

Preserving expansiveness in the thought

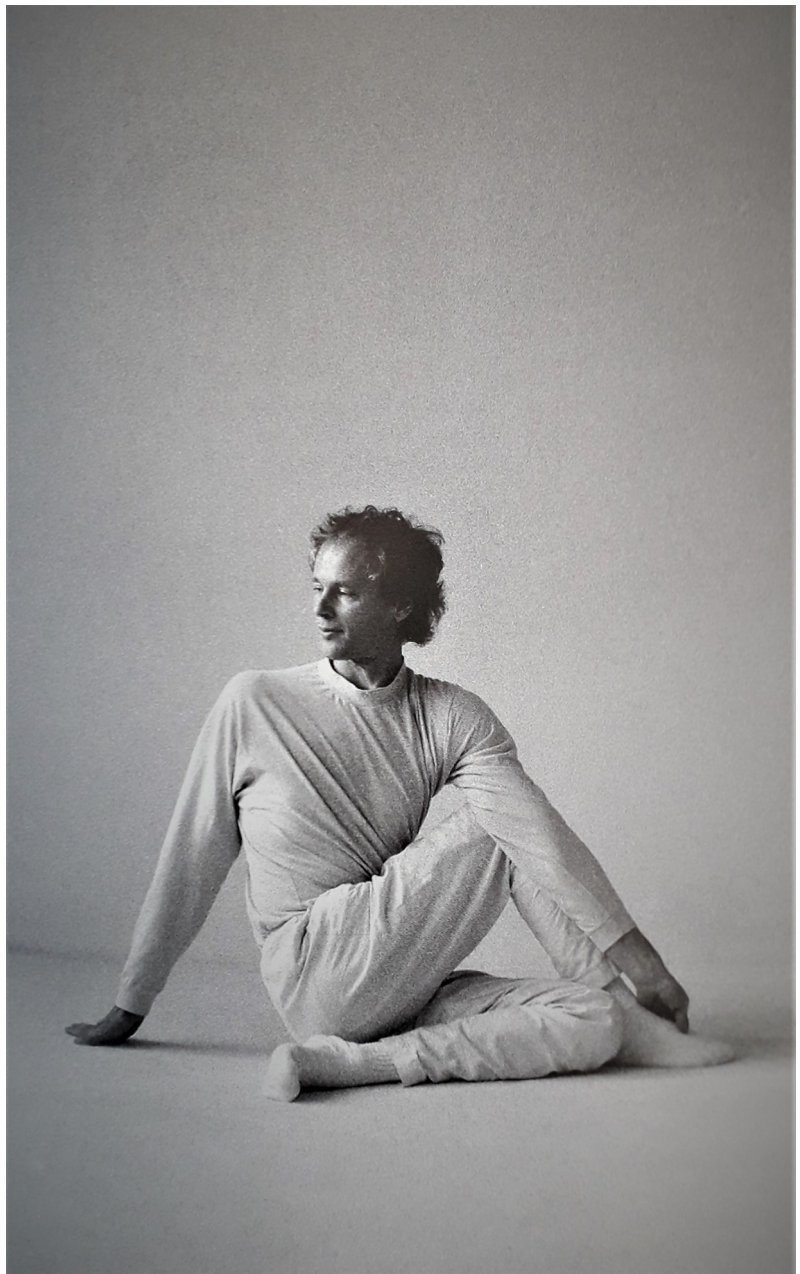
The sitting twist and the cow's face

In conventional daily life, the attention constantly flows outwards through the senses, which are unconsciously bound to the will. That dimension, which is named as soul and consciousness within the attention, is almost always masked by this driving will orientation belonging to the senses. Through the exercises, however, a consciousness comes about for the individual limbs of human existence, like for example the body, and the soul life that works on it, and finally for the spirit that exists in thought contents.

For example, if we close our eyes for just one short moment, we clearly feel the unrest of the thinking. The consciousness is not free, but is occupied by the everyday impressions and above all by emotions, wishes and perhaps fears. Working towards *samadhana*, inner calm, is a very important step with every soul activation and above all with the intention for an exercise. By perceiving our own thinking, feeling and wanting, and shaping these further with the exercise, a first "expansiveness and freedom" arises in the thinking.

This exercise cycle leads to a first conscious perception of the thought in relation to the physically freely swinging breath. By experiencing this relationship between thinking and breath through observation and concentration, energies are centred directly along the spine and into the spinal cord. The experience of a growing personal strength and of calmness is induced with this mental orientation. Pictorially, practitioners reach out wide into the external world, move their arms, feeling their way into the sphere. They return, allow their movements to come to a calm form and yet retain the observation of the breathing in relation to their own thoughts.

A harmonious and stabilising movement is formed out of the expansiveness of the consciousness with simultaneous awareness and free gesturing of the breath. The sitting twist, *matsyendrasana*, is one of the classical yoga positions, which exists in various difficult variations. Out of the spacial thought picture, the movement is led in a precise way into a clear form.

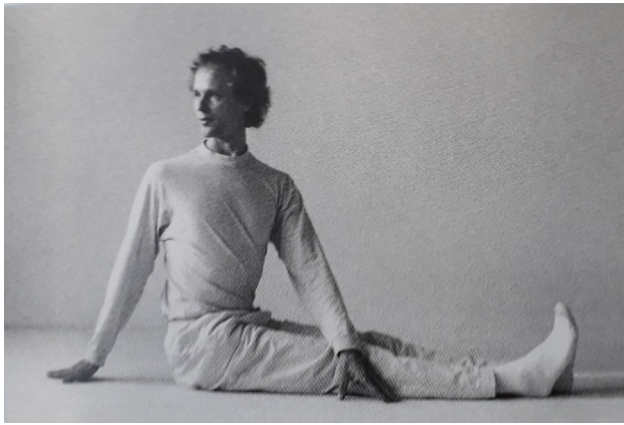


However, this short cycle will be introduced with another exercise, which enables a detailed experience of the spine in some flexibility. Adopt a base in the form of an equilateral triangle. Stretch far upwards, relax your upper body and then, gliding dynamically outwards, bend farther and farther forwards and slowly downwards. The head approaches the ground and the hands still glide in the air like wings.

The dynamic extension of the spine does not happen in a linear direction of movement; it develops much more out of counter-movements, gliding out and forming themselves anew, which are carried out in a gentle way with the upper spine towards the head. In this way, the spine is consciously worked and mobilised in all sections and the arms give a traction outwards so that the breath space is constantly expanded.

Consciously experience the upper thoracic spine and the lower part of the neck. This section of the spine, which is often so ignored and no longer perceived, should actively shape the exercise by lightly lifting up and stretching out. Give yourself time for this introductory exercise and do it far enough that you can eventually reach a final position with the hands on the ground in a wide triangle.





This preparation leads on harmoniously to the twist of the spine about its own axis, in the way it happens in all forms of the sitting twist. The easiest form of twist in this sitting position is also still suitable for older people and takes place with an upright spine and straightened legs. It serves as a good preparation for the next, more difficult position.

Begin, then, for the main pose of the half spinal twist kneeling on your heels. Sit on the ground to the right of your legs and place your left foot over your right knee. Carefully straighten up your spine starting from the sacrum. In order to facilitate this straightening up, it is helpful to support the left hand next to the body and to bend the right arm against the bent up thigh. Turn the head to the left.

Pay attention to the even height of the shoulders, relax them, and remain in this preparation until you sense the feeling of relaxation combined with uprightness. Then in a great big movement raise your arms up, stretch more intensively, but leave the head and face completely relaxed. Then from this height, reach over your leg with your right arm, pressing against your knee, and take hold of your left foot. From the extensive movement of the upright body and the arms which reach back out of the space, comes the forming of the body. In Sanskrit this pose is called *ardha matsyendrasana*, the half spinal twist. It can be further developed into numerous variations, often very challenging in terms of difficulty.

Hold this position on each side for around one to three minutes. Then return again to the kneeling position.

Before the sitting twist adopts its ultimate motionless form, the arm glides far outwards. Gliding out with the arm demonstrates the expansiveness of the consciousness and the free gesturing of the breath.

The seat must be a seat. The sitting calmly approaches the ground and can be felt as a base.

This position is already very difficult as it requires great flexibility in the hips. The twist takes place in the middle of the back at the level of the thoracic spine, while in the classical form of the sitting twist the movement rises up more from below.

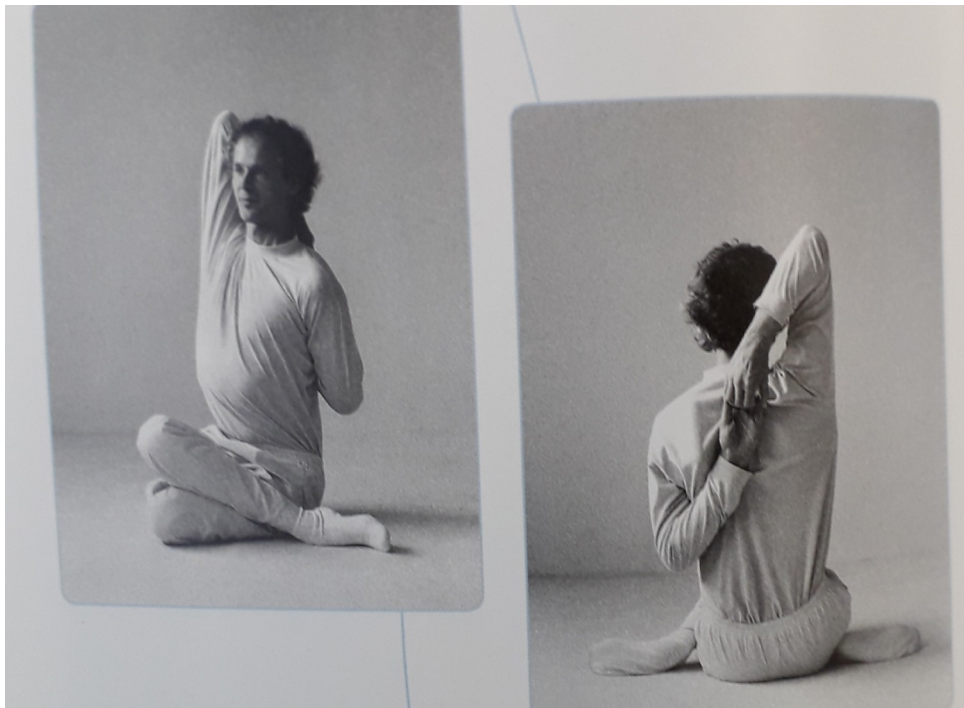


For an advanced practice, some further very difficult variations of the sitting twist can be described. In the starting position pull your crossed leg as far back as possible and take hold of it from behind on the opposite side. In a big movement the second arm swings up, presses the bent up leg to the side and takes hold of the knee. The twist takes place about the axis once again, the head remains free.



An even more difficult position forms the initial starting point for *purna matsyendrasana*, the full spinal twist. A requirement for this is the lotus position. Bend the left leg into the lotus and place the right leg over the left knee. Straighten up as far as possible out of the sacrum, stretching the spine up as high as possible. In a big, wide movement, the left arm is now led into the forming process until the right foot is taken at its outer side. The right arm is supported behind and keeps the balance. From a physical perspective this position shows a great concentration. It seems closed, while the head perceives this extreme form in a free oversight and clarity. The centred breathing in this position leads to an intensive movement of the cerebrospinal fluid pressure in the spine.

A next position, which it makes sense to combine with the sitting twist, is *gomukhasana*, which literally means the cow's face.



To do this pose, now sit to the left of your legs on the ground and place your right leg over the left thigh. Both feet face backwards, the knees are placed one on top of the other. Straighten up so that your spine and head are upright and become aware of the geometry of this position. From the cosmic space the human being is born and this cosmic space forms itself in specific movements to become a picture in the earthly realm. Move the arms widely and become conscious of this vast external space. The sphere of air surrounds the body.

Take your right arm down out of the vastness and reach with your hand behind your shoulder, so that this hand lies against the back of the shoulder-blades. Also take the left arm down out of the vastness and take hold of the fingers of the right hand from above. Gently pull with both arms in each vertical direction. The breath is allowed to swing freely. Consciously keep the head and spine erect.

The mental picture that the thinking is free from the breath and the breath swings freely in respect of the body, is highly recommended as a content both for the sitting twist and also for the "pose of the face". The thought lives from the moment in which it is consciously thought and maintained.

The movement of the outer realm has come to a complete standstill. Also forget the tension in the arms and remain in observation of the freely flowing breath and the thought being thought. The breathing comes and goes and remains like a natural supply for the physical body. The spirit nevertheless shines independently in thoughts.

After some time release this hand position again and feel your way with your hands into the vastness of the space. The arms seem like the tools which experientially feel the cosmos in its space. The spine holds the head upright as a stable and resting pole. Then lead your left hand between the shoulder-blades and take hold of it from above with the right hand. Leave your eyes open and hold the position again in the consciousness with the respect to the breath and the thought, which is free from the breath. Change the legs around and practise this position once again with each hand position.

If it is not possible for you to take hold of your fingers behind your back, you can hold on to your sweater and slowly walk your hand along it until the fingers are touching. The kneeling position on your heels can also be taken as an alternative leg position. However, the position is then not as intensive from an energetic respect.

The stabilising effect of the sitting twist happens less through the physical practice, but rather through the power of concentration, which develops through the process of differentiation and maintaining a mental picture while practising. The building of protein in the metabolism can take place in an extremely sensitive and co-ordinating way when this differentiation, between a free thought and the body, happens. In general these positions have the effect not only of stabilising the subtle feeling-activity of the mind, but also of strengthening the immune system.

This extract is taken from the book der Freie Atem, by Heinz Grill.