

ALIGNMENT ENLIGHTENMENT, ANATOMY ASANA



This book presupposes a working knowledge of *asana* practice. Provided in this section is a basic understanding of alignment for foundational postures found in an *asana* practice. Keep in mind that not every pose is for every body. For those beginning their *asana* practice, I recommend taking classes, workshops, and possibly one-on-one sessions with a knowledgeable, experienced yoga teacher.

When the body, mind, and spirit are more fully aligned, we experience a state of connection, oneness, and wholeness. The goal of all yogic practices is yoga—union—the realization that all of life is interconnected. To move closer to a state and experience of yoga, we begin by aligning our bodies. By using the basic principles of alignment within a variety of yoga *asanas*, we develop more body awareness and deeper connections within the practice of yoga.

It is important to note that feeling uncomfortable, awkward, or challenged by the various *asanas* is normal. Also, the postures are not meant to be painful; if at any time you experience pain, take it back a notch by modifying the pose or resting in a neutral position.

As individuals, we are unique in terms of the shape, size, length, and proportions of our bodies. Since each body is different, it is important to let go of the idea of “perfect alignment,” which suggests that everyone shares the exact same skeletal frame and range of motion in our joints, as well as an identical height, weight, and shape. Obviously, this is not the case.

Alignment guidelines in yoga offer assistance, but they do not work for everyone all the time. We all have limitations within our individual bodies, and it is important to respect those boundaries rather than push our bodies into postures that may result in injury. *Asana* encourages us to intentionally introduce stress to the body and to practice handling that stress in a healthy way through focused intention and steady breathing. When we lose the ability to maintain our intention or focus on the breath during our *asana* practice, it is time to modify and/or come out of the pose.

The following sections include foundational poses—intrinsic to a variety of yoga practices—with general points of alignment. You may use these alignment suggestions off the mat as well, continuing to hold your intentional posture when driving a car, walking, standing, working at the computer, and so on. Understand-

ing the basics of human anatomy and physiology greatly enhances your yoga practice, both on and off the mat. Please see the *Recommended Resources* section of this book for suggested reading on the anatomy and physiology of *asana*.

PROPS FOR *ASANA* PRACTICE

Props are used to enhance the *asana* practice. A prop makes a posture more comfortable and facilitates extension and alignment. Props are very useful tools for every level of *asana* practice. Here are some common examples and their characteristics:

- *Mat*: Constructed from various materials, like rubber, a yoga mat provides both cushion and a tacky surface to prevent sliding.
- *Block*: This brick-shaped prop, made from foam, wood, or cork, assists the body in various postures; it may support the lower palm in triangle pose or be squeezed between the inner thighs for support in bridge or wheel pose.
- *Wedge*: A wedge is a triangular piece of foam or wood, about two feet long, that tapers to a thin edge and may be used to elevate the sit bones in a seated forward fold, the wrists in plank pose, or the heels in a squat.
- *Bolster*: This firm, supportive pillow may be used to support the torso in a wide-leg seated forward bend or to support the entire length of the spine in a passive backbend.
- *Strap*: This long cotton rope or belt may be used for reaching the toes in a forward bend or clasping the hands in a posture that encourages binding.
- *Blanket*: This is a versatile prop that, when folded, may be used to elevate the hips in a seated pose, the shoulders in shoulderstand, and placed under the knees for relaxation. It may also cover the entire body to concentrate body heat and keep muscles warm.
- *Chair*: A metal folding chair may be used to assist with balance in standing poses or as a method for elevating the body to perform seated poses; addi-



tionally, there are styles of asana in which a chair may be used for support throughout the practice.

- *Wall:* At times, a wall may be just as useful as a yoga mat in terms of keeping the body steady when attempting a new pose. It may also deepen relaxation, for instance, when a yogi lies down and elevates the legs, resting them against the wall.
- *Earth, Floor, or Ground:* The earth below us is an important prop that is used in every *asana*. A smooth, even surface is ideal for asana practice, although some yogis may like the challenge of practicing outdoors on uneven ground.

POINTS OF ALIGNMENT FOR FOUNDATIONAL POSES

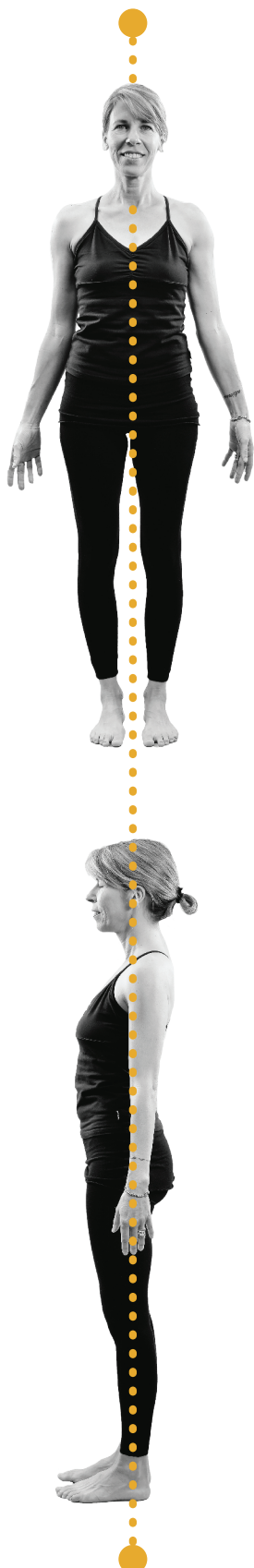
Now, we align and refine. This section offers practical tips to assist with your alignment in foundational poses; these are intrinsic to a typical World Peace Yoga *asana* sequence. I also recommend that you seek the guidance of an experienced teacher when starting an *asana* practice so that you also receive hands-on instruction.

This book provides the necessary information to begin, or continue with, the practice of World Peace Yoga once you have gained a working knowledge of *asana*. Once you understand alignment for the basic poses of each main posture category—standing poses, seated poses, balancing poses, forward bending poses, hip opening poses, twisting poses, back-bending poses, inverted poses, and arm strengthening poses—these same methods may be used in more challenging poses.

I often share with students in our teacher training program that, “basics is advanced.” By this I mean that having the awareness of how to align our bodies in the most foundational poses equates to advanced yoga *asana*. It is very common for today’s yoga practitioners to jump into the *asana* practice and begin with the more challenging classes, skipping over the basics. They may miss out on the experience of creating greater wholeness in their body. After all, when we skip past the foundations of *asana*, we gloss over the knowledge of how to align our unique bodies in a pose. Without the necessary insight into our inner workings, the more flowing and vigorous classes offer only an external imitation of the poses. By understanding the foundations of *asana*, we deepen the level of our practices.

The alignment points of various postures may use the word *energetic* or *energetically* to describe a particular action of the body. This means to be aware and focused on the direction of the action, even when nothing physically moves in your body. In addition, each *asana* described in this book includes a *drishti*, or gazing point, which assists with focus. Besides being a great exercise for your eyes, the *drishti* assists with coming into alignment with your physical form as well as your authentic self. Like conscious breathing, the *drishti* is a tool that keeps your mind focused and calm. This assists in remembering the purpose and intention of your *asana* practice, which is to see the sameness in all beings and experience a state of oneness.





TADASANA—MOUNTAIN POSE/SEAT

Tadasana, the mountain pose/seal, is the foundation of all the *asanas*. Various yogic texts state that when you understand the alignment and practice of the mountain seat—or when you “become” the mountain—you gain the knowledge of how to practice all of the *asanas*.

POSE TECHNIQUE:

- Stand tall with your feet parallel and placed either together or hip-width apart.
- Press down through all four corners of the feet—this includes the inner and outer heels; inner and outer balls of your feet—distribute your weight equally and feel a “rooting down” take place.
- Lift the arches of your feet by lifting and spreading your toes. Lift your inner and outer ankles energetically upward.
- Lift your kneecaps by contracting your quadriceps to create space in the knee joint. Lift upward and out of the joint, rather than compressing or locking the joint. Place a slight bend in your knees to assist with this action.
- Structurally, the legs are parallel. Energetically, the upper thighs and legs rotate outward while the lower legs and calves rotate inward.
- Lengthen your tailbone down toward the floor and lift your pubic bone toward your navel.
- Tuck your lower abdomen in and lift upward.
- Lengthen your torso and side body; expand your ribcage in all directions.
- Lift your sternum; spread apart your collarbones; soften your front ribs toward the waist; expand your back ribs.
- Make sure your chin is parallel to the floor.
- Move your shoulder blades downward along your back.
- Extend your arms (upper arms rotate outward and lower arms rotate inward) with the palms facing your thighs; reach your fingers toward the floor.
- Soften your eyes and gaze; focus your drishti on a neutral spot toward the horizon.

PROP TECHNIQUE:

- Squeeze a block between your inner thighs and push it forward and backward to find the middle; energetically draw the block upward, bringing awareness to your core.
- Balance a block on top of your head; place straps under the arches of your feet; lift upward without sinking into your arches.
- Stand against the wall or lie on your back; drop your tailbone and find a neutral spine.

Pose Qualities: Strong; steady; still; grounded; resilient; balanced; peaceful; and powerful

HANDS AND KNEES (OR) TABLETOP POSE/SEAT

Tabletop pose assists us with setting up a stable form for the poses that may follow, such as puppy, downward-facing dog, and plank.

POSE TECHNIQUE:

- Bring your hands and knees to the floor.
- Press your palms firmly into the ground. Spread your fingers wide, middle fingers parallel to each other; your hands are shoulder-width apart.
- Stack your wrists, elbows, and shoulders; lift up out of your wrists and allow the “eyes” of your elbows to face each other.
- Create space in your elbow joints by lifting up, out of the joint—rather than compressing or locking out the joint—a slight bend in your elbows may assist.
- Place your knees hip-width apart; stack your hips over your knees. Press the tops of your feet into the floor.
- Move your shoulders down your back away from your ears. Keep your chest open and do not let your shoulders round forward.
- Draw your navel inward; engage your body’s core with a neutral spine. Lengthen your tailbone straight back.
- Lengthen your neck and keep it in line with your spine; reach the crown of your head forward.
- Focus your gaze, or drishti, on the space just in front of you (do not look up or down).

Pose Qualities: Sturdy, like a table, this pose assists us with developing our sense of inner balance.





PUPPY POSE/SEAT

Ah, to be a puppy. Puppy pose is the space between child's pose and downward-facing dog. It is more active than child's pose, yet more passive than downward-facing dog.

POSE TECHNIQUE:

- From a hands and knees/tabletop position, curl your toes under and press your hips toward your heels (hips do not touch heels).
- Spread your fingers wide; press into the pads of your hands and the area between your first fingers and thumbs.
- Lift up and out of your wrists and armpits.
- Allow the "eyes" of your elbows to face each other; create space in your elbow joints by lifting up and out of the joint. Keep the muscles of your arms active and rotate the upper arms outward.
- Draw your shoulders away from your ears; wrap your shoulder blades around your upper body. Soften your shoulder blade wings into the body.
- Face your forehead toward the floor; relax your head and neck and keep neck in line with your spine.
- Soften your rib cage into your body while drawing your navel inward; maintain a neutral spine.
- Allow your tailbone to drop and stay in a neutral position.
- Focus your gaze, or *drishti*, toward your knees.

Pose Qualities: Playful; spirited; enthusiastic



ADHO MUKHA SVANASANA—DOWNWARD-FACING DOG POSE/SEAT

In downward-facing dog, you distribute your weight equally on all fours and become one with your “inner dog.”

POSE TECHNIQUE:

- From hands and knees position, curl your toes under and extend your legs; draw your hips toward the ceiling and form an inverted V with your body.
- Spread your fingers wide; press into the pads of your hands and the area between your first fingers and thumbs.
- Lift up out of your wrists; keep the underside of your arms active (do not sink into your wrists; instead, place a wedge or rolled-up mat underneath your wrists to elevate them and prevent sinking).
- Allow the “eyes” of your elbows to face each other; create space in your elbow joints by lifting up and out of the joint (rather than compressing or locking out your joint—a slight bend in the elbows may assist). Keep the muscles of your arms active and rotate your upper arms outward.
- Draw your shoulders away from your ears; wrap your shoulder blades around your upper body and soften your shoulder blade wings into your body.
- Relax your head and keep neck in line with your spine. Move your chin toward your chest.
- Soften your rib cage into your body and draw your navel inward; maintain a neutral spine.
- Lengthen your tailbone in a neutral position and reach toward the ceiling.
- Create space in your knee joints by lifting up out of the joints and engage your quadriceps to lift your kneecaps. *Optional:* bend your knees.
- Reach your heels toward the earth and press them down; lengthen the fronts of your ankles to avoid compressing them (try to reduce your skin wrinkling around your ankles).
- Keep your feet hip-distance apart.
- Distribute your weight equally throughout the front and back halves of your body, like a dog on all fours.
- Focus your gaze, or *drishti*, toward your thighs or navel.

Pose Qualities: Loyal; reliable; faithful; devoted

PHALAKASANA—PLANK POSE/SEAT (HIGH PLANK, ARMS EXTENDED)

In plank, you become a sturdy platform while developing the strength to stand your own ground.

POSE TECHNIQUE:

- Start by assuming the foundations of downward-facing dog pose.
- Inhale to bring your shoulders over your wrists; stack your wrists, elbows, and shoulders in one line. Lift up out of your wrists.
- Allow the "eyes" of your elbows to face each other; create space in the elbow joints by lifting up and out of the joint (rather than compressing or locking out the joint—a slight bend in your elbows may assist).
- Press through your heels, creating one straight line from your head to your heels.
- Press your shoulder blades firmly against your back and spread them away from your spine; keep your chest open and do not allow your shoulders to round forward.
- Contract your quadriceps, lift your kneecaps, and press your hamstrings toward the ceiling.
- Draw your navel inward; engage the core of your body. Maintain a neutral spine; lengthen your tailbone toward your heels.
- Lengthen your neck and bring it in line with your spine; reach the crown of your head forward.
- Focus your gaze, or *drishti*, on the space just in front of you.

Pose Qualities: This is a holistic pose in which the whole body is active; it creates a sense of inner equilibrium and harmony.



VASISTHASANA—SIDE PLANK POSE/SEAT

Side plank pose, dedicated to the sage Vasistha, is another stabilizing seat that embodies both grace and brilliance.

POSE TECHNIQUE:

- Start by assuming the foundations of plank pose.
- Shift your weight to the outer edge of your right foot and move your supporting hand just in front of your shoulder.
- Stack your left foot on top of your right foot; turn your torso to the left and reach your left arm upward (repeat on the other side).
- The weight of your body is supported by the outer edge of your foot and the hand that remains on the floor; your wrist, elbow, and shoulder are stacked in one line with the supporting hand placed in front of your shoulder.
- Lift up out of your wrists; create space in your elbow joints by lifting up and out of the joint (rather than compressing or locking out the joint—a slight bend in your elbows may assist).
- Create a straight line from your head to your heels.
- Press your shoulder blades firmly against your back and spread them away from your spine; keep your chest open and do not allow your shoulders to round forward.
- Contract your quadriceps to lift your kneecaps.
- Draw your navel inward; engage the core of your body. Maintain a neutral spine; lengthen your tailbone toward your heels.
- Lengthen your neck and bring it in line with your spine; reach the crown of your head forward.
- Focus your gaze, or *drishti*, on the space just in front of you (do not look down); you may also look up at your hand.
- Reverse directions and practice the same pose on your other side.

Pose Qualities: Strength; brilliance; grace



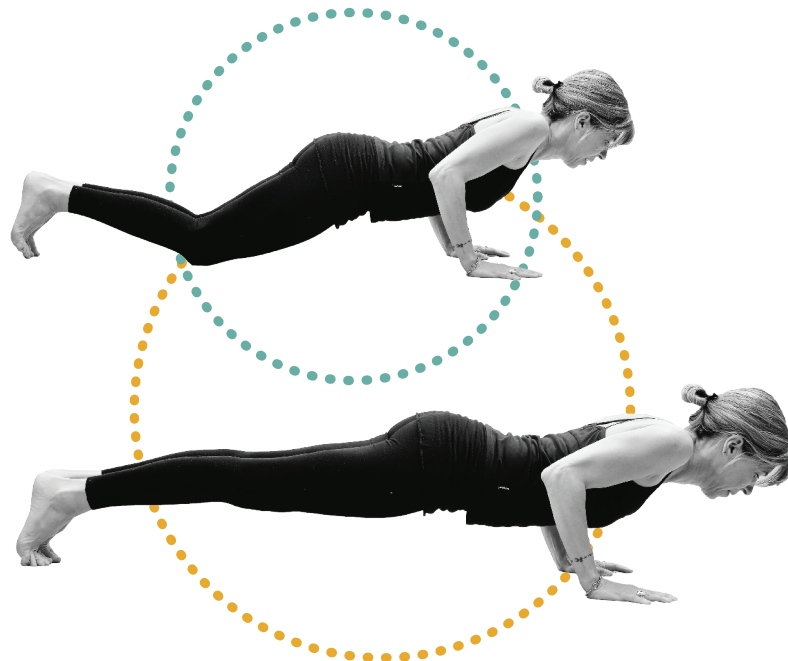
CHATURANGA DANDASANA—FOUR-LIMBED STAFF POSE/SEAT (LOW PLANK WITH BENT ELBOWS)

The four-limbed staff pose is commonly practiced in sun salutations or as a transitional pose to get from one *asana* to the next. It is typically not held for more than ten to twenty seconds.

POSE TECHNIQUE:

- Start by assuming the foundations of plank pose.
- Press forward on the balls of your feet and shift your shoulders in front of your wrists.
- Exhale and lower your body halfway to the earth while you squeeze your elbows into the sides of your torso. Align your thumbs with your lower ribs.
- Press through your heels to create one straight line from your head to your heels.
- Make your shoulder blades broad against your back and draw them slightly together.
- Contract your quadriceps to lift your kneecaps.
- Draw your navel inward; engage the core of your body. Maintain a neutral spine; lengthen your tailbone toward your heels.
- Lengthen your neck and bring in line with your spine; reach the crown of your head forward.
- Focus your gaze, or *drishti*, on the space just in front of you.

Pose Qualities: This is another holistic pose in which the whole body is active; it creates a sense of inner equilibrium and harmony.



ASHTANGA NAMASKARA—EIGHT-POINT POSE/SEAT (KNEES-CHEST-CHIN)

The eight-point pose is commonly practiced in sun salutations or as a transitional pose to get from one *asana* to the next. It is typically not held for more than ten to twenty seconds.

POSE TECHNIQUE:

- Start by assuming the foundations of plank pose.
- Drop your knees to the earth and shift your shoulders in front of your wrists; lift your tailbone upward.
- Exhale and lower your chest and chin to the earth while you squeeze your elbows into the sides of your torso. Align your thumbs with your low ribs. Keep hips lifted.
- Make your shoulder blades broad against your back and draw them slightly together.
- Draw your navel inward, engage the core of your body, and lift your tailbone to the sky.
- Focus your gaze, or *drishti*, on the space just in front of you.

Pose Qualities: The eight points of your body connect to the earth and represent the “royal path,” which is the Eight Limbs of Yoga.



UTKATASANA—FIERCE POSE/SEAT

Take a seat. Fierce pose, or chair pose, is a powerful standing *asana* that builds strength and stamina both within and without.

POSE TECHNIQUE:

- Start by assuming the foundations of mountain pose with your feet together.
- Inhale and reach your arms overhead.
- *Option 1:* Separate your palms so that they are shoulder-width apart and face each other.
- *Option 2:* Keep your palms together, in line with the center of your chest.
- Exhale and bend your knees; bring your hips down and back. Make sure you are able to see your toes.
- Bring your torso to lean slightly forward over your thighs. Your thighs are not quite parallel to the floor;
- Keep your inner thighs parallel to each other and squeeze them together.
- Bring the heads of your thigh bones to root down toward your heels. Lengthen your torso and reach upward.
- Lengthen your tailbone down toward floor; lift your pubic bone toward your navel.
- Lift your lower abdomen inward and upward.
- Keep your shoulder blades firm against your back.
- Soften your eyes; focus your gaze, or *drishti* on a neutral spot toward the horizon, or look up.

Pose Qualities: Powerful; exuding fierce love and strong values



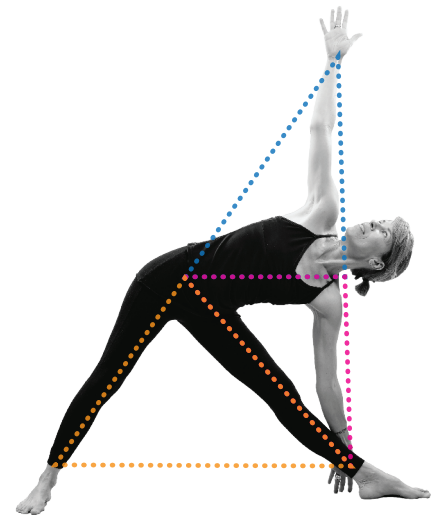
UTTHITA TRIKONASANA—EXTENDED TRIANGLE POSE/SEAT

Your body forms three full triangles in this pose to symbolize the unity of body, mind, and spirit.

POSE TECHNIQUE:

- Stand with your feet about a leg's distance apart; root down equally through the four corners of your feet, as in mountain pose.
- Turn one foot/leg outward at a ninety-degree angle from your body; turn your other foot/leg slightly inward.
- Align the *heel* of your foot/leg that is turned outward with the *arch* of your foot/leg that is turned slightly inward.
- Energetically rotate the leg muscles outward, draw your sit bones together across the back of your pelvis.
- Bring your front knee in line with your second toe (you may start with a slight bend in your knee to make sure it is not turned inward); engage your quadriceps to lift your kneecaps.
- Reach your front-facing hand toward your thigh, shin, or big toe of your front foot that is at a ninety-degree angle; lengthen the underside of your body.
- Extend your other hand toward the ceiling; stack your shoulders; open your chest and soften your ribcage.
- Stack your hips; allow both cheeks of the buttocks to remain even with each another.
- Focus your gaze, or *drishti*, toward your upward-reaching hand.
- Lengthen your neck; reach the crown of your head forward. Align your head with your spine.
- Work to align the backs of your legs, torso, and hips so that they are together on a single plane.
- Reverse directions and practice the same pose on your other side.

Pose Qualities: Extended triangle pose embodies divinity, which represents the “physical-mental-spiritual” nature of human beings— that is, the triad—which consists of the three triangles formed in the body when practicing this pose. This pose symbolizes the coming together of the body, mind, and spirit connection.



PARIVRTTA TRIKONASANA—TWISTED TRIANGLE POSE/SEAT

In twisted triangle pose, your body forms three triangles while holding a twist. This pose may challenge your balance, so use props that assist in steadying and supporting your body.

POSE TECHNIQUE:

- Start by assuming the foundations of mountain pose.
- Root down equally through the four corners of your feet; maintain a strong foundation in mountain pose throughout.
- Keep your hip points facing forward and step one leg back; firmly root your foot; press your heel downward. Turn your toes outward from your body at an angle between sixty and eighty degrees.
- Point your other foot forward and bring parallel to the long edges of mat; draw an imaginary line between your two heels.
- Keep your legs active; engage your quadriceps and lift your kneecaps.
- Keep your hips, pelvis, and sacrum level with one another; move the hip of your front leg backward, energetically, while the hip of the back leg moves forward, energetically. This results in balanced, level hips.
- Move your back hand toward your front foot.
- *Option 1:* Place your hand opposite of your foot that is forward on the floor next to your big toe (easier) or next to your baby toe (more challenging).
- *Option 2:* Place your hand opposite of your foot that is forward on your front shin or on a block next to your front foot (on whichever side of the foot feels best).
- Place your other hand on your outer hip; gradually reach that hand upward, toward the ceiling, while you stack your shoulders.
- Focus your gaze, or *drishti*, toward your upward-reaching hand.
- Lengthen your neck; reach the crown of your head forward.
- Reverse directions and practice the same pose on your other side.

Pose Qualities: These qualities are the same as those listed for the extended triangle pose described earlier in this chapter.



VIRABHADRASANA I—WARRIOR I POSE/SEAT

In this seat, imagine embodying the qualities of a warrior, maintaining a state of peace and calm amidst great challenges.

POSE TECHNIQUE:

- Start by assuming the foundations of mountain pose.
- Root down equally through the four corners of your feet; maintain a strong foundation in mountain pose throughout.
- Keep your hip points facing forward and step one leg back; firmly root your foot; press your heel downward. Turn your toes outward from your body at an angle between sixty and eighty degrees.
- Point your other foot forward and bring parallel to the long edges of mat; draw an imaginary line between your two heels.
- Keep your legs active; engage your quadriceps and lift your kneecaps.
- Bend your front leg and bring your knee over your heel; do not extend it beyond your ankle. Visually align your kneecap with your second toe.
- Press your back leg into the outer edge of your foot; activate both legs so that they work together. Do not let your knee go past your ankle (make sure you are able to see your big toe and second toe when you look downward).
- Keep your hips, pelvis, and sacrum level with one another; move the hip of your front leg backward, energetically, while the hip of your back leg moves forward, energetically. This results in balanced, level hips (imagine that you have headlights on your hip bones and they are shining forward toward the peace path).
- Face your torso forward; drop your tailbone. Draw your navel inward; lift your chest.
- Reach your arms up from the center of your chest and drop your shoulders away from your ears; align your hands with your heart.
- Focus your gaze, or *drishti*, at your thumbs.
- Reverse directions and practice the same pose on your other side.

Pose Qualities: We tend to think that when we are peaceful, we are unable to be powerful. Or, if we are powerful, it is not possible to be peaceful. True power—the warrior's power—exudes from the qualities of compassion, love, and kindness. This pose was dedicated to Virabhadra, a warrior who showed great inner calm amidst challenges.



VIRABHADRASANA II—WARRIOR II POSE/SEAT

In this seat, imagine embodying the qualities of a warrior, standing your own ground, and maintaining a state of serenity amidst challenges.

POSE TECHNIQUE:

- Stand with your feet at least one leg-width apart; root down equally through the four corners of your feet, as in mountain pose.
- Turn one foot/leg outward at a ninety-degree angle from your body; turn your other foot/leg slightly inward.
- Align the *heel* of your foot/leg that is turned outward with the *arch* of your foot/leg that is turned slightly inward.
- Energetically rotate your leg muscles outward and draw the sit bones together across the back of your pelvis.
- Keep your legs active; engage your quadriceps and lift your kneecaps.
- Bend your front leg and bring your knee over your heel; do not extend it beyond your ankle. Visually align your kneecap with your second toe; work to keep your front thigh parallel to the floor.
- Press your back leg into the outer edge of your foot; activate both legs so that they work together. Do not let the knee go past your ankle (make sure you are able to see your big toe and second toe when you look downward).
- Keep your hips level and as even as possible with your torso upright (do not lean forward).
- Draw your arms up to shoulder height; reach your front arm forward and your back arm backward (as if they are being pulled in two opposite directions) and find balance in the middle. Relax your shoulders away from your ears.
- Lift your chin slightly.
- Focus your gaze, or *drishti*, just past your front middle finger.
- Reverse directions and practice the same pose on your other side.

Pose Qualities: These qualities are the same as those listed for the warrior one pose described earlier in this chapter.



VRIKSHASANA—TREE POSE/SEAT

Root down and branch outward and upward. In this seat, you become a tree, which requires a balance of strength and flexibility to stay grounded. When challenged by an outside force, a strong tree that is stiff and rigid topples over, while a tree that is both strong and flexible may weather the storms.

POSE TECHNIQUE:

- Start by assuming the foundations of mountain pose.
- Root down equally through the four corners of your feet; maintain a strong foundation in mountain pose throughout tree pose.
- *Option 1:* Shift your weight to one foot by turning out the opposite foot and leg; place your heel of the turned-out foot against the inner ankle of your opposite leg. Find your balance here and encourage your legs to press toward each other.
- *Option 2:* Bend the knee of your turned-out leg; begin to walk your foot up your balancing leg; work toward bringing your foot above your knee; press your foot into your inner thigh and your inner thigh into your foot (this creates stability within the pose).
- Keep your hips and pelvis level on both sides; lengthen your torso and draw your navel inward.
- *Option 1:* Place your palms together at the center of your chest.
- *Option 2:* Stretch your arms overhead to create branches.
- Become a tree. From the hips down, imagine you are buried in dirt. Imagine your legs are tangled roots, your waist is a trunk, and your arms are branches.
- Focus your gaze, the *drishti*, on the horizon or slightly upward.
- Reverse directions and practice the same pose on your other side.

Pose Qualities: Generosity; tolerance; perseverance; balance



BAKASANA—CRANE POSE/SEAT

Bakasana is often referred to as both crane and crow pose, however, there is a slight difference between the two poses. Crane, known in Sanskrit as *bakasana* is practiced with the arms extended to express the longer legs of a crane. Crow, known in Sanskrit as *kakasana*, is practiced with the elbows bent to represent the shorter legs of a crow.



POSE TECHNIQUE:

- Start by assuming the foundations of mountain pose with your feet slightly apart.
- Squat down; move your buttocks toward your heels and lift your heels off the earth.
- Separate your knees so they are wider than your hips; tilt your torso forward between your inner thighs.
- Place your hands shoulder-width apart on the earth; extend your arms and maintain a slight bend in your elbows.
- *Option 1:* Squeeze the outside of your upper arms with the insides of your knees; bend your elbows (this is referred to as *kakasana*, or crow).
- *Option 2:* Bring your knees/shins to the backs of your upper arms with your arms extended (this is referred to as *bakasana*, or crane).
- Spread your fingers wide; lift up out of your wrists.
- Press deeply into the balls of your feet and lean forward; allow the weight of your body to come onto your upper arms.
- Contract your torso; engage your abdominals. Round your back slightly; draw your tailbone as close to your heels as possible.
- Activate and engage your inner thighs; work to touch your big toes together. Keep your head in a neutral position.
- Focus your gaze, or *drishti*, toward the earth in front of you.

PROP TECHNIQUE: Place a block under your feet to assist with lifting them, or situate a block so that it supports your forehead as you lift your feet up and off the earth.

Pose Qualities: Longevity; justice; transformation



DANDASANA—STAFF, STICK OR ROD POSE/SEAT

Staff pose sets up a nice foundation for seated postures. Like mountain pose, it appears to be extremely simple, but there is a lot going on in this seemingly "easy" *asana*.

POSE TECHNIQUE:

- Sit down with your legs together and extended in front of your body; keep your spine upright.
- *Optional:* Sit on a blanket to raise your seat; this is a nice option for anyone whose tailbone hits the earth due to a rounded spine.
- Place your thumbs on your hip creases with your fingers on your outer thighs; press down to root your seat and lengthen your torso.
- Place your hands next to your hips on the earth; spread your fingers and point them toward your feet with the palms flat.
- Flex your feet as if standing in mountain pose; lift your heels to activate your legs. Lower your heels while you contract your legs.
- Engage your quadriceps to lift your kneecaps.
- Structurally, your legs are parallel; energetically, your upper thighs and legs rotate outward and your lower legs rotate inward.
- Lengthen your torso; maintain a neutral spine and draw your navel toward your spine.
- Lift your chest toward your chin; soften your ribcage.
- Focus your gaze, or *drishti*, toward the horizon or slightly downward from the horizon.

Pose Qualities: Encouraging and caring



PASCHIMOTTANASANA—INTENSE WESTERN STRETCH, SEATED FORWARD BEND POSE/SEAT

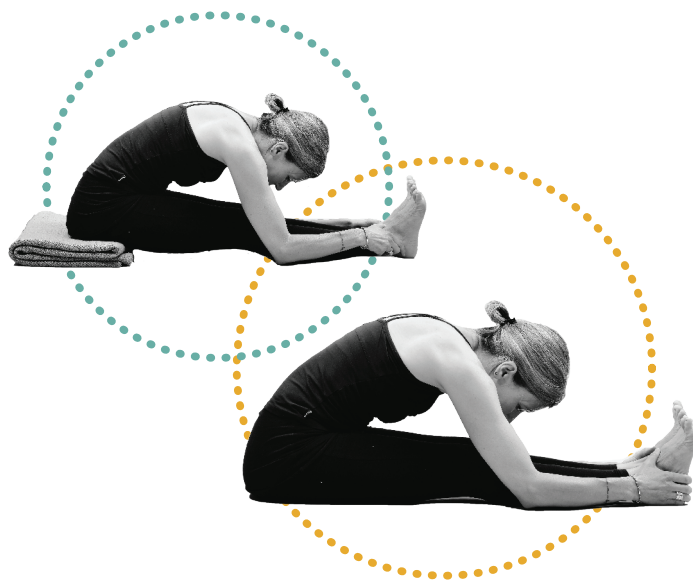
Forward bends symbolize our reflection on the past; they also assist us in finding the courage to let go of what's holding us back so that we may truly move forward.

POSE TECHNIQUE:

- Sit down with your legs together and extended in front of your body; keep your spine upright.
- *Optional:* Sit on a blanket to raise your seat; this is best for anyone whose tailbone hits the earth due to a rounded spine.
- Reach toward your feet with your hands and lean forward with your chest. Bend forward and slowly extend your legs. Lengthen your spine and bring your abdomen toward or to rest on your thighs.
- Reach for the outsides of your feet, either with your hands or a strap if your knees are still bent.
- When you reach the peak of your spinal extension, round your back. Open your chest and draw your shoulders draw away from your ears. Align your head with your spine.
- Engage your quadriceps and lift your kneecaps.
- Structurally, your legs are parallel; energetically, your upper thighs and legs rotate outward and your lower legs rotate inward.
- Focus your gaze, or *drishti*, toward your toes or shins.

PROP TECHNIQUE: A bolster or rolled-up blanket may be placed under your knees; elevate the hips with a folded blanket or blocks may be stacked between your legs so that your forehead may rest on them.

Pose Qualities: Reflection; contemplation; humility; healing of the past



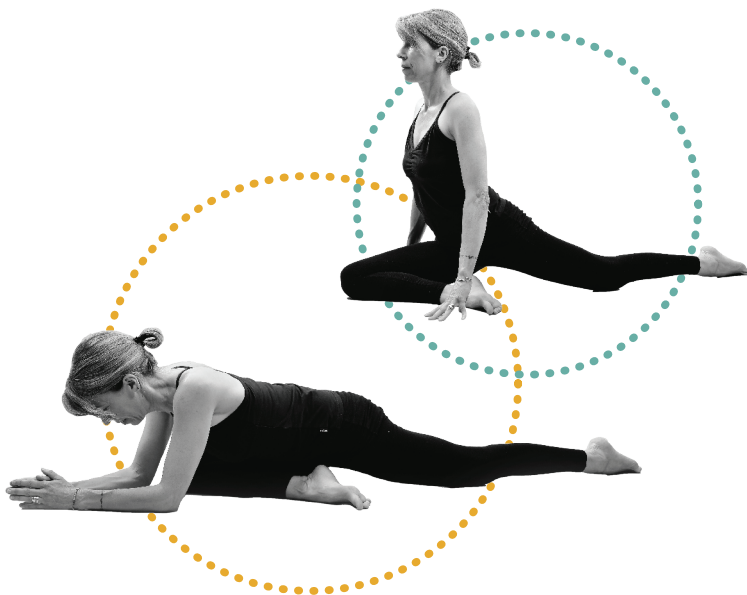
EKA PADA RAJAKAPOTASANA—ONE LEG KING PIGEON POSE/SEAT

In addition to deeply opening your hips, one leg king pigeon pose also may be a backbend. When you extend your arms it increases the backbend effect; dropping to your forearms decreases the backbend effect.

POSE TECHNIQUE:

- Start by assuming the foundations of downward-facing dog pose.
- Bring your right knee forward between your hands, toward your right wrist, while extending your back leg.
- Place the heel of your front foot close to your groin; align your hip crease with your knee.
- *Optional:* Slowly move your front foot forward toward the alignment of your ankle in line with your knee (maybe your foot reaches to parallel with the front edge of your mat). Fully extend your back leg and bring your hips toward the earth.
- Keep your hips, pelvis, and sacrum level (do not lean to one side); prop a blanket under your hips to prevent leaning.
- Extend your arms, drop to your forearms, or extend your arms outward on the ground.
- Push your extended leg backward as you reach forward with arms.
- Lengthen your neck; align your head with your spine.
- Focus your gaze, the *drishti*, straight forward.
- Switch legs and practice the same pose on your other side.

Pose Qualities: Pigeons are faithful and home-loving; as members of the dove family, they also symbolize peace.



NAVASANA—BOAT POSE/SEAT

"Row, row, row your boat gently down the stream . . ." This is a powerful, core-strengthening pose that may be practiced with great ease, like a boat that gently glides down the stream.



POSE TECHNIQUE:

- Start by assuming the foundations of staff pose.
- Bend your knees; place your feet on floor. Bring both hands near your hamstring area.
- Lean back; fully extend your arms forward. Lengthen your torso and spine (do not round your back); expand your chest. Engage your abdominals.
- Lengthen your tailbone toward the floor as you lift your pubic bone toward your navel.
- Balance on your sitting bones (the buttocks) and your tailbone.
- Squeeze your inner thighs together.
- *Option 1:* Lift your feet off the floor; keep your knees bent and your feet in line with your knees.
- *Option 2:* Lift your feet off the floor; extend your legs.
- For both options, maintain the alignment described above.
- Lengthen your arms alongside your legs and make them parallel to floor.
- Draw your shoulders backward; spread your shoulder blades across your back and lengthen your fingers forward.
- Press the heads of your thigh bones toward the floor; lift your sternum.
- Focus your gaze, or *drishti*, toward your thighs or toes.

Pose Qualities: Sturdy; durable; agile



PURVOTTANASANA—INTENSE EASTERN STRETCH, INCLINED PLANE/ REVERSE TABLETOP POSE/SEAT

In this *asana*, extend your legs to assume the inclined plane seat, or *purvottanasana*. Bend your knees to assume the reverse tabletop seat.

POSE TECHNIQUE:

- Sit down with your knees bent and your feet hip-distance apart; place your ankles just in front of your knees.
- Position your hands six to ten inches behind your hips; point your fingers toward your hips and spread your fingers wide, root through the pads of your hands.
- Lift your chest toward your chin and draw your chin toward your chest.
- On an inhale, lead with your pelvis to lift your hips toward the ceiling; work to lift your pelvis high enough that you no longer see your knees and draw your navel inward.
- *Optional:* Extend your legs and press your feet into the floor.
- Keep your legs and feet parallel; open your chest and heart.
- *Optional:* Squeeze a block between your legs to activate the inner thighs.
- Lift your chin toward the ceiling; lengthen the back of your neck and keep in line with your spine. Reach the crown of your head toward the wall behind you.
- Focus your gaze, or *drishti*, upward toward the ceiling.

Pose Qualities: Strength in compassion



VIRASANA—HERO POSE/SEAT

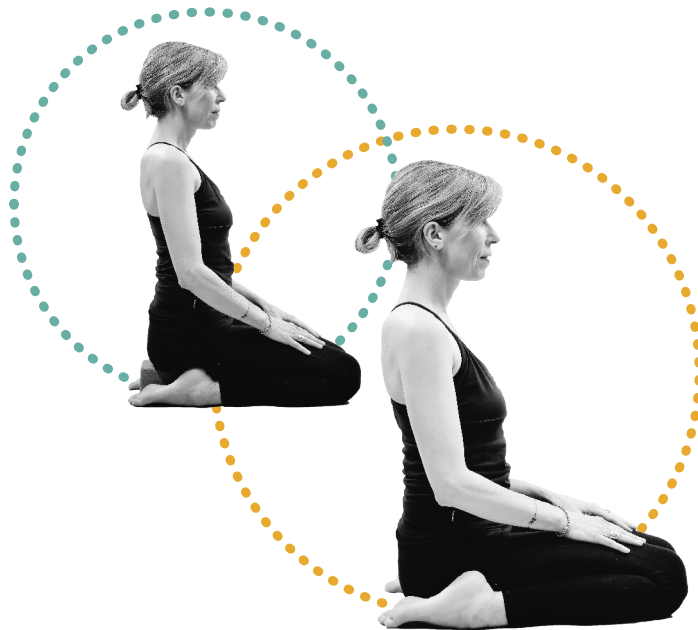
Now is the time to take the noble and humble seat of the hero; courage, wisdom, and peace are within.

POSE TECHNIQUE:

- Start by assuming the foundations of tabletop pose.
- Bring your knees together. Place your feet slightly wider than your hips; your inner knees touch (if possible); the tops of your feet press evenly into the earth.
- Use your hands to roll your calf muscles toward the outsides of your heels.
- Sit back between your feet and bring your buttocks to the ground; keep your thighs parallel to the ground, maintain a thumb-width space between your inner heels and outer hips.
- *Optional:* Elevate your hips with a blanket or blocks.
- Bring your torso upright.
- Turn your thighs inward; place your hands on your hip creases and press down. Lengthen your torso; reach your tailbone toward the earth.
- Relax your hands onto your lap; keep your shoulder blades firm against your back and release your shoulders away from the ears.
- Widen your collarbones while you expand your chest.
- Focus your gaze, or *drishti*, toward the horizon.

PROP TECHNIQUE: Place a blanket under your knees, shins, and feet for extra padding; elevate your hips by sitting on a folded blanket or block to evenly support both sitting bones.

Pose Qualities: Peacemaker; hero; star; champion



BHUJANGASANA—COBRA POSE/SEAT

If you are interested in releasing your fear of snakes, why not become one?
Enjoy your time as a cobra!

POSE TECHNIQUE:

- Lie on your abdomen, extend your legs and squeeze them together and press your pubic bone, thighs, and tops of feet into the ground. Bring your big toes to touch.
- Bring your palms to the ground with your thumbs near your lower ribs; squeeze your elbows into the sides of your body.
- Inhale to lift your chest off the floor; extend your arms only as far as is comfortable. Use your spine and abdominals to lift your body upward; like a snake, use very little of your arm strength.
- Spread your fingers wide; draw your shoulders away from your ears. Press your shoulder blades firmly against your back; press your chest forward.
- Lengthen your tailbone toward your pubic bone; lift your pubic bone toward your navel.
- Imagine your body as a single limb; keep your legs together and lift upward from your core, rather than from your arms. The arms create the cobra's hood.
- Focus your gaze, or *drishti*, straight forward.

Pose Qualities: Cautious; contemplative; attentive



URDHVA MUKHA SVANASANA—UPWARD FACING DOG POSE/SEAT

Upward dog is a pose often used in sun salutations or to transition from one form to the next. You may also hold it for a longer period of time. This seat creates greater strength in your arms, upper back, and legs.

POSE TECHNIQUE:

- Start by assuming the foundations of four-limbed staff pose.
- Inhale and push forward on the balls of your feet; roll over your toes. Bring the tops of your feet to the floor; extend your arms.
- Lengthen your torso; imagine pulling your hips forward toward your hands; reach your tailbone backward.
- Press your palms flat with your fingers spread wide; lift up out of your wrists. Stack your wrists, elbows, and shoulders; keep your arms firm and turned out with your elbow creases facing forward.
- Press the tops of your feet into the earth; only your hands and feet touch the ground.
- Lift your sternum and soften your front ribs.
- Turn your thigh muscles slightly inward and keep them firm.
- Press your shoulder blades firmly against your back; expand your chest and reach your side ribs forward.
- Focus your gaze, or *drishti*, straight forward or tilt your head slightly backward, keep your head in line with the natural curve of your spine.

Pose Qualities: Loyalty; reliability; faithfulness; devotion



SHALABHASANA—LOCUST POSE/SEAT

In the seat of the locust, imagine being pulled in two directions, so that your spine is lengthening rather than compressing. This is a fabulous core-strengthening backbend.

POSE TECHNIQUE:

- Lie on your abdomen and extend your legs; place your arms beside the body with your palms facing downward, or interlace your fingers behind your back and extend your arms.
- Root your tailbone downward and draw your lower belly inward. Activate your core and soften your ribcage.
- Squeeze your legs together and bring your big toes together; lengthen the back of your legs and extend your feet backward.
- Draw your shoulders away from your ears and down your back; press your shoulder blades firmly into your back.
- Focus your gaze, or *drishti*, straight forward; lengthen the back of your neck and reach your head forward.
- Lift your feet, knees, thighs, arms, hands, chest, shoulders, and head off the floor.
- Draw your feet backward while you reach your head forward to create length in your spine; the back of your neck curves in line with the curve of your spine. Keep your feet and shoulders at equal heights.

Pose Qualities: Collaboration; working together



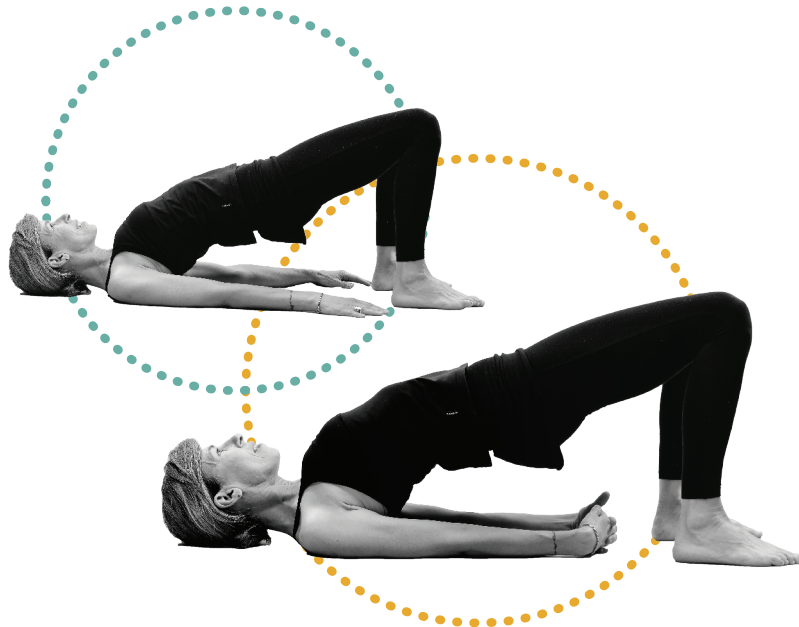
SETU BANDASANA—BRIDGE/HALF WHEEL POSE/SEAT

This seat is often referred to as bridge, or half wheel. There is a more challenging variation of bridge, *setu bandasana*, in which the bottoms of your feet and the top of your head are the two main balance points. The back arches, and the whole body extends. The bridge pose described here is less intense and your shoulders remain grounded.

POSE TECHNIQUE:

- Lie on your back with your knees bent and feet hip-distance apart; keep your heels below your knees (do not extend your knees past your ankles).
- Keep your feet parallel; place your palms on the floor beside your hips.
- To prepare for this pose, draw your navel toward your spine; allow your tailbone to drop. Press your back into the mat and find a neutral position for your spine.
- On an inhale, lift up from the lowermost part of your spine to the uppermost part of your spine; move your buttocks off the floor.
- Draw your shoulder blades closer together; lift your chin slightly away from your sternum.
- Bring your shoulder blades firm against your back and press the top of your sternum toward your chin; keep your palms on the floor or interlace your fingers underneath your back.
- Activate and engage your inner thighs; root down through the inner edges of your feet. Keep your feet and thighs parallel.
- *Optional:* Squeeze a block between your thighs.
- Lengthen your spine in the backbend; keep your knees directly over the heels, energetically push them forward away from your hips and lengthen your tailbone toward the backs of your knees.
- Focus your gaze, or *drishti*, upward, toward the ceiling.

Pose Qualities: Structure; support; integrity



URDHVA DHANURASANA—WHEEL/ UPWARD FACING BOW POSE/SEAT

In this seat, the body becomes a wheel of love. Weight distributes equally throughout the front and back halves of your body, and your chest expands toward the ceiling. This opening of your chest and heart area symbolizes a state of unconditional love.

POSE TECHNIQUE:

- Lie on your back with your knees bent; place your feet hip-distance apart. Keep your heels below your knees (do not extend your knees past your ankles); keep your feet parallel.
- Place your palms beside your head with your thumbs next to your ears; point your fingers toward your shoulders. Keep your elbows shoulder-width apart and point them toward the ceiling.
- To prepare for this pose, draw your navel toward your spine; allow your tailbone to drop and press your back into the mat and find a neutral position for your spine.
- Press your shoulder blades firmly into your back.
- On an inhale, lift up from the lowermost part of your spine to the uppermost part of your spine; move your buttocks off the floor.
- On an exhale, press into your palms and bring the crown of your head to the floor; optional you may walk your hands a few inches forward.
- On an inhale extend your arms and lift your head off the floor.
- Distribute your weight evenly throughout the front and back halves of your body.
- Keep your feet and legs parallel; work to bring your wrists, elbows, and shoulders into a straight line.
- Focus your gaze, or *drishti*, toward the horizon.

PROP TECHNIQUE: Squeeze a block between your inner thighs; use a wedge to elevate your wrists.

Pose Qualities: Forgiving; letting go; empathetic; compassionate





ARDHA MATSYENDRASANA—HALF LORD-OF-THE-FISHES POSE/SEAT (SEATED TWIST)

In this pose, visualize the form of half fish with tail in the lower part of your body and a half man with torso and head in the upper part of your body. Or, half woman, if you prefer . . . just like a mermaid!

POSE TECHNIQUE:

- Start by assuming the foundations of staff pose.
- Bend your knee into your chest; cross that same leg's foot over your extended leg's knee without disturbing the foundations of the pose (sit bones root down; sacrum/hips/pelvis remain level).
- The extended leg remains where it is, or you may bend it so that your heel moves to the outside of your opposite buttock.
- *Note:* The sacrum is a sacred joint that creates stability. Because of this, there is not a focus on twisting it or increasing mobility within your sacrum. The twist begins within your lower spine, just above your sacrum (the triangular bone at the base of the spine), and moves toward the middle to upper spine.
- Point your bent knee toward the ceiling; place your opposite elbow on the bent-knee thigh and point your fingers toward the ceiling.
- Place your other hand on the floor beside your hip for support (do not lean into this hand).
- Press your bent-knee foot into the earth; release your groin and lengthen the front of your torso. Lean backward slightly into your shoulder blades with your upper torso; lengthen your tailbone toward the floor.
- With every inhalation, sit up a bit taller and lift a little more through your sternum; with every exhalation, draw your navel inward and go deeper into the twist. Distribute the twist evenly throughout the entire length of your spine.
- Focus your gaze, or *drishti*, over your shoulder, in the direction of the twist.
- Twist your torso to one side and then the other; this aids with digestion and assimilation of food and neutralizes your spine.
- Reverse and practice the same pose on your other side.

Pose Qualities: Named after the sage and teacher Matsyendra, this pose encourages you to tune into your inner guru.



SUPTA MADHYASANA—RECLINED TWIST

Twist into relaxation and rejuvenation. This is a lovely pose and a great way to twist out anything that does not serve you and release them from your body.

POSE TECHNIQUE:

- Lie down on your back; then assume the foundational alignments of mountain pose.
- Draw one knee into your chest; rest it just above your navel.
- Place your opposite hand on the outer thigh of your bent leg; move your bent leg so that it twists toward the same direction in which your knee is pointing.
- Bring your knee all the way to the floor; you may also rest it on a bolster or blanket for support.
- Stack your hips/sacrum/pelvis; as you twist your bent leg to one side, shift your bottom hip slightly to the opposite side (this assists in stacking your hips).
- Extend your arms either in line with your shoulders or in a cactus/goal position; with each exhale, release your lower shoulder into or toward the earth.
- Focus your gaze, or *drishti*, over your shoulder, in the opposite direction of the twist.
- Reverse and practice the same pose on your other side.

PROP TECHNIQUE: If your bent knee does not touch the floor, use a blanket or bolster to provide support to the leg; alternately, intensify the pose by placing a blanket on top of the bent knee.

Pose Benefits: Neutralizes your spine; increases the spine's range of motion. Stimulates digestion; relieves menstrual discomfort, fatigue, sciatica, and backache.

Pose Qualities: Transformation; "wringing out" what no longer serves us



SALAMBA SARVANGASANA—SUPPORTED SHOULDERSTAND POSE/SEAT

Due to its powerful benefits, shoulderstand is known as the “queen” or “mother” *asana*.

PROP TECHNIQUE:

- Lie flat on your back; rest your palms on the floor beside your hips.
- Place one to three blankets, folded in fours, midway down your yoga mat.
- Roll the top half of the mat over the smooth edge of the blanket.
- Lie down on your mat; relax your shoulders onto the mat (elevated by the blankets). Bring your head off the mat (to alleviate neck tension and maintain the curve in your cervical spine).
- Follow the steps below to move into shoulderstand.

POSE TECHNIQUE:

- As described in the optional *Prop Technique* above, lie flat on your back; rest your palms on the floor beside your hips.
- On an exhale, press into your palms; bring your feet over your head. Stack your hips over your shoulders; draw your shoulder blades closer together.
- Balance on your shoulders and upper arms; support your lower back with your hands. Bring your pinky fingers closer together; point your fingers upward; press your palms into your back.
- On an inhale, extend your legs upward; stack your shoulders, hips, knees, and ankles. Keep your feet together; point your toes toward the ceiling (flex the feet if cramping occurs).
- *Note:* You may also enter shoulderstand from the foundations of bridge pose; be sure to draw your elbows inward before extending your legs upward.
- Narrow your elbows to match the width of your shoulders; stretch your shoulders away from your neck; bring your elbows closer together and keep your upper arms parallel to each other.
- Support your body's weight with your shoulders; work toward moving your body's weight away from your elbows and hands by bringing your shoulders, hips, knees, and ankles into one straight line.
- Activate your inner thighs; keep your legs together and broaden your sacrum to remove any strain from your back.
- For those new to the practice of shoulderstand, hold this pose for one minute; work to eventually hold the pose for five minutes.
- *Note:* When you practice an inversion, such as shoulderstand, for at least five minutes, your brain releases neurotransmitters and endorphins that act as mood enhancers.
- This pose is not recommended for those with high blood pressure, heart conditions, impure blood, weak blood vessels in the eyes, recent neck injuries, slipped discs, enlarged thyroid/liver/spleen, or shoulder injuries.
- Focus your gaze, or *drishti*, toward the ceiling.

Pose Benefits: Reverses the effects of gravity while massaging and toning the internal organs; gives the heart a physical rest from working against gravity to pump blood to your brain and relaxes your brain and relieves stress. Stimulates

SAFETY & SELF-AWARENESS

Practice inversions like shoulder stand and headstand with a skilled yoga teacher who is able to assist you with props and modifications. This way you are able to make an assessment as to whether or not the pose is safe for you to practice.

the pituitary, pineal, thyroid, and prostate glands; improves digestion; reduces fatigue; and is generally therapeutic for your whole body!

Pose Qualities: This is the “queen” or “mother” of all yoga poses. “As a mother strives for harmony and happiness in the home,” states yogi B.K.S. Iyengar, “so this *asana* strives for the harmony and happiness in the human system.”

VIPARITA KARANI—REVERSING ATTITUDE

The seat is also referred to as “legs up the wall,” and may be practiced as an alternative to shoulderstand. *Against* the wall, this pose is very relaxing and requires less physical effort. *Away* from the wall—supported by a block, bolster, or two blankets under the sacrum—the pose is equally beneficial.

POSE TECHNIQUE 1 AWAY FROM THE WALL:

- Start by assuming the foundations of bridge pose.
- Place a bolster or a block under your sacrum; add extra padding for more support by draping a blanket over the block.
- Lift your legs toward the ceiling; align your hips, knees, and ankles. Rest your sacrum on the block; exhale to release your hips/sacrum into the block.
- On an inhale, extend your legs toward the ceiling; stack your hips, knees, and ankles.

POSE TECHNIQUE 2 AGAINST THE WALL:

- Place two neatly-stacked, folded blankets or a bolster against the wall; sit on the blanket or bolster edges, beside the wall.
- Sit on the wall-facing edges of the blankets; position one side of your body against the wall.
- On an exhale, turn your torso to face the wall; bring your hands to the floor on either side of the blankets.
- On an inhale, bring your buttocks up against the wall; walk your feet up the wall and extend your legs.
- On an exhale, release your shoulders and head to the floor; relax your feet against the support of the wall (your hips remain elevated by the blankets).





SIRSASANA—HEADSTAND POSE/SEAT

Headstand is known as the “king” *asana*; the head pressing into the earth symbolizes the seat of intelligence.

POSE PREPARATIONS:

Before you safely attempt headstand pose, it is important to establish yourself in the foundations of downward-facing dog pose. I also recommend dolphin and plank as a preparatory *asanas*. Dolphin is very much like downward-facing dog, but instead of rooting through your hands, you press your forearms into the earth with interlaced fingers.



POSE TECHNIQUE:

- Start by assuming the foundations of tabletop/hands and knees pose.
- Lower your forearms to the earth, shoulder distance apart; stack your shoulders over your elbows.
- Interlace your fingers, tuck the bottom pinky finger inward; bring your pinky fingers flush with the earth; soften your fingers to avoid white knuckles.
- Cross your thumbs or touch the tips of your thumbs together (those with tighter shoulders may benefit from the latter option).
- Interlace your fingers and keep your elbows directly below your shoulders; this creates a strong triangle/pyramid form with your arms.
- Keep your wrists firm—avoid twisting/opening them to the sides—to maintain this solid foundation.
- Place your head on the floor; find a spot somewhere between the hair-line and the crown of your head (the exact placement varies from person to person).
- Touch the insides of your wrists to the back of your head, or hold your head with your hands.
- On an exhale, curl your toes under; extend your legs and lift your knees off the floor.
- Activate your thighs; root the balls of your feet into the earth and lift your heels.
- On an inhale, walk your feet toward your elbows; bring your hips over your shoulders to align your shoulders with your ears.
- Press your shoulder blades firmly against your back; lift them toward your tailbone and lengthen your front torso as much as possible (this prevents your shoulder weight from collapsing onto your neck and head).
- On an exhale, bend one knee at a time into your chest; alternately, bend both knees into your chest at the same time.
- On an inhale, point your bent knees toward the ceiling. Align knees over hips and hips over shoulders; keep shoulders in line with ears.
- On an exhale, extend your legs toward the ceiling; align ankles over knees; align knees over hips; align hips over shoulders; keep shoulders in line with ears.

- Hold this pose; relax your fingers (do not intensely grip hands) and continue to press your shoulder blades against your back, widen and draw them toward your tailbone.
- Keep your weight evenly balanced on your two forearms; lift your tailbone upward toward your heels; maintain the length of your legs and press up through the balls of your feet, which may be pointed or flexed.
- Focus your gaze, or *drishti*, toward the horizon.
- Refer to the alignment points for mountain pose; they are essentially the same, but are simply "upside down" as applied to headstand pose.
- **Pose Suggestions:**
- Do not skip any of these stages; you receive benefits during each stage of headstand pose.
- Point your bent knees toward the ceiling before extending your legs and feet; this sets you up for aligning your body with ears, shoulder, hips, and knees stacked.
- For yogis who are beginning to practice headstand, I recommend maintaining 10% of your body's weight in your head, keeping 90% of your weight in your forearms/shoulders/upper back. If your neck feels strained, transfer weight away from your head. With regular practice, you build strength and may (over time) transfer more weight to your head. Work to hold headstand pose for 1 to 5 minutes at a time.
- Reverse out of headstand the same way you went into the pose; rest in child's pose for a few breaths.
- I do not recommend this pose for those with high/low blood pressure, heart conditions, impure blood, glaucoma, detached retina, weak blood vessels in the eyes, recent neck injuries, slipped discs, or kidney problems.
- Turning your body upside down on a regular basis prepares you for those moments when your life "turns upside down." This pose enables you to handle stress with more ease. Use headstand to assist you with finding a sense of calm and inner peace amidst all situations, circumstances, and outer discord. Headstand provides many of the same benefits as shoulderstand.

Pose Benefits: According to B.K.S. Iyengar, "Regular practice of *sirsasana* makes healthy pure blood flow through the brain cells. This rejuvenates them so that thinking power increases and thoughts become clearer. The *asana* is a tonic for people whose brains tire quickly. It ensures a proper blood supply to the pituitary and pineal glands of the brain. Our growth, health and vitality depend on the proper functioning of these two glands."

Pose Qualities: Headstand is the "king" of all yoga poses. "When we are born," says B.K.S. Iyengar, "normally the head comes out first and then the limbs. The skull encases the brain, which controls the nervous system and the organs of sense. The brain is the seat of intelligence, knowledge, discrimination, wisdom, and power."

