretching exercise very slowly get out of bed, stretch once more with your arms above your head and I assure you that your usual morning half dead feeling will be conspicuous by its absence.

I will end your first lesson in stretching and relaxation by describing an exercise taken from the ancient system of SOORYA NAMASKAR OR SUN EXERCISE because it is practiced facing the sun as it rises, or at least in the early morning. There are twelve positions which bring flexibility to the spine which is so vital if one is to perform the more strenuous Yoga asanas. Of the twelve, which stretch various ligaments and give

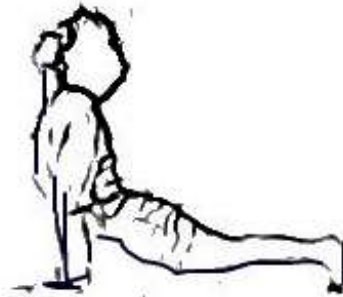
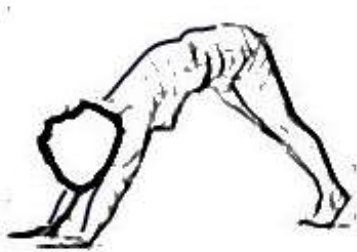
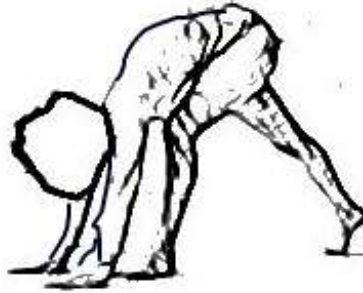
different movements to the vertebral column, I have selected a series of five which the average reader will not find beyond his capabilities. In this series a full round constitutes nine movements, that is five forward movements and four retracing ones.

### ***Soorya Namaskar or Sun Exercise***

1. Stand erect, feet together, hands at your sides. Take a deep slow breath, raise your arms above your head with the fingers interlaced and then bend backwards as far as you can without overbalancing. (See Fig. 8, page 39.)
2. Now exhale as completely as you can and at the same time bend forward and place your palms flat on the floor about four or five inches in front of your toes. Keep your knees absolutely straight. The correct position is shown in figure 2.

One important feature of the SUN EXERCISE is the chin lock, which simply means pressing your chin tightly against your chest. The Yogis maintain that this has a beneficial effect on the thyroid glands. Remember while performing the SUN EXERCISE to maintain the chin lock through stages 2, 3, 4, 6, 7, and 8.

3. Inhale again, step back with the right foot as in figure 3 so that the other knee is bent and the chin lock is maintained.
4. Exhale once more and move the other leg back as in figure 4, keeping the knees as rigid as possible and trying to reach the floor with your heels. This is not possible of course but the action of trying to reach the floor with the heels will increase the pull on the calves and thighs. Remember to maintain the chin lock.
5. Inhale again, slowly and deeply and at the same time release the chin lock and, while keeping the upper part of the body as steady as possible, lower the legs and abdomen slowly. Balance throughout stage 5 on the toes and palms until you are in the cobra-like position in figure 5. Arch your back as fully as possible, keep your knees rigid and press back your neck and your head while keeping your arms straight. Only your palms and your toes should touch the floor.
6. Having performed the five exercises you must now retrace your steps to the starting position thus: from stage 5 assume the position in figure 4 with the body making a bridge. (See Below.)



Bring one leg forward as in figure 3.

Bring forward the other leg and you are now bending forward with your palms flat on the floor as in figure 2.

Very slowly straighten up, take a deep breath and then lie down for a few moments and relax.

It may take you a little time to perfect the Sun Exercise, as it has taken you some little time to read it and look at the illustrations but the actual performance of it should take you no more than sixty seconds if done correctly. It is not really complicated and once you have learned the simple sequence of movements they should follow one another with fluid simplicity. Nothing should be hurried. Every movement of the SUN EXERCISE should be held for as long as possible before proceeding to the next.

The benefits are manifold. Soorya Namaskar stretches the spine in several directions and helps to keep it supple. It stretches and contracts the abdomen and so helps to relieve congestion and constipation. It tones and limbers up the muscles and has a bracing effect on the entire body. Soorya Namaskar is one of the most complete and beneficial exercises in the whole Yoga range and should never be omitted from your practice schedule.

I will now outline a schedule for those of you who are convinced that you cannot find the time to practice Yoga asanas. It requires but twelve minutes but if you can find more time in which to practice so much the better.

Leg stretching exercise, sixty seconds each leg 2 minutes

Savasana or Corpse Posture preceded by concentration on relaxing muscles, tension of muscles or Angle Balance 5 minutes

3. Sun Exercise performed slowly four times 4 minutes

The extra minute is to give you time to wake up. Twelve minutes is so very little time out of your whole day but you may soon find that these minutes become the most important part of your day because of your increased feeling of relaxation and well being. In time that alarm going off twelve minutes early will not seem like a monster but more like a welcome friend.

## CHAPTER THREE

### Tension and emotional stress

You are not alone, you who are tense, nervous, worried, unable to relax even in bed. You seem to be tied up in knots and you sometimes feel at your screaming wits' end. And you take relaxation pills, pep pills, tranquillizers, anything to give you a 'lift' and then wonder at the resulting unpleasant side effects. Can Yoga help? But of course it can. Yoga doesn't like drugs and you know, your body does not either so if the so-called orthodox methods have failed to establish an easing of tension in your overworked body and over-worried mind then why not try Yoga's way? Yoga has often been known to succeed when medicine has failed.

Proper breathing is intrinsically linked with relaxation, with the emotions, with the health of the body itself. The thoughts are reflections of the breathing habits and so if the breathing is faulty then the mind cannot but be affected. You can prove this for yourself by your day to day experiences. When you are absorbed in a book, watching television, or listening to an interesting talk on the radio your breathing processes become slow. When your mind is afflicted by anger, or sorrow, the breath becomes irregular and choppy. When you are frightened you gasp and hold your breath, and when you are bored you open your mouth and yawn.

The exercises formulated by the Yogis of ancient times in connection with the respiratory tract are all based on a close observation of the body's natural impulses. This most vital of the body's functions is so neglected by the average person that the majority of people take in only enough oxygen to keep themselves from falling dead.

Mind and breath, then, being interdependent, you must learn how to breathe properly if you want to calm your mind and rid yourself of your worries and frustrations in everyday life. When you are at peace your breath is slow and even so if you reverse the process and learn to breathe slowly and deeply your mind will follow suit. You cannot be worried and upset if you are breathing in a calm and controlled manner, nor can you be calm if your breath is coming in hurried jerks.

So first things first. I want you to try the Yoga COMPLETE BREATH which employs the lower, middle and upper lung. It is sometimes divided into three—diaphragmatic, intercostal, and clavicular breathing—but in its correct form the Yoga COMPLETE BREATH should employ all three sections in one fluid intake of breath. Beginners should take things very easily at first. Lie down flat on the floor, no pillows, and place your hands lightly over your diaphragm. Remember to wear nothing tight around your waist or chest, and women should always loosen the bra before doing any Yoga breathing exercise.

#### The Complete Breath

Slowly exhale as completely as you can.

Very slowly inhale through the mouth, drawing in the air

evenly and without sudden jerks. With your hands placed lightly over your diaphragm you will find that this is the first area to expand.

As your inhalation progresses you will feel a very slight retraction of your lower abdomen.

As you complete your inhalation you will feel your shoulders rise slightly as your upper lung becomes fully expanded.

Slowly exhale through the mouth, using slight force. Contract the abdomen as you complete your exhalation to expel as much air as possible.

Lie quietly for a few minutes after you have taken your first Complete Breath. Do not attempt to sit up for a while or you may experience a slight dizziness or faintness due to hyperventilation caused by a sudden, excessive, and unaccustomed intake of oxygen. If you do have such a reaction it only proves how badly your poor lungs needed that extra oxygen, but do not worry, the dizzy feeling will soon pass. Go carefully at first with this exercise and soon you will be able to perform it with no unpleasant side effects. When you reach this stage you can perform the exercise sitting up straight with your head level and your hands in your lap, or even standing erect with your hands at your sides. Always, of course, practice Yoga breathing exercises before an open window and if at all possible, in the open air. For the first few days do not take more than two Yoga Complete Breaths a day, but gradually increase the number ad lib up to sixty full breaths a day. This should be a slow process and you should allow yourself quite some time before attempting the full quota of sixty a day. Be content at first to take just a few at a time.

When performing the Complete Breath I want you to be conscious of the slow filling up of your lungs, from the abdomen to the shoulders, and the ensuing slow exhalation should produce a feeling of calmness and relaxation in your body and in your mind. Never hurry this exercise. It is far better to take two slow correct Complete Breaths than to take ten hurried ones. In Yoga exercises it is always quality and not quantity that counts.

Tense people will particularly benefit from this exercise if they perform it just before bedtime as it promotes healthy, natural and refreshing sleep. When you are able to perform it correctly do try to practice it whenever you can during the day but particularly when you feel tired, depressed or upset. You can even take a few deep breaths as you take that morning walk up to the bus stop or the train, in which case you can match your breathing to your footsteps, say breathe in for six and exhale for six. If you are lucky enough to be anywhere near the sea draw in that wonderful, sweet-smelling air for all you are worth.

It is said that some people are tense by nature. Not true. They are tense by sheer bad habit, and these so-called natural-tension-merchants unconsciously allow all kinds of lurking tensions to accumulate until, hey presto! a beautiful, full-blown peptic ulcer, a chronic heart condition or worse. The breaking up of tension is going to be, for most people, the breaking of the habit of a lifetime. I have been told in all seriousness many times, 'But, Miss Richmond, I must build up tension while I am working otherwise . . .' Otherwise what? Otherwise, I would add, you would have so much more energy that you wouldn't know what to do with it, so you feel you must squander a little by becoming tense!

Let us consider this problem in its proper perspective. No one, repeat, no one ever got the best out of themselves by means of tension. You may think you need it, that you could not do without it, nevertheless you wonder sometimes why you are unable to sleep and that your nerves are often 'worn to shreds', and you suffer from nameless fears. Can you imagine what it would be like to be free for ever of these distressing symptoms, to feel relaxed and cheerful and full of energy ? I can show you the way, through Yoga, but there is a price. You will have to part with those precious tensions of yours.

My intention in this book is to show you the way to better health through Yoga and not to moralize in any way, but may I tell you just one story which I hope might stick in your mind for the rest of your life ? It is aimed particularly at those readers who feel they cannot live without a burden of tension on their shoulders.

There was once a wise old man who was sitting at the window of his house when he saw, down in the street below, a poor beggar carrying a heavy load on his back. 'What is that you carry ?' called the old man. The beggar looked up at the window and then opened up the large sack he was carrying. It contained bundles of old newspapers, empty bottles, bits of wood, empty tins, broken bricks and all kinds of useless matter. 'But it is nothing but a lot of rubbish,' protested the old man, 'tell me, why do you burden yourself with it?' To which the beggar replied, 'I must, it is all I have'.

And now to the second round in this battle against those tensions of yours. In the previous chapter I discussed physical relaxation, yawning and stretching, and if you have been practicing the exercises I described they will have gone a long way towards the breaking up of tension. Let us now go a step farther. Your next task is to learn how to

develop and control your respiration. In Yoga breathing the following five principles are involved:

The habitual use of the full power of the lungs.

Retention of the breath.

Cleansing of the lungs and bronchial passages.

Breathing and slow stretching.

Alternate breathing, or breathing through one nostril at a time. This is known as 'Sun and Moon' breathing.

In this book I will cover all five principles of Yoga breathing and in this chapter I will deal with 1, 2, and 5. Firstly, then, practice the Yoga Complete Breath as often as you can and always remember that the depth and quality of your breathing is far more important than the number of breaths you take. It is a good idea to start your Pranayama or breathing exercises by taking a few full breaths to cleanse your lungs and prepare yourself for the other breathing exercises, all of which are basically variations of the Complete Breath. Practice the Complete Breath in any position you prefer, either lying down, sitting on the floor with your spine straight, sitting on a hard chair with your hands in your lap, or standing up straight.

### ***Retention of the Breath***

This should not be attempted until you are able to perform the Complete Breath at least half a dozen times in succession without experiencing any unpleasant dizziness or fainting. Then proceed as follows. When you have completed your inhalation hold your breath for an instant before you start to exhale. One second is enough at first, but gradually extend this period of retention until you can hold your breath for several seconds without discomfort and without employing any force. Please do not try to force your lungs to do things which you know they would rather not. Remember that correct Yoga breathing is based on the body's natural impulses.

At the end of every exhalation there is a natural pause with the lungs completely empty. At first you must obey this natural impulse and breathe in when you feel the need to, but gradually extend this pause for a second longer, and then yet another second, but do not force the pace. This gradual extension of the pause will make the ensuing inhalation that much more full and deep. Practice retention of the breath until you can perform it to your satisfaction but I repeat s-l-o-w is the word for Yoga breathing, slow and rhythmic. The word hurry has no place whatever in this book.

### ***Alternate Breathing***

I would like you now to try Alternate Breathing or, as it is also called, SUN AND MOON BREATHING.

To explain this strange name before you begin, the two aspects of Prana or life force which surrounds us are personified as Pingala, the positive pole and Ida, the negative pole. One of the aims of Yoga is to balance their opposite currents in the body, which then produces a state of perfect spiritual and mental equilibrium. The breath that enters the right nostril or Pingala is called the sun breath and that which enters the Ida or left

nostril is the moon breath. The ALTERNATE BREATH consists of deep controlled breathing through each nostril in turn.

Sit down either cross-legged on the floor or on a hard chair with your spine erect, but not stiff, and your head level. Close your eyes and proceed as follows:

Close your left nostril with your left thumb and breathe in, slowly and deeply, through the right nostril.

Hold the breath for two seconds.

Close the right nostril with the last two fingers of your left hand and exhale very slowly through the left nostril.

A natural pause will follow and when the impulse to inhale appears do so, this time through the left nostril, the right still being held closed.

Hold the breath for two seconds.

Exhale slowly through the right nostril with the left held closed.

This completes one round. Beginners to Pranayama should limit themselves to two rounds at first, but do add one round each week until you are performing six rounds a day. Ideally this exercise should be performed facing different points of the compass according to the time of day, following the path of the sun. Thus in the early morning you should perform it facing east, at midday facing the meridian, at sunset facing the west, and at night facing the north, SUN AND MOON BREATHING should be preceded and followed by three or four Complete Breaths to create the right atmosphere of peace and tranquillity throughout the mind and the body. Though I have concentrated on the physical aspect of Yoga in this book, as I said in the beginning, it is impossible to divorce the body from the mind and all Yoga exercises, breathing or otherwise, must always affect all parts of the organism, both physical, mental, and spiritual.

When you have been practicing Sun and Moon breathing for a few days and have established some sort of rhythm and balance in your performance, proceed to the next stage, which is the regulation of the length of your exhalations to twice that of your inhalations. Thus if you inhale to a count of four, then you exhale to a count of eight. I use four only as an example for the length of your inhalation must always depend on your individual capacity and comfort. I reiterate the warning about undue strain. Please, no straining in this or any other Yoga exercise. It can only do harm and achieve nothing.

After a few days of the above controlled breathing your next step is to prolong very gradually the retention of the breath until it equals the length of your inhalation. Thus if you inhale on a count of four then hold your breath for four and then exhale on a count of eight. Again you must adjust this counting to suit your own capacity.

This is the simplest form of Sun and Moon breathing and will suffice for our purposes in this chapter which deals with the calming of the mind and nerves. The advanced forms of this exercise call for almost superhuman discipline and are practiced in connexion with



the awakening of a mysterious force in the body known as Kundalini, the Serpent Power. This may briefly be described as the Divine Power of Knowledge and Wisdom from which, through civilization, Man has become separated. But the Kundalini, said to lie coiled at the base of the spine, is not dead but dormant, which is why every man is potentially divine no matter how far he may have strayed from the Divine Path.

But to return to your frayed nerves and wayward emotions, I will end this chapter with two simple exercises, one which combines breathing and movement and one which calms the mind and quenches thirst. The first of these is called THE L BALANCE STRETCH because while performing it your body roughly resembles the letter L.

Stand up straight, feet together and hands at your sides.

Inhale deeply and at the same time raise your arms above your head, lace your fingers together and turn them palms upwards.

Remain stretching upwards with your arms while you complete your inhalation.

Hold your breath for an instant and then, while exhaling slowly bend your knees until your calves are touching the backs of your thighs. Remain thus until you have completed your inhalation, with your arms still stretched above your head.

A natural pause will follow the completion of your inhalation, during which you should rise into the standing position and lower your hands to your sides.

When you can perform this exercise try a slightly more difficult version which requires you to hold the breath throughout the movement, thus:

Stand erect, inhale deeply while raising your hands above your head with the fingers laced as before.

When you have completed your inhalation hold your breath and bend your knees as before with your arms above your head.

Remain in this position for as long as you comfortably can without exhaling.

When the impulse to exhale appears do so, at the same time rising to your feet. Repeat up to six times according to the time at your disposal.

This exercise taxes your sense of balance but it is a good exercise in calming the mind for it requires a considerable degree of concentration and muscular control to keep from overbalancing and this discipline, in conjunction with the deep slow breathing and the retention of the breath, results in a calm mind and soothed nerves. In conclusion here is a

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