

THE PATH OF YOGA

by Tana Edye

Hatha Yoga is essentially a means by which we can harmonise and elevate the physical, emotional and spiritual components which make us a unique and potentially divine species upon this extraordinary planet. Through the practice of pranayama (breathing exercises) and asanas (postures) we can literally unify and balance the two essential energies of our inner and physical being thus bringing about greater distribution of the energies at our disposal and a finer, or rather, more finely tuned instrument for the perusal and study of this particular stage of our evolution i.e. both the ability to experience via the five senses ... taste, touch, sight, smell, breath and to assimilate and decipher the information thus reported via the brain to the spiritual centre (the heart in unison with the mystical third eye), for the benefit of the journey of the soul through an infinite quantum of time and space.

The word *yoga* (in sanskrit; 'to link the energy or make whole') is in fact an eightfold path encompassing the myriad aspects of being both human and spiritual at this point in our evolutionary path. These aspects are to do with control of the senses, using will in action (to do what is right, be it what we consume, do, think or say, or the manner in which we relate to each other). To breathe and exercise in a manner which will provide optimum energy for our needs (both physical and spiritual ... this aspect being referred to as hatha yoga), to withdraw the senses from worldly desires.

Herein lies the love aspect, to do unto others as we would have them do unto us, and finally to concentrate, meditate and contemplate the finer aspects of creation and life (Raja Yoga). My personal feeling is that the latter is much more beneficially enhanced when all the other aspects are practised unilaterally, and I am certain that this was also desired by the masters who passed on the tradition of yoga as a whole concept for mankind to be assisted on the journey towards liberation. A piecemeal attempt is not good enough, if we want the best, we must be prepared to give our best.

The brain uses more oxygen than any other organ in the human body and therefore ample supplies of fresh air are necessary for its efficient functioning. A deficiency will result in an impoverished system generally exhibiting the effects of premature old age (look at the complexion of any tobacco smoker), depression, poor circulation, heart problems and depleted energy levels.

The practice of Hatha Yoga focuses on correct breathing as well as movements (asanas-postures) that will en-

hance and activate the muscular integrity and well being of the body. The effectiveness of these asanas is as much based on correct breathing as moving in a symmetrical way.

I have found that there are *three golden rules* that should be applied to every yoga session for the result to be doubly beneficial.

1. Focus on a point directly ahead of your line of vision. For example your third eye (the point between the brows if using a mirror, the latter beneficial for checking the movements are symmetrical and balanced) and that the point is obviously moving with the line of vision, if moving vertically up and down.

2. The use of the hands in prayer position at the beginning, during and as the final gesture of a yoga session will help balance the energies and bring about a state of enhanced wellbeing. The prayer position is one that is very positive and beneficial for harmonising the entire system.

3. Breathing should be deep and rhythmic (in breath always through the nose) and in unison with the movement that is occurring at the time. For instance, expansive movements (stretching up and out) are accompanied by an inhalation and contractual movements bending and crouching, or drawing the body into itself are accompanied by exhalation.

The reason for this is that the diaphragm is able to drop down as you breathe in, allowing the lungs to fully expand. Maximum supplies of fresh oxygen are able to infiltrate the body via the circulatory system, being more effective carrying fresh nutrients to the cells and carrying away the toxic wastes. Deep breathing is a wonderful tonic for the entire system for this reason. Watch your complexion glow and your creative ideas surge with the effort to supply your body with this wonderful free energy that has been made available to us.

Another important point to keep in mind is that *prana* — the vital life force energy that is in every living thing — is a profound source of energy for us. In other words there is quality available to us in the air that we breathe, e.g. the air by the seaside or in the country or anywhere where there is an abundance of plants and natural elements. Remember the scent of jasmine or a jacaranda by a waterfall, or any place where you feel the air is alive with life. That is PRANA ... so try to make the effort to breathe deeply when you are in those places and work with all of us who care about our environment to protect the riches of this wonderful planet.

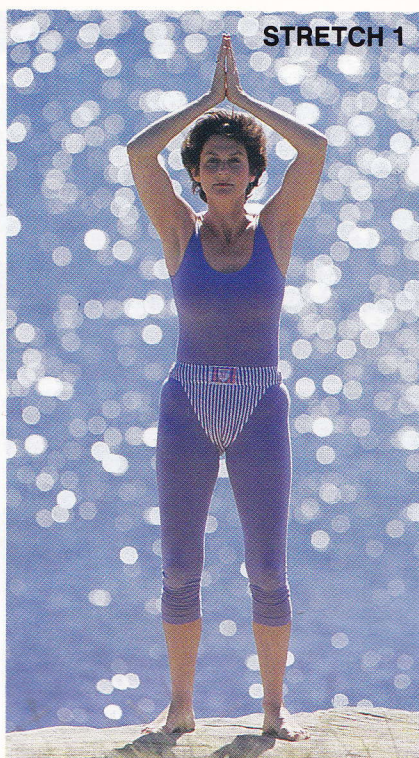
The ozone layer, that special layer in the atmosphere that encompasses our planet and protects us from ultra violet radiation is dangerously close to being destroyed. We can look after the ozone layer by avoiding aerosol cans and polluting the atmosphere with needless chemical waste. Then when we breathe deep, nature rewards us with her bounteous storehouse of loving energy which nourishes the body and the spirit and aids us in the journey to becoming finer and more conscious human beings, towards a wholesome way of life.

Prana is also extracted from food (living foods such as grains, legumes, seeds, nuts, fruits and vegetables) via the taste buds of the tongue. So it is important to chew your food well at meal-times and if possible to avoid drinking at the same time so that the digestive juices are not diluted and the accompanying metabolic processes work more efficiently.

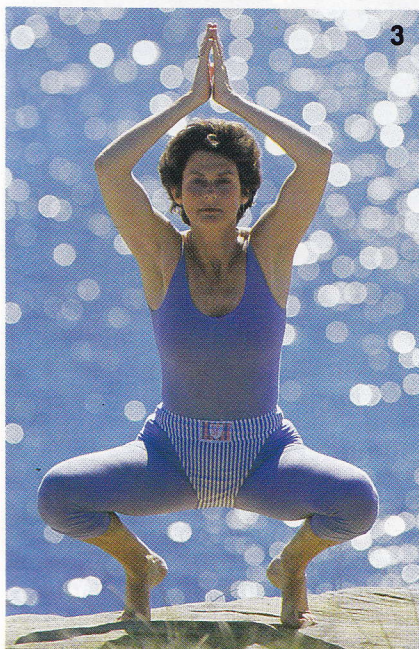
It's also worth knowing that many yoga asanas involve inverting the body (i.e. legs upward towards the sky). The reason for this is that some of the most important glands in our bodies are located in the neck (Thyroid and Parathyroid, responsible for well being and inner harmony), and Pineal, between the eyebrows, focus of spiritual awakening and responsible for interpolating the messages of experience in one's outer life and transforming them to inner knowledge. As well, the Pituitary which is located in the centre of the brain and is the master gland responsible for the integration of all other glandular activity.

When the body is inverted and the blood supply to these parts is increased, then increased glandular and circulatory efficiency into and involving these parts is increased. Brain function and thought processes are boosted, the perceptive faculties involved in assessing your life situation and creative works and relationships is enhanced and polished to a finer state of being. Not to mention the outer manifestation of this nourishment; the cells of your skin and complexion takes on a new glow, eyes become clear and all parts involved in the mechanics of the human form function like a well oiled machine. No stiff joints and sore backs upon awakening.

Now for the exercises. I have outlined a series of movements that can and should merge into each other like a form of dance and remember that each expansive or contractive movement is accompanied by the appropriate breathing. There are hundreds of asanas. The ones I have chosen are for those city dwellers, like myself, who want to keep well and healthy and to be able to make the most of each moment



STRETCH 1



3

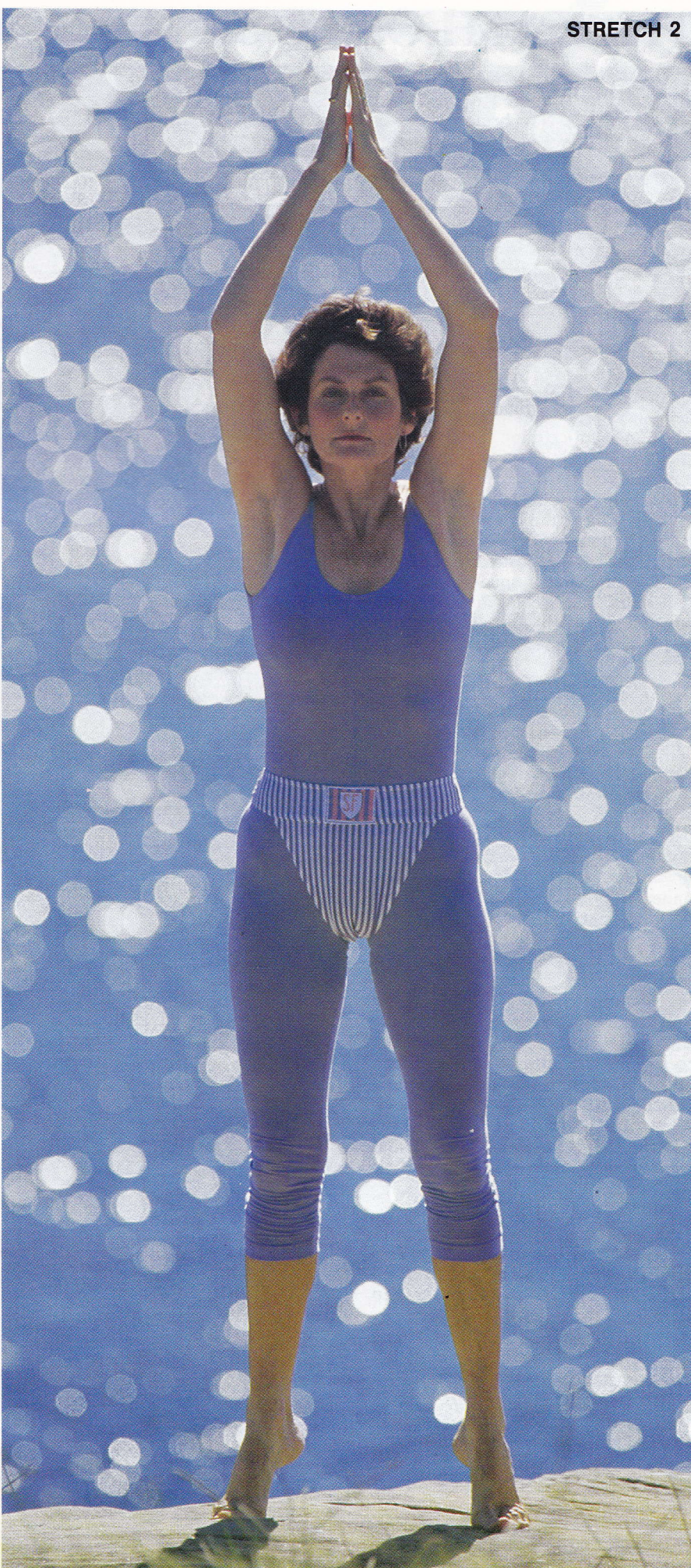
of each day and grow in a really beautiful way. So grab your sarong or any nice piece of natural cloth, something that's special for your magic carpet ride, and something that is easy to move in; be it shorts, swimming costume or leotard and start on the road to completion.

Exercises for stretching and slimming

These will give you a long lean look and strengthen every ligament and muscle from the tips of your toes up to your head.

Breathing in, place your hands in prayer position above your head and stretch as tall as you can onto your tip toes. Now stretch your arms and hands upward towards the ceiling and imagine you are pulling on a rope that will

Continued on next page



STRETCH 2

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take you towards safety. Your life depends on this ultimate stretch. Really S-T-R-E-T-C-H. Now bring your arms beside your body and exhale as you relax.

Tree Posture

This is one of the most potent meditational asanas in yoga. It should not be sustained for these purposes except for those who have mastered the ability to stand on one leg for several minutes without any discomfort. This is a truly wonderful asana. It will redefine the tops of your legs and take any nasty bulges away. It will improve flexibility of the hips, knees, ankles and is a wonderful calming exercise. Look at a point directly ahead of you (remember your third eye if using a mirror) and breathe deeply and rhythmically. Count the number of inhalations and repeat for the same length of time with the opposite leg.

If you are up to it, squat towards the floor with knees bent for additional work for and toning of the legs. Breathe in as you stand up and relax.

Inverted Pose

This posture is excellent for those times when you feel very tired or need a lift. The increased flow of blood to the head will release trapped toxins that may be preventing you from feeling and looking your best. Lying on your back, arms gently beside you, palms up, breathe out and raise your legs up towards the ceiling. Placing your hands under your hips to support them off the floor, look at your navel and breathe deeply in and out for as long as you feel comfortable. Five to ten minutes is most beneficial.

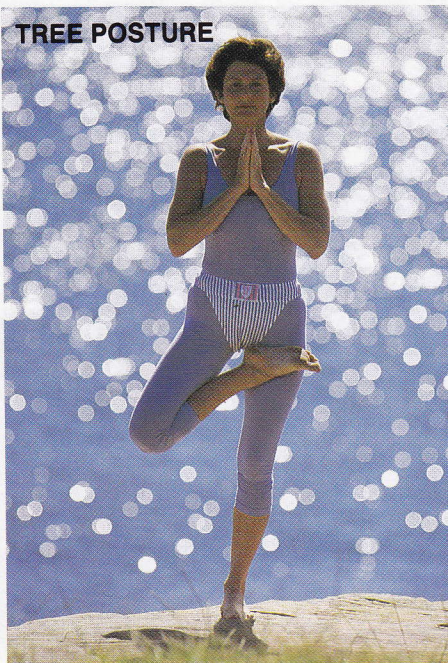
If you are comfortable holding the previous position, drop your spine a little and, breathing out, take your legs to a parallel position with your body and then towards the floor, touching the latter with the tips of your toes. This posture will strengthen the muscles and ligaments of the spine and legs and energise the system.

Halasana. Plough Posture

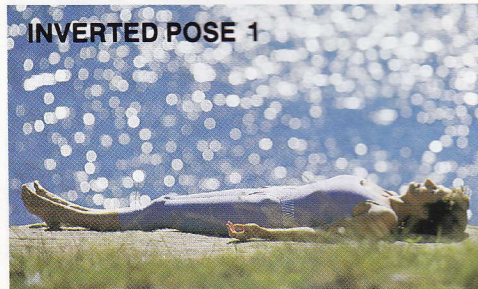
Stretch your hands towards your feet, breathing in and out gently. This posture exercises and nourishes all internal organs and will limber and strengthen the spine with regular practise. Also strengthens the abdominal region, aids digestion and elimination and energises the whole system. Providing you can manage this posture with little discomfort you are ready to proceed to the next pose.

This posture brings the spine into perfect alignment for the shoulderstand (sarvangasana — mother of asanas). Do not attempt shoulderstand unless you can hold this position with relative ease. With time and patience

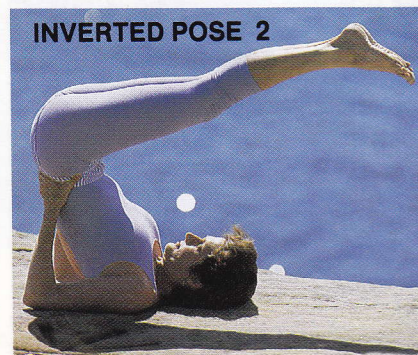
TREE POSTURE



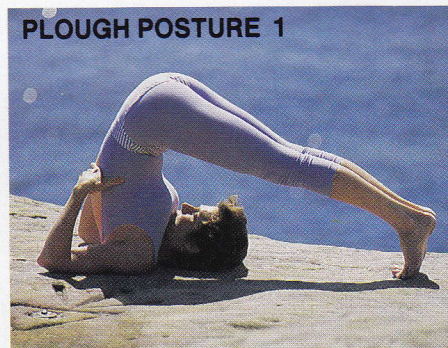
INVERTED POSE 1



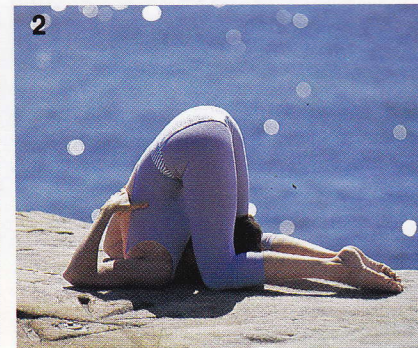
INVERTED POSE 2



PLOUGH POSTURE 1



2



SHOULDERSTAND



you will master it — especially with daily practise.

Shoulderstand

Chin firmly against the chest. Body in a straight line and at right angles to head and shoulders. Excellent for insomnia, headache and depression. Regulating weight and inner harmony. Eyes should be focused on the tip of the nose or the navel. Return to lying position retracing the same movements that took you to this asana. Relax, breathing deeply in and out for a few minutes before moving on to the next asana.

Now roll over onto your tummy for Locust Posture

A wonderful tonic for the kidneys by increasing adrenalin tones and energises the nervous system. Eases lower back pain.

Laying on your tummy with hands under hips and chin to the floor in front, raise your right leg as you breathe in, then lower it slowly as you exhale. Repeat with the left leg as you inhale and then drop it down as you exhale.

Now raise both legs together as you breathe in and gently lower them to the floor as you exhale. Relax, turning your head to the right side, breathing deeply in and out. Hands by your side.

Photos: Robbi Newmann

Cobra

This asana will strengthen the lungs and enlarge the chest cavity. A must for asthmatics and anyone suffering from back problems, it will strengthen the spine and adjust the vertebrae. Also stimulates energy levels and strengthens tummy muscles.

Laying down on your tummy with elbows bent and hands at shoulder level, chin to floor. Breathe in and raise the chest, neck and shoulders.

Stretching as far back as you can and holding the breath whilst you sustain the pose for a few seconds or as long as you feel comfortable. Then lower the body back to the floor as you exhale, still keeping the neck fully stretched. Just as a cobra would.

Now move into a position called the **Cat Stretch** which is a lovely follow through asana from the cobra. It will further assist to adjust the vertebrae in your back and tone your pelvic and abdominal muscles and organs. Breathe in as you raise your neck up. Hands stretched to the floor and on your knees.

As you breathe out and lower your head towards your tummy, pull your abdominal muscles up towards the rib cage as high as you can, then breathe in and let your tummy drop out as you raise your head and body back to the previous posture.

Complete Supine Diamond Posture

Relieves tension, sinusitis, bronchial and asthmatic complaints. Increases circulation to the pineal and pituitary glands and gives a wonderful stretch to the entire spine and chest cavity. Stimulates clarity of thought and clear headedness.

Sitting in Diamond Posture, i.e. on your knees, arms beside you, torso between your feet. Hands against the soles of your feet or on the floor beside you. Breathe in as you come back to resting on your elbows, breathe out, then as you take a deep breath in, arch your spine and head back towards the floor behind you and bring your hands into prayer position in the middle of your chest. As below illustration shows.

Return to the original position breathing out as you raise the body back up to Diamond posture. ☺

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