

Openness and Centring

The sitting position

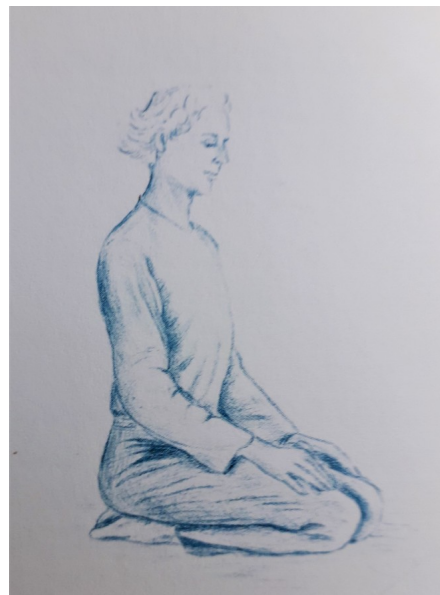
The sitting position on the ground is natural in India and is practised a lot. In these countries that are permeated and influenced by the spirit of yoga, this position causes most people no difficulty.

For the harmony of the sitting position, the techniques is of less significance than the whole attitude of consciousness. Pleasant and graceful is the picture of a person sitting on the ground, silently devoted to the surrounding space, without personally representing a closed off or dreaming reality. The spine supports itself vertically, gently impressive, yet remaining light and without strain; the legs and arms rest unmoved. The eyes remain either closed or unobtrusively open. The natural openness with its simultaneous centring announces itself in this posture through the connection of a humility with a sensitive participation in the external world.

However, in spite of the mental difference, the sitting position on the ground is also to be recommended for Westerners. During a calm concentration exercise or pause for reflection in the seated posture, subtle energies flow along the spine. The concentration increases with the consciousness and eventually captures the body in a form that purifies it and permeates it with light. With the legs the body is connected unobtrusively with the ground. The body is body and the breath is breath; both are a components and, in a sense, carriers of the earthly sphere. Feeling this differentiation, the spine can with time be straightened up effortlessly. The human spirit, in its thoughts with content, is not really the body; it may perhaps be reflected in the body but this spirit, in its existence of being, with the help of the free breath, remains unobtrusive, light and free from matter.

The simplest position is the kneeling position. Sit on your heels and place one hand in the other on your thighs. This position is simple but in terms of its subtle feeling it has the disadvantage that practitioners do not really experience a closeness to the ground with their legs or, with this, a calming signalled through the lower body. This position in its subtle feeling is more like a sitting position on a chair.

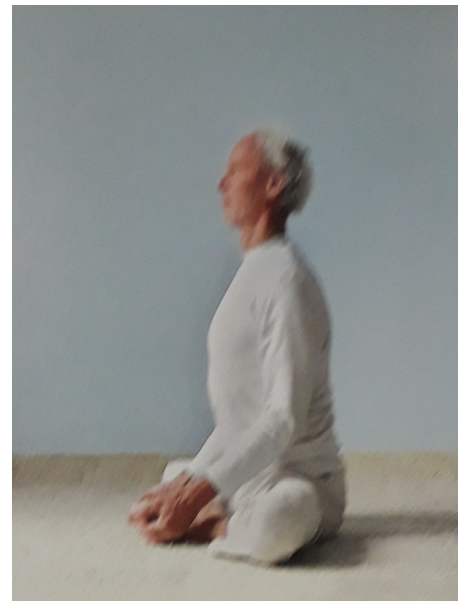
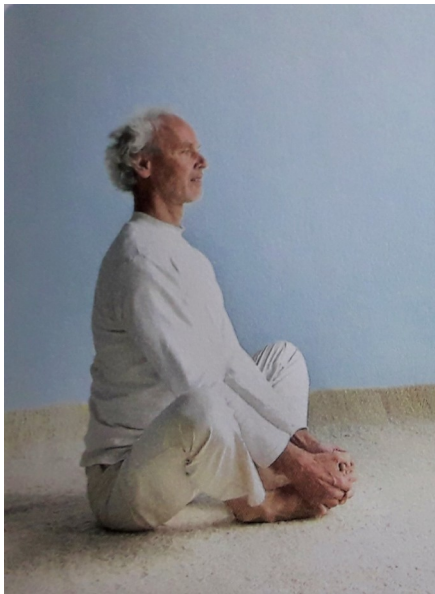
In contrast to the lotus forms, when kneeling practitioners are slightly raised. The subtle feelings have different sensitive qualities depending on the height, closeness to the ground or distance from the ground.



Those who are more advanced should choose the cross-legged position in whatever form is possible. In order to make it easier overall, it is recommended to use a firm cushion or folded blanket as an aid. By sitting with your buttocks a little higher than your legs, the spine gains a first freedom in straightening up. With increasing practice it eventually becomes possible to partially or fully dispense with the blanket and to practise the posture in a relaxed way.

A very advanced sitting position is presented by the half lotus. Pull one leg close to the inside of your thigh and place the other foot above your shin in your groin. Keep your body upright. In this position the leg region is centred towards the sacrum and the spine seeks the ever lighter levitation. Closeness to the ground and concentrated, light rising up join to form one sensitive entity of experience.

The full lotus is the progression from this and forms the classical meditation posture (see picture). The body rests very stably and connected on and with the ground; the spine can be straightened up effortlessly. In this posture attention and concentration increase. The closed form of the position give a pleasant subtle feeling of calm. Pictorially a person in lotus is on the one hand anchored in the earth and on the other hand straightened up vertically towards the cosmos. The soles of the feet look strangely upwards, while in everyday work they are directed downwards. A subtle feeling of being detached from the earth can be experienced in this position.



A natural training for the lotus can take place with the so-called butterfly movement with the legs. Practitioners press their heels together quite strongly and move their legs towards the ground.

While the heels press actively together, the pelvis contracts and the spine is pushed upwards out of the sacrum. Closeness to the ground and a vertical line describe the essential subtle feelings of this preparatory exercise.

In all lotus forms the body rests stably and connected on and with the ground.

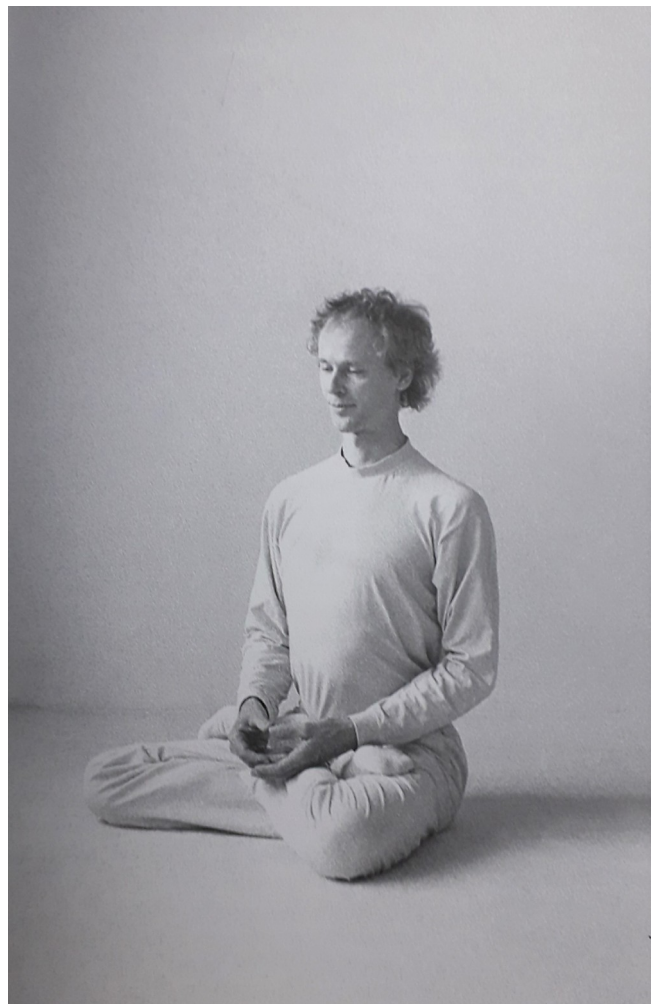
Place your right foot in your groin. Make sure that your right knee remains on the floor. Proceed carefully and without forcing. Cross your left leg over the right. To start with hold this position for a few minutes, until eventually you can remain in it without pain for up to fifteen minutes.

Learning the half or full lotus happens by actively making the hip joint more flexible. The hip joint is the largest joint in the body and enables the legs to be lowered to the floor. Avoid pressing on the knees to prevent injury.

The centring happens on the one hand through the freely allowed breath and on the other hand through consciously straightening up and maintaining mental thought-pictures. Practitioners do not sink back into themselves dreaming but remain in a concrete activity. They are not, as people think, empty within, rather they are highly active in thought and content, while the body nevertheless remains entirely united with the physical conditions in this posture. The body becomes earth, the breath in its free swinging and rhythm further calms the bodily world.



The classical picture of the lotus from the oriental traditions describes the body resting on the ground while the head is raised perfectly freely like a flower. With its flower the lotus plant swims in the water and with its root it is deeply integrated in the pond. The calm seat on the ground should become felt, because it sensitises the breath and gently frees the breath from the body.



This chapter is taken from the book
“Der Freie Atem” by Heinz Grill.