

# ASANAS

PREPARATION FOR MEDITATION

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## 1. Foreword

Dear Readers,

This pdf is about the practices of the Samaya Srividya Tradition. This Tradition is unique in that, its ancient lineage goes back to over 6000 years. These practices have been handed down in an unbroken lineage from teacher to student. Times have changed considerably and in the last few years a lot of information, including teachings and practices of have been made freely available in the form of books and in internet. Nowadays it seems common to learn techniques from the internet or from books and even teach these to others without any prior practical experience of these techniques.

Our Tradition is an Oral Tradition and thus the core teachings and the complementary practices are handed down through personal instruction and direct experience; not through intellectual study of books and websites. One of the great modern masters of this Tradition, is the Himalayan sage Swami Rama. I can personally vouch for the fact that these practices are not mixed with those of other traditions or lineages and a great deal of effort has been made to maintain the authenticity and purity of these traditional practices.

One should remember that practices and teachings without personal guidance are not very useful. These teachings and practices have been put together for the benefit of those participating in the mentoring program with Radhikaji. The mentoring program is a modern term for the traditional method of teachings; it is the Oral Tradition of personal instruction and direct experience. For others who read and practice these techniques without personal guidance, caution is advised. Indiscriminate practice of some of these techniques can cause damage to the pranic vehicle, disturbances at subtle mental level or physical issues such as headache, damaged muscles, etc. The author does not accept any liability and you have been advised.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank my good friend Krishna Narasimhan for his help and support in the publication of this pdf. This pdf is an excerpt from a book to be published on the same subject.

*Radhika Shah-Grouven*

*April, 2015*

*Hofheim/Frankfurt a.M, Germany*

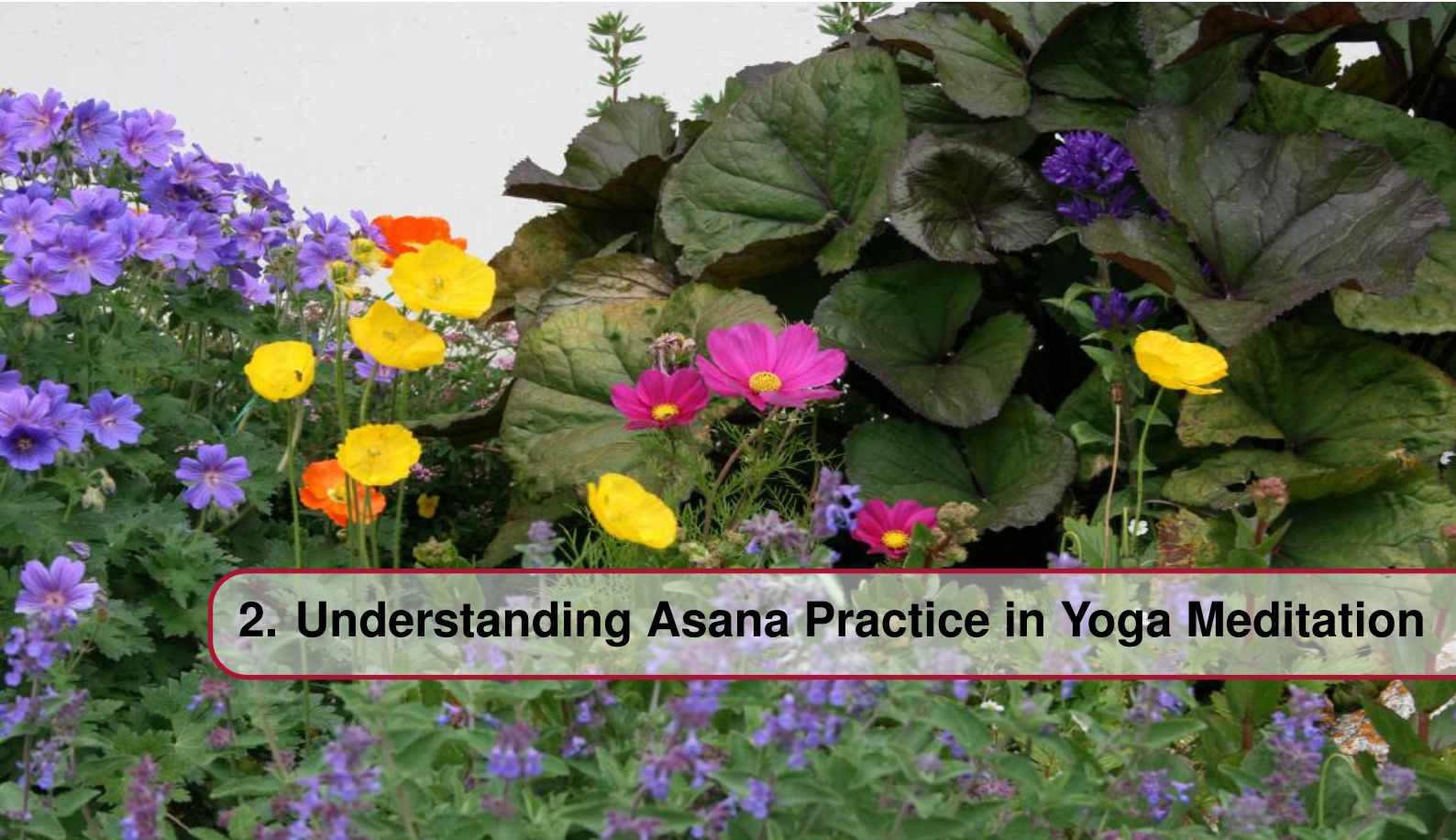
Dedicated to my  
first teacher ,  
My Mother.





# Asanas





## 2. Understanding Asana Practice in Yoga Meditation

**Asana practice in Yoga Meditation is quite different from that of modern yoga studios. This guide to Asana practice is for those participating in Yoga Mentoring with Radhika Shah-Grouven.**

The word asana is a Sanskrit word and is translated as "seat, pose". Our Tradition is a meditative Tradition and asanas were never meant to be dynamic but merely poses with little or no movement. The asanas are not the end of the practice but only an extremely small part of the practice. Static asanas are not exercises as understood by the conventional sense of the word.

### 2.1 Anatomy behind Static Asanas

**How can asanas with little or no movement help?**

The brain and nervous system constantly sends out messages in the form of impulses to the nerve endings controlling the muscles. These impulses are carried by the motor neurons, acting like postmen delivering messages. A very active neuron might carry 40-50 nerve impulses per second to its muscle fibres, and a moderately active neuron might carry 10-20 nerve impulses per second.

When motor neurons transmit impulses, the muscle fibre contracts, when they do not transmit any nerve impulses the muscle fibre relaxes.

This physiological process was discovered by the yogis thousands of years ago and used to train and gain control of the nervous system. Through experimentation they discovered that the converse also holds true: When the muscles relax the nerve impulses decreases.

So what does one do to make a muscle relax?

To relax a muscle requires only 2 simple conditions:

- Do not move. Be still.
- Do not fall asleep. Remain conscious.

In fact, when muscles do not move at all, the nerve impulses stop completely.

A completely relaxed muscle such as in Savasana, the corpse pose, indicates that no nerve impulses are being carried. In this manner the yogis gain conscious control over the nervous system and some functions of the body, that science calls involuntary and reflexive.

A common misconception that still exists among biologists is that muscles continue to receive input from motor neurons at rest, however Biofeedback since the 1960's has proven this to be incorrect.

## 2.2 Dynamic versus Static Asanas

Due to the dramatic difference in the way they are practiced, dynamic asanas or physical exercise serves quite a different purpose.

The purpose of dynamic asanas is not attaining the state of Yoga. The purpose of dynamic asanas is increasing heart rate, exercising the circulatory and respiratory systems. Many modern institutions in the plains of India have integrated asanas in their exercise regime to promote public health and fitness. What is good for physical health is not necessarily suitable for Yoga Meditation. Dynamic asanas do not calm the nervous system. In fact depending on how they are practiced dynamic asanas even excite the nervous system. Dynamic asanas are not suitable for Yoga Meditation.

## 2.3 Is it necessary to do asanas in Yoga Meditation?

Yes, correct asana practice is absolutely necessary for those who wish to practice Yoga Meditation because asanas:

1. **Balance the Nervous System:** Asanas are an unique system of poses that calm down and balance the nervous system as a preparation for pranayama (breath and energy practices) as well as advanced states of meditation.
2. **Facilitate Diaphragmatic Breathing:** Asanas open the chest cavity and strengthen the diaphragm so that diaphragmatic breathing becomes effortless and natural even during deeper states of meditation when we start losing body awareness.
3. **Train the correct Meditative Posture:** Asanas stretch the muscles so that one can sit comfortably in a meditative pose. Poor posture during meditation will lead to discomfort and pain, which is a great obstacle that will force awareness to return to the body level. Asanas also strengthen the back for longer meditation sessions. Without a strong back it is almost impossible to sit in the correct posture for longer sessions. You may use support of the wall in the initial stages but those aspiring to higher states of meditation should have strong backs and erect posture during meditation.
4. **Sharpen the Concentration like a Laser Beam:** Besides the above reasons, one of the most important reasons to practice asanas is learning to train your awareness and focus your attention like a laser beam. The meditator first learns to withdraw his attention from all worldly objects and bring his attention to his own body, gradually moving to the layer of breath and energy, then bringing the awareness slowly to subtler aspects of mind and beyond. The entire process of Yoga Meditation takes the meditator gradually inward through the 5 layers of the yogic body. The attention is trained to gradually sharpen its focus like a laser beam from the gross to the subtle, from the large to the small, from the external to the internal.

## 2.4 How many asanas do we need to do in a Yoga Meditation session?

A session of asanas should contain asanas that:

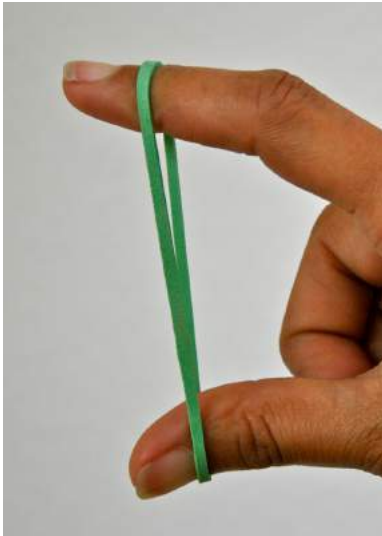
- Stretch the spine
- Bend backward
- Bend forward
- Twist the spine

- Reverse the spine
- Relax the spine

Rather than quantity, focus on quality. Spend time on preparatory poses so that you can slowly and gradually perfect the asana. Perfection of an asana is not like that of a circus artiste or acrobat. This perfection is not strenuous or contrived; it is natural and effortless.

## 2.5 Mastering Asanas: 3 Insider Tips

Imagine the muscle to be like a rubber band. When you stretch the rubber band it is very elastic.



However, once the tension is removed, the rubber band contracts immediately.



Everyone remembers the severe muscle cramps after running a race in school or the first day at the gym. This is because the muscle contracted upon sudden stretching. This rubber band principle is known to science as the myotatic stretch reflex.

The rubber band principle also applies when practicing asanas. Use of ropes, chairs or other props to suddenly and violently stretch the muscles, leads to contraction of the muscles. This is counterproductive making asanas strenuous and difficult.

With exhalation the muscles in the body relax. With every exhalation relax deeper in to the posture. To make the asanas effortless and easy, stretch slowly and gently; instead of force use gravity to your advantage.

To gain mastery in asanas:

- Stretch slowly; avoid sudden jerky movements
- Relax deeper into the pose with every exhalation
- Use gravity to your advantage

## 2.6 What do I need to practice asanas?

- Wear loose comfortable clothing, preferably of natural fibre
- If your floor is carpeted then you can practice asanas directly on the carpet. If not you may need a mat.
- You do not need to buy expensive Yoga mats. In India one often uses an old woollen blanket or carpet.
- In south India where it is very warm it is quite common to use a cane mat.
- Ancient texts such as the Bhagavad Gita 6.11 also mention animal skin.
- You may find cotton, silk and woollen shawls useful to prepare your meditation seat or to cover yourself during meditation.
- Some meditators find a dark cotton or woollen hat useful to cover the head and eyes during meditation.

## 2.7 Guidelines for Asana Practice

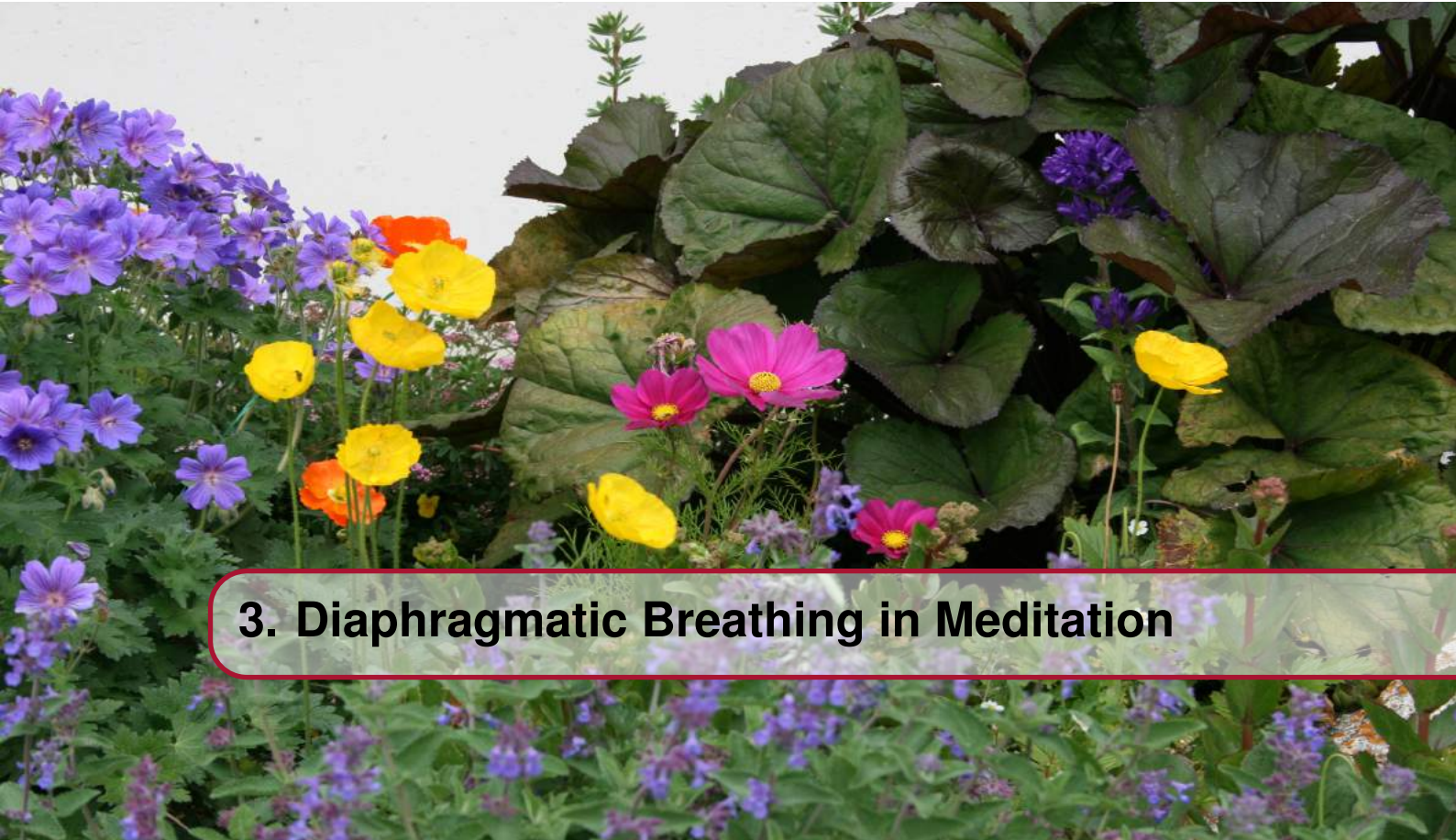
1. Practice at the same time everyday. If you establish a routine, a regular pattern, the mind will be prepared to practice. You will struggle less with laziness and sluggishness. It is customary to practice 4 times a day in our Tradition; asanas is only a short part of this practice. Practice in the morning before breakfast, at midday before lunch, in the evening before dinner and at night before you go to bed. A healthy lifestyle and routine are a prerequisite.
2. Remember to be flexible in your routine. Touching the mat counts! Even a minute, 4 times a day is better than 3 hours on the weekend. It may be a good idea to choose one or two times in the day when you can devote a longer time for the entire practice. The other practices during the day may be short. You can use the shorter practices to strengthen weaker aspects of the practice or to do those practices that may be convenient to the circumstances.
3. Do not exceed your capacity. Pushing the body violently beyond its capacity not only causes injuries but also agitates the nervous system. This is a form of violence against your own body. Be gentle and loving to your body, and it will serve you well.
4. Always relax and rest between poses. Let the heart rate return to normal and the breathing remain smooth and even. Dynamic asanas that flow from one in to another raise the heart rate and excite the nervous system are counterproductive to the purpose of Yoga. Yoga, the traditional way is meant to calm the nervous system.
5. Do not hold the breath when you rest in a pose. Breathing should be smooth, fine and without jerkiness. In our Tradition we do not hold the breath during asanas. In general, breathe out when the chest and abdominal area is compressed or twisted. Breathe in when the chest cavity expands.
6. Keep your eyes closed whenever possible while practising asanas. This is especially important when you rest in the pose. This calms nervous system, leads the mind within and prepares for the next stage of the practice session, Pranayama.
7. You should know the order in which you practice the asanas and all other practices by heart. Interrupting your practice to look at your list of practices, a book, an app or a website is

counterproductive.

8. Never practice on a full stomach. This will cause indigestion, stomach pain and other related disorders. It is best to practice before meals since this also creates a nice habit pattern that is easier to follow.
9. Women should not practice asanas during menstruation. This is a good time for complementary practices such as Vichara or Internal Dialogue and contemplation on profound yogic concepts found in the texts of our Tradition such as Mandukya Upanishad.







## 3. Diaphragmatic Breathing in Meditation

**Diaphragmatic Breathing is the most efficient method of breathing. This chapter explains one of the single most important practices to learn before beginning meditation.** The human body is made up of head, torso and 4 limbs.

The torso itself can be divided into 3 parts:

- thorax or chest which houses the two lungs,
- the diaphragm, a tough sheet of muscle, which separates thorax or chest area from the digestive organs in the abdominal region, and
- the pelvis which extends from the hip bones to the organs of excretion and reproduction

### 3.1 The 3 types of Breathing

One can fill the lungs in 3 ways:

- Extending the diaphragm downward, called diaphragmatic breathing
- Expanding the walls of the chest outward, called thoracic or chest breathing
- Moving the shoulder area upward, called clavicular breathing

If your breath is rapid and shallow you are probably chest breathing. This means means you are not allowing your breathing to be full and complete and you are only using part of the lungs' capacity.

Of the three types of breathing, diaphragmatic breathing is physiologically the most efficient. The goal is to reestablish the body's natural respiratory pattern, called even, diaphragmatic breathing.

In even diaphragmatic breathing, all inhalations and exhalations flow through the nostrils rather than the mouth and the entire process is silent and noiseless. When you establish even, diaphragmatic breathing you allow the lungs to expand fully with the inhalation and to be emptied completely on exhalation.

### 3.2 How Diaphragmatic Breathing works

In its resting position, the diaphragm billows up into the chest cavity like a dome. For this reason its movements are not directly visible at the body's surface.

Diaphragmatic inhalation is accomplished by moving the diaphragm downwards. As the diaphragm moves down it decreases the volume of the abdominal cavity, so that the abdomen moves passively outward. If the diaphragm moves downward or the ribs outward the lungs will expand.

The lungs are very elastic and expansive and when they are efficiently filled, their capacity is far greater than when we breathe shallowly, as in chest breathing. As the diaphragm moves up, the lungs are emptied; as the diaphragm comes down, the lungs are allowed to fill more completely.

You cannot really observe the diaphragm muscle, but when you breathe diaphragmatically, you may notice that the lower ribs flair out slightly on inhalation and the abdominal area may also move out a bit. On exhalation the abdominal area moves back in toward the spinal column.

### 3.3 Are you breathing right?

You can check your breathing in normal seated position by placing one hand on the chest and the other on the abdomen. If you are breathing diaphragmatically, then the hand on the abdomen will rise and fall, while the hand on the chest will not.



When you breath evenly and diaphragmatically you will breathe more slowly, since each breath is more effective. However it is impossible to breath diaphragmatically unless head, neck and trunk of the body are correctly aligned.

### 3.4 Diaphragmatic Breathing and Meditation

If your posture is poor and your spine curved you will be unable to breathe freely, and will unconsciously constrict the movement of diaphragmatic breathing, resulting instead in rapid, shallow breathing.

This is why sitting posture is so important: If the spine is poorly aligned, you cannot breathe freely, and when the breathing process is disturbed, the mind will become agitated.

You should plan to spend 4 weeks consciously attending to the breathing and learning how to breathe diaphragmatically before you turn your attention to other aspects of meditation.

There are interesting interactions between the diaphragm and gravity, depending on the posture one assumes. If the body is in an upright posture, gravity tends to pull downward on the abdominal contents, the diaphragm and the lungs, making inhalation easier.

When one lies flat on the back the diaphragm pushes the abdominal wall upward during inhalation. The diaphragm must work harder. On the other hand, little or no muscular effort in

needed for diaphragmatic exhalation in this position. This makes the horizontal body position interesting for training diaphragmatic breathing and establishing an even and balanced breath.

### 3.5 How to train Diaphragmatic Breathing

There are a couple of useful techniques that will help you to become aware of diaphragmatic breathing.

#### **Savasana**

Lie on your back on the floor in Savasana. If you place one hand on the chest and the other on the abdomen at about the navel area, it will be easy for you to become aware of when you are breathing diaphragmatically,

As one inhales, the lower edge of the rib cage should expand and the abdomen should rise; as one exhales the opposite should occur.

If you are breathing diaphragmatically you will feel relatively little movement of the upper chest.

#### **Makarasana**

In the crocodile pose, lie on the stomach, placing the legs a comfortable distance apart and pointing the toes outward.



Fold the arms in front of the body, resting the hands on the lower arms. Position the arms so that the chest does not touch the floor.

Let the head rest on the arms.




This posture necessitates diaphragmatic breathing. When you inhale you feel the abdomen pressed against the floor, and when you exhale you feel the abdominal muscles relaxing. So you can easily notice the movement of the diaphragm when you are in this posture.



Breathing for 5-10 minutes, twice a day, morning and evening, in this posture can help make diaphragmatic breathing a habit.

Once you can maintain diaphragmatic breathing during the day or when lying down, it will be normal to breathe this way while sitting upright in meditation.



## 4. Vrikshasana

**Asana practice in Yoga Meditation is quite different from that of modern yoga studios. Vrikshasana, the Tree pose is described here for those participating in 1-1 Yoga Mentoring with Radhika Shah-Grouven.**



Vriksha is Sanskrit and means Tree. The Tree prepares you for the meditative postures of Swastikasana and Siddhasana. It is not possible to sit for longer Meditation sessions with tight hip muscles, tense shoulders or faulty back posture. Vrikshasana loosens the inner hip muscles so that one can master the meditative postures. It stretches the shoulders and the spine so that the back remains strong and straight even for longer durations of meditation.

### 4.1 The Supine Tree

The Standing Tree is a balancing posture that requires some time to master. It is best for beginners to prepare for this pose in the supine position first.

Lie on the floor; place the legs together with the heels and toes touching, hands by the sides.

Bend the right leg and slide the right foot up the left leg as far as you can. If you do this daily, with time you will find that your muscles stretch and you can grasp the right ankle with the right hand, without bending forward.



Rest the sole of the foot on the inside of the left thigh as high as possible. Let the knee rest on the floor. If the knee does not rest on the floor allow the natural pull of gravity to do the work for you. Do not use force to press the knees on the ground.



Inhaling raise both arms overhead. Keep the upper arms next to the ears and stretch the arms upward. As you do this pose daily over a period of time, you will be able to place your palms together and stretch fully.

Breathe normally in this position. Maintain this pose for a couple of minutes or as long as is comfortable. Bring your hands to the side again and release foot.

Repeat the same for the other side.

Practice this over a longer period of time and you will find the posture is very comfortable. Then you can place your foot, sole facing upwards, on the left thigh. If the knees do not touch the floor, rest in that position and allow gravity to gradually bring the knee lower down to the floor.



Inhaling raise both arms overhead. Keep the upper arms next to the ears and stretch the arms upward. As you do this pose daily over a period of time, you will be able to place your palms together and stretch fully.

Breathe normally in this position. Maintain this pose for a couple of minutes or as long as is comfortable. Bring your hands to the side again and release foot.

Repeat the same for the other side.

Once you have mastered this posture lying on the floor, you will find it relatively easy to do the same in the standing position.

## 4.2 Vrikshasana: The Standing Tree

Stand erect with legs together, hands by the sides.

Place the left leg and foot firmly on the ground.



To prepare for the balancing pose, fix your gaze on a point on the wall in front of you. Now slowly bend the right leg and slide the right foot up the left leg.



Without bending forward, grasp the right ankle with the right hand.

Rest the sole of the foot on the inside of the left thigh as high as possible, with the knee turned out to the side at a 90 degree.



Balance steadily on the left foot. Fix your gaze on a stationary point in front.

While breathing normally bring the hands to the chest in the prayer position. Hold the pose for a 15 seconds or as long as you can.

If you feel steady on one foot and confident, then inhaling raise both arms overhead.

Place the palms together, keep the upper arms next to the ears and stretch the arms upward. Keeping gaze fixed on a point in front of you hold the pose for 15 seconds or as long as you can.

Then slowly lower the hands and arms and release foot. Relax on both feet.

Repeat, standing on right foot.

### 4.3 The Standing Tree: Advanced Version

Stand erect with legs together, hands by the sides.

Place the left leg and foot firmly on the ground. To prepare for the balancing pose, fix your gaze on a point on the wall in front of you. Now slowly bend the right leg and slide the right foot



up the left leg.

Without bending forward, grasp the right ankle with the right hand.

Instead of resting the sole of the right foot on the inside of the left thigh, place the right foot on top of the left thigh in the half lotus position.

Balance steadily on the left foot. Fix your gaze on a stationary point in front.

While breathing normally bring the hands to the chest in the prayer position. Hold the pose for a 15 seconds or as long as you can.



If you feel steady on one foot and confident, then inhaling raise both arms overhead.

Place the palms together, keep the upper arms next to the ears and stretch the arms upward. Keeping gaze fixed on a point in front of you hold the pose for 15 seconds or as long as you can.

Then slowly lower the hands and arms and release foot. Relax on both feet.

Repeat, standing on right foot.





## 5. Bhujangasana - The Cobra

**Asana practice in Yoga Meditation is quite different from that of modern yoga studios. Bhujangasana is described here for those participating in Yoga Mentoring with Radhika Shah-Grouven.**



Bhujangasana is the Cobra pose. It is a very powerful backward bending pose and highly recommended for those practicing Yoga Meditation. It strengthens the back for longer Meditation sessions.

### 5.1 Preparation for the Cobra

Lie on the stomach, with the forehead resting on the floor. Keep legs and feet together, with the body fully extended.

Bend the elbows, keeping them close to the body, place the hands palms down beside the chest.

Inhaling, slowly raise the head. Begin to raise the shoulders and chest slowly. Look up and bend back as far as possible. The navel must remain on the floor. Use the muscles of the back only.

Bring your hands in front, cup your palms under the chin and let the weight of your head rest in your palms.

Breath normally. Hold for 30 seconds or as long as comfortable.

Release your hands, bring them to the sides. Exhaling slowly lower the head and body until the forehead rests on the floor.

You can rest in Makarasana, the Crocodile pose, until your respiration and heartbeat returns to normal.

After practicing the preparatory pose for a few weeks your back will feel strong enough to practice Bhujangasana, the Cobra.

## 5.2 Bhujangasana: The Cobra

Lie on the stomach, with the forehead resting on the floor. Keep legs and feet together, with the body fully extended.

Bend the elbows, keeping them close to the body, place the hands palms down beside the chest.

Inhaling, slowly raise the head. Begin to raise the shoulders and chest slowly. Look up and bend back as far as possible. The navel must remain on the floor. Use the muscles of the back only.

Do not use arms or hands to push the body off the floor. The hands and arms should rest lightly on the floor. The use of external force, such as a person pulling the back or shoulders or use of belts or other props is not necessary. These may seem useful for those interested in body culture, but is not suitable for preparation of Yoga Meditation.

Breathing normally hold for 15 seconds or as long as comfortable.

Exhaling slowly lower the body until the forehead rests on the floor.

You can rest in Makarasana, the Crocodile pose, until your respiration and heartbeat returns to normal.

Repeat once.



## 6. Makarasana - The Crocodile Pose

Asana practice in Yoga Meditation is quite different from that of modern yoga studios. Makarasana, the Crocodile pose is described here for those participating in Yoga Mentoring with Radhika Shah-Grouven.

There are two variations of the Crocodile pose. One is extremely useful for Breath training and the other is a wonderful posture for relaxation.

### 6.1 The Crocodile: Variation 1 for Breath Training

Lie on your stomach, placing the legs a comfortable distance apart and pointing the toes outward.



Fold the arms in front of the body, resting the hands on the upper arms. Position the elbows and lower arms so that the chest does not touch the floor.

Rest your forehead on the arms.



Keeping your eyes closed, pay attention to the breath and its effect around the abdominal area. While inhaling, feel the abdominal muscles gently press against the floor; while exhaling feel the abdominal pressure decrease.



Stay in this position as long as comfortable.

In order to train diaphragmatic breathing one can also do Makarasana between any asana and before the Pranayama practice. This is also a stand alone practice and can be done more often than once during the day.

## 6.2 The Crocodile Variation 2 for Relaxation

This variation is more relaxing and can be used to rest between asanas.

Lie on your stomach, placing the legs a comfortable distance apart and pointing the toes inward.



Fold the arms in front of the body, resting the hands on top of each other. In this variation the elbows, lower arms and the chest touch the floor.

Keeping your eyes closed, let your head rest to the right for a few minutes.

Relax completely, letting your attention rest gently at the breath. Breathe normally.

Then turn your head to the left and once again relax for a few minutes.



You can also do Makarasana variation 2 between strenuous asanas such as Bhujangasna and Dhanurasana for a few minutes.







## 7. Paschimottanasana - The Posterior Stretch

**Asana practice in Yoga Meditation is quite different from that of modern yoga studios. Paschimottanasana is described here for those participating in Yoga Mentoring with Radhika Shah-Grouven.**

Paschimottanasana, the Posterior Stretch is called so because it stretches the back, the posterior body, entirely. It strengthens the middle and lower back so that one can sit longer in meditation without backache or support.

### 7.1 Preparatory Pose 1 for Paschimottanasana

Sit with the head, neck and trunk straight.

Extend legs in front as of you as far apart as possible.

Inhaling, raise the arms overhead, stretch.

Exhaling, bend forward towards right leg, keeping back straight and head between arms.

Place the hands as close to the right foot as possible.

Breathe normally. With every exhalation let your body relax deeper in to this pose. Hold this position for 10 seconds or as long as is comfortable.

The knees must remain on the ground.

Repeat the above, bending towards the left leg.

Repeat the same, bending forward between the legs.

Practice this daily for a few weeks. When you are comfortable doing this posture you can try the next level.

### 7.2 Preparatory Pose 2 for Paschimottanasana

Sit with the head, neck and trunk straight. Keep legs extended in front of the body and feet together.

Bend the right leg at the knee and place the sole of the right foot on the inside of the left thigh, as high as possible.

Inhaling, raise the arms overhead and stretch.

Exhaling bend forward as far as possible, keeping the back straight and heads between the arms.

Rest the hands on the left leg.

The left knee should remain on the floor. The foot should be straight with toes pointing upwards. Breath normally. With every exhalation let your body relax deeper in to this pose.

If possible grasp the lower leg, or foot or even the big toe.

With every exhalation let your body relax deeper in to this pose until the head rests gently on the knee.

Hold this position for 10 seconds or as long as is comfortable.

Inhale, and keeping the arms close to the head, slowly stretch up and return to the sitting position.

Exhale, lower the arms and relax.

Repeat with the right leg extended and the left knee bent.

Take your time with this preparatory pose. It may take more a few weeks to a few months to master this pose. Once you have perfected this, you may aspire to master Paschimottanasana, the Posterior Stretch.

### 7.3 Paschimottanasana: The Posterior Stretch

Sit with the head, neck and trunk straight and the legs together, extended in front of the body.

Inhaling raise the arms overhead and stretch.

Exhaling, bend forward as far as possible, keeping back straight and head between arms.

Rest hands on both legs. The both knees should remain on the floor.

Breath normally.

With every exhalation, relax deeper in to the posture. With daily practice over weeks, you will eventually be able to relax in to this posture until your hands can grasp the lower legs, then the feet and later the big toes. Finally you may be able to rest your head on the knees

Breath normally and hold the posture at your comfortable level for 10 seconds or as long as you can.



## 8. Matsyendrasana - The Spinal Twist

**Asana practice in Yoga Meditation is quite different from that of modern yoga studios. Matsyendrasana is described here for those participating in Yoga Mentoring with Radhika Shah-Grouven.**

Matsyendrasana is named after the famous yogi and tantric master Matsyendranath. It is the finest of all spinal twists. It is excellent to energise the spinal column. Besides this it strengthens the shoulder muscles for a better posture during longer sitting sessions and it tones muscles so that one can sit longer in a meditative pose.

Since the final pose is quite challenging, there are progressive levels that lead gradually and gently to the mastery of this pose.

### 8.1 Preparatory pose 1 for Matsyendrasana

Lie on the back with the legs and feet together.

Extend the arms up to shoulder level keeping the palms on the floor.

Inhaling, bend the knees and draw them to the chest.

Exhaling, bring the knees to the floor near the right arm and simultaneously turn the head to the left side.

Breath normally in this position for around 10 seconds or as long as is comfortable.

Inhaling, bring the knees back to the chest and at the same time turn the head back to the centre.

Do the same for the other side.

Do this daily for a few weeks at least. When you are absolutely comfortable doing this preparatory exercise, you try Ardha Matsyendrasana.

### 8.2 Preparatory pose 2 for Matsyendrasana

This pose is something also called Ardha Matsyendrasana. This means the half Matsyendrasana.

Sit with the head, neck and trunk straight and legs extended in front of the body.

Bend the left leg and place the left foot on the floor outside the right knee.

Exhaling, twist the body toward the left.

Place the left hand approximately 6 inches behind the left hip, with fingers pointing away from the body.

Keeping the back straight, twist to the left. Twist from the lower spine and not from the shoulders.

Bring the right arm over the left leg. You may bend forward slightly, but remember to keep the spine straight.

Look over the left shoulder. Do not use the arms to force the body in to the twist. Instead gently twist the lower spine with every exhalation, relaxing in to the posture. Use the arms only to maintain your balance.

Breath normally. Hold this position for 10 seconds or as long as possible.

Repeat on the opposite side.

### 8.3 Matsyendrasana

Sit with the head, neck and trunk straight and legs extended in front of the body.

Bend the left leg and place the left heel below the right hip.

Bend the right leg and place the right foot on the floor outside the left knee.

Raise the arms to shoulder level. Exhaling twist the body to the right.

Grasp the right foot with the left hand.

Twist deeper in to the pose until you can wrap the right arm behind the body and rest it on the left waist. If you cannot twist further, then breath normally and hold this position as long as you can, while breathing normally. Then relax and repeat on the other side.

If you can still twist further, then allow the right shoulder to pass over the right knee. Bend the left elbow and reach under the right knee to clasp the hands behind the back.

Gaze over the right shoulder with the chin parallel to the ground.

Breath normally. Hold this position for 15 seconds or as long as is comfortable.

Relax and repeat on the other side.



## 9. Sarvangasana - The Shoulderstand

**Asana practice in Yoga Meditation is quite different from that of modern yoga studios. Sarvangasana, the Shoulderstand is described here for those participating in Yoga Mentoring with Radhika Shah-Grouven.**

Sarvangasana is a very advanced pose and you should try it only after you have mastered Halasana. It is an important asana because it completely transforms the energy flow in the body. Reversing the energy flow is an important step leading to higher states of meditation.

Care must be taken to practice this posture correctly. Incorrectly practiced the Shoulderstand can cause serious physical injuries of the neck and shoulder as well as agitate the nervous system and subtle energy channels of the body. This pose gets the heart pumping which makes it a strenuous pose. You should know your own limits. If you are not sure seek the guidance of your teacher.

### 9.1 Sarvangasana variation 1:

In this variation you first assume the position of Halasana, the Plough and then go in to Sarvangasana, the Shoulderstand.

Lie on the back with legs together, flat on the floor. Place the arms along the sides of the body with the palms on the floor.

Inhaling, raise both legs until they are 90 degrees to the floor. Do not bend the knees. Keep the shoulders, arms and hands relaxed. Do not press the arms against the floor while lifting the legs.

Now raise the hips off the floor, keeping the legs straight and together. Extend the feet beyond the head until the legs are parallel to the floor. Allow gravity to do the work for you, let the weight of the legs gently fall to the floor.

Stretch your back and legs completely until the toes are flat on the floor behind the head.

Inhaling, raise both legs until they are 90 degrees to the floor. Do not bend the knees.

Bend the elbows and place the hands as close to the shoulders as possible, with the fingers pointing toward the small of the back and the elbows firmly on the floor.

Stretch the legs and hips upward towards the ceiling.

Press the breastbone against the chin.

Breathe normally, hold this pose for 30 seconds or as long as is comfortable.

Exhaling slowly lower the hips and return the legs to the perpendicular position. Continue exhaling as you lower the legs to the floor.

You may want to rest in Savasana, the Corpse position for a few minutes.

## 9.2 Sarvangasana variation 2

In this variation you directly assume the pose of the Shoulder Stand without going in to Halasana.

Lie on the back with legs together, flat on the floor. Place the arms along the sides of the body with the palms on the floor.

Inhaling, raise both legs until they are 90 degrees to the floor. Do not bend the knees.

Keep the shoulders, arms and hands relaxed. Do not press the arms against the floor while lifting the legs.

Now slowly lift the hips, middle and upper spine off the floor, until only the shoulders rest on the floor. Do not use the strength in the arms or swing your legs, hips and back in to this pose.

Bend the elbows and place the hand as close to the shoulders as possible, with the fingers pointing toward the small of the back and the elbows firmly on the floor.

Stretch the legs and hips upward towards the ceiling.

Press the breastbone against the chin.

Breathe normally, hold this pose for 30 seconds or as long as is comfortable.

Exhaling slowly lower the hips and return the legs to the perpendicular position. Continue exhaling as you lower the legs to the floor.

You may want to rest in Savasana, the Corpse position for a few minutes.



## 10. Halasana - The Plough

**Asana practice in Yoga Meditation is quite different from that of modern yoga studios. Halasana, the Plough is described here for those participating in Yoga Mentoring with Radhika Shah-Grouven.**

Halasana, the plough is a very difficult asana. It is best to progressively move through all the levels of preparation before attempting the final pose. This pose is not only good for the lower back and stomach muscles, it also completely transforms the energy flow in the body. Reversing the energy flow is an important step leading to higher states of meditation.

Care must be taken to practice this posture correctly. Incorrectly practiced the Plough can cause serious physical injuries as well as agitate the nervous system and subtle energy channels of the body. It is important that you master each preparatory pose before you move on to the next. You should know your own limits. If you are not sure seek the guidance of your teacher.

### 10.1 Preparatory Pose 1: Single Leg Lifts

Lie on the back with legs together, flat on the floor. Place the arms along the sides of the body with the palms on the floor.

Inhaling, slowly raise the right leg as high as possible. Do not bend the knee.

Keep the shoulders, arms and hands relaxed. Do not press the arms against the floor while lifting the leg. While raising the right leg do not bend the opposite leg, keep it straight on the floor.

Breathe normally, holding this position for 10 seconds or as long as possible.

Exhaling lower the leg.

Repeat with the left leg.

After about two weeks of practicing Preparatory Pose 1 daily or whenever you are ready for the next level, move on to Preparatory Pose 2.

### 10.2 Preparatory Pose 2

Lie on the back with legs together, flat on the floor. Place the arms along the sides of the body with the palms on the floor.

Inhaling, raise the right leg about 10 cms from the floor. Do not bend the knee.

Keep the shoulders, arms and hands relaxed. Do not press the arms against the floor while lifting the leg. While raising the right leg do not bend the opposite leg, keep it straight on the floor. Feel the weight of the leg being lifted by the abdominal muscles.

Breathe normally, holding this position for 10 seconds or as long as possible.

Exhaling lower the leg.

Repeat with the left leg.

After about two weeks of practicing Preparatory Pose 2 daily or whenever you ready for the next level, move on to Preparatory Pose 3.

### 10.3 Preparatory Pose 3

Lie on the back with legs together, flat on the floor. Place the arms along the sides of the body with the palms on the floor.

Inhaling, raise the right leg at 45 degrees from the floor. Do not bend the knee.

Keep the shoulders, arms and hands relaxed. Do not press the arms against the floor while lifting the leg. While raising the right leg do not bend the opposite leg, keep it straight on the floor. Feel the weight of the leg being lifted by the abdominal muscles.

Breathe normally, holding this position for 10 seconds or as long as possible.

Exhaling lower the leg.

Repeat with the left leg.

After about two weeks of practicing Preparatory Pose 3 daily or whenever you ready for the next level, move on to Preparatory Pose 4.

### 10.4 Preparatory Pose 4

Lie on the back with legs together, flat on the floor. Place the arms along the sides of the body with the palms on the floor.

Inhaling, raise the right leg until it is 90 degrees to the floor. Do not bend the knee.

Keep the shoulders, arms and hands relaxed. Do not press the arms against the floor while lifting the leg. While raising the right leg do not bend the opposite leg, keep it straight on the floor.

Breathe normally, holding this position for 10 seconds or as long as possible.

Exhaling lower the leg.

Repeat with the left leg.

After about two weeks of practicing Preparatory Pose 4 daily or whenever you ready for the next level, move on to Preparatory Pose 5.

### 10.5 Preparatory Pose 5: Double Leg Lifts

Lie on the back with legs together, flat on the floor. Place the arms along the sides of the body with the palms on the floor.

Inhaling, raise both legs about 10 cms from the floor. Do not bend the knees.

Hold this position for 10 seconds.

Inhaling, raise both legs higher, holding the position at 45 degrees from the floor for about 10 seconds. Do not bend the knees.

Inhaling, raise both legs still higher until they are 90 degrees to the floor. Do not bend the knees. Keep the shoulders, arms and hands relaxed. Do not press the arms against the floor while lifting the legs.

Breathe normally, holding this position for 10 seconds or as long as possible.

Exhaling lower both legs.



Do the Preparatory pose 5 for at least 2 weeks. This is an important step for mastering both Halasana, the Plough as well as Sirsasana, the Headstand.

### 10.6 Preparatory Pose 6: Ardha Halasana, the Half Plough

Lie on the back with legs together, flat on the floor. Place the arms along the sides of the body with the palms on the floor.

Inhaling, raise both legs until they are 90 degrees to the floor. Do not bend the knees. Keep the shoulders, arms and hands relaxed. Do not press the arms against the floor while lifting the legs.

Now raise the hips off the floor, using the strength of your stomach muscles. Do not push your hips up with your hands. If you cannot raise your hips without using the support of your hands, then return to the Preparatory Pose 5, the Double Leg Lifts.

Keeping the legs straight and together, extend the feet beyond the head until the legs are parallel to the floor.

Breathe normally and hold this position for 15 seconds or as long as it is comfortable.

Keep your hands and arms on the floor, using them only to maintain the balance.

Exhaling lower the hips and return the legs to the perpendicular position and eventually lower the legs to the floor.

Practice Ardha Halasana daily for at least a week before attempting Halasana, the Plough.

### 10.7 Halasana: The Plough

Lie on the back with legs together, flat on the floor. Place the arms along the sides of the body with the palms on the floor.

Inhaling, raise both legs until they are 90 degrees to the floor. Do not bend the knees. Keep the shoulders, arms and hands relaxed. Do not press the arms against the floor while lifting the legs.

Now using the strength of your stomach muscles, raise the hips off the floor, keeping the legs straight and together.

Extend the feet beyond the head until the legs are parallel to the floor. Now allow gravity to do the work for you, let the weight of the legs gently fall to the floor until the toes touch the floor behind the head. Do not bend the knees. If you have to bend your knees, return to Ardha Halasana, the Half Plough.

Breathe normally. Hold this pose for 10 seconds or as long as possible.

Exhaling lower the hips and return the legs to the perpendicular position and eventually lower the legs to the floor.





## 11. Savasana - The Corpse Pose

**Asana practice in Yoga Meditation is quite different from that of modern yoga studios. Savasana, the Corpse pose is described here for those participating in Yoga Mentoring with Radhika Shah-Grouven.**



Figure 11.1: Shava means Corpse: Death is a new beginning.

Savasana is a posture that prepares you for advanced energy practices. Daily practice of Savasana after the asana series is recommended. It can be used between asanas to allow the respiration and heartbeats to return to normal.

### 11.1 Savasana: The Corpse Pose

Lie on the back and gently close the eyes. Place the feet a comfortable distance apart; place the arms away from the sides of the body, with the palms upward and the fingers gently curled. The legs should not touch each other, nor should the arms and hands touch the body. Lie with the head, neck and trunk aligned.

Observe your body mentally. Do not make suggestions to your body, just survey it.

Begin from the crown of the head and travel downwards. Observe gently the cheeks and jaws, the neck and shoulders. Survey mentally the arms to fingertips. Mentally return to the shoulders. Observe the chest area mentally and then let your attention move to your abdominal area. Feel the abdominal area rise and fall with the inhalations and exhalations. Survey the pelvic area, the hips, thighs, knees, calves, ankles and finally the feet.

The body is completely relaxed and the limbs are lifeless and heavy. While the body lies still like a corpse the mind is alert and focussed on the flow of the breath. Do not fall asleep during this

phase of Savasana, this is habit forming and defeats the purpose of the practice. If you find yourself at the brink of sleep, speed up the practice and end it.

After a few minutes of focussing on the flow of the breath, let your awareness return to the feet. Now continue the survey returning through the body in the same order backwards until you reach the crown of the head.

Slowly feel the life return to your limbs. Gently move the extremities. Turn over to the left side and using the support of your arms and hands, sit up.



## 12. Matsyasana - The Fish

Asana practice in Yoga Meditation is quite different from that of modern yoga studios. Matsyasana is described here for those participating in Yoga Mentoring with Radhika Shah-Grouven.



knee or ankle injuries.

Matsyasana, the Fish pose is excellent for relaxing the inner hip and thigh muscles. It also makes the knees, ankles and feet more flexible, so that they do not ache or "fall asleep" during meditation.

The Fish pose is also excellent to relax the neck muscles after Halasana, the Plough.

Matsyasana requires a great deal of flexibility of the lower limbs. Due to modern lifestyle and sitting on chairs most people find this posture extremely difficult. It is best to graduate slowly from the easier to the more difficult preparatory poses until one masters the final Fish pose. Caution is advised for those having

### 12.1 Preparatory Pose 1: Leg cradle

Sit cross-legged with the head, neck and trunk straight.

Cradle the left leg, holding the knee with the left hand and holding the foot with the right hand. Gently rock the leg from side to side, moving it from the hip.



Repeat with the right leg.

Practice daily for a minute or two. When you are comfortable doing this, you can move on to the next preparatory pose.

### 12.2 Preparatory Pose 2

This pose is similar to the leg cradle but requires more flexibility.

Cradle the left leg by placing the foot in the bend of the right elbow and the knee in the bend of the left elbow. Interlace the fingers in front of the leg.



Gently rock the leg from side to side, pulling it higher and closer to the body.

Repeat with the right leg.

Practice daily for a minute or two. After a couple of weeks of daily practice you should feel comfortable with this pose.

### 12.3 Preparatory Pose 3: Ardha Padmasana

The Half Lotus posture is a preparation for the full Lotus posture.

Sit with the head, neck and trunk straight. Extend the legs fully in front of you.

Bend the right leg, take hold of the foot and turn it upward. Place the heel firmly against the abdominal wall.

Bend the left leg and tuck it under the right leg.



Rest the hands on the knees in Jnanamudra, close your eyes and mentally observe your breath. If you feel discomfort let your attention mentally travel to the area feeling discomfort and gently ask your mind to relax that area.



Repeat the posture with the left leg on top and the right below.  
Practice daily for a couple of minutes.

#### 12.4 Preparatory Pose 4: Padmasana

This pose is the full lotus, the pose known as Padmasana. Attempt this pose only when you are absolutely comfortable in Ardha Padmasana, the Half Lotus.

Sit with the head, neck and trunk straight. Extend the legs fully in front of you.

Bend the left leg and take hold of the foot. Turning up the sole of the foot place it firmly at the right groin.

Similarly fold the right leg, turning the foot upward and placing it firmly at the left groin. Both the heels should press firmly against the abdominal wall.



Rest the hands on the knees in Jnanamudra, close your eyes and mentally observe your breath. If you feel discomfort let your attention mentally travel to the area of discomfort and gently ask your mind to relax that area.

Reverse the leg positions.

Practice daily for a couple of minutes.

### 12.5 Matsyasana: The Supine Fish pose

Attempt the Fish Pose only when you are absolutely comfortable in Padmasana, the Lotus Pose.

Sit in Padmasana, the full Lotus position.

Exhaling, lean back and place the elbows on the floor.

Inhaling, arch the back, expand the chest and place the crown of the head on the floor.

Take hold of the big toes with the index fingers and the thumbs. Keep the elbows on the floor.

Breathe normally. Hold the supine fish pose for 10-15 seconds.





Release the legs and relax the body completely.

Return to the seated Padmasana position, reverse the leg positions and repeat the supine Fish pose.





## 13. Dhanurasana - The Bow

**Asana practice in Yoga Meditation is quite different from that of modern yoga studios. Dhanurasana, the Bow is described here are for those participating in 1-1 Yoga Mentoring with Radhika Shah-Grouven.**

Dhanurasana, the Bow, like all other backward bending poses, strengthens the back and increases the flexibility of the spine, so that the meditator can sit comfortably for longer periods in meditative postures like Swastikasana and Siddhasana.

### 13.1 Preparatory Pose 1

This is a simple variation of Ardha Dhanurasana: Half Bow

Lie on stomach with the legs together, the chin on the floor, the right arm extended alongside the body, and the left arm bent at the elbow and placed on the floor in front of the head.

Bend the right leg at the knee and with the right hand grasp the outside of the ankle. Inhaling raise the head, shoulders and chest, pulling the leg up as high up as possible without straining the muscles of the back.

Breath normally. Hold this position for 10 seconds or as long as is comfortable.

Exhaling slowly lower the leg.

Rest in Makarasana, until the respiration and heartbeat are normal.

Repeat the exercise on the left side.

Practice this daily for at least 2 weeks before attempting the next preparatory pose.

### 13.2 Preparatory Pose 2

This is another variation of Ardha Dhanurasana.

Lie on stomach with the legs together, the chin on the floor, the right arm extended alongside the body, and the left arm bent at the elbow and placed on the floor in front of the head.

Bend the right leg at the knee. This time grasp the outside of the ankle with the left hand. Inhaling raise the head, shoulders and chest, pulling the leg up as high up as possible without

straining the muscles of the back.

Breath normally. Hold this position for 10 seconds or as long as is comfortable.

### 13.3 Dhanurasana: The Bow

Lie on stomach with the legs together, the arms extended alongside the body.

Place the chin on the floor. Bend both the knees. Grasp the outside of the ankles.

Inhaling raise the head, shoulder and chest. Pull the legs up as high as possible.

Breathing normally hold this position for 5 seconds or as long as comfortable.



In the initial weeks as you begin to practice the full Bow, you may allow the legs to be apart. As you get more comfortable in this pose, keep the legs together, taking care not to overstrain yourself. Exhaling slowly lower the legs first and then the torso.

You may want to relax for a few minutes in Makarasana Variation 2, the Crocodile, until the breath and heartbeats are normal.



Repeat the asana again.



## 14. Trikonasana - The Triangle

Asana practice in Yoga Meditation is quite different from that of modern yoga studios. Trikonasana is described here are for those participating in 1-1 Yoga Mentoring with Radhika Shah-Grouven.



### 14.1 Trikonasana: The Triangle

Stand with hands by the side.

Assume a standing posture with feet about 3 feet apart.

Keep the heels in line and place the right foot at 90 degrees angle from the left.

Inhaling slowly raise the arms away from the sides to the shoulder level with palms facing downward.

Exhaling and making sure that the hips remain facing forward, lower the torso gently to the right. The arms stay in a line. the left arm extends straight up with palm facing front. The head turned to look up at the left hand. Do not attempt to go deeper in to the posture by bending twisting your hips. Hold the posture wherever you feel comfortable.

If you can touch the floor with your fingertips, without twisting your hips, then hold the

posture in this position.

Breath normally and with every exhalation feel yourself relaxing deeper in to this posture, without twisting your hips, until your hands rest on the floor.

Close your eyes and hold posture as long as comfortable. Breath normally.

Inhaling, slowly return to standing position. Turn the right foot so that it face forward.

Bring hands down slowly to the sides and feet together. Breath normally in this position for a few moments.

Now repeat on the other side.



## 15. Shalabhasana - The Locust

**Asana practice in Yoga Meditation is quite different from that of modern yoga studios. Shalabhasana is described here for those participating in Yoga Mentoring with Radhika Shah-Grouven.**

Shalabhasana, the Locust is an asana that stretches and relaxes the lower spine. A relaxed and firm lower back provides a stable base for meditative postures such as Swastikasana and Siddhasana. It is best to begin with the Half Locust, the preparatory pose, to avoid strain and injury to the lower back.

### 15.1 Preparatory Pose 1 for the Locust

This pose is also called Ardha Shalabhasana: Half Locust. Lie on the stomach with the legs together and the arms extended along the sides of the body. Place the chin on the floor. Make fists with the hands, placing thumb and forefinger on the floor. Inhaling and without bending the knee or twisting the body sideways, raise the right leg as high as possible. The pelvic bones should remain on the floor. The left leg remains relaxed; do not allow the left knee to press against the floor.



Breathe normally. Hold this position for around 10 seconds or as long as is comfortable. Exhaling slowly lower the leg. Repeat with the left leg. If you practice the preparatory pose for a couple of weeks daily, you will be ready for Shalabhasana: the Locust pose.

## 15.2 The Locust

Lie on the stomach with the legs together and the arms extended along the sides of the body. Place the chin on the floor. Make fists with the hands. Keeping arms straight, place the fists under the upper thighs. Inhaling raise both legs as high as possible. Do not use the fists to push your thighs up. Breathe normally; hold position for about 10 seconds or as long as is comfortable. Exhaling, slowly lower the legs and relax.





## 16. About the Author

### **About Radhikaji, Author, Founder THATfirst and Teacher of the Samaya Srividya Tradition**

Radhika Shah-Grouven is a Teacher of the Samaya Srividya in the lineage of Swami Rama. Radhikaji, as she is often called, was born and grew up in Mumbai, India. She has been teaching since 1994. In 2009 she formed the organization THATfirst with the clear purpose of serving the Tradition in the lineage of the Himalayan Masters and presenting Yoga in its original form to sincere seekers. Radhikaji travels between Germany and India. She devotes most of her time training the students of the Mentoring programme. She also leads meditation retreats in Rishikesh, spiritual gatherings in Germany and online meetings for sincere seekers from different parts of the world. These pdfs are excerpts from 3 books by Radhikaji:

1. Mastering Pranayama
2. Atma Vichara - Vedantic Meditation
3. Asanas - Preparation for Meditation

From more information about Radhikaji, Samaya Srividya and Teachings of Swami Rama: [www.THAT-first.com](http://www.THAT-first.com)