

## **Anthroposophy and Yoga - are Yoga exercises useful even for anthroposophists?**

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Rudolf Steiner, the founder of anthroposophy, spoke decidedly against the practice of classical Yoga and justified his statement in several ways.

One of his main arguments refers to the difference in the breathing process, which in earlier times was experienced completely differently than today. About 3000 years before Christ, the story of the Bhagavad Gita emerged, an epic composed in verse forms with a rhythmical character. In these almost wondrous tales about the development and value of yoga, as it was understood then, the rhythms of the cosmos still swing. The Sanskrit language, in which this poetry is treated, acts melodiously and by its elegantly raised character is reminiscent to the higher spiritual worlds.

Unfortunately many anthroposophist's speak against yoga far too quickly and flippantly. They adopt the concepts of Rudolf Steiner without deeper engagement to the different terms, contents and feeling value. How was the breathing process in former times, how is it today? What kind of practice does the enlightened modern citizen of the Western world need for their soul spiritual development?

### **Yoga exercises vs Eurythmy**

The sweeping, succinct statement, that eurythmy, which has developed in artistic forms of expression and movement, is the appropriate physical way of exercising for the occidental citizen, and that yoga only leads back to old, past times, and therefore is unsuitable for the progress of the soul, is too simple a statement to arrive at a real assessment of the deeper relationships.

Especially for the anthroposophist, who mostly remains in solid ideas of thinking, intensive forms of movement that place a challenge to the body, would be a very meaningful and healing element. Eurythmy conveys very light, swinging movements, it demonstrates music in motion, letters in figures and colours in forms of experience. With one's own body and the possibility to transform it through thoughts, feelings and contents is eurythmy very little engaged with. Now, it would, however, be very foolish, if one would want to acclimatise a fish that feels comfortable in the water to the element of airy space, and in the same sense, it might seem a bit foolish, if one would want to remove the anthroposophist who is severely founded in thought, from this discipline and to educate them to an old yoga style, which aspires to live into a cosmic reality.

### **Yoga for harmonisation?**

The experiences over many years of grappling with yoga in its classical sense, with the opportunity to newly re-establish and to lead it into a contemporary soul-spiritual dimension, and finally the intensive studies of anthroposophy show, however, that the thinking activity itself, if it's connected with meditation, adopts very easily one-sided paths and the body almost falls out of a totality. He becomes stiff, frail, and the radiation of the whole personality tends also to a kind of rigor. They lack, in a sense, the integrity and connecting subtle feeling soul.

Yoga, however, if it's not brought to a contemporary and spiritual level, carries the temptation that with all its exercises, breathing forms and meditations it can lead to a kind of binding-back to the body, to the organs and not least to the genetics. A style, which leads more to an artistic and even to the recognising and forming of knowledge, would be very appropriate for a new cultural perception of yoga. It doesn't have to be ascetic or emotionally coloured exercises, but it could have very nice forms of movement, such as the verticality of the headstand or a wide glide into an arch shape, to satisfy an aesthetic yearning with the body. Many people who practice Yoga, flee back into their own subjective feeling space and participate less in the questions of worlds evolution and the whole of society. Others still only see in the yoga exercises a kind of "*Benessere*", a kind of wellness scene with a good utility value for relaxation and personal calmness. Yoga with its body exercises, the so-called asana, can and must even help with many possibilities to strengthen the joints, organs, the circulation and to lower blood pressure. The breathing exercises, which are named with the term *pranayama*, mostly set free

the hidden potential of energies, which provide the practitioner with a greater concentration-power for everyday. However, the health value of body and breathing exercises does not yet open up the real posing of the question of spirituality and soul-spiritual development.

### **The effects of a yoga exercise on the ether body.**

Eurythmy comprises of a large number of very moving and light exercises, while the physical exercises of yoga, like for example, an intensive forward movement with a far gliding out of the upper body to the knees and the head to the shins, clearly brings to mind in their end phase a static. Dynamics and rest are, however, chosen variably. Independent of these contrasting movement elements of yoga and eurythmy, one places, however, the question about the consciousness - which of the respective exercises can bring about individual development? After all, each kind of exercise engages with a goal orientation, and if you consider them very accurately, you can discover many possibilities for creative design.

#### **PICTURE/BILD – KOPFSTAND**



The headstand shows a graceful vertical line

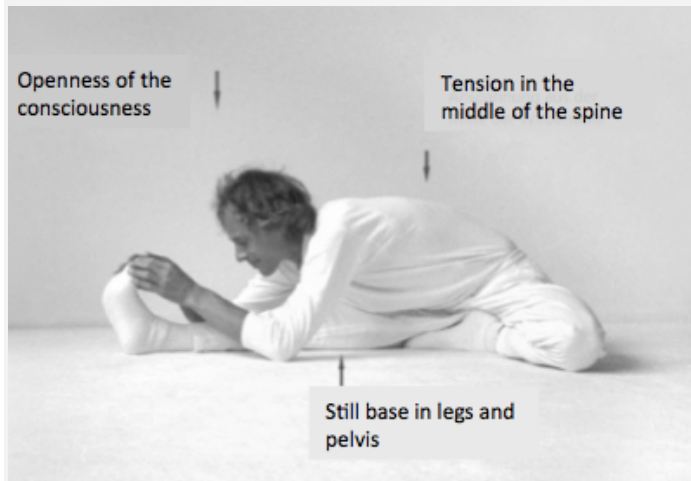
A body exercise can be performed, for example, as a kind of technical, sporty activity, or it can start from a concrete idea, if one guides it more from the consciousness. The practitioner imagines, for example, the gliding out from the middle of the spine in the longitudinal direction, they create an image of a centre on the spine and associated periphery, which they experience in the limbs. As the movement begins with an exact idea, develops in the so-called ether-body, or said more generally, in the flowing of the life-streams, a precisely measured force translation. It can be said, that the etheric body is the subtle carrier of all energies. This etheric body orientates itself on the created ideas, which develop the consciousness. They recognise immediately the created forms of thought. Just as thinking conceives a movement, sketching, consciously creating in proportions, like a form of geometry, so the movement continues inwards by the etheric body. The activity of thought, especially if logical and appropriately created to the striving course of movement, causes activation to the inside, which takes place at first unconsciously. The thinking, which begins in the free sense-head is translated into the inner or the body. To this ideational activity follows very quickly a perception, which expresses itself ensouling and invigorating. The practitioner, who starts from the consciousness to steer the movements permeates their body, transforms it with new aesthetic elements and in a completely natural way strengthens their health. The ensouling perception gives it a balance between the earthly

and the spiritual world. Thinking takes a path from above to below or from outside to inside, and in the body the desired expression of the intended movement takes place.

## The threefold structuring the yoga positions

This kind of practice would be every interesting even for anthroposophically oriented persons and would give a natural complement to philosophical and abstract thinking. To a particular extent, however, the yoga exercises pose a challenge to the willpower, because the practitioner develops the movements, as a rule, not only to the first comfortable limits of expansion or forming, but they overcome again and again the physical resistances and learn specific, dynamic approaches for the aesthetic and extended control of the various form-possibilities.

BILD: Threefold structuring in the yoga poses



The so-called threefold structuring, which in general has become a major theme in the social organism by Rudolf Steiner, can within the process of forming the consciousness and in the artistic shaping out of a physical exercise now find their solid practical application. The practitioner leaves the head, shoulder and neck region as relaxed as possible, opens the eyes to an overview and maintains the perception over the whole body. The tension takes place in specific sections and carries itself in the dynamics mostly from the inside out to the periphery. At the same time, the practitioner does not connect the movements in this kind of yoga activity with the breath, but pays attention to a careful structuring of the areas of rest, quiet movement elements, dynamic tension and completely free sense-activity. Precisely through the yoga exercise, the anthroposophical training framework can be better understood and put into practice. The threefold structuring in the practical application can really reach liveliness.

For yoga practitioners, who are very often one-sidedly concerned with the body and its energies, in contrast, a turn to the anthroposophical schooling path would be very valuable. The thinking and imaginative activity appears in most yoga organisations like a step-child and, therefore, an encounter with appropriate developmental steps to different approaches would be very valuable.