

# **GLOSSARY**

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*of*

# **YOGA LINGO**



# Eliana

Eres esa luz, que a través del universo. Tú, me invitas a viajar

Tu me cautivas con tu forma de ser

Para quererte no necesito una razón

Quiero llegar hasta tu alma

Quiero volverte a encontrar

Tienes una belleza singular que nunca he visto

Quiero pasar el resto de mi vida conociéndote

Nunca conocí a alguien como tú

Tu pasión es bella

Mama que es inspiración





# The eight steps of RAJA YOGA

## 1 Yamas Abstentions

**Ahimsa:** Non-violence, inflicting no injury or harm to other beings in thought, word or deed  
**Satya:** Truthfulness, absence of falsehood  
**Asteya:** Non-covetousness, respecting others' possessions, non-stealing  
**Brahmacharya:** Moderation, control of the senses, continence  
**Aparigraha:** Absence of avarice, non-possessiveness, non-acquisitiveness

## 2 Niyamas Observances

**Saucha:** Cleanliness of body and mind  
**Santosha:** Contentment  
**Tapas:** Self-discipline, leading a simple life  
**Swadhyaya:** Self-study, study of spiritual texts  
**Ishvara Pranidhana:** Self-surrender, surrender to the divine will

## 3 Asanas

**Posture**  
Holding a firm, steady and comfortable pose



## 4 Pranayama

Control of life energy  
Breathing exercises to calm the mind



## 5 Pratyahara

Withdrawal of the senses



## 6 Dharana

Concentration  
One-pointedness of mind



## 7 Dhyana

Meditation  
Natural and effortless deep concentration



## 8 Samadhi

Superconscious state  
The mind merges with the object of meditation



Source: The Sivananda Book of Meditation

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# Cobra

## Bhujangasana

### Asana of the Week



### ENTRY

**1**

Lie prone on the floor. Stretch your legs back, tops of the feet on the floor. Spread your hands on the floor under your shoulders. Hug the elbows back into your body.

**2**

Press the tops of the feet and thighs and the pubis firmly into the floor.

**3**

On an inhalation, begin to straighten the arms to lift the chest off the floor, going only to the height at which you can maintain a connection through your pubis to your toes. Press the tailbone toward the pubis and lift the pubis toward the navel. Narrow the hip points. Firm but don't harden the buttocks.

**4**

Firm the shoulder blades against the back, puffing the side ribs forward. Lift through the top of the sternum but avoid pushing the front ribs forward, which only hardens the lower back. Distribute the backbend evenly throughout the entire spine.

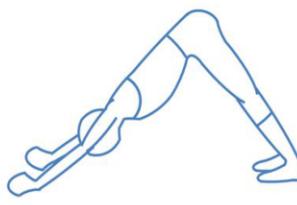
**5**

Hold the pose anywhere from 15 to 30 seconds, breathing easily. Release back to the floor with an exhalation.

# Downward Facing Dog

## Adho Mukha Svanasana

### Asana of the Week



### Entry

**1**

Come onto the floor on your hands and knees. Set your knees directly below your hips and your hands slightly forward of your shoulders. Spread your palms, index fingers parallel or slightly turned out, and turn your toes under.

**2**

Exhale and lift your knees away from the floor. At first keep the knees slightly bent and the heels lifted away from the floor. Lengthen your tailbone away from the back of your pelvis and press it lightly toward the pubis. Against this resistance, lift the sitting bones toward the ceiling, and from your inner ankles draw the inner legs up into the groins.

**3**

Then with an exhalation, push your top thighs back and stretch your heels onto or down toward the floor. Straighten your knees but be sure not to lock them. Firm the outer thighs and roll the upper thighs inward slightly. Narrow the front of the pelvis.

**4**

Firm the outer arms and press the bases of the index fingers actively into the floor. From these two points lift along your inner arms from the wrists to the tops of the shoulders. Firm your shoulder blades against your back, then widen them and draw them toward the tailbone. Keep the head between the upper arms; don't let it hang.

**5**

Adho Mukha Svanasana is one of the poses in the traditional Sun Salutation sequence. It's also an excellent yoga asana all on its own. Stay in this pose anywhere from 1 to 3 minutes. Then bend your knees to the floor with an exhalation and rest in Child's Pose.

### Tips for all Levels

**Beginner**

Don't overdo the backbend. To find the height at which you can work comfortably and avoid straining your back, take your hands off the floor for a moment, so that the height you find will be through extension.

**Intermediate**

Find depth in this pose incrementally. Find your maximum height on an inhale, exhale lower to halfway, inhale and lift higher. Ensure that you are not locking the muscles in the lower back with too much of a glute engagement.

**Advanced**

To increase the level of this backbend, press through the hands, drop the head back, and start to look backwards for your toes. Bend at the knees and start to try and bring your forehead to the soles of your feet. This is intense.

**Beginner**

If you have difficulty opening your shoulders in this pose you can raise your hands off the ground on some blocks or a towel. Additionally, you do not have to have the heels to the ground or even completely straight legs. Work towards that!

**Intermediate**

Integrate the muscles in the back. Try to bring the spine in to a perfectly straight line from the crown of the head through the tailbone. Don't allow the chest to collapse to the floor or the back to round to the sky.

**Advanced**

Floating to or from downward dog from a forward fold position is an excellent 'advanced' action for this pose. Floating is all about learning to bring most of your weight in to your hands and shoulders and allowing the hips to come upwards.

**Contraindications and Cautions**

This posture can be a very deep backbend. As the beginner option states, if you are new try this pose first with no weight in the hands using mostly back strength to lift you up. As you do start to advance, if you feel a burning or tingling sensation right above the tailbone be very careful. These feelings are usually indicative of bone on bone compression or a nerve issue and can be detrimental. Also, this pose should be avoided during a pregnancy.

### Tips for all Levels

**Contraindications and Cautions**

This pose can be quite difficult on the joints in the arms, specifically in the wrists. If you have wrist problems, talk to a teacher about finding the best hand position in this posture for your practice. There is no shame in using props in this pose. Additionally, take care with blood pressure changes (dizziness) in this pose as you are quickly changing the relative positions of the heart and head. Enter and exit this pose with care.

### Anatomy

**Move**

Feel the lower half of your body press down in to the floor. Feel the glutes rolling away from the back and to the floor while the lower abs pull away from the tailbone. Feel the chest open upward and to the front while the shoulders tighten and roll down the back.

**Lengthen**

The entire front side of your body is lengthening. Dropping the head back will start to stretch the neck. Opening the chest will broaden the pectoralis major. Lifting the stomach will stretch the abdominals and the psoas. Advancing, the quadriceps will stretch.

**Contract**

A light contraction of the glutes will help stabilize this posture, never engage enough to lock the lower back. Feel a slight contraction through the triceps rhomboids and latissimus dorsi to help lift the chest. A slight engagement in the hamstrings will help as well.

**Move**

Press the hands and feet down strongly in to the floor and isometrically begin to contract them together. Feel the shoulders roll down the spine while creating space in the lower back by pulling it towards the tailbone. Work on straightening the legs and grounding the heels.

**Lengthen**

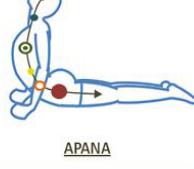
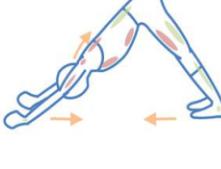
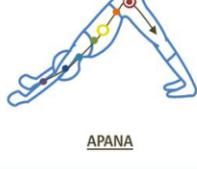
Muscles in the back of the legs are stretching deeply: hamstrings, gastrocnemius, gluteus, and the pelvic floor muscles. Feel the muscles in the lower and middle back broaden as well: erector spinae, lower latissimus. Find opening in the wrists and palms.

**Contract**

Muscles in the chest and arms are active as you press the floor away from you: trapezius, deltoids, triceps, and pectorals. Additionally, find activation in the rhomboids to integrate the back in this posture. Feel and engagement in the abs and quads.

### Energy

### Anatomy

**PRANA****APANA****PRANA****APANA**

Bhujangasana is excellent at opening **anahata** (heart). The chest lifts and **prana** flows upward and forward directly to the heart. As you advance, **svadhisthana** (sacral) will begin to open as it lifts away from the floor. On your exhale breaths, send **apana** deep in to the body toward **muladhara** (root) as your lower half binds with the earth.

Adho mukha svanasana is a superb pose to open **muladhara** (root). Feel your self offer your root chakra for opening with **prana** and **apana** flowing freely from and into the chakra. As you find more awareness find an energy center underneath the chest as **manipura** (solar plexus) begins to swell.

# Monkey

## Hanumanasana

### Asana of the Week

July 13, 2014



#### Entry

1

Kneel on the floor. Step your right foot forward about a foot in front of your left knee, and rotate your right thigh outwardly. Do this by lifting the inner sole away from the floor and resting the foot on the outer heel.

2

Exhale and lean your torso forward, pressing your fingertips to the floor. Slowly slide your left knee back, straightening the knee and at the same time descending the right thigh toward the floor. Stop straightening the back knee just before you reach the limit of your stretch.

3

Now begin to push the right heel away from your torso. Because we started with a strong external rotation of the front leg, gradually turn the leg inward as it straightens to bring the kneecap toward the ceiling. As the front leg straightens, resume pressing the left knee back, and carefully descend the front of the left thigh and the back of the right leg to the floor.

4

Also check to see that the back leg extends straight out of the hip, and that the center of the back kneecap is pressing directly on the floor. Keep the front leg active by extending through the heel and lifting the ball of the foot toward the ceiling. Bring the hands into Anjali Mudra or stretch the arms straight up toward the ceiling.

4

5

Stay in this pose for 30 seconds to a minute. To come out, press your hands to the floor, turn the front leg out slightly, and slowly return the front heel and the back knee to their starting positions. Then reverse the legs and repeat for the same length of time

1

Begin in Downward Facing Dog, with both hands and feet pressed firmly into the floor.

2

Step your right foot forward between your hands. Turn your left heel in, press into your feet, and lift your torso up. Your right foot should be slightly to the right of the center of your mat (not directly in front of your left heel). With this positioning, your hips can be parallel with the front of your mat.

3

Once your hips are square, interlace your hands behind you and press the heels of your palms together in a double fist. Keeping your right knee bent, hinge at your hips and fold forward as far as you can. Allow your arms to move toward your head to stretch your chest. If your head is hovering above the floor, gaze at the ground below you.

4

If your hips are very flexible, place the crown of your head on the floor as shown in the picture below. No matter where you are, stay integrated in the shoulders and keep them rolling towards your tailbone while still lifting the hands upwards.

5

Hold here for five breaths. Then release your hands to the floor, take a vinyasa and come back to Downward Facing Dog. Step your left foot forward and do Humble Warrior on the other side.

### Tips for all Levels

#### Beginner

Practice the "half" version of the pose. While remaining on one knee, extend the opposite leg forward. Squeeze that extended leg and begin to pivot forward at the waist stretching the hamstring. Begin to slide the rear knee backwards.

#### Intermediate

As you begin to progress in this pose, you may find it hard to support the weight of your torso before the pelvis reaches the ground. Place a block on the ground underneath the groin and allow yourself to relax.

#### Advanced

Once you have found the full version of the pose, work on squaring the hips to the front of the mat. If you want more, begin to work for a backward bend. Gradually allow the chest to open and reach rearward for the knee.

#### Beginner

It is not necessary to interlace the fingers behind the back in this posture if you are unable. Pivoting forward at the hips with the arms actively pointing backwards at the hips is completely acceptable. Keep the back leg strong.

#### Intermediate

Work on allowing your body to sink in to this posture. Getting the crown of the head to the floor is very advanced, just focus on pivoting forward at the hips and allowing yourself to open. A slightly wider stance may aid.

#### Advanced

Work the crown of the hand down to the floor while not collapsing through the neck and hips. Allow the shoulders to open. If possible, you can take a deeper arm bind by grabbing opposite elbows are seeking reverse prayer.

#### Contraindications and Cautions

This pose is an incredibly intense stretch for the hamstrings and hips, please practice with caution. With the legs the hamstrings fully extended, and potentially weight bearing, you have to be very careful to advance in to this pose slowly. Allow your hamstrings to open over time rather than pushing your torso downwards past what is acceptable for your body. Be aware of the lower back and that you are not compacting the lumbar spine.

#### Contraindications and Cautions

This pose can put stress on the shoulders, hips, knees and ankles. If you have knee and ankle injuries, staying on the ball of the foot in the rear leg can help alleviate stress. Additionally, explore the width between your hips in this posture to practice with stability. If you have a practice that allows you to bring your crown to the floor, do not sink in to your neck muscles, stay integrated and keep the back of the neck long.

### Anatomy

#### Move

Extend forward through the front toes and backwards through the rear toes. Allow the rear legs hip to move forward to square the hips. Extend downward through the tailbone and left upwards through the spine. Extend the arms to the sky and gaze upward slightly.

#### Lengthen

The forward leg's hamstring and the rearward leg's quadriceps are stretching deeply. Find length in the erector spinae as you begin to extend through the chest. Find a massive opening in the psoas and hip flexors as you work deeper.

#### Contract

Engage the muscles in the front leg as much as possible to aid in the release in the hamstrings. Find some tightness in the rear hamstring to help lengthen the hips. Feel the core squeeze to keep the lower back integrated in the posture.

#### Move

Feel strength in the rear leg as the foot presses downwards. Lengthen forward from the solar plexus and pivot forward at the hips. Allowing a slight outward motion of the forward knee can allow for a deeper posture. Feel the arms lift upwards.

#### Lengthen

Find a deep stretch in your psoas muscle. As you sink you will also stretch your hip adductors and abductors. Allow much of the upper body to elongate in this posture: trapezius, deltoid and pectorals are all open in this pose. Keep the lower back long.

#### Contract

The quadriceps muscles in the legs are engaged to keep the legs lifted in this posture. Feel the rhomboids and muscles in the upper back engage to allow more length on the front body. Keep the gluteus engaged and the abdominal wall strong.

### Energy

### Energy



PRANA



APANA



PRANA



APANA

Hanumanasana is an advanced pose that brings opening from **muladhara** (root) directly upward to **sahasrara** (crown). Feel **prana** move upwards from your connection to the earth up to the sky. Oppose that with the downward force of **apana** on the exhalation. Feel the interplay of energy enliven the sushumna.

Buddha virabhadrasana is an excellent posture that allows you to connect the upper and lower chakras. **Svadhisthana** is opening in this deep hip stretch and **sahasrara** will open as you bring it to contact with the earth. Allow **prana** and **apana** to circulate in this pose as the uppermost chakra connects to the earth.

# Frog

## Bhekasana

### Asana of the Week

June 9, 2014



### Entry

1

To begin come on your belly, and bring the upper body to rest on your forearms. Ground down into your left forearm.

2

Bend your right knee to a ninety-degree angle. Sweep your right arm behind you. Clasp your right foot with the thumb and big toe touching. Begin to lightly bring the heel closer to the glutes.

3

Continue advancing by drawing the right foot closer and closer to your buttocks. When comfortable for the shoulder spin the hand so the fingers face forward. Press the heel of your palm into the top of your foot.

5

Engage your upper back and lift your chest gradually reducing the weight in your left forearm. Bend your left knee to a ninety-degree angle. Come to the fingertips of the left hand then carefully reach backwards and clasp the left foot in the same way as the right.

4

Breathe here. Continue working the heels closer to the glutes or even past them towards the floor. To release, allow the heels to lift and release on foot at a time on the exhale breath.

1

Stand in mountain pose. Bring your hands to their preferred position: straight up overhead, hands clasped with the finger extended, or to the chest in prayer. Step one of your feet forward on your mat. Bring the weight of your body in to that foot and ground through the toe.

2

Lift the backward foot a few inches and point the toe back. Strengthen through the abdominal wall and make the body a straight line. On an exhale breath pivot at the hips to bring the body downwards maintaining it in a straightline.

3

Synchronize the straightening of the front leg and the lifting of the back leg. Don't allow the torso to bend as you pivot forward. You should strive to find the shape of a capital T and not an upward arrow.

4

Stretch your arms forward, parallel to the floor and parallel to each other, palms facing each other. Press the head of the downward thighbone back and press the heel actively into the floor. Lift the chest, the hands and the foot more as you fight gravity. Square the hips to the floor.

5

Stay in this position for 30 seconds to a minute. Pivot upwards from the hips and return to standing over both feet. Step the opposite foot forward and repeat on the other side. Once finished release the arms and return to mountain.

### Tips for all Levels

#### Beginner

Half frog pose with props is an excellent beginner alternative. Rather than executing with both feet simultaneously, do one foot at a time and switch. You can also use a yoga strap on the ankle if you can't bind the foot.

#### Intermediate

Progressing from half-frog to full-frog can be difficult. The key is training the muscles in the upper back to hold your chest upwards so you can reach your hands back safely. Roll the shoulders down and send the sternum upwards.

#### Advanced

An advanced version of this pose takes your heels down to the floor rather than to the tops of your glutes. To accomplish this, a small internal rotation of the legs is necessary for most. Try and point your fingers forwards.

#### Beginner

This pose does not require you to come all the way parallel to the floor to experience the benefits. If you have inflexible hamstrings, very slight pivots from the hips is acceptable. Hands to the heart is the easiest hand position.

#### Intermediate

Don't bind the hands as you pivot forward. Allow both arms to reach forward independently. Do not allow the stomach to drop towards the ground. Keep the core engaged and pull it upwards through the back.

#### Advanced

Once the body is parallel to the floor square the hips to the ground without collapsing through the rear leg or stomach. Attempt to find reverse prayer behind the back without letting the chest move towards the ground.

### Contraindications and Cautions

Bhekasana can be tremendously dangerous for the knees, and ankles if practiced improperly. The knee is a hinge joint and people new to the pose should ensure that the downward motion of the foot stays in line with the leg. Ensure that you are not putting lateral pressure on the knee with your arm pressure. Additionally, a flat foot is not required for those with problems in the ankle.

### Contraindications and Cautions

As you are changing the plane of the head and heart, move into this pose with control to maintain an even blood pressure and avoid dizziness. If you have shoulder issues, hands to the heart or pointing backwards will allow you to practice this pose. This pose can be difficult on the ankle and knee joints so practice with care, but be steadfast as this pose strengthens standing leg stabilizers greatly.

### Anatomy

#### Move

Roll the shoulders downwards towards your hips. Keep the knees moving towards the midline and don't let them splay to the sides. Press the heels close to the glutes while lifting the chest further away from the floor. Look upwards slightly to protect the neck.

#### Lengthen

The front side of the body is stretching. This will create a tremendous stretch through the front of your quadriceps and ankles. Allow the pectoralis to open as you lift your chest upwards. A slight stretch to the sternomastoid is accomplished by gazing upwards.

#### Contract

Keep the upper back engaged to allow your chest to lift upwards to clasp the feet. A slight engagement through the abdominals is used to keep the lower back integrated. Try and find strength in your glutes and hamstrings to move deeper.



#### Move

Extended both forward from the fingers and backwards through the toes. Roll the shoulders down the spine and lift the chest. Feel the lower spine and leg lift to parallel with the ground. Ground down through the tailbone and standing femur move back.

#### Lengthen

There will be a tremendous stretch on the internal two hamstring muscles from the forward fold, and as you square the hips the outer muscle will lengthen. Feel the psoas lengthen as the leg lifts. Open through the chest and broaden it towards the floor.

#### Contract

The ankle's connective tissue, the gastrocnemius, and quadriceps are all engaged as you balance. The glutes and lifted leg's quadriceps flare as you point the toe backwards. Feel the abdominal wall and rhomboids strengthen as you lift the upper body.

### Energy

#### PRANA



#### APANA

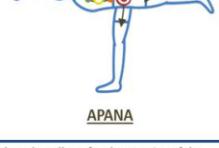


### Energy

#### PRANA



#### APANA



Bhekasana is an intense front body stretch that works to open **svadhisthana (saecral)** while it is still rooted to the ground. Work the **apana** energy upwards and release it as you open **vishuddhi (throat)**. Find strength in the back body as **apana** works its way toward **muladhara (root)**.

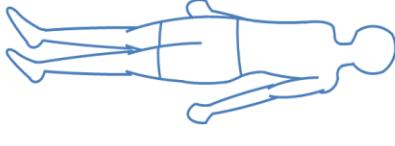
Virabhadrasana III is a forward fold with open legs that allows for the opening of the **muladhara (root)**. Pull **prana** upwards from the grounded foot and through the horizontally aligned chakras. As you progress the chest begins to lift opening **manipura (solar plexus)**. **Apana** takes a balancing energy back to the legs.

# Corpse

## Savasana

### Asana of the Week

December 30, 2013



### Entry

1

Sit on the floor with your knees bent, feet on the floor, and lean back onto your forearms. Push the back of the pelvis toward the tailbone, then return the pelvis to the floor. Inhale and slowly extend the legs pushing through the heels. Release both legs, and see that the legs are angled evenly and that the feet turn out equally. Narrow the front pelvis and soften the lower back.

2

Lift the base of the skull away from the back of the neck and release the back of the neck down toward the tailbone. Broaden the base of the skull, and lift the crease of the neck diagonally into the center of the head. Make sure your ears are equidistant from your shoulders.

3

Release the arms to the floor. Turn the arms outward and stretch them away from the space between the shoulder blades. Rest the backs of the hands on the floor. Make sure the shoulder blades are resting evenly on the floor. Imagine the lower tips of the shoulder blades are lifting diagonally into your back toward the top of the sternum. From here, spread the collarbones.

4

Soften the root of the tongue, the wings of the nose, the channels of the inner ears, and the skin of the forehead, especially around the bridge of the nose between the eyebrows. Let the eyes sink to the back of the head, then turn them downward to gaze at the heart. Release your brain to the back of the head.

5

Stay in this pose for 5 minutes for every 30 minutes of practice. To exit, first roll gently with an exhalation onto one side, preferably the right. Take 2 or 3 breaths. With another exhalation press your hands against the floor and lift your torso, dragging your head slowly after.

# Intense Side Stretch

## Parsvottanasana

### Asana of the Week

November 11, 2013



### Entry

1

Stand in mountain. Step or lightly jump your feet  $3\frac{1}{2}$  to 4 feet apart. Rest your hands on your hips. Turn your rear foot in 45 degrees and your forward foot out 90 degrees. Align the front heel with the back heel. Firm your thighs and turn your forward thigh outward, so that the center of that forward knee cap is in line with the center of that ankle.

2

Rotate your torso to the front of the mat, squaring the front of your pelvis as much as possible. As the rear leg's hip point turns forward, press the head of the femur back to ground the back heel. Press your outer thighs inward. Firm your scapulas against your back torso, lengthen your coccyx toward the floor, and arch your upper torso back slightly.

3

Lean the torso forward from the groins over the leg. Stop when the torso is parallel to the floor. Press your fingertips to the floor on either side of the forward foot. Press the thighs back and lengthen the torso forward, lifting through the top of the sternum.

4

Be sure to soften the front-leg hip toward the earth and away from the same-side shoulder while you continue squeezing the outer thighs. Press the base of the big toe and the inner heel of the front foot firmly into the floor, then lift the inner groin of the front leg deep into the pelvis.

Exhale and bring the front torso closer to the top of the thigh, but don't round forward from the waist to do this. Hold your maximum position for 15 to 30 seconds, then come up with an inhalation by pressing actively through the back heel and dragging the coccyx first down and then into the pelvis. Repeat the same on the opposite side.

### Tips for all Levels

#### Beginner

Laying down and neutralizing may be difficult for some. Feel free to use as many props wherever you may need them. Blankets or pillows under the neck, the lower back, the knees or the thighs are completely appropriate.

#### Intermediate

Work on bringing the heels closer together as you let the toes fall towards the floor, possibly stretching the inner hips. Work on bringing the back of the neck a bit closer to the floor and sending the occipital bone upwards.

#### Advanced

Find the stationary mind as well as the stationary body. Breathe. Release. Allow both the mind and the body to start to melt. Find absolute stillness in the mind while you are embracing stillness in the body. Let go.

#### Beginner

Moving down to parallel or past that point is not necessary in this pose. Move the torso downward with a straight spine as low as is comfortable. This can be very little depending on the body. Feel free to use

#### Intermediate

It is easy to allow the hips to become unbalanced in this posture. Most often people will allow the front-leg hip to lift up toward the shoulder and swing out to the side, shortening the front-side leg. Work on not allowing this to happen.

#### Advanced

There are quite a few hand binds that are possible with open shoulders and hamstrings: bring the hands behind your shoulders in reverse prayer, bind hand to wrist while reaching behind the rear leg, bind hands to rear calf or heel.

#### Contraindications and Cautions

If you do have a back or neck injury that make this pose uncomfortable, you can find several modifications. If you have the need you can bend your knees and place the feet flat on the floor. Also, try to at least experience a few minutes of savasana after every practice in whatever form you may find it. Many people avoid savasana as it is not an 'exercise' pose and miss many of the benefits yoga and mindfulness can bring.

#### Contraindications and Cautions

If you have a back or spine injury, this pose should be practiced with caution. If necessary, practice with the hands on a wall for support. As you are moving your head above and below your heart in this forward fold, take care with your entrance and exits. Moving quickly in or out of this pose can cause substantial blood pressure variations which can be dangerous when it comes to sustaining your practice and balance.

### Anatomy

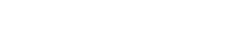
#### Move

Tuck the chin slightly and bring the occipital bone towards the back of the room. Allow the toes to drop out towards the sides while you extend downward through the hands. Allow the chest to broaden as the shoulders melt to the ground.



#### Lengthen

Depending on the body, allowing the toes to draw down can cause a tremendous stretch on the inner hamstrings or hip adductors. The chest stretches as it melts towards the ground. The erector spinae elongate as the spine relaxes.



#### Contract

If you are working on a more advanced practice you can begin to work on several bandhas during savasana: mula engages the area under the genitals, jalendara locks energy in the body in the throat, or uddiyana holding energy in the abdomen.



### Anatomy

#### Move

Feel your two grounded feet somatically move towards one another. Allow your tailbone move downward while the low back lengthens away from the hips. Feel the shoulders roll down the spine and the sternum move towards the toes. Extended through the crown.



#### Lengthen

Both of your hamstrings and gastrocnemius (calf) muscles will be stretching greatly. Depending on the body this forward fold can allow lengthening of the gluteus muscles. Allow the erector spinae to elongate as your chin separates from the hips.

#### Contract

Engagement on the front of your torso will assist in the lengthening of the back body. Feel your quadriceps muscles grip the femur and lift away from the ground. Squeeze the abs and use them to pull you downward. Activate the upper back by rolling the scapulas down.

### Energy



#### PRANA

Savasana is the final resting posture after every asana practice. In this final pose you bring all of the chakras in to alignment and allow **prana** to flow upwards through the body opening **ajna (third eye)** and finally opening **sahasrara (crown)**. **Apana** works its way downward towards **muladhara (root)**. Find peace. Open the mind.



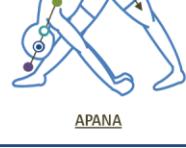
#### APANA

### Energy



#### PRANA

Parsvottanasana is a forward fold whose connection to the body opens two of the upper chakras. **Ajna (third eye)** is stimulated and opened as it comes in to contact with the legs. Some variations call for looking toward the toe to open **vishuddhi (throat)** in this pose. Focus on lining up the chakras to allow **prana** and **apana** to move freely.



#### APANA



# Wild Thing

## Camatkarasana

### Asana of the Week

November 25, 2013



### Entry

1

Start in downward-facing dog. Bring your weight into one side's hand and roll onto the outer edge of the foot on the same side like side plank pose.

1

Stand evenly over both feet with a small space between them. Turn your arms outward (or laterally) so your palms face away from your torso and thumbs point backward. With an inhale, sweep your arms out to the sides and up toward the ceiling

3

On an inhalation, lift your hips with buoyancy. Stay strong in your grounded hand making a clawing action with the fingers. Keep the head of the grounded arm bone back. Step your top foot back and place your toes on the floor with your knee partially bent.

2

2

If tighter in the shoulders, stop when your arms are approximately parallel to each other. But if possible without hunching your shoulders forward, press your palms firmly together by, touching the bases of your palms first, then the palms themselves, and finally the fingers.

5

Curl back through your upper back to create a sweeping action of the shoulder blades into the back of the rib cage. Allow the chest to open, and the shoulder blades to roll down the spine.

4

On an inhalation lift your hips higher until you curl more into a backbend with your downward foot solid on the ground. Extend out through the lifted hands/fingers and feel the front body open.

3

Extend your elbows fully and reach up through your pinkies so your thumbs turn slightly down toward the crown of your head. Making sure not to compress the back of your neck, tip your head back slightly and gaze at your thumbs.

5

Hold for 5-10 breaths, return to side plank, then return to downward facing dog and repeat on the other side.

2

Lift your ribcage away from the hips. Roll the shoulders down the spine and keep the tailbone moving toward the floor. Press the hips forward and allow the chest to begin to open towards the ceiling. Your arms draw down behind you as you press down through the heels. Never allow yourself to compress above the tailbone.

4

Hold for 3-5 breaths, moving deeper on your exhale breaths and affirming your backbend on the inhale breath. To release, with control begin to draw the arms upwards, slide the hips backwards, and allow your spine to neutralize.

### Tips for all Levels

#### Beginner

Rather than approaching this pose from side plank, remain in downward dog. While keeping the shoulders square to the floor lift one leg high and open the hips skyward. It is not necessary to 'flip the dog' to experience benefits.

#### Intermediate

Rather than using side plank as an transitional posture into this pose, flow directly from down dog. Lift one leg high, and on an exhale lift the hips and 'flip the dog'. Breath and lengthen. Reverse the flip and find downward dog to exit.

#### Advanced

Find hasta pada camatkarasana. Solidify the base by rotating the hand and foot. Shift most of your weight into the side of the body with the hand on the ground until the opposite side's foot lifts. Bind the lifted hand and foot.

#### Beginner

Backbends come in all shapes and sizes. If you have very little mobility in your back, be patient and don't force a deeper stretch. Rather than having the arms extended place the hands on the hips with the fingers pointing down to support yourself.

#### Intermediate

The closer the feet are to one another in this pose the more challenging a backbend is. Over time bring them side by side. Begin to find activation in the hamstrings and upper back to help deepen your backbend practice.

#### Advanced

Attempt a dropback. Generally, your first attempt should be when your backbend is deep enough that you can see the back of your mat when bending from the front. For ease, the knees bend and the feet are apart. Be brave and let go!

### Contraindications and Cautions

Moving from downward dog to an inverted bow (wheel) or wild thing pose can be very strenuous on the shoulders. If you have a rotator cuff injury or damage to the deltoids, this pose should be avoided. Additionally, if you have damage in the wrists this pose should be practiced with caution. Finally, as you are practicing a deep backbend take care to keep the lower back long and not compress the vertebrae above the tailbone.

### Contraindications and Cautions

Standing backbends are responsible for quite a few injured yogis. Practice within your body's limitations and do not move in to injury. Backbends are originate, focus, and sustain in the middle and upper back. Forcing the entirety of a backbend to the lumbar spine is a recipe for injury. A backbend should cause the spine to look more like the graceful curve of a half moon rather than a jointed obtuse angle.

### Anatomy

#### Move

Press down through all of your grounded limbs to establish a strong foundation. Allow extension through your lifted hand. Feel the entire front body lift upwards and in all directions. Allow the head to roll backwards and look towards the lifted hand.

#### Lengthen

All of the muscles on the front of the body are lengthening. The quadriceps, psoas, abdominals, and pectoralis muscles are all broadening. Focus on the muscle train running across the body from the lifted hand to the opposite leg.

#### Contract

Using back body activation in this pose will help in this posture. Use contraction in the rhomboids, glutes, and hamstrings to lift yourself higher. Feel the muscles of the arm, the triceps and deltoids, activate as you press your body away from the floor.

### Anatomy

#### Move

Establish a foundation and press down through the feet while lifting upwards through the hands. Press the hips forward while letting the tailbone slide towards the floor. The shoulders draw together and down the spine while the chin lifts skywards.

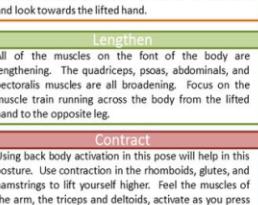
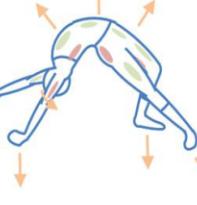
#### Lengthen

Before your backbend practice focus on warming up the major muscle groups of the front side. Allow the deltoids, latissimus dorsi, and pectoralis to open and lengthen. The abdominals, psoas, and quadriceps will stretch deeply as you open.

#### Contract

If new to the asana, a strong contraction of the gluteus can help protect the lower back. As you advance, release some of that contraction to allow for deeper backbends. Feel the rhomboids, erector spinae, and hamstrings engage to take you deeper.

### Energy



In camatkarasana, with every inhale breath **prana** wells through **manipura (solar plexus)** and begins to open the front body. As your practice deepens **prana** will further spring upward through **anahata (heart)**. The exhale breath takes **apana** downward and stabilizes **svadhisthana (sacral)** on its way to strengthening **muladhara (root)**.

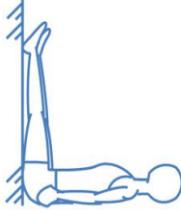
As with all backbends, anuvittasana focuses on opening **anahata (heart)**. Feel the chest open skywards as **prana** wells upward through the body. As you deepen, **vishuddhi (throat)** will unlock after the heart releases. Send focused **apana** downward towards a strong, engaged, and centering **muladhara (root)**.

# Legs Up the Wall

Viparita Karani

## Asana of the Week

July 20, 2014



### Entry

1

Start with your support about 5 to 6 inches away from the wall. Sit sideways on right end of the support, with your right side against the wall. Exhale and, with one smooth movement, swing your legs up onto the wall and your shoulders and head lightly down onto the floor.

2

Check that the front of your torso gently arches from the pubis to the top of the shoulders. If the front of your torso seems flat, then you've probably slipped a bit off the support. Bend your knees, press your feet into the wall and lift your pelvis off the support a few inches, tuck the support a little higher up under your pelvis, then lower your pelvis onto the support again.

3

Lift and release the base of your skull away from the back of your neck and soften your throat. Don't push your chin against your sternum; instead let your sternum lift toward the chin. Take a small amount under your neck if the cervical spine feels flat. Open your shoulder blades away from the spine and release your hands and arms out to your sides, palms up.

4

Keep your legs relatively firm, just enough to hold them vertically in place. Release the heads of the thigh bones and the weight of your belly deeply into your torso, toward the back of the pelvis. Soften your eyes and turn them down to look into your heart.

5

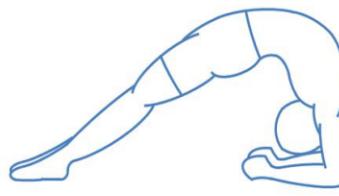
Stay in this pose anywhere from 5 to 15 minutes. Be sure not to twist off the support when coming out. Instead, slide off the support onto the floor before turning to the side. Then slide the support to one side, lower your pelvis to the floor, and turn to the side. Stay on your side for a few breaths, and come up to sitting with an exhalation.

# Two-Foot Inverted Staff

Dwi Pada Viparita Dandasana

## Asana of the Week

May 13, 2013



### ENTRY

1

Begin in corpse. Bend your knees, feet on the floor, heels under the knees, and step your feet a little wider than your hips. Bend your arms and place your palms on the floor by your ears, fingertips facing the shoulders, shoulder-width apart. Press your knees away from your torso and lift your hips, shoulders, and head from the floor as you straighten your arms.

2

Bend your arms and place the crown of your head on the floor between your hands and feet, keeping your elbows shoulder-width apart and directly over your wrists, slide one hand past your ear to cup the back of your head, bringing your weight onto your forearm. Repeat the same action with the other arm, interlacing your fingers behind your head.

3

Press down through your inner elbows and wrists and lift your chest to raise your head off the floor. As your head lifts, press your inner heels down. If the head does not lift, do not try and force it off the ground with the shoulders.

5

It is acceptable to keep the knees bent. For a fuller expression, walk the feet away from your hands until your legs are nearly straight; then plant your inner feet and exhale as you stretch down through your calves and push to straighten the legs completely. Maintain this pose for 30 seconds.

4

Come out of this asana with great attention. First, place the crown of your head back on the floor. Walk your feet back under your knees. Return your palms to the floor next to your ears. Push with your hands to lift the head and tuck your chin and tail bone in as you roll your spine back down to the floor, tail bone touching last. Rest in corpse.

### Tips for all Levels

#### Beginner

While the instructions for the pose above have your lower back being on a support, it is unnecessary to have one. Practicing with the lower back on the ground is also great. Allow the tailbone to be as far from the wall as needed.

#### Intermediate

As you begin to advance, work on using taller and taller supports. Start with a towel or block, then turn the block on its side or add another towel under the lower back. Work on getting the tailbone closer to the wall.

#### Advanced

Find this pose without the wall. Rather than using an external support. Bend your elbows and place them closer together. Bring the hips to the top of the hands and use them for support. Extend the legs vertically upwards.

#### Beginner

If this pose is intimidating, continue working on wheel and headstand. Alternatively, practice this pose with a wide stool. Lie backwards on to the stool with your middle back and hips supported. Drop your head to the floor and extend the legs.

#### Intermediate

It is not necessary to lift the head off the floor nor straighten the legs. Practicing this asana with bent knees and crown down is still very advanced. Once there, actively press through the arms and pull them back to open the chest.

#### Advanced

Lift the head off the ground and begin to look backwards towards your toes opening the neck. Find the straight line on the front body. Walk the feet closer to the hands but maintain the straight line, making this a deeper backbend.

### Contraindications and Cautions

As with any inversion Viparita Karani should be avoided if you have serious eye problems, such as glaucoma. With serious neck or back problems only perform this pose with the supervision of an experienced teacher. If your feet begin to tingle during this pose, bend your knees, touch your soles together, and slide the outer edges of your feet down the wall, bringing your heels close to your pelvis.

### Tips for all Levels

### Contraindications and Cautions

This posture is very advanced, ensure that you have a strong upward bow and headstand practice before attempting. With that, this pose can be difficult on the wrists, shoulders, lower back, and neck. Through the entirety of this posture, be very careful with your neck never placing too much pressure in to the crown. If you have lifted the head and feel like you are going to collapse, immediately tuck the chin to land on the shoulders and protect the spine.

### Anatomy

#### Move

Work to bring the toes skywards. Bring the tailbone closer to the wall. Press the high bones towards the wall. If you are using a support, allow the tailbone to dip slightly towards the ground. Extend through the fingertips.

#### Lengthen

The hamstrings will begin to lengthen as you work the legs up the wall and closer towards its base. Keep the lower back lengthen towards the floor. Allow the back of the neck to drop downwards to the floor, connecting the entire spine to the floor.

#### Contract

There should be very little engagement in this pose. You can use a slight engagement through the core to bring the lower back down when the back is on the ground. Slight tightness in the quads can lengthen the hamstrings more.

### Anatomy

#### Move

Press down through the forearms immensely and lift the head off the ground. Press down and back through your toes and inner heels to straighten the legs. Lift the hips, stomach, and chest up and forward striving to stack the shoulders on top of the elbows.

#### Lengthen

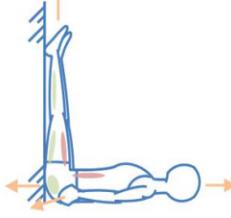
The deep back bend and lift of the hips in this pose will stretch the entire front side of the body: the quadriceps, psoas, abdominals and pectoralis major and minor are lengthening. Control the lengthening in the abdominals and hips to protect the lower back.

#### Contract

Push down through the feet and isometrically contract them to the feet to engage the hamstrings and help lift the hips. A slight strengthening through the glutes will give you more height. Contraction of the latissimus, rhomboids, triceps and deltoids lifts the head.

### Energy

#### PRANA



#### APANA



### Energy

#### PRANA



#### APANA



As an inversion, viparita karani should seek to open ajna [third eye]. Allow yourself stillness in this pose and bring awareness to the breath. Allow prana to move up the body and out the crown while apana roots you to the wall. Manipura [solar plexus] will open as you take deeper breaths.

As a backbend, dwi pada viparita dandasana focuses on opening anahata [heart] by lifting it up and forward. Additionally, lifting the hips high works on opening svadhisthana [saecral]. Lifting the head off the ground allows prana to move upward through the crown. Apana moves downward into a strong muladhara [root].

# Half Moon II

## Ardha Chandrasana

### Asana of the Week

March 04, 2013



### Entry

1

Perform extended triangle to the right side. Let your left hand rest on the left hip. Inhale, bend your right knee, and slide your left foot about 6 to 12 inches toward the right along the floor. At the same time, reach your right hand forward, beyond the little-toe side of the right foot, at least 12 inches.

3

Exhale, press your right hand and right heel firmly into the floor, and straighten your right leg, simultaneously lifting the left leg parallel to the floor. Extend actively through the left heel to keep the raised leg strong. Be careful not to lock the standing knee. Make sure the top of the leg is aligned straight forward and isn't turned inward.

5

Rotate your upper torso to the left, but keep the left hip moving slightly forward. Beginners can keep the left hand on the left hip and the head in a neutral position, gazing forward.

2

Bear the body's weight mostly on the standing leg. Press the lower hand lightly to the floor, using it to intelligently regulate your balance. Lift the inner ankle of the standing foot strongly upward. Press shoulder blades firmly against the back torso, and lengthen the tailbone toward the raised heel.

4

4

5

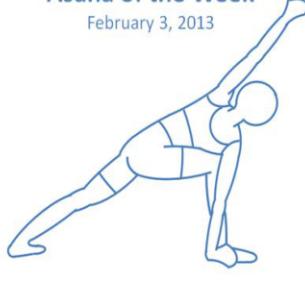
Stay in this position for 30 seconds to 1 minute. Lower the raised leg to the floor with an exhalation, and return to extended triangle. Perform the pose to the left for the same length of time.

# Revolved Side Angle

## Parivrtta Parsvakonasana

### Asana of the Week

February 3, 2013



### ENTRY

1

Stand in mountain pose. With an exhalation, step or lightly jump your feet apart. Rest your hands on your hips. Turn your right foot out to the right 90 degrees and turn your left foot in slightly to the right. Align the right heel with the left heel. Firm your thighs and turn your right thigh outward.

3

Exhale and turn your torso to the right until you're facing directly out over the right leg; as you do this, lift your left heel off the floor and spin on the ball of the foot until the inner left foot is parallel to the inner right foot. For greater challenge, keep the heel down and pressing in to the floor. Exhale again and bend your right knee.

5

With another exhale turn further to the right and lean the torso down, placing the left hand on the floor inside the right foot. Place your right hand on your low back and allow the thigh bone to sink toward the floor. Firm the shoulder blades into the back ribs and lean the torso back slightly, away from the inner thigh. Stay in this position for a few breaths.

2

4

Bend your left elbow and bring it to the outside of the right knee. Resist the knee and elbow against each other. Bring your hands into a prayer position. If possible, straighten your left elbow and reach the hand toward the floor. Stretch your right hand over the back of the right ear with the palm facing down. Turn your head to look at the right arm.

5

Stay for 30 seconds to 1 minute. Inhale to come up, exhale to release the twist. Reverse the feet and repeat for the same length of time to the left. Then return to mountain.

### Tips for all Levels

### Tips for all Levels

#### Beginner

Using a block under the downward hand to aid in balance can be helpful. Allowing the upward hand to stay on the hips and not forcing your gaze upwards can make balance in this pose easier as a beginner.

#### Intermediate

Let your hand touch the floor, but only lightly, try to use core strength to maintain your posture. Begin to let the gaze drift towards the top of the room. Let the upward hip lift and open to the side of the room.

#### Advanced

Allow your hand come off the floor and use internal strength to maintain this pose. Consider extending the downward arm forward in front of you or taking the top arm behind your waist and grabbing the thigh.

#### Beginner

If this twist while supporting your weight is difficult, allow your back knee to come to the floor. Additionally, you may use a block if you are having trouble bringing your hand to the floor while you are rotating the spine.

#### Intermediate

Use the resistance from the elbow on the thigh in a twisted prayer position to intensify the rotation. As you deepen your twist, start to work on getting the downward hand to the floor outside of the front foot.

#### Advanced

Rather than lifting the back heel off the ground, enter this pose with it placed on the floor as if in warrior one. Finally, bind the hands by moving the downward arm under the front thigh and the lifted arm around the torso.

### Anatomy

### Anatomy

#### Move

Ground down through your big toe and allow your leg to control your balance. Stretch both forwards and backwards decompressing the spine. Allow your upper hip to lift begin to look to the top of the room. Stretch up through your lifted hand.

#### Lengthen

As your body moves towards parallel with the floor feel a deep stretch in your standing hamstring. The pectoralis major / minor and deltoid are stretched as the chest broadens. As you work your upper hip open, feel the leg adductors stretch.

#### Contract

Contract your quadriceps to aid in stability of the standing leg and to strengthen and straighten the lifting leg. Engage your abdominals and obliques to help support the torso. Core strength prevents the upper body from collapsing to the floor.

#### Move

Press down through your feet and isometrically contract them together while working your forward thigh to parallel. Extend out through your fingertips in both directions. Allow your head to pull away from the hips as you look upwards.

#### Lengthen

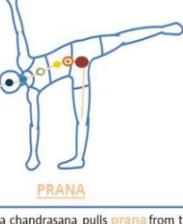
As your thigh comes downward and you stretch forward feel your obliques and rear hamstring begin to lengthen. Actively work to broaden the pectoralis major and minor as you deepen your twist. Your head twists upward to stretch the neck.

#### Contract

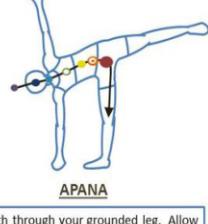
Engage your back leg and feel the quadriceps begin to strengthen. The deeper you come in to the lunge, the more your gluteus and front quadriceps will strengthen. Contract your abdominals and pull them up, using the strength of the core to twist.

### Energy

### Energy



PRANA

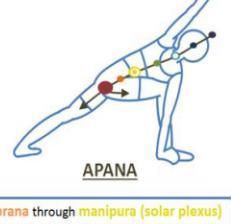


APANA

Ardha chandrasana pulls prana from the earth through your grounded leg. Allow the energy to open svadhisthana (sacral) as your hips start to open. Anahata (heart) will open as your chest lifts away from the floor. Send apana downward through the body and return it back to the earth through muladhara (root).



PRANA



APANA

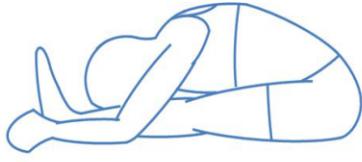
The twist in parivrtta parsvakonasana sends prana through manipura (solar plexus) and helps you to deepen your twist. As you begin to send your gaze upwards and rotate your head vishuddhi (throat) will begin to open as well. Apana travels down from the crown and deep into the rooted legs strengthening muladhara (root).

# Intense West Stretch

## Paschimottanasana

### Asana of the Week

June 17, 2013



### ENTRY

1

Sit on the floor with legs straight in front of you. Rock slightly onto your left buttock, and pull your right sitting bone away from the heel with your right hand. Repeat on the other side. Turn the top thighs in slightly and press them down into the floor. Lift the top of the sternum toward the ceiling as the top thighs descend.

Draw the inner groins deep into the pelvis. Keeping the front torso long, lean forward from the hip joints, not the waist. Lengthen the tailbone away from the back of your pelvis. Take the sides of the feet with your hands, thumbs on the soles, elbows fully extended.

2

Lengthen the front torso into the pose, keeping your head raised. Bend the elbows out to the sides and lift them away from the floor. The lower belly should touch the thighs first, then the upper belly, then the ribs, and the head touches the shins last.

3

With each inhalation, lift and lengthen the front torso just slightly; with each exhalation release a little more fully into the forward bend. In this way the torso oscillates and lengthens almost imperceptibly with the breath.

4

Stay in the pose anywhere from 1 to 3 minutes. To release, first lift the torso away from the thighs and straighten the elbows again if they are bent. Then inhale and lift the torso up by pulling the tailbone down and into the pelvis.

5

1

Start in downward facing dog. Then inhale and draw your torso forward until the arms are perpendicular to the floor and the shoulders directly over the wrists, torso parallel to the floor.

2

Press your outer arms inward and firm the bases of your index fingers into the floor. Firm your shoulder blades against your back, then spread them away from the spine. Also spread your collarbones away from the sternum.

3

Press your front thighs up toward the ceiling, but resist your tailbone toward the floor as you lengthen it toward the heels. Lift the base of the skull away from the back of the neck and look straight down at the floor, keeping the throat and eyes soft.

4

Allow the eye of the elbow to rotate forwards. Ensure that you are pressing down through the entire palm rather than just the wrists. Work to bring as little of your toes touching the floor as possible.

5

Plank Pose is one of the positions in the traditional Sun Salutation sequence. You can also perform this pose by itself and stay anywhere from 30 seconds to 1 minute.

### Tips for all Levels

#### Beginner

If you cannot grasp your feet with your legs straight in front of you, use a strap around the soles of the feet. If a strap is unavailable, it is ok to bend the knees and grab the big toes. If the knees are bent, remove rounding in the upper back.

#### Intermediate

Work on straightening the back. As students advance it is common to see the chest and forehead touch the lower body before the thighs. Lead with your sternum in this pose. Begin to pull your toes backwards with your hands.

#### Advanced

Find the more advanced hand placements: bound around the feet, bound around the feet with an added block, or extended on the ground past the toes. Have a partner assist for deeper stretch by pressing up the spine from the hips.

#### Beginner

Holding this pose can be difficult for new practitioners. If you do not yet have the strength required for this pose, practice with your knees on the floor. Ensure that you are still maintaining a flat back in this position as well.

#### Intermediate

Hold this pose for longer periods of time without losing the form. It can be very difficult on the chest and abdominal endurance. To increase the effort you can lift a foot at a time while holding the pose for a fun variation. Fingerlifts.

#### Advanced

Floating from a forward fold directly to plank. Press your hands strongly to the floor until your toes start to lift. Lightly lift (less hopping) the toes up and back to where your body is directly in plank pose. For more, find handstand before plank.

#### Contraindications and Cautions

Do not overstretch the hamstrings. The most common injury in a yogi is hamstring tendonitis stemming from overstretching. With a bind on the feet in a forward fold it is very easy to pull oneself farther than the muscles are ready to go. Ensure that you are listening to your body in this stretch and not pushing to injury. Additionally, if you have back injury ensure to take caution in this pose.

#### Contraindications and Cautions

This pose will put a lot of strain on the wrist, for those of you who have issues with this joint please take care. You can explore alternative hand positions to help alleviate some of this (fingerlifts, rotation, etc). This pose can also induce stress in the shoulders and elbows if you compensate your lack of strength with bad form. There is nothing wrong with coming to the knees for this pose. Try not to allow the lower back to droop as it will stress the spine.

### Anatomy

#### Move

Feel separation start to happen on the pubis as the backs of the upper thighs ground down and forward while the lower back lengthens up and forward. Lead with the sternum as you fold forward. The upper back and head are both drawing towards the top of the mat.

#### Lengthen

The entire back side of your body is lengthening. The forward fold lengthens the gastrocnemius, hamstrings and glutes. As you lengthen forward the muscles of the back stretch as well: erector spinae, latissimus dorsi and rhomboids.

#### Contract

Feel a strong contraction through the quadriceps to aid with hamstring length. Strengthen through the entire abdominal wall to help pull the torso forward. A very slight engagement through the biceps can aid in pulling the crown forward.

#### Move

Press down through the entirety of both of your palms to stabilize the torso. Press down through the toes and roll forward on to them slightly. Send your tailbone downwards towards your heels while broadening the shoulder blades across the back. Neutralize the neck.

#### Lengthen

You will be stretching your wrists in this pose which can be uncomfortable. The muscles lengthening the back of the body are lengthening. The erector spinae all the way up through the rhomboids are long. The muscles in the neck lengthen as you extend through the head.

#### Contract

Front body is strongly engaged. Your pectoralis, deltoids, triceps, and trapezius are all turned on to keep your torso off the ground. Find strength in your quadriceps and abdominals to steady the body. For more work, squeeze the glutes.

### Energy

#### PRANA

Paschimottanasana yields itself to utilizing the interplay between prana and apana to deepen a pose. Feel prana lift upward from the root as it opens svadhisthana (sacral) and manipura (solar plexus) on the way upwards. Feel apana ground down through the chakras on its way towards strengthening muladhara (root).

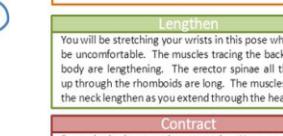
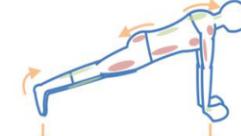
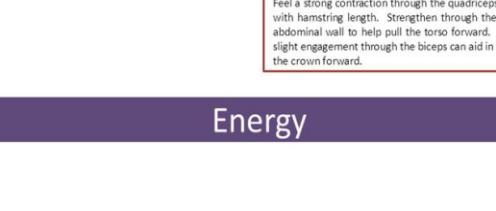
#### APANA

#### PRANA

Uttihita chaturanga dandasana is used for opening the svadhisthana (sacral) and manipura (solar plexus) chakras. Feel yourself pull the prana energy upwards from your hips and stomach on an inhale breath. Strengthen in to the earth through muladhara (root) with downward apana energy.

#### APANA

#### APANA



#### PRANA

Paschimottanasana yields itself to utilizing the interplay between prana and apana to deepen a pose. Feel prana lift upward from the root as it opens svadhisthana (sacral) and manipura (solar plexus) on the way upwards. Feel apana ground down through the chakras on its way towards strengthening muladhara (root).

#### PRANA

Uttihita chaturanga dandasana is used for opening the svadhisthana (sacral) and manipura (solar plexus) chakras. Feel yourself pull the prana energy upwards from your hips and stomach on an inhale breath. Strengthen in to the earth through muladhara (root) with downward apana energy.

#### APANA

/r/yoga



#### PRANA

/r/yoga



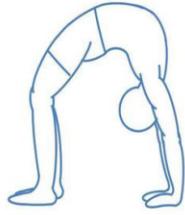


# Upward Bow

## Urdhva Dhanurasana

### Asana of the Week

February 11, 2013



### ENTRY

1

Lie supine on the floor. Bend your knees and set your feet on the floor, heels as close to the sitting bones as possible. Bend your elbows and spread your palms on the floor beside your head, forearms relatively perpendicular to the floor, fingers pointing toward your shoulders.

2

Pressing your inner feet actively into the floor, exhale and push your tailbone up toward the pubis, firming the buttocks, and lift the buttocks off the floor. Keep your thighs and inner feet parallel. Firmly press the inner hands into the floor and your shoulder blades against the back and lift up onto the crown of your head. Keep your arms parallel.

3

Press your feet and hands into the floor, tailbone and shoulder blades against your back, and with an exhalation, lift your head off the floor and straighten your arms. Turn the upper thighs slightly inward and firm the outer thighs. Narrow the hip points and lengthen the tailbone toward the backs of the knees, lifting the pubis toward the navel.

4

Turn the upper arms outward but keep the weight on the bases of the index fingers. Spread the shoulder blades across the back and let the head hang, or lift it slightly to look down at the floor.

5

Stay in the pose anywhere from 5 to 10 seconds or more, breathing easily. Repeat anywhere from 3 to 10 times.

### Tips for all Levels

#### Beginner

As you begin, use a prop such as a chair / blocks / wall to let your hands rest higher than the floor. Once your back bend allows for your hands to come the floor, set up this posture with the hands further away from the head.

#### Intermediate

During your set up, lift the hips as high as you can and pull the shoulders back in the socket more than you think possible. Allow your shoulders to stack on top of the hands and feel the chest expanding forward.

#### Advanced

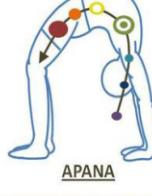
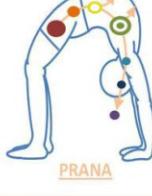
While in this posture press through the toes and lift the heels. Walk the feet closer to the head. Press down and out through the hands to prepare the chest. Engage the back more to pull your chest further forward.

### Anatomy



Move
Actively press down through your hands and feet into the floor. Allow your thighs and hips to begin to lift further away from the ground. Your stomach lifts higher and your chest will begin to open up and forwards. Allow your head to hang downwards.
Lengthen
The thighs and hips lifting away from the ground will begin to stretch the quadriceps and psoas. Control the lengthening of the abdominal muscles to protect the lower back. As you deepen, your pectoralis major and minor will stretch profoundly.

### Energy



With every inhale breath prana wells through manipura [solar plexus] and begins to open the front body. As your practice deepens prana will further spring upward through anahata [heart]. The exhale breath takes apana downward and stabilizes svadhisthana [sacral] on its way to strengthening muladhara [root].

# Asana of the Week

January 07, 2012

### Extended Triangle Pose

Uttita Trikonasana



### ENTRY

1

Stand in mountain pose. With an exhalation, step or lightly jump your feet 1/2 to 4 feet apart. Raise your arms parallel to the floor and reach them actively out to the sides, shoulder blades wide, palms down.

2

Turn your left foot in slightly to the right and your right foot out to the right 90 degrees. Align the right heel with the left heel. Firm your thighs and turn your right thigh outward, so that the center of the right knee cap is in line with the center of the right ankle.

3

Exhale and extend your torso to the right directly over the plane of the right leg, bending from the hip joint, not the waist. Anchor this movement by strengthening the left leg and pressing the outer heel firmly to the floor. Rotate the torso to the left, keeping the two sides equally long. Let the left hip come slightly forward and lengthen the tailbone toward the back heel.

4

Rest your right hand on your shin, ankle, or the floor outside your right foot, whatever is possible without distorting the sides of the torso. Stretch your left arm toward the ceiling, in line with the tops of your shoulders. Keep your head in a neutral position or turn it to the left, eyes gazing softly at the left thumb.

5

Stay in this pose for 30 seconds to 1 minute. Inhale to come up, strongly pressing the back heel into the floor and reaching the top arm toward the ceiling. Reverse the feet and repeat for the same length of time to the left

### Tips for all Levels

#### Beginner

Do not be worried about getting your hand to the floor. Hand placement varies and can be anywhere along the leg. At no point should you collapse into the supporting oblique, maintain strength in the side body.

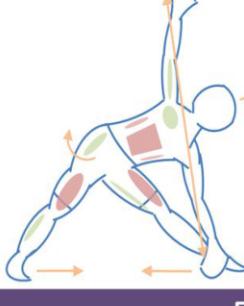
#### Intermediate

Once your hand reaches the floor, begin to focus more on internal support. Engage the inner hamstrings to lift the pelvis. Focus on opening your hips and chest, feel as though your body is moving into a single plane.

#### Advanced

Consider binding your lifting arm around the waist to the front thigh and use the added leverage to open the heart more. Without a loss of oblique strength, bring the downward arm off the ground and parallel to the floor.

### Anatomy



**Move**  
Isometrically contract your two heels together. Pull your top hip back away from the floor. Keeping your forward bend, feel like you stretch your crown forward. Broaden through the chest rotating your heart open without collapsing through the side.

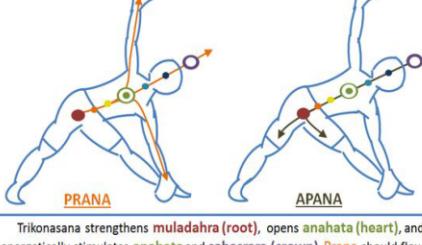
#### Lengthen

The forward bend creates a stretch on the hamstring and back calf. Opening the hip flexors and the hip abductors (gluteus medius / minimus) and Broadening through the chest stretches the pectoralis major/minor and anterior deltoid.

#### Contract

The isometric contraction between the legs strengthens the adductors and quadriceps muscles. Supporting and lengthening the torso engages the abdominals and oblique. Broadening through the front strengthens the rhomboids and trapezius.

### Energy



Trikonasana strengthens muladhara (root), opens anahata (heart), and energetically stimulates anahata and sahasrara (crown). Prana should flow up from the root and through the heart extending through the crown lengthening. Apana should flow from the crown to the root and strengthen.



# Shoulder Pressing

## Bhujapidasana

### Asana of the Week

February 19, 2014



### Entry

1

Squat with your feet a little less than shoulder width apart, knees wide.

2

Tilt your torso forward between your inner thighs. Then, keeping your torso low, raise your hips until your thighs become close to parallel to the floor.

1

Stand in mountain. Shift your weight slightly onto one foot, keeping the inner foot firm to the floor, and bend the opposite knee. Reach down with the bent knee side's hand and clasp your ankle.

2

Lift the knee slightly and draw your right foot up and place the sole against the inner thigh of the standing leg; if possible, press the lifted heel into the groin of the standing leg, toes pointing toward the floor. The center of your pelvis should be directly over the standing foot.

3

Rest your hands on the top rim of your pelvis. Make sure the pelvis is in a neutral position, with the top rim parallel to the floor.

4

Lengthen your tailbone toward the floor. Firmly press the lifted foot's sole against the inner thigh and resist with the standing leg. Press your hands together in a prayer position. Gaze softly at a fixed point in front of you on the floor about 4 or 5 feet away. If desired lift the hands.

5

Stay for 30 seconds to 1 minute. Step back to mountain with an exhalation and repeat for the same length of time with the legs reversed.

4

Snug your upper left arm and shoulder as much as possible under the back of your left thigh just above the knee, and place your left hand on the floor at the outside edge of your left foot, fingers pointing forward. Then repeat on the right. As you do this your upper back will round.

5

Press your inner hands firmly against the floor and slowly begin to rock your weight back, off your feet and onto your hands. As you straighten your arms, your feet will lift lightly off floor, not by raw strength but by carefully shifting your center of gravity.

Squeeze your outer arms with your inner thighs, and cross your right ankle over your left ankle. Look straight ahead. Hold for 30 seconds, then bend your elbows and lightly release your feet back to the floor with an exhale. Repeat the pose a second time with the left ankle on top.

### Tips for all Levels

#### Beginner

This pose can be very difficult to attempt the first few times. If necessary you can place a bolster or block under your butt to make lifting and finding your balance easier. Also, the single leg variation can be easier for some.

#### Intermediate

Work on straightening your arms completely, actively press the floor away from you rather than just hovering. Tighten through the core and lift the buttocks as high off the ground as you can focusing on core strength.

#### Advanced

An advance variation of this pose has you bring both legs over and around your head rather than just up and over the shoulders. Transition to this pose and from this pose into chataranga is a fun advancement to try.

#### Beginner

If you are very unsteady when balancing, you can practice this pose against the wall. Additionally, rather than having the foot high in the groin place the sole of the lifted foot on the calf or even the ankle for an easier variation.

#### Intermediate

Begin to lift the hands and find a bit of a backbend in tree pose. Focus on opening your heart. For an added challenge, practice this pose with your eyes closed. Having to move internally for balance is more challenging than it sounds.

#### Advanced

Find the preparation for ardha baddha padmottanasana. Rather than bringing the lifted foot to the inner groin, bring it to the front of the standing leg's hip. Bring the lifted foot's hand around the back and bind to the big toe.

### Contraindications and Cautions

You are holding your entire body weight with your arms and shoulders in this pose. If you have injuries the shoulder, elbow, or wrist joints please practice this pose with caution. If moving to advanced variations, make sure to have a friend around so you do not get stuck with your feet behind your head (it happens). Finally, this pose can be irritating to lower spine injuries, be aware for those with issues.

### Tips for all Levels

### Contraindications and Cautions

As with all balancing poses one must take care with the joints in the legs. Be aware of the ankle, knee, and hip joints while practicing this pose. It is essential to not place the lifted foot directly on the standing knee. The knee is a hinge joint and does not move well laterally. Placing the foot, and thereby lateral pressure, on the knee can be very dangerous. If your hips are not open enough to lift the foot past the knee, place it on the calf.

### Anatomy



#### Move

Actively press your hands downwards into the floor and feel your torso lifting away from the floor. Squeeze your legs to your arms as your tailbone lifts and you extend out through the toes. Begin to bring your gaze forwards as you advance.

#### Lengthen

The muscles in the back body are broadening: rhomboids, erector spinae, and latissimus dorsi. Depending on the body, you may feel a deep stretch through the hamstrings and gluteus as you extend the toes. Feel the neck open to the floor.

#### Contract

The upper body is working to keep you lifted. The trapezius, pectorals, triceps and deltoids are all actively engaged as you fight gravity. Begin to squeeze the muscles of the quadriceps to help you straighten the legs. Find a strong squeeze in the abdominal wall.



#### Move

Press down solidly through the standing leg while extending upwards through the arms. Begin to roll the shoulders down over the spine. Pull the lifted leg closer to the groin and roll the same sides hip backward while maintaining a neutral pelvis.

#### Lengthen

As you lift the hands skyward, actively feel the pectoralis major and minor begin to stretch. Feel the psoas stretch as you pull the upper body away from the lower body. The hip adductors of the lifted leg will lengthen as your foot moves upward.

#### Contract

Engage through the standing leg strongly to assist with your balance. Strength in the gluteus and abdominal muscles will help solidify your balance. Engagement of the rhomboids latissimus dorsi will help open the chest and lift you higher.

### Energy



#### PRANA



#### APANA

The body's position in bhujapidasana makes it difficult to allow **vishuddhi** (throat) to open, but as you advance strive to look forward and allow **prana** to move upwards. As you attain greater balance and awareness in this pose bring the attention outside the body to **sahasrara** (crown). **Apana** will take energy towards **muladhara** (root).



#### PRANA



#### APANA

Vrkasana is a strongly rooted posture that brings all the chakras in to alignment. Feel **muladhara** (root) open as you bring energy upwards from the earth into yourself. Allow **prana** energy to move upwards unlocking chakras on its path and welling in **anahata** (heart). Feel **apana** send strength downwards towards the earth to root.

# Reverse Bow

Viparita Dhanurasana

## Asana of the Week

September 30, 2013



### Entry

1

Ideally, this pose should be practiced with three people: a flyer, the person lifted off the ground and moving towards bird; the base, the person connected to the ground and the foundation for the flyer; and the spotter (not shown), the person aiding in achieving this pose in a safe manner.

2

Base, lay flat on the floor with the entire spine contacting the floor. Bring the knees above the hips with your feet off the ground and place your hands on the floor just behind the flyer's feet. Flyer, stand in mountain pose with your toes at the base's finger tips with your body straight and strong facing away from the base.

3

Base, place your feet parallel to one another on the flyer's glutes. Bring the toes on the flyer's lower back so that the big toes (or pad) sit comfortably above the glutes on the outside of the spine. Flyer, adjust the base's feet to where you find them most comfortable and stable. Reach back and grab the base's ankles with your hands.

4

Base, bring your knees in towards the chest to where your hands can clasp the flyer's shoulders. Extend straight up through the heels and legs to lift the flyer. Flyer, allow the base to take your weight in a backbend as they lift you up. Relax your spine. Release the base's ankles, bend your knees, and grab for your ankles. Move slowly and with control.

5

Spotter, never allow the flyer an uncontrolled fall to the mat. An awkward hug and slow fall is safer than a complete drop. To support on entry, as the flyer's weight is taken by the base, use your hand's on their hips to guide them up evenly. Be aware of any signs of discomfort or uneasiness in the flyer.

# Easy

Sukhasana

## Asana of the Week

April 28, 2014



### Entry

1

Begin in staff pose. Cross your shins, widen your knees, and slip each foot beneath the opposite knee as you bend your knees and fold the legs in toward your torso.

2

Relax the feet so their outer edges rest comfortably on the floor and the inner arches settle just below the opposite shin. You'll know you have the basic leg fold of Sukhasana when you look down and see a triangle, its three sides formed by the two thighs and the crossed shins. In Sukhasana, there should be a comfortable gap between the feet and the pelvis.

3

Sit with your pelvis in a relatively neutral position. To find neutral, press your hands against the floor and lift your sitting bones slightly off the support. As you hang there for a few breaths, make your thigh bones heavy, then slowly lower your sit bones lightly back to the support. Try to balance your pubic bone and tail bone so they're equidistant from the floor.

4

Either stack your hands in your lap, palms up, or lay your hands on your knees, palms down. Lengthen your tail bone toward the floor, firm your shoulder blades against your back to your upper torso, but don't overarch your lower back and poking your lower front ribs forward.

5

You can sit in this position for any length of time, but if you practice this pose regularly, be sure to alternate the cross of the legs. A good rule of thumb: On even-numbered days, cross the right shin in front of the left, and on odd-numbered days, do the opposite.

## Tips for all Levels

### Beginner

Practicing a reverse entry can be challenging in its own right. The blind entry of the flyer necessitates a much greater level of control and trust. To begin, a backbend with the base's toes in the flyer's low back can provide an excellent alternative.

### Intermediate

After a safe entry is established, begin to work on a lifted backbend for the flyer without working for the bind. Flyer, allow you stomach and chest to open as you relax into to this deep supported back bend solidified by your base.

### Advanced

Find the bind for dhanurasana. Flyer, reach back and clasp the outside of the feet, creating a deeper backbend. If this is solid, progress to dancer's pose where one of the flyer's legs is extended up towards the sky.

### Beginner

Place a folded blanket under the butt for added comfort. Sit with your back to a wall, slightly closer than the length of a yoga block, and wedge the ends of the block between the wall and your lower shoulder blades.

### Intermediate

The difficult in this pose starts to happen as you sit for longer periods of time. Allow yourself to find peace while still maintaining good form. Keep the spine straight and lifted and the belly pulling in slightly.

### Advanced

Challenging versions of this pose have lifted arm mudras. Press the palms together above your head actively, or lift your arms straight with your favorite hand mudras. Holding this is challenging for shoulder endurance.

## Contraindications and Cautions

Take your journey in to acro yoga with a spotter. Learning a safe and well executed 'reverse' entry and exit is essential for progressing towards other partner poses. Bases, if at any point you are feeling fatigued or feel the flyer become unbalanced, communicate your need to stop the practice. Flyers, if you feel as if you are losing stability, it is advisable to stop the practice and try again rather than wiggle/move to find better balance. Flyers, don't force the bind here.

## Contraindications and Cautions

This pose can put strain on damaged knees and ankles. If this is the case, allow the heels to move further away from the groin until you can sit comfortably. If you are going to be working towards longer meditative times, try to work up to them rather than just starting at a long period. Muscles in the lower back are not used to sitting with perfect posture for long periods (most of us, at least) and can fatigue quickly. Practice with care.

## Anatomy



### Move

Flyer, allow your shoulders to roll back and down the spine and work to lengthen the front body from shoulder to knee. Base, feel your tailbone tuck slightly to bring the entire lower back to the floor. Extend up through the heels and press the toes up slightly.

### Lengthen

Flyer, the entire front body is lengthening. Feel the pectoralis, abdominals and psoas all stretch deeply as you are lifted skyward. Base, feel an incredible stretch on the hamstring and gastrocnemius, while feeling a light lengthening in the gluteus.

### Contract

Flyer, light activations on the back body can aid in achieving this bind. Flare the rhomboids and hamstrings to find a deeper backbend. Base, activate your front body to aid in stability: the pectoralis, abdominals, and quadriceps are all firing.

## Anatomy



### Move

Allow the tailbone point downwards as you lift upwards through the crown of your head. Roll the shoulders down your spine slightly and pull your belly in. Pull the torso upwards slightly and begin to let the knees melt towards the floor.

### Lengthen

This pose can cause lengthening in the psoas, hip adductors, and hip abductors depending on the body. Allow the muscles to loosen over time. Keep the muscles in the chest broad. Feel the muscles tracing the neck and spine elongate as you sit tall.

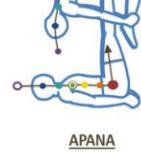
### Contract

Mulabandha is essential. Feel the pelvic floor muscles pulling away from the earth with strength. Keep a light engagement in the abdominals to keep the spine straight. Engage the rhomboids slightly to keep the chest lifted.

## Energy



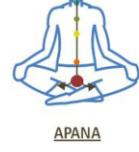
### PRANA



### APANA



### PRANA



### APANA

Viparita dhanurasana opens **anahata** (heart) chakras of both the flyer and the base as the heart opens skyward. The flyer's **svadhisthana** (sacral) chakra feels a deep opening with the base lifting it upward. The base's **sahasrara** (crown) chakra opens as their awareness grows. Feel the intertwine of **prana** and **apana** at the contact point.

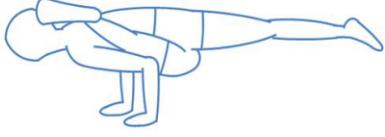
Sukhasana is an iconic meditative pose in yoga, as such you are allowing **ajna** (third eye) to open. As you advance in your meditations you will find union as upward **prana** energy moves through **sahasrara** (crown). Allow **apana** to move downward towards an engaged **muladhara** (root).

# Pose Dedicated to the Sage Koundinya I

## Eka Pada Koundinyasana I

### Asana of the Week

March 18, 2013



### ENTRY

1

Come into this asana from a standing position. First bend your knees as if to squat, then take your left knee to the floor. Turn your left foot so it points to the right and sit on the heel. Cross your right foot over your left thigh and place it, sole down, beside your left knee. Your right knee should point toward the ceiling.

To twist, bring your left waist, side ribs, and shoulder around to the right. Place your left upper arm across your right thigh and slide your left outer armpit down the outside of the thigh. Maintaining this contact high on the arm and far to the outside of the thigh is very important and is maintained through the entire set up.

3

To place your hands on the floor, first straighten your left elbow and put your left palm down. To place your right hand, carefully lift both hips without losing the arm to thigh placement. Lean more to the right, and put your right hand on the floor. Your hands should be shoulder width apart and parallel with most of your weight still on your knees and feet.

Lift your hips high and come to the ball of the left foot. Lift your left knee off the floor so most of your weight is in the foot. Start shifting your weight to bring your torso between your hands. Bend your left elbow and tilt your shoulders a bit toward the floor. Allow the right foot to lift. Lean your weight farther forward until your left foot lifts up as well.

5

Straighten both knees simultaneously with an inhale. Lift the left leg until it's parallel to the floor. Bend your left elbow more and lift your right foot higher. Reach out through the balls of both feet. Bring your torso parallel to the floor. Hold the pose for at least 20 seconds then release both feet to the floor. Repeat on the other side for the same length of time.

2

4

1

Begin in mountain pose. Step or hop your feet three to four feet apart. Place the hands on the hips and pivot forward at the waist, keeping the back as straight as possible.

3

Place your hands on the floor and walk them forward until your hips are on top of your ankles, knees can be bent. Walk both hands to the right foot. Keep the stomach sucking in and extending through the crown.

5

Keep the left leg straight. Find your favorite position for the left foot: keep the outside blade of the foot planted in to the floor, or keep the heel on the ground and point the toes upwards. Continuously squeeze the left thigh.

2

4

Find your favorite hand positioning: extend outwards strongly from the fingertips, bring the hands to prayer, find reverse prayer, extend one upwards or even keep them on the floor. Broaden through the chest.

### Tips for all Levels

#### Beginner

As a beginner, you may first want to focus on lifting the legs with the forehead on the ground or on a block. As you start to lift the back leg, allow your entire torso to rest on both your arms like a tabletop to aid in support.

#### Intermediate

Over time try and not use both arms to support your torso. Only allow the twisted hip to sit on the elbow and use internal engagement to lift yourself off the other arm. Focus on starting to straighten the legs more.

#### Advanced

Make this pose taller. Feel yourself push down through the floor and try and straighten the arms not supporting the hip. Instead of collapsing on release, control the body and lift back to chaturanga dandasana.

#### Beginner

This pose can be deceptively difficult for beginners. There is no need to move your knees and ankles all the way to the right/left or lift your hands off the ground. Whatever version of a side lunge suits you is fine.

#### Intermediate

Work on getting the bent knees flat to the ground. This is a fantastic ankle stretch if you work towards it. Over time work the tailbone closer and closer to the floor, but never actually land the sits bone to the floor.

#### Advanced

Find the advanced bind. With the right knee bent, bring the right shoulder to the front of the right knee reaching the hand backwards behind the torso. Bring the left hand behind the torso to meet the right for a bind.

### Contraindications and Cautions

If you are entering this pose unassisted for the first time, it may be beneficial to place a mat or towel under the face to cushion yourself on any forward falls. Collapsing and falling on to the face and neck can be exceedingly dangerous. There is a lot of pressure on the wrists in this pose so exercise caution if you have issues in that joint. As with all twists take care if you have lower back issues.

### Tips for all Levels

### Contraindications and Cautions

Skandasana can be very dangerous on the knees and ankles. At no time during this pose should you feel like you are forcing your joints to bend more than needed. Relax and let yourself open to this pose naturally. Keeping the hands on the floor is encouraged for newer yogis to maintain stability in the pose. Finally, if needed a yoga block can go under the glutes to allow yourself to hold this pose for a longer period.

### Anatomy

#### Move

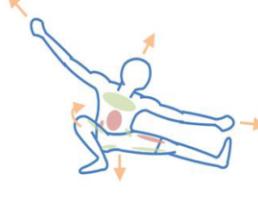
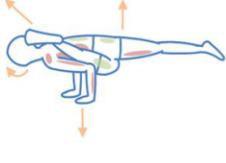
Press the entire palm of your hand into the floor to maximize your stability. Lift the hips off the ground and onto the elbow. Send our rear toes backward and straighten the leg. Extend out through the front heel and lift it high off the ground.

#### Lengthen

Allow this deep twist to stretch the muscles in the side body and spinal column. Feel the obliques and erector spinae open. Allow your psoas to lengthen as you rotate the legs open. Feel the hamstrings stretch as you extended out through the heel.

#### Contract

Use the major muscle groups in the upper body to support your torso. The pectoralis major, triceps, deltoids, and abdominals are all engaged. Your forearms and wrists strengthen as you hold yourself up. Squeeze the quadriceps of both legs tightly.



#### Move

Extend upward from the crown of the head while expanding outwards through the fingertips. Work the bent knee closer and in line with the rest of the torso. Feel your tailbone sink towards the floor while you isometrically contract your heels.

#### Lengthen

Feel broadness through the chest as you open the hands. Allow the hamstrings to lengthen. Depending on the body and your positioning, find length in the obliques and hip flexors. Allow the glutes to open as the tailbone falls.

#### Contract

Feel the abdominals engage strongly to keep your torso lifted and straight. Allow the shoulders to roll down the spine to engage the rhomboids. Squeeze the quadriceps of the extended leg to help find more length in the hamstring.

### Energy



#### PRANA

As with most arm balances, eka pada koundinyasana focuses on the upper chakras. Allow **prana** to move through and open **vishuddhi** (throat) on its way to **ajna** (third eye) and out through the crown. Focus on moving a strengthening **apana** downward towards **muladhara** (root) to assist with the lift in the lower half.

#### APANA



#### PRANA

Skandasana works to open the lower two chakras. With the groins separating work to find openness in **muladhara** (root) as it moves towards the earth. Use **prana** to lift from the root slightly and continue to open **svadhisthana** (saecral). **Apana** will energize as it moves downwards towards the earth through the legs.



#### APANA

/r/yoga

# Bow

## Dhanurasana

### Asana of the Week

August 19, 2013



### ENTRY

1

Lie on your belly with your hands alongside your torso, palms up. Exhale and bend your knees, bringing your heels as close as you can to your buttocks. Reach back with your hands and take hold of your ankles / tops of the feet. Make sure your knees aren't wider than the width of your hips, and keep your knees hip width for the duration of the pose.

Inhale and strongly lift your heels away from your buttocks and, at the same time, lift your thighs away from the floor. This will have the effect of pulling your upper torso and head off the floor. Burrow the tailbone down toward the floor, and keep your lower and middle back muscles soft.

2

As you continue lifting the heels and thighs higher, press your shoulder blades firmly against your back to open your heart. Draw the tops of the shoulders away from your ears. Gaze forward and up slightly.

3

With the belly pressed against the floor, breathing will be difficult. Breathe more into the back of your torso, and be sure not to stop breathing.

4

Stay in this pose anywhere from 20 to 30 seconds. Release as you exhale, and lie quietly for a few breaths. You can repeat the pose once or twice more.

5

# Pendant

## Lolasana

### Asana of the Week

August 26, 2013



### ENTRY

1

Start in a tabletop position: on your hands and knees, with your torso and head parallel to the floor. Position your knees directly below your hips, set your hands a few inches ahead of your shoulders at shoulder width, spread your palms, and press the bases of your index fingers firmly into the floor.

Cross one ankle over the other. Bring the hips backwards and allow your buttocks to rest on your heels. The fleshy base of your pelvis on your higher heel. Yes, it's uncomfortable. If desired you can cross the ankles after you lift upwards.

2

Bring the palms towards the hips and place your hands besides your folded legs, or a little ahead of the folded legs. If you are unable to reach the floor, keep blocks beside you and keep your hands on those blocks. Spread the fingers wide and press the entire palm down.

Slowly lean forward as you exhale, putting pressure on your hands. Curve your back and shoulder blades and press your shoulders towards the floor. Feel the armpits move down while the spine moves up. Engage the core tremendously. These two combined actions will slowly help you raise your legs off the ground and stay suspended in the air.

3

Stay suspended for 15-20 seconds at a time. Slowly increase this time. You will go from balancing in a wobbly manner to staying in your place more confidently. Once confident and strong begin a controlled rocking of the torso back and forth. To release, slowly set the legs on the ground. Repeat with the opposite foot crossed on top.

4

### Tips for all Levels

#### Beginner

Beginners can find this pose quite difficult and uncomfortable. You can use bolsters under the thighs to aid in lifting the legs up off the floor. Additionally, placing a bolster under the solar plexus or sternum can help in getting the chest off the ground.

#### Intermediate

Allow your shoulders and chest to release. Far too many people limit their bow pose anatomically. Feel the shoulder heads shrug up towards the ears, then roll down the spine toward the butt, sliding past the acromion process.

#### Advanced

Find padangusthasana dhanurasana. Begin as normal, then turn the ankle inward and toes outward. Reach back normally and flip the palms, eye of the elbow is out. Grab the top of the foot. Roll the shoulders forward, elbows up, lift.

#### Beginner

If liftoff is unattainable, don't sweat it, just keep the feet on the ground. The longer the arms relative to the torso the easier this pose will be. If you have shorter arms, support them on a block as you try to lift the legs off of the ground.

#### Intermediate

Rather than lifting both legs off of the ground simultaneously, lift one foot towards the glutes and stay supported with the other. Drop that foot and lift the other. Over time work on supporting less and less of your body with the foot.

#### Advanced

Once you can achieve hanging over the ground begin to work on rocking back and forth. The first transition to attempt is a shoot back to chaturanga. Alternatively, bring the legs through to staff pose. Move from one to the other.

### Contraindications and Cautions

Be careful with your lower back in this posture. With your hands being bound to your feet, it is easy to use your upper body strength to pull yourself into too deep of a stretch. Begin the pose with a small contraction through the gluteus to help protect the lower back. If you have lower back or neck issues, this pose should be practiced with great care. In general, this pose should be avoided during pregnancy for the pressure it places on the fetus.

### Contraindications and Cautions

This pose can be very strenuous on the wrists. Before focusing on this asana, spending some time opening and strengthening the wrist joint is advised. As you are balancing on the arms, elbow and shoulder injuries can also make this pose more difficult, please practice with caution. If working on transitions to, from, and through this pose, please take care with the neck as falling out of the pose can be dangerous.

### Anatomy



#### Move

Roll the shoulders down and back towards the tailbone, and feel the chest lift up and forwards. Begin to lift the bottom ribs off of the ground. Move the topmost part of thighs up off the floor, and move the toes skyward as if your shins are sliding up the wall.

#### Lengthen

The entire front side of the torso is expanding in length. A deep stretch through the pectoralis major and minor is achieved by clasping the hands to the feet. The muscles from the abdominals to the tibialis anterior (front of shin) are lengthening in the backbend.

#### Contract

To begin, a slight contraction of the gluteus can help maintain integrity in the lower spine. Additionally, some practitioners will find that a small contraction of the rhomboids and hamstrings will help achieve new depth in this posture.



#### Move

Press down through the fingers tremendously, try to press the earth away from you as strongly as possible. Find a gigantic round through the spine as you expand it in all directions. Lift the heels towards the buttocks and look forward.

#### Lengthen

The entire back body is lengthening. The broadness through the rhomboids, latissimus dorsi, trapezius, and erector spinae helps achieve this pose. Looking forward will begin to stretch the front of the neck. The wrists are stretching immensely.

#### Contract

Feel an engagement in the triceps, deltoids, pectorals major and minor and abdominals as you pull the weight of your legs off the floor. An engagement through the psoas and the hamstrings can also aid in lifting the legs.

### Energy



#### PRANA



#### APANA



#### PRANA



#### APANA

Dhanurasana is a backbend that allows **manipura (solar plexus)** to open as the chest lifts away from the floor. The exposed chest and neck also allow for the **vishuddhi (throat)** to open as the gaze moves skyward. The **prana** rides up the backbend and through the throat and **apana** moves downwards to **muladhara (root)** and the earth.

Lolasana is a rounded arm balance that brings attention to opening the **svadhisthana (sacral)** chakra. As you bring the energetic focus of **prana** and **apana** through this chakra the pose will fall into place. Open **vishuddhi (throat)** by gazing forward. To aid this pose, feel an energetic strengthening of **muladhara (root)**.

# Lord of the Dance

Natarajasana

## Asana of the Week

July 22, 2013



**ENTRY**

1

Stand in mountain pose. Shift your weight onto your downward foot, and lift your opposite heel toward your buttock as you bend the knee. Press the head of your downward thigh bone back, deep into the hip joint, and pull the knee cup up to keep the standing leg straight and strong.

There are two variations you might try here with your hand grip. In either case, try to keep your torso relatively square to the front of the mat. The first is to reach back with your hand, on the same side as your lifted foot, and grasp the outside of your foot or ankle. If you prefer, you can also grab the inside of your foot or ankle.

3

Begin to lift your lifted foot up, away from the floor, and back, away from your torso. Extend the lifted thigh behind you and parallel to the floor. Stretch your opposite arm arm forward, in front of your torso, parallel to the floor.

Again there are multiple variations for advancement in this pose. You can allow your entire body to come parallel to the floor and search for a straight line ankle to ankle. Alternatively you can try to keep your chest lifted as high as possible for a deep back bend.

5

Stay in the pose for 20 to 30 seconds. Lift the chest and bring the body perpendicular to the floor, release the grasp on the foot, place the lifted foot back onto the floor, and repeat for the same length of time on the other side.

2

4

1

Kneel on the floor with your knees hip width and thighs perpendicular to the floor. Rotate your thighs inward slightly, narrow your hip points, and firm but don't harden your buttocks. Keep your outer hips as soft as possible, and press your shins and the tops of your feet firmly into floor.

Rest your hands on the back of your pelvis fingers down, thumbs out. Then hands spread the back pelvis and lengthen it downwards. Lightly firm the tail forward toward the pubis. Inhale and lift your heart by pressing the shoulder blades against your back ribs.

3

Lean back against the firmness of the tail bone and shoulder blades. For this move keep your head up, chin near the sternum, and your hands on the pelvis. Tilt the thighs back a little from perpendicular and place your hands on their same-side foot. Press the thighs back to perpendicular.

Release the front ribs and lift the front of the pelvis up while lifting the lower back away from the pelvis. Press your palms firmly against your soles, with the bases of the palms on the heels and the fingers pointing towards the toes. Turn your arms outwardly so the elbow creases face forward. Begin to drop the head back or keep the neck neutral.

5

Stay in this pose anywhere from 30 seconds to a minute. To exit, bring your hands onto the front of your pelvis, at the hip points. Inhale and lift the head and torso up by pushing the hip points down toward the floor. If your head is back, lead with your heart to come up. Rest in child's pose for a few breaths.

2

4

## Tips for all Levels

### Beginner

If you lack the shoulder flexibility to reach back and clasp the foot, use a strap around the ankle and hold it in both hands over the head. Additionally, if you are having trouble with balance practice near a wall or chair for support.

### Intermediate

Focus on allowing your shoulders, chest, and back to open. Roll your shoulder blade up and back towards your spine then towards the pubis. Allow the chest to relax and broaden. People focus too much on the hamstring release.

### Advanced

Find the full bind, or standing splits. For the full bind, allow your clasped hand's shoulder to release and rotate until the elbow is pointing upwards. Reach back with the other hand and use it to clasp the foot as well while you lift.

### Contraindications and Cautions

As this is one of yoga's 'beautiful poses' people will pull their hamstrings to injury trying to lift the leg higher. Allow the back of your legs to open safely and with control. Do not stretch in to the hamstring attachments behind the knee or under the gluteus. Keep the stretch in the meat of the muscle behind the femur. If you have shoulder problems, be careful while allowing your shoulder to open and rotate.

### Beginner

It is unnecessary to drop the hands back to the feet to achieve benefits in this pose. Keep the hands on the low back while you open the chest. When working on getting the hands down, curl the toes under the first few times.

### Intermediate

Try to move the hands to the heels at the same time. That is, don't reach for one foot and then the other. As move your elbows outwardly, rather than letting the shoulder blades squeeze the spine pull them further away.

### Advanced

In the set up, rather than having them hip-width distance bring the knees closer together. Eventually have the knees side by side. For a deeper backbend, you can also work the hands closer to behind the knees.

## Anatomy



### Move

Ground down through your big toe and find the stability to achieve more height. Lift up and forward through your chest while rolling your lifting leg's hip down to parallel. Feel your lifted toes and fingers raise higher and further away from the floor.

### Lengthen

The major lengthening in this posture is on the psoas and quadriceps of the lifting leg and the hamstrings of the grounded leg. Additionally allow the muscles in the abdomen and chest to loosen to aid with the deep backbend that is found here.

### Contract

Squeeze your grounding quadricep and feel the muscle grip your femur. You should feel the engagement move the muscle up away from the knee. Use the power of the glutes and hamstrings to pull your lifted leg higher. A slight engagement in the lats will help.

## Anatomy



### Move

Press down through your entire shin to stabilize yourself. Allow the talibone to lengthen downward while the upper back pulls away from the coccyx. Drop your head back and allow the entire front side of your body to expand in all directions.

### Lengthen

Allow the entire front side of the body to stretch. Feel your neck muscles lengthen as you look backwards. The pectoralis and deltoids broaden as you open upwards. The abdominals, psoas, and quadriceps stretch in this deep backbend.

### Contract

A very slight contraction to the gluteus muscles will maintain integrity in the lower back. Feel your hamstrings engage with an isometric contraction of the knees. Your rhomboids will strengthen as you pull your scapula away from the vertebrae.

## Energy



PRANA

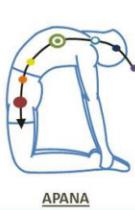
APANA

The lifted chest variation of natarajasana is an excellent heart opener as it is a backbend. Feel the **prana** rush up through **svadhisthana (sacral)** chakra as it opens on its way up through **anahata (heart)** which is shining up and forward. Feel **apana** move downward towards a rooted **muladhara (root)** which aids in balance.

## Energy



PRANA



APANA

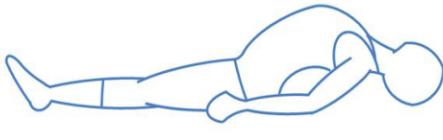
Ustrasana is an excellent heart opener. Allow **prana** to well upwards through the body and open **anahata (heart)**. As you gaze backwards, feel the energy move through **vishuddhi (throat)** on its way to the crown. Allow your exhale to take **apana** deep in to the legs to strengthen **muladhara (root)** and solidify your base.

# Fish

## Matsyasana

### Asana of the Week

September 02, 2013



### ENTRY

**1**

Lie on your back on the floor with your knees bent, feet on the floor. Inhale, lift your pelvis slightly off the floor, and slide your hands, palms down, below your buttocks. Then rest your buttocks on the backs of your hands (and don't lift them off your hands as you perform this pose). Be sure to tuck your forearms and elbows up close to the sides of your torso.

**2**

Inhale and press your forearms and elbows firmly against the floor. Next press your scapulas into your back and, with an inhale, lift your upper torso and head away from the floor. Then release your head back onto the floor.

**3**

Depending on how high you arch your back and lift your chest, either the back of your head or its crown will rest on the floor. There should be a minimal amount of weight on your head to avoid crunching your neck.

**4**

You can keep your knees bent or straighten your legs out onto the floor. If you do the latter, keep your thighs active, and press out through the heels.

**5**

Stay for 15 to 30 seconds, breathing smoothly. With an exhalation lower your torso and head to the floor. Draw your thighs up into your belly and squeeze.

**1**

Begin in mountain pose. Squat with your feet as close together as possible. Keep your heels on the floor if you can. If you have sufficient strength in the ankle and foot allow the heels to hover, otherwise support them on a folded mat or towel.

**2**

Separate your thighs slightly wider than your torso. Exhaling, lean your torso forward and fit it snugly between your thighs.

**3**

Press your elbows against your inner knees, bringing your palms to together in Anjali Mudra, and resist the knees into the elbows. This will help lengthen your front torso.

**4**

Press your inner thighs against the sides of your torso. Reach your arms forward, then swing them out to the sides and notch your shins into your armpits. Press your finger tips to the floor, reach around the outside of your ankles and clasp your back heels, or clasp your hands behind your back. Begin to bring your forehead to the floor.

**5**

Hold the position for 30 seconds to 1 minute. Use your breath to deepen your posture. To exit, inhale, straighten the knees, and stand into mountain.

### Tips for all Levels

**Beginner**

Beginners can strain their neck in this pose. If you are feeling pressure in the neck, lower the chest a bit or place a blanket under your head. Alternatively, placing a block or blanket between the shoulder blades to rest on can help.

**Intermediate**

Work on finding a deeper and more engaged backbend. Feel the muscles of the upper back firm as you pull the chest sideways. Flex through the toes and slightly point them to keep the quadriceps active and lift the belly.

**Advanced**

This pose is traditionally practiced with the legs in padmasana, but that is beyond the scope of many students. Find your lotus pose, lean back arching the spine, and bring the head to the floor. Reach forward and grab the feet.

**Beginner**

Allow the feet to stay separated and do not force your heels to the floor. The heels will lower as your body opens. Use a folded towel under the heels if needed. Keep the hands pressing together rather than releasing them.

**Intermediate**

Work to bring the feet together in your squat. Bring the knees closer and deeper in to the armpits as you move in to a deeper fold. Work on moving the hands to the position behind the heels or binding on the back.

**Advanced**

Ensure that inner soles of the feet are touching and the heels are on the ground. Bring your groin down to the backside of your heels. Bring the forehead to the floor and start to work your nose closer to your big toes.

### Contraindications and Cautions

For those of you who want to rush to the lotus variation of this pose, please be careful. Pulling yourself in to padmasana can wreak havoc on the knee, hip, and ankle joints. Practice it with care. Additionally, please take great care with your upper spine and neck. Putting pressure directly on the head can be very difficult on the body. As a note, neck pressure does not always manifest in the neck; if you feel tingles in the extremities, back off in the pose.

### Tips for all Levels

### Contraindications and Cautions

This pose places a tremendous amount of pressure on the knees and ankles. If you have issues with these joints, ensure a supported posture with props. If squatting is not an option, sit on the edge of a chair with your legs perpendicular to the torso, heels slightly in front of the knees and begin to bring the torso between the knees. Additionally, if you have lower back issues focus on ensuring core strength as you fold forward.

### Anatomy

**Move**

Roll the crown of the head downward and extend out through the heels while still pointing through the toes. Reach through the finger tips towards the feet. Lift skyward through the chest, stomach, and lower abdomen while staying rooted to the floor.

**Lengthen**

The entire front side of the torso is expanding and lengthening. Feel the pectoralis major and minor stretch upwards and let the abdominal wall lengthen. Depending on the body, this pose can allow for a deep stretch of the psoas and neck muscles.

**Contract**

Engage through the topides of your legs, both the quadriceps and tibialis anterior (front of calf), to help lift the chest. Feel strength begin in the rhomboids and deltoids to aid in lifting higher. If newer to yoga, strength in the neck is safer than length.

### Anatomy

**Move**

Press the entire foot firmly in to the floor and begin to roll the talon bone downwards towards the heels. Feel your back begin to spread as the lumbar spine moves toward the heels and the thoracic spine moves to the floor. Tuck your chin toward the toes.

**Lengthen**

The squat gives a stretch through the ankles. Your inner hip adductors are stretched by bringing the torso down and forward. The latissimus and serratus broaden as your spine lengthens. An elongation in the gluteus and hamstrings occur.

**Contract**

Use a tremendous contraction through the abdominal wall to aid in broadening through the back side. A slight engagement through the biceps, rhomboids, and trapezius can help to bring the forehead closer to the toes.

### Energy

**PRANA****APANA**

Matsyasana is a fantastic blend of a resting posture and a passive backbend that works on opening **vishuddhi** (throat) and **anahata** (heart) chakras. On the inhale, **prana** moves upward and crests in the heart on its way upward through the body. On the exhale, **apana** moves downward towards **muladhara** (root) and grounds.

### Energy

**PRANA****APANA**

Malasana focuses on sending **apana** to the lower to chakras. Feel **apana** move down to **svadhisthana** (sacral) and further downward to strengthen **muladhara** (root). Feel the **prana** move upward through the body and connect with the earth through **ajna** (third eye) as it comes downward.

# Half Moon I

## Ardha Chandrasana I

### Asana of the Week

February 25, 2013



### ENTRY

1

Stand in mountain pose with the inner soles of your feet touching. Ground down through your feet with the big toes pressing down firmly your pinky toes flaring. Tighten the muscles in your lower body and establish a strong foundation.

2

On an inhale breath, bring your arms up overhead from the side and take your preferred hand position: interlace your fingers and release your index fingers, press the entirety of your palms flat together, or take one hand and clasp your other wrist making the clasped wrist's palm parallel to the ceiling.

3

Bring the weight slightly in to your heels with your hips pressing forward slightly. On your next inhale breath, lift your torso up and away from your hips and lengthen up through the arms. Keep the abdominals engaged. Keep your lower back completely flat.

4

On an exhale breath, begin to slide your hips to the left and reach for the top corner of the room. Keep your chest, shoulders, and hips parallel to the front of your mat. Continuously feel the rib cage lengthening away from the hips. Maintain the integrity in the supporting oblique.

5

Stay in this pose for 30 second to 1 minute. Inhale to come up, keeping the lower body strong and the feet pressing in to the floor. Reaffirm the strength in the legs and stretch to the other side. Once completed, exhale your arms down to your side and return to mountain pose.

### Tips for all Levels

#### Beginner

Use the hand grip with interlaced fingers and the extended index fingers. You can separate your feet a few inches if bringing them together is uncomfortable. Allow your entire side body to stretch, heel to fingers.

#### Intermediate

As you begin to advance, ensure that you maintain correct form. Make sure that you do not collapse in to flexibility and you are using your obliques to support your weight. Try to squeeze the head with the arms.

#### Advanced

The palms pressing in to each other completely without a grip makes this pose harder to maintain. Press your hips further to the side and use your breath to move deeper. Try bring the torso parallel to the floor.

### Anatomy



#### Move

Ground down through the entire foot to stabilize your body. Rotate the tops of your thighs to the midline of the body. Slide the hips to the side and expand your side body upwards. Feel your fingers stretch further away from the spine.

#### Lengthen

Allow the entire side of the body to stretch. Feel the intercostal muscles, the muscles that knit your ribs together, stretch more. Feel the opening along latissimus dorsi and deep in to the shoulder joint. Allow the iliobibial band (outside of leg) to open.

#### Contract

Contract your gluteus and quadriceps immensely, stabilizing your body for this side stretch. Squeeze your abdominals to take all the round out of your lumbar spine. Do not let your supporting oblique disengage, use it to support this pose.

### Energy



Ardha chandrasana is excellent for strengthening **svadhisthana (sacral)** and **muladhara (root)**, your lowest two chakras. Use strong guided apana to take a grounding energy deep in to the body. The **prana** flow will open both **anahata (heart)** and **vishuddhi (throat)** on it's way upward through the body.

# Asana of the Week

January 14, 2012

### Inverted Locust

Viparita Salabhasana



### ENTRY

1

Begin in reversed corpse pose. Lay on your stomach, arms at your sides with the palms facing up, toes are together heels are splayed outwards. Allow your breath to release your back muscles.

2

As a beginner, bring your mouth down to the ground to protect your neck. If you are advancing, look forward and allow your neck to come to the floor. Make sure your chin stays on the ground. Roll up on to one of your shoulders so that you can bring both of your arms underneath you.

3

There are two hand positions you can try, see which one feels the most comfortable. Either interlace your fingers, clasp your palms together, and straighten your arms. Or keep your hands apart with either your palms pressed into the mat (or facing upwards). Then roll your body so it's resting on your extended arms.

4

With a strong exhalation, with all your strength press into your arms and lift both legs up as high as you can. If your upper body is strong and your back is flexible, lift your hips off the floor, so your spine is as upright as possible. Press your feet and thighs together.

5

Stay in this pose for 20 - 30 seconds. Slowly exhale your breath and use control to lower your body back to the floor. Bring your arms out from underneath your body and return to reverse corpse pose. Allow your inhales and exhales to release the tension in the back body.

### Tips for all Levels

#### Beginner

Start by lifting one leg at a time rather than both, then move to holding both feet up. Allow the elbows and wrists to open. This can be an uncomfortable position for these joints when you begin, but they will open with time.

#### Intermediate

As your hips start to lift higher off the ground, focus on engaging your chest and arms to lift to new heights. When you feel strong enough, begin trying this pose looking forward with the throat opening toward the floor.

#### Advanced

Feel like you are pressing your hips up and forward, over time bringing the hips above the head. Now begin to allow your back to bend more deeply by bending your knees and dropping your toes towards your head.

### Anatomy



#### Move

Point the toes and isometrically contract the legs together. Lift your hips, thighs, and shins off the ground as high as you can. Press down through your hands and feel yourself roll onto the top of the chest. Begin to look to the front of the mat.

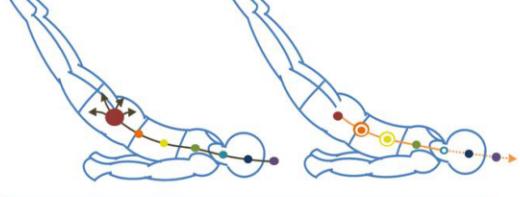
#### Lengthen

A strong point of the toes and lift of the hips will create length through the quadriceps. Continue to broaden through the hips and abdomen as they lift further away from the floor. Over time feel a deep stretch in the throat as it opens towards the floor.

#### Contract

Press the arms in to the floor and feel the chest and biceps (or triceps) begin to strengthen. The entire backside of the body is powering you into this lift. Feel an engagement through the trapezius, gluteus, erector spinae, rhomboids, deltoids, and latissimus.

### Energy



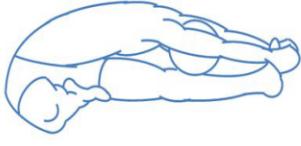
Viparita salabhasana is a posture that focuses on apana over prana. This pose utilizes a focused burst of apana to strengthen muladhara (root). Over time this pose becomes a svadhisthana (sacral) and manipura (solar plexus) opener. It can be difficult to allow prana to circulate, focus on unlocking and vishuddhi (throat) as you advance.

# Asana of the Week

January 28, 2013

## Head to Knee

Janu Sirsasana



### Entry

1

Sit on the floor with your legs straight in front of you. Inhale, bend your right knee, and draw the heel back toward your groin. Rest your right foot sole lightly against your inner left thigh, and lay the outer right leg on the floor with the shin at a right angle to the left leg.

2

Exhale and turn the torso and hips slightly to the left, lifting the torso as you push down and ground through the inner right thigh. Square your hips to the left foot by lining up your navel with the middle of the left thigh.

3

Take your preferred hand position. Hands may be on the floor splitting the leg, grabbing the toes, or extending past the foot for a bind. Inhale and lift the front torso, pressing the top of the left thigh into the floor and extending actively through the left heel. Lengthen the front torso from the pubis to the top of the sternum.

4

Exhale and extend forward from the groins, not the hips. Be sure not to pull yourself forcefully into the forward bend, hunching the back and shortening the front torso.

5

Lengthen forward into a comfortable stretch. The lower belly should touch the thighs first, the head last. Stay in the pose anywhere from 1 to 3 minutes. Come up with an inhalation and repeat the instructions with the legs reversed for the same length of time.

### Tips for all Levels

#### Beginner

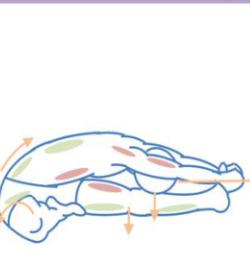
Permit yourself to open in to this posture over time. Do not allow a round in the back to give yourself the illusion of forehead to knee. If you have trouble catching the foot, feel free to use a strap on the soul of the foot to assist.

#### Intermediate

Allow the back of the leg to come to the floor and begin to stretch your spine towards your toes. Engage more than usual through your thigh to let your hamstring lengthen. Play with pulling the toe to stretch the calf.

#### Advanced

Begin to focus on bandhas. Find mula and pull the perineum off the floor. Establish jalendara and then after an active exhale pull your stomach up and forwards to the crown and find uddhiyana. Release the stomach. Inhale.



### Anatomy

#### Move

Begin to let your lead knee sink towards the floor. Rotate your rear inner thigh away from the midline. Pull your lumbar spine in alignment with your upper body and bring your forehead to your knee. Stretch the crown of the head to the toes.

#### Lengthen

As your knee drops, the hamstrings will begin to stretch. Rotating the rear thigh back and down opens the hips. As you elongate forwards a deep stretch through the latissimus begins. Pulling the toes towards the face stretches the gastrocnemius.

#### Contract

Engage the quadriceps forcefully. Feel the muscle pull back and away from the knee joint. Create a small tension in the biceps and roll the shoulder blades down the back to strengthen the deltoids. Engage the abdominals to assist in lengthening.

### Energy



In janu sirasana feel the **prana** open **swadhisthana** (sacral) and flood in to the lower back. As you advance, your forehead moves towards your knee and **ajna** (third eye) begins to stimulate. Use **apana** to ground yourself and energize **muladhara** (root) preparing for yourself for the next lengthening **prana** breath.

# Supported Headstand

Salamba Sirsasana

## Asana of the Week

April 15, 2013



### ENTRY

1

Kneel on the floor. Lace your fingers together and set the forearms on the floor, elbows at shoulder width. Roll the upper arms slightly outward, but press the inner wrists firmly into the floor. Set the crown of your head on the floor.

2

Inhale and lift your knees off the floor. Carefully walk your feet closer to your elbows, heels elevated. Actively lift through the top thighs, forming an inverted "V." Firm the shoulder blades against your back and lift them toward the tailbone so the front torso stays as long as possible. Do not allow the weight of the shoulders to collapse onto your neck and head.

3

Exhale and lift your feet away from the floor. Take both feet up at the same time, even if it means bending your knees and hopping lightly off the floor. As the legs rise to perpendicular to the floor, firm the tailbone against the back of the pelvis. Turn the upper thighs in slightly, and actively press the heels toward the ceiling.

4

Firm the outer arms inward, and soften the fingers. Continue to press the shoulder blades against the back, widen them, and draw them toward the tailbone. Keep the weight evenly balanced on the two forearms. Lengthen through the heels. Maintain that length and press up through the balls of the big toes so the inner legs are longer than the outer.

5

As a beginner, hold for 10 seconds. Gradually add 5 to 10 seconds onto your hold every day or so until you can comfortably maintain the pose for 3 minutes. Come down with an exhalation, without losing the lift of the shoulder blades, with both feet touching the floor at the same time.

### Tips for all Levels

#### Beginner

Use a folded blanket or sticky mat to pad your head and arms. Begin this pose against the wall. The clasped finger tips should be a few inches away from the base of the wall. Your first few times, lift up a single foot at a time.

#### Intermediate

Move this pose to the center of the room and do not use the wall for support. Begin to focus on using the shoulders to press in to the floor making this pose taller. Ensure that the inner wrists are perpendicular to the floor.

#### Advanced

Pike in to your headstand. Begin to hold this pose for extended periods of time to the tens of minutes. If you are confident in your balance and form, begin to try leg variations: eagle, lotus, splits, and twists.

### Contraindications and Cautions

This inversion can place much stress on the neck, ensure that you are actively using your forearms for support. If you have any neck injuries, this pose should be attempted with great caution. Lifting in to this position focuses on back strength, so if there are injuries there use a wall to establish the motion. Finally, for your first several attempts at this pose consider having an instructor or spotter there for support.

### Anatomy



#### Move

Actively press down through your entire forearms lifting yourself higher in this posture. Squeeze the outer legs together and roll the outer thighs in. Lift the tailbone skyward to take the sway out of the lower back. Extend up through the toes.

#### Lengthen

Ensure that you are keeping the neck long and not collapsing into your neck joints. Allow the erector spinae and lower latissimus dorsi to lengthen without sinking in to low back flexibility. Extension through the toes can lengthen the psoas.

#### Contract

An active downward motion through the arms will strengthen the upper body as they support your weight: pectorals, deltoids, triceps, and rhomboids should all be engaged. Strengthen through the abdominal to increase stability.

### Energy



Salamba sirsasana is one of the best poses for opening your upper two chakras. The alignment of the chakras allows **prana** to move directly up to **ajna** (third eye) and **sahasrara** (crown). The connection of the head to the earth is allows for **apana** and **prana** to flow from the earth to the body and visa versa.

# Feathered Peacock

Pincha Mayurasana

## Asana of the Week

February 11, 2013



### ENTRY

1

Begin in dolphin pose. Your forearms are parallel to each other at shoulder width. Firm your shoulder blades against your back torso and pull them toward your tailbone. Rotate your upper arms outward, to keep the shoulder blades broad and hug your forearms inward. Spread your palms and press your inner wrists firmly against the floor.

2

Bend one knee and step a foot closer to the elbows. Keep the opposite leg active by extending through the heel. Sweep your rear leg upward through a wide arc, and kick your forward foot off the floor, pushing through the heel to straighten the leg.

3

If you are unable to achieve the full inversion, lift up and down several times. With each successive time, push off the floor a little higher and try to hover at the top during each attempt. Be sure to exhale deeply each time you kick up.

4

If you are able to maintain the inversion, lengthen your lower back. Draw your front ribs in to your torso and reach your tailbone towards your heels. Draw the navel towards the spine and squeeze the outer legs together while rolling the thighs in. The head should be off the floor gazing towards a point in front of you.

5

Stay in the pose 15 to 60 seconds. When you release, do not sink onto the shoulders. Keep the shoulder blades lifted and broad, and take one foot down at a time with an exhalation. Lift into dolphin pose for 30 seconds to a minute.

1

Squat down from mountain pose with your inner feet a few inches apart. Separate your knees wider than your hips and lean the torso forward between the inner thighs. Stretch your arms forward, then bend your elbows and place your hands on the floor with the backs of the upper arms against the shins.

2

Squeeze your inner thighs against the sides of your torso, and your shins into your armpits. Slide the upper arms down as low onto the shins as possible. Lift up onto the balls of your feet and lean forward, taking the weight of your torso onto the backs of the upper arms.

3

Lean forward even more onto the backs of your upper arms. Keep leaning forward to the point where the balls of your feet leave the floor. Now your torso and legs are balanced on the backs of your upper arms.

4

Squeeze the legs against the arms, press the inner hands firmly to the floor and straighten the elbows. Seen from the side, the arms are angled slightly forward relative to the floor. The inner knees should be glued to the outer arms, high up near the armpits.

5

Keep the head in a neutral position with your eyes looking at the floor. Alternatively, lift the head slightly without compressing the back of the neck and look forward. Stay in the pose anywhere from 20 seconds to 1 minute. To release, exhale and slowly lower your feet to the floor, back into a squat.

## Tips for all Levels

### Beginner

Practice with your arms bound in a yoga strap. Wrap the strap around your triceps to help you maintain integrity through the chest and shoulders. Try this pose against the wall. Allow the feet to touch the wall as you invert.

### Intermediate

Overcome fear and move away from the wall. Get rid of the sway in the lower back as much as possible by engaging the stomach. Actively press your forearms into the floor and feel as though your pose gets taller.

### Advanced

Begin to allow your collar bone, not your chest, to melt towards the floor. Allow the back of the neck to lengthen. Over time bring the neck in line with the spine looking between the arms. Hold this pose longer to build strength.

### Beginner

Worry less about straightening your arms. Keep your arms bent as much as needed and think about using your triceps as a table for your knees. Try lifting one foot up at a time if the forward tilt is intimidating.

### Intermediate

Focus on pulling your knees closer into your armpits and straightening your arms. Engage through your core completely and use abdominal strength to pull knees higher and the heels up closer to your tailbone.

### Advanced

Engage the abdominal wall and broaden through the back. Find additional strength to begin to pull the knees off the back of the triceps and hover the body without knee support. Exit into chaturanga or sirsasana ii.

## Anatomy



### Move

Actively press down through your entire forearms lifting yourself even higher in this posture. Squeeze the outer legs together and roll the outer thighs in. Stretch your tailbone to your heels to take the sway out of the lower back. Look between the arms.

### Lengthen

Focus on allowing erector spinae and lower latissimus dorsi to lengthen without collapsing in to flexibility. The back of the neck will slacken as you begin to look forward through your arms. This motion is very helpful in aligning the entire spine.

### Contract

Pressing down through the forearms and hands will actively strengthen the upper body. The pectoralis major / minor, the rhomboids, the deltoids, and the triceps are all working to support your weight. Engage through the abdominals to increase stability.



### Move

Actively press down through your palms into the mat to try and bring your arms closer to straight. Feel your heels and tailbone start to squeeze towards one another. Begin to broaden your back up towards the ceiling, using your breath to expand.

### Lengthen

As you begin to begin to expand through the back body feel your trapezius enlarge. Broaden the back even more and as you progress and feel the stretch move in to the rhomboids, latissimus, and erector spinae. Let the wrists stretch as you tilt forward.

### Contract

The forceful press in to the floor will contract the triceps and deltoids. Balancing in this position will strengthen the chest and all of the muscles of the forearm. The contraction in your abs helps pull your knees up. Use hamstring strength to lift your heels.

## Energy



**PRANA**



**APANA**

Pincha mayurasana will open the upper chakras and align the energy centers of the body.

**Prana** wells up through the body opening **vishuddhi** (throat) and **ajna** (third eye).

**Prana** is unleashed through **sahasrara** (crown) once the chakras move into alignment.

**Apana** flows straight through **muladhara** (root) and deep into the body.

## Energy



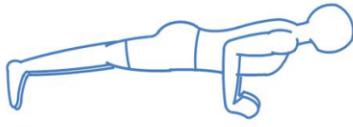
Bakasana focuses on **ajna** (third eye) as mental stillness is required to hold this pose for lengthened periods of time. Align the spine so that **prana** moves towards **ajna** then flows through to **sahasrara** (crown). Use the downward **apana** force to strengthen **muladhara** (root) and **swadhisthana** (sacral) without diverting it through the arms.

# Four Limbed Staff

Chaturanga

## Asana of the Week

January 8, 2014



### Entry

1

Perform downward facing dog, then plank pose. Firm your shoulder blades against your back ribs and press your tailbone toward your pubis.

2

With an exhalation slowly lower your torso and legs to a few inches above and parallel to the floor. There's a tendency in this pose for the lower back to sway toward the floor and the tailbone to poke up toward the ceiling.

3

Throughout your stay in this position, keep the tailbone firmly in place and the legs very active and turned slightly inward. Draw the pubis toward the navel. Firm the fronts of your thighs and engage your abdomen.

4

Keep the space between the shoulder blades broad. Don't let the elbows splay out to the sides; hold them in by the sides of the torso and push them back toward the heels. Press the bases of the index fingers firmly to the floor. Lift the top of the sternum and your head to look forward.

5

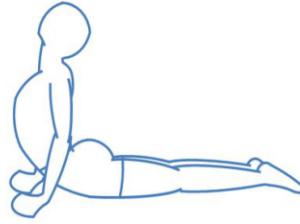
Chaturanga Dandasana is one of the positions in the Sun Salutation sequence. You can also practice this pose individually for anywhere from 10 to 30 seconds. Release with an exhalation. Either lay yourself lightly down onto the floor or push strongly back to downward facing dog, lifting through the top thighs and the tailbone.

# Cobra

Bhujangasana

## Asana of the Week

June 3, 2013



### ENTRY

1

Lie prone on the floor. Stretch your legs back, tops of the feet on the floor. Spread your hands on the floor under your shoulders. Hug the elbows back into your body.

2

Press the tops of the feet and thighs and the pubis firmly into the floor.

3

On an inhalation, begin to straighten the arms to lift the chest off the floor, going only to the height at which you can maintain a connection through your pubis to your legs. Press the tailbone toward the pubis and lift the pubis toward the navel. Narrow the hip points. Firm but don't harden the buttocks.

4

Firm the shoulder blades against the back, puffing the side ribs forward. Lift through the top of the sternum but avoid pushing the front ribs forward, which only hardens the lower back. Distribute the backbend evenly throughout the entire spine.

5

Hold the pose anywhere from 15 to 30 seconds, breathing easily. Release back to the floor with an exhalation.

### Tips for all Levels

### Tips for all Levels

#### Beginner

Chaturanga dandasana, especially when holding for long periods of time, can be very difficult for those with less upper body strength. If needed you can place your knees on the floor to aid in holding this pose with integrity.

#### Intermediate

Two important things to work on in this posture as you begin to advance: try to avoid letting your torso sag towards the floor as you lower in to this pose, also try to keep the arms at a ninety degrees at your lowest point.

#### Advanced

As you find a more advanced version of this pose, think about pulling your body forward on the tops of your toes. There are advanced variations that call for lifting one of your legs at a time to find a three limbed staff.

#### Beginner

Don't overdo the backbend. To find the height at which you can work comfortably and avoid straining your back, take your hands off the floor for a moment, so that the height you find will be through extension.

#### Intermediate

Find depth in this pose incrementally. Find your maximum height on an inhale, exhale lower to halfway, inhale and lift higher. Ensure that you are not locking the muscles in the lower back with too much of a glute engagement.

#### Advanced

To increase the level of this backbend, press through the hands drop, the head back, and start to look backwards for your toes. Bend at the knees and start to try and bring your forehead to the soles of your feet. This is intense.

#### Contraindications and Cautions

This pose can put stress on the wrists, shoulders, and elbows. If you feel pressure or tension in any of these joints try this pose on your knees. Alternatively, you can place your hands in other positions and orientations to help alleviate pressure in this posture. Finally, many teachers will caution against allowing the shoulder carriage to move below the elbows to ensure safety of the rotator muscles in the shoulder.

#### Contraindications and Cautions

This posture can be a very deep backbend. As the beginner option states, if you are new try this pose first with no weight in the hands using mostly back strength to lift you up. As you do start to advance, if you feel a burning or tingling sensation right above the tailbone be very careful. These feelings are usually indicative of bone on bone compression or a nerve issue and can be detrimental. Also, this pose should be avoided during a pregnancy.

### Anatomy

#### Move

Press downwards through the hands and feel like you are sending the crown of the head forward. Roll the shoulders downward towards the floor. Send the tailbone downwards towards the heels and feel the thighs push towards the toes.

#### Lengthen

The muscles in the psoas will lengthen as the upper body pulls away from the toes. Keep the erector spinae in the lower back should lengthen to maintain integrity in the body. The muscles in the back of the neck should remain long as you lower.

#### Contract

Most of the muscles in the upper body are engaged. The triceps, deltoids, pectoralis and rhomboids are all engaged as they are used to support the torso. The muscles in the quadriceps and abdominals should be tight to maintain the integrity in this pose.

### Anatomy

#### Move

Feel the lower half of your body press down in to the floor. Feel the glutes rolling away from the back and to the floor while the lower abs pull away from the tailbone. Feel the chest open upward and to the front while the shoulders tighten and roll down the back.

#### Lengthen

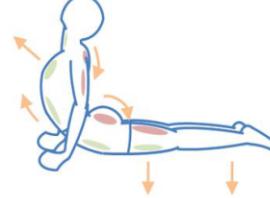
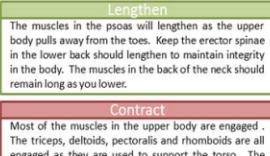
The entire front side of your body is lengthening. Dropping the head back will start to stretch the neck. Opening the chest will broaden the pectoralis major. Lifting the stomach will stretch the abdominals and the psoas. Advancing, the quadriceps will stretch.

#### Contract

A light contraction of the gluteus will help stabilize this posture, never engage enough to lock the lower back. Feel a slight contraction through the triceps rhomboids and latissimus dorsi to help lift the chest. A slight engagement in the hamstrings will help as well.

### Energy

### Energy



#### PRANA

#### APANA



Chaturanga dandasana is a pose practiced on an **apanic** (exhale) breath. Feel the strength move downward to **muladhara** (root) to firm you in this pose. On the inhale breath allow **prana** to move upward and open **svadhisthana** (saecral) on its way further upward to and through **manipura** (solar plexus).

Bhujangasana is excellent at opening **anahata** (heart). The chest lifts and **prana** flows upward and forward directly in to the heart. As you advance, **svadhisthana** (sacral) will begin to open as it lifts away from the floor. On your exhale breaths, send **apana** deep in to the body toward **muladhara** (root) as your lower half binds with the earth.

# Half Lord of the Fishes

Ardha Matsyendrasana

## Asana of the Week

July 15, 2013



### ENTRY

1

Sit on the floor with your legs straight out in front of you. Bend your knees, put your feet on the floor, then slide your left foot under your right leg to the outside of your right hip. Lay the outside of the left leg on the floor. Step the right foot over the left leg and stand it on the floor outside your left hip. The right knee will point directly up at the ceiling.

2

Exhale and twist toward the inside of the right thigh. Press the right hand against the floor just behind your right buttock, and set your left upper arm on the outside of your right thigh near the knee and reach for your left knee. Pull your front torso and inner right thigh snugly together.

3

Press the inner right foot very actively into the floor, release the right groin, and lengthen the front torso. Lean the upper torso back slightly, against the shoulder blades, and continue to lengthen the tailbone into the floor.

4

You can turn your head in one of two directions: Continue the twist of the torso by turning it to the right; or counter the twist of the torso by turning it left and looking over the left shoulder at the right foot.

5

With every inhalation lift a little more through the sternum, pushing the fingers against the floor to help. Twist a little more with every exhalation. Be sure to distribute the twist evenly throughout the entire length of the spine; don't concentrate it in the lower back. Stay for 30 seconds to 1 minute and repeat to the left for the same length of time.

1

Stand in mountain pose, hands on hips. Exhale and bend forward from the hip joints, not from the waist. As you descend, draw the front torso out of the groins and open the space between the groin and top sternum.

2

If possible, with your knees straight, bring your palms or finger tips to the floor slightly in front of or beside your feet, or bring your palms to the backs of your ankles. Press the heels firmly into the floor and lift the sitting bones toward the ceiling. Turn the top thighs slightly inward.

3

With each inhalation, lift and lengthen the front torso just slightly; with each exhalation release a little more fully into the forward bend. In this way the torso oscillates almost imperceptibly with the breath. Let your head hang from the root of the neck, which is deep in the upper back, between the shoulder blades.

4

Uttanasana can be used as a resting position between the standing poses, a point in a sun salutation, or a pose in itself. Stay in this pose for anywhere between 30s to 1 minute if practicing it as a standalone posture.

5

Don't roll the spine to come up. Instead bring your hands back onto your hips and reaffirm the length of the front torso. Roll the shoulder blades down your back towards your buttocks. Press your tailbone down and into the pelvis and come up on an inhalation with a long front torso and straight back.

## Tips for all Levels

### Beginner

In this version, the opposite side arm is wrapped around the outside of the raised-leg upper thigh. This may be impractical for beginners. Sit up on a blanket support and wrap your arm around the raised leg and hug the thigh to your torso.

### Intermediate

Tighten the twist. Bring the foot of the leg with the knee pointed upwards closer to the hips. Point the toes of the opposite leg to the back of the room. Begin to find half binds by bringing the planted rear hand behind to wrap the thigh.

### Advanced

Find the full bind. Bring the rear hand under the knee and grab the downward reaching hand. If you are very open, attempt the full pose; rather than having left toes outside the hip on the ground, nuzzle them on top of the right hip.

### Beginner

If you are unable to get the hands to the floor, cross your forearms and let the hands hold opposite elbows. If you are tight towards the legs and hips, allow some separation between the feet or even allow a bend to the knees.

### Intermediate

Ensure that there is no space between the feet as you fold down. Start to work the hands further backwards, eventually bringing the fingertips in line with the toes. Bring the head closer to the tops of the feet.

### Advanced

Work the fingertips even further back, lining them up with the heel. Activate the back body by pressing the hands into the floor and lifting the shoulders away from the floor. Work the stomach and thighs to touching.

### Contraindications and Cautions

Sufferers of back/neck pain should practice cautiously, gently and with close supervision. This is especially true for those with clinically diagnosed disc herniation: avoid seated twists until you can do back stretches, gentle back bends, and standing poses without pain. Also be warned if you have internal organ issues; this pose can be aggravating. During pregnancy, practice only gentle twisting poses that are open and allow space for the fetus.

## Tips for all Levels

### Beginner

If you experience chronic hamstring problems be careful with this forward fold. Placing the hands on the ground allows you to push deeper into a stretch which can further your injury. If you have a back injury, do this pose with bent knees. Alternatively you can perform a half forward bend against the wall: place your hands on the wall torso parallel to the floor, legs perpendicular to the floor. Use the hands for added support.

### Intermediate

Contract

If you experience chronic hamstring problems be careful with this forward fold. Placing the hands on the ground allows you to push deeper into a stretch which can further your injury. If you have a back injury, do this pose with bent knees. Alternatively you can perform a half forward bend against the wall: place your hands on the wall torso parallel to the floor, legs perpendicular to the floor. Use the hands for added support.

## Anatomy



### Move

Feel the entire body twisting moving it like a screw. The inhale breath takes you up and out, the exhale breath twists you down and in. Keep the head up and lifted and do not let it sag. Feel the backward and forward foot isometrically contract towards one another.

### Lengthen

This twist stretches most of the muscles in the torso: the pectoralis major and minor broaden, the intercostal muscles open, the obliques stretch, and the erector spinae are lengthened. Depending on your flexibility, the hip abductor (outside of thigh) is also stretched.

### Contract

Use a strong contraction through the core to pull your torso in to a deeper twist. Feel the muscles in the pelvic floor lift: muscles in the levator ani and the coccygeus. Also use strength in your hip adductor (inside of thigh) to pull you deeper.



### Move

Press the palm of the hand and soul of the foot into the floor for stability. Roll your tailbone skyward and begin to lift your hips higher. Feel your stomach pull towards your thighs and pull your shoulder blades away from your ears. Relax your neck.

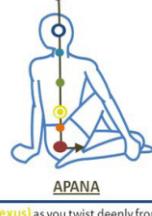
### Lengthen

Forward fold lengthens the entire back body. The forward bend stretches the gluteus, hamstrings, and gastrocnemius. Focus activation in the upper body to begin to stretch the latissimus, erector spinae, rhomboids, trapezius and deltoids.

### Contract

Contract the quadriceps strongly to lend length to the hamstrings. Pull yourself deeper by powerfully engaging the abdominals and pectorals major. A slight engagement in the triceps/biceps can take you deeper in the fold.

## Energy



Ardha matsyendrasana opens **manipura (solar plexus)** as you twist deeply from that area. Gazing backwards in this pose gives clarity and wisdom while opening **ajna (third eye)**. Feel **prana** move upwards and out as you twist, and let **apana** take you downwards and in as you twist. **Muladhara (root)** is strong to aid in the twisting.



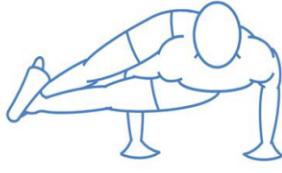
Uttanasana focuses on the lower two chakras. Inverting your energy line allows your **prana** breath to peak upward in to **muladhara (root)** and **svadhisthana (saecral)**. Use a strong **apana** breath to take more strength down in to **muladhara** and **svadhisthana**. This internal balancing motion is called **samanavayu**.

# Eight Angle

Astavakrasana

## Asana of the Week

June 10, 2013



### ENTRY

1

Stand in mountain pose with the feet separated a bit wider than usual. Exhale, bend forward and, press your hands to the floor outside your feet.

3

With your knees slightly bent, slip your right arm to the inside and then behind your right leg, and finally press the hand on the floor just outside your right foot. Work your right arm across the back of the right knee, until the knee is high up on the back of your right shoulder.

5

Begin to lean your torso forward and lower it toward parallel to the floor; at the same time, straighten your knees and extend your legs out to the right, parallel to the floor. Squeeze your upper right arm between your thighs. Use that pressure to help twist your torso to the left. Keep your elbows in close to the torso. Look at the floor.

2

Brace your shoulder against the knee and slide your left foot to the right. Cross the left ankle in front of the right and hook the ankles. Lean slightly to the left, taking more weight on your left arm, and begin to lift your feet a few inches off the floor. With the right leg supported on the shoulder, exhale and bend your elbows.

4

Hold for 30 seconds to a minute. Then straighten your arms slowly, lift your torso back to upright, bend your knees, unhook your ankles, and return your feet to the floor. Stand back and rest in forward fold for a few breaths. Then repeat the pose for the same length of time to the left.

1

Come onto the floor on your hands and knees. Set your knees directly below your hips and your forearms on the floor with your shoulders directly above your wrists. Firmly press your palms together and your forearms into the floor.

3

Curl your toes under, then exhale and lift your knees away from the floor. At first keep the knees slightly bent and the heels lifted away from the floor. Lengthen your tailbone away from the back of your pelvis and press it lightly toward the pubis. Against this resistance, lift the sitting bones toward the ceiling, and from your inner ankles draw the inner legs up into the groins.

5

Continue to press the forearms actively into the floor. Firm your shoulder blades against your back, then widen them away from the spine and draw them toward the tailbone. Hold your head between the upper arms; don't let it hang or press heavily against the floor.

You can straighten your knees if you like, but if your upper back rounds it's best to keep them bent. Continue to lengthen your tailbone away from the pelvis and lift the top of your sternum away from the floor.

4

Stay between 30 seconds to one minute. Then release your knees to the floor with an exhale.

## Tips for all Levels

### Beginner

This is an advanced arm balance, feel free to work on your core and arm strength in *eka pada koundinyasana I* or *II*. If you want to try this pose and are having trouble, place a bolster under the bottom hip and outer leg to aid balance.

### Intermediate

Work the entire body perfectly parallel to the floor: legs and chest. Try this pose without supporting the torso on the triceps and using only core strength. Squeeze your legs together and find length on the backsides of the hamstrings.

### Advanced

Find transitions to and from other arm balances to this pose. Try and entrance from *eka pada koundinyasana II* by pulling in the core strong and moving the rear foot under the supporting arm and clasping the forward lifted foot.

### Beginner

Ensure that you are actively pressing the floor away from you with the entire forearm and not just the wrist or elbows. Straight legs with heels on the ground is not necessary and will come with time. Focus on opening the chest and shoulders.

### Intermediate

Find your lats by feeling your chest and sternum lift upwards, don't allow your torso to sag towards your ears. Moving the toes forwards, creating a taller peak, will create more strength in the shoulders for inversions.

### Advanced

Lots of advanced variations for this pose: lifting one leg, using the fingertips of one arm, lifting one leg and the opposite arm. This is also the preparatory pose for forearm stand and several versions of a headstand.

## Contraindications and Cautions

This posture is difficult on the joints in the arms. If you have shoulder, wrist, or elbow issues you may want to avoid this pose. As always, when practicing a new arm balance take care not to fall out of the posture on to your head or neck. A yoga brick or bolster underneath the forehead can yield some added support. Finally, make sure not to carry all of your body weight in one arm when practicing this pose, it can severely stress those joints.

## Tips for all Levels

## Contraindications and Cautions

Dolphin can cause a tremendous amount of pressure in the shoulders and neck. If this is the case it is recommended to keep the knees slightly bent to carry some extra weight in your legs. Additionally, try and maintain a firm pressure through the entire forearm rather than holding all of your weight in the elbow or wrist joint. Finally, as you are inverting the body, take care to move into and out of this pose with care to avoid dizziness.

## Anatomy

### Move

Press down through your hands firmly and feel your tailbone lift off the ground. Begin to move the chest away from and parallel to the floor. Squeeze the legs together and start to bring them towards parallel with the floor as well.

### Lengthen

The backside of the legs are lengthening: the hamstrings and gastrocnemius (calve). As you twist the upper back and sides will stretch: rhomboids, obliques, erector spinae. Pressing in to the floor and supporting your weight will stretch the wrists and biceps.

### Contract

The entire frontal upper body is engaged: pectorals, deltoids, and abdominals are all working immensely. Supporting yourself with bent arms is forcing the forearms and triceps to strengthen. Squeeze through the quadriceps to aid in extension of the legs.

## Anatomy

### Move

Feel the heels drop downwards as the backs of the thighs pull away from the glutes. Lift the tailbone skyward and separate it from the lower back. Roll the shoulders up the spine while pressing the forearms downwards. Squeeze the elbows to the toes.

### Lengthen

Feel the back body elongate as the tailbone lifts. The glutes, erector spinae, hamstrings, and calf (gastrocnemius) are all stretching in this pose. You will also feel opening in the ankles and palm as you drop the heels and expand the hand.

### Contract

The front body is strengthening and engaged for stability. Feel the quadriceps and abdominals contract to give space for their reciprocal muscle groups. The pectoralis, rhomboids, deltoids, and latissimus are all solids as you push the floor away.

## Energy

### PRANA



### APANA



## Energy

### PRANA



### APANA



Astavakrasana is about finding and bringing balance between **ajna** (third eye) and **manipura** (solar plexus), bringing the chakras in to line while parallel to the floor. **Prana** moves upward from forward fold and in to a twist which opens **manipura** while balance opens **ajna**. Strength is sent downward with **apana** toward **muladhara** (root).

This adho mukha svanasana variation is relatively easy and allows you to focus on bringing your chakras into an inverted alignment. Feel **muladhara** (root) open as you lift it skyward, an allow **sahasrara** (crown) space as it moves towards the earth. Allow the invert energy too, **prana** moving downward and **apana** moving upward.

# Pigeon

## Kapotasana

### Asana of the Week

January 22, 2014



### Entry

1

Kneel upright, with your knees slightly narrower than hip width apart and your hips, shoulders, and head stacked directly above your knees. With your hands, press down against the back of your pelvis.

3

On an inhalation, tuck your chin toward your sternum and lean your head and shoulders back as far as you can without pushing your hips forward. Firm your shoulder blades against your back and lift the top of your sternum. When your chest is maximally lifted, gradually release your head back.

5

Separate your hands and reach them overhead toward the floor behind you. Bring your hips forward enough to counterbalance the backward movement of the upper torso and head. Keep your thighs as perpendicular to the floor as possible as you drop back. Place your palms on the floor, fingers pointing toward your feet, then lower your crown to the floor as well.

Press your palms, lift your head slightly off the floor and raise your hips, opening your front groins as much as possible. Lift your pelvis as much as possible, lengthen and extend your upper spine and walk your hands to your feet. Lower your forearms to the floor. If possible, grip your ankles. Draw your elbows toward each other until they're shoulder width apart.

2

4

Take a full inhalation to expand your chest. Hold the pose for 30 seconds or longer, further expanding the chest with each inhale, softening the belly with each exhale. Then release your grip, walk your hands away from your feet, and push your torso back to upright with an inhale. Rest in Child's Pose for a few breaths.

# Chair

## Utkatasana

### Asana of the Week

October 14, 2013



### Entry

1

Stand in mountain. Inhale and raise your arms perpendicular to the floor. Either keep the arms parallel, palms facing inward, or join the palms.

3

Exhale and bend your knees, trying to take the thighs as nearly parallel to the floor as possible. The knees will project out over the feet, and the torso will lean slightly forward over the thighs until the front torso forms approximately a right angle with the tops of the thighs.

5

Keep the inner thighs parallel to each other and press the heads of the thigh bones down toward the heels. Firm your shoulder blades against the back. Take your tailbone down toward the floor and in toward your pubis to keep the lower back long.

2

4

Multiple approaches from here: work on keeping the back straight and strong while sitting as deeply as possible, or lift the chest high and create a contextual curve in the middle and upper spine (pictured).

### Tips for all Levels

### Tips for all Levels

#### Beginner

Practicing this position while backbending over a chair is a good alternative, allowing for a supported and opening backbend. Additionally, practicing camel pose gradually sliding your hands to your knees is a good introduction.

#### Intermediate

While it is an improvement to the pose, don't worry about keeping your hips over your ankles in this pose. A large backwards tilt is necessary for most people to enter the pose. Once there, gradually start to work your hips forward.

#### Advanced

Make this pose as tall as possible. Try and get your hips directly over your knees with your hands binding your calves or even your knees. Try exiting this pose with strength from the quads, trying to push with the arms as little as possible.

#### Beginner

For some, keeping the feet slightly separated can aid when starting out in this posture. Additionally, practicing near a wall can help you build strength. Bend the knees as deep as possible and the tailbone should barely brush the wall behind.

#### Intermediate

Get the big bones parallel to the floor. Getting to this point can require a large amount of strength and flexibility increases from where most people begin. Squeezing a yoga brick between the thighs can help strength gains.

#### Advanced

While keeping the thighs parallel to the floor, lift the chest upwards away from the thighs. Ideally you want to have two ninety degree angles in this pose: knees to thighs, and thighs to torso. Finding both simultaneously is very difficult.

#### Contraindications and Cautions

This is a very advanced backbend. As such, the first several times practicing this pose try and do so with a teacher or experienced friend nearby. Try to prevent losing integrity in the lower back; it is very easy to put too much stress right above the tailbone. This pose can also put a lot of stress on the knee and ankle joints, if you have problems with these areas practice this pose with caution.

#### Contraindications and Cautions

As you advance in this pose, it can cause a tremendous amount of stress in the ankle joint. If you are lacking strength and flexibility there, or have an injury, take care. This pose can cause large fluctuations in blood flow and blood pressure, the best way to prevent this is to enter and exit slowly to give the body time to acclimate. Finally, take care with the lower back for those of you who go for a high chest in this pose.

### Anatomy

### Anatomy



#### Move

Expand upwards and forwards through the entire front body. The hips are moving forward, while the stomach is moving upwards, and the chest is expanding outwards. Send the tailbone downward and lengthen the lower back. Let the neck drop towards the floor.

#### Lengthen

The entire front body is opening. Feel the quadriceps lengthen and the psoas stretch deeply as you tilt into your backbend. Allow the stomach to expand and the chest to broaden as they expand in to the back body. The neck should stay long and not compact.

#### Contract

Light engagements through the backbody can protect your lower back. Send a small contraction into the gluteus to keep awareness in the area. Feel your upper back, deltoids and triceps contract as you press the arms in to the floor to give your back space to expand.



#### Move

Press downwards through the feet, lift the hands skywards, and bring your femurs to parallel. Roll your shoulders to your tailbone, and tuck your tailbone downward towards the floor. Lift the chest up and forward as your chin stays near level.

#### Lengthen

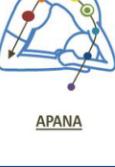
Allow the chest to open in this pose. Feel a deep stretch across the pectoralis major and minor on the front body. Depending on the body, you may feel a stretch in the upper arms and ankles depending on the flexibility in the area.

#### Contract

Your quadriceps and your gluteus medius are very engaged and are strengthening. With care, begin to activate the muscles along the spine: erector spinae, latissimus dorsi, rhomboids, and trapezius muscles as you pull the chest skyward.

### Energy

### Energy



Kapotasana is a very deep backbend. As with most backbends, kapotasana is used to open both **manipura (solar plexus)** and **anahata (heart)**. Allow **prana** to move upwards from **muladhara (root)** and crest in your expanding energy points. Allow **apana** to flow downwards from the crown and deep into the legs.



In utkatasana allow **apana** energy to strengthen your **muladhara (root)** chakra. Every exhale breath makes you stronger and brings you closer to the earth. Allow **prana** to surge upwards on an inhale and open **manipura (solar plexus)** and **anahata (heart)** as it makes its way out of the body.

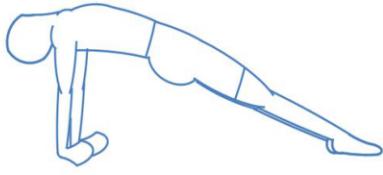
# Upward Plank

## Purvottanasana

via wellbeyondmars.com

### Asana of the Week

August 3, 2014



### Entry

1

Sit in staff pose with your hands several inches behind your hips and your fingers pointing forward. Bend your knees and place your feet on the floor, big toes turned inward, heels at least a foot away from your buttocks.

2

Exhale, press your inner feet and hands down against the floor, and lift your hips until you come into a reverse tabletop position, torso and thighs approximately parallel to the floor, shins and arms approximately perpendicular.

3

Without losing the height of your hips, straighten your legs one at a time. Lift your hips still higher without hardening your buttocks. Press your shoulder blades against your back torso to support the lift of your chest.

4

Without compressing the back of your neck, slowly drop your head back.

5

Hold for 30 seconds, then sit back down in Dandasana with an exhale.

# Intense Side Stretch

## Parsvottanasana

### Asana of the Week

November 11, 2013



### Entry

1

Stand in mountain. Step or lightly jump your feet  $3\frac{1}{2}$  to 4 feet apart. Rest your hands on your hips. Turn your rear foot in 45 degrees and your forward foot out 90 degrees. Align the front heel with the back heel. Firm your thighs and turn your forward thigh outward, so that the center of that forward knee cap is in line with the center of that ankle.

2

Rotate your torso to the front of the mat, squaring the front of your pelvis as much as possible. As the rear leg's hip point turns forward, press the head of the femur back to ground the back heel. Press your outer thighs inward. Firm your scapulas against your back torso, lengthen your coccyx toward the floor, and arch your upper torso back slightly.

3

Lean the torso forward from the groins over the leg. Stop when the torso is parallel to the floor. Press your fingertips to the floor on either side of the forward foot. Press the thighs back and lengthen the torso forward, lifting through the top of the sternum.

4

Be sure to soften the front-leg hip toward the earth and away from the same-side shoulder while you continue squeezing the outer thighs. Press the base of the big toe and the inner heel of the front foot firmly into the floor, then lift the inner groin of the front leg deep into the pelvis.

5

Exhale and bring the front torso closer to the top of the thigh, but don't round forward from the waist to do this. Hold your maximum position for 15 to 30 seconds, then come up with an inhalation by pressing actively through the back heel and dragging the coccyx first down and then into the pelvis. Repeat the same on the opposite side.

### Tips for all Levels

#### Beginner

Practice this pose on a chair. Sit near the edge of the seat and wrap your arms along the backside of the chair. Gradually straighten one leg at a time and press it to the floor until your legs straighten and your butt lifts off the seat.

#### Intermediate

Avoid the two most common mistakes in this pose as you advance. Keep the hips actively moving upwards away from the floor. Do not allow the chest to shrug in to the shoulders and towards the ground.

#### Advanced

Find eka pada purvottanasana. Lift one of your legs straight off the ground without letting the hips fall. Or find any variation of the legs here. Finally, find eka hasta purvottanasana using only one hand to support the torso.

#### Beginner

Moving down to parallel or past that point is not necessary in this pose. Move the torso downward with a straight spine as low as is comfortable. This can be very little depending on the body. Feel free to use

#### Intermediate

It is easy to allow the hips to become unbalanced in this posture. Most often people will allow the front-leg hip to lift up toward the shoulder and swing out to the side, shortening the front-side leg. Work on not allowing this to happen.

#### Advanced

There are quite a few hand binds that are possible with open shoulders and hamstrings: bring the hands behind your shoulders in reverse prayer, bind hand to wrist while reaching behind the rear leg, bind hands to rear calf or heel.

#### Contraindications and Cautions

Please be careful with your wrists in this pose, especially if you have an injury in the area. You are carrying a lot of weight in the wrist, try to mitigate that by pressing the entire palm down. You can also explore different orientations of the hand to help, slightly rotating side to side until you find the most comfortable position for you. This pose is also difficult on the knee and ankles, if needed a slight bend in these joints will help alleviate pain.

#### Contraindications and Cautions

If you have a back or spine injury, this pose should be practiced with caution. If necessary, practice with the hands on a wall for support. As you are moving your head above and below your heart in this forward fold, take care with your entrance and exits. Moving quickly in or out of this pose can cause substantial blood pressure variations which can be dangerous when it comes to sustaining your practice and balance.

### Anatomy

#### Move

Press downwards through the hands and feet while still pulling the heels towards your hands. Roll your tailbone down while lifting through the upper back. Press upwards from your hips stomach and chest while dropping the head backwards.

#### Lengthen

Allow yourself to broaden through the entire front body. Feel the pectoralis major and minor open across the front body. Allow the abdominals, psoas, and hip flexors to stretch as they lengthen upwards. Feel the muscles in the front of your neck stretch.

#### Contract

Press down through the hands and feel your triceps, rhomboids and deltoids engage. Squeeze your glutes to press the hips up. Engage through the quadriceps and isometrically contract the hamstrings to lift the pelvis higher.

### Anatomy

#### Move

Feel your two grounded feet isometrically move towards one another. Allow your tailbone move downward while the low back lengthens away from the hips. Feel the shoulders roll down the spine and the sternum move towards the toe. Extended through the crown.

#### Lengthen

Both of your hamstrings and gastrocnemius (calf) muscles will be stretching greatly. Depending on the body this forward fold can allow lengthening of the gluteus muscles. Allow the erector spinae to elongate as your chin separates from the hips.

#### Contract

Engagement on the front of your torso will assist in the lengthening of the back body. Feel your quadriceps muscles grip the femur and lift away from the ground. Squeeze the abs and use them to pull you downward. Activate the upper back by rolling the scapulas down.

### Energy

#### PRANA



#### APANA



### Energy

#### PRANA



#### APANA



Purvottanasana offers the front body, the east side of the self, skyward. Allow **prana** to move upwards from the earth and crest in **vishuddhi (throat)** and **anahata (heart)**. Feel a strong exhale take **apana** down towards a strong **muladhara (root)** and back towards the earth as you root to rise.

Parsvottanasana is a forward fold whose connection to the body opens two of the upper chakras. **Ajna (third eye)** is stimulated and opened as it comes in to contact with the legs. Some variations call for looking toward the toe to open **vishuddhi (throat)** in this pose. Focus on lining up the chakras to allow **prana** and **apana** to move freely.