

CHAPTER THREE

ABDOMINOPELVIC EXERCISES

A sure way to develop what yogis call inner strength is to tone the abdominal region. If energy in the arms and shoulders is weak, a strong abdomen can give you an extra edge, but if the abdomen is weak, look out, because even the strongest arms and shoulders are likely to fail you. One of the most memorable boxing matches of the century (Muhammad Ali vs. George Foreman, Oct. 30, 1974) is a perfect example. Ali knew he had lost his edge for dancing around the ring “like a butterfly,” and that he probably couldn’t win unless he adopted unconventional tactics. Suspecting that Foreman would not have the stamina for a long bout, Ali had prepared a steely but resilient belly with thousands of repetitions of sit-ups and other abdominal exercises. He called on this secret strength early in the match, repeatedly going to the ropes and letting his opponent punch himself to exhaustion. Reality hit in the eighth round—with a few precise strokes Ali brought Foreman down for the count.

The structural foundation for abdominopelvic strength and energy (this is obviously a literary rather than a scientific use of the term “energy,” something like saying someone has “a lot of pep,” or “a lot of guts”) is the pelvis and abdomen, a complex region whose architecture can be understood most easily by studying two simple and familiar exercises: crunches and sit-ups. Then we’ll be able to make more sense of the general design of the abdominopelvic region in relation to the chest and lower extremities. This in turn will enable us to discuss leglifts, sit-ups, the boat postures, and the peacock. These seemingly diverse exercises not only strengthen the torso, they stimulate abdominal energy by using the abdomen as a fulcrum to manipulate large segments of the body in relation to one another in the field of gravity.

In the second half of the chapter we’ll shift our attention to the *anatomical perineum* and discuss practices that work with that region and with the abdomen and pelvis in relative isolation, in contrast to the abdominal exercises, which demand use of the body as a whole. The practices in the second half of the chapter include *ashwini mudra*, *mula bandha*, *agni sara*, *uddiyana bandha*, and *navli kriya*. Last, we’ll take a critical look at contraindications and benefits.



Figure 3.23c. Third position for the peacock, with weight supported only between the feet and the hands.



Figure 3.23d. Peacock posture completed. As the weight comes further forward, the forearm flexors lengthen eccentrically to support the posture.