

*Jelena Lieberberg*

# FUNKY ASANAS



Expand your Yoga practice with this collection of playful poses from my column. Now available as an e-book.

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KICKASS YOGA &  
YOGA JOURNAL

# The history behind KickAssYoga

First of all, for anyone who feels frightened by the paradoxical name: No, it's not about kicking someone's Ass, even if you think someone might deserve getting taught a lesson.



*This is me*

Hi, my name is Jelena and I have been teaching Yoga since 2009 and also started working as an Osteopath in Berlin since 2022. In 2015 the first issue of my column *DiesDasAsanas* was published in Yoga Journal Germany.

When I was faced with the question of what I should name my first Facebook page 10 years ago, I naturally first thought about calling this adventure JelenaYoga. However, that was too self-centered for me.

KickAssYoga is not about me, instead it's about encouraging people, women in particular, to devote more time to building their own strength, which helps develop confidence and self-belief in the community around us. Everytime I think back to my weaker self, this mantra of Kick Ass Yoga helps to give it a proverbial kick every now and then for the better!

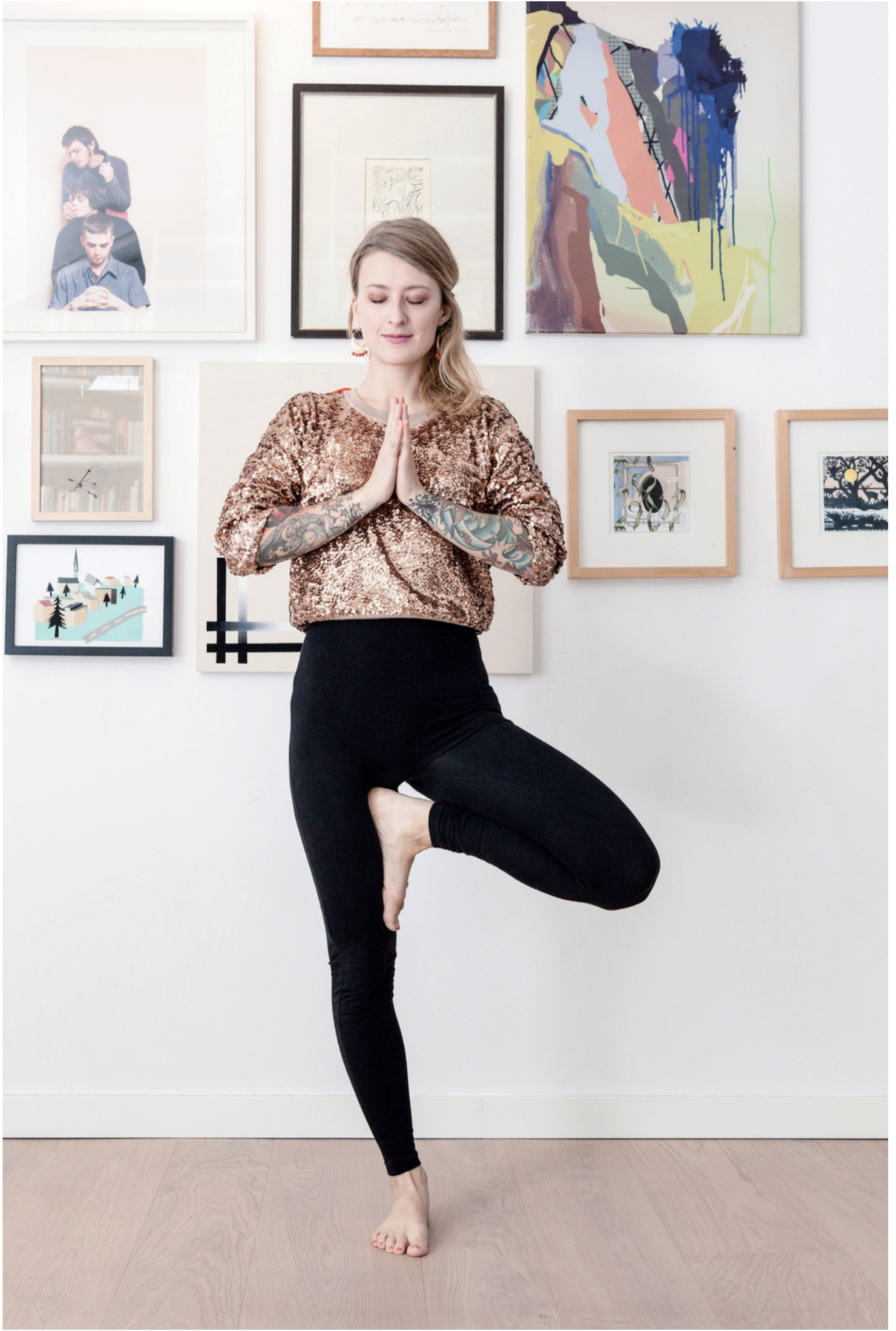




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# INTROSPECTIVE TREE

**Whenever people who don't have anything to do with Yoga find out that I'm a yoga teacher, they usually do one of 2 things! They either say:  
"Well, then you must be totally relaxed!" or they show me their tree pose.**

*Vrksa* (= *Vrikshah*, tree) or *Vrksasana* is one of the few vowel-poor postures in yoga. Judging by the name, it could also be a Croatian island. Similar to *Tadasana* (mountain pose) or *Shavasana* (corpse pose), it seems so simple. But that changes abruptly if you close your eyes while standing on one leg.

Often taught in beginner courses, this standing balance pose has more to do with learning how to calm a restless mind and increase focus than somebody's physical condition.

What is astounding and a tough nut to crack for the rational mind is that being in balance does not mean standing still. It means being open to change! Sometimes you sway more, like treetops in an autumn gust, sometimes only a spring-like breeze is blowing. You can feel very small movements in the foot of the supporting leg, which, if you allow it, make balance possible in the first place. When successful, it can be like just standing in Mountain Pose (*Tadasana*). //

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## step by step

- 1 Stand in *Tadasana* (Mountain Pose) on a mat or the floor.
- 2 Place your left foot either on the inside of the thigh (classic variant), place the toes on the floor on the inside of the right foot (for the easy variant) or pull the leg into a half lotus (for the pro variant). Turn your left knee outwards and straighten your pelvis into a neutral position beneath you.
- 3 Ground yourself over the supporting leg, the tree trunk, and root yourself by pulling the inside of the supporting leg towards midline.
- 4 Hands are clasped in front of the heart, the shoulder blades pulled slightly down and together, the face remains soft. Let your breath flow evenly.
- 5 Slowly try to lower your gaze inward between your eyebrows and, over time, close your eyes completely.

Repeat this on the other leg as well.

### TIP:

Sometimes it is easy to keep your balance, sometimes it can be very challenging. As you discover a sense of calm and focus, you may be able to gradually extend how long you can hold this pose up to 1 minute or more. This variant of tree pose with your eyes closed will show you how patient and dedicated your practice can become without giving up







# FLIP DOG AKA WILD THING

**As always, I like to develop postures that are not found in traditional yoga books. This time it's a dog that, instead of looking down obediently, just rolls over sideways and stretches its belly skyward.**

*Camatkarasana*, Wild Thing, or Flip Dog, is one of those funky, modern yoga poses that has only started popping up in the last 15 or so years. Inverted Downward Dog is a powerful hybrid of *Vasishthasana* (the side plank) and *Urdhva Dhanurasana* (wheel or upward arch) and as such is a backbend pose. The effect of the Flip Dog is strongly energizing, it inspires your body and mind and can trigger almost ecstatic feelings. In flowing vinyasa sequences, this wild asana brings something wonderfully playful and emotional to the practice.

I really enjoy practicing Flip Dog. Sometimes more as a heart opener, sometimes to stretch my hip flexors - but mainly just because it's just fun. The tricky transition requires a knack for timing and concentration. As a bonus thank you, the chest, shoulders and neck also are stretched. //

## IS THIS POSE A MUST?

*Not necessarily. However, the Flip Dog provides an introduction to the subject of stable backbends and teaches confidence in one's own abilities. Important: Slowly get into the position, continue to breathe calmly and experience the pose as an active opening position, while at the same time building strength.*

## WHAT DO I NEED?

*This pose requires some armstrength and a good body feeling through your core; plus a dash of courage to drop your foot behind you.*

## IS THIS DANGEROUS?

*The danger with flip dog is being too hasty or roughly forcing yourself into a backbend. The rule is: take your time, rather approach carefully and practice slowly. When to be cautious: carpal tunnel syndrome, injuries to the neck, shoulders or back.*

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## step by step

**1** Start in downward facing dog. As you inhale, extend your left leg backwards (three-legged dog). Then bend the left knee, rotate the leg outward and stretch the left flank from the groin to the ribs.

**2** Shift your weight slightly to the right hand and release the left hand from the mat. Now bend your right knee as well and turn your right foot onto the outside edge.

**3** Then stretch your right leg again and at the same time let your left foot gently touch the floor.

**4** The right leg is stretched, from here the hips are slowly raised, the pelvis tilted and the left arm stretched forward diagonally next to the head. Allow space to develop throughout the core through the breath.

**5** Back to downward-facing dog by using the weight on your left arm

and shifting gently from left foot which pushes you off.

Repeat on the other side.

**More difficult transition into the flip:**  
*From three-legged dog, with an exhalation and without bending the right knee, let the left foot fall to the right side.*

**Variant:** *If you want to deepen the pose, grab your left ankle with your left hand.*







# HANDS-FREE HEADSTAND

**When I saw this yoga pose in a photo for the first time, I was speechless. How can you possibly hold such a crazy position for several breaths - and on a hard surface like that? Let me tell you it is possible, even for a brief moment.**

The photograph in which I first saw this mysterious posture is of a short man in billowing linen trousers: Dharma Mittra.

Many will know him without realizing it: Dharma Mittra is the incredibly strong yet flexible man on the gray poster with the 908 asana variations. It was created in 1975 and still hangs in yoga studios around the world. Before becoming a student of Yogi Gupta, the native Brazilian was a bodybuilder and powerlifter. Today, the 80+ year-old has been practicing yoga for over 50 years, he owns a school in New York and still inspires with his signature pose, the free headstand.

There's probably a simple reason why he's so good at it: I assume that Dharma Mittra has a very flat skull. This is the only way he can balance his head on a manhole cover, as in the famous photo. The shape of the skullcap is usually quite a decisive feature for headstands: the more pointed it is towards the top, the less likely it is that you will be able to do a headstand without pain. Luckily there are numerous variants that take pressure off the skull and cervical vertebrae, above all the classic one with forearms supported in a V-shape and hands crossed. However, is a flat skullcap enough to be able to balance freely on your head for minutes? By chance I was able to observe Sri Dharma Mittra at a workshop in Berlin a few years ago when he performed the asana for a photo. Low and behold, even he could only keep his balance for a brief moment! But at least long enough that he could fold his hands in front of his heart and the photographer could capture the image, even while smiling. I had to concentrate so much on quickly extending both arms besides my body for this photo that I look a bit serious, but mission accomplished, behold the wonder of the hands-free headstand.



*The well known 908 yoga asana poster of Dharma Mittra.*

## IS THIS POSE A MUST?

*No! Not at all. Iyengar was right when he said that shoulderstand and headstand are the king and queen of yoga. The healing effects of the inverted postures arise regardless of whether one supports oneself or not - and they only arise if one holds the positions for a longer period of time, i.e. for a few minutes. Since this is never the case with a hands-free headstand, one cannot call this asana an essential, nourishing pose.*

## IS THIS DANGEROUS?

*Yes. The pressure on the top of the skull and the cervical vertebrae is considerable, and there is also a risk of falling. In short: The posture is anything but a nice gimmick, which is why I'm going to forego instructions here as an exception.*





FOTO: GORDON SCHIRMER



# LIGHT-FOOTED SWAN

**The hands-free headstand featured on the last page isn't for the mere mortal. Here's another pose with attitude that could be fun for anyone who enjoys gimmicks and new things.**

This swan is a hybrid of *Virabhadrasana III* (Warrior III) and the standing splits, but also counts as a backbend. You fly gracefully, firmly grounded by your standing leg, spread your arms wide and let your flying leg slide into a powerful, elegant external rotation. Putting your hands together behind your back gives your wrists, forearms, and shoulders an often neglected stretch.

At the same time, this opens up the possibility of feeling the bandhas (body locks) in a new way: tilting the pelvis not only awakens the muscles in the front of the body, but also those in the back. In order to keep your balance, you also need the holding power of the bandhas. The more abdominal tension (*Uddiyana Bandha*) and pelvic floor strength (*Mula Bandha*) you can engage, the more you will feel the large muscle group of the back extensors pressing against the hands lying in place on the lower back.

## IS THIS FUN?

*Yes! Precisely because it's a bit trickier to keep your balance when you're actively rotating your lifted leg outwards (unlike in Warrior III). In addition: The upper body must not rotate and the shoulders should be higher than the hips.*

## WHAT DO I HAVE TO TAKE CARE OF?

*As in all backbends, you should protect your lower back. This requires conscious activation of the abdominal muscles.*

## HOW CAN I PREP?

*The pose requires good leg stability. For example, if you can hold Warrior III for about five breaths. For the position of the hands behind the back, the shoulders must be mobile enough. You can practice this beforehand while standing or in *Parshvottanasana* (pyramid). Beware of shoulder injuries! (Don't force it).*

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## step by step

- 1 Start standing in *Tadasana* (Mountain Pose). Slowly clasp your hands behind your back, finger by finger. Make sure that you are not pulled into an excessive hollow back. To do this, activate *Mula Bandha* by pulling your pubic bone towards your navel.
- 2 Root your left foot and straighten your right leg back as in Warrior 3. At the beginning, the upper body may move a little lower towards the floor, as in the standing splits.
- 3 As soon as the right leg is up, slowly turn the lifted leg outwards from the hip joint, raise the upper body again slightly and pull the shoulder blades together. Try to get these three crucial movements in a good balance.
- 4 After about five steady breaths in this pose, lower the right leg again and return to *Tadasana*. Give your wrists and shoulders a short break and shake out your legs. Then repeat on the other side.







# SUPER SPLITS

**I love yoga photos that make you suspicious. Like a “brain teaser” or a particularly tricky puzzle: You have to look a second and third time before it clicks and you can trust what your eyes are seeing. A prime example of this in yoga is this variation of Urdhva Prasarita Eka Padasana.**

As with other challenging poses, the bound standing splits offers a lot of “play” for advanced yogis. With the help of straps, you can in principle also make them accessible to beginners. Very different elements interact here and there is a lot to discover and explore: The forward bend is combined with the stretching of the thigh and a bound back bend (as in the king pigeon, for example). The whole thing might look goofy to an outsider, as the face and butt (rather half of it) are facing in the same direction.

For the practitioner, of course, the perspective is different. Because of the rotation, the balance is more demanding than with a simple standing split, at the same time the connection of hand and foot intensifies the stretching of the front of the thighs. Depending on which goal you are pursuing, you will focus on feeling the balance. You'll try to calm and deepen your breathing as you bend forward, or work to mobilize your groin—until eventually both legs are pointing in completely different directions.

## IS THIS FUN?

*Yes! As crazy as it looks, this tied split feels wonderful when you understand where the journey is going on a physical level.*

## IS IT A MUST?

*No. This asana is particularly useful when Uttanasana (standing forward bend with closed legs) and standing splits are easy. The benefits of the bound version are numerous: the brain calms down, the liver and kidneys are stimulated, and it also stretches and strengthens the backs of the legs, calves, thighs, knees and ankles.*

## HOW CAN I PREP?

*This pose requires a good warm-up, including the following asanas: Uttanasana (standing forward bend), Prasarita Padottanasana (standing straddle forward bend), Padangushthasana (hand-big-toe pose), Adho Mukha Shvanasana (downward-facing dog), Janu Shirshasana (head-to-knees pose), Pashchimottanasana (seated forward bend), and any other pose that stretches the front of the thighs.*

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## step by step

- 1 Beginning in *Uttanasana* (Standing Forward Bend), position yourself on your fingertips and extend your right leg back (similar to Warrior 3). Bend your standing leg to slide your left shoulder behind your left lower leg as far as possible.
- 2 Root your left foot and straighten your right leg back as in Warrior 3. At the beginning, the upper body may move a little lower towards the floor, as in the standing splits.
- 3 Rotate your right hip as far as you can by pointing your toes toward the ceiling. Your right hand is your anchor for balance. You can support yourself with your palm or fingertips.
- 4 Bend your right knee and grab your right foot with your left hand and gradually slide deeper into the hip opener, with the idea of allowing your right knee to face the ceiling.
- 5 Relax your neck. Hold the pose for 5 to 10 breaths. Then repeat the whole thing on the other side.

**STRAP VARIATION:** If you can't grab your right foot, use a yoga strap or robe belt to catch it like a lasso.







# HOVERING PYRAMID

**Yoga means concentration. A skill that is in great demand, whether at work or in the family. In this variant of pyramid (*Parshvottanasana*) you can not only feel your own concentration is in demand, but strength and balance are also required.**

You probably know the starting position *Parshvottanasana* (pyramid or intensive flank stretching): It is one of the basics of yoga practice. This hamstring stretch can be very intense, so the pose requires patience. When you're too fast and too ambitious, you tend to round your back, and your spinal discs don't like that. If your pyramid works well, then you can let it fly. The raised rear leg and the arms pushed backwards turn this standing position into a balanced position.

## IS THIS FUN?

*Yes! Be sure to check the length of your torso. As your back curves, prop your hands up on two blocks.*

## IS THIS POSE A MUST?

*Not necessarily. Only if it's fun for you. Over time, however, it makes sense to modify the usual asanas in unfamiliar, playful ways – in addition to the mind, the fascial tissue in particular benefits from this as well.*

## HOW CAN I PREP?

*The more compactly the upper body can nestle against the front leg, the easier it is to balance on one leg. That's why it's good if the simple pyramid works relatively effortlessly. Asanas like downward facing dog, seated forward bend, standing forward bend and of course the simple pyramid give the necessary length to the back of the body. Some strength in the upper body is also important, because only with the help of this support can you keep the position stable.*

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## step by step

- 1 Beginning in Tadasana (Mountain pose), step your right foot back while keeping both of your hip bones parallel to the front edge of your mat (closed hips) and set your hands on your hips.
- 2 Inhale and expand your chest toward the ceiling. As you exhale, begin to slowly bend forward from your hip joints. Ensure you keep your entire torso stretched out. Depending on your mobility, place your hands on two blocks placed under your shoulders or on the floor.
- 3 Now push your hands (if necessary with the blocks) backwards on both sides of the front leg as far as possible. The arms are stretched and the fingers point backwards. Pull the kneecaps up to activate and fully straighten both legs. Establish yourself well in this pose for about five breaths and try to enjoy it.
- 4 To make your pyramid fly, press your hands firmly against the surface and slowly lift your right foot. In doing so, look either at the tip of the nose (classic *drishti*) or at the front foot.
- 5 After up to 5 breaths, put your foot back down. Put your hands on your hips, straighten your torso and stand up again. Exhale and return to your starting position. Repeat on the other side.







# HANDSTAND SANS HANDS

**Jelena Lieberberg presents a real - and not without any risk - challenge with this pose:  
The living pull-up bar is not only unusual, it also completely turns our idea of what is possible upside down!**

As a child, I absolutely loved the German Little Erna jokes. Especially the one where the little girl from Hamburg rides her bike: "Look, mom, only with one hand on the handlebars!", "Look, no hands at all!" Stupidly, to the regret of her mother, she is so clumsy that she finally shouts: "Look mom, now without teeth!"

It is important to me to teach yoga in my classes and workshops honestly and without embellishments that make you believe that the world is ideal. Still, I'm not a pessimist. Rather realist. I see my column as an investigative reality check.

With so many pictures on the internet, it's hard to believe what you're seeing. As a viewer, you usually do not recognize how much strength and practice is behind it. You have to try it. A handstand without hands is not possible in space, unless one has put oneself into another state of consciousness or, as in AcroYoga, is floating on another person. However, it works if you brace yourself in a door frame like a living pull-up bar. This requires a lot of strength in the legs, back and willpower. And yes, it's risky too.

## IS THIS FUN?

Totally! Thrill seekers will get their money's worth here. The narrower the passage, the easier, the narrower the door frame, the more difficult it becomes.

## IS IT A MUST?

No. Trying this if you're doubtful of your skills, is not necessarily recommended! At least you shouldn't practice alone at first, but always with a partner. There is a risk of falling on your head. Think of little Erna!

## HOW CAN I PREP?

For the time being it is enough just to have the sensation of pushing yourself into the doorframe: push your back into the door frame and stretch your legs out to the other side. If that goes well, you can try the whole thing standing up. First stretch out one leg and, depending on the length of the leg, press firmly against the door frame until you are floating seemingly effortlessly.

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- 1 Stand on all fours in a doorway with your hands relatively close to the left and right of the frame.
  - 2 Raise your knees and let your pelvis rise until you can lean your back against the frame, as in a handstand, and your pelvis is over your shoulders.
  - 3 Lift one leg off the floor and place your foot high enough on the opposite door frame that you can pinch yourself in the frame through the pressure of your foot and back. If possible, put the other foot next to it.
  - 4 Welcome to a sort of handstand! If you feel brave enough and have a helper who can grab your pelvis if necessary, raise a hand.
  - 5 If possible, raise your second hand and place your hands together.
  - 6 Floating with only one leg (see picture) is a very advanced variant. Therefore, only practice to the extent that you still feel good and safe doing it.





FOTO: BELLA SCHWARZ | BELLALIEBERBERG:



# TWIST & STRETCH

**As always with our author Jelena, this asana looks spectacularly good. But this pose not only looks good - it also has great effect, Parivritta Janu Shirshasana is a real yogic all-rounder!**

Parivritta Janu Shirshasana is a totally underestimated pose - it requires a lot of calmness and patience! The sight of it quickly tempts you to focus on the goal. But: It's not about getting the maximum stretch out of the hips, inner legs and flanks. It is much more important to slowly wake these areas up, lengthen them and allow them to open up gradually.

Properly practiced, this asana has a calming and invigorating effect at the same time. The twist in the seated and sideways position is quite relaxing; at the same time, the shoulders and chest on the upper side of the body are widened in a beneficial way. The asymmetric load mobilizes the diaphragm and can help relieve the connective tissue of the internal organs.

## IS THIS FUN?

Yes! Once you get the hang of it, this sidebend opens up a new dimension of stretch.

## IS IT A MUST?

No - as always, the motto is: Everything is possible, nothing is a must! There is a lot of leeway, so that all those who practice can treat themselves to exactly the amount of stretch that suits their body.

## HOW CAN I PREP?

Prepare well! Sun salutations and all asanas that stretch legs and flanks are suitable for this: Upavishta Konasana, Parshvakonasana, Adho Mukha Shvanasana, Supta Padangushthasana and Janu Shirshasana, as well as twists while sitting, lying or standing.

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## step by step

- 1 Begin sitting with your legs spread. Bend your left knee, plant the sole of your foot and pull your heel towards you. Let your right knee relax and pull your right leg out a little more.
- 2 On an exhale, lean to the right, initially keeping your right forearm close to the inside of your right leg. Extend your left arm overhead while inhaling. If possible, grab your right foot with your left hand or wrap a strap around the ankle and grab the other end with your left hand.
- 3 With your right hand, grasp the ankle of your left foot to form a kind of anchor. For a stronger stretch, slowly lower your upper body backwards. Watch as this evokes entirely new sensations.
- 4 Intensify the posture by using the breath: Direct your breath to those parts of your body where you feel resistance. Remain in this position for about 1 minute.
- 5 To come out of the pose, first release the front hand and slide it to the middle - then the top hand. Gently lift the upper body back to center and repeat the asana step by step on the other side.





FOTO: BJÖRN FEHL



# MOON RISE

**... in twisted, bound form. It actually looks doable but it's trickier than you might think. With this column, our Asana columnist Jelena Lieberberg challenges you again to explore your limits in a playful way.**

## TWISTED STANDING MOON

is a surprise package: The pose combines the power of the standing leg from the classic half-moon with an intensive, detoxifying and circulation-stimulating twist and, in addition, with a significant backbend and stretching of the thighs. On a spiritual level, it promotes clarity, stamina and willpower, because as soon as concentration lapses, there is not much of a sense of balance and the moon threatens to fall from the sky!

Watch your inner drive while practicing and take the chance to playfully sharpen your focus: Are you merely waiting for this challenging asana

variant to finally be over? Or would you like to try again - and this time with a smile on your face? Especially in tricky asanas, it is important not to tense up and involuntarily hold your breath. You will only make your moon shine in this variation if you remain as relaxed as possible and continue to breathe calmly.

## IS IT FUN?

YES! Anyone who has experienced the effects of intense twists knows how good our back feels when we wring it out like a freshly washed towel.

## IS IT A MUST?

NO! As with all hybrid poses, approach the matter with caution, confidence and a certain pinch of curiosity. If you're afraid of tipping over, practice with your back to the wall.

## HOW CAN I PREP?

Sun salutations and various twisting postures serve as preparation, as well as the classic half moon (Ardha Chandrasana), the stretched triangle (Utthita Trikonasana) and the twisted triangle (Parivritta Trikonasana). A block under the front hand facilitates good alignment.

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## step by step

1

Start in a high lunge with your left foot forward. Place both hands on the mat, straighten the front leg and lift the back leg. The pelvis points straight down. By placing your left thumb in the pit of your left hip and pulling your hip slightly back, you create space in the hip joint.

2

On an inhale, raise your left arm to the side in extension of your chest, and on an exhale, bring your right hand under your right shoulder (elevated on a block if necessary) and gently enter the twist to the left. With each further inhale, stretch yourself over the crown of your head and both legs in length. With each exhalation, deepen the twist from the center of your body.

3

To join your hand and foot behind your body, bend your right knee and grab your right foot with your left hand. If you want to deepen the resulting backbend, roll your left shoulder back and gently slide your foot into your hand. You can increase the stretch on the front of your thighs by pulling your heel closer to your buttocks.

4

After about 5 breaths, carefully release the pose and repeat on the other side.









# FLYING FRONTSPLIT

**Our asana guide Jelena Lieberberg seems to have an endless supply of offbeat, playful asanas. Anyone who enjoys Hanumanasana & Co. will also enjoy this variant of the flying splits. The good news is, that the risk of face planting is low, so is the fear of diving into this asana.**

In this compact arm balance, above all mobility and strength are needed. However, stacking the bones intelligently makes it that much easier to take off. Once you're brave enough to lean forward and trust your arms, there's a great temptation to jump off your back foot. Much better than a hop, however, is a feeling of firmness: Build up enough body tension to allow the back leg to float with strength and devotion – more like a wintry swan elegantly spreading its wings, instead of a hopping snow hare. Don't despair if you don't succeed the first time, and rather let humor and perseverance inspire you when it comes to tricky arm balances like this one.

## IS IT FUN?

Yes! For many, this variant of Eka Pada Koundinyasana 2 is easier because the splits are not performed with stretched legs, but the front leg takes on the function of a pincer and the back leg can also be bent. In this respect, less mobility is required than in the classic version.

## IS IT A MUST?

No. As always, everything can be explored, but nothing has to. The desire to play and try things out is paramount. Whether you then master this asana variation is another question.

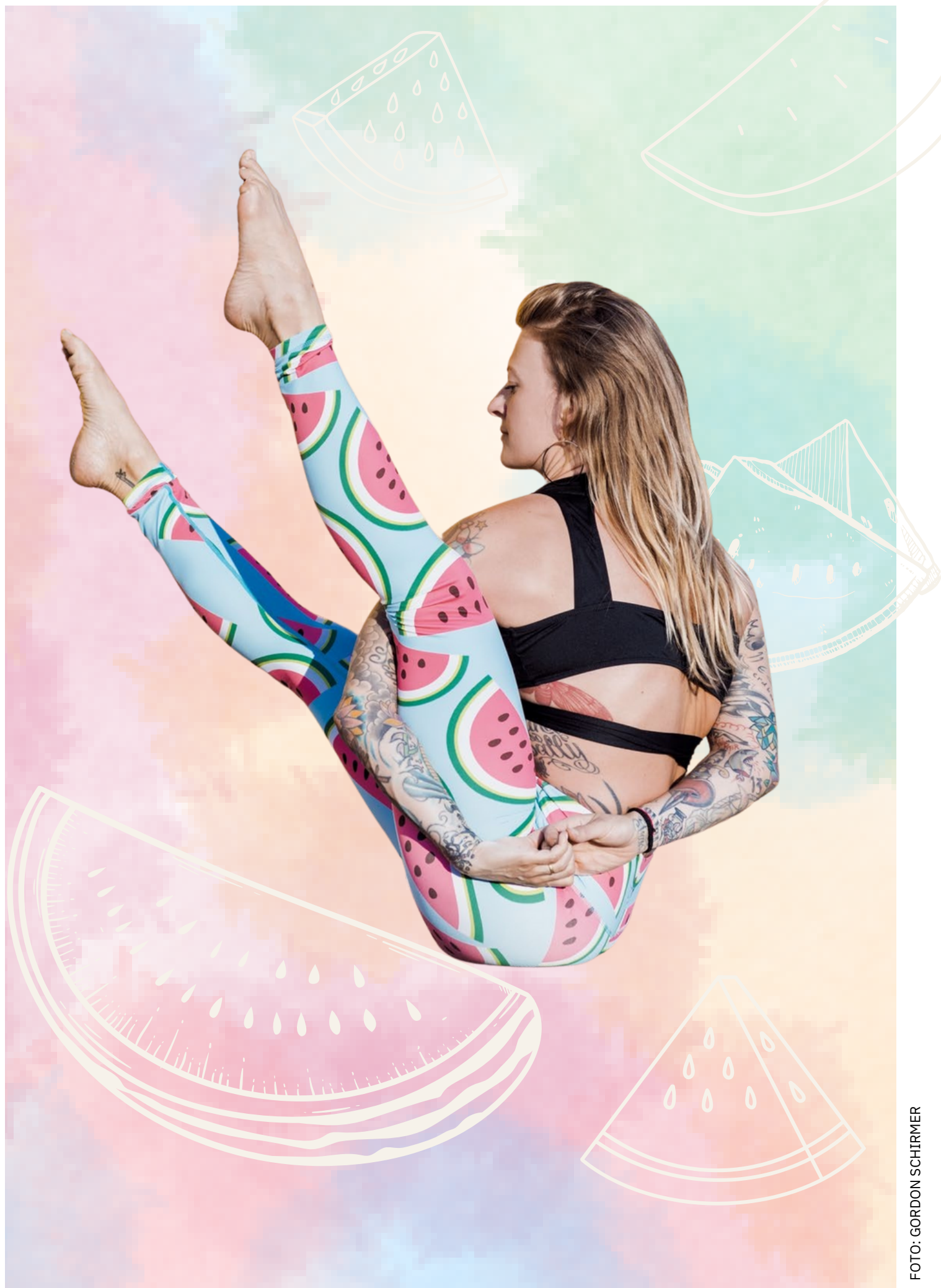
## HOW CAN I PREP?

This arm balance is about strength in the core and arms and flexibility in the legs and hips. Sun salutations with lunges, warriors and pyramid pose help with mobility. Simple push-ups and Chaturanga Dandasana pave the way for increased arm and core strength.

## step by step

- 1 Start in a lunge with your right leg in front and place both hands on the inside of the front foot. At the beginning you can place your left knee on the mat briefly to push your right shoulder under your right knee as much as possible. After that, your right hand will be outside of your right foot again.
- 2 Lift your left knee off the floor. Then pinch your upper right arm with your right leg as if with pliers and move your right foot further and further inward. At the same time, your arms bend more and more until you notice that your left foot begins to float almost by itself.
- 3 Try to avoid jumping, otherwise there is a risk of falling on your face. Instead, think strong and compact upper body. Shifting your weight forward, actively pushing the floor away with your hands and pulling your shoulders back will then allow the back leg to lift off.
- 4 If necessary, bend the rear leg for the compact variant shown in the picture; otherwise it is extended backwards. To release the pose, place the back leg back down and release the pincer. Then flow through a vinyasa and try the whole thing on the other side. Smiling, smirking and giggling are allowed the whole time.







# AHOY MATE!

**The boat is one of the most common exercises for effective abdominal muscle training – but you can also live out your play instinct in Navasana. For example in this twisted, bound version of our columnist Jelena. Capsizing not excluded ...**

I love exercises that light my center, i.e. the abs and core muscles, on fire! Everyone knows boat pose, of course, but it's not that easy to keep your upper body and legs straight and lift them while balancing on your sit bones. Can you do it? Do you find it easy? The following variant is even trickier! Anyone who is enthusiastic about physical puzzles like this will shed much sweat until the stomach and legs work in such balanced harmony in the tied boat, that the upper body can be twisted and one shoulder can be stretched at the same time. A guarantee to wobble is included - but a bit of swell is part of a boat trip.

## IS IT FUN?

Exploring your own limits can be frustrating at times. It's nicer if you practice with alert curiosity and playful pleasure instead of with brute force. Motto: Smile instead of panting!

## IS IT A MUST?

No. As always, the guiding principle applies: Everything can be explored, but nothing is a must. First, test the sea-worthiness of your boat by simply straightening your legs and holding them up for 1 to 5 breaths.

## HOW CAN I PREP?

Several things are important when warming up: On one hand, shoulder mobilization and rotations, such as those practiced in bound warrior or in various twisting positions are required. In addition, of course, practice abdominal muscle exercises such as sit-ups or bicycle crunches while sitting or lying on your back. You'll also need a hamstring stretch for the backs of your legs, and various forward bends can be used for this. Since the tied boat not only activates the abs but also the hip flexors, it's important to stretch the groin afterwards, perhaps with Reclined Hero Pose.

## step by step

**1** Start in a seated position for boat pose with your knees bent. Stretch both arms upwards as you inhale. On your next exhale, twist your upper body to the right, lower your arms, bend forward slightly and push your left arm between your legs. The left shoulder nestles into the left thigh.

**2**

Bring your left arm back under your leg and grab your right wrist behind your back. You may already be lifting your left foot off the floor. If the hands do not reach each other, either interlace the fingers as shown in the photo or use a strap.

**3**

As you inhale, lengthen your torso. Exhaling, activate your core and stabilize your sitting position. From this stability, raise both legs. The knees can be bent or straight. With each inhale, focus on length and extend your body from your sit bones to the crown of head. Stabilize and deepen the position with each exhale.

**4**

To mindfully release the pose, gently plant your feet, release your arms, and rotate back to center. After a short pause, repeat on the other side.









# LEVITATING SQUAT

**Just like lying, standing or sitting, squatting is a basic human posture - but unfortunately one that has almost been forgotten in our latitudes. Our asana columnist Jelena Lieberberg doesn't just squat, she practically levitates...**

IN MANY COUNTRIES, people spend a large part of their time squatting down – for cooking, eating, doing laundry, giving birth, or just having a leisurely chat. It's different with us. For centuries we Europeans have not squatted on the floor (unfortunately often quite cold in this country), we sit on chairs and benches, or very comfortably in armchairs or on the sofa. The weight does not rest on the feet, as it does when squatting, but on the proverbial 'sit-meat' as we say in German. And we need a lot of it: We travel to the most exotic countries in cramped airplane seats, commute between town and country in car seats, spend hour after hour stuck in office chairs, sit at the dining table, in the subway and in the waiting room. In short, we spend a large part of our lives on seating furniture. As is well known, this also has its dangers: Sitting for long periods promotes metabolic and cardiovascular

diseases, leads to weight gain, weakens the leg veins and can result in varicose veins and thrombosis; it often causes pain in the shoulders and neck and can damage the intervertebral discs.

So we not only need more exercise in general, but also more variety in our basic postures. In yoga, exactly this balance happens: gentle flow, pressure and tension in the right places to provide the bones, tendons and ligaments with sufficient care. But attending one yoga class alone is often not enough. I also try to vary my posture in everyday life. One of my favorite things to do is squat down: sometimes on the train, sometimes while tidying up the children's rooms – or, as is the case right now, while writing on the laptop. The floating squat offers a good opportunity to mobilize and strengthen your feet and, incidentally, to widen your back.

## IS IT FUN?

YES! Balancing is easier than you think. If things get shaky, you can support your buttocks against a wall.

## IS IT A MUST?

NO. But, anyone who cannot touch the ground with their heels in Malasana (garland pose) will find this variant even easier than the classic.

## HOW CAN I PREP?

For the squat, the fascial chain on the back of the body must be stretchable, and you also need a certain amount of mobility in the hips. Sun salutations are the perfect preparation.

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## step by step

**1** Begin standing with your feet hip-width apart, possibly with your back to the wall. Slowly squat down, slightly rotating your toes outward so that your knees and toes point roughly in the same direction. You can either squat on tiptoes from the start or put your heels down first and then lift them up.

**2** Try to keep your back as upright and straight as possible. This is easier if you gently push your knees outwards with your elbows. At the same time, the pressure intensifies the hip stretch.

**3** Feel the balance and breathe in and out calmly. At first, stay in the pose for only 1 to 2 breaths and gradually increase to 5 to 10. As in yoga in general, the same applies here: short but regular practice is better than long, irregular ones. The most important thing to me – the joy of playful movement.





FOTO: GORDON SCHIRMER



# NEW TERRITORY

**Bet that even a classic feels completely new and different if you tweak it a tiny bit? We've practiced the standing forward bend 1000 times and never came up with this idea - but that's why we follow our Asana guide Jelena Lieberberg.**

Forward bends stretch the entire dorsal chain of fascia, from top to toe. They help to shut down the nervous system and invite us to look inwards and switch off - actually perfect for the quiet time of the year. However, this one-legged variant is more stimulating than the classic *Uttanasana*. The reason: Concentration is required here! We don't stand on both feet as usual, while the whole world seems to be upside down. It's quite a dizzy feeling when the ground is pulled out from under one foot like this.

But it is exactly this unfamiliar, new thing that makes us happy and gets us out of the rut of habit. So if you enjoy testing your balance, you will surely love this quest for equilibrium on one leg.

Incidentally, you also enjoy all the positive effects of the classic forward bend: stretch the backs of your legs and lengthen your spine and the nerves that run through.

This not only promotes your mobility, but also blood circulation in this area.

## IS IT A MUST?

Of course not, but it's always exciting to put your own balance to the test. If you are comfortable with Warrior 3 and Tree pose for over five breaths, then you are ready for this challenge. Your hands do not have to touch the floor, let alone grasp your legs. You can also support yourself with one or both hands on a chair.

## IS IT FUN?

YES, because it's trickier than it looks. It is best to practice in front of a soft sofa or next to a wall at the beginning. This will help you find your balance and get used to the position before attempting free standing.

## HOW CAN I PREP?

Sun salutations and any type of forward bend are suitable as a warm-up, because the easier it is for you, the more compact (and therefore more stable) you can practice this one-legged version.

---

## step by step

1

The starting position is the classic standing forward bend (*Uttanasana*). First, place your left hand on the floor, a block, or a chair. Your hand replaces your second leg and helps you stand steady when you step one foot off the ground.

2

Bend your right leg and pull your heel as close to your buttocks as possible. Then release your right hand from the floor and grab your right foot or shin. Now it depends on how deep your forward bend is: you either look at the floor, or you lower your head and look behind you.

3

As soon as you are securely in balance here, also release your left hand from the floor and place it on your left ankle. Allow your left leg to carry you. Hold the pose for 1 to 5 breaths. Then repeat the sequence on the other side.







# LIFT OFF CROW

**Among birds, crows are considered to be particularly intelligent and playful. No wonder the yoga crow shouldn't settle for just one or two classic forms, at least according to our equally clever and playful asana columnist.**

I love the variety in yoga. Isn't it wonderful that there is exactly the right yoga style for every age and every situation in life? From quiet to flowing, from gentle to powerful, everything is included. So if you don't feel like exertion and strength training and feel much more comfortable in Yin Yoga, for example, you can just enjoy the beautiful shades of blue that I found for this photo on Ibiza. All those who are looking for stability and power will be happy about the playful options that I will show you here: On the way to becoming a one-legged crow, the hard-working yogi and hard-working yogini encounters this position of the legs, among other things. Once spirit and soul flow on the same wavelength, let

the body get ready for one or the other adventure. This pose reminds me a little of the symbol of Sicily, the Trinacria, a mythical creature with a head and three legs. Luckily we only have 2 to worry about.

## IS THIS FUN?

Yes! This asana variant is suitable for everyone who wants to use their strength and smile at defying the thrill of balance. The nice thing is: As soon as you have found the right feeling for the center of gravity in your hands and fingertips, you can theoretically move your legs into almost impossible positions – provided you have the necessary strength and mobility, of course.

## IS IT A MUST?

Of course not. Nevertheless, building strength and flirting with balance is a great thing - even if you do without all the bells and whistles and limit yourself to the classic crow (steps 1 and 2).

## HOW CAN I PREP?

Thoroughly warm up your wrists, shoulders, and core muscles. To be prepared in case you fall, place a large sofa cushion in front of you. So you can, if not gracefully, then at least softly catch yourself.

---

## step by step

1

Begin by bending forward from a standing position and placing your hands on the floor, shoulder-width apart. Activate your hands and root them powerfully on the ground. Then lift your heels, bend knees and push one after another firmly against your upper arms.

2

Gently shift your weight forward until your toes lift off the floor. In this pose, first try to pull your heels towards your bottom.

3

Once step 2 works with ease, try releasing one knee from the upper arm, letting it hover midway between the elbows, and then placing it back on the upper arm. Repeat the same on the other side. You not only stabilize yourself with your abdominal muscles, but above all with the strength of your actively working hands.

4

If that works, after a little rest, start again in crow (steps 1 and 2). Slowly and in a controlled manner, release one knee from your upper arm and pull it towards the sky. Then try to lift the raised knee until you can touch the other foot. Voila! After 1-3 breaths you will sail slowly and elegantly back and repeat the whole thing on the other side.



FOTO: GORDON SCHIRMER



# RELAXED FROG

**Don't let the leopard print and pink legs fool you: this half frog has all the froggy characteristics that hip joints love. And that's not just good on a physical level.**

When it comes to the big and important topic of "hip openers", opinions differ: some love them and can't get enough of them, others would love to run away screaming as soon as it comes to stretches in and around the hip joints. Why is that? Some are naturally flexible here, or they did a lot of gymnastics or dancing as a child. In that case, they probably enjoy sinking into half-pigeon extensively, for example. Others are rather "stiff" in this body region, especially if they sit a lot and for a long time due to their job - in the office, in the car, on the train ...

But especially if it is rather frustrating at first: mobilizing the hips can do a lot to make this body region feel liberated and loose again. This is not only important on a physical level: It is precisely in this area that the body potentially stores many emotions and traumatic experiences.

Especially the iliopsoas (often abbreviated as psoas) is considered to be the "muscle of your soul" - and this can even be explained quite plausibly: When our ancestors were threatened by danger and the sympathetic nervous system activated the fight-or-flight mode, this muscle had to translate fear into movement at lightning speed, "take to its heels" and run as fast as they could.

Today, anxiety and stress are more subtle and they last longer (which is arguably much worse), but we still intuitively hinge at our hips in these situations. Together with a lot of sitting and lack of movement, this can lead to shortening, tightness and weakness. To counteract this and to consciously feel the switch to the para-sympathetic nervous system, regular exercises that mobilize the hips are a must. Because only in this way can we rest and digest food, experiences and adventures.

## IS THIS FUN?

Yes, because this variant of the frog is much more accessible than the classic form, where both knees are bent to the side.

## ANYTHING TO TAKE CARE OF?

In this variation, it is especially important to develop a feeling for the lower back: it needs a bit of support, i.e. stability in the abdomen and pelvis and tension in the buttocks.

## HOW CAN I PREP?

A few sun salutations won't hurt, but for once you don't need an extensive warm-up for this pose: you can even practice it at work in between (as long as your colleagues aren't watching).

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## step by step

**1** Lie flat on your stomach. At the beginning rest your forehead on your hands. Pull the right knee out to the right side until the upper leg is approximately at a right angle to the torso and the knee is at the same level as the hip.

**2** While doing so, bend the right foot to protect the knee. The left foot lies on the back of the foot and is extended.

**3** Support yourself on your hands or forearms. Attention: Consciously activate the buttocks, especially on the left side. This will help you feel the stretch in your left hip and protect your lower back. The lower abdomen can lift off the floor as you do this. The more you tilt the pelvis, the less pressure there is in the lumbar spine.

**4** Remain in the posture for 30 to 60 seconds. Then gently return to the floor to change sides.







# FUNKY CHAIR POSE

**Everyone knows and perhaps dreads chair pose and twisted chair probably too. But this one? Clearly, our asana columnist has tried something new again.**

**UTKATASANA, CHAIR POSE** or standing squat, belongs to the classic standing postures, all of which awaken the strength of the legs and buttocks and warm them from within. You probably know this posture mainly from various sun salutations, where chair pose introduces a series of standing postures. Depending on the yoga style and physique, the emphasis varies: Sometimes the palms lie together in front of the heart, sometimes the arms are stretched out shoulder-width forwards or upwards. Sometimes you emphasize the curvature of the lumbar spine, sometimes you counteract it with the corresponding abdominal tension. Vinyasa yogis appreciate the posture above all because of the many possibilities it offers to create supple, flowing connections between individual asanas.

Here we take a completely different approach: instead of a flowing transition, we settle down for a while and twirl the chair in an unusual way. Strictly speaking, this is not only a variation of *Utkatasana*, but also a variation of *Vishvamisana*, with the difference that the base is not a split, but a twisted half split in chair. Sounds complicated? It's actually not at all. But it's not exactly easy either: a game with balance that requires a fair amount of flexibility, stability and 'fingertip feeling' as we say in German, which means instinctive feeling.

## IS THIS FUN?

Yes! For all adventurous yogis looking for a little challenge, this variation is a super gimmick away from the usual.

## IS IT A MUST?

No. As always, what is not, doesn't have to be - and certainly not today. However, anyone who would like to cautiously try out one step into adventure, can do so at any time with a strap and perhaps a supporting wall close by.

## HOW CAN I PREP?

Warm up your flanks thoroughly, especially, using side bends while standing or sitting. The forward bends in sun salutation and twisted variations such as warrior twist or chair twist prepare your body for the intense combination of forward bending and twisting.

## step by step

**1** Begin standing with your feet together or just hip-width apart. Raise the arms on an inhale along the ears, bend the knees and lower the pelvis into a deep chair. Exhaling place the hands together in front of the heart and begin to turn to the right. Place your left elbow on the outside of the right thigh, for the classic twisted chair.

**2** Everything easy so far? Then place your left hand or fingertips on the outside of your right foot on the floor and stretch your right arm toward the sky. Left shoulder nestled close to the right leg helps you stabilize. Turn your gaze to the ground as you now shift your weight to your right foot and let your left foot hover just above the ground. Then reach for the left foot with your right hand.

**3** If you still feel stable in this posture, extend your left leg forward as best you can while you turn your chest to the right and up. As you do so, try to bring the buttocks and floating leg into a horizontal line.

**4** Remain in this posture for 3-5 breaths. Then gently release it, relax for a moment and repeat the same steps on the other side.





FOTO: GORDON SCHIRMER



# BALANCED EAGLE

Let's create the most wonderful mixed creatures -  
like this crow-like eagle (or the eagle-crow?)

**THOSE WHO KNOW MY COLUMN**, will know that there is always room for surprising and sometimes unexpected combinations. I just enjoy looking at asanas from a different angle and trying my luck at combining the most important aspects of different postures. This time I am inviting you to try a combo of crow (Bakasana) and eagle (Garudasana). The intertwining of the legs almost creates a new bandha, which makes it a very compact and centered position, which (at this point you may breathe a sigh of relief) is much easier than it looks! The only difficult thing about this hybrid asana is floating elegantly into it. Once the bones are cleverly stacked, the posture feels almost as light as a feather.

As the two bird names suggest, Crow is one of those postures that primarily strengthens the upper body, i.e. arms, shoulders, back and abdomen. Therefore, it is a good idea to combine this core strength with something that addresses the lower half of the body. In Garudasana, we create a pleasant pressure on the legs that activates the lymphatic system - an all-around connection that is guaranteed to put a smile on your face.

## IS THIS FUN?

Yes, if you enjoy balancing on your arms, you will be able to playfully test your strength and balance with this variation - even if the double knot doesn't work out (i.e. if the upper foot can't be twisted behind the calf).

## IS IT A MUST?

No, because, as always, you can just look at it and enjoy what the human body (in my case: the body of a mother of two) can do.

## HOW CAN I PREP?

A few sun salutations will get your circulation going and prepare the wrists to bear weight. After that, classic standing eagle and various twisting poses ensure that this powerful eagle becomes inspiring and effortless for you rather than an insurmountable hurdle.

## step by step

- 1 Let's start in a standing position. Shift the weight onto your right foot and cross the left leg over the right. Place your hands together in front of your heart in Anjali Mudra. Do not lock the foot behind the calf in this first step. We save this detail for the last step in the arm balance, because we still need the tips of our toes to support us a bit on the way down.
- 2 Bend your supporting leg a little more than usual in eagle pose, turn to the left so that your elbows are outside the left upper leg. From there, slowly bend your knees more and more and tilt your upper body towards the floor until your hands are shoulder-width apart on the mat (or on two blocks) with your hands shoulder-width apart.

- 3 Depending on your mobility, you can either use both elbows as pedestals to rest your hips and thighs, or position only the left thigh on the right elbow.
- 4 Now, as you gradually shift more and more of your weight onto your hands, first direct your gaze forward. This will help you avoid tipping over. As soon as your feet begin to hover, try to wrap your left foot behind your right calf. When everything feels safe and stable, turn your gaze to the right. Voila.
- 5 Stay in this flying position for 1-5 breaths. After that, untangle yourself and come down. After shaking out your arms and legs, try the other side.





FOTO: Sofia Gomez Fonzo



# MYTHICAL CREATURE

**Peacock feather or crow? Pretty much half, half! Just like gryphons, sphinxes and other chimeras of ancient myths, this asana creation is composed of two postures. And because the dividing line here runs along the longitudinal axis, the balance seems quite tricky at first glance. But this is deceptive ...**

**PINCHA MAYURASANA**, the peacock feather (or forearm stand), has fascinated me for a very long time. When I fell over in the bathroom more than ten years ago (and rolled off halfway skillfully), the fear was surprisingly swept away. I had made the experience: Falling over is not so bad. So I continued to practice. And I really enjoy teaching this asana. I understand all the aspects of the feeling of being squeezed, because of course - as with most inverted postures - things can get dicey. But the biggest hurdle is and remains the head. And it is also at the helm when the ego is driving you. After all, the forearm stand always earns you astonished looks and sayings, especially when non-yogis experience this asana live: "Look, she can stand on her arms!"

I always enjoy playing with the postures without thinking too much. When I brought the crow into play for the first time in Pincha Mayurasana, I was amazed myself: You would think that this would make the posture more difficult, but excitingly, the combination also creates an interesting kind of base. And on this basis, further game-reises and leg variations are even made easier.

## IS THIS FUN?

Yes! Stretching, floating and carrying your own weight on your hands brightens your mood and promotes healthy self-confidence. It's best to try this variation in front of a wall to start. But don't worry: you'll find that the staggered

position of the arms gives you even more stability than in many symmetrical arm balances.

## IS IT A MUST?

Of course you don't. But if you enjoy the feat of forearm stand (and arm balances in general), then this position could be another test of your power and endurance. If you prefer not to carry so much weight on your shoulders, just enjoy the sight of this curious Asana hybrid.

## HOW CAN I PREP?

Warm up your core, shoulders and legs to be able to participate with full body effort. Dolphin, forearm stand and cranes are preparatory must-haves.

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## step by step

**1** Start on all fours and first place the left forearm on the floor pointing straight forward. Then place your right hand a little to the side and a hand's width further back on the mat.

**2** Now release the knees from the floor, just as in the dolphin, only instead of using both forearms, here you are supporting yourself on one forearm and one hand.

**3** Place the right knee on the right upper arm and carefully shift the weight further and further forward. When doing this, resist the temptation to bring the nose too close to the floor. Instead, actively push yourself away from the floor, and look down at your mat.

**4** At the moment when the weight is fully supported by the hand and forearm, you can almost effortlessly release the left foot from the floor. Now, in order to stretch the leg towards the ceiling, you need to mobilize sufficient strength in your trunk and legs.

It will help if you stretch your feet. Hold the posture for 1-5 breaths the posture for 1-5 breaths, then carefully put your feet back down and repeat on the other side.







# SMOOTH NINJA

**Nothing can scare a real ninja: fast as lightning and deft as a shadow, he overcomes gravity - and many other obstacles.**

THE OVERCOMING OF GRAVITY has fascinated me (like many others) since my childhood. Giving up the feet as a familiar base and carrying your own body weight on your hands instead takes not only strength, but above all courage. The prime examples of this are, of course, the hand and forearm stand. But it can also be simpler and still spectacular: this variation of Ashtavakrasana, the Reclining Eight, is simpler than most arm balances. First, the drop height is lower, and second, you can master the position playfully and with more ease by cleverly stacking your bones on top of each other. In contrast to the classic lying eight, the feet are not crossed, but aligned separately from each other.

But what all these supposedly crazy asanas are actually about is more than just overcoming gravity and mastering a spectacular pose. That's fun and strokes the ego, but if you take a closer look, you can also learn something else: not to immediately shy away from challenges and unfamiliar situations, but to trust yourself in the truest sense of the word "in every situation" - and not only in the more difficult things of yoga, but also in those of life. This ninja tactic will help you to find a balance between relaxation and tension, not only physically but also mentally.

## IS IT FUN?

Yes, because a twisted ninja on hands not only looks fun, it also feels great!

## IS IT A MUST?

No way, but I invite every yogini and yogi to try this interesting balancing act at least once. Only then can you judge whether this posture is for you or not.

## HOW CAN I PREP?

Sun salutations are known to be the A and O of the practice. In addition, I recommend to warm up your hands and shoulder joints and to prepare the center of the body with twists and core work. Those who have already mastered the classic form of Ashtavakrasana will master this Ninja in no time.

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## step by step

1

Start in a seated position, knees loosely bent, feet and hands placed in front of the body. Then swing both legs to the right side so that you enter a rotation: Your upper body with your hands placed on top continues to look forward, your legs to the right.

2

Loop your right arm between your legs and place your hand back in its previous position. The left upper thigh is now above the right elbow. From now on, press both thighs as tightly as possible against the arm and against each other, because this is the only way to prevent the leg from slipping in the coming steps.

3

Now comes a little 'lift': lean forward and shift the weight from your butt to your hands. At the same time, try to let your bent legs lift off as well. This only works if you continue to firmly squeeze your thighs together. If this works, you can extend the leg resting on your right elbow forward.

4

The more strength you build up in your legs, the easier it will be to hold this asana: Therefore, stretch both feet up to the toes. This not only looks beautiful, it also creates the tension we need. Send your gaze either forward, or to the upper foot as shown in the picture. After 2-5 breaths switch sides.







# TWISTED BALLERINA

**Hello spring, here comes a playful dance detox twist from our Asana-columnist Jelena, who, as always, doesn't miss the opportunity to put a new twist on familiar yoga poses.**

DETOX, has long been a trendy topic. Every spring, the detox calls sprout as surely as daisies. In fact, the body detoxifies all year round and all by itself, if you let it (instead of feeding it more and more toxins). The liver, intestines, kidneys and pancreas make the largest contribution to this. Nevertheless, one can support oneself well with the digestion, excretion and thus with the detoxification by turning postures. And as the saying goes, "You are as old as your spine!" This sounds provocative, but it is true. If you want to stay young and agile, you should practice twisting postures. They not only cleanse the internal organs, they also delay aging by keeping the spine supple.

There are twists in all degrees of difficulties: complex ones in combination with balance like the twisted standing moon or very simple twists like Ardha Matsyendra, which is also the basis of this variation.

The so-called "bind", the joining of the hands behind the back makes this simple twist a stretch for the shoulders. If the leg is also stretched like a graceful ballerina, then the back of the leg is stretched as well. However, take your time with the individual steps and don't force anything, otherwise the fine picture-book ballerina will rather become a less elegant elephant.

## IS IT FUN?

Absolutely! The prerequisite is that you are in this seated twist with or without the help of a strap.

You can tie your hands behind your body when using the belt.

## IS IT A MUST?

No, but as always: If you enjoy small, subtle, but no less exciting details, you will enjoy gimmicks like the ballerina twist. Important: Don't forget to smile!

## HOW CAN I PREP?

Sun salutations work wonders as a warm-up, especially for the mobility of the back fascia chain. Simpler twists prepare the spine for this more intense twist, such as lunge twists, warrior 1 twists, or the simple twist sit with one leg extended on the floor.

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## step by step

- 1 Start in a seated position with feet up and legs bent. In the photo you can see the twist to the left, but to aid digestion it is best to start laterally reversed with the twist to the right. To do this, pull the left foot to the right buttock and rest the knee and lower leg on the floor.
- 2 Next, place your right foot on the floor on the outside of your left thigh. In this posture, ground both sitting bones and allow the spine to grow toward the sky.
- 3 Grasp your right knee with your left hand. Inhale while extending your right arm toward the ceiling. Then, with an exhalation, place the right hand behind you on fingertips or palm.
- 4 Remain in this twist for 2-3 breaths before moving on to the bound variation. For this, push the left shoulder as far as possible in front of the right knee, so that you can reach behind the back with the right hand to the left. If this doesn't work right away, use a strap or sock to connect the hands. Continue to emphasize the length of the spine with each inhalation and avoid rounding the back.
- 5 Once this version feels stable and good, slowly try to stretch the right leg. Then after 2-5 breaths gently switch sides.









# TWISTED FORWARD FOLD

**Hah, if only it were as simple as it looks in the photo! The joke is: Eventually, it will actually get easier to twirl into Paschimottanasana as gleefully as our asana columnist. The only question is when.**

FOR SOME very agile yogis and yoginis, at some point the question arises, "What next?" You can look at this philosophically - keyword: contentment or karma yoga, i.e. doing for the sake of doing. But I want to approach it practically on the physical level: How can I continue in a position in which I am already very deep? What else might there still be to discover? In this column, I will try to show you again and again playful ways in which small (or sometimes larger) changes can open up a completely new perspective on the familiar. I am clearly not interested in "higher, faster, further" but rather in broadening the horizon before we all dissolve into Samadhi (wink wink). Pashchimottanasana, the forward bend from the long seat, is a wonderful exercise when done correctly.

Many beginners dread it, because both the stretching of the back of the legs and the patience and dedication required are quite challenging at first. Once it becomes effortless, however, you can start to deepen and play: At some point, you'll be reaching around a yoga block behind your feet or around the other wrist with one hand. The posture gets an exciting new twist in the truest sense of the word in this variation. Here forward bend, twist and side stretch are combined - and suddenly something completely new is created. A light smile helps here, too, not to dare to try this experiment too bitingly.

## IS IT FUN?

Yes, those who like it intense will get their money's worth here. Those who just want to look at it and imagine it, may undoubtedly do that as well.

## IS IT A MUST?

No. As always with Dies.Das.Asanas, everything can, nothing must. The first step is open to everyone: Close your eyes once for a moment and imagine yourself in this position. Do you see it?

## HOW CAN I PREP?

Preparation includes sun salutations and the various seated forward bends, first and foremost of course Pashchimottanasana, as well as intensive twists such as the twist sit with the leg extended or with the leg bent, and flank stretching exercises. If you can't stretch your legs in the classic forward bend from the long seat, but still want to try the twist, you have two options: either bend your knees or use a belt.

## step by step

1

We begin after the body is thoroughly warmed up, sitting with the back erect and legs extended. Initiate the active forward bend by creating length in the back with the inhalation and moving forward towards the legs with the exhalation from the strength of the center of the body.

2

Stay concentrated in this posture for at least 2-3 breaths. Use your entire body and feel exactly what the intensifying forward bend does.

3

For the rotation to the left, now reach diagonally to the left foot with your right hand and crosswise to the right foot with your left hand. Use the strength from the center of your body to gently move more and more clearly into the rotation.

4

As soon as possible, place your right elbow on the outside of your left knee. This abutment helps you to deepen the rotation further - but avoid "levering" yourself into it by force.

5

The correct position for your head and neck is the one that makes you feel comfortable. Classically, orient your gaze in the direction of the rotation. Stay in the posture for 2-5 breaths, then slowly release and switch to the other side.





FOTO: NENAD BLAŽEVIĆ



# CURVEY DOWNDOG

**"Don't sink in the shoulders!" is what we usually say in Downdog. In this wild, three-legged variation, we consciously go into a deep stretch of the entire front of the body - until the classic forward bend becomes an intense backbend.**

The Downward Looking Dog is one of my all-time favorites, even though it's so basic that I'm sure all the yogis and yoginis in the world know it. The classic form of Adho Mukha Shvanasana builds strength in the supporting apparatus and offers an opportunity to intensively engage with the back chain: This is stretched in the dog not only on a muscular level, but also on a fascial level. In vinyasa flow, the posture combines a variety of asanas, allowing us to immerse ourselves in wonderfully flowing sequences that celebrate yoga, our bodies, and life itself.

The variation of the three-legged dog that I present to you today also awakens this wild joie de vivre, but it is quite different in its physical effect:

by actively pulling the floating leg towards the sky and letting the chest sink deeply, we promote the stretching of the shoulders, middle and upper back. The chest becomes wide, the heart space opens - just like in a classic backbend. Of course, you don't need rusty tracks for this, and please don't practice in a turbulent train station either, but preferably in peace on your beloved yoga mat.

## IS THIS FUN?

Absolutely. Especially in your own four walls, "downdog" invites you to play and explore. You can practice it statically, as in the Ashtanga practice, or in the dynamics of Vinyasa or Power Yoga, you can alternately lift your legs, change the distances, rotate - and with each small change other fascia tracts

are addressed. This way you stay youthful and supple instead of always moving in the proverbial fixed tracks.

## IS IT A MUST?

No. Those who know the three-legged dog know that it can create an intense stretch of the legs, while the upper body is strengthened properly, the longer the leg remains. This variation is more for yogis who are on the way to the splits.

## HOW CAN I PREP?

Warm up thoroughly (with sun salutations, focusing on stretching the front and back of the legs and mobilizing the thoracic spine and shoulders. Be careful if you have problems with your shoulder joints!

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## step by step

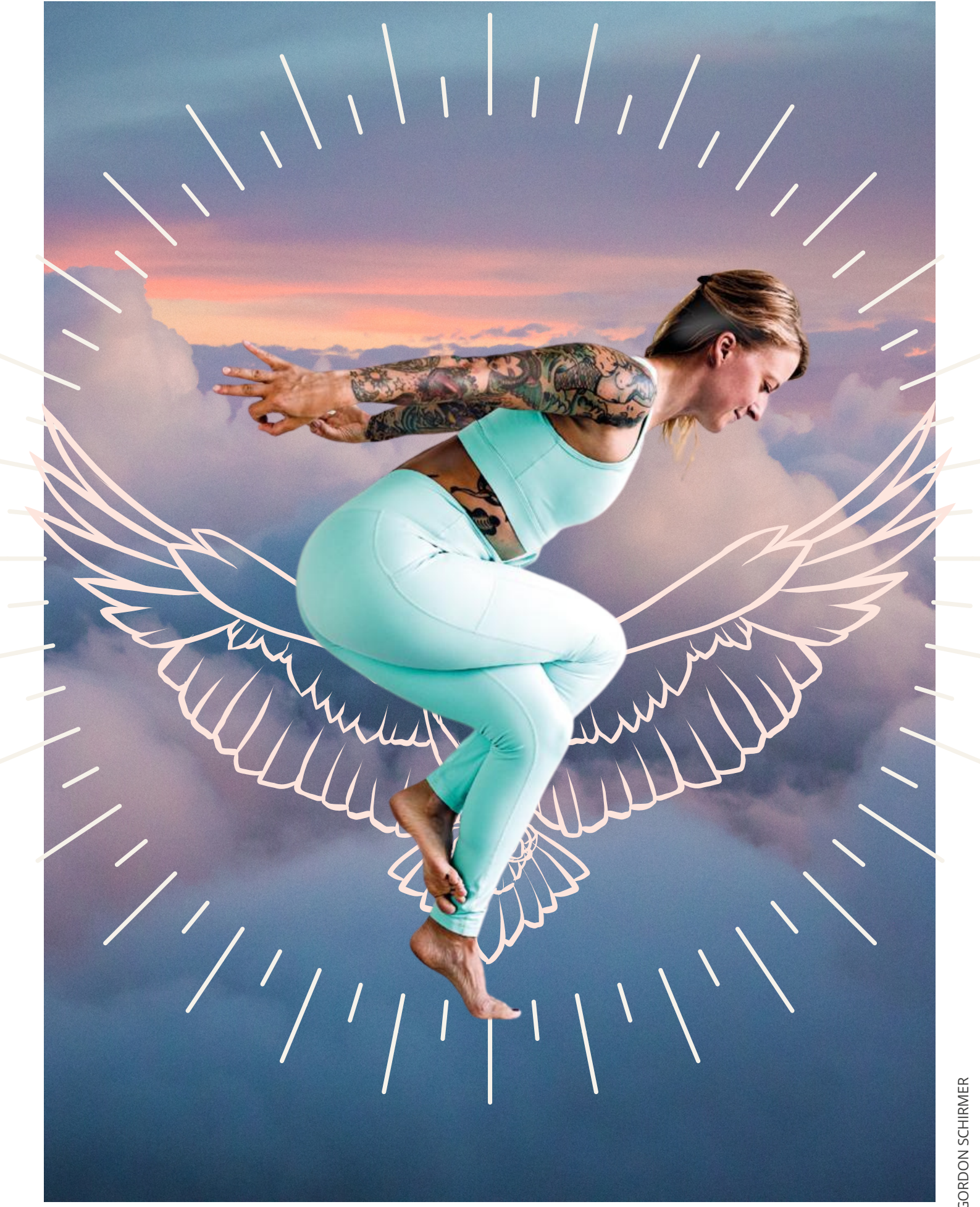
**1** We'll start in the downward looking dog: first set up your posture well. Place your feet a little wider apart than usual, if you like you can bend your knees. Activate your hands, arms and shoulders. To do this, "push the floor away" so that your shoulders move a little closer to your ears, then rotate your armpits towards the floor.

**2** Slowly lower your heart more towards the mat while looking between your hands. Stay in good contact with the center of your body: You don't want to "hang in" the posture, but practice the stretch in a controlled way. You can also gently bounce: 5-10 dynamic pulses into the stretch and out again. Remain in the stretched position for 2-5 breaths, then return to the usual dog with raised shoulders.

**3** Now lift the right leg towards the ceiling. To warm up, alternately "open" and "close" the hips, i.e., lift the leg a little higher, rotate it outward and stretch the groin upward (similar to Warrior 2). Then you align both hips parallel to the floor again (as in Warrior 1).

**4** Keep your pelvis stable in this neutral alignment when you lower your heart towards the mat. At the same time, engage your right leg actively from the strength of your buttocks. Here too, it is important to keep the tension within the center of the body, so that an arc of tension runs through the entire body. After 2-5 breaths, return to the floor. Repeat on the other side.







# FLYING EAGLE

**In this variation of Garudasana, the eagle raises its wings and pushes off powerfully for flight. Perhaps the legendary messenger of the gods of Indian mythology has an important announcement for us?**

We all know Garudasana, the eagle pose, and may have heard of its meaning in Indian mythology: Garuda is a snake-slaying, half-man, half-eagle mount of the god Vishnu. In Asian mythology, the Garuda also has the meaning of a messenger who delivers news and instructions from the gods to people, depicted with the golden body of a man, white face, red wings and an eagle's beak. (Small hint: A rather amusing interpretation of this Garuda, can be found in the blockbuster comedy "Night at the Museum 3").

The yoga garuda actually wears its arms crossed in front of its chest and has the heel of its standing leg firmly on the ground. For the variation shown here

of Garudasana, I imagine that he has had enough of squatting in his eagle's nest with his wings knotted - he gets ready to push off and soar into the sky: Wings spread backward, he lifts his heel and leans far forward for takeoff. As it is often the case with these gimmicks, this looks easier than it actually is. But don't worry: The risk of injury is so low that you can dare to try this little modification. (You know that I take care of you!).

## IS IT FUN?

Absolutely, because it's always fun to try out your own balance - preferably with a healthy mix of playful joy and serious focus. So on the one hand the eagle makes you smile, on the other hand also teaches you to have a goal and not to lose sight of it.

## IS IT A MUST?

If the classic eagle is a challenge for you, you'd better approach this variation slowly. If standing poses in combination with wobbly elements are your thing, then go for the flying eagle!

## HOW CAN I PREP?

Actually, you don't need any special prerequisites. However, you will probably be more stable in this jump-ready version after you have thoroughly warmed up your leg muscles, back and core - for example, with the help of sun salutations and the classic Garudasana.

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## step by step

1

We start in a stable, well-grounded stance. Then bend your left leg (your standing leg) and cross your right thigh over your left thigh as far up as possible. If you can, you also loop your right foot behind your lower left leg. But if you can't do this double crossing yet, it doesn't matter, just press your foot against the side of your leg. In both cases you stabilize yourself by pushing your legs firmly against each other.

2

Slowly bend forward from the hips with a straight back. At the same time stretch both arms backward. Keep your upper body stable from its center so that it does not sag downward, and pull the shoulder blades together slightly.


3

Before you try to lift your heel, choose a point to focus on the floor and fix your gaze on it to stabilize yourself. Meanwhile, feel the support from the center of your body and continue breathing calmly. All of this will help you to slowly come up on your toes while maintaining your balance.

4

Try to stay in the posture for 1-5 calm breaths. Once you are confident in your balance, focus on the qualities "soft" and "strained". Is your body soft or stiff? The breath: soft or hard? Can you be relaxed and concentrated at the same time? Afterwards, land safely on the mat again and repeat the whole thing on the other side.



A woman with blonde hair in a ponytail and extensive tattoos is performing a backbend against a white wall. She is wearing a black sports bra and maroon patterned leggings. Her hands are on the wall, and her feet are on the ground. The scene is outdoors on a paved area with shadows from trees and the wall.

**Bridge, arch or wheel are the names of a rather challenging backbend: Urdhva Dhanurasana. Here we show a playful variation on the wall. But be careful: even this bridge requires good preparation - and a lot of stability.**



# WALL BRIDGE

Our most common everyday position is sitting immobile for hours - in the car, at work at the desk, while eating and then also comfortably on the sofa. By now it is well known that this is not good for the back. This makes it all the more important to actively counteract this constant slouching and hunching forward: by practicing backbends. Not only do they stretch the entire front of the body and keep the spine supple, but also have an incredibly invigorating & strengthening effect. A regular, balanced backbend practice builds the supporting skeletal muscles and vitalizes you through and through. However, be careful: Strong bones and long muscles give us the ability to move in all directions, but only with the right combination of strength and flexibility do sensitive vertebrae and nerves remain protected. Urdhva Dhanurasana (upward pointing bow or bridge), sometimes also called Chakrasana (wheel), is certainly one of the most demanding backbends.

(If you are not yet flexible enough, if you don't warm up enough or if you don't support your mobility with enough strength and stability, you can hurt yourself pretty badly. Especially if you don't build the bridge from the supine position upwards, but let yourself sink backwards from a standing position in the advanced version. Once you know how to do it, this version feels even easier, but it also takes more effort. My suggestion: build yourself a bridge and practice on the wall. This way you can literally approach the bridge and find your individually appropriate form.

## IS IT FUN?

Of course. But only if you start carefully and avoid aiming for too much too fast. So it's better to stack the deck low. After all, no yoga master has ever fallen from the sky...

## IS IT A MUST?

No. As always, the way is the goal. You can also make the experience of strength, courage and width standing quite upright and close to the wall. Or gradually walk further and further along the wall towards the ground.

## HOW CAN I PREP?

A thorough warm-up is crucial. Here you focus on the entire front of the body and the thoracic spine: sun salutations, heart openers such as warrior 1, cobra, dog looking up and grasshopper, as well as stretches of the thighs and groin as in lunges, but also shoulder exercises such as cow head or cat.

## step by step

1

Stand upright and initially with your back relatively close to the wall. Root your feet to the floor, activate your legs and pelvic floor and powerfully straighten upward. Place both hands together in front of the chest, stretch long and lift the chest.

2

From this stable base, with one inhalation, raise one arm up and back until you reach the wall with the tips of your fingers. You may have to change your distance to the wall and start again. If everything fits, lift the second arm. Keep your heels firmly on the floor and work powerfully with your thighs, pelvic floor (mula bandha) and abdomen.

3

If you can continue to breathe freely and feel that you can go deeper in a stable and peaceful way, begin to slowly move down a little with your hands and forward a little with your feet away from the wall. Concentrate on stretching your arms long and pushing yourself with your heart towards the ceiling. At the same time, push the pelvis forward and try to use the power of the butt to pull as much length into the lower back as possible. Imagine that you are actively pushing away from the wall and going into a backbend from the strength of your upper and middle back.

4

Stay for 5-10 breaths. To leave the position safely, move your hands upwards step by step and place your feet backwards closer to the wall. Try this 2 or 3 more times. In between, relax the lower back in a loose forward bend with the legs clearly bent.







# SHIMMERING LOTUS

**Lotus flowers are something beautiful - and who would not like to sit relaxed in the lotus as a yogi\*ni? Unfortunately, that's not so easy. Instead, we bring Padmasana to bloom here in this half tilted variant.**

The lotus plays an important role almost everywhere in Asia. In Buddhism, it stands for purity of the heart, for faithfulness and enlightenment; moreover, the Buddha is said to have been born in a lotus flower. Hindus have represented the chakras with the petals of the lotus flower, because it stands for spiritual unfoldment and perfection: its roots are in the mud, it grows from the murky water to the light and unfolds with the first rays of the sun. "Om Mani Padme Hum" is the oldest and most popular mantra of the Tibetans. It means "Om, jewel in the lotus" and is said to be an expression of the basic attitude of compassion in sound and image.

No wonder that the lotus seat has such a central meaning in yoga. Especially non-yogis (apart from tree pose) think this posture represents the essence of yoga.

But lotus is not only the clichéd epitome of the practice, but also an important traditional meditation posture - yet it is anything but easy. The extreme outward rotation of the hip joints, with the legs bent and bent at the same time, not only requires a lot of practice and patience, it is simply anatomically impossible for many people. Those who do not take this into account and force themselves into the posture can injure themselves quite badly, especially in the knees. We will be content here with the half lotus, Ardha Padmasana, and combine it with a beautiful stretch in the wide side bend.

## IS IT FUN?

Absolutely. The side bend from the stable seat pulls the flanks long and

elongates the neck - combined with hip mobilization makes it a perfect combination.

## IS IT A MUST?

No. Even the half lotus is not absolutely necessary here. You can also practice the posture in Sukhasana, the simple cross-legged position. If your knees or ankles start to ache, you better sit on a meditation cushion in an elevated position.

## HOW CAN I PREP?

Mobilize your hip joints in preparation. To do this, you can lift one leg at a time with your hands while sitting and let it gently rotate. The eye of the needle or the half pigeon also help you to sit better in the lotus (and the other classic sitting postures).

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## step by step

- 1 We start in a sitting position and first try to place the right foot on the left thigh in the half lotus with the help of the hands. Be cautious: If there is tension in the knee or foot, then you better put the foot on the floor. Ground yourself through both sitting bones - here a seat elevation (cushion, blanket) can be a good idea.
- 2 Pull the left foot on the floor towards you and bend both feet to protect your knees.
- 3 With an inhalation, raise your right arm and with the next exhalation lean to your left side. While doing so, gently lean on your left hand. Make sure that your right sitting bone remains on the floor and stretch as if you want to reach the nearest wall with your fingertips. As you do so, gently lower your ear toward your shoulder and your shoulder toward the floor.
- 4 Remain in the posture for 5-10 breaths. Then gently straighten up and release the upper leg. Stretch both legs forward and move your feet before repeating these steps on the other side.







# TWISTED HEADSTAND

Once you get the hang of it, the classic headstand is actually not a very difficult posture. According to B.K.S. Iyengar, headstand (Shirshasana) and shoulderstand (Sarvangasana) are the king and queen of yoga poses - not so much because of their difficulty as because of their many effects on the body and mind: The headstand relieves the heart, supports blood circulation and lungs, and can therefore also have a rejuvenating effect. In its two classical variants, it is practiced with the forearms resting on the head and the fingers interlocked behind the head, or in the tripod version with the palms resting on the head. In the second version, there is much more weight on the top of the skull than in the first. It becomes even more extreme here: The attached fingers only serve

to support the balance. But what makes this Shirshasana really exciting and tricky is the twist. It starts at the hips and extends to the shoulders, while the head continues to rest in the center. Since the top of my skull is rather pointed towards the crown of my head, I use what is called a headstand donut. This is a cork curl that allows me to stand more stably and stay in the position longer. I haven't found it for sale anywhere yet, but you can get it through my handstand teacher Yuval (@Yuval\_on\_hands). If you have a rather flat head, you will have no difficulties in the tripod with the right practice and technique.

## IS IT FUN?

Yes! If you like Sudoku or other

Brain Teasers may also enjoy this tricky body puzzle.

## IS IT A MUST?

Of course not! However, if you already feel perfectly comfortable in the classic headstand, you are invited to play a little with this rotation of the legs and hips. Practicing in front of the wall will support you mentally and can secure you in case you fall.

## HOW CAN I PREP?

Clearly, you should be able to do the headstand with palms up before you try the twist. To warm up, not only sun salutations are helpful, but also exercises that make the back, neck and core supple and strong.

---

## step by step

1

We begin in tabletop. From here, gently place your forehead on the mat and then roll onto the center of the skullcap. Extend your arms out to the sides towards your feet. While doing so, either keep your palms flat on the floor on the floor or push the tips of your fingers in the floor.

2

Keep the neck long and powerful and bring the shoulders, arms and torso into a stable tension as you now first release the knees from the floor and move the feet a little closer to the body. (If the Tripod is not for you, you can also try the Twist from the connected headstand with forearms up and fingers interlocked).

3

Lift your legs in a controlled manner and without momentum (motto: float instead of jump!) and stretch your body long and vertically upwards at first. As soon as you are stable in the classic headstand, lower your feet sideways into a wide straddle. This is our starting position for flow into rotation.

4

Rotate the hips to the right and at the same time lower the left foot toward the right hand. As you do this, the right leg goes up to the left into the diagonal. From here you flow back into the straddle and repeat on the other side. You can keep your eyes open, I closed them for a moment for the sake of the photo.







# LITTLE BIRDIE

**Spring chirping:** The name of this pose, Tittibhasana, supposedly comes from a "ti, ti, ti" chirping bird. It doesn't look like it's going to flutter off anytime soon, but it does open up new perspectives on the world for us.

Don't be surprised: Tittibhasana is often also translated as firefly, the version with the bird is found less often - but I like it better. In Ashtanga yoga, three variations of Tittibhasana are taught. In the best-known, Tittibhasana A, you balance on your hands and stretch your legs forward and up over your arms. Gymnasts know this as "Swiss" - and just like in yoga, this pose is considered the trickiest transition to handstand.

Here you can see my variation on Tittibhasana B. In the classic version of this forward bend from standing, the hands are clasped behind the back and then, knotted with yourself this way, you go five

steps forward and back again. But where is the front and where is the back in this position? In any case, the feet point in a different direction than the face. This is also the case in our variant, but we do without the clasped hands and instead place them together in front of the heart in Anjali Mudra. This is a little easier and it helps you to center and orient yourself head over heels as well.

## IS THIS FUN?

Definitely! Especially if you find forward bending easy, you'll have fun with this strange bird. But as always: Everything can, nothing must. Feel your way gently - the backs of your legs and hips should already be very mobile, even for this easier variation.

## IS IT A MUST?

Of course not. Practice this asana only if you can maintain contact between your upper body and thighs. This is usually the case when you can approximately stretch your legs in the turtle (Kurmasana).

## HOW CAN I PREP?

Intense forward bends like this need good preparation so that the body is thoroughly warmed up and its back side is nice and supple. This includes sun salutations and of course forward bends like standing straddle (Prasarita Padottanasana), seated straddle (Upavishta Konasana) and turtle (Kurmasana). My tip: Also use the PNF stretching method to actively develop more flexibility.

## step by step

- 1 Start in the standing forward bend (Uttanasana), put the arms around the legs and reach around the elbows. Stay in this posture for a while and feel the contact between the upper body and thighs. Relax the neck and let the head dangle freely. Also, alternately bend and straighten your knees to intensify the stretch a bit more.
- 2 Increase the distance between your feet without straightening up. You can do this by alternately pushing your toes and heels a little toes and heels outward until you find a comfortable distance.

- 3 Hug your feet from behind at the heels, bend your knees slightly and push your shoulders a little more past your thighs. You can increase or decrease the distance between your feet as needed.
- 4 Place your palms together in front of your chest and slowly stretch your legs. Then push your chest over your elbows past your legs.
- 5 For the classic, bound variation, bend your knees slightly and interlace your fingers behind your back. Then straighten your legs again. If you're feeling adventurous, try taking a few steps back and forth.





**It's not so easy to keep a cool head in Jelena's playful asana variations - even if it looks like it in this photo for once. But behind the playfulness there is always a lot of potential for improving strength, coordination and body awareness.**



# FIGURE 7

## HEADSTAND

The headstand (Shirshasana) has, as we know, a lot of positive effects on body and mind: It supports the blood circulation and promotes the lymph flow, which not only means a relief of the heart but also provides more oxygen for the brain. Good reasons, then, why the headstand has landed on Swami Siva nanda's top 3 list of the best asanas.

The number 7 describes the shape created in this variation by the position of the legs and torso. But don't be fooled: It's more than just a play on possible positions. The 7 headstand is also a good opportunity to become aware of your core: With a hollow back, you can shape that 7 pretty easily - too easily, in fact, because it involves cheating: An extremely concave lower back causes an elongated abdomen and thus a loss of control of the Core.

Instead, we want to enable the legs to do these (and other) variations from awake bandhas, an active body center and a contraction of the ribs. Similarly, the 7 can also be practiced in a handstand to build strength and flexibility in the shoulders. This can also be done with the feet against the wall.

### IS THIS FUN?

Definitely. If you already feel perfectly comfortable in headstand (whether against the wall or standing freely), you will enjoy new possibilities for play. However, for this variation you need a certain mobility of the back fascia chain, especially of the hamstring muscles, i.e. the backs of the legs. If these are shortened, the stretched leg will not float parallel to the floor, but rather diagonally.

### IS IT A MUST?

No. A straight headstand with straight legs and a well-controlled torso (abdomen and lower back) is already very advanced, this is completely sufficient - and is also the basic prerequisite for all variations. If you are unsure about your balance, try the 7 with your back to the wall first.

### HOW CAN I PREP?

A thorough warm-up with sun salutations, strengthening abdominal exercises and forward bends to stretch the backs of your legs (single-legged as in pyramid and classic standing) will help prepare you for this headstand adventure. Very important, even if the headstand appears again and again in this column and I emphasize it again and again: Please do NOT jump into the headstand, but let your legs float upwards in a controlled way! Your cervical spine and the surrounding muscles will thank you.

## step by step

- 1 We start on all fours. Interlace your fingers and place your elbows a little narrower than shoulder width in front of you. Place your pinkie finger into your fist to be able to be able to put weight on both edges of your hands. Place the crown of your head between your forearms so that the back of your head is supported by your hands.
- 2 First come into half headstand by aligning the pelvis vertically over the shoulders. To do this, first come up on your toes and move your feet a little closer to your chest.
- 3 The easiest way to move the legs upward in a controlled manner is to draw the knees together or one after the other, and then slowly begin to straighten the legs until you reach the classic straight headstand.
- 4 In order to come to 7, activate the pelvic floor and abdomen even more and lower the legs slowly and as straight as possible towards the floor. The goal is to align them horizontally. As shown here bend one leg and let the foot point towards the ceiling, you may make this alignment a little easier.
- 5 All the while, actively press up from the shoulders and do not allow the ribs to fan out, but on the contrary, rather contract them. When you can move both legs parallel, then raise and lower them 5-10 times. In the variation shown, with one leg bent leg, you alternate 5-10 times. Then release the posture slowly and carefully and relax for several breaths in a child's position. For more learning experience, repeat the whole thing 3 times.







FOTO: SOFIA GOMEZ FONZO



# RADIANT GODDESS

**Well grounded, persistent and connected with the power of the pelvis - all this is the effect of "Goddess Pose". But men can - and should - also get something out of this goddess.**

## **Goddess Pose aka Utkata Konasana:**

The name makes it quite clear that we are dealing with a very special yoga posture. You may know it from pregnancy yoga, where it is often used to dilate the uterus and prepare for birth. Yet it can do much more: it strengthens the legs and mental stamina while promoting a sense of support and grounding. The idea is that with the power of this goddess, you can access more inner strength and the overriding feminine principle. This is important not only for women: we are all too often tempted to follow the "male" principles of ego, competitive spirit,

Rigidity and stress and to concentrate a lot of energy in the head. It is therefore all the more important to return consciously to where the base of our energy centers (the chakras) are located, namely in our pelvis. The goddess provides us with a stable stance, mobilizes the hips and creates presence and awareness in the pelvis, while at the same time strengthening the urogenital tract, the cardiovascular system and our breathing.

## **IS THIS FUN?**

Absolutely - and that doesn't just apply to women! Everyone can use a little range of motion in the hips and strength in the pelvis. If you also have a desire for well-toned legs, you will

find its joy (or its final opponent) in holding this position for a longer time.

## **IS IT A MUST?**

The risk factor for injury is extremely low with this asana, so it is accessible to beginners and older yogis and yoginis.

## **HOW CAN I PREP?**

A few sun salutations will get your circulation going and warm up your leg muscles. While standing (Tada- sana), practice lifting your heels without falling over, which strengthens your calf muscles. The deep squat of the frog position or even the half frog in prone position will help you mobilize your hips to prepare for the goddess.

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## step by step

- 1 Start standing lengthwise on your mat and spread your stance into a wide straddle, turning your toes slightly outward, keeping your heels on the mat at the beginning.
- 2 Concentrate first on bending the knees and strength in the pelvis and hips. Do not allow your knees to fall forward, but constantly push them outward.
- 3 Stay as upright as possible in the torso and gently tilt your pelvis back so that your lumbar spine remains long and you don't get a hollow back.
- 4 Place your palms together in front of your heart or let your hands rest on your legs as you now lift your heels and play with the balance on your toes.
- 5 Once you are stable, take your arms above your head and try to balance as upright as possible on your toes for a few breaths, letting your inner and outer goddess shine.





FOTO: ALJOSA PETRICIC



# YIN & YANG IN SIDEPLANK

The dance of polarities already plays an important role in Patanjali's Yoga Sutra. In yoga classes, the principle of *stira sukham asanam* is woven into the asana practice as a philosophical gift. It can be found in the second chapter of the Sutra, that is in *Sadhana-Pada*, the practice part. There is a lot of dispute about the exact interpretation. R. Sriram translates the text with "The ideal posture is stable and light at the same time." Sometimes it is also said, "Asanas should have the qualities of strength and relaxation in equal measure." Or, "The seat is firm and light." Similar to how Chinese philosophy seeks to bring the poles of yin and yang into harmony, *Stira Sukha* thus also describes the emergence of the whole through the connection of opposites. *Vasisthasana*, the side support, is a challenging posture that balances the body and the mind, while

some tension is required. At the same time, it addresses our heart chakra and thus promotes access to self-love, a peaceful interaction with ourselves. I am especially interested in the balance between effort and lightness, yang and yin, *stira* and *sukha*, because especially in arm balances one can easily fall into old patterns of effort. The more interesting it becomes to let the principle of polarities flow into the practice and to perceive the power in this supporting position and at the same time to go in search of lightness.

## IS IT FUN?

Absolutely. This asana has variations for all levels, which makes it accessible to beginners: In the easy variant, the lower knee stays on the floor and you focus more on the quality of the posture than on the form.

## IS IT A MUST?

No, but if you ever feel like doing something for your body tension, in this case especially for the oblique abdominal muscles, buttocks, legs and arms, then the side support is ideal. If you notice that it is difficult for you, then practice it consciously 2-3 times per side and try to hold it for 5 breaths or longer. This way you will build more strength and endurance.

## HOW CAN I PREP?

Your wrists will be grateful for a little warm-up. For this, you can interlace your fingers and let the joints circle for 30 seconds. To get your circulation going, you'll also practice 3-5 sun salutations before moving on to the side plank.

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## step by step

**1** We start in *down dog*. Set your feet a little further back and closer together to each other and shift your weight a little forward until the shoulders are approximately vertical above the hands. This is how you get into the inclined plane (also called plank posture).

**2** Now shift your weight to your right hand and turn your body into space. You have different options for the legs: In the classic variation you stretch both legs and "stack" your bent feet on top of each other. You can also place the upper foot on the floor in front of the lower one, or even the lower knee. In either case, you align the left hip vertically above the right and the left shoulder over the right.

How much strength do you need? Where can you find ease? Choose a variation that gives you just that balance.

**3** The best way to recognize the right level of intensity is to breathe calmly. Stabilize yourself from the center of your body and stretch your body long. At the same time, release excess tension, especially in the upper arm and face.

**4** If you would rather use a little more force, then additionally (as in the photo) bend the upper leg and place your free hand on the knee. This hand on the knee is your reminder of the principles of the sutras: Be strong and confident and at the same time kind to yourself. Breathe with ease. This kindness you can well achieve and support with a benevolent smile and support it.

**5** Stay in the posture for 5-10 breaths, then repeat the side support on the other side as well. Tip: If one side feels much weaker, practice it longer or give it more repetitions.



## Practice with me online or in real life:

1. Find me on Instagram as @kickassyoga and on facebook and youtube
2. Work towards your goals with my 1:1 Online Coaching
3. Practice with my 8 week online yoga program (German only).
4. Click here for my online teaching schedule
5. Click here for my festivals, retreats and events





## Funky Asanas

I hope that some of my hybrid variants have encouraged you to just hop on your mat and try them out! If you are longing for even more inspiration, then have a look online at youtube, Insta & Co or send me a message. And of course my column continues to run in Yoga Journal Germany magazine, which is published every 2 months.

Find out more about the column: [yogaworld.de/dies-das-asanas/](http://yogaworld.de/dies-das-asanas/)



*Thank you!*

"To me, yoga is more than just bodywork. My practice allows me to express myself through movement and to feel comfortable and at home within myself."



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