

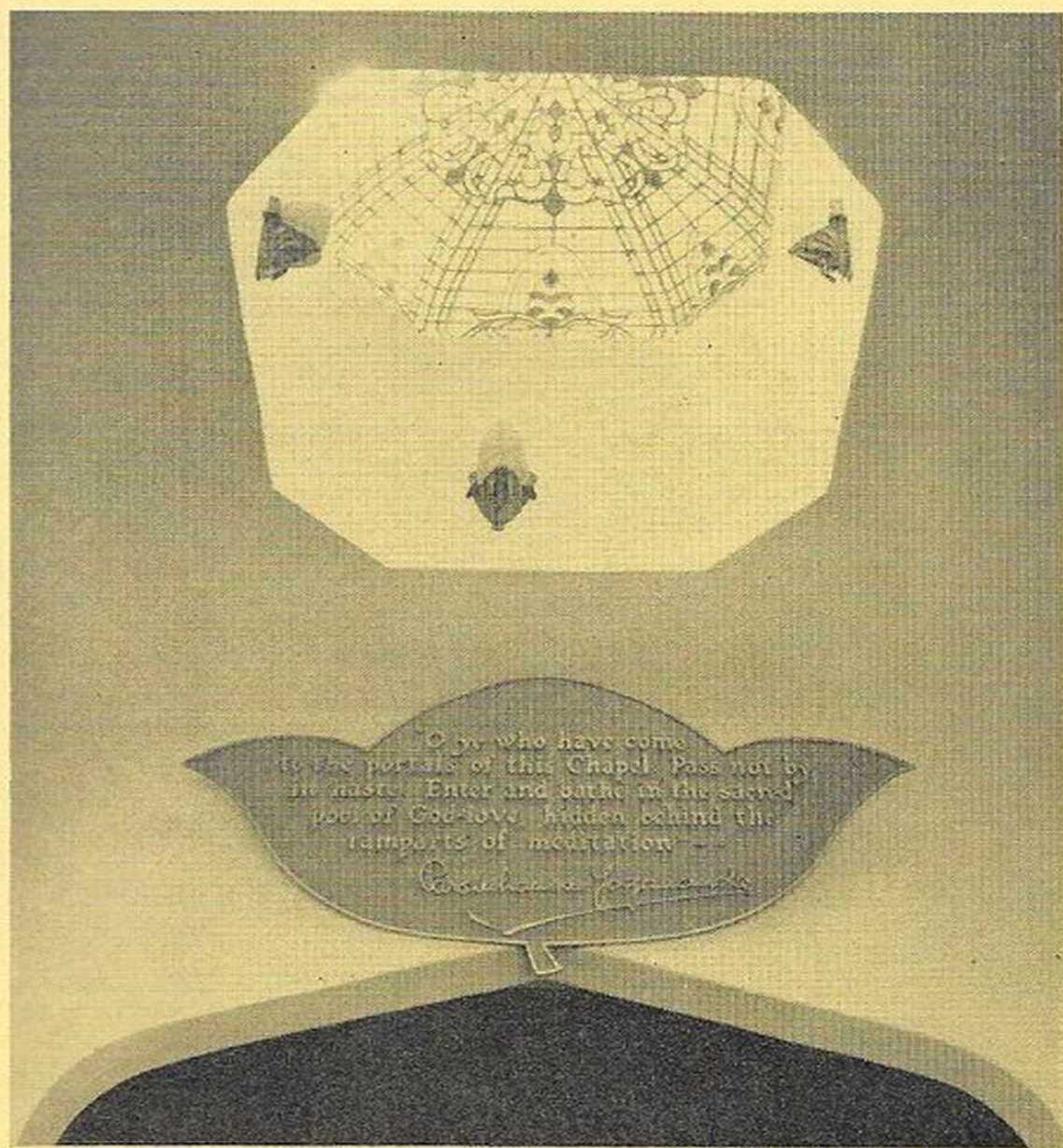
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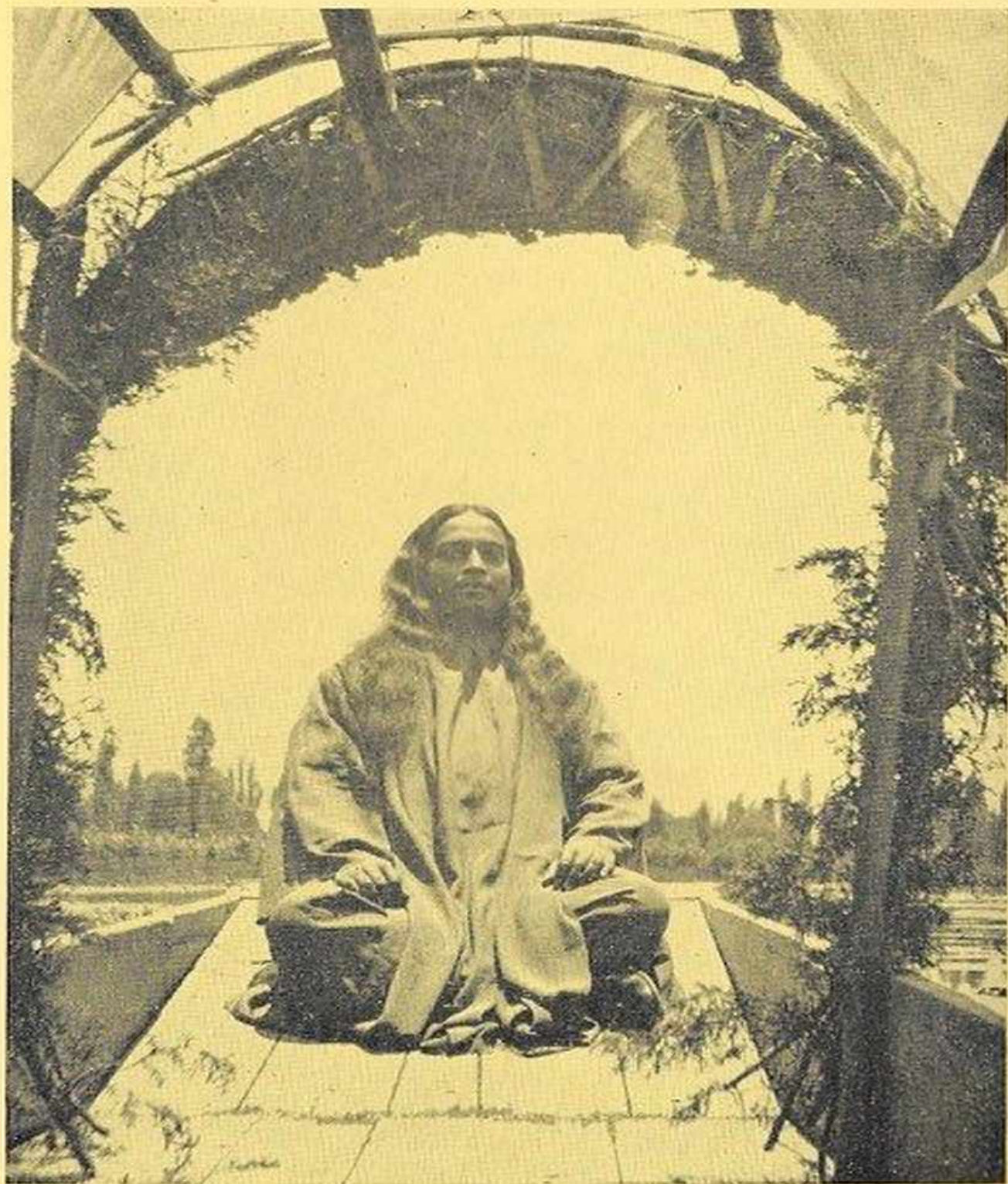


Self-Realization

MAGAZINE



Stained-glass dome in ceiling of vestibule of Self-Realization Fellowship Church, Hollywood, California. The plaque reads: "O ye who have come to the portals of this Chapel! Pass not by in haste. Enter and bathe in the sacred pool of God-love, hidden behind the ramparts of meditation. — Paramahansa Yogananda."



PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA

The beloved Guru in a canopied boat on Lake Xochimilco,
Mexico, where he vacationed in 1929

Self-Realization Magazine

FOUNDED IN 1925 BY PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA

May-June 1962

Vol. 33, No. 5

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Bedroom of Paramahansa Yogananda in Self-Realization Fellowship Hermitage, Encinitas, California.
His living quarters in Encinitas and Los Angeles are now shrines.

Understanding the Unreality of Matter

By PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA



The Hindu scriptures point out that belief in the nonexistence of matter and the allness of Spirit should not be founded on dogmatic, illogical, unintelligible, or inexplicable theories but on scientific inner investigation and exact understanding.

Men generally identify themselves with the body, which is supported by food; but they fail to realize that the basic source of bodily existence is *prana* (life energy). No food or other outer aid can revive a man from whom the cosmic current has been withdrawn.

The link between man's material body and his immaterial mind is *prana*. The ancient Hindu sages discovered the existence of *prana* and formulated the science of *pranayama*, life-energy control.

Lord Jesus fasted in the wilderness for forty days. He said: "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."*

The "word" is cosmic vibration; the "mouth of God" is the medulla oblongata in the posterior part of the brain, tapering off into the spinal cord. This, the most vital spot in the human body, is the divine entrance ("mouth of God") for the "word" or *Aum*, the cosmic vibratory energy by which man is sustained.

Persons who never fast do not know from experience that man can live, as Christ did for forty days, solely by the Word of God.

In the early stages of a week's fasting, hunger is present; but as the days go by, less hunger and a sense of freedom are distinctly felt. Why? Because by denial of gross food to the body, the latter is compelled to depend on immaterial food: the life current.

Man's will power is the great generator of energy. Through will power and willingness one is able to draw quickly on the infinite store of inner strength. A person who is unwilling to perform his daily tasks

*Matthew 4:4.

experiences a lack of energy. A man who works hard but with willingness is borne up physically and mentally by the cosmic current.

One who learns and practices the metaphysical methods of living by will power and by consciously tapping the inexhaustible source of life energy is freed from many limitations of the body.

The Hindu sages and yogis say that matter is materialized mind-stuff; and some of them, like Jesus, have proved this truth by demonstrating the power to materialize and dematerialize their bodies and other physical objects.

The 92 Elements are Electronic Vibrations

Modern science states that matter is composed of vibratory forces. The ninety-two* elements, the structural factors responsible for all forms in the universe — from stones and stars to man — are nothing more than different forms of electronic vibrations. For example, in ice we find coldness, weight, form; it is visible. Melt the ice; it becomes water. Pass electricity through it; it becomes invisible hydrogen and oxygen, which, analyzed further, are forms of electronic vibrations. One may therefore say scientifically that ice does not exist, even though it is perceptible to our senses of sight, touch, and so on. In reality its essence is invisible electrons or forms of energy.

In other words, that which can be dissolved into invisibility can-

*Excluding the synthetic transuranium elements.



New meeting place of Self-Realization Fellowship Center, Mexico City



Mr. C. J. Tenukest and Mrs. Augusta Claude (*center, front row*), meditation counselors; and other members of Self-Realization Fellowship Center, Sydney, Australia, December 1961. As of that time this group and other Australian SRF members had donated to Australian libraries 122 copies of Paramahansa Yogananda's *Autobiography of a Yogi*.

not be said to have valid existence. *In this sense*, matter can be considered as not existing; but matter does have relative existence. Matter exists in relation to our mind and as an expression of invisible electronic forces that do exist, being unchangeable and immortal.

Both water and ice are manifestations of invisible gases and have only formal, transitory existence. Similarly, both mortal mind and matter are fleeting manifestations of Divine Consciousness, and possess merely formal existence; in reality only Cosmic Mind exists.

Just as a child could not be born without the instrumentality of parents, so matter is dependent on mind for its existence. Matter is born from Divine Mind and is perceptible to mortal mind; *in itself and of itself* matter has no reality, no intrinsic existence.

The blind or nonintellectual electronic forces of creation are nevertheless creative teleological agents because they contain within themselves the vibrations of the universal, conscious-of-itself life force or *prana*, which in turn issued from the fiat of Divinity.

"God said: Let there be light: and there was light,"* that is, the projection of Divine Thought and Will became light or vibra-

*Genesis 1:3.

tory energy, "the flowing forth of life current and electrons, which further vibrated more strongly and became the diverse subtle or unseen forces of Nature, which in turn externalized themselves as the ninety-two elements of matter that constitute the universe.

To human consciousness, matter is both perceptible and real. But man has discovered through theoretical investigation, through logic, and through certain laboratory experiments (such as converting a visible piece of ice into invisible forces) that a permanent and unalterable creative power must underlie all the transitory and illusive forms of the phenomenal world.

This truth may be grasped just as we grasp the fact that the ocean exists though its waves have no permanent existence — being just passing, formal manifestations of one great substance. Waves cannot exist without the ocean, but the ocean exists with or without waves.

These concepts can be intellectually understood but cannot be *known* until one has learned the method of converting matter into life force, and life force into Cosmic Consciousness, as Christ and other Self-realized masters were able to do. To such enlightened ones, matter *per se* does not exist because they see that beneath the slight rippling waves of creation is the changeless Ocean of Spirit.

The Universe is God's Dream

In the *Vedanta* and *Yoga* philosophies the universe is spoken of as God's dream. Matter and mind — the cosmos with its stars and planets; the gross surface waves and the subtle undercurrents of the material creation; the human powers of feeling, will, and consciousness; and the states of life and death, day and night, health and disease, success and failure — are realities according to the law of relativity governing this dream of God's.

All the dualities perceived by the law of relativity are real to the dreamer, the mortal man who plays his little part in the great cosmic dream. To escape from *maya*, illusion, the law of relativity, one must awaken from the dream into eternal God-wakefulness. We cannot change the lawful dream by imagination or by denying its existence, or by accepting "life" but rejecting "death," or by recognizing health but ignoring sickness. One state is as much a part of its opposite state as are the two sides of a fabric. The dualities are inherently and essentially one. The truth seeker does not try to separate them in his mind but to rise above them by wisdom.

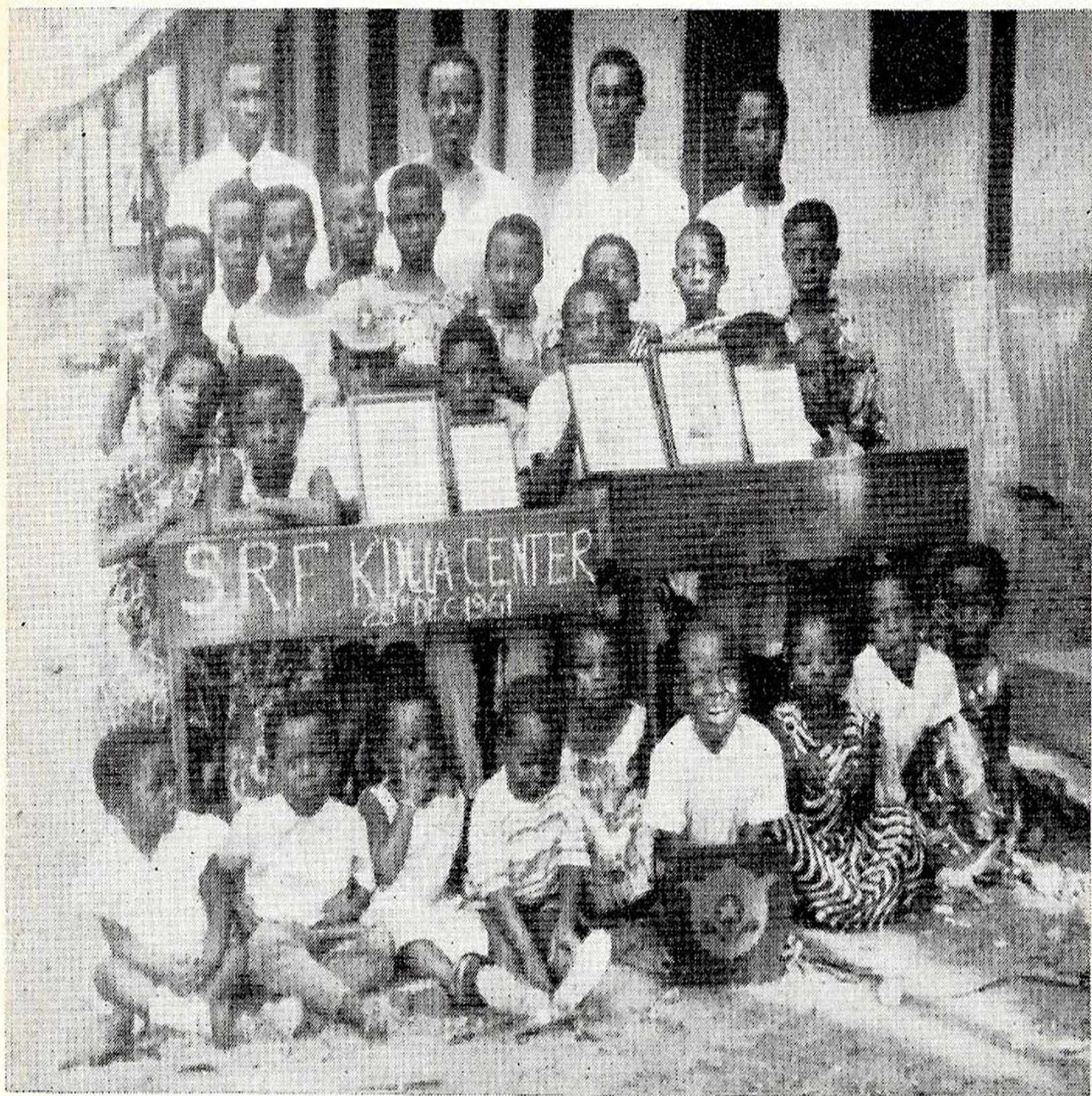
The man who considers his body to be different from his mind and who wants to accept as "real" only the positive, happy, and beneficial aspects of a universe unalterably dual in its nature is a man deeply asleep in the delusions of the dream-world.

Just as a person has dreams that seem real for a time but lose their validity when he emerges into the waking state of consciousness, so it is possible for man to awaken from the dream of matter-reality and to live in the changeless realm of Spirit.

Only the superman, who has learned to expand and transfer his consciousness to the Infinite, can realize creation as a dream of God's; he alone can say with true knowledge that matter has no existence. Through a long series of self-disciplinary steps: through following the scientific yoga path or any other way of spiritual perfection, whether that of love, wisdom, service, or self-effacement, the God-seeker dissolves the dualities and discerns the Eternal Oneness.



Paramahansa Yogananda on the grounds of "Casa Questa" near Lake Chapala, where he spent part of his 1929 vacation in Mexico



Sunday School children of Self-Realization Fellowship Center, Koforidua, Ghana, with four adult members: (*back row, from left*) Mr. Chri, Mr. C. R. Larnyoh, service leader; Mr. E. Quaye, and Mr. Doetcher Assem. Children seated at desks are holding pictures of the SRF Gurus.

Yoga Postures for Health

By B. TESNIÈRE, M.D.

PADAHASTASANA — PHYSIOLOGY AND BENEFITS

(Continued from March-April issue)

This second and last installment on *Padahastana*, the Jackknife Pose, deals with the physiology and benefits of the asana.

It is commonly thought that a limber spine is the foremost requisite for successfully doubling up the body on straightened knees. This is not so. A little experiment available to anyone will clearly demonstrate the point.

When sitting on a table with the feet dangling over the edge ("dangle-sitting," *Fig. 1*), one can easily double up the body so that the chest touches the thighs. On the contrary, when sitting with the legs straightened out on the table ("long-sitting," *Fig. 1*), one usually finds it hard to bend the trunk forward very far.

Study of these two poses reveals that elasticity of the hamstrings is the main agent for successful jackknifing.

In dangle-sitting, the hamstring muscles in the back of the thighs are somewhat elongated and of a relatively soft consistency. In long-sitting, on the contrary, they are fully elongated and of a very hard consistency. The science of anatomy tells us that one end of these muscles is inserted in the lower leg bones and the other end in the pelvic bones. When the legs are flexed in dangle-sitting, the hamstrings are not stretched at all and their elasticity is utilized only partially in tilting the pelvis forward (and with it the lumbar spine); hence in this position the hamstrings are relatively soft.

In long-sitting, on the other hand, the straightening up of the legs absorbs much of the hamstrings' elasticity, and what remains of it is used up to tilt the pelvis (and thus the lumbar spine) forward; hence the hamstrings in this position are very hard.

Parents often marvel at the ease with which a baby can double up its body. At this early age the hamstrings can be fully extended. In adulthood, however, the hamstrings seldom have the same full range of action. They usually have become "muscles of short action," as described by R. Wheeler Haynes who studied them in detail.

Various factors are responsible for this change. Firstly, during the second year of life, standing and walking necessitate contraction of the hamstrings to maintain the equilibrium of the body and, when walking, to bend the leg at the knee. Secondly, the growing organism of the young goes through periods when the bones develop faster than the muscles; it takes some time before the muscles catch up with the skeleton. A third factor, lack of proper exercise, is perhaps the major offender. This last factor has been investigated by Dr. Hans Kraus of the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation, New York University, as we shall see later.

Stretches Spinal Cord and Medulla

Though the experiment mentioned above proves that doubling-up of the body is more a matter of hamstring elasticity than of spinal flexibility, nevertheless medical investigations have shown that jackknifing has far-reaching effects on the spine, its cord, and its nerves.

Almost a hundred years ago the French physician C. Lasègue attracted the attention of the medical world with the statement that the sciatic nerve, the main nerve of the leg, is stretched when the straight leg is bent at the hip toward the torso. His thesis has since become a classical concept in medicine.

Just a few years ago Dr. C. G. Smith of the University of Toronto, Canada, showed that jackknifing stretches not only the sciatic nerve but also the entire spinal cord. By inserting pins in the cord

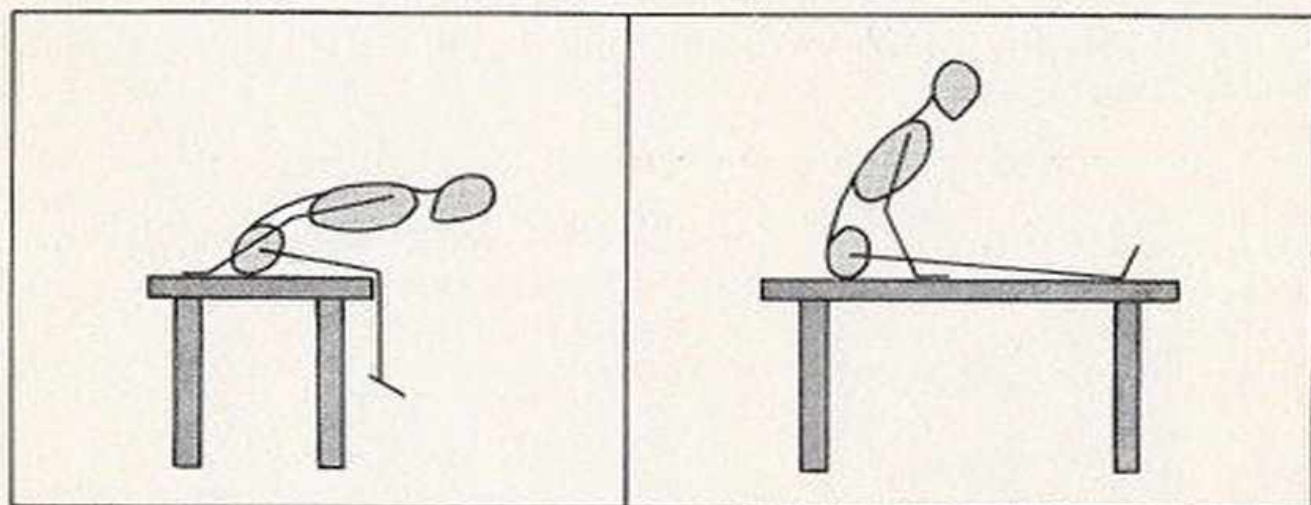


FIGURE 1—In “dangle-sitting” (left) forward bending of the spine is far easier to achieve than in “long-sitting” (right). Explanation in text.

at various levels and by measuring from X-ray photographs their relative positions with change of posture, he found that the stretch in jackknifing extends throughout the spinal cord, reaching even the medulla oblongata — the seat of the vital heart and breathing centers!

These postural changes in the length of the spinal nervous system are "remarkable," Dr. Smith declares in his report, "because they presumably distort the cell groups and the delicate connections between axons and dendrites [their various parts] without impairing their function."

This distortion increases the circulation of blood within the cord and thus improves the nutrition of the cord. The significance of these data will be examined later.

Stimulates Circulatory Reflexes

The physiology of *Padahasthasana* or at least of the leaning-forward position has been investigated from yet another angle. In 1928, two researchers in France, D. Olmer and I. Jacques, showed that leaning forward from a standing position produces a transient slowing down of the pulse and a transient rise in blood pressure — phenomena that are most marked within a few seconds after the change in position; then pulse and blood pressure tend gradually to revert to their initial values (*Fig. 2*).

The investigators also noticed that the slowing-down of the pulse occurred in only two-thirds of the subjects when they leaned forward, whereas the rise in blood pressure was present in every person. These phenomena are not difficult to interpret in the light of the discovery by H. E. Hering of the "carotid sinus mechanism," which is now widely known.

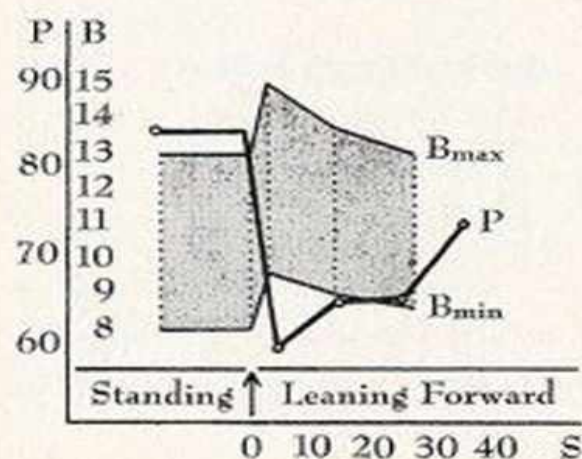
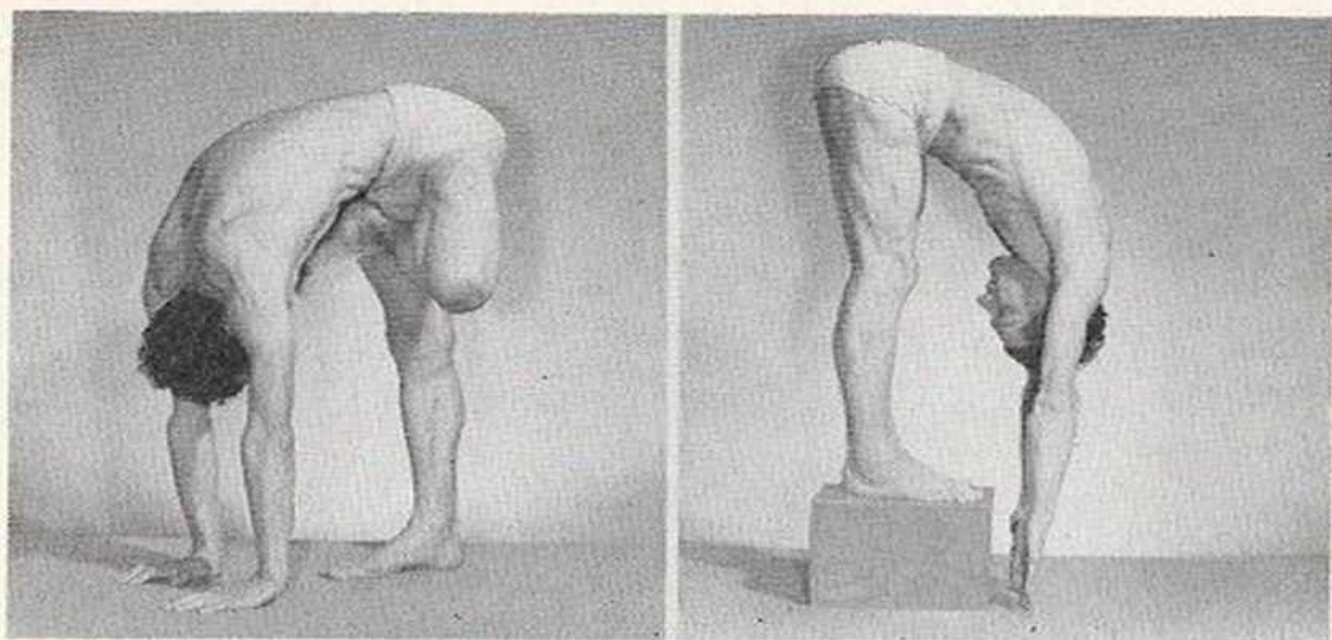


FIG. 2 (After Olmer and Jacques)

Transient increase in blood pressure and decrease in pulse rate produced by leaning forward (arrow indicates the change in position). Letters on diagram signify the following:

- P — pulse rate (beats per minute)
- B — blood pressure (in cm of Hg)
- S — seconds the pose is held
- B_{max} — greatest pressure (systolic)
- B_{min} — lowest pressure (diastolic)



VARIATIONS OF PADAHASTASANA

(Left) *Ekapadahasthasana*, the One-Legged Jackknife Pose

(Right) Floor Touch from an elevated position

The carotid arteries in the neck contain devices, the carotid sinuses, that are extremely sensitive to changes in blood pressure. Faithful "doorkeepers" of the brain circulation, they send messages to the medulla for slowing down or speeding up the heart rate whenever the blood pressure in the carotid arteries is too high or too low. Thus the brain remains adequately supplied with blood.

When leaning forward, the columns of blood in the vessels of the upper part of the trunk and in the neck are shifted headward, creating greater pressure on the carotid sinuses. This mechanical phenomenon occurs in every person. The nervous response or reflex of slowing down the heart brings into play the delicate balance between the sympathetic and the parasympathetic nervous system; this balance varies from one individual to another. Hence only two-thirds of the subjects examined by Olmer and Jacques presented a transient slowing down of the pulse while leaning forward.

These transient circulatory changes when leaning forward explain why middle-aged persons, when they first perform *Padahasthasana*, occasionally experience a feeling of dizziness—a sign of temporary slowing down of the blood circulation in the brain. Within a

few days' practice of the pose, however, one finds that his organism has adapted itself to the gravitational shifting of the blood mass within the neck vessels and that dizziness no longer occurs.

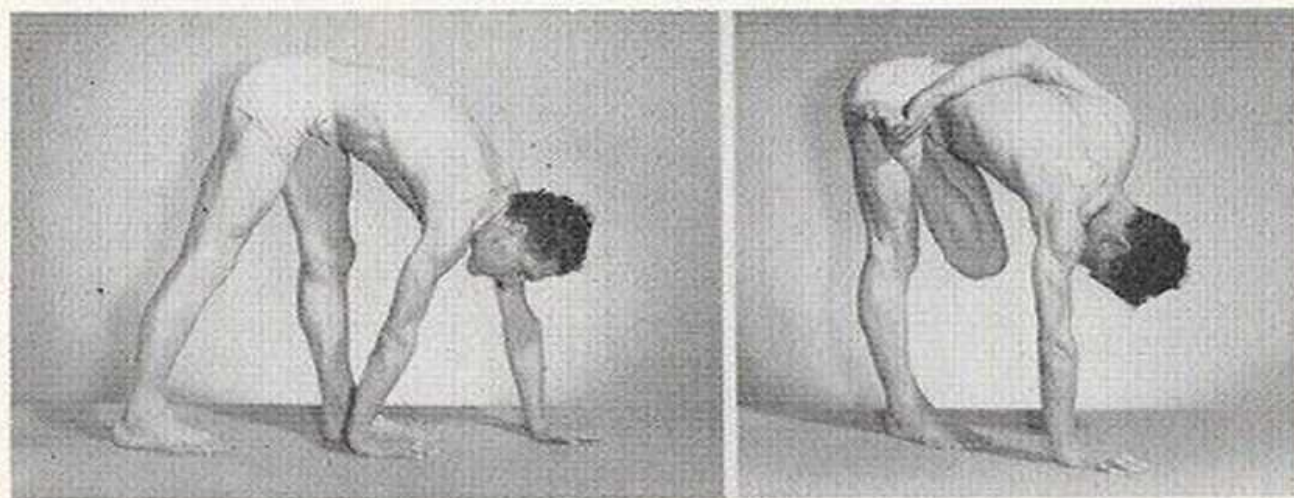
Benefits the Inner Organs

Padahastasana brings numerous benefits to its practitioners. First of all, the pose is highly praised as a weight-reducing measure. By contracting the abdominal muscles and stimulating the circulation in the front of the belly, the pose helps to eliminate fat and to shape the waist along more youthful and graceful lines.

Padahastasana also strengthens the abdominal belt, the main sustainer of the viscera. It also temporarily takes away all downward pressure on them. Therefore the practice of the pose is recommended in case of dropped or displaced organs of the abdomen or pelvis.

A retrodisplaced uterus is not infrequently the cause of painful, irregular menstruations. The practice of *Padahastasana* makes the uterus gravitate forward toward its normal position; the symptoms disappear. Retrodisplacement of the womb may follow labor. The practice of the pose (either the static variation or the dynamic variation—the "monkey trot") for two or three months after labor has been found useful in preventing the condition (Crossen and Crossen).

Padahastasana stimulates the organs of digestion and assimilation. It enhances intestinal peristalsis. It is useful in combating dyspepsia and sluggish liver and in relieving gas and constipation.



VARIATIONS OF PĀDAHASTASANA

(Left) Elephant Walk or Monkey Trot

(Right) *Baddha Ekapadahastasana*, the Bound One-Legged Jackknife Pose

Suffuses the Lungs with Blood

Padahastasana squeezes the blood out of the abdomen toward the lungs, heart, thyroid gland, face, and brain. The increased quantity of blood in the lungs during the pose is an important factor in preventing pulmonary tuberculosis, since the disease usually starts in the poorly irrigated apexes of the lungs. In patients with chronic lung disease (asthma, bronchitis, or emphysema) the practice of *Padahastasana* combined with rhythmic breathing (inhalation on raising the arms overhead, exhalation on bending down) produces valuable physiological and psychological effects, relieving patients' anxieties and bringing them a more efficient pattern of respiration (J. D. Sinclair).

The pooling of the blood headward during *Padahastasana* is similar to that observed in the topsy-turvy poses (*Viparita Karani*, *Sarvangasana*, *Sirshasana*), although to a far less extent. The practice of *Padahastasana* therefore constitutes an excellent introduction to the inverted poses.

Improves Body Mechanics and Proper Posture

Another set of benefits produced by *Padahastasana* derives from its stretching action on the back muscles of the body. Several examples illustrate the point and the related value of *Padahastasana* in improving one's body mechanics and proper posture.

It has been noted that children who sit much of the time on their feet (a pose known in yoga as *Vajrasana*) develop a contraction of the heel cord. This shortening of the Achilles tendon prohibits flexion of the ankle joints to bring the feet beyond the right angle assumed in a standing position and thus prevents walking with the feet straight. The practice of *Padahastasana*, particularly its dynamic variation, the "elephant walk" (keeping the feet flat on the floor), is one of the exercises that counteract the injurious effects of habitual sitting in *Vajrasana*. *Padahastasana* stretches the contracted Achilles tendons and enables the child to walk normally again (J. H. Kite).

In other words, *Padahastasana* and *Vajrasana* are complementary poses. Parents whose children sit much in *Vajrasana* should require them to practice *Padahastasana* regularly.

Tight or contracted hamstrings — a condition which, as we have seen, develops very early in life — is an important factor in producing

(Continued on page 46)



SELF-REALIZATION FELLOWSHIP WORLD BROTHERHOOD COLONY, ENCINITAS, CALIFORNIA. (See page 31.)

THE FLOWER

By George Herbert

(1593-1633)

How fresh, O Lord, how sweet and clean
Are Thy returns! e'en as the flowers in spring;
To which, besides their own demean,
The late-past frosts tributes of pleasure bring.

Grief melts away
Like snow in May,
As if there were no such cold thing.

Who would have thought my shrivell'd heart
Could have recovered greenness? It was gone
Quite underground; as flowers depart
To see their mother-root, when they have blown;

Where they together
All the hard weather
Dead to the world, keep house unknown.

These are Thy wonders, Lord of power,
Killing and quick'ning, bringing down to hell
And up to heaven in an hour;
Making a chiming of a passing-bell.

We say amiss,
This or that is;
Thy word is all, if we could spell

And now in age I bud again,
After so many deaths I live and write;
I once more smell the dew and rain,
And relish versing: O my only light,

It cannot be
That I am he
On whom Thy tempests fell at night.

CAPTION FOR AIR-VIEW PHOTO ON PAGES 28-29

SRF World Brotherhood Colony, Encinitas, California

(Center) Main hermitage *(seen from rear)* and white front of meditation cave just below it, overlooking Pacific Ocean. At left of hermitage is garage-apartment and *(far left)* an ashram for monks. Part of fruit orchard is visible beyond garage-apartment.

In center background is golden-lotus tower, with smaller towers a short distance to left and right. Between main tower and smaller one at right is SRF India Restaurant *(seen from rear)* and parking lot *(light area behind low white wall)*. At right of small tower is a garden area, a garage, and the L-shaped SRF Retreat *(seen from rear)*. White building this side of garage is a storehouse for supplies and equipment. Trees obscure several buildings, including an ashram for nuns *(near lawn at right end of hermitage)*.

Palm-lined fields in far background and on palisade at far right are gardens where vegetables are grown for Encinitas, Lake Shrine, India Center, and Mt. Washington colonies and for the SRF restaurants in Encinitas and Hollywood.



Dining room, Self-Realization Fellowship Hermitage, Encinitas, California

A SPIRITUAL INTERPRETATION OF THE *BHAGAVAD - GITA*

(India's greatest scripture, a part of the "Mahabharata" epic)

By PARAMAHANSA YOGANANDA



Chapter XIV, Stanza 6

O sinless one (Arjuna)! of these (three gunas), the stainless sattwa gives enlightenment and health. Nevertheless, it binds man through attachment to happiness and attachment to knowledge.

Prakriti or Cosmic Nature is composed of the three *gunas*. Therefore even the highest *guna*, *sattwa*, is a part of *Maya* or the delusive force inherent in creation.

Though a brilliant fetter, *sattwa* is still a fetter. A gold wire can tie a man to a post just as securely as can a wire of silver or steel. Like *tamas* (ignorance) and *rajas* (selfish activity), *sattwa* also binds the soul to the body and to the earth plane.

By its inherency in Nature rather than in the soul, *sattwa* is powerless to free man from egotism, the root cause of rebirth.

This stanza of the *Gita* explains why even good actions can keep man on the reincarnational wheel. The *sattwa* qualities are themselves pure and untainted by delusion; yet when a person relates happiness and wisdom to his own physical body and brain, his soul has identified itself with the human ego. A man who thinks: "I am happy; I am wise," is harboring selfish rather than egoless sentiments.

Bliss and wisdom belong to the soul. But through delusion the ego connects them with bodily enjoyments and intellectual knowledge. The ego considers happiness and knowledge to be its own qualities,

thus ignorantly chaining the soul to bodies and rebirths. Through these the ego experiences diluted and limited pleasures and knowledge instead of realizing the unalloyed and infinite bliss and wisdom of the soul.

The good deeds that virtuous men do for others should not be performed for the purpose of attaining name, fame, or ego-satisfaction. Instead, all actions should be performed with the thought of pleasing God.

All his actions bring a true yogi happiness and wisdom. He understands that all good actions and qualities flow from the soul and not from the ego. He knows why good actions performed with egotistical pride will lead to reincarnational bondage and why the same good actions, performed while one thinks of the Lord as the Doer, will lead to liberation.

For instance, when a person eats with only the thought of nourishing the body as the temple of God, he is incurring no karma — not even good karma. To eat with this purpose is to act in the service of Divinity; the greed of the ego is not being catered to. A man who dies without overcoming the desire to please his sense of taste by consuming delicious foods is required by cosmic law to be reborn on earth to satisfy his cravings. Subconsciously he is unwilling to stay in a heaven that lacks kitchens and cooks, curries and pies!

Chapter XIV, Stanza 7

O son of Kunti (Arjuna)! understand that rajas is activating, giving birth to desire and attachment; it strongly binds the embodied soul by a clinging to works.

The performance of worldly activity without wisdom gives rise to an unquenchable thirst of longings for and attachments to material objects and egotistical satisfactions. The man who acts for selfish reasons becomes deeply attached to bodily activities and desires.

Such worldly activity binds the majority of persons to earthly rebirths, owing to the ceaseless desires it engenders, many of which remain unfulfilled at the time of death. To perform worldly activities only to please God, however, is never binding.

A few persons are *sattwik*. There are also a few men of exceedingly *tamasik* nature — those who are effortlessly disposed to commit evil. But the greatest number of human beings are *rajasik* by inclination, absorbed in worldly and selfish interests.

(Continued from page 27)

faulty posture in school children and, in teen-agers, of epiphysitis (a disease of the vertebral bodies). Shortened hamstrings limit the pelvic flexion at the hip and thus unsettle the body mechanics. In the effort to make up by flexion of the spine that which is insufficient in the hip joint, children may develop a poor posture (round back when long-sitting) or the epiphyses of the vertebrae may become irritated (epiphysitis).

Dr Thomas Wheeldon of Richmond, Virginia, has particularly studied the former condition. He examined a thousand school children and found one fifth with faulty posture and contracted hamstrings. He treated them by passive stretching and obtained a postural improvement almost directly proportional to the extent to which the hamstrings were stretched out. The high percentage of definite improvement obtained (75%) indicates the importance, in restoring proper posture, of measures that stretch the hamstrings.

Helps to Prevent and Also to Cure Low Back Pain

Low back pain is a common complaint. It often starts when one straightens up after leaning forward to pick up a small object on the floor. Persons so afflicted may be suffering from disease of the vertebrae, of the ligaments, of the discs, of the urinary or genital tracts, etc.; but in many cases no specific illness has been found.

To cope with this problem, at the instigation of Dr. Barbara Stimson, an extensive investigation of backache was started in 1946 at Columbia Presbyterian Medical Center, New York City. Three thousand back sufferers were examined by a group of specialists in various fields of medicine. The old theory that low back pain may be due to muscular deficiency was given special consideration and a series of tests was instituted to determine the strength and flexibility of key posture muscles. Among these tests was *Padahastasana*, called the "Floor Touch Test."

The investigation proved that the majority (four out of five) of sufferers from low back pains have a deficient back musculature and no specific disease whatsoever. Under-exercise was held responsible for the muscular deficiency. Accordingly, the muscularly deficient patients performed a series of carefully gradated exercises — among them *Padahastasana*. Follow-ups for two to eight years on 233 of the patients showed that four out of five were reconditioned and fully rehabilitated by proper exercises together with supportive treatment.

It is now held that inability to perform *Padahastasana*, step II (Toes Touch), indicates the presence of a spinal "danger zone" wherein backache may easily occur. Conversely, it has been repeatedly shown that relief is obtained when the patient, through gradual exercise, can successfully perform the Toes Touch (Kraus).

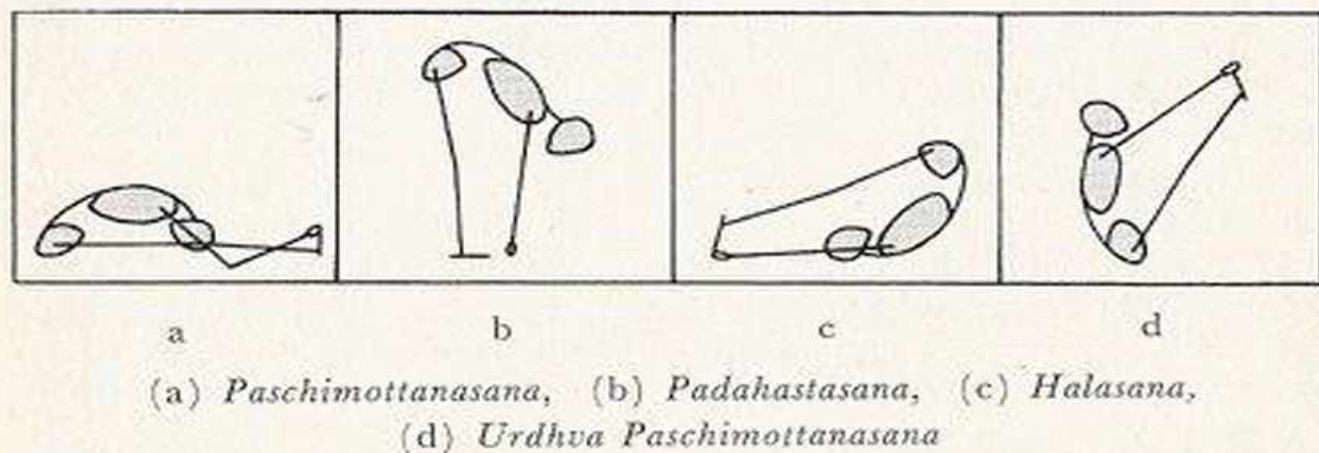
Heals the Spinal Cord

Padahastasana increases the flexibility of the spine (*Halasana* is even more efficient), and stretches the spinal nerves and the whole spinal cord. (As we have previously observed, *Padahastasana* also helps to stretch the sciatic nerves; yogis say that the practice of this pose prevents sciatica.)

In the last decade of the past century jackknifing was used for the treatment of certain diseases of the spinal cord. The straightened legs of supine bedridden patients were lifted upward and headward until the knees touched the forehead. The head was supported by a pillow so that the stretching of the spinal cord would be greater.

A disease of the spinal cord common in those days was locomotor ataxia (*tabes dorsalis*), characterized by inability to stand still with closed eyes and by disordered movements in the limbs while walking. In this illness certain parts of the spinal cord, the posterior columns and nerve roots, undergo chronic inflammatory changes, which result in loss of the power of harmonious muscular coordination. Dr. Benedikt applied jackknifing to these patients and obtained surprising results: patients could again maintain their balance while standing with closed eyes and could even go (open-eyed) for long walks.

FIG. 3 — THE PASCHIMOTTANASANA SERIES



Unfortunately, the method was practiced too roughly (it was called "forced extension of the spinal cord"!) and the method sank into oblivion. Nevertheless, it showed that jackknifing (properly practiced, in gradual steps and without strain or jerks, as in the *Paschimottanasana series*—*Fig. 3*) has a good influence on the spinal cord. It stimulates blood circulation and cerebrospinal fluid circulation, and eventually heals spinal ailments (A. Hégar).

A common disease of the spinal cord is infantile paralysis (poliomyelitis). The regular practice of *Padahastanasana* might be an efficient measure in the prevention and treatment of this viral malady.

A Help on the Spiritual Path

Yogis have long realized the importance of *Padahastanasana* and associated poses as a key to physical, mental, and spiritual health.

The development and well-being of the physical body depends on a healthy state of the spinal cord. In an incredibly small space it contains all the wiring that connects the medulla and brain with the rest of the body. The wiring is highly specialized and extremely concentrated within the spinal canal: each millimeter of the spinal nervous tissue is important to the proper functioning of the bodily machinery.

Mental states are closely connected with spinal posture: one is depressed, moody, listless, when the trunk is allowed to slump; alert, courageous, energetic, when the chest is held high and the back erect.

According to yogis, the spinal cord is of vital importance to man's spiritual evolution. One can become aware of the cord as he is aware of his hands or eyes. That awareness is highly desirable, yogis maintain, because the cord, together with the brain, is the physical instrument of divine perception: the more the spiritual aspirant's consciousness is centered on the cerebrospinal axis, the more he is able to feel the attributes of Spirit: peace, intuitive understanding, ever new joy.

By stimulating the circulation in the spine, medulla, and brain, *Padahastanasana* enables the yogi to shift his center of consciousness from his body and the world of matter to the infinite realm of Spirit. There are of course other much deeper, more powerful, yoga methods that help the yogi to change his center of consciousness. But *Padahastanasana* has a place in the yogic system of all-round development.

For these reasons the practice of *Padahastanasana* or, more general-

ly, of the poses of the *Paschimottanasana* series, should be included in one's daily routine. Why don't you try *Padahasthasana* and see what it can do for you?

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Other asanas mentioned in this article have been fully described and illustrated in *Self-Realization Magazine*, as follows:

- Halasana*, The Plow Pose, September 1958.
Paschimottanasana, the Posterior-Stretching Pose, January 1956.
Sarvangasana, The Shoulderstand, July and September 1961.
Sirshasana, the Headstand, July, September, November 1959, January 1960.
Vajrasana, the Diamond Pose, July 1957.
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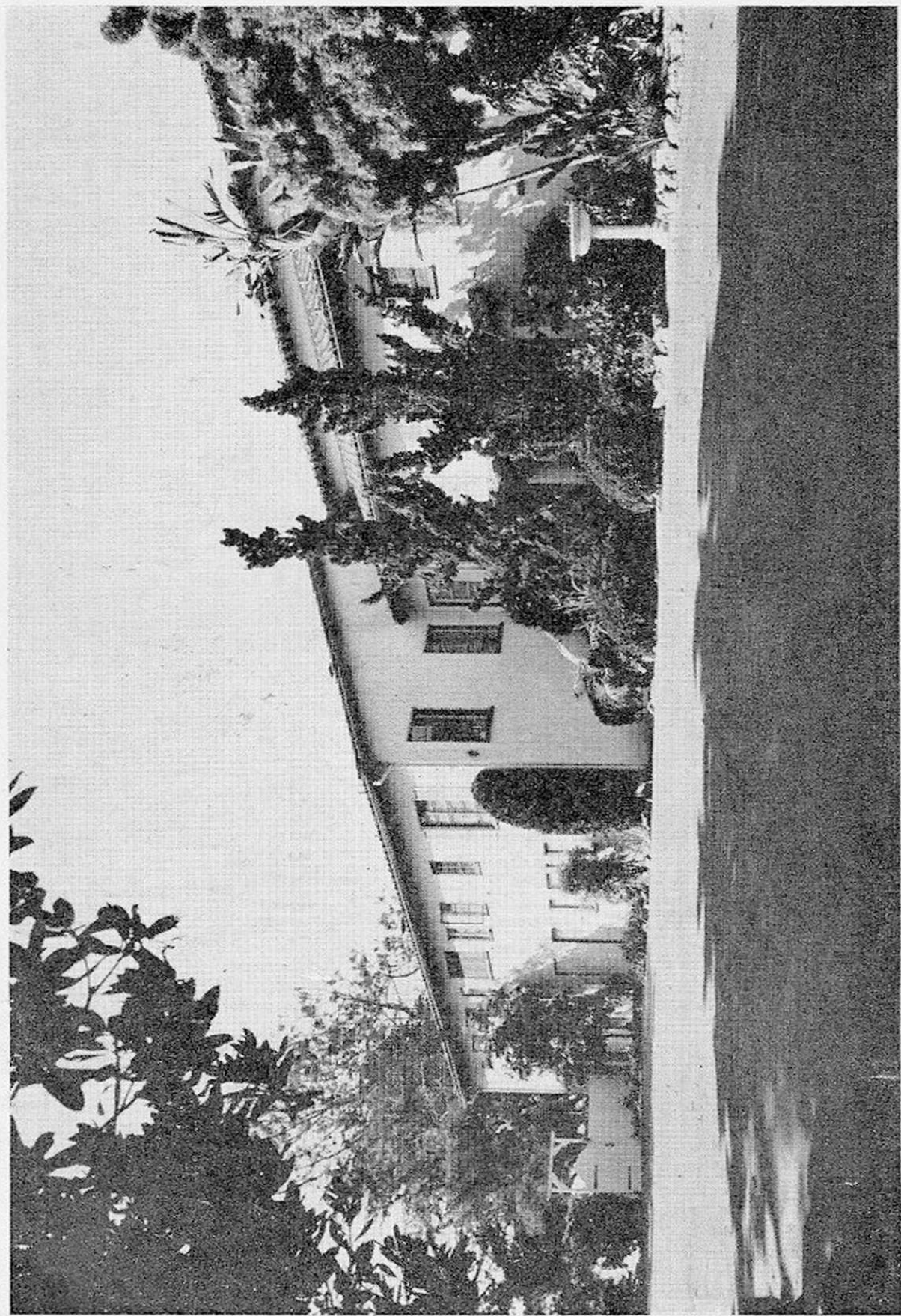
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