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Eighteen-Week Yoga Plan Ian Jackson

I have selected the asanas that seem to me to be excellent for runners. Since I am a beginner, my range of choice is severely limited. There are several advanced poses that Iyengar specifically recommends for runners. About one of these, *hanumanasana*, he writes, "This pose helps to cure sciatica and other defects of the legs...and if practiced regularly is recommended for runners. It relaxes and strengthens the abductor muscles of the thighs." The only problem is, the pose has a difficulty rating of 36, so I cannot demonstrate it for you. It's the kind of thing we can keep in mind for later, when these basic positions have long ago been discarded for more intense stretches.

The sequence suggested here should be patiently observed. The time to be spent on each section is a *minimum*. If you desire, you can spend months rather than weeks. You don't have to achieve the final positions of one section before going on to the next, but you should not move on until you feel reasonably comfortable and competent. You'll notice the sanskrit names of the poses. I do this as a reminder that hatha yoga is radically different from the forms of exercise that we are familiar with. I find that repeating the sanskrit names of the poses before doing them helps to get me in the right frame of mind. My pronunciation is probably all wrong, and I often have to refer back to the book to check myself, but (for me at least) this little ritual is a transition to concentrated attention.

You'll probably find yourself very stiff and sore in the beginning. I think it takes a few painful experiences to learn a healthy respect for these powerful stretches, so you should look upon your early problems as a helpful part of your progress. Don't hesitate to take a few days off whenever you overdo things. It might even be a good idea at first to take

a day off each week. I find that an occasional day of doing only the easiest poses seems to bring faster progress.

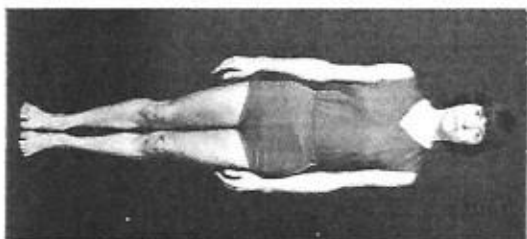
You'll find the "alphabet" on the following pages. Why not start right now? Stay on each section for at least three weeks. You should never feel you are taking on more than you can handle. If you practice regularly and patiently, you'll amaze yourself. In a few months time, you'll find it hard to believe that these asanas once seemed difficult.

- Section I—*asanas* 1 through 7
- Section II—*asanas* 1 through 9
- Section III—*asanas* 1 through 12
- Section IV—*asanas* 1 through 14
- Section V—*asanas* 1 through 15
- Section VI—*asanas* 1 through 18

Note: although these pictures are good guides, they should not be taken as perfected postures. There are numerous ways to approach each posture, and each time the final pose may be slightly different. Your own body will vary the pose also. The best guide is a well-trained teacher.



UTTHITA TRIKONASANA
1 Triangle Pose DIFFICULTY LEVEL 3



A. All standing postures begin in *Tadasana*, the mountain. Stand with toes touching, heels apart about one inch. The kneecaps are pulled up by tightening the thighs. The spine is as long and as straight as possible. The neck is straight.

B. Jump so that feet land about 3-3½ feet apart, arms straight out from the shoulders, palms down.

Benefits: This posture tones the leg muscles by stretching the calves and hamstrings. It also strengthens the ankles, removes stiffness in the hips, and develops the chest.



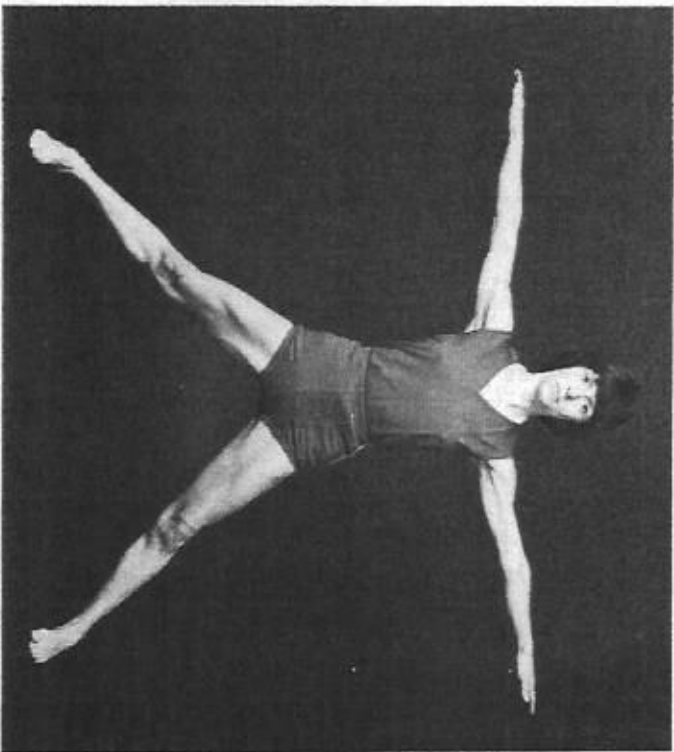
C. Turn left foot 90 degrees to the left, right foot 60 degrees to left. Exhale. Bend at the hip socket and stretch out to the left. Keep the sides of the body long. Knees are locked by pulling up kneecaps.

D. Place left hand on leg. Stretch right arm up in line with left. Twist the body so that the left ribcage comes forward and the right ribcage moves back. Turn head and gaze at the right thumb.

Hold position 30-60 seconds, breathing deeply and evenly. On inhalation, return to upright position (B). Then jump to standing position (A). Repeat exercise on right side.

UTTHITA PARSHVAKONASANA

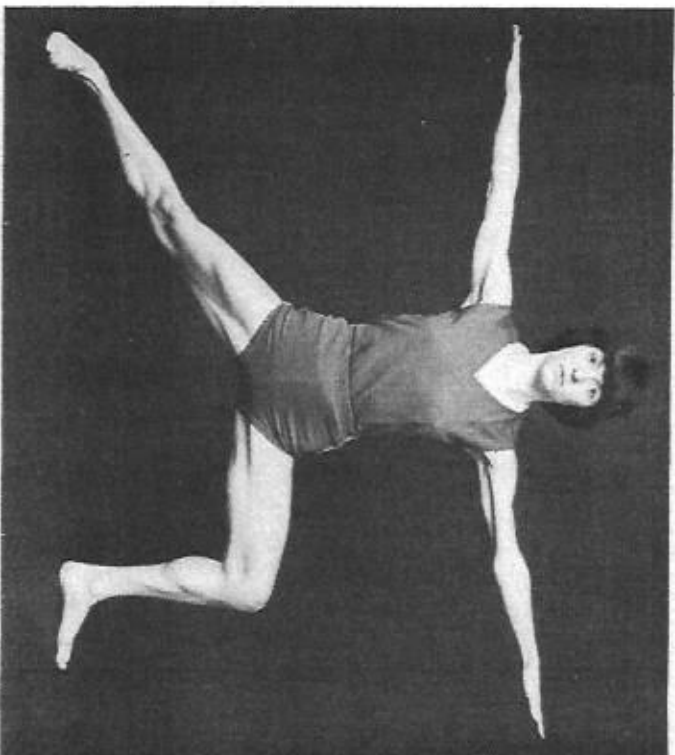
2 Side Stretch DIFFICULTY LEVEL 4



A. Begin in Tadasana (1A). Inhale and jump the legs 4 1/2 feet apart, arms extended straight out from shoulders.

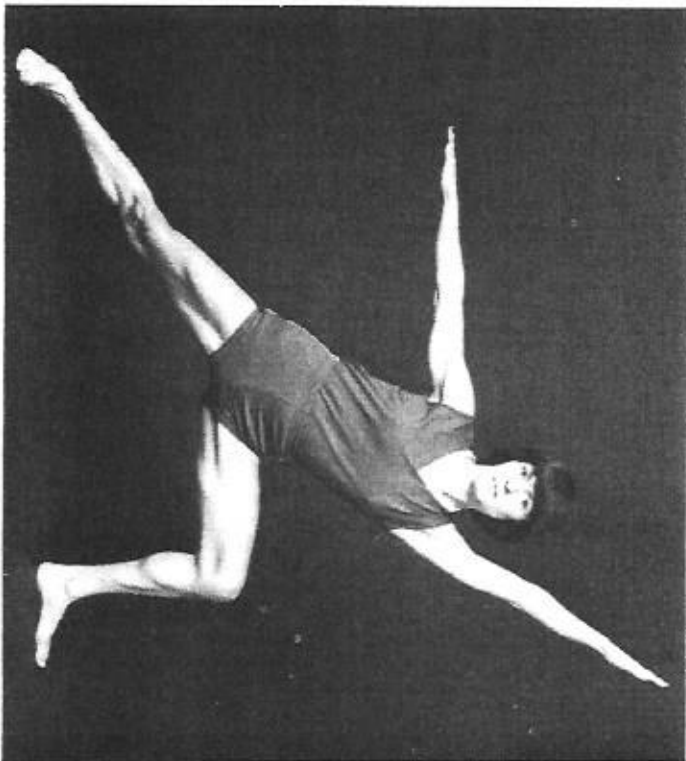
palms down. Turn left foot 90 degrees to left, right foot slightly to left.

Benefits: This pose strengthens and stretches ankles, knees and thighs, particularly works on the calves and thighs.

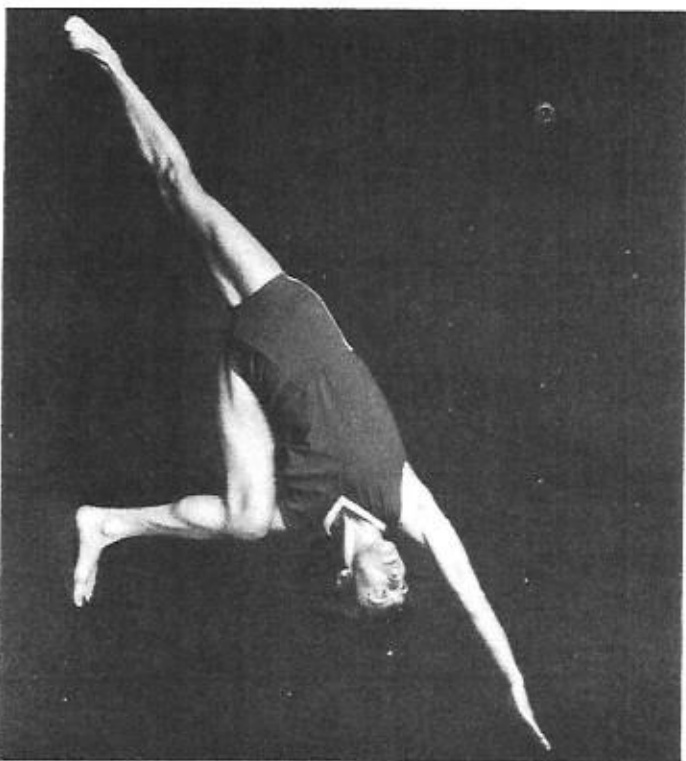


B. As you keep the torso straight, and the right heel on the floor, bend the left leg to form a right angle, thigh parallel to floor.

UTTITHA PARSHVAKONASANA



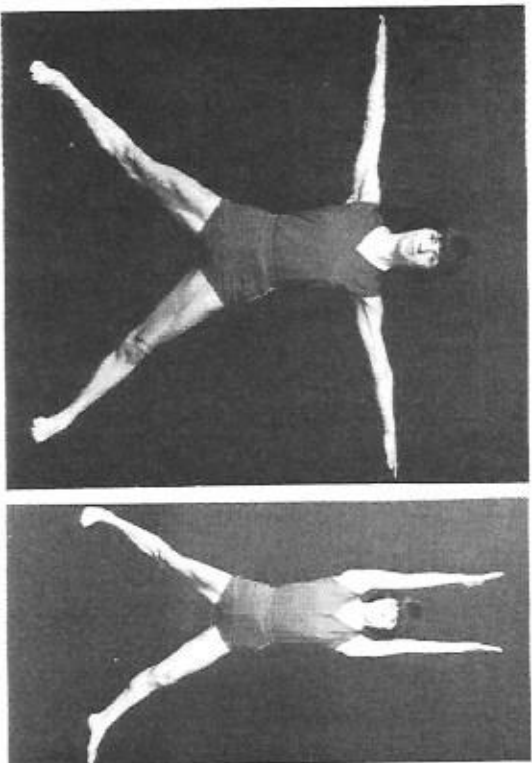
C. Bending at the hips, stretch the left side out on the left thigh.



D. Place left hand on floor eyes on right elbow. Move alongside left foot. Armpit right arm to left keeping touches outer side of knee, both heels on the floor. Stretch and straighten right arm over right ear. Keep tight. Stretch so the skin is pulled

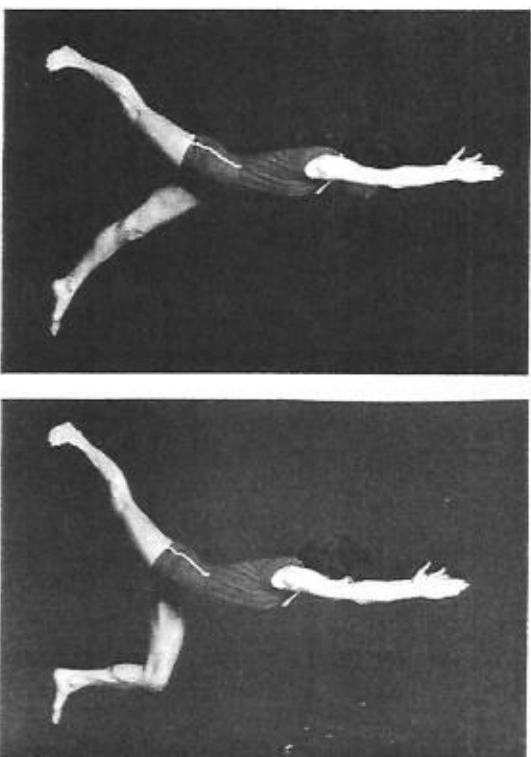
Hold position 30-60 seconds, breathing deeply and evenly. Come up from pose with inhalation. Repeat on other side.

VIRABHADRASANA I
3 Fencer's Pose (I) DIFFICULTY LEVEL 3



A. Begin in Tadasana (1A). Jump the legs 4-4½ feet apart (2A).

B. Turn left foot 90 degrees to left, turn right foot slightly to left. Stretch arms above head, palms in, your shoulders down.



C. Exhale and turn to left. Keep the knees locked by tightening the thighs. Keeping the spine long, bring the right side forward enough to face in same direction as left foot.

D. Bend the left knee to form a right angle. The bent knee is in line with the heel. Keep the right heel on the floor. Stretch spine and arms. Lift head and gaze at palms.

Benefits: Here again the legs are being stretched and strengthened. The forward leg is being stretched particularly in the Achilles. The backward leg lengthens in the calf and in the front of the groin.

VIRABHADRASANA II

4 Fencer's Pose (II) DIFFICULTY LEVEL 1



A. Legs 4-4½ feet apart. Stretch arms straight out.



B. Turn right foot 90 degrees to right and left foot slightly to right.



C. While keeping the torso straight, bend the right knee to form a right angle. Stretch left leg, tighten knee, making certain the outer edge of the foot is on the floor.



D. Exhale. Stretch arms as if two people are pulling them in opposite directions. Turn head and gaze at right hand.

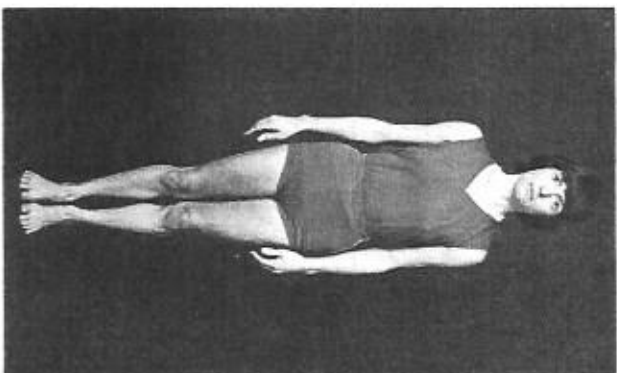
Hold position (D) 20-30 seconds with normal breathing. Exhale. Return to starting position. Repeat on other side.

Benefits: This pose gives shape to the legs and increases strength. It not only stretches the legs but helps to relieve cramps in the calf and thigh muscles.

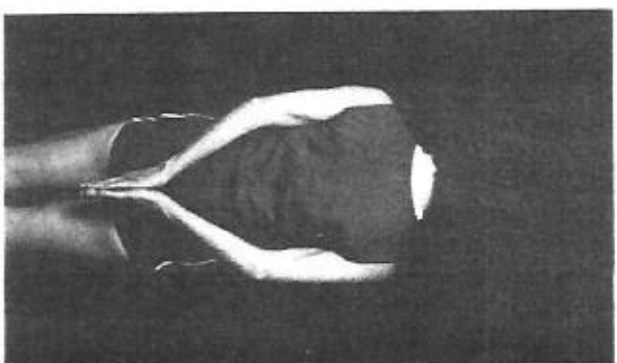


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5 Intense Side Stretch DIFFICULTY LEVEL 5



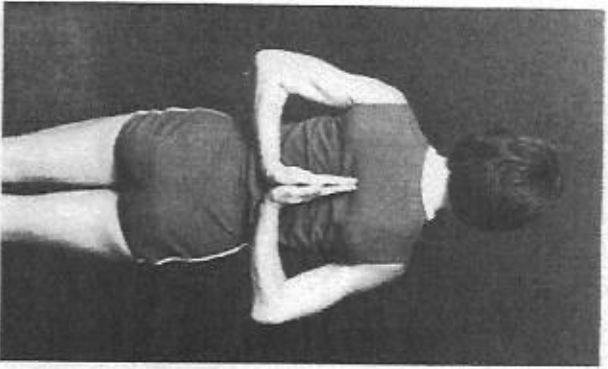
A. Begin in Tadasana.



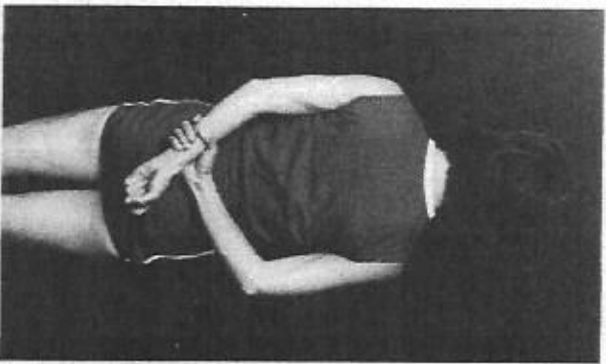
B. Bring the palms up together behind the back.

Benefits: This posture relieves stiffness in the legs and hip muscles and gives greater flexibility to the hip joints and spine. Done correctly it also corrects round and drooping shoulders.

PARSHVOTTANASANA



C. Twist the arms, bringing fingers up between shoulder blades. Press the palms flat against each other.



D. Or, if you find B impossible, hold one wrist with the other hand.

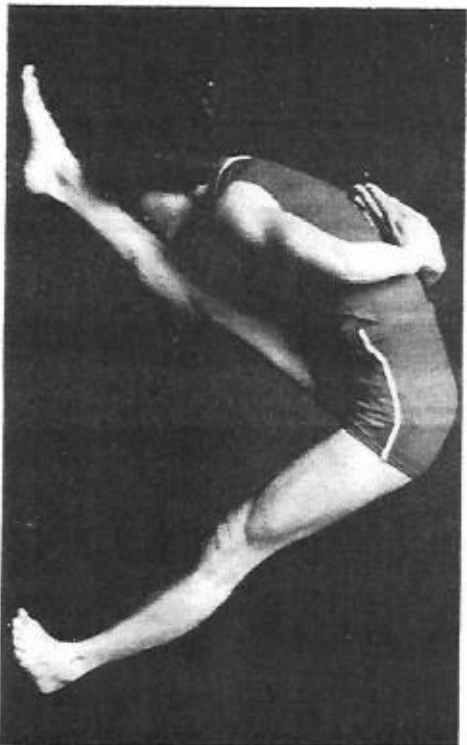


E. Exhale, jump the legs apart 3-3½ feet. Turn right foot 90 degrees to right and left foot 75-80 degrees to right.



F. Inhale and turn trunk to right. Tighten the buttocks to keep the spine long. Bring the left side forward to face in same direction as right foot. Keep both legs straight and tightened at knee.

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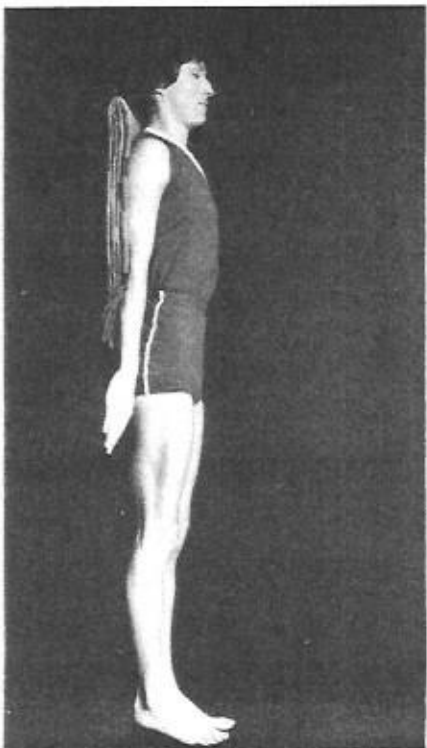


G. Exhale. Keeping both heels on floor, bend forward at the hips with the back straight. Bring the torso parallel to the floor and hold for a couple of breaths.

H. Exhale and bend lower, trying to rest the forehead on the lower leg. Keep both knees tight. Inhale. Straighten. Repeat on other side.

SALAMBA SARVANGASANA

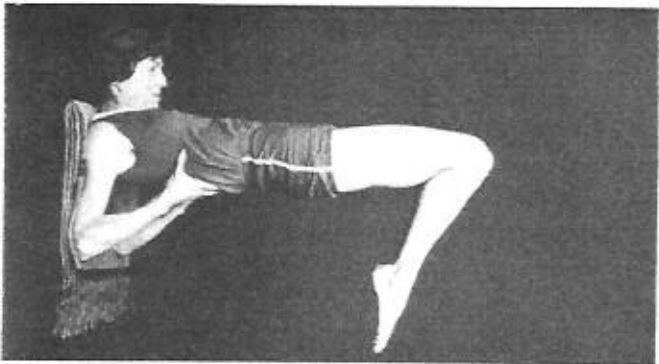
6 Shoulder Stand DIFFICULTY LEVEL 2



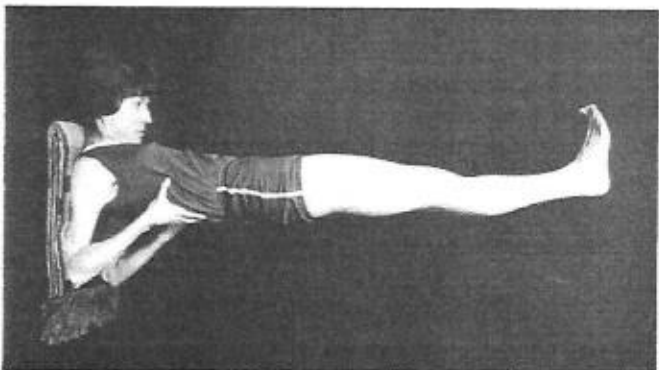
A. Place a folded towel (carpet or mat) under shoulders so that the shoulders are elevated. The head is on the floor. Lie on back. Stretch legs, tighten knees. Hands, palms down, by side of legs.

B. Exhale. Bend the knees, bring thighs up to rest on stomach.

Caution: People with high blood pressure should not do this pose without advise from a teacher.



C. Exhale, raise knees up. Press the hands into the back and move the trunk to a vertical position. Bring the elbows toward each other for stronger support.

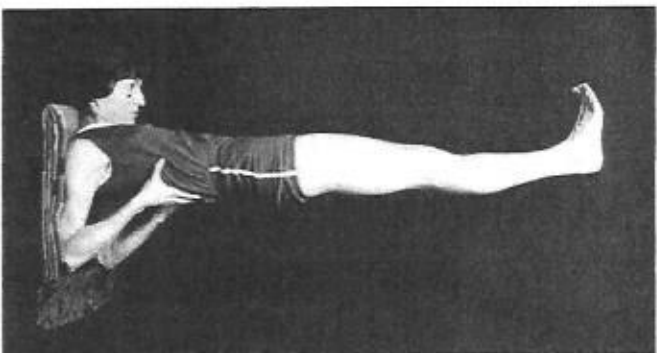


D. Exhale and stretch legs straight up. As the trunk becomes more vertical, the hands move toward the floor. Tighten knees and buttocks, make the torso as straight as possible.

Hold position (D) 5 minutes with even breathing.

Benefits: The shoulder stand is one of the most beneficial poses in yoga. Because it reverses the effects of gravity much of the body is revitalized. The pose stimulates the thyroid and parathyroid particularly. An added supply of blood circulates into the head and the upper body. The shoulder stand is known as the pose of relaxation and will calm the nerves while refreshing the body.

7 The Plough DIFFICULTY LEVEL 4



A. Start with the shoulder stand.



B. Keep the torso straight, lower the legs over the head. The feet are arched back, as though standing on them.

Benefits: Besides the internal circulatory effects of being upside down, this posture particularly benefits runners, as it stretches the hamstrings and brings mobility to the back, neck and shoulders.

HALASANA



C. This posture stretches the entire back side of the body. If there is difficulty in getting the feet to the floor with the back straight, then place a chair behind the head and rest the toes on it.

D. If possible, continue to lower the feet to the floor. The kneecaps are tight, the buttocks high.



E. Alternate to this arm position, and then . . .

F. . . . to this one.

Hold position (D) 1-5 minutes with normal breathing.