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Inversion Postures by Sri Dharma Mittra **New York Yoga Magazine, April 2007**

Yogi Sri Dharma Mittra has been teaching in NYC since 1967 with selfless expectation. He is definitely the teacher with the most mileage and unfailing consistency in bringing his ancient philosophy for radiant health and long life to the public. Sri Dharma practiced Karma Yoga for his Guru Swami Kailashananda for nine years. He had the esteemed honor of being the personal assistant to the Guru, as well as the main demonstrator of the Yoga Asanas during lectures the Guru gave to the public in the 60's and 70's. Swami Kailashananda is known as the first Guru to bring the practice of Hatha Yoga to the west in the 1950's. Sri Dharma continues to inspire, enlighten, and reveal to Yoga teachers and practitioners today, the real meaning of Yoga. "It is my greatest joy to share with students this knowledge that I have acquired in the past 50 years of practice and study. Yoga practice will give one's body the power and strength to have resistance to common illnesses and diseases. With proper encouragement and increased faith in the Guru, as one can improve his physical body and mental attitude rapidly, thereby igniting the higher motives of making one's self useful to himself and all mankind. Hatha Yoga or the 3rd limb of Yoga, brings us the practice of Inversions, rightly know as the most beneficial of all the types of poses. The main purpose of the inverted poses is to increase circulation in the head and brain, stimulate the pineal and pituitary glands, and thusly increase mental abilities and bring one radiant health. The positions and movements within inversions are not found in regular life activities, sports, or most other different forms of physical exercise. Always move in a conscious, slow and graceful manner. During your Yoga practice, regulate and slow down your breath, so that you can start to bring your attention deep within.

The Hare Pose *(Shashankasana)*

In order to feel comfortable being upside down, the first pose I would recommend is the Hare Posture. This posture is a preparation for the headstand, but it also serves as a good substitute for the headstand. Most everyone can do this pose, and receive its supreme value immediately. The Hare Pose stretches and relaxes the spine and back of the neck, massages the abdominal viscera, supplies fresh blood the brain, eyes and all parts of the head, and makes the pulsing of the heart slow and steady. This posture also stimulates the pancreas, kidneys and liver to function well and improves memory, eyesight and the power of hearing.



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To begin, please sit on your heels with the knees and ankles on the floor. Have your palms either resting alongside your feet, hands holding the little toes, or for more flexible students resting on the soles of the feet. Now while breathing in deeply thru the nose, simultaneously arch the head, neck and then upper back backwards, contracting the spine. When the breath is complete, and your chest is fully expanded, begin to start exhaling slowly, tucking your head in, and rounding forward as your head leads you towards the floor. While doing this, shift the weight from the feet to the knees until the top of the head rests on the floor. For those who can, try to touch the forehead to the knees, and for others as near as possible. Hold the heels with both hands, and if this is not possible, press palms on the floor. Maintain the pose for between 10 to 30 seconds breathing normally. Make sure to concentrate on the space between the eyebrows in order to activate the prana towards the spine, neck and head, and continue arching back to open the chest. Then slowly return to the original seated upright position and relax seated for 3 to 4 breaths. I recommend that you repeat this pose two or three times. Within a few weeks of practice you will feel the benefits.

The Shoulderstand *(Sarvangasana)*

In the Yoga system, this pose is known as the Mother of all the postures. The Shoulderstand is truly one of the great gifts to humanity by the saints and sages. It is a complete tonic, bringing balance to the entire physical system. *Sarva* means all or whole, and *anga* means limbs. So this pose acts as a mother does, keeping peace and wellbeing for the entire family, it takes care of the whole body. It stimulates the thyroid and the secretion of thyroxin hormone, which controls the rate of oxidation the body. It massages the thyroid gland to bring youthfulness and consistent good health. The organs and glands are bathed in fresh blood, absorbing nutrients from the blood, and secrete proper hormones for the proper functioning of both the body and the brain. Mental abilities are greatly increased. In this pose the veins of the legs rest. It is a panacea for the majority of common ailments. Persons suffering from asthma, bronchitis, stomach, intestinal and bowel problems, thyroid conditions and throat ailments will benefit greatly from this posture.

To begin please lay full length flat on your back with legs stretched out, on a blanket, carpet or mat. Now place the hands by side of legs, palms down. Take a few relaxed deep breaths, now take in a small breath and exhale as you bend your knees; bring the legs towards the stomach. Keep your elbows bent shoulder width apart and raise the hips from the floor and rest your palms on your lower back. Take a breath and in easy stages, exhale and bring the back up a bit more, using the pressure of



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your palms, as you stretch the legs straight up, with the toes extended. Make sure that your neck is aligned straight with chin against the chest and relaxed. Beginners should hold the pose with even breathing or for 1-5 minutes building up the time gradually. The time can be lengthened to 15 to 20 minutes with practice. Close the eyes and bring the attention within. Concentrate on the space between the eyebrows (Trikuti). Try to feel nice as you can learn to relax and meditate in the pose.

To release, slowly roll down your spine vertebra by vertebra, with your arms by your sides on the floor palms pressing down. When your buttocks are resting on the ground, slowly lower the legs as you concentrate on your navel region. Then release your entire body in relaxation pose flat on the floor with the arms a little bit away from the sides of your body and the legs comfortably falling apart. This pose will without a doubt, give you a fresh youthful glow, try it.

- The regular practice of this pose will rejuvenate the body bringing one radiant health, prolonged your and long life.
- Concentration can initially be at the 5th Throat Chakra (Vishuddha), and then it can move to the space between the eyebrows third eye, 6th Chakra (Ajna) during the pose.

The Plough *(Halasana)*

The practice of Shoulderstand is usually followed by the Plough pose as this pose is considered a continuation of the Shoulderstand. Hala means a plough, which is the Indian plough that this pose resembles the shape of. Many of the same benefits are present in this posture as in the Shoulderstand. This pose makes the spine very elastic, especially the lower part, and the abdominal viscera strong and rejuvenated due to contraction. By the stretching and contracting of each vertebra, and its nerves, the spine receives an extra supply of blood in this pose. This prevents the softening of the bones and, helps to relieve backaches and stiff shoulders. The Plough pose also tones the digestive organs, the liver and the spleen. It helps to keep the waistline trim, strengthens the nervous system, and stimulates the functions of the brain.

When coming into the pose from the Shoulderstand (on a soft surface), slowly and under control, let the lower part of the trunk bend forward in order to lower the legs straight over the head. Try to rest the toes on the floor. If this is not possible, let the legs bend and bring knees near the shoulders. Place the hands to the middle of the



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back, and try to keep the trunk perpendicular to the floor. If the breathing becomes difficult, straighten the back and move the thighs away from the chest. You may hook the thumbs and stretch the arms and legs. You may also interlock the fingers and turn the wrists so the thumbs rest on the floor. In the beginning, it may be difficult to interlock fingers, or to get the toes to reach the floor, but don't worry too much about it. With steady practice gradually you will see results. Remain in the pose for one minute, building towards five minutes with slow and steady breathing. To come out of the pose, release the hands. Raise the legs up to Sarvangasana and gradually lower the back thru the vertebra to the floor, when the buttock touch as in the Shoulderstand, continue to lower the legs down slowly under control. Relax the body completely lying flat on your back. If needed, please relieve your lower back by bending your knees into your chest and gently rocking side-to-side or forward and back.

- The regular practice of this pose will bring one peace of mind, regulated blood pressure, and wonderful digestive health
- Concentrate on the adrenal glands and the lower part of your spine in the pose

The Headstand

(Sirsasana)

The Headstand is known as the King of the Postures, and is rightly the most important of the poses. Sirsa means the head, and the Headstand is a basic posture that has many variations. It is a more advanced pose, and should be practiced only after proper instruction with a teacher extremely well versed in the practice and teaching of it. No individuals are alike, and therefore many factors, such as general health, age, and vitality must be taken into consideration before trying this pose. With its practice and mastery, you will receive in exchange the powers of concentration, memory, self-confidence, will power, and physical poise. It relaxes the heart and is a tonic for the entire body. An enormous amount of blood is sent to the upper regions of the body, and all the organs, which normally do not receive this much blood, become vitalized. The digestive and eliminative systems are toned and brought into a vibrant state of health. The organs of the stomach and intestines are also toned, since they are required to work hard in order to stay in their normal position upside-down. This pose arouses the dormant faculties of the mind and body, and the entire nervous system is strengthened. This posture is wonderful for children as it helps their brains grow larger.



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Have a softer surface for your head, and stay close to a wall to be safe. To begin, rest on the knees, placing the forearms on the floor with elbows no wider than your shoulders. Interlock your fingers tightly, right up to the fingertips. Place the outer edge of the hands firmly on the floor. Now bring the crown of the head to the floor between the hands, so that the back of the head touches the palms, which are now upped around the head. The hands will act like a helmet supporting especially the back of the head. Do not rest on the forehead or the back of the head, but on slightly forward of the crown of your head. Now straighten the knees, balance the body on the forearms and toes, and slowly raise the toes using the two elbows by connecting them into the strength of your shoulders for support. Bend the knees into the chest, and bring your pelvis back and upright over your chest in this inverted position. Now it is time to slowly extend the legs so the feet are over your hips and the legs are stretched upward. The whole body is now aligned naturally upright and perpendicular to the floor. Gently stretch thru the toes. Let the body become still and steady. It is now time for the most important part of this Asana. Close the eyes and with determination concentrate at the space between the eyebrows. Visualize a bright light there, as the breath continues to slow down. After staying in the pose for one to five minutes, or your capacity, flex the knees and gradually under complete control lower down to the floor in reverse order. Stretch out onto your back on soft surface and relax completely for one or two minutes.

- This posture is generally followed by the Shoulderstand.
- Regular practice of the Headstand discipline the mind and makes one able to face with equanimity fear or victory, pain and pleasure, heat and cold, sorrow or joy, loss or gain
- Concentrate on the third eye region or the 6 Chakra (Ajna)

Sri Yogi Dharma Mittra teaches classes in Shiva Namaskar Vinyasa Level IV for teachers and advanced yogis weekdays 12-2pm. He also teaches Mondays at 6:30pm Level III and on Wednesdays at 6:00pm Level III and 7:30pm Psychic Development and Meditation Techniques. He is known as the “Rock of Yoga” and the “Teacher’s Teacher”. Dharma’s next Life of a Yogi Teacher 200 hour Certification is June 21-30 2007. He is the author of the Master Yoga Chart of 908 Postures, 608 Yoga Poses, and Maha Sadhana DVD’s Level I & II.

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