

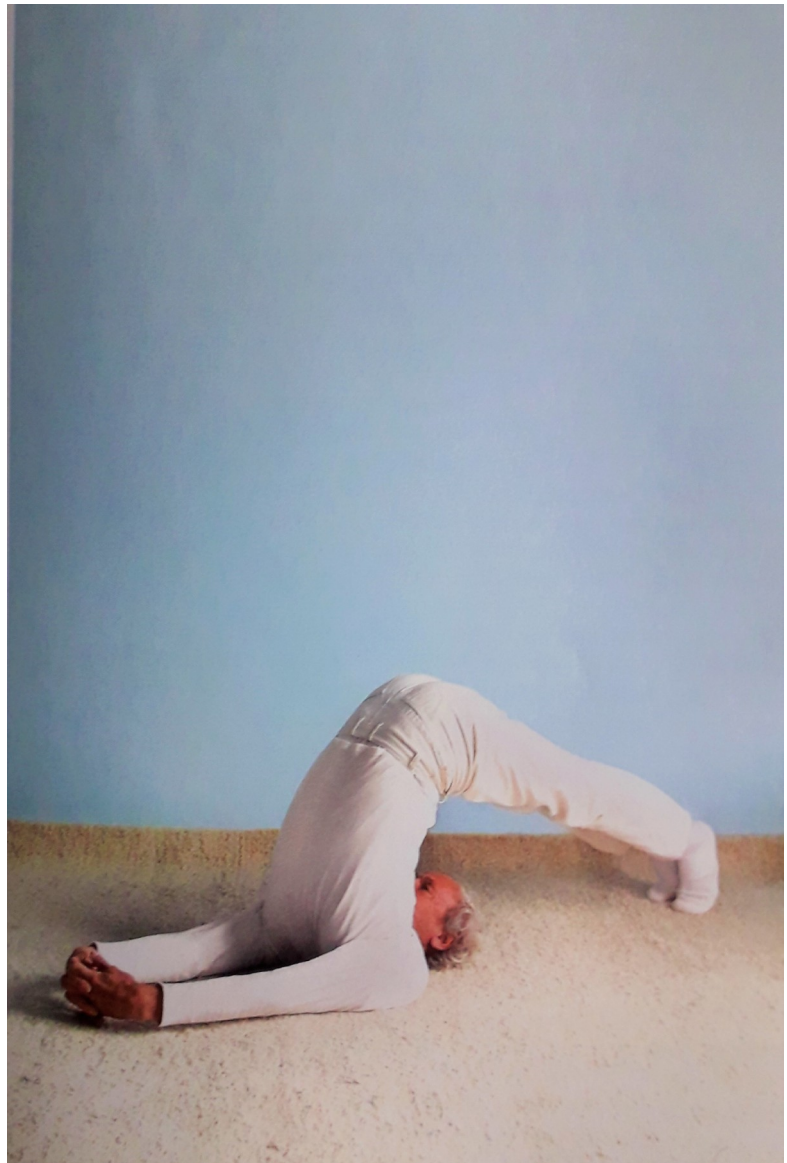
Differentiation, *visesya* The Plough and The Fish

"All is one!" This modern esoteric phrase almost tempts the meditator or yoga practitioner to think in a generalised way about the world, about the life of the soul and about the spirit. Although in their existence human beings demonstrate a unity between body, soul and spirit, their development requires that these individual planes are very precisely separated out and ultimately differentiated. The training of any recognition requires differentiated thinking and discriminating feeling. The comfortable view that the world and the spirit and the whole of humanity are one, would with time hinder relationship between people, while at the same time, if individuals did not train their recognition sufficiently, they would be unable to develop further skills and really integrate into the earth.

The two exercises suggested here should promote a very differentiated perception with respect to the body, and with respect to bodily sensation, and with respect to the individual limbs. During the practice, the consciousness is experienced in an alert overview and determines the movements in the very detail in which they are carried out.

The image of the first exercise is reminiscent of the form of a primitive, old wooden plough. It concerns an inverted pose in which the legs are guided over the head towards the ground. The plough breaks open the earth so that the seed can find new, fertile ground. The ground can be compared symbolically with the physical body, while the soul with its thinking, feeling and willing represents the sprouting seed. The spirit with its contents and thoughts moves the soul. The thinking and feeling work on the physical body. Neither the spirit nor the soul come from the physical body. This first recognition, that results from dividing up these planes, is essential for the practice of every single exercise, be it an anthroposophical exercise or an exercise of the New Yoga Will.

To carry out the exercise lie on your back on a soft blanket. The legs are closed, the hands rest next to your body with the palms on the ground. Breathe out consciously and at the same time raise your legs. Breathe in and in a generous movement take the legs over your head into the air.

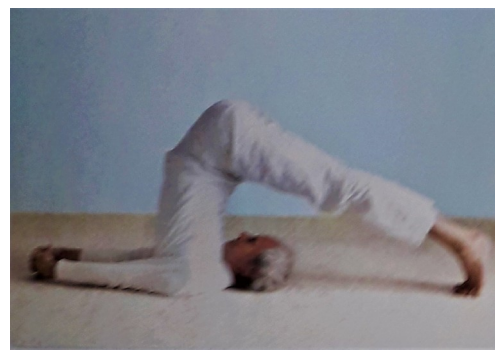


This movement of the legs should be consciously combined with the exhalation, as this ensures the natural depth of the breathing. Now in a slow, controlled movement guide the legs farther, lifting the chest upwards, until the toes finally touch the ground. If this is not yet possible then it is better initially to leave the legs in a half-way position that is possible for you.

In the classical pose, *halasana*, the legs are stretched through their full length, the arms are taken behind the back along the ground and the fingers are interlocked. The movement of the arms represents a kind of counter-movement to the legs. In a dynamic that complements the arm movement, the thorax should stretch out in the direction of the legs. Consciously continue to breathe during the movement. The longer you remain in the position the more the thorax adapts to the unusual position, becomes more dynamic, and the spine stretches out easily both upwards as well as outwards beyond the head. Take conscious care not to overstretch or overload the neck. If there is damage in this region the position should be done with great caution. Nevertheless, the differentiated nature of the movement enables the tension to be distributed better and more carefully so that you can feel your way gently into the movement.

Do not hold the position for too long in the final stage; 20 to 30 seconds are enough. The dynamic stages can be done for longer. Then return to the relaxation position on your back, or if the position is easy for you carry out the following variations:

In the plough lift the legs up once again and support your back with your hands. Guide your legs apart in an expansive stretch and once again activate your whole thoracic spine upwards, in other words towards your pelvis. Spread your legs as widely as possibly as this spreading literally pulls your back into the sought after lengthways stretch. The experience of the sides stretching towards the legs can help you to feel in a differentiated way.



With your hands gliding along the ground you can lead this movement still further up vertically, into a position similar to the shoulderstand.



Finally lower your legs to the ground out of the air until the toes touch the ground. Take hold of your toes and retain the stretch in the legs for a few seconds. The breath is led from the sides right into the depth in this position.



If you don't succeed in lifting your legs and pelvis to start with, you can assist this by gently rolling onto your back from the sitting position, as shown in the drawings.

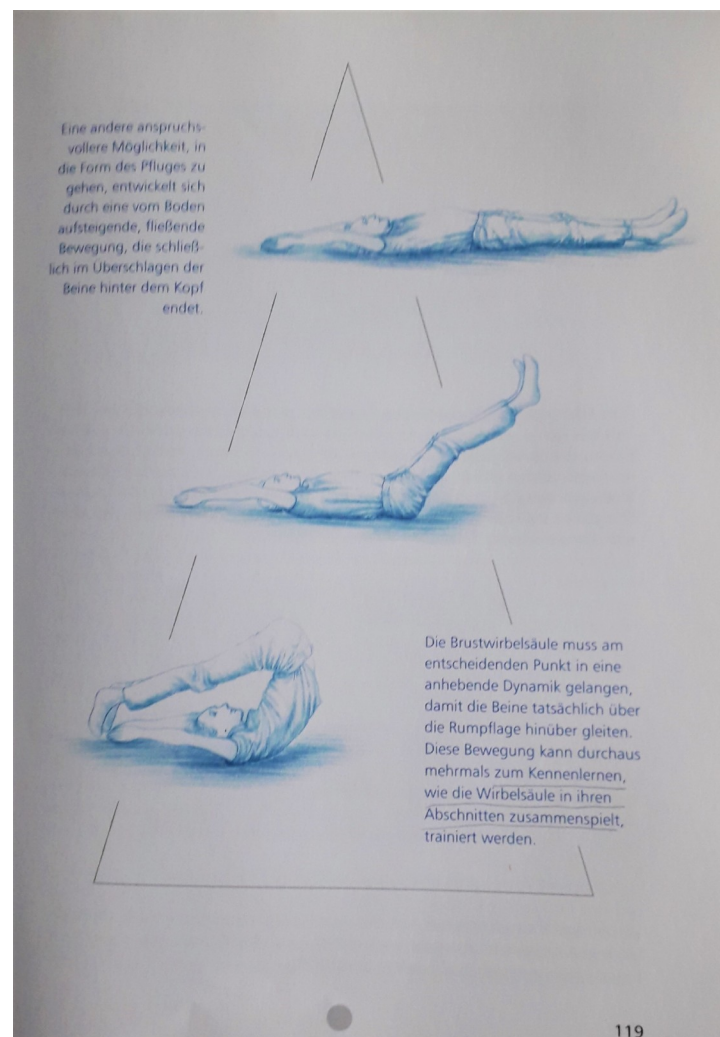


From the movement of falling and rolling back, the chest, hips and legs rise upwards in a kind of counter-movement.

Another more demanding way of getting into the form of the plough develops through a flowing movement that rises up from the ground and finally ends with a swing of the legs over the head.

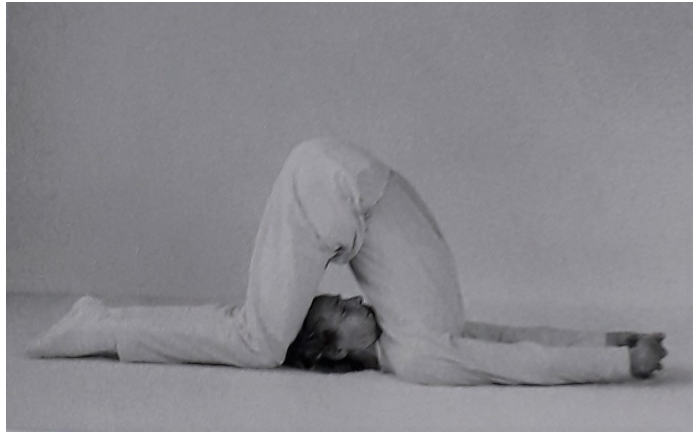
The thoracic spine must come into a dynamic that lifts the body up at the decisive point, so that the legs actually glide beyond the position of the trunk. This movement can well be practised several times in order to familiarise yourself with the way the different sections of the spine co-ordinate with each other.

A very advanced position can be practised if the spine is healthy and flexible. Stretch farther upwards, actively involving your thoracic spine, so that a strong dynamic flows downwards towards the legs, right to the feet and toes. Then from this



already advanced main position, lower the knees behind the head onto the ground. This advanced position should only be held for a few seconds so that the neck is not over-loaded.

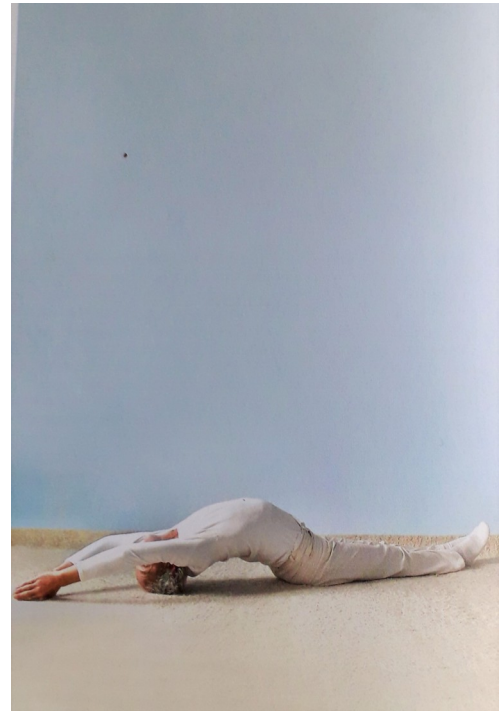
The plough position can be combined with the shoulderstand, as both exercises require the same starting position and are similar in their calm and yet inwardly-dynamic character.



A counter-image to *halasana*, the plough, is formed by "the fish", *matsyasana*. In this position, a very careful and differentiated perception of the whole body, including the cheek bones and the jaw, can come about. Start by lying on your back and take your hands under your buttocks. The legs are closed and remain relaxed throughout the exercise. Support yourself rising up onto your elbows, stretch your thoracic spine far upwards, raising and stretching through the chest to the maximum degree, and then while maintaining this degree tension in the thoracic spine, put the crown of your head back on the ground. A constant tension remains between the shoulder-blades during the one to two minute holding time, while all the other parts, the legs and also the neck, the jaw, remain relaxed. Nonetheless the legs do not lose their exact, closed form. The body feels very long and narrow in the position.

Always let the breath in the chest region flow easily and at the necessary speed. The body itself is nurtured and perfused by the breath, yet all limbs remain motionless and calm. The differentiated perception in respect of this body and in respect of the freely coming breath has the effect of strengthening the capacity of the consciousness to enhance the surroundings through an alert involvement that allows freedom.

A further variation of the fish can be done by placing the arms not underneath the buttocks but beyond the head and once again raising the chest dynamically, *dirgha matsyansana*. This long stretch while arching and lifting the chest up high enables a light, differentiated perception of the different parts of the body.



The technically detailed way of practising, with different processes of perception in respect of the body, makes it easy for those practising to recognise that the thoughts of human beings are free and the consciousness works on the body from outside inwards. Separating out the planes of body, soul and spirit enables a new step of recognition, and that is precisely the curious and seemingly paradoxical truth: The more the individual thoughts, feelings and impulses can be perceived as differentiated, and the more they can be discerned within the different planes, then the more they can be noticed in their collaboration and in their real connection and ultimately even in the way they belong together as a unity.

The therapeutic effect of this combination of the plough and the fish is to balance and lower the blood pressure. The thorough shaping in the plough, that results from the inverted movement and the thorough, deep breathing, expands the arterioles and promotes the circulation right to the ends of its regions of operation, while the fish accentuates more the sensitivity of the breathing and in this way refines and eases the stream of breath, and thus lifts it into the subtle feeling of free breath. A positive widening of the blood vessels is the reaction to both these forms of breath: to the thorough and penetrating deep breathing, which relieves pressure, and to the quality of the increasingly sensitive breathing, which brings about a lighter and freer and thus more relaxed bodily feeling.



In this movement too, for moments a very centred tensing can happen. However practitioners always maintain the stretch through the chest during the exercise.