

CHAPTER SEVEN

TWISTING POSTURES

Imagine what it would be like if we couldn't twist. We couldn't swing a bat or a golf club. We couldn't greet someone standing next to us without turning our entire body. We couldn't even twist the lid from a jar. We would walk like marionettes and dance like robots. Twisting is needed for every activity that involves moving to the side and front simultaneously. Lean diagonally across a table—you twist. Throw a ball—you twist. Scratch your left foot with your right hand—you twist. Not only that, every inquiry about anything not directly in your line of sight requires twisting. It might be something as simple as looking around a room to determine where to go and what to do next, or it could be something as complex as twisting the head, neck, and trunk around 135° in an automobile seat to confirm that no one is alongside and slightly behind you before you change lanes.

Anatomically, all asymmetric whole-body activities, even those that principally involve flexion and extension, contain elements of twisting. Take walking. As you stride forward with one foot the opposite hand comes forward—right foot left hand, left foot right hand, right foot left hand, left foot right hand. This creates a moderate whole-body twist, and a slight twist in the gait not only balances the body, it calms the nervous system. If you are skeptical, try it the other way—right foot and right hand forward at the same time, clunk; then left foot and left hand forward at the same time, clunk. It's jarring.

In hatha yoga we have many twisting postures to pick from, including all asymmetrical postures that are not pure sidebends. In this chapter we'll examine a few of them in detail, including basic spinal twists, various combinations of flexion, extension, lateral flexion, and twisting of the head and neck, and certain standing postures that combine twisting with backbending and forward bending. We'll start with an analysis of the fundamentals of twisting, then look at the anatomy of twisting from head to toe, and complete the chapter by looking at supine, standing, inverted, and sitting twists.

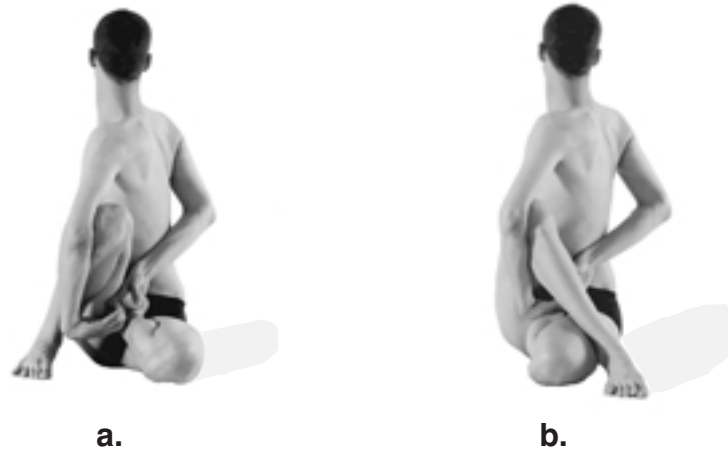


Figure 7.33. The full spinal twist (b) and its most immediate preparatory posture (a) are among the most difficult poses in hatha yoga. To do the preparatory pose, come into the half lotus (left foot pulled to the top of the right thigh) and then lift the right knee and pull the right foot in toward the perineum (a). To come into the full spinal twist, go from the preliminary pose and place the right foot on the floor on the left side of the left knee. Twist to the right, looking back, and catch the hands, interlocking the fingers behind the back (b).