Kripalu

YOGA TEACHER TRAINING MANUAL

200-HOUR TRAINING
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Inquiries should be directed to the Kripalu Schools of Yoga and Ayurveda at ksy@kripalu.org.
part 1
- agreements
- self-care

part 2
- yoga philosophy
- anatomy, physiology, and kinesiology
- benefits of yoga

part 3
- kripalu yoga
- teaching methodology
- warm ups
- asana
- safe hands-on assists
- teaching pranayama
- teaching meditation
- guiding relaxation

part 4
- practice teaching
- student journal of assessments
# Content

**Kripalu Yoga Teacher Training Manual 200-Hour Training**

## Part 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1.1</th>
<th>an integrative approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>kripalu school of yoga and ayurveda</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.3</td>
<td>student-teacher mantra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.4</td>
<td>the learning environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.7</td>
<td>kripalu yoga teacher-in-training responsibility agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>kripalu yoga teacher-in-training 200-hour criteria for certification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>kripalu yoga teacher’s ethics agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>kripalu yoga teacher-in-training responsibility agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.17</td>
<td>kripalu yoga teacher-in-training 200-hour criteria for certification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1.21</td>
<td>kripalu yoga teacher’s ethics agreement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Self-Care

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>2.1</th>
<th>the kripalu approach</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>receiving care while you are here</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>the kripalu approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>ayurveda: aligning with natural rhythms</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>the kripalu approach</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.10</td>
<td>conscious communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.11</td>
<td>step one: “I” statement to awaken awareness and creative force</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.13</td>
<td>step two: co-listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.14</td>
<td>step three: reflective listening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.15</td>
<td>step four: empowering feedback</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Part 2

### Yoga Philosophy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>3.3</th>
<th>classical yoga</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3.3</td>
<td>teachings on consciousness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>patanjali’s eight-limbed path</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.5</td>
<td>five yamas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.7</td>
<td>five niyamas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.9</td>
<td>the eight limbs embodied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.10</td>
<td>the kosa-based kripalu method</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.11</td>
<td>the koshas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>the koshas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.13</td>
<td>the kripalu philosophy family tree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>the kripalu lineage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.14</td>
<td>lakulisha</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.20</td>
<td>three stages of kripalu yoga</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Anatomy, Physiology, and Kinesiology

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4.2</th>
<th>skeleton—anterolateral view</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4.3</td>
<td>skeleton—posterior view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>skeleton—lateral view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>details of pelvis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>details of hip joint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.6</td>
<td>joints and ligaments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>superficial muscle layer—anterolateral view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.8</td>
<td>superficial muscle layer—posterior view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.9</td>
<td>superficial muscle layer—lateral view</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.10</td>
<td>intermediate muscle layer—anterolateral view</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## 4.11 intermediate muscle layer—posterior view
## 4.12 deep muscle layer—anterior view
## 4.13 deep muscle layer—posterior view
## 4.17 the spine
## 4.22 yoga and the body systems

### benefits of yoga

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5.2</td>
<td>speaking about the traditional benefits of yoga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.3</td>
<td>speaking about the modern science benefits of yoga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>speaking about the benefits of yoga</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.5</td>
<td>evidence-based yoga for special populations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.6</td>
<td>working with a student with a medical condition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.8</td>
<td>references</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## part 3

### kripalu yoga

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>6.3</td>
<td>kripalu yoga stages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.4</td>
<td>kripalu yoga stages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.5</td>
<td>kripalu yoga tool bag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>stage one tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>stage two tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.10</td>
<td>stage three tools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.11</td>
<td>tools for all three stages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.12</td>
<td>tools for all three stages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.13</td>
<td>tools for all three stages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.14</td>
<td>tools for all three stages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.15</td>
<td>tools for all three stages</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.16</td>
<td>a model of transformation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.17</td>
<td>b.r.f.w.a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### kripalu yoga

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>7.1</td>
<td>teaching philosophy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>teaching methodology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.3</td>
<td>creating the context for learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.8</td>
<td>developing awareness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.11</td>
<td>awareness of support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.14</td>
<td>teaching and guiding a new posture to beginners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.15</td>
<td>e.s.r.i.t</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.16</td>
<td>class design and sequencing the planning process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.18</td>
<td>the art of sequencing</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
content

Kripalu Yoga Teacher Training Manual 200-Hour Training

7.20  lesson planning form

warm-ups

8.4  head lift and tilt
8.5  head side-to-side
8.6  upper back cat and dog
8.8  dolphin dives
8.9  extended seated side stretch
8.10 extended seated side stretch
8.11  seated twist
8.12  side stretch arm circles
8.13  sun breaths
8.14  torso cat and dog
8.15  torso circles
8.16  hip openers
8.17  hip openers with twist
8.18 modified table
8.19  table cat/dog
8.20  table cat and dog circles
8.21  puppy pose
8.22  thread the needle
8.23  table twist
8.24  parighasana
8.25  cross-crawl
8.26  hips side-to-side
8.27  hip circles
8.28  hamstring stretch
8.29  runner’s lunge
8.30  arm circles
8.31  side-to-side extended arms
8.32  lunge arm circles
8.33  pelvic tilt
8.34  sun salutation
8.36  child
8.38  plank
8.40  four-limbed staff
8.42  upward-facing dog

asana

9.1  asana
9.2  general guidance
9.6  benefits, precautions, and contraindications
9.8  leading the new posture
9.8  use of language
9.10 simple, clear, and effective posture cues
9.12  questions and clarifications
9.13  leading stage one
9.15  action words for guiding postures
9.16  yoga posture sheets
9.17  checklist
9.17 core asana set
9.19  boat
9.27  bound angle
9.35  bow
9.43  bridge
9.51  cobra
9.59  downward-facing dog
9.67  eagle
9.75  fish
9.83  gate
9.91  half moon
9.99  half shoulderstand
9.107  head to knee
9.115  knee-down twist
9.123  mountain
9.131  pigeon
9.139  posterior stretch
9.147  seated spinal twist
9.155  side warrior
9.163 standing squat

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9.171 standing wide angle
9.179 symbol of yoga
9.187 tree
9.195 triangle
9.203 upward boat
9.211 warrior

safe hands-on assists
10.1 assisting
10.3 types of safe assists
10.4 press points overview
10.4 awareness through alignment
10.5 various press points
10.8 press points: front
10.9 press points: back

teaching pranayama
11.1 pranayama: yogic breathing
11.3 using pranayama in a beginner-level yoga class
11.4 teaching basic pranayama
11.5 chapter learning outcomes
11.6 basic pranayama techniques

teaching meditation
12.1 meditation practice
12.4 seated postures
12.6 centering a group
12.8 chanting om
12.9 centering intentions
12.10 concentration meditation
12.11 developmental sequence for concentration meditation
12.12 awareness meditation
12.13 meditation as doing nothing
12.13 meditation on the third eye, ajna chakra
12.14 slow-motion prana
12.15 teaching tips for kripalu meditation

guiding relaxation
13.1 the purpose of relaxation
13.1 types of relaxation
13.2 teaching methodology contraction and release
13.5 corpse
13.6 corpse
13.9 relaxation options

part 4

review

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Welcome to the Kripalu School of Yoga (KSY). The curriculum we have created draws inspiration from ancient tradition, primarily the classical yoga of Patanjali, along with modern science, to develop a profound understanding of yoga and its personal and universal impact. One of the goals of the 200-Hour Kripalu Yoga Teacher Training is to kindle trust for the body’s intelligence, encouraging a practice rooted in self-awareness and self-care. This approach steadies the mind, invigorates the body, stimulates the heart, and cultivates self-observation without judgment—a key principle of Kripalu Yoga.

KSY has been training Kripalu Yoga teachers for more than 40 years. While our curriculum continues to evolve in service of our current global community, our school is inspired by dedicated yoga explorers like you. Thank you for choosing our certification program.

Namaste.

Yoganand Michael Carroll
Dean, Kripalu School of Yoga
kripalu school of yoga and ayurveda

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student-teacher mantra

Also known as the Prayer for Harmony, and Shanti Mantra

Sanskrit Transliteration

Om Saha na-va-vatu  
Saha Nau Bhu-naktu  
Saha viryam karav-va-vahai  
Tejas-vi na-vadhi-tam astu  
Ma vid-visha-vahai  
Om shanti, shanti, shanti

Asato ma sada ga-maya  
Tamaso ma jyotir ga-maya  
Mrityor ma amritam ga-maya

Om shanti, shanti, shanti

English Translation

May we be protected together  
May we be nourished together  
May we work together with great vigor  
May our study be enlightening  
May no obstacle arise between us  
Om peace, peace, peace

Lead us from the unreal to the real  
Lead us from the darkness to the light  
Lead us from death to immortality

Om peace, peace, peace
the learning environment

Respect the Retreat Space

- Be respectful of each other.
- Keep the program room clean.
- Return props (blankets, blocks, cushions, BackJack® chairs, chairs, and straps) neatly to their proper place.
- Dispose of used tissues, and place recyclables in appropriate bins.
- Take personal items with you after each session (except yoga mat).
- Return all dishes to the Dining Hall—do not leave them around the building.
- Beverages are allowed only in closed containers with a sealable lid.
- No food or coffee in the room.
- Place shoes on rack in hallway.
- Place your sacred items on the altar.

Role of a Student

- Attendance and participation at all sessions is mandatory for certification.
- Arrive early for all sessions to sign in and set up. Be ready to begin on time.
- Bring manual, anatomy book, journal, and mala beads to all sessions.
- Reading assignments may be given during the program. Please use these assignments to enhance your learning.
- Wear your name tag at all times.
- Be attentive and alert in class. No side conversations.
- Say name first when speaking. Balance between not sharing and oversharing.
- Practice silence entering and leaving morning sadhana and evening sadhana.
• Participate fully in every sadhana. Inform staff if you are not feeling well.
• There are no scheduled bathroom breaks during the program sessions. You are free to quietly leave the program room as needed.
• Wear modest yoga attire to classes.
• Refrain from using scented products of any kind at Kripalu, out of respect for those with sensitivities.
• The regular practice of yoga asana and the philosophical principles of yoga can be stimulating on many levels. Taking time for personal silence between class sessions and during meals can help to integrate the experience.

Living and Learning in Community
• Co-listening and conscious communication techniques are built into the curriculum. Students are encouraged to work with these methods in interactions with fellow students and staff throughout the training.
• Practicing yoga and intimate community living may increase energy that can be mistaken for romantic feelings. Romantic and/or sexual relationships have a tendency to be distracting. Refrain from entering into a new romantic relationship during this program.
• There is time available in almost every session to speak relevant thoughts, questions, feelings, and insights into the room. There may be time boundaries set by the session leader out of respect for the overall process. Faculty, staff managers, and assistants are available outside of class for one-on-one meetings.

General Kripalu Information and Guidelines
• The Dining Hall is open 24 hours a day for beverages, except during meal setup and cleanup.
• Sun Room (silent, computer-free), Meditation Room (silent), Silent Study Room, and the cafe and lounge are open 24 hours a day and are available for laptop work and quiet conversation.
• Whirlpool for women and sauna are open 5:00 am to 10:00 pm.
• Building-wide quiet hours run from 10:00 pm to 5:30 am. All exterior doors lock at 10:30 pm. After this time, please use circle drive entrance.
• No cell phone calls except in phone booths and Luggage Room. Do not bring cell phone into program room, even if it is off.
• Wi-fi access: Wireless Internet access is available in the Kripalu Cafe. Please do not use computers in other areas.
• Guest kitchen with refrigerator and microwave is located on the Fourth Floor. Please label and date all items.
• In case of emergency, use any house phone to call the Front Desk, ext. 3165.

Dormitory—Shared Housing Etiquette

• Quiet hours are from 10:00 pm to 5:30 am. Overhead lights must be turned out by 9:30 pm. Personal bed lights may be used until 10:00 pm.
• Close door softly when coming or going.
• No alarms set before 5:30 am. Do not use snooze button on alarm clock. If using cell phone alarm, it must be set to alarm-only mode. No texting during quiet hours.
• Kripalu is a smoke- and flame-free environment. Per the State Fire Marshal, please do not burn candles, incense, sage, or any other materials on Kripalu property.
• Keep your belongings confined to your assigned personal space (i.e., your bed, drawers, and closet area). If you’re staying in a dormitory or shared room, please do not spread out to empty beds and/or storage spaces in your room, as they will likely be assigned to other Kripalu guests or students during your stay.
kripalu yoga teacher-in-training responsibility agreement

I understand that Kripalu Yoga Teacher Training is a physically and psychologically rigorous residential immersion program. I am responsible for my experience in the Kripalu Yoga Teacher Training and for my well-being while at Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health. I agree to support Kripalu’s retreat environment and contribute to a safe, respectful, and positive experience for everyone in-house during my stay.

I understand that the practice of yoga often produces non-ordinary states of awareness, and that Kripalu program instructors and staff are not responsible for managing every student’s personal needs. I understand that the 200-Hour Kripalu Yoga Teacher Training curriculum has been designed to create the optimal yoga education for the majority of students, and each specific experience may have content that differs from my beliefs. I understand that the study of yoga involves exploring and discussing different belief systems. I agree to respect all the ideas and practices that are presented as part of the 200-Hour Kripalu Yoga Teacher Training curriculum. I understand that any ideas presented are not necessarily the view of Kripalu. I understand that Kripalu is not requiring me to change my beliefs in any way in order to be certified as a 200-Hour Kripalu Yoga teacher.

I understand that practicing yoga is often about exploring new boundaries and personal limitations. I recognize that activities of this nature involve an element of physical, emotional, and psychological risk. I understand that each person’s level of physical and psychological fitness is different, and that some activities may not be appropriate for me given my individual capacities. I accept the need to monitor my own participation in each activity, and each exercise within any given activity, and that Kripalu is not responsible for any physical and psychological risk I choose to take in my education, exploration, and inquiry.

Although my attendance is required in each session for me to become certified as a Kripalu Yoga teacher, my participation is never required if I feel unsafe in any way. It is my responsibility to honor my physical and psychological boundaries, and if I feel unsafe in any way, to stop participation in an experience and speak to a staff member.

Substance Use

The use or abuse of alcohol or other recreational drugs is prohibited during the training and is not allowed on the premises. Violation of this policy at any time during the training will result in dismissal from the program with no refunds.
Kripalu Promotional Efforts

At times Kripalu takes photographs and makes audio and video recordings of guests to promote the benefits of participating in its programs and activities. Whenever these activities are happening, I can tell Kripalu staff that I do not want to participate, or move to a place in the room that is not being photographed or recorded. Otherwise I hereby consent to being the subject of any photographs or audio/video recordings made during my stay by Kripalu staff, and grant permission for these to be published or posted in ways that promote Kripalu.

Social Media and Posting of Photographs and Videos

Kripalu recognizes that a portion of its guests wish to photograph or record aspects of their program experience to post on social media sites such as Facebook and YouTube. In order to protect the privacy of others, Kripalu requires that all guests agree not to post or publish any photographs, video, or audio recordings of other individuals, or make use of the Kripalu name or logo, without express permission. I understand that I am solely responsible and potentially liable for any harm or damages caused by my online activity relating to Kripalu.

Release of Liability

After being informed of the above risks and responsibilities, I generally release Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health, together with its instructors and other representatives, from all claims, causes of action, medical expenses, and other costs related to my guest participation, whether they arise while at Kripalu, or from my later use of information or instruction at home.

I will abide by the terms of this Kripalu Yoga Teacher-in-Training Responsibility Agreement because it makes me aware of Kripalu’s policies and creates a legally binding general release of liability.

Signature: ________________________________ Date: _____________

Name: ____________________________________
(please print)

Reference Copy to Keep
kripalu yoga teacher-in-training 200-hour criteria for certification

This program is intended to result in certification as a Kripalu Yoga teacher. Certified Kripalu Yoga teachers must possess a certain level of emotional and mental stability, and the skills necessary to safely and competently teach yoga. You will be evaluated on the criteria listed below. Although the majority of students who attend complete this program and are certified, we reserve the right to withhold certification from any student who fails to develop the necessary skills and meet the criteria described below.

In the event that you do not make satisfactory progress, every attempt will be made to provide input throughout the program about challenges that might be impeding your certification. If it is determined that you have not successfully met the certification requirements, you will meet with the teacher trainers, who will determine the appropriate steps needed for you to complete certification. This process may include working with a certified Kripalu Yoga teacher or mentor at additional expense. The specifics of any additional work required will be determined individually, based on the needs of each student. In most cases, this process takes from three to six months, but may take up to a year to complete. In the case of extended study and a pending certification, the student and the teacher trainers will agree upon the terms of continued study and sign a letter outlining the required steps and the timeline agreed upon with the teacher trainers and the Director of the Kripalu Schools of Yoga and Ayurveda. Students who are unable to complete the additional requirements within a year from the end date of the program must repeat the training in order to be certified. Any student denied certification by the teacher trainers has the right to seek the review of the Director of the Kripalu Schools of Yoga and Ayurveda, whose decision will be final.

Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health reserves the right to ask any student enrolled in a yoga teacher training program to leave the program if the School of Yoga determines that student is not a good fit for the program. There are no refunds available if a student is asked to leave a training.
Certification Requirements

Attendance

100 percent attendance is required. You are responsible for marking the attendance roster each day. To be considered present, you must arrive on time and stay for the duration of the session, or you must talk to training staff before leaving a session. The staff will note tardiness, and excessive tardiness will result in not receiving certification. If you need to miss any session, you must speak to a teacher-trainer prior to the session. You are responsible for making up hours and any course material missed.

Active Class Participation

Being fully present and actively participating in the daily activities of class to the best of your abilities is required. Actively participating enables you to process, apply, interact, and share experiences as part of the educational process. The interactive components support the goal and the educational objectives for learning to be an effective Kripalu Yoga teacher.

Teaching Competence and Proficiency

Students must demonstrate command of the skills necessary to safely and competently teach a Kripalu Yoga class. Participation in all practice-teaching sessions is mandatory for certification. During these sessions and throughout the training you must demonstrate the ability to teach Kripalu Yoga using the methodology presented in the training as noted below:

• Demonstrate knowledge, embodiment, and modeling of postures, including modifications, intuitive and evidence-based benefits, contraindications, and alignment principles.
• Demonstrate understanding and use of effective conscious communication skills.
• Demonstrate ability to lead basic pranayama, guided meditation, and relaxation.
• Demonstrate fundamental knowledge of basic anatomy and physiology—muscles, bones, and systems.
• Demonstrate knowledge of Kripalu Yoga philosophy and methodology.

Maintain Safe Space for Teaching and Practicing Yoga

Students must have the ability to create a safe space for people to learn and practice yoga through demonstrating the following abilities:

• Appropriately direct and manage attention toward oneself and others.
• Receive and integrate constructive feedback.
• Show respect for other students, and for guests, time, and the experience.
• Articulate, describe, and embody the Kripalu Yoga Teacher’s Ethics Agreement.
• Bring forth personal needs and concerns to appropriate staff in a timely manner.

Assessments
Students will be given a series of assessments designed to support integration of content. The assignments include self-reflective based journaling, lesson reviews, and practice teaching exercises. The successful completion of these assessments, as determined by the training staff, is required for certification.

Take-Home Assignments (multi-session formats only)
Students attending the trainings that are multiple sessions, such as the 2x12, may be given assignments to complete between segments. Students must satisfactorily complete and submit all assignments and materials in order to receive certification.

Professional Behavior and Ethical Conduct
Professional behavior and ethical conduct create an environment that promotes a safe, high-quality student experience and engenders a constructive learning environment. The following are guidelines for professional behavior and ethical conduct:
• Maintain cleanliness and a neat appearance, and dress appropriately for class.
• Listen respectfully to students and teachers during group activities and personal sharing.
• Respect the cultural and religious differences of others.
• Remain truthful in verbal and written communications.
• Communicate differences in opinion and good-faith criticism respectfully, in the appropriate forum.
• Be on time for class and meetings.
• Keep shared student information confidential.

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By signing below, I verify that I have read and understand the above certification criteria. I understand that failure to adequately meet these criteria may result in not being granted certification after I have commenced participation.

Signature: ___________________________________________ Date: ______________

Name: ________________________________________________
(please print)

Reference Copy to Keep
kripalu yoga teacher’s ethics agreement

Kripalu Yoga teachers offer experiential yoga classes and programs. The nature of yoga promotes physical and psychological growth through which profound transformation can occur. As a yoga teacher, you must possess a high degree of emotional maturity and personal integrity in order to serve and empower your students, as it is your responsibility to uphold and foster a sacred, safe environment to allow transformation to happen.

As a Kripalu Yoga teacher, I agree to the following code of ethics:

• I agree to have a sincere commitment to provide the highest-quality care to those who seek my professional services.

• I agree to represent my qualifications honestly and provide only the services I am qualified and certified to perform. I agree to refrain from recommending treatment, diagnosing a condition, or suggesting that a student disregard medical advice. I agree to acknowledge the limitations and contraindications of yoga and refer students to the appropriate health-care professionals.

• I agree to consistently maintain and improve my professional knowledge and competence, striving for professional excellence through regular assessment of personal and professional strengths and weaknesses and through continued education and training.

• I agree that effective yoga teaching often involves some physical contact applied in an atmosphere of safety. It is my responsibility as a teacher to create and maintain a safe environment that engenders trust and mutual respect among students and teacher. I agree to offer compassionate, competent, and safe touch to my students when assisting them in yoga classes.

• I agree that an essential part of teaching Kripalu Yoga is the development and maintenance of a professional teacher/student relationship. This includes establishing clear and appropriate social and sexual boundaries.

• I agree to refrain, under all circumstances, from initiating or engaging in any sexual conduct, sexual activities, or sexualizing behavior involving a student, even if the student attempts to sexualize the relationship.

• I agree to conduct my business and professional activities with honesty and integrity.

• I agree to refuse to unjustly discriminate against students.
• I agree to avoid any interest, activity, or influence that might be in conflict with my obligation as a teacher to act in the best interest of the students.

• I agree to respect students’ boundaries with regard to privacy, disclosure, emotional expression, and beliefs.

• I agree and understand that all actions that breach the principles of this Kripalu Yoga Teacher’s Ethics Agreement will be fairly investigated. I understand that if the situation warrants, my certification as a Kripalu Yoga teacher may be revoked or restricted.

Signature: _________________________________________________ Date: ______________________

Name: ________________________________________________________
(please print)

Reference Copy to Keep
Kripalu Yoga Teacher-in-Training Responsibility Agreement

I understand that Kripalu Yoga Teacher Training is a physically and psychologically rigorous residential immersion program. I am responsible for my experience in the Kripalu Yoga Teacher Training and for my well-being while at Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health. I agree to support Kripalu’s retreat environment and contribute to a safe, respectful, and positive experience for everyone in-house during my stay.

I understand that the practice of yoga often produces non-ordinary states of awareness, and that Kripalu program instructors and staff are not responsible for managing every student’s personal needs. I understand that the 200-Hour Kripalu Yoga Teacher Training curriculum has been designed to create the optimal yoga education for the majority of students, and each specific experience may have content that differs from my beliefs. I understand that the study of yoga involves exploring and discussing different belief systems. I agree to respect all the ideas and practices that are presented as part of the 200-Hour Kripalu Yoga Teacher Training curriculum. I understand that any ideas presented are not necessarily the view of Kripalu. I understand that Kripalu is not requiring me to change my beliefs in any way in order to be certified as a 200-Hour Kripalu Yoga teacher.

I understand that practicing yoga is often about exploring new boundaries and personal limitations. I recognize that activities of this nature involve an element of physical, emotional, and psychological risk. I understand that each person’s level of physical and psychological fitness is different, and that some activities may not be appropriate for me given my individual capacities. I accept the need to monitor my own participation in each activity, and each exercise within any given activity, and that Kripalu is not responsible for any physical and psychological risk I choose to take in my education, exploration, and inquiry.

Although my attendance is required in each session for me to become certified as a Kripalu Yoga teacher, my participation is never required if I feel unsafe in any way. It is my responsibility to honor my physical and psychological boundaries, and if I feel unsafe in any way, to stop participation in an experience and speak to a staff member.

**Substance Use**

The use or abuse of alcohol or other recreational drugs is prohibited during the training and is not allowed on the premises. Violation of this policy at any time during the training will result in dismissal from the program with no refunds.
Kripalu Promotional Efforts

At times Kripalu takes photographs and makes audio and video recordings of guests to promote the benefits of participating in its programs and activities. Whenever these activities are happening, I can tell Kripalu staff that I do not want to participate, or move to a place in the room that is not being photographed or recorded. Otherwise I hereby consent to being the subject of any photographs or audio/video recordings made during my stay by Kripalu staff, and grant permission for these to be published or posted in ways that promote Kripalu.

Social Media and Posting of Photographs and Videos

Kripalu recognizes that a portion of its guests wish to photograph or record aspects of their program experience to post on social media sites such as Facebook and YouTube. In order to protect the privacy of others, Kripalu requires that all guests agree not to post or publish any photographs, video, or audio recordings of other individuals, or make use of the Kripalu name or logo, without express permission. I understand that I am solely responsible and potentially liable for any harm or damages caused by my online activity relating to Kripalu.

Release of Liability

After being informed of the above risks and responsibilities, I generally release Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health, together with its instructors and other representatives, from all claims, causes of action, medical expenses, and other costs related to my guest participation, whether they arise while at Kripalu, or from my later use of information or instruction at home.

I will abide by the terms of this Kripalu Yoga Teacher-in-Training Responsibility Agreement because it makes me aware of Kripalu’s policies and creates a legally binding general release of liability.

Signature: __________________________________________ Date: ________________

Name: ________________________________________________
(please print)
kripalu yoga teacher-in-training 200-hour criteria for certification

This program is intended to result in certification as a Kripalu Yoga teacher. Certified Kripalu Yoga teachers must possess a certain level of emotional and mental stability, and the skills necessary to safely and competently teach yoga. You will be evaluated on the criteria listed below.

Although the majority of students who attend complete this program and are certified, we reserve the right to withhold certification from any student who fails to develop the necessary skills and meet the criteria described below.

In the event that you do not make satisfactory progress, every attempt will be made to provide input throughout the program about challenges that might be impeding your certification. If it is determined that you have not successfully met the certification requirements, you will meet with the teacher trainers, who will determine the appropriate steps needed for you to complete certification. This process may include working with a certified Kripalu Yoga teacher or mentor at additional expense. The specifics of any additional work required will be determined individually, based on the needs of each student. In most cases, this process takes from three to six months, but may take up to a year to complete. In the case of extended study and a pending certification, the student and the teacher trainers will agree upon the terms of continued study and sign a letter outlining the required steps and the timeline agreed upon with the teacher trainers and the Director of the Kripalu Schools of Yoga and Ayurveda. Students who are unable to complete the additional requirements within a year from the end date of the program must repeat the training in order to be certified. Any student denied certification by the teacher trainers has the right to seek the review of the Director of the Kripalu Schools of Yoga and Ayurveda, whose decision will be final.

Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health reserves the right to ask any student enrolled in a yoga teacher training program to leave the program if the School of Yoga determines that student is not a good fit for the program. There are no refunds available if a student is asked to leave a training.
Certification Requirements

Attendance

100 percent attendance is required. You are responsible for marking the attendance roster each day. To be considered present, you must arrive on time and stay for the duration of the session, or you must talk to training staff before leaving a session. The staff will note tardiness, and excessive tardiness will result in not receiving certification. If you need to miss any session, you must speak to a teacher-trainer prior to the session. You are responsible for making up hours and any course material missed.

Active Class Participation

Being fully present and actively participating in the daily activities of class to the best of your abilities is required. Actively participating enables you to process, apply, interact, and share experiences as part of the educational process. The interactive components support the goal and the educational objectives for learning to be an effective Kripalu Yoga teacher.

Teaching Competence and Proficiency

Students must demonstrate command of the skills necessary to safely and competently teach a Kripalu Yoga class. Participation in all practice-teaching sessions is mandatory for certification. During these sessions and throughout the training you must demonstrate the ability to teach Kripalu Yoga using the methodology presented in the training as noted below:

- Demonstrate knowledge, embodiment, and modeling of postures, including modifications, intuitive and evidence-based benefits, contraindications, and alignment principles.
- Demonstrate understanding and use of effective conscious communication skills.
- Demonstrate ability to lead basic pranayama, guided meditation, and relaxation.
- Demonstrate fundamental knowledge of basic anatomy and physiology—muscles, bones, and systems.
- Demonstrate knowledge of Kripalu Yoga philosophy and methodology.

Maintain Safe Space for Teaching and Practicing Yoga

Students must have the ability to create a safe space for people to learn and practice yoga through demonstrating the following abilities:

- Appropriately direct and manage attention toward oneself and others.
- Receive and integrate constructive feedback.
• Show respect for other students, and for guests, time, and the experience.
• Articulate, describe, and embody the Kripalu Yoga Teacher’s Ethics Agreement.
• Bring forth personal needs and concerns to appropriate staff in a timely manner.

Assessments
Students will be given a series of assessments designed to support integration of content. The assignments include self-reflective based journaling, lesson reviews, and practice teaching exercises. The successful completion of these assessments, as determined by the training staff, is required for certification.

Take-Home Assignments (multi-session formats only)
Students attending the trainings that are multiple sessions, such as the 2x12, may be given assignments to complete between segments. Students must satisfactorily complete and submit all assignments and materials in order to receive certification.

Professional Behavior and Ethical Conduct
Professional behavior and ethical conduct create an environment that promotes a safe, high-quality student experience and engenders a constructive learning environment. The following are guidelines for professional behavior and ethical conduct:
• Maintain cleanliness and a neat appearance, and dress appropriately for class.
• Listen respectfully to students and teachers during group activities and personal sharing.
• Respect the cultural and religious differences of others.
• Remain truthful in verbal and written communications.
• Communicate differences in opinion and good-faith criticism respectfully, in the appropriate forum.
• Be on time for class and meetings.
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Signature: ____________________________________________ Date: ______________

Name: ____________________________________________
(please print)
Notes:
Dear student,

Welcome to the Kripalu Schools of Yoga and Ayurveda!

Studying at Kripalu is a unique experience that immerses you in the practices of yoga and Ayurveda. At Kripalu, all of your basic needs are taken care of—we provide housing, three freshly prepared meals per day, and a wonderful environment in which to learn and grow. The only thing left for you to do is to take care of your personal needs so that you can thrive as you embark upon your training.

We invite you to commit to a personal self-care routine that helps you build a foundation for health, moves you toward balance, and aligns you with the rhythms of nature. The practices on the following pages also support digestion and elimination, restful sleep, and a relaxed and receptive mind—especially helpful as you integrate into a life at Kripalu in which you are exposed to all sorts of new experiences, people, food, and energies.

Sincerely,

Yoganand Michael Carroll

Larissa Hall Carlson

Dean, Kripalu School of Yoga

Dean, Kripalu School of Ayurveda
receiving care while you are here

If you are experiencing a digestive or sleep imbalance while at Kripalu, consider making an appointment for an Ayurvedic consultation, which may help identify some additional self-care options to assist you.

For recommended resources, please see final chapter.

For more information on advanced studies in self-care, please contact:

Larissa Hall Carlson
Dean, Kripalu School of Ayurveda
Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health
P.O. Box 309
Stockbridge, Massachusetts 01262
phone: 413.448.3324
e-mail: larissac@kripalu.org
Ayurveda originated in India more than 5,000 years ago and is the oldest continuously practiced health-care system in the world. Drawn from an understanding of nature’s rhythms and laws, Ayurveda is built around the five elements of ether, air, fire, water, and earth. It is understood in Ayurveda that humans, as natural beings, are governed by the same rules and laws as all other natural beings. The goal of Ayurveda is to teach people how to attain optimal health through a deeper understanding of themselves and their own particular nature in relationship to the world around them.
How to determine your Ayurvedic constitution

When answering these questions, remember as far back as you can, to your youth and early adult years. You want to identify those characteristics that you were born with. This will help in identifying your constitution. Pick one per category and circle, then add up your score at the bottom.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Vata</th>
<th>Pitta</th>
<th>Kapha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Body frame</td>
<td>Thin, tall, or short</td>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>Heavy, broad</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weight</td>
<td>Hard to gain, easy to lose</td>
<td>Easy to gain, easy to lose</td>
<td>Easy to gain, hard to lose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skin</td>
<td>Cold, dark/sallow, tans easily</td>
<td>Warm, light, sunburns easily</td>
<td>Cool, fair, oily, thick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hair</td>
<td>Dry, frizzy, thin, dark</td>
<td>Straight, fine, premature graying</td>
<td>Oily, wavy, thick</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eyes</td>
<td>Small, brown, gray, violet, unusual color</td>
<td>Green, hazel, almond-shaped</td>
<td>Big, dark, blue</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appetite</td>
<td>Irregular</td>
<td>Intense</td>
<td>Consistent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evacuation</td>
<td>Constipated, irregular, small quantity</td>
<td>Loose, regular, large quantity</td>
<td>Slow, regular, moderate quantity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sweat</td>
<td>Scanty</td>
<td>Profuse</td>
<td>Moderate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Temperament</td>
<td>Fearful, indecisive, nervous, perceptive</td>
<td>Angry, intelligent, arrogant, successful</td>
<td>Greedy, calm, stable, stubborn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memory</td>
<td>Learns quickly, forgets quickly</td>
<td>Learns quickly, forgets slowly</td>
<td>Learns slowly, forgets slowly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speech</td>
<td>Erratic, talkative</td>
<td>Articulate, decisive</td>
<td>Slow, cautious</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Climate</td>
<td>Dislikes dryness, cold</td>
<td>Dislikes heat and humidity</td>
<td>Dislikes humidity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Restless and active</td>
<td>Competitive</td>
<td>Calm and likes leisure activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Routines</td>
<td>Dislikes routine</td>
<td>Likes planning and organizing</td>
<td>Works well with routine</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Beneficial Daily Routines

• Wake up before the sunrise.
• Drink a full glass (8 oz.) of room temperature or warm water.
• Clean your face, mouth, and nasal passages, and gargle with salt water.
• Scrape your tongue.
• Rinse your mouth and oil your ears with sesame oil.
• Do some light yoga or stretching.
• Meditate for 20 minutes.
• Take a walk or run for 30 minutes, three to four times per week.
• Have a nutritious breakfast according to your body type.
• Have a relaxing and complete meal at lunchtime (11:00 am or 2:00 pm).
• Relax for 30 minutes after lunch.
• Meditate in the late afternoon, before your evening meal, for 20 minutes.
• Dinner should be between 5:00–7:00 pm. This should not be a heavy meal.
• Allow two hours after dinner before going to bed.
• Bedtime should be between 10:00 am and 11:00 pm.
• Give thanks.

General Food Practices

Kripalu serves three meals per day in the Dining Hall. The food is freshly prepared, mostly organic, and full of variety. We offer a salad bar; a sandwich station; a Buddha Bar, with a simple vegan menu of legumes, rice, and vegetables; and our main line, featuring a selection of omnivorous options. Although the variety is wonderful, too much in a meal may cause a digestive imbalance. We encourage you to take a walk around the Dining Hall to see what is being offered before you begin serving yourself. Consider choosing a simple combination of foods that will be easy to digest.
Sleeping at Kripalu

Kripalu offers a number of room options for sleeping and personal space. Some will find it to be a place conducive to rest, while others may find it challenging to be away from their own beds and other home comforts.

- If you know you are going to be sharing a room, bring along earplugs and an eye cover. These items are especially helpful in our dormitory housing.
- Before bedtime, massage a small amount of sesame oil into the crown of your head and the soles of your feet, to help ground nervous energy and promote sleep.
- Keep a journal—take some time to write down your thoughts and feelings each day in order to release any excess mental chatter.
- Bring a good book or two to read at night—something to take your mind off your studies.
- Drink a full glass of room temperature or warm water (with lemon if you wish) upon rising. Do some gentle yoga or stretching and twisting to stimulate the body and circulation. Take time and sit on the toilet, even if you don’t yet have the urge. Don’t hurry through your morning routines.

General Tips for Healthy Digestion

- Give thanks.
- Sip warm water and/or ginger tea. Avoid ice-cold food or drink.
- Enjoy three meals a day without snacking in between.
- Choose only three or four different items at each meal. Avoid eating raw and cooked foods together.
- Leave one-third of your stomach empty, using your hands as your guide. Cupping both hands together is a good indicator to the amount of food to ingest and an equal amount of liquid to drink, leaving an equal amount empty. Eat only when you feel hungry. Allow a few hours between meals and bedtime.
- Eat quietly and focus on your food without distraction. Take advantage of the silent dining room option. Eat at a moderate pace. Never eat and run, and allow a few minutes after eating to relax or take a gentle walk.
Tips If Your Digestion Starts to Go Awry

- Eat simple dhal and rice with chutney and ghee (clarified butter).
- For constipation, add ghee, olive oil, and/or ground flaxseeds to your food.
- For excessive gas and bloating, avoid raw vegetables, kale, and large legumes, such as chickpeas, kidney beans, pinto beans, and black beans; favor small beans, root vegetables, and ginger tea.
- For loose stools, ease up on yogurt, apple cider, citrus, peppers, spicy foods, sour foods, and oily foods; favor cooked greens, legumes, cilantro, apples, and mint teas.
- To heat up sluggish digestion, steer clear of dairy, wheat, and meat; favor steamed vegetables, legumes, barley, quinoa, ginger tea, ginger spice, cumin, coriander, fennel, cinnamon, turmeric, and cardamom.
- Triphala is a gentle herbal formula for all types. It can be taken each evening before bed with warm water.

Tips for Digestion and Nutrition

Include the six tastes at every meal

- In Ayurveda, foods are classified into six tastes: sweet, sour, salty, bitter, pungent, and astringent. Ayurvedic practitioners recommend that you include all of these six tastes at each meal. Each taste has a balancing ability, and including some of each minimizes cravings and balances the appetite and digestion. The general North American diet tends to have too much of the sweet, sour, and salty, and not enough of the bitter, pungent, and astringent tastes.

Opt for whole, fresh, in-season, local foods

- Ayurvedic herbal preparations are made by processing the whole plant or the whole plant part, not by extracting active substances from the plant. Similarly, from the Ayurvedic perspective, the most healthful diet consists of whole foods.
- Foods that are frozen; canned; refined; processed with artificial colors, flavorings, additives or preservatives; genetically altered; or grown with chemical pesticides or fertilizers are not recommended because they lack prana, the vital life force.
- For the above reasons, it is best to choose locally grown or produced foods, in season, organic, natural, and whole.
Include spices and herbs in your daily diet

- Spices and herbs are particularly revered in Ayurveda for their ability to enhance digestion and assimilation and cleanse ama (toxins) from the body, and their yogavahi property—their ability to transport the healing and nutritive value of other components of the diet to the cells, tissues, and organs.

- Spices, in Ayurveda, are generally eaten cooked. Sauté spices in a little olive oil or ghee and pour the mixture over cooked foods, or simmer spices with foods like beans or grains as they cook. Fresh herbs such as cilantro or mint are generally added at the end of the cooking process, just before serving.

- Ayurveda recommends spices and herbs to stimulate digestion before, during, and after a meal: ginger tea, ginger spice, cumin, coriander, fennel, cinnamon, turmeric, and cardamom.

Cleansing the Sense Organs

Our bodies naturally work on clearing excess toxins out of our system during the night. These toxins are deposited in our colon and skin, which is why it is important to take care of personal hygiene first thing in the morning. The following routines are helpful in clearing these excesses and preventing toxic buildup. Cleanse as follows:

- Mouth: Purchase a tongue scraper and scrape the tongue from back to front in long, smooth strokes; then floss and brush teeth.

- Eyes: Gently splash some fresh, cool water into the eyes. This can also be done with a few drops of rosewater added to a container of water.

- Nose: Purchase a neti pot and use it with salt water. Following the neti, add a few drops of nasya oil (medicated oil) or sesame oil into each nostril.
  
  > Neti: Fill the neti pot with warm water and add a pinch of sea salt. Bring to sink. Tilt your head over the sink and place the spout into one nostril, breathing out of your mouth; allow the water to flow into the nostril and out the other nostril. Repeat on the other side. Blow your nose if necessary and gargle with a little salt water.

  > Nasya: You can use a formulated nasya oil, ghee, or sesame oil. Apply by placing the oil on your pinky finger and inserting it into one nostril while closing the other nostril. You can also use a dropper or a squirt bottle. Sniff the oil into the nose until you feel it drip into the back of your throat. Repeat on the other side.

  > Ginger paste nasya: This can be done when you are feeling sinus congestion coming on. Combine: ⅛ teaspoon dried ginger, ¼ teaspoon raw sugar, and 2 tablespoons water. Coat nose with sesame oil first, then add ginger drops one nostril at a time. Do not use more than two or three days in a row.
• Ears: Gently massage a drop or two of sesame oil into each ear. Do not penetrate deeply.

• Skin: Shower, then perform abhyanga, a self-applied, full-body oil massage.
  > Choose an oil (herbalized, blended, or organic cold-pressed base oil) for your body type: sesame for vata and kapha, and coconut or sunflower for pitta. In the winter, perform abhyanga with warm organic sesame oil (not toasted). In the summer, use coconut oil.
  > Keep your oil in a bottle or jar. You can heat it if you like in some warm water in the sink, or just apply at room temperature. Once it is applied, let the oil stay on for a few minutes before you go into the shower. Once in warm water, do not soap it off; just let the warmth of the shower drive the oil into your skin. You can soap and wash the hairy portions of your body and pat dry with a towel at the end.
  > With the intention of stimulating the heart center, the root of vital systems, slowly apply the oil using long, slow strokes on each body part. Start with the extremities and move inward, applying to the core last. At each of the joints, rub the oil in slow circles.
  > It may take two to 20 minutes to massage the entire body, so take your time and enjoy the process. After the massage, you may want to step into the sauna for a few minutes to assist the absorption of the oil into the skin.
  > Follow with a short warm shower. There is no need to use excessive amounts of soap to wash off the oil; simply allow it to penetrate into the skin. This practice nourishes the nervous and lymphatic systems, as well as moisturizes the skin and settles energy.

Please do not enter the Kripalu whirlpool with any oil on your body.
This will damage our whirlpool system.
In attempt to understand and engage with the vast, changing, and often challenging dynamics of life, it is important to explore how language choices can be critical to leading a fulfilled and happy life. The words we use to describe our experiences greatly impact our perspective and meaning-making processes. For instance, what may be explained as a crisis or insurmountable obstacle by one person might be an opportunity or hidden blessing to another. The way experiences are framed is often as important to the impact as are the events themselves. The more conscious, truthful, and clear language is, the greater the ability to engage in life in a meaningful and sincere way. By becoming aware of the language we use to express ourselves, we can learn self-responsibility and accountability for choices, perspective, and actions. Such awareness of language opens avenues to engage with self and others in an authentic, honest, and openhearted manner.

This chapter will introduce several key practices of conscious communication that will help foster healthy and nourishing patterns of relating. The first practice, “I” statements, is critical to owning statements and feelings. Looking for “I” statements behind another’s words can also provide insight into how to be a more empathic listener. The second practice, co-listening, provides a simple, yet powerful, tool for expressing yourself fully and holding space for another to express themselves fully without the interjection of another’s perceptions, biases, or judgments. The third practice, reflective listening, offers a chance to practice engaged listening and conscious mirroring. The final step, empowering feedback, cultivates the capacity to call upon your own critical thinking and experiences to offer support and insight to another.
step one:

“I” statement to awaken awareness and creative force

The first step in conscious communication is becoming aware of your experience. The clearer you are about your own thoughts, feelings, and actions, the easier it is to express them to another person. As multi-dimensional beings, there is potential to experience life through different layers. You may notice physical sensations (anamaya kosha), energetic experiences (pranamaya kosha), thoughts and emotions (manomaya kosha), intuitions (vijnanamaya kosha), and moments of interconnection (anandamaya kosha). Without judging good or bad, right or wrong, take time to explore the koshas, and see what is there.

Once you are aware of your experience, communicate using “I” statements. Speaking from personal experience is self-empowering, because you take responsibility for your own thoughts, feeling, and actions. By using “I” statements, you also avoid making assumptions about others that may or may not be true. Rather than saying “you feel better after doing yoga,” try saying “I feel better after doing yoga.” Rather than saying “everyone loves savasana,” try saying “I love savasana.” Notice if you feel a difference when you use “I” statement, instead of generalizations.

Getting lost in togetherness

Using “we” rather than “I” can place responsibility and project your own power of creativity on someone or something other than yourself:

- “We should fix dinner” versus “I feel hungry and I want us to fix dinner.”
- “It is strange talking to you” versus “I feel strange talking to you.”
- “People feel nervous in new situations” versus “I feel nervous in new situations.”

Externalizing your feelings

We often use “the,” “this,” “you,” “your,” and “that” when we really mean “my,” “mine,” or “I.” They can be statements we use to avoid our feelings.

- “This is a stupid situation” versus “I feel stupid.”
- “Did you like the way that was done?” versus “Did you like what I did? Do you like me for it?”

Questions can be “I” statements in disguise.

- “Why did you wear those boots?” versus “I don’t like your boots.”
- “When did you get home?” versus “It was late and I feel hurt that you didn’t call me when you got home.”
Qualifiers are ways of watering down the truth and qualifying our experience.
They include “I guess,” “I suppose,” “perhaps,” “maybe,” “kind of,” “probably,” “only,” “just,” and “sort of.”
• “I guess what I’m feeling is kind of hurt” versus “I feel hurt.”
• “I suppose you’d say I’m sort of angry” versus “I’m angry.”

Nullifiers are ways of avoiding or escaping what is.
They diminish self-responsibility. Examples include “I should” when we mean “I could” or “but” instead of “and.”
• “I should eat more moderately” versus “I could eat more moderately.”
• “I have to do this because...” versus “I choose to do this because...”

Notes:
step two:
co-listening

In co-listening, one partner listens while the other partner speaks. During this process, the listener puts full attention on the speaker, and practices non-judgmental awareness (witness consciousness), without replying in any way. It’s natural for the listener to be aware of other sensory information or internal commentary, and that is not bad or wrong. But, when the listener notices that their attention is moving in another direction, they simply guide it back to their partner’s voice. The speaker’s role is to simply verbalize what they are aware of, without planning or needing to censor what they say. The speaker notices what it is like to express their feelings, thoughts, and emotions, without being judged, analyzed, or fixed. The listener notices what it is like to listen, without commenting, affirming, or fixing. When the first speaker is complete, the partners switch roles.

Notes:
**step three:**

**reflective listening**

Reflective listening is similar to co-listening, as it begins with one partner speaking and the other partner listening. For this practice, once the speaker is finished sharing, the listener reflects what they heard their partner say, without interpreting or analyzing. If the speaker feels like anything they expressed was misheard or not acknowledged, they have an opportunity to clarify. When this process is complete, the roles are reversed.

**Speaker**

“It is difficult for me to wake up so early each morning for sadhana. I am much more of a night person and it usually takes me time to get going in the morning. When I have to wake up before I want to, I feel sensitive and irritable. Even though I wouldn’t choose to wake up so early for yoga, I usually feel calmer and centered by the end of practice. Thank you for listening.”

**Listener/Reflector**

“What I heard you say is that it is difficult for you to wake up early for sadhana each morning. You are more of a night person, and it takes you time to get going in the morning. When you have to wake up earlier than you want to, you feel sensitive and irritable. Even though you wouldn’t choose to wake up so early for yoga, you feel calmer and centered by the end of practice. Did I Hear you correctly?”

**Notes:**

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step four: empowering feedback

The next step of conscious communication is empowering feedback. When you engage intentionally with community there is potential to learn from every individual and each situation. You can reflect things to your peers they might not see themselves, and vice versa. As a Kripalu yoga teacher, it is important to be skillful in offering and receiving feedback, so you are self-empowered, can empower others, and continue to learn and grow. To ensure what you are offering has the best chance of being received, considered, and integrated, there are a few elements that are important.

Intention of Learning and Support
When you offer feedback, keep in mind that the intention is to learn about your own unique needs, and communicate them to the other person in a way that they can understand and integrate. Feedback is not meant to criticize or make anyone “wrong,” it is meant to inform. Each person receiving the feedback has a free choice to make an adjustment, or not. When you speak with an intention of cooperation and learning, feedback becomes empowering, rather than judgmental.

Speak from Personal Experience / “I” Statements
It is important to understand that different people experience things in their unique way. When offering and receiving feedback, try not to assume that others have had the same experience as you. When each person takes responsibility for his or her experience, particular needs, preferences, and information generally lands easier. Speak about your own thoughts, feeling, and actions using “I” statements. Inform the other person of what your experience was, and what you appreciated, or needed different from them. By communicating in this way, you are helping them learn about your experience, and supporting their ability to empower a wide range of individuals.

Use Simple and Observable Examples
To keep the feedback process simple and clear, use observable examples that you can speak about directly. Feedback may be an affirmation or appreciation, or something that you needed differently from the teacher. The more specific your example is, the easier it is to understand. When offering feedback, reflect a specific example of something the person said or did, what your experience was, and if needed, an action they could have done to support you. This will help you integrate your own experience, and give the listener concrete information to empower their teaching.
3 – steps to offer empowering feedback

1. When you (observable behavior)...
2. I experienced (feeling, thought, emotion, intuitions, etc.)...
3. I appreciated / needed...

**Example of offering an appreciation:**

- “When you taught Tadasana, you gave simple and detailed instructions.”
- “I experienced a feeling of safety and strength in my body.”
- “I appreciated how you used language to creatively describe the sequence.”

**Example offering a potential improvement point (PIP):**

- “When you taught triangle pose, I was facing the side of the mat, and I couldn’t see you.”
- “I felt unsure of whether I was doing the pose correctly or not.”
- “What I needed was for you to teach the pose from a place where I could hear you and see you.”

Notes:
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A well-rounded practice of yoga requires an understanding of the underlying principles surrounding the tradition. Learning the practical techniques without some understanding of the classical scriptures of yoga is akin to getting into your car for a drive without knowing where the various roads can take you. A dedicated study will yield a much deeper practice, and a steady practice will reveal the hidden meanings outlined in the philosophy of the scriptures.

Originally, yoga was passed down only to dedicated seekers as part of an oral tradition reaching back thousands of years. An unbroken lineage of gurus and disciples worked closely together to preserve and practice the teachings, keeping the tradition alive throughout the generations.

While much of it is still not translated from ancient Sanskrit, there is now a vast library of yogic scriptures available in the West. As a yoga teacher, you will find it useful to understand the core yogic beliefs referred to in various texts and to be aware of how yoga is currently being presented in Western culture.

It is not unusual for practitioners of yoga to have experiences that are difficult to describe. We may have experiences of energy moving inside the body or bubbling up into the mind, generating strong emotions or moods.

As modern yogis, we have a language that has evolved among practitioners to help us contextualize these experiences that is strongly influenced by modern psychological understanding. We talk about “stuff coming up,” “being triggered,” or “feeling empowered.”

Ancient yogis had similar experiences and felt the same need to understand what was happening to them. Lacking the models given by modern psychology, they developed their own models, which were influenced by their world view and the society they lived in, and passed them on to their students. They were embellished, expanded, and sometimes merged with other models. They were adapted to the times as society changed.

Models give us something to hold on to in the midst of transformation. They give us confidence that we can understand what is happening, and that confidence gives us the strength to stay with the process.

As you explore the different philosophies that have been handed down to us and have influenced the yoga tradition, please view them as models that were developed by yogis in particular times and cultures to describe subtle processes. In some modern yoga traditions, one philosophical tradition is accepted as ultimate truth. Philosophical systems are often viewed as being at odds with other systems, and believers in these systems debate about which is the “true” philosophy. This has led to results that are completely outside the teachings of yoga.

Swami Kripalu saw the primary models as complementary. He saw the different views as appropriate to different stages of the path.
yoga philosophy

Notes:
classical yoga teachings on consciousness

Patanjali’s Yoga Sutras, as interpreted by Swami Kripalu

1.1 atha yoganushasanam
now instruction in the discipline of yoga

1.2 yogas citta – vrtti – nirodhah
controlling, disciplining, and sublimating all the contents of mind is yoga

1.3 tada drastuh sva-rupe vasthanam
then consciousness abides in its true nature

1.12 abhyasa-vairagyabhyam tan-nirodah
the contents of the mind are controlled by practice and nonattachment
Patanjali’s yoga system was developed around 200 BCE. His contributions are often described as a psychology of yoga, and pick up where the Sankyan model leaves off. According to Patanjali, matter and spirit are separate, and the way to connect one with the other is through the eight-limbed path and the Yoga Sutras. He divided the practices of yoga into eight categories, each focusing on a particular of spiritual evolution. The eight limbs, or categories, consist of yama, niyama, asana, pranayama, pratyahara, dharana, dhyana, and samadhi. Today, these practices are often spoken of as the “path of commitment,” as many of the eight limbs support us in explorations that often lead to deep transformation.

The first two limbs, yama and niyama, are not meant to be dogmatic rules to be adhered to, but as experiments in becoming a fulfilled and fully expressed human being. It’s difficult to feel fulfilled and healthy if we’re not aligned in some way with truth, kindness, or moderation. These practices support us in deep-seated inquiry:

3. Asana: yoga postures.
4. Pranayama: breath control.
5. Pratyahara: sense withdrawal.
7. Dhyana: exercises that support meditation.
8. Samadhi: recognition and absorption of infinite nature through extended meditation.
five yamas

Ahimsa
Nonviolence, compassion, understanding, loving-kindness, and self-love in words, thoughts, and actions.
- Observe thoughts, actions, and words, toward self and others.
- Journal: What ways am I being violent to myself/others in my yoga practice and in the world?
- Affirmation: I am enough, I am worthy, I am valuable.

Satya
Truth. Being honest, genuine, authentic, owning feelings, practicing conscious communication, and having integrity.
- After saying something that doesn’t feel fully accurate, ask yourself: Is that really true?
- If you make a mistake and feel that you are at fault, apologize right away; set the record straight.
- Agree to disagree.
- Affirmation: I live in truth. I speak the truth to myself and to others. I take responsibility for my actions.

Asteya
Non-stealing. Providing for oneself. Not taking what is not yours.
- Take responsibility for providing for yourself.
- Acknowledge other’s successes.
- Affirmation: I live in gratitude for all that I have. I take and use only what is rightfully mine. I respect the possessions, time, and talents of others.
yoga philosophy

Brahmacharya

Energy management. Exploring how energy is affected by our choices in regards to food, speech, relationships, actions, thoughts, physical activity, and sex. Becoming more sensitive to these choices; practicing moderation.

• Honor and explore extremes to learn about the place in the middle (i.e., notice what happens to your energy when you eat sugar).

• Write down parts of your life that are draining you.

• What are you giving your attention to? Where attention goes, energy flows.

• Affirmation: I am moderate in my lifestyle. I use my energy in ways that create optimal balance.

Aparigraha

Nonattachment. Taking only what is needed. Letting things go when necessary.

• Observe how much food you take at meals.

• Write down who/what you are attached to that is not serving you.

• Honor that which is of high value to you.

• Affirmation: I release attachment to other people, substances, and unrealistic ideals that do not serve me.
five niyamas

**Saucha**

Purity, cleanliness, organization, clarity, and precision. Getting out of your own way so you can get done what you desire.

- Practice pranayama, belly pumping, tongue scraping or skin exfoliating, and self-massage.
- Organize your external space.
- Create a list of goals.
- Affirmation: I cultivate purity in my body by practicing yoga, pranayama, meditation, and conscious eating. My inner and outer environments are organized.

**Santosha**

Contentment, equanimity, tranquility, choosing to accept what is. Honoring life’s ups and downs.

- Keep a gratitude journal.
- Recognize that valleys are just inverted peaks.
- Make space for dark emotions.
- Notice emotional reactions to external situations that don’t go your way.
- Affirmation: I am content. I am grateful for what I have and for what I do not have. I learn from the joys and disappointments that life brings me.

**Tapas**

Discipline, dedication, patience, and will to create expansion and development.

- Make a commitment (i.e., have sweets only once a week for one month).
- Cultivate a personal practice (start small with asana, meditation, spending time in nature, singing, making art, etc., two or three times a week).
- Affirmation: I cultivate discipline. I have a realistic, balanced schedule for my work, my sadhana, and my personal needs.
yoga philosophy

Swadhyaya
Self-study of and self-inquiry into thoughts, words, relationships, and actions.

- Track patterns in your life (i.e., when I get angry/stressed, I always eat cookies).
- Study yogic texts and other spiritual teachings.
- Affirmation: I practice conscious awareness on my yoga mat and throughout the day. I study the works of great teachers and artists. I expand my self-knowledge and reflect upon my life with greater awareness.

Ishvar-Pranidhana
Soften, know when to let go and surrender effort.

- Be present. Connect to love, laugh, and taste all of life.
- Dance, practice yoga, meditate, receive or give massage, chant, engage in conscious relationships, and journal.
- Focus on the breath as it flows into your body.
- Practice letting go.
- Affirmation: I repeat the mantra Om Namo Bhagavate Vasudevaya (I pay homage to the intelligence that resides inside and out).
the eight limbs embodied

On the chart below the eight-limbed path of yoga is shown in relationship to the sheaths and bodies. While the path is nonlinear (one can begin at any point, and each limb affects all levels of being), it is a helpful model in understanding how the various aspects of practice lead within and build upon each other. In teaching, it can set a framework from which the teacher may facilitate students to deeper levels of experience.
the kosha-based kripalu method

In yoga philosophy, our body consists of three aspects: the physical body, the subtle body, and the casual body. These three bodies are composed of five distinct but not separate sheaths known as the koshas. Annamaya, the food sheath, is contained in the physical body. Pranamaya is the life-force sheath. Manomaya is the mental and emotional layer. Vijnanamaya is the discriminative mind, or wisdom, layer. Together these three comprise the subtle body. Anandamaya kosha is the bliss, or soul sheath, and is located in the causal body.

In some early yoga systems, the koshas are seen as coverings that veil the light of the true self, and the intention of life’s journey is to transcend the first four sheaths to arrive at bliss. In the later philosophy of yoga, however, everything is contained in everything, so this journey takes a different form. The goal, then, is to awaken to the presence of equanimity, bliss, and sweetness in each one of these layers. In lieu of a systematic journey wherein the mission is to travel through each kosha in turn to find joy only in the last, we engage in an ongoing dynamic dance that unearths the ecstasy embedded in each sheath.

The koshas can be thought of as a lens through which to see our internal landscape and the way we interact with others and the external world. All the layers of our being inform one another, and through inquiry with the various parts of ourselves we can make more conscious choices to line up these layers. When the koshas are out of line, energy stagnates. When they are balanced, what we think, feel, say, and do are often more aligned.

Yoga supports us in the exploration of each of these layers. Yoga asana creates inquiry of the physical sheath. Breathwork aids in the exploration of our energy body. Concentration and meditation support our mental and emotional functioning. All of these practices help us cultivate access to our intuitive innate wisdom.
the koshas

- Bliss/Soul: Anandamaya
- Intuition/Wisdom: Vijnanamaya
- Thoughts/Feelings: Manomaya
- Breath: Pranamaya
- Physical: Annamaya
the koshas

Physical
Annamaya

Breath
Pranamaya

Thoughts/Feelings
Manomaya

Intuition/Wisdom
Vijnanamaya

Bliss/Soul
Anandamaya
the kripalu philosophy family tree
the kripalu lineage
lakulisha

Kripalu Yoga is part of the Pashupata lineage, which extends back to about 200 BCE. The Pashupata Sutram is the only ancient text specific to the Pashupata path. It was written by Lakulisha, who was the foremost teacher in the Pashupata tradition and the only teacher recognized in the historical record.

Born somewhere around the first century CE in Gujarat state in northwestern India, Lakulisha settled in the city of Kayavarohan. From Kayavarohan, Lakulisha’s students carried his teachings all over India. Lakulisha’s teachings spread quickly, probably because they were based on practice and ritual, not just philosophy.

Lakulisha had a large center in Kayavarohan with an ashram, or spiritual community, a library, and a hospital that utilized yogic techniques to heal the sick. Eventually he decided to build a temple where the devotional aspects of the Pashupata path could be practiced.

Because Lakulisha was a devotee of the Hindu god Shiva, he chose to dedicate the temple to him. Shiva represents the transformational energy of yoga, and, in Shiva temples, he is often honored in the form of the Shiva Linga, a column of stone that symbolizes both the infinite and sexual energy. The Shiva Linga is both a phallic and a vaginal symbol, and serves to remind students of Pashupata that sexual energy is divine and a source of spiritual energy when transformed by yoga practice.

According to tradition, the stone that Lakulisha chose to serve as the Shiva Linga for his temple was very unusual. He directed the builders to a nearby field where they found a meteor, about four feet tall, in the perfect shape of a Shiva Linga. Other sources indicate that the sage
Vishvamitra, who first established Kayavarohan, had also used this stone as a Shiva Linga many ages earlier.

Lakulisha’s temple was designed following ancient and esoteric architectural standards. The temple symbolized the body, and every room, window, and doorway symbolized some aspect of the body as experienced by yogis in deep meditation. The whole spiritual journey is symbolically followed in a visit to such a temple, from washing the feet at the outer gate (physical purification), to climbing steep steps to the entrance (tapas), to contemplating the Shiva Linga in the inner sanctum (representing infinite spirit or the source of creation).

Several years after the completion of the temple, Lakulisha called his foremost students to Kayavarohan. The students assembled with their teacher in the inner sanctum of the temple. Lakulisha announced that his work on earth was complete and that he was merging back into infinite spirit. According to legend, he led a meditation and, when the students opened their eyes, Lakulisha was gone, and the Shiva Linga had changed. Now carved onto the front of the linga was the form of Lakulisha.

The students were saddened by the loss of their teacher, but were greatly inspired by the transformation of the Shiva Linga. They continued to honor the linga with devotional rituals and to meditate before it in order to feel the presence of their teacher. The Shiva temple, with the Linga of Lakulisha, became a pilgrimage center for thousands of Pashupata practitioners. It was highly respected until the temple was destroyed, along with the city of Kayavarohan, by an invasion of northern India in 1025 CE. The great ancient city survived only as a village, never regaining its former glory.

On May 26, 1866, a farmer from the village of Kayavarohan was plowing his field when the plow hit a large stone. The farmer dug into the ground and discovered the Shiva Linga. He recognized that the statue was carved from a type of stone not native to the area and had survived its time in the earth with absolutely no erosion. The farmer did not know anything about the statue, but thought that it must be special. It was not unusual for archaeological remains to be discovered in the area when roads were built or foundations dug, but it was not until almost 100 years later that archaeologists from a nearby university would discover that a large city had existed at this site 1,000 years before. With help from his friends, the farmer brought the statue into the village, where it was stored in a courtyard reserved for archaeological objects. It was forgotten until Swami Kripalu’s visit to Kayavarohan in 1955.
Swami Kripalu

Swami Kripalu was born in a small town in northwest India in 1913. His father died shortly after his birth and the family experienced great financial hardship. Swami Kripalu’s older brother moved to Bombay, some 100 miles away, and was able to provide some financial support to the family. When Swami Kripalu was 16, he joined his brother, hoping to earn money to send home to his mother and sisters.

After several years of searching unsuccessfully for a steady job, Swami Kripalu became suicidally depressed. Just when he had decided to take his own life, he met an elderly yogi who invited him to live in his ashram and taught him yoga philosophy and practice. The yogi was secretive about his identity, saying only that he was “prana,” the life force. This led Swami Kripalu to call him Pranavanandji.

Swami Kripalu lived in Pranavanandji’s ashram as a student for more than a year. One day, the yogi announced that his work was complete, that his students had received all the instruction they needed for their spiritual journeys, and that he would depart forever in a few days.

After Pranavanandji’s departure, Swami Kripalu went back into the world. With the support of other devotees, he found a job and educated himself. He wrote stories for a magazine and, for several years, taught music to children. At the age of 30, he renounced the world and took monastic vows from a traveling monk, officially becoming a swami.

For the next eight years, Swami Kripalu walked through northwest India as a mendicant, living on alms and studying ancient yoga texts. As he traveled through small villages, he would offer instruction and inspiration to whoever would listen. He became renowned as a yogi and spiritual teacher.

After years of traveling and teaching, Swami Kripalu made a pilgrimage to Rishikesh, a holy region of the Himalayan mountains. According to legend, while traveling alone through a wooded field, Swami Kripalu was startled to meet a young man with radiant skin and eyes. In the course of their conversation, the young man revealed details of Swami Kripalu’s past that only Swami Pranavanandji would have known. The young man, as the story goes, then revealed that his spirit had entered the body of an old man, and, in that manifestation, had taught Swami Kripalu in Bombay. This manifestation, as a young and vibrant man, was his true form, and he instructed Swami Kripalu to strive to learn his true identity. After assigning Swami Kripalu this task, the young man vanished.

Swami Kripalu was amazed by this experience and felt an increase in love for his teacher and new inspiration for his spiritual journey. A short time later, he received a vision in meditation. The young man appeared before Swami Kripalu and instructed him to stop traveling and begin practicing specific yoga techniques that the old yogi had taught to Swami Kripalu as a student in Bombay, with the instruction that he not practice them until permission was given.
Shortly after, Swami Kripalu settled into a spare room belonging to a devotee’s family and began practicing. He would sit in Lotus position and practice anuloma viloma pranayama an hour three times each day. After several months of daily practice, he increased to an hour and a half three times daily.

After several months of practicing this routine, Swami Kripalu experienced an energy awakening. Thereafter, whenever he sat for pranayama, his body would begin to vibrate and shake. Spontaneous vigorous breathing patterns would occur, and his body would be thrown into positions he had never seen before. Swami Kripalu was frightened by these experiences, but he continued his practice, trusting in his teacher’s protection.

Soon after his energy awakening, Swami Kripalu was given a book on hatha yoga. He was amazed to discover that many of the spontaneous breathing patterns he had experienced were classical pranayamas. He also learned that many of the positions his body was propelled into were traditional yoga postures. Inspired by this discovery, Swami Kripalu continued his practice with enthusiasm.

Swami Kripalu increased his practice time to 10 hours each day. In addition, over the years he also experimented with different lifestyle approaches to support and deepen his practice. For example, for three years he fasted on milk and toward the end of his life spent 12 years under a vow of silence.

In 1955, Swami Kripalu was invited to be a guest speaker at a spiritual celebration in the village of Kayavarohan. For some unknown reason, even though he usually declined invitations to speak, especially when they involved travel, he accepted this invitation and went to Kayavarohan.

After giving his lecture, he was offered a tour by the village elders. He was told of archaeological excavations that had unearthed an ancient civilization. Swami Kripalu toured the ruins and was led to the courtyard inside the village where special archaeological objects were kept. He was amazed to see the large Shiva Linga, and recognized the yogi carved into the front of it as the same man who had appeared to him in a vision in Rishikesh.

Later in meditation, the story goes, the young man appeared to Swami Kripalu again and revealed himself as Lakulisha. He instructed Swami Kripalu to continue his sadhana and to work to revive Kayavarohan as a spiritual center. Swami Kripalu moved to Kayavarohan and founded a nonprofit organization to rebuild Lakulisha’s temple and establish an ashram where aspirants could study and practice yoga. Swami Kripalu continued his sadhana and rebuilding efforts in Kayavarohan until he came to the United States in 1977, to live at Amrit Desai’s ashram.
Amrit Desai met Swami Kripalu when he was 15, and Swami Kripalu quickly became a father figure to the young man. Amrit would visit Swami Kripalu regularly after school, when Swami Kripalu was ending his daily meditation and could spend time teaching Amrit. They spent several years together in this way before Swami Kripalu’s move to Kayavarohan.

Amrit was athletic and developed a love for yoga but decided not to follow Swami Kripalu into monastic initiation. Instead he chose to have a family and seek a career. In 1960 he traveled to Philadelphia to attend art college and study textile design. His plan was to earn a degree and return to India as a fabric designer. To support himself while attending school, he taught yoga.

Amrit found teaching yoga in Philadelphia more enjoyable and lucrative than he imagined fabric design in India would be, so he stayed in the US after completing college, and established a retreat center and ashram on a farm outside the city. Amrit was a popular teacher and was soon training others to teach yoga as well. His ashram filled to capacity with seekers who accepted him as a guru, or spiritual master.

As Amrit learned of more advanced practices from Swami Kripalu, he wanted to bring these practices to his students. He observed that the advanced spiritual practices required profound dedication and a willingness to undergo difficult austerities and purification, traditionally practiced only in supportive, monastic settings. Wanting the benefits for his students, Amrit began to investigate, under Swami Kripalu’s guidance, the possibility of a yogic path adapted to modern life.

Exploring and experimenting with his close students, Amrit developed Kripalu Yoga as a bridge to Swami Kripalu’s advanced practice. It required discipline and surrender, but not to the extent of Swami Kripalu’s path. Kripalu Yoga can be practiced by people living “normal” lives. Swami Kripalu acknowledged and supported the practice of Kripalu Yoga as a powerful, transformational path for non-ascetics.

Every few years, Amrit would visit Swami Kripalu in India. He would show Swami Kripalu photos of his ashram and invite Swami Kripalu to visit.

When Amrit presented his invitation to Swami Kripalu in 1976, Swami Kripalu surprised him by saying that he would visit. Preparations began, and Swami Kripalu arrived in the US in May 1977. After spending several months at the ashram in Pennsylvania, Swami Kripalu visited ashrams in Canada and California that had been established by other disciples. Swami Kripalu then settled in Amrit’s Pennsylvania community, where he stayed for four years. During his time at Amrit’s ashram, he consciously broke his 12-year vow of silence, speaking to the community often, in addition to communicating by writing on a slate. He returned to India in September 1981, and on December 29, Swami Kripalu died there in the company of close disciples.
With the death of Swami Kripalu, Amrit became a lineage holder of Swami Kripalu’s tradition in the West. The Kripalu ashram grew in size and depth, teaching students and training teachers to spread Kripalu Yoga throughout the world.

**A New Paradigm: The Teacher Within**

In 1983, the directors of the Kripalu ashram purchased the Shadowbrook estate, a 325-acre property in Stockbridge, Massachusetts that included a former Jesuit seminary. By 1992, Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health was a sanctuary for more than 15,000 guests annually, with a residential staff of more than 300.

In October 1994, it was revealed that Amrit had committed a series of consistent ethical violations over the years, and the trust between him and his disciples became irrevocably severed. Amrit Desai was asked by the Kripalu Board of Trustees to resign as spiritual leader.

Since 1994, Kripalu has grown, evolved, and changed organizationally and spiritually. The transition from a guru-disciple, ashram-based model to a community that values and honors all traditional and contemporary spiritual paths is unique and represents a journey into new frontiers.

Today, Kripalu is the largest yoga-based retreat and educational center in North America. The Kripalu School of Yoga offers aspiring teachers the opportunity to deepen their practice through immersion trainings, while mastering the skills necessary to lead others in the practice of Kripalu Yoga. The Kripalu School of Ayurveda is aimed at promoting Ayurveda as a healing science in the West. The schools are mission-driven, with the goal of making a lasting impact on individuals and communities through the wisdom and practice of yoga and Ayurveda.
three stages of Kripalu yoga

- Physical Body
- Causal Body
- Subtle Body

Stage One

Stage Two

Stage Three

Kripalu Yoga
Notes:
skeleton—anterior view

From Heck’s Pictorial Archive of Nature and Science
skeleton—posterior view

From Heck’s Pictorial Archive of Nature and Science
skeleton—lateral view

- Cervical Spine
- Thoracic Spine
- Lumbar Spine
- Sacrum
- Coccyx
- Rib cage
- Metatarsals
- Tarsals
- Phalanges

From Heck's Pictorial Archive of Nature and Science
The female pelvis is proportionally wider than the male pelvis from both front to back and side to side. The aperture at the bottom of the pelvis is wider as well, to facilitate childbirth.

From Heck’s Pictorial Archive of Nature and Science
joints and ligaments

Elbow

Hip

Knee

anatomy, physiology, and kinesiology

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superficial muscle layer—
    anterior view

- Deltoid
- Pectoralis Major
- Biceps Brachii
- Pronator Teres
- External Oblique
- Iliotibial Tract
- Sartorius
- Quadriceps (3 of 4 heads): Vastus Lateralis, Rectus Femoris, Vastus Medialis
- Tibialis Anterior
superficial muscle layer—posterior view

From Heck’s Pictorial Archive of Nature and Science
superficial muscle layer—lateral view

From Heck’s Pictorial Archive of Nature and Science
intermediate muscle layer—anterior view

From Heck's Pictorial Archive of Nature and Science
intermediate muscle layer—posterior view

From Heck's Pictorial Archive of Nature and Science
deep muscle layer—anterior view

From Heck’s Pictorial Archive of Nature and Science
deep muscle layer—posterior view

From Heck’s Pictorial Archive of Nature and Science
Basic Anatomical Terminology

- **Anatomical position** is when most of the joints of the body are in neutral position and the muscles are relaxed, hands facing forward, feet slightly turned out. It looks like Corpse pose as opposed to Mountain pose.

- **Axial skeleton** is the part of the body that makes up the torso and head. It includes the ribs, spine, and cranium, but does not include the shoulder and pelvic girdles.

- **Appendicular skeleton** is comprised of the shoulder and pelvic girdles; the arms, forearms, and hands; and the thighs, legs, and feet.

Planes Of Movement

- **Sagittal plane:** Divides the body into sides.
  - Medial means closer to the center of the body.
  - Lateral means closer to the outside of the body.

- **Coronal plane:** Divides the body into front and back.
  - Anterior refers to the front of the body.
  - Posterior refers to the back of the body.

- **Transverse plane:** Divides the body from top to bottom.
  - Superior is closer to the head.
  - Inferior is closer to the feet.

- **Proximal and distal** only apply to the appendicular skeleton.
  - Proximal means closer to the axial skeleton.
  - Distal means further away from the axial skeleton.

Types of Joints

- **Fibrous joints:** Immovable joints such as the skull sutures, or partly moveable joints such as the radioulnar joint (the joint between the two bones of the forearm).

- **Cartilaginous joints:** Immovable or partly moveable joints connected by fibrocartilage. Some of these joints permit limited movement, such as the discs between the vertebrae and the costal cartilage connecting the ribs to the sternum. The pubic symphysis is only moveable during childbirth. Fibrocartilage has the consistency of rubber or soft plastic. It enhances resistance to tensile and impact forces. It is avascular (does not have its own blood supply) and receives nutrition through diffusion. Because of this, it does not repair easily after injury.
• **Synovial joints:** Synovial joints are freely moveable within the limits of the bony architecture. They connect two or more bones within a joint capsule. The ends of the bones, which lie within the joint capsule, are covered with hyaline cartilage, a harder substance than fibrocartilage. The joint capsule itself arises from the periosteum, which covers the rest of the bone. The joint capsule is thickest where movement is limited and thinner where movement is allowed. The joint capsule is lined with a synovial membrane that secretes synovial fluid to lubricate the joint. Gentle movement enhances the secretion of synovial fluid from the membrane and also warms the fluid so that it becomes thinner, making it better able to flow over and penetrate the hyaline cartilage. This provides more cushioning for the joint and allows the ends of the bones to glide more smoothly past each other.

**Types of Synovial Joints**

• **Hinge:** Convex surface of one bone fits against the concave side of another bone. Hinge joints permit movement in only one plane. Examples are the elbow and interphalangeal joints. At the elbow, the ulna has a cup-shaped depression that keeps the joint from extending past 180 degrees.

• **Ball-and-socket:** One surface, is basically spherical and the other is cup-shaped. Examples are the hip and shoulder. Ball-and-socket joints permit movement in all directions.

• **Gliding:** Consists of generally flat surfaces such as the facet joints of the vertebrae and the intercarpal and intertarsal joints.

• **Ellipsoid:** A reduced ball-and-socket configuration in which movement in one plane is largely excluded, such as at the wrist and knee joints.

• **Pivot:** A ring of bone rotating around an axle of bone, such as the atlas/axis of the cervical spine.

• **Saddle:** Two concave surfaces articulating with each other, as seen in the carpal/metacarpal joint of the thumb. Permits all movements except rotation.

**Joint Movements**

• **Flexion:** A movement on the sagittal plane that reduces the angle of the joint is called flexion. An exception is the shoulder joint, in which flexion lifts the arm overhead, increasing the angle of the joint. Flexion at the ankle joint is called dorsiflexion because it involves more than one joint.
  > An example of flexion is Standing Squat, where the ankles, knees, hips, and shoulder joints are all in flexion.

• **Extension:** A movement in the sagittal plane that increases the angle of the joint is called extension. Extension usually straightens a joint. At the shoulder joint, it would be bringing the arm to resting or backward behind the body. Abnormal extension is called hyperextension. Extension at the ankle is called plantar flexion because it involves not just the ankle but movement in the tarsals as well.
  > An example of extension is Boat, where the ankles, knees, hips, spine, and shoulders are all in extension.
• **Adduction:** A movement on the coronal plane that takes a part of the body toward the middle is called adduction.
  > An example of adduction is Eagle, where the arms and legs are both adducted.

• **Abduction:** A movement on the coronal plane taking a part of the body away from the torso is called abduction.
  > An example of abduction is Five-Pointed Star, in which the arms and legs are both abducted.

• **Lateral flexion:** In the torso, a movement on the coronal plane is called lateral flexion.
  > An example of lateral flexion is Half Moon.

• **Lateral rotation:** A movement on the transverse plane that takes a part of the body outward is called lateral rotation. Rotation only occurs at ball-and-socket, gliding, and pivot joints. In the neck rotation, is called left and right rotation. Often we think that when we circle the arm or the leg, we are rotating that appendage, but the actual term for that movement—which is a combination of flexion, adduction, extension, and adduction—is circumduction.
  > When we turn our front toes out in Triangle and Side Warrior, we are laterally rotating the femur in the hip socket.

• **Medial rotation:** A movement on the transverse plane that takes a part of the body inward is called medial rotation.
  > When we turn our back toes in during Triangle and Side Warrior, we are medially rotating the femur in the hip socket.

• **Supination/pronation:** A movement at the radial/ulnar joint, which turns the palm up and down from the elbow. Supination is palm up, and pronation is palm down.

• **Inversion/eversion:** Movements at the tarsal joints that turn the soles in (inversion) and out away from each other (eversion).

• **Anteversion** means tilting the pelvis forward (as in Dog Tilt).

• **Retroversion** means tilting the pelvis backward (as in Cat Tilt).

**The Shoulders**

The shoulder girdle is a complex joint and special terminology is used for its movements. If not for the mobility of the shoulder girdle, there would be significantly more restriction on the movements we make with our arms.

• **Elevation/depression:** Lifting the shoulder blades, or scapula, is referred to as elevation, and lowering the scapula is referred to as depression.
• **Protraction/retraction**: Movement of the scapula away from the spine is called protraction, and movement of the scapula back in toward the spine is called retraction.

• **Upward/downward rotation**: When the scapula slides up and out at the same time, that is upward rotation; when it slides in and down at the same time, that is downward rotation.

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### The Spine

The spine can move in many directions: flexion, extension, lateral flexion, and rotation on its own axis. Movement at each joint segment is small, but the combined movement of the entire spine is large. This allows the spine to be mobile and also be protective of the spinal cord. Other than the atlas and axis, each vertebra is made up of a body and a vertebral arch. Each vertebra also has several surfaces that articulate (fit together) with the adjacent vertebrae. The way in which these surfaces are oriented and interact determines the range of motion in that segment of the spine. These surfaces are called articular facets (adjoining surfaces that face each other on the vertebral arch), spinous processes (which project from the back of the vertebral arch), and transverse processes (which project from the sides of the vertebral arch).

- **Cervical**: seven vertebrae in all.
  - The atlas and the axis are the first and second vertebrae of the cervical spine and together form a pivot joint. Most of the rotation in the cervical spine occurs at this joint. In the rest of the cervical spine, the bodies of the vertebrae are small and curved.
  - Articular facets are shallow (45-degree angle), and lateral flexion is always accompanied by a slight amount of rotation caused by this angle.
Spinous processes are shorter than in the thoracic spine, but are relatively long, to provide support for the head and neck. They point straight out rather than at a downward angle, but when the head is dropped back, they overlap each other and provide a bony restraint.

C7 has the longest spinous process and can be easily palpitated. The transverse processes are short and broad and limit side bending.

Normal position of the cervical spine is lordosis (curving toward the front).

The cervical spine is the most mobile in all directions.

- **Thoracic**: twelve vertebrae in all, with larger bodies and discs.
  - These vertebrae have long spinous processes to help prevent hyperextension. The transverse processes articulate with the ribs. All movements are possible, but most movements are limited by the rib cage, especially flexion.
  - Articular facets are almost flat and are located on the circumference of a circle. This facilitates rotation, which is the easiest movement of the thoracic spine.
  - Normal position of the thoracic spine is kyphosis (curving toward the back).

- **Lumbar**: five vertebrae in all, with massive bodies and thick discs.
  - Short spinous processes, which allow lots of extension. Transverse processes are broad.
  - Articular surfaces are straight forward and back (up and down), which limits rotation.
  - Normal position of the lumbar spine is lordosis, giving the lumbar spine a tendency toward extension.

- **Sacrum**: five fused vertebrae.
  - Kyphosis is severe.
  - L5 wants to slide forward off the first sacral vertebra, but is not allowed to by the placement of the articular surfaces.
  - The sacrum forms a cartilaginous joint with the innominate bones (ilium). There is almost no movement at the sacroiliac joint.
• *Points of hypermobility:* There are certain areas of the spine that can easily be overused due to the way they are constructed. These tend to be areas where transitions occur from one type of vertebra to another:
  - C1/Occiput—Flexion and extension
  - C1/C2—Rotation
  - C7/T1—Flexion
  - T11/T12—Rotation (due to floating ribs, as opposed to fixed ribs)
  - T12/L1—Flexion and lateral flexion
  - L5/S1—Extension
  - Because of these natural tendencies, it is important to strengthen the spinal muscles before making them more flexible. Working on flexibility before ensuring proper support may lead to injury.

• *Movements of shoulder and effects on spine.* Flexion of the arms is associated with extension of the spine. Extension of the arms behind the back causes flexion of the spine. Adduction causes lateral bending to that side, and abduction causes lateral bending to the opposite side.

**Examples Of Disc Problems**
Muscles

- Muscle makes up between 70–85 percent of the body’s weight.
- There are three types of muscles in the body:
  - Skeletal muscles, which move the skeleton.
  - Cardiac muscles, which compress the heart cavity.
  - Smooth muscles, which are the involuntary muscles of the other systems, such as digestion and elimination.

How Skeletal Muscles Work

- Two main types of contraction:
  - An isometric contraction is a contraction in which the muscle engages but the length of the muscle does not change.
  - An isotonic contraction refers to a muscle being engaged when its length changes. This can be either a concentric contraction or an eccentric contraction.
    - A concentric contraction happens when a muscle is stimulated and shortens as it pulls the two sides of the joint closer together.
    - An eccentric contraction happens when a muscle increases in length under tension while resisting gravity.
    - Usually concentric and eccentric contractions happen on opposite sides of a joint. For instance, when the biceps brachii concentrically contracts to flex the elbow, the triceps brachii eccentrically contracts to allow the elbow to flex. The opposite happens when the elbow is extended. If the elbow is held in flexion, it becomes an isometric contraction.
    - The muscle that concentrically contracts to cause movement is called the agonist (prime mover), and the muscle that eccentrically contracts to oppose that movement is called the antagonist. This system of mutual opposition works to create stabilization in the bones and joints.
    - When two or more muscles work together to do the same thing, they are called synergists. An example would be the adductor muscles, which work as a group. Anything other than the opposing muscle that opposes a movement is called resistance (such as a weight or gravity).
    - Fixator muscles stabilize proximal joints during weight-bearing functions of more distal joints. For example, the serratus anterior stabilizes the scapula when the arms are lifting weight.
It is important to remember that muscles do not work in a vacuum. Any movement produces movement in other parts of the body, either to facilitate the movement or to compensate for the movement. Allow the body to stay in balance.

**Stretch Reflexes**

- **The myotatic stretch reflex, or knee-jerk reflex:**
  
  a. This reflex acts to help us absorb shocks by quickly contracting the muscle to keep us from collapsing (such as when we get up off a chair). It is known as the “knee-jerk reflex” because it is especially sensitive in the large antigravity muscles, such as the quadriceps, and can be activated when the nervous system gets a message for the muscle to contract, such as when the doctor taps your quadriceps tendon with a reflex hammer and your foot kicks forward.

  b. Stimulating the muscle fibers repetitively in this way serves to shorten the muscle involved and diminish flexibility. This can be seen in runners whose hamstrings become short over time. In hatha yoga, we want to minimize the stimulation of this reflex because it serves to limit stretch. Therefore, doing things in a bouncy way, such as jumping in and out of standing postures will reduce the ability to stretch.

  c. What we refer to in this program as the “stretch reflex” is actually the overriding of the myotatic reflex through extended gentle holding, which invites the muscle to lengthen.

- **The clasp knife reflex:** This reflex acts to resist the relaxation of a muscle up to a certain point and then to suddenly release. It can be demonstrated by the action that occurs in an arm-wrestling match, when the two sides appear evenly matched for a while and then suddenly one collapses. It can work in hatha yoga, as in the following example: Fold forward at the hips with the legs straight, to get a frame of reference. Then bend the knees until you can bring your torso against your thighs. Clasp your arms behind your legs, and then press up strongly into your sitz bones. Hold for 30 seconds, then release. Fold forward again with straight legs and see how far forward you can come.
yoga and the body systems

Respiratory

• **What is it?** A group of conducting passages that include the nasal cavity (air is warmed and humidified, cilia filter), pharynx (two openings of airway where the mouth and nose meet), larynx (voice box, vocal cords) in the upper tract and trachea (windpipe), bronchi (tree-like structures that connect to the lungs; house alveoli; where exchange of oxygen and carbon dioxide takes place), and lungs in the lower tract.

• **What does it do?** Takes in oxygen to fuel the cells and removes carbon dioxide (waste) from the body.

• **How does yoga affect it?**
  > Strengthens and expands the lungs through continual deep breathing and specific postures (Cobra, Bridge, Half Moon, Bow/Wheel, Camel, and Fish).
  > Provides more room/vitality for the breath once deep breathing has ceased.

Endocrine

• **What is it?** Series of glands that secrete hormones, or chemical messengers, into the bloodstream.

• **What does it do?** Glands regulate the body’s mood, growth, and development; tissue function; metabolism; sexual function; and reproductive processes.

• **The glands (group of cells)**
  > Pineal: melatonin hormone related to sleep.
  > Pituitary: master gland, instructs other glands.
Hypothalamus: heart rate, body temperature, blood pressure, memory, senses, and emotional experience.
Thyroid: metabolism, body thermostat.
Parathyroid: calcium and phosphorus in the blood.
Thymus: T-cells (white blood cells), for healthy function of immune system.
Adrenal: produce adrenaline (for fight-or-flight), steroids for inflammation, sugar, water, minerals, and sexual hormones.
Pancreas: digestive juices, blood sugar, and insulin/glycogen.
Ovaries: eggs, estrogen, and progesterone; testes: small sacs, testosterone.

• How does yoga affect it?

- Supports the glands in optimal functioning, which results in less depression, stress, sluggishness, or excess weight gain.
- Allows hormone production and release to remain balanced and well-tuned.
- Aids the body in better dealing with such disorders as diabetes, hypoglycemia, hypothyroid, and hyperthyroid.
- Activates thymus in heart-opening postures, such as Pigeon, Fish, and Bow.
Circulatory

- **What is it?** The heart, arteries (away from heart), veins (to heart), and capillaries (connect arteries and veins).

- **What does it do?** The heart pumps blood into the body’s tissues, providing them with oxygen and nutrients while removing metabolic waste. It works with the respiratory system to transport oxygen and with the endocrine system to transport hormones through the blood. Sends out white blood cells to defend the body against foreign organisms (leukocytes).

- **How does yoga affect it?**
  
  - Deep breathing results in lower blood pressure and less stress in the body.
  
  - Increases the heart’s effectiveness by allowing veins to bring more blood to the heart and by allowing the heart to slow down and pump more blood into the system. Circulation opens up by stretching muscles.
Digestive

- **What is it?** A group of organs that, together, move, secrete acid, break down, digest, absorb, and eliminate our food.

- **What does it do?** Transfers nutrients and water from food to supply cells with energy to perform body functions and create new cells.

- **How does yoga affect it?**
  > Most yoga postures compress and release the abdomen, which massages and squeezes the organs.
  > Old blood, bile, and lymph fluid go out, and fresh blood and nutrients come in.
  > Deep breathing moves the abdomen, and also aids in the massaging of organs.
Nervous

- **What is it?** The brain, spinal cord, and threadlike nerves that connect to each organ and body part.

- **What does it do?**
  > Relays messages and instructions from the brain to the organs and body parts and from the body parts and organs to the brain in order to regulate and communicate.
  > Tiny cells called neurons help the nervous system function. There are two types of neurons—sensory (to brain) and motor (from brain).

- **How does yoga affect it?**
  > Helps stretch the spine, which allows the nervous system to communicate better with the rest of the body.
  > Activates the parasympathetic nervous system and aids the body in a quicker transition from fight-or-flight.
  > Supports the nerves in functioning at equilibrium.
Lymphatic

- **What is it?** Extensive drainage network that helps keep bodily fluids level and defends against infection.

- **What does it do?** Collects extra lymph fluid and returns it to the blood to avoid tissue swelling. Defends the body against germs, bacteria, viruses, and fungi. These invaders are filtered out by the lymph nodes, which house white blood cells that produce antibodies to fight disease. The spleen is a part of the lymphatic system and also aids in the fight against invaders by producing its own white blood cells.

- **How does yoga affect it?**
  > Postures improve the flow of fluid in the system, aiding in the removal of toxins and increasing immunity.
  > In inversions, lymph fluid that might have been building up in the feet and ankles is more easily released back toward the heart.
benefits of yoga

Kripalu Yoga Teacher Training Manual 200-Hour Training

“As teachers, we must present yoga professionally, refraining from any tendency to make unsubstantiated claims or promise miraculous benefits. At the same time, we don’t want to close any doors to yoga’s more subtle effects and its tremendous capacity to heal the body and mind. Along with understanding and, when appropriate, explaining the traditional teachings, everyone’s subjective experience of yoga should be respected.”

—Shobhan Richard Faulds

The language we use when teaching can help deepen students’ experience and appreciation of yoga. This is especially true when speaking about the benefits of yoga. As a Kripalu Yoga teacher, it’s important to explain the benefits of yoga in a manner that is accurate and resonates with your students. This means knowing the different ways in which you can create entryways into yoga—through the traditional yoga door or the modern science door—and how to speak accurately from each. By bringing awareness and rigor to your explanations of the benefits of yoga, you will engender feelings of safety and trust in your students.
When you’re clear about the framework in which you’re speaking, you will benefit your students in a number of ways.

1. It will increase your authenticity as a yoga teacher. In a world of media oversaturation, it can be easy to speak about yoga’s benefits in inaccurate ways. Trusting your information source will boost your confidence in talking about yoga.

2. It will provide a sense of safety to your students when you are clear and honest about what you do and don’t know. Your students will be able to trust your depth of knowledge—both that what you share is accurate and dependable and that you are also willing to admit when you don’t know something. It may be helpful for you as a developing yoga teacher to know that there is no expectation for you to be omniscient or to know everything about every subject. Instead, we encourage you to teach what you’re comfortably knowledgeable about.

3. The ability to speak in different ways about the benefits of yoga allows you introduce more people to the practice of yoga. Some students will be intrigued by the scientific benefits of yoga, while others may feel more compelled by the benefits as traditionally they are understood. Awareness of both will help you to interact with and serve more students.

Each doorway will provide unique support and challenge in cultivating your ability to serve as a Kripalu Yoga teacher—empowering people and communities to explore their full potential through the transformative wisdom and practice of yoga.

speaking about the traditional benefits of yoga

Examples:

- “My experience is that Warrior can give a sense of confidence.”
- “Many of my teachers share that Child’s pose can quiet an anxious mind.”
- “Many students find forward folds relaxing.”

Personal experience: At times, it’s very useful to speak about the benefits of yoga from your own personal experience. How has yoga helped you? What impact have you noticed (either in your own body or working with other students) of a particular pose or practice? Your subjective experience of the practice will be of value to many students.

Teachers/guru: When you hear a teacher talk about the benefit of yoga from his/her experience, you may wish to share this benefit with your students. If so, first determine if it is a traditional
yoga benefit or a modern science benefit. If a modern science benefit such as “this pose increases parasympathetic activity,” you may want to double-check this with a scientific reference. If not, share the benefit from the traditional yoga doorway. Students may feel inspired to know that a well-seasoned teacher knows the scientific benefit of a certain pose or practice. It is important to be clear who you are quoting and that it is a teacher you trust and respect.

Ancient yoga texts: You might also talk about the benefits of yoga by citing a certain doctrine, such as the Yoga Sutras or Hatha Yoga Pradipika. As long as you note where you are offering this benefit from, this could inspire students to understand more about the traditional benefits of yoga as well as interest them in reading more about yoga philosophy.

Yoga framework/philosophy: It’s important as a teacher to be clear about which framework you’re referencing. For example, if you are talking about the benefits of nadi shodhana and you want to offer a traditional yoga benefit, you could say, “Traditionally, this practice is aimed at clearing the energy channels.”

speaking about the modern science benefits of yoga

This doorway can be broken down into two sub-doorways: yoga research and modern medicine.

Examples:

• “Research shows that Cobra pose can help people with low-back pain.”
• “Numerous studies show that this breathing practice can activate the relaxation response and reduce anxiety.”

Yoga research: When you cite a benefit that has been rigorously researched, you are citing a yoga-research benefit. This includes any peer-reviewed research study on yoga practices. Peer-reviewed research articles have been reviewed by a group of experts to determine a study’s rigor. Many such studies can be found at www.pubmed.com, an extensive research database that holds all peer-reviewed studies being conducted in the US and around the world. These studies are also considered “evidence-based,” meaning they include a rigorous research protocol, study implementation, and statistical analysis.

Modern medicine: This doorway may include more general research studies, but it specifically includes any documented science on such things as Western anatomy and physiology, brain science, and systems recognized/developed by modern science. This doorway can help you speak about the benefits of yoga from a broader Western medical perspective. For example, from this
benefits of yoga

doors way you might say something like “Warrior poses help to strengthen the muscles of the legs,” because you know from Western medicine that engaging in any kind of stretching and holding can increase the strength of the muscle group being held.

speaking about the benefits of yoga

Key words
• Benefits as seen through the lens of the ancient yoga system
• Benefits as seen through the lens of modern science and current research
• “Peer-reviewed journal” and www.pubmed.com

Chapter learning outcomes
• Learn two different ways to talk about the benefits of yoga.
• Understand why this is important and will help you as a teacher.
• Experience a pranayama technique in which benefits are talked about from each doorway.
• Learn some of the documented benefits of yoga.

evidence-based yoga for special populations

As a Kripalu Yoga teacher serving a community, it’s likely that you will have students who come to class with a condition that impacts their abilities. It’s important for you to feel empowered to support your students in the practice of yoga. Awareness of the research on yoga and special populations will empower you and your students to practice yoga safely and with the utmost integrity.

While you are not expected to know how to treat these conditions, as a yoga therapist might be, it’s important to know how to support students to have a safe yoga experience in your classroom.
The following pages list five conditions which starts with low-back pain. While you may wish to learn from a trusted teacher or book about the benefits and contraindications for various poses from a traditional yoga perspective, below is the latest in yoga research on the conditions mentioned. You may also wish to learn more about these conditions through books or videos.

All teachers will be confronted with students who are working with a variety of conditions. It is not your role to offer treatment suggestions or options for your students with these conditions. However, it is your responsibility to help your students stay safe in your yoga classes.

working with a student with a medical condition

• Be proactive: Ask your students about special conditions. Before class starts, ask your students if they have any concerns or health conditions that you need to be aware of.

• Thank any students who let you know about their condition. This is privileged information that your student trusts you with.

• Ask the student if their doctor knows about their condition and also knows that they are taking yoga classes. If the students reports that their doctor does not know they that they are practicing yoga, gently invite them to let their doctor know in order to optimize their safety and ease. In addition, you may want to suggest that your student see a yoga therapist. Doctors do not always know the potentials, possibilities, and pitfalls of practicing yoga.

• Encourage students to use modifications, be gentle, and listen to their bodies. Encourage them to take care of themselves in class, and remind them that pushing too much could actually aggravate their condition. Let them know you are there to support them as much as you can.

• Check in with students after the class. You might ask them, “Did the class meet your needs?” Follow up to see how they might continue to feel supported in the next class.

The following recommendations come from evidence-based yoga research studies that can be found at www.pubmed.com.

1. Low-Back Pain

• 85% of people will experience low-back pain at some point in their lives.
benefits of yoga

- 21% of the population come to yoga for low-back pain.
  (Groessi et al, 2008; Williams et al, 2005)
- Yoga improves back function and mobility.
- Some evidence shows that yoga alleviates back pain and that these effects can last long-term.
  (Cramer, 2013; Williams et al, 2009)
- Key poses: Cat/Cow, Cobra and variations, Warrior, Bridge, Supine Twist, Triangle, Downward-Facing Dog (generally avoid forward bends).
  (Cramer, 2013; Williams et al, 2009; McCall, 2007)

2. Pregnancy
- Yoga can reduce levels of stress, depression, and anxiety.
- Yoga can positively increase levels of mindfulness and bonding with the baby.
- Research shows that yoga reduces labor pain and improves birth weight.
  (Satyapriya et al, 2009; Field et al, 2012; Muzik et al, 2012; Songporn et al, 2008; Songporn et al, 2008)
- To be avoided: vigorous twists, forward bends with legs closed, pushing personal edge
- Consider offering supported Savasana.
  (McCall, 2007)

3. High Blood Pressure (HBP)
- HBP is an imbalance in the circulatory system and is correlated with heart attack, stroke, and metabolic syndrome.
- 67 million people have high blood pressure (1 in 3 people).
  www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure/facts.htm
- Yoga has been shown to improve blood pressure.
  (Cohen et al, 2007; for a review Hagins et. al, 2013)
- Modifications for people with HBP: Practice slow, gentle styles of yoga and avoid strenuous poses/flow.
  (McCall, 2007)
4. Cancer

- About 1.6 million people are diagnosed with cancer each year, and at any given time about 12 million Americans currently have cancer.

- It is common for individuals undergoing treatment to feel fatigued and experience change in cognitive and physical functions. (McCall, 2007)

- Studies show that yoga helps people with cancer in a number of ways: They require shorter hospital stays; heal more rapidly from wounds; and experience less nausea. (Culos-Reed et al; Holger, 2012 & McCall, 2007)

- Recommended yoga: gentle yoga, gentle pranayama, meditation, yoga nidra (avoid hot yoga). (McCall, 2007)

5. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder

- Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may develop in some people after exposure to extremely traumatic events, such as military combat, crime, an accident, or a natural disaster.

- Each year, 7.7 million people 18 or older are diagnosed with PTSD. Symptoms of PTSD include high levels of anxiety or depression, reliving traumatic experiences, nightmares, and excessive avoidance of people or places that act as triggers.

- Several studies show that meditation, especially mindfulness meditation, improves PTSD symptoms.

- Research on postures is varied, with one study showing improvements in symptoms and the other showing no differences with a control group not practicing yoga.

- Mantra practice has been shown to be effective in alleviating some of the symptoms of PTSD. (Kim et. al, 2013)

- Recommended yoga: yoga nidra, mantra, three-part breath. (Stankovic, 2011)

Key words

- Evidence-based
- Protocol for supporting special-needs students
- Control group
Chapter Learning Outcomes

• Learn five common conditions that yoga students may have.
• Understand basic features and vulnerabilities of these different conditions.
• Learn the latest outcomes of yoga research for these specific populations.
• Gain an embodied understanding, through a group experience, of what it’s like to carry one of these conditions into a yoga class.

references

Low-Back Pain


Pregnancy


**High Blood Pressure**

• www.cdc.gov/bloodpressure/facts.htm


**Cancer**


**PTSD**


Kripalu Yoga is an integrated system of self-transformation that empowers you to realize your full potential. The journey begins as you revitalize the body through postures, breathing exercises, and relaxation techniques. It deepens as you learn to focus awareness, enabling you to enter meditative states that awaken compassion and clear the mind. Through the practice of Kripalu Yoga, you discover how to nurture the roots of health, catalyze personal growth, live with greater skillfulness and joy, and transform your sense of what it means to be alive.

Kripalu Yoga lives both on and off the yoga mat. As we practice and teach yoga, our lives inevitably begin to change. As we practice Kripalu Yoga on the mat, we begin to notice obvious changes in our physical body, a growing tolerance for the sensations that are created in each asana, and an increase in flexibility, strength, and health. In addition, noticeable shifts occur emotionally and spiritually. The practice of being present begins to suffuse each moment as we explore asana, pranayama, and meditation. Samskaras, or energy blocks, are activated and opened, literally loosened, by on-the-mat practice. Prana, the life force, opens resistance in our body and mind as we become ready. Consequently, we are supplied just the right situations to draw these resistances to the surface for greater inquiry. Whether we like the feelings and sensations that arise in yoga or not, we are encouraged to examine, feel, and integrate them over time. As we continue to practice, we can become more skillful in listening to the inner wisdom that guides us in the flow of our lives.
The Kripalu Approach:

- Awakes nonjudgmental self-awareness.
- Yoga as a safe and disciplined practice for integration.
- Combines Western science with Eastern philosophy to promote vitality.

A Kripalu Yoga class includes:

- Welcoming and setting a context and/or intention for practice.
- Centering.
- Pranayama to cleanse the body and build a more connected relationship to the life force.
- Warm-Ups (hara or core engagements) that synchronizes breath with movement and concentration, preparing the body for more challenging asana.
- Asana sequences designed to strengthen, stretch, and balance the body, including standing and balancing, forward bending and backbending, spinal twists, lateral bends and inversions. A Kripalu Yoga class can range from gentle, moderate to vigorous, and includes tools from the three stages.
- Relaxation to allow integration of the practice on a physical, energetic, and mental level.
- Meditation.
kripalu yoga stages

Stage One: Will
Purpose: To increase awareness of bodily sensations.

- Practice of Stage One creates purification, resulting in increased physical awareness. This produces strength, flexibility, and stamina.
- Attention focuses on physical sensations.
- Witness consciousness begins through physical inquiries: You do yoga.
- Alignment principles are based on anatomical architecture and references.

Stage Two: Will and Surrender
Purpose: To increase awareness of thoughts, feelings, and emotions.

- Practice of Stage Two strengthens the will and removes blocks/habitual patterns. This produces personal clarity and honesty.
- Relaxed attention on thoughts, feelings, emotions, and breath.
- Witness consciousness develops through posture inquiry: You do yoga, and yoga does you.
- Alignment principles are based on prana/energy.

Stage Three: Surrender
Purpose: To increase awareness of instinct and intuition.

- Practice of Stage Three results in increased ability to experience situations without judgment, and to be present in body, mind, and spirit simultaneously. This produces joy, power, and wisdom.
- Passive attention on instinctual, intuitive movement.
- Witness consciousness surrenders to experiences of meditation in motion: Yoga does you.
- Alignment principles come from natural intuition.
kripalu yoga stages

By learning the foundational yoga poses, developing your will, listening to your body’s wisdom, quieting the mind, and awakening nonjudgmental awareness, your yoga is revealed.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>STAGE ONE</th>
<th>STAGE TWO</th>
<th>STAGE THREE</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Will</strong></td>
<td><strong>Will/Surrender</strong></td>
<td><strong>Surrender</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Purpose</strong></td>
<td>Increased awareness of bodily sensations.</td>
<td>Increased awareness of thoughts, feelings, and emotions.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Practice</strong></td>
<td>Creates purification, resulting in increased physical awareness. This produces strength, flexibility, and stamina.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attention</strong></td>
<td>Focused on physical sensations.</td>
<td>Relaxed... thoughts, feelings, emotions, and breath.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Witness Consciousness** | Begins through physical inquiries. 
You do yoga. | Develops through posture inquiry. 
You do yoga, and yoga does you. | Surrenders to experiences of meditation in motion. 
Yoga does you. |
| **Alignment** | Principles are based on anatomical architecture and references. | Principles are based on prana/energy. | Principles come from natural intuition. |
kripalu yoga tool bag

The following are methodologies for teaching Kripalu Yoga. As a yoga teacher, you will find it essential to have tools to create powerful learning experiences. A Kripalu Yoga teacher teaches yoga postures, but also provides an experience that resonates. This requires that you create safety, cultivate body awareness, and build an attunement using clear language and sensitivity to the needs of your individual students.

We have grouped the tools below into those that seem to apply to a particular stage and those that are practiced in all three stages. There are times when it’s useful to distinguish which stage a tool fits in, and times when it’s impossible to do so. For the purposes of systematic learning, it can be helpful to break down experiences into manageable components. These Kripalu Yoga methodologies first transform your life on the mat, and then extend into your life off the mat.

**Stage One Tools: Build gross body awareness and focus the mind.**
- Coordinating breath with movement.
- Building a posture from the ground up.
- Instructional demonstration.
- Posture options.
- Comparisons.
- Assisting and props.
- Finding your edge.
- Knowledge of anatomy, physiology, and kinesiology.
- Benefits and contraindications.

**Stage Two Tools: Develop subtle body awareness and awaken prana.**
- BRFWA (Breathe, Relax, Feel, Watch, Allow).
- Guided breathing.
- Exploring the edge.
- Sustaining a pose.
- Functional Imagery.
Stage Three Tools: *Surrender to prana and connect to Source.*

- Silent demonstration.
- Slow-motion prana exercise.
- Prana responses.
- Meditation in motion.

Notes:

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stage one tools

**Coordinating Breath with Movement**

Instructing students in coordinating breath with movement begins to awaken awareness and reduces the possibility of injury. It is a clear way to instruct movement while inviting students to stay connected to the breath. For example, “Inhale your arms overhead. Exhale and release arms down. Inhale, bend your right knee, and lift your right foot off the ground. Exhale, set your right foot back on the ground.”

**Building a Posture from the Ground Up**

Each asana has an anatomical and energetic architecture. Building the posture from the ground up is a way to ensure a strong foundation and clear alignment detail. When guiding students in standing poses, start with the feet; in other poses, start with the areas that are in contact with the ground, such as the hands or the legs.

**Instructional Demonstration**

Taking the time to demonstrate a posture, building from the ground up, highlighting common misalignments, and showcasing the use of props and posture options can deepen students’ knowledge and experience.

**Posture Options**

Every posture has options (variations, modifications, and adaptations) for students at all levels. Being aware of how to adjust a position or movement to meet individual needs is an intuitive talent that takes knowledge, time to develop, and practice.

**Comparisons**

Having students observe how they feel before a specific movement, watch how they feel during the movement, and observe how they feel after completing the movement gives them an opportunity to observe the effect of each part of their experience. Some comparisons include before/after, between two sides of the body, or between effort and ease. Comparisons are a wonderful way to cultivate witness consciousness and create increased body awareness.
Assists and Props

Assisting students in postures can guide them into a way of doing the posture that they may not have otherwise experienced. Conscious, confident, and caring assists (verbal, press-point, energetic, feel-good, and hands-on) are one of the benefits of being in a class rather than practicing with a video or alone. Introducing props (chairs, walls, straps, blankets, blocks, mats, bolsters, and mirrors) can also help students grow in their practice.

Finding Your Edge

No matter how skilled you or your students are at doing an asana, there is always an edge. Finding your edge (of strength, flexibility, attention, or endurance) and entering it with the appropriate balance of effort and compassion is a skill worth honing. Do you resist bringing yourself to your edge, rarely pressing up against limitation? Or do you push into your edge, in competition or judgment, sometimes causing injury? Finding the place that is just right helps the body to open and strengthen.

Knowledge of Anatomy, Physiology, and Kinesiology

Offering information about the muscles, bones, glands, and organs and how they work provides visual images, a sense of comfort, and reference points for alignment principles and benefits and contraindications.

Benefits

Possessing the skill and knowledge to describe and inspire students to notice and feel the benefits of a posture is invaluable. Speaking about benefits helps create body awareness, provides support as students maintain a pose, and educates them about the functions of their body.

Contraindications

An important role of the yoga teacher is to provide safety for students when guiding asanas. Being able to recognize potentially harmful situations and communicating reasons why students should modify or avoid a posture/breath is vital. It’s best to communicate contraindications by instructing students in what to do rather than what not to do. Consider checking in with your students at the beginning of class by asking, “Is there anything I should know about your body or health?”
stage two tools

**BRFWA: Breathe, Relax, Feel, Watch, Allow**

BRFWA is a Kripalu model for allowing experience to move, integrate, and release.

- **Breathe**: Reconnect with the sensations in the body through attention to inhalation and exhalation.
- **Relax**: Soften muscles, reduce any effort around mental activity, open to energy moving through resistance in the bodymind.
- **Feel**: Focus awareness on the sensations, feelings, memories, and thoughts flowing through the bodymind.
- **Watch**: Observe your experience with compassion and acceptance.
- **Allow**: Let your experience be just as it is, without any need to understand, judge, or change it.

**Guided Breathing**

Guided breathing contributes to strong witness consciousness, reduces the risk of injury, strengthens awareness of prana, brings a person into the present moment, and helps to purify the body, mind, and emotions. For example, “Apply kapalabhati as you sustain Warrior” or “Take a moment to breathe and notice how you feel.”

**Exploring the Edge**

In Stage One, you find the edge. In Stage Two, you explore the edge through movement inquiry, sustaining the pose and riding the waves of sensation. As you sustain a pose, you may notice that the edge shifts as you place attention on it.

**Sustaining a Pose**

Staying in postures for an extended period of time increases physical and energetic awareness.

**Functional Imagery**

This technique gives students mental pictures on which to focus and can create a somatic ability to perform a new movement. For example, in Half Moon, have students picture themselves leaning up and over a giant beach ball.
stage three tools

Silent Demonstration

Silent demonstrations of preparing for, moving into, sustaining, and moving out of an asana or asana sequence can provide students an energetic and evocative experience.

Slow-Motion Prana

Guiding students to feel and play with subtle prana in slow motion is an introductory experience for sensing, directing, and opening/surrendering to the life force.

Prana Responses

Guiding students to respond to prana gives them permission to listen to and follow the wisdom of their body. Most bodies, after doing a forward bend, intuitively respond with some kind of back-bending movement. When you provide permission, guidance, and time to respond to postures, unique and creative sequences may begin to emerge. Giving students small amounts of time to respond to prana after individual postures or sequences primes them for meditation in motion.

Meditation in Motion

Meditation in motion is when yoga/prana moves you. You become the creator of yoga. The Bhagavad Gita states that there are as many yoga poses as there are infinite manifestations of God. The ancient yogic text known as the Gheranda Samhita says, “There are 84 hundreds of thousands of asanas described by Shiva. The asanas are as many in number as there are species of living creatures in this universe.” All movement done with awareness is yoga.

As a yoga teacher, you will rarely lead a 90-minute meditation-in-motion class. Meditation in motion is usually a personal, intimate experience most often done in one’s personal practice. During your practice of meditation in motion, you may discover unique, creative sequences you may wish to lead in class. Meditation-in-motion experiences are naturally appropriate for one’s body, age, limitations, and strengths.
tools for all three stages

Alignment

- **Stage One**: Principles are based on anatomical architecture and references, generally building a pose from the ground up, stacking the major bones on top of each other.
- **Stage Two**: Principles are based on prana and lines of energy. Awareness is brought to areas of sensation.
- **Stage Three**: Principles come from intuition. The body’s wisdom is expressed and released. There are no rules or limits; the body follows what feels appropriate.

Creative Sequencing

Creative sequences, including vinyasa flows, are a hallmark of Kripalu Yoga. As a Kripalu Yoga teacher, you are not limited to classical postures, and there are no prescribed sequences to follow. With the three stages of Kripalu Yoga, yoga becomes a living inquiry.

- **Stage One**: Engage students’ attention, prepare their body for holding postures.
- **Stage Two**: Help students explore, open, strengthen, and sustain poses on deeper levels, empowering them to uncover their own imagination and creativity.
- **Stage Three**: The practice is inherently one of creative sequences, as prana guides the flow, and students tune into their natural energies. As a Kripalu Yoga teacher, the creative sequences that you bring to your classes often emerge from your personal Stage Three experiences.
tools for all three stages

Language

Voice quality and use of language are two of the most influential tools for guiding students. Learning to speak in ways that do not distract students from their experience, but instead guide them deeper, is an art. Different types of language is used in each of the three stages.

- **Stage One:** Clear, precise directions provided in progressive, logical steps help guide students into asana. In general, build poses from the ground up, coordinate breath with movement, bring awareness to details, and offer benefits and contraindications.

- **Stage Two:** Explorational language and guidance is provided to encourage micromovements, prana response, and creative inquiry. Functional imagery (giving students mental pictures on which to focus) can create a somatic ability to perform a new movement. For example, “In Standing Forward Fold, picture your whole body draped like a towel over a towel rack.” Another Stage Two technique is the use of affirmations to focus attention and provide support while sustaining poses. For example, have students repeat “I am strong and powerful” and encourage them to notice their internal dialogue while holding Warrior pose.

- **Stage Three:** Language comes from deep intuition and connection to Source, allowing students to listen to the direction of prana. It is an acquired skill to allow your voice to “disappear” into the background so that the experience of the student becomes the guide. Use language that encourages listening to and following prana, and is affirming of uninhibited expression of self.

Meditation

- **Stage One:** Chitta meditation—The intention is to deliberately focus your attention on an object (breath, mantra, mandala, chant, asana, candle), and when your attention wanders, simply bring it back.

- **Stage Two:** Chitta/prana meditation brings focused attention to prana, breath, movement, and witness consciousness simultaneously.

- **Stage Three:** Prana meditation involves focusing on primal and subtle energy, biological drives, emotion, images, and feelings. When witness consciousness is developed to the point where you can identify with and experience prana fully without judgment, you can maintain an inner posture of meditation during prana experiences. Meditation in motion is a prana meditation that is unique to Kripalu Yoga.
tools for all three stages
(continued)

Movement Inquiry

Movement inquiry is the exploration that happens when you pulse, stretch, wiggle, circle, turn, rock, and relax within a posture. By playing with movement, you and your students can find different ways of being in a posture, or create new postures altogether. Micromovements focus attention on smaller, subtler movements.

- **Stage One:** Explore alignment—placement of body parts—and limits of strength, flexibility, and balance. As a teacher, you can create movement explorations to help your students find their expression of each posture.

- **Stage Two:** Explore and respond to prana. Guiding students in movement inquiry while sustaining a pose helps awaken subtle prana/energy, coax open dormant areas, and increase the ability to sustain the pose.

- **Stage Three:** Prana guides movement. Meditation in motion takes you beyond the mind and connects you to primal rhythms within the body. These rhythmic movements can unleash healing, insight, and connection to Source.

Music

Music can be a helpful tool in assisting your student’s exploration. The use of music is a personal choice for you as a teacher. Music may encourage flow, openness, breath coordinated with movement, and sound. It can also be a distraction.

Experiment, and make deliberate choices regarding the use of music in your classes. Remember that music does not have to be all or nothing. Consider weaving music only into particular segments of the practice, such as during warm-up or at the end of class into Savasana.
tools for all three stages
(continued)

**Nonjudgmental awareness/Witness consciousness**

Acquiring nonjudgmental awareness/witness consciousness is essential to Kripalu Yoga.

- **Stage One:** The mind is given details of alignment, benefits and contraindications, the names of poses, and the “how, why, when, and where” of yoga. You are encouraged to watch the inner dialogue that takes place on the mat and how that may affect you off the mat. You do yoga. Will is required.

- **Stage Two:** Purification and transformation happen by holding poses for greater lengths of time, increasing strength, stamina, and flexibility in all areas. Witness consciousness is solidified by finding your edge, working with breath retention and release, and riding waves of emotion. You do yoga and yoga does you. Will and surrender are required.

- **Stage Three:** Witness consciousness/nonjudgmental awareness is established. The ability to simultaneously surrender and be directed by prana, the wisdom of the body, intuition, and inner guidance are experienced. Witness consciousness allows free expression without the control of the mind, and opens you to bliss. Nonjudgmental awareness allows you to be in the present moment. Experiencing life as it is, without any need to change it, judge it, label it, or resist it, opens us to our personal power. Yoga does you. Surrender is required.

**Pranayama**

Pranayama, or breathing techniques, are a foundational tool for developing witness consciousness (Stage One), building and retaining energy (Stage Two), and surrendering to prana (Stage Three). Each pranayama has unique benefits. All breathing techniques oxygenate the body, stimulate the immune system, focus the attention, strengthen the diaphragm, increase the metabolism, and help purify the system.

- **Stage One:** Primarily learn and practice ujjayi, dirgha, nadi shodhana, hara breathing, and breath coordinated with movement.

- **Stage Two:** Includes kapalabhati, bastrika, anuloma viloma, and breath retention (kumbhaks).

- **Stage Three:** Breath is free to express itself under the direction of prana.
tools for all three stages 
(continued)

**Repetition**

Repeating alignment details and repeating postures by moving in and out of the same pose several times helps to increase awareness in the postures.

- **Stage One:** Repeating the posture cues of building from the ground up moves the attention throughout the body in a specific posture. For example, in Dandasana, Staff pose, you might say, “Press the sitting bones into the floor. Press the backs of the knees away from you. Draw the toes toward the belly button and the belly button toward the toes. Lift through the crown and lengthen the spine. Breathe.” Then repeat.

- **Stage Two:** Repeating the same posture cues several times can assist students in sustaining poses, a beneficial tool for increasing strength and awareness in a posture. For example, when guiding students into Warrior, use ground-up posture cues the first time, then use Stage Two tools the second time to have them explore micromovements and/or pranayama while sustaining Warrior.

- **Stage Three:** The third time in Warrior, inviting students to explore prana responses during or after holding the posture is a way of providing deep experiences, new awareness, and inquiry into the posture.

**Silence**

Silence allows students to turn inward. Balance speaking with times of personal experience.

- **Stage One:** Less silence and more verbal direction. Moments of silence usually occur when you are modeling postures for your students and allow them to experience the benefits of the pose.

- **Stage Two:** Periods of silence provide opportunities for students to access their inner dialogue and make it conscious. They also allow students to find their edge and their expression of the posture. Periods of silence may include the practice of pranayama (i.e., ujjayi and kapalabhati) during the holding of postures, warm-ups, micromovements, pulsing, and hara breathing.

- **Stage Three:** Silence provides the space within which students can attune to prana.
a model of transformation

In Kripalu Yoga, we recognize two kinds of growth: gradual/progressive and cathartic. Gradual, progressive growth happens when we live a yogic lifestyle, strengthen our body, and develop healthy relationships. We progressively see ourselves healing and strengthening. This builds our self-esteem, which provides a stable base and opens us to even more integration. Cathartic growth occurs when change happens suddenly, brought on by a deep practice or simply by life handing us a challenge. In the cathartic growth experience, the sense of self partially dissolves and, if worked with appropriately, reforms more whole and complete. The model below illustrates stages in this process. Having a road map such as the one below helps us to understand and safely navigate the experience.
**BRFWA**

breath | relax | feel | watch | allow

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**1. Incident occurs**

**2. Sensations build**

When feelings and sensations become uncomfortable, we

- Use habitual behavior to jump off the wave. If we choose this, we do not arrive at #3.
- Stay with experience, use the practice of being present (BRFWA).

**3. Sensations crest**

Through the use of breath, sensations peak. The experience is contained in the cells and transmitted energetically throughout the koshas. A shift occurs.

**4. Integration**

As integration begins, the learning moves from the unconscious to the conscious level. We experience insights, knowing, and “aha” moments.

**5. Beliefs**

As the mind reestablishes its presence, it may take a protective stance, disavowing the cathartic experience and reasserting old beliefs. When you stay committed to riding the waves, beliefs can be rewritten.
teaching philosophy

We all know that feeling we experience at the end of a Kripalu Yoga class, an inner balance that is difficult to capture in words. Perhaps we begin to wonder how the teacher was able to guide us toward such harmony. “What did he/she say that allowed me to have this feeling inside? How did it happen that as soon as I walked into the room I felt relaxed? And as the class progressed, I felt as though I was finally home inside myself.” These are some of the appropriate questions an aspiring Kripalu Yoga teacher may ask. This section addresses how to create a Kripalu Yoga experience. Being the teacher and guiding students to connect to their inner wisdom is the balance at the heart of teaching Kripalu Yoga.
The purpose of this section is to

- Reveal to you the methods behind the structure of a Kripalu Yoga class so that you are able to develop an awareness of how the experience is created.
- Develop a way of seeing that allows you to be open and receptive to the moment.
- Help you move toward being nonjudgmental of yourself and others so that you may learn from everyone and everything around you.
- Assist you in letting go of trying to get it right, striving for the end result, or trying to achieve anything, and just allowing yourself to flow with what is happening at any given moment.

Being a yoga teacher carries with it much joy, as well as much responsibility. This program provides opportunities for growth and to witness the growth of others. In the role of a student or teacher, we can be caring and also invite ourselves and others to take responsibility for the inner and outer journey. The journey includes

- Learning to be with yourself in a deep way, as the springboard for sharing that depth with others.
- Learning how to be with yourself in a way that is fulfilling.
- Helping each person to enjoy their body, and accepting each person as they open inner doorways of transformation and health.

Teaching is an art that encompasses many aspects, including

- Knowledge of the techniques and material.
- The ability to communicate.
- Being objective, with a nonjudgmental attitude.
- Willingness to grow and remain a student.
- Permission to not know, to be the beginner, and to be a learner.
- A sense of humor.
- Dropping expectations to accomplish any goals.
- Being willing to tune into your needs and the students’ needs.
- Teaching from personal experience.
- Sharing with gratitude what you have received from your own yoga teachers and practice to help cultivate humility.
teaching methodology

The Kripalu Yoga teaching methodology includes:

- How to design and sequence a complete class.
- Creating sacred space, psychological safety, and a context for learning.
- How to teach postures, pranayama, relaxation, and meditation.
- Fostering body awareness.
- Honing assisting skills.
- Ways to take students beyond the postures into a deeper knowledge of themselves.

creating the context for learning

Each of the following methodologies can help us as teachers to become increasingly more sensitive in creating a context in which real learning can take place.

Creating Safe and Sacred Space

The yoga class begins the moment the students enter the room. Every detail of the environment is a part of the yoga experience. If the intention of yoga is to create harmony between the body, mind, and spirit, then it is equally important to create harmony between individuals and their environment. It is worth every effort on the part of the teacher to make all preparations to ensure a comfortable, relaxed classroom environment.

Greeting

What you feel emotionally in relation to your students affects them. Your body language, dress, and attitude tell them a great deal about you. Consider how you want to welcome your students as they enter the yoga space.
Environment/Ambiance

The care and attention you put into structuring the mood and environment of the class is a large part of your task as instructor. The following details can greatly enhance the experience you wish to create: music, lighting, temperature, air quality, your appearance, and your initial contact with individuals in the group.

- Is the lighting comfortable and inviting? When a particular room has only fluorescent or harsh overhead lighting, it's a good idea to bring a lamp or candles to soften the ambiance.
- Is the air fresh and clean-smelling? Arrive with enough time to air out the room and adjust the temperature to ensure everyone's comfort. Burning a moderate amount of incense before the students arrive can add a meditative quality to the mood. However, too much strong-smelling incense can be irritating.
- Is the music soft and soothing? Music is one of the most potent ways to create an environment that is conducive to relaxation. Choose your audio with regard to the mood you want to create: slow, deep, and relaxing; active, stimulating, and energizing; mellow, carefree, and lighthearted; or pensive, calming, and meditative.
- Is all excess furniture in the room neatly organized and either out of sight or arranged in an unused part of the room? Clear the visual space so the external environment is not distracting.
- Is the floor surface clean and comfortable? One of the most important criteria is that the floor be clean. Bring extra mats for new students or those who do not have their own. As the instructor, you'll want to have a mat for yourself. Arrange to have the floor cleaned before each class, or arrive early enough to do it yourself.
- Are there other activities happening around your classroom? If so, make any possible prior arrangements so that your class time is free from loud, distracting noises.

Space use

Explore different space-use options before deciding which to incorporate into your design:

- You: Teaching from the center, up front, on a mat, on a platform, moving, staying still, sitting, standing, or a combination.
- The group: Sitting on cushions, BackJacks®, chairs, or yoga mats; in rows, arcs, big circle, small circles, close together, or spread out.
- If you have handouts, sale items, or registration materials that need completion, set up a hospitality table somewhere near the entrance so that all transactions are accessible and easy to complete.
Creating psychological safety

Every time we ask our students to learn something new, we are asking them to enter into the unknown. By anticipating the physical and psychological discomforts that arise during the learning process, we are better able to create safety, support, and encouragement for relaxed learning to happen.

For each new movement or posture we are about to teach, it is important to take care of the part of our minds that needs security. Brain research has revealed that it is the job of the limbic system (associated with the “old brain,” located at the base of the brain stem) to safeguard our experience. It does so by constantly monitoring the environment for changes in temperature, light, proximity of other objects or beings, duration of events, and the rhythm and speed of elemental forces around us. This part of our brain is also called the “reptilian” brain, and its job is to create security.

In other words, to be able to let go and relax into any kind of new experience, the reptilian brain must be assured that survival of the organism is not endangered. On a practical level, this is essential information for the yoga teacher, who wants to create a mood in which the mind can let go of its usual problem-solving, critical-awareness functions.

Here are some examples of questions the reptilian brain will want answered:

- How long will this class last?
- Are we going to begin and end on time?
- Is the room temperature comfortable?
- Where are the restroom and water fountain?
- Is the floor surface clean and comfortable?
- Do I have enough personal space around me?
- Can I hear and see the instructor?
- Where can I store my shoes, clothes, and other belongings without needing to stay aware of them?
- Does the instructor look competent, reliable, and approachable?
- Is there enough fresh air?
- Do I feel safe and that I belong here?

From these questions, you can get a sense of the fundamental level of safety that we require in order to learn. Knowing and honoring that each of us asks these questions in one form or another,
and that it is natural and expected that these questions be answered, will help you provide a truly safe environment at the most basic level. Many of these questions can be answered by the way you organize the classroom space.

Another way of saying this is that we need a certain level of creature comfort in order to be willing to enter another realm of experience. The extent to which our bodies are externally uncomfortable or our minds are agitated and insecure directly affects our state of relaxation.

**Your interaction with individuals**

How you interact with individuals in the group impacts their experience. Practice loving-kindness. Find out what your students’ needs are, and do your best to meet them. Let your students be a vehicle for you to practice sensitivity to others. Walk your talk.

**Your interaction with a group**

Be aware of:

- Your ability to listen.
- The energy and mood of the group (i.e., tired, wired, playful, rebellious).
- Respecting/being sensitive to various differences in the group (female/male, old/young, introverts/extroverts).
- Dialoguing versus trying to fix.
- Creating space for questions and reactions.
- Staying open to your own learning process.
- Reinforcing empowerment through interactions versus having your students become dependent on you.
- Letting go of your “correct” answers.
- Keeping agreements (such as starting and ending class on time).

**Here are some examples of questions students may ask**

- What is yoga?
- What is prana?
- What are the benefits of yoga?
- Is yoga a religion?
- What is the difference between yoga and other types of exercise?
• Can yoga cure disease?
• What are your qualifications?
• What do you mean by meditation? By energy? By spirit?
• What is Kripalu and Kripalu Yoga?
• Is yoga for me if I have scoliosis, a spinal fusion, a neck injury, or am pregnant?
• When should I practice yoga and for how long at a time?
• How long does it take for yoga to work?
• Can I hurt myself doing yoga?
• What is a guru?
• Will I lose weight?
• Must I change my diet? My lifestyle?
• How is Kripalu Yoga different from other types of yoga?
• What is hara?
Developing Awareness

Awareness of the Body

Kripalu Yoga facilitates a deep contact with and awareness of the various dimensions of life, including the physical, emotional, energetic, mental, and spiritual. The following methodologies all aim to focus the awareness on the experience of being present. Many of these methods include details to support learning, and some are also tools found in the Kripalu tool bag.

Details for the Mind

Our minds serve us in so many ways throughout the day, yet our attention is often focused on what is happening outside of us. To become aware of the body requires that we give the mind specific details as internal points of focus. Otherwise, the mind continues to function in the way it has become trained. In the first stage of Kripalu Yoga, we take full advantage of the way the mind works. We harness all the power of discrimination and observation to enhance body awareness. The mind loves detail. The more detail we provide, the deeper the learning process and the deeper the effects of the initial stage of yoga.

Alignment

To protect the body from injury in the postures and to avoid reinforcing painful imbalances that have already developed within the body, it is necessary to provide a basic map of alignment for each posture. For example, in Mountain pose (Tadasana), if you have the students close their eyes and bring their feet parallel to each other without looking, many people will not come close to actual parallel alignment. They may feel as if their feet are aligned, but the habitual imbalances have become so “normal” that actual balance feels awkward. When the students open their eyes and look at their feet, they can often bring their feet more closely into alignment. Yet for some, alignment can still be difficult to achieve. Pointing this out helps punctuate the importance of becoming aware of the body through the details of alignment.

Isolation of Body Parts

When they are lying on the floor, many students are unaware that one foot and leg is often more turned out than the other, that one shoulder is heavier on the ground than the other, or that the head is turned more to one direction than the other. By drawing attention throughout the class to various body parts, the teacher helps students begin to train their own awareness and watch for the subtleties that happen throughout the body, especially during the postures.
**Before-after comparisons**

Having students observe how they feel before doing a specific movement, watch how they feel during the movement, and then observe the difference in how they feel after completing the movement gives them an opportunity to observe the effect and benefit of each part of their experience.

**Right-left comparisons**

Performing a posture on one side of the body and then pausing to observe the different sensations between the two sides of the body allows the effects to register deeply within the observing mind.

**Sensations**

It is helpful to suggest various possible sensations that students might feel during the movements and postures. For example, after they stretch the left arm above the head and slowly lower it back down to the side, ask them to notice what is happening in the entire length of the arm, from the tips of the fingers to the crest of the shoulder. Do they notice any tingling or pulsing sensations? Does this arm feel warmer or cooler than the other arm? Does this arm feel longer, or heavier, or lighter than before they began? Do they feel energy streaming through the arm?

**Exaggerating the extremes**

The more vivid the sensation you emphasize, the easier it is for the mind to observe the effect. Performing several movements combined with deep breathing on one side of the body before going to the opposite side increases the effect by exaggerating the difference between the two sides. Or use an image to emphasize the direction or intention behind a movement. For example, “Stretch your left arm above your head. Look up in the direction of the stretch and imagine yourself reaching through the ceiling to tickle the clouds.”

**Moving in non-habitual Ways**

We all have ways in which we move that are habitual. One of the most dramatic ways this shows up is in how we interlace our fingers. Typically, one way of doing it will feel “right” and the other “wrong,” or unnatural. Encouraging your students to perform the opposite of what they do automatically or habitually creates an opportunity for more awareness. Another way this may manifest is in the order in which we do things—for instance, always doing a posture on the right side first. Again, use a shift from autopilot to bring greater awareness to the present. Doing so helps to rein in the mind.
Breath awareness/Reversing the breathing pattern

In yoga, we teach basic breathing patterns that facilitate certain movements. For example, we usually exhale as we fold forward or twist, and inhale as we extend or return to center. Reversing this pattern for short periods of time creates an opportunity to observe how the ease and depth of the breath is affected by these movements.

Assists

Using verbal or hands-on assists gives students more awareness in their postures.

Pause/Allow

Taking a moment to stop and observe the effects of a posture or series of postures creates space for awareness and integration to occur. When we’re constantly moving, we’re less likely to notice subtle changes in how we feel.

Micromovements

Moving in small ways after entering a posture or movement creates sensation and can allow for greater openings. For instance, when your ear is dropped toward your right shoulder, make small circles with your nose.

Repetitive movement

Repeating a movement several times can progressively deepen the movement.

Functional imagery

Giving students a mental picture on which to focus can sometimes create the somatic ability to perform a new movement. An example would be to picture yourself leaning over a giant beach ball when doing Half Moon.

Sustaining the pose

Sustaining a posture is one of the best ways to create sensation in the body and to notice how those sensations are constantly changing.

Developmental movement

Giving detailed instructions for entering a posture from the ground up allows a feeling of stability and safety to emerge, which can give students more awareness of where they are in space.
awareness of support

Creating variety in the learning experience keeps students’ awareness fresh and involved. Introducing any of the following elements can help break up the long stretches of a learning experience that can otherwise fall into a monotonous, repetitive pattern that loses its impact.

**Partners**

Having students work with each other helps create an atmosphere of caring, personal contact, and, ultimately, a deeper experience. There is more to Kripalu Yoga than learning postures. Students are learning to interact with themselves in new, expanded ways. It’s helpful to create opportunities for them to interact with each other, deepening their own sensitivity to themselves while opening up to a deeper contact with others. Placing students together for partner experiences is an art in itself. We want to enhance comfort and awareness, not put someone on edge, creating discomfort or confrontation.

Partner work can be used to create relaxation and greater depth in a posture, bring awareness to parts of the body used in certain postures, and facilitate greater breath awareness, among many other benefits. In your Kripalu Yoga Teacher Training, you will experience a variety of partner postures, and through your teaching experiences, you will create more partner assists that work for you.

**Props**

It’s important to be familiar with the use of props—mats, blocks, yoga ties, blankets, tennis balls, cushions, chairs, walls, and/or mirrors—which can be used to meet students’ needs in poses. While the rest of the class is performing the guided movement, some individuals may need to support a knee by doubling up their mat, place their elbows on a folded blanket instead of the floor, use a chair to maintain their balance, or use any other prop that would be helpful. Teaching our students to use props and to create ways of supporting themselves communicates how important it is to be aware of the body’s needs. No two bodies are alike, and each body has its own way of strengthening and letting go. Props help students find the level they can fully absorb.

**Awareness of the self**

The ultimate intention of everything we do in a Kripalu Yoga class is to create space for students to make deep contact with the self. The real yoga is what happens inside each person. What language you use is important. Utilize experiential language to facilitate deeper opening. Also, the
silent space that you allow between postures creates an opening for students to register the inner effects of what they’re doing. Kripalu Yoga cannot be taught; it can only be experienced from within. By leading people in yogic inquiries and explorations, you create the possibility for each person to go within and discover that his or her own inner experience is the real yoga teacher.

**Encourage sounds**

When you were a baby, you were learning how to move and simultaneously exploring how to make sounds. Primarily, you made the movements and sounds that felt good to you. You were self-stimulated by repeating the pleasurable movements in your body. As we return to that primal learning process as adults, releasing sounds that accompany movements—moaning, groaning, squealing, sighing, laughing, crying—stimulates the learning center in your brain that is connected with movement. The majority of us have learned to stifle and inhibit bodily sounds. It is considered rude and impolite to yawn during a serious conversation with a friend. When we start to enter the world of the body, expressing our bodily sounds helps us feel at home in the experience. Letting students know this, and making sounds yourself, helps to release the inhibitions of prior conditioning, and also helps to make the experiences more enjoyable.

**Acknowledging pleasure and pain**

Many of us have the unconscious belief that it’s not okay to feel good. To really do something good for our body, we think, must necessarily create stress, tension, and perhaps even pain. Ergo, “No pain, no gain.” The Kripalu approach to creating body awareness emphasizes acknowledging the pleasurable sensations that arise from doing the simplest, most effortless movements. By encouraging students to make sounds in order to enjoy each stretch and to expand into their bodies, you guide them into what can be the most enlightening part of the learning experience: that having a body and being in a body feels wonderful. Along the way, what is not open, loose, flexible, or expansive often reveals itself as pain. Acknowledging that there is pain along the path of discovering pleasurable sensation is also important.

We encourage our students to proceed slowly, to breathe into each sensation, to use proper alignment when it makes a difference in how the movement is done, and, above all, to remain aware and in contact with the messages their bodies are sending them along the way. Kripalu Yoga is a learning process, an inquiry, an exploration. Part of the inquiry is about discriminating between the discomfort that comes from opening and the pain that comes from straining.

Another form of inquiry your students may experience is emotional or psychological. Our bodies are a walking repository of our past experiences. Kripalu Yoga acknowledges that tension in the body is sometimes the result of undigested experiences. Past experiences that we have not fully integrated, be they pleasurable or painful, may be stored in the body’s muscle memory. As we start using areas of the body that are not accustomed to moving, past experiences often become activated as laughter, tears, and sensitivity.
teaching and guiding a new posture to beginners

Remember how you felt when you took your first yoga class? For most beginners, there is a period of adjustment. There are the natural insecurities of being in a new place, doing “weird” things with the body, and, most of all, being with yourself in a new way. For many people, this can be an overwhelming experience. As a teacher, it’s important to be sensitive to this and to keep it in mind as you take on new students. This, along with creating an environment of acceptance and safety, can make a big difference for new students. What will also make a difference is your level of confidence and inner organization as you enter into the experience of teaching a new posture to beginners. For this reason, we offer a simple, reliable, and user-friendly format for teaching a new posture to beginners. This formula has been used for years and has provided security and support for many Kripalu Yoga teachers. It is comprised of eight sequential steps:

Protocol

1. Give a context.
2. Warm up the students.
3. Demonstrate the new posture.
4. Offer benefits, precautions, and contraindications.
5. Answer questions.
6. Lead the new posture.
7. Answer any other questions.
8. Lead the posture again (or lead it on the other side).

A final component to teaching a new posture is guiding the posture a second time and offering an opportunity for students to share about their experience. After becoming familiar with each step, you may wish to experiment with variations or other steps that you may find helpful in your discovery process. This is just a starting place; a springboard for your expression of creativity and personality.

SEE SECTION STARTING ON PAGE 9.2 FOR MORE ON THIS PROTOCOL.
ESRIT

enter | sustain | release | integrate | transition

BREATH

enter | sustain | release | integrate | transition
class design and sequencing
the planning process

Suggestions for planning a yoga class

1. Set aside a time when you can relax and not be disturbed.

2. Create an atmosphere that fosters your own relaxation and creativity (light candles, play music, find a clear space in which you can do some postures).

3. Relax, center yourself, and allow yourself to be open and receptive.

4. Visualize and/or “feel” the people in your class—imagine where they might be stiff, what their problems might be, and how you can support them.

5. Visualize how they will feel at the end of the class. What is your intent for them and for yourself?

6. Do the postures that you have decided to teach in this class. Do them in the most basic ways; think simple. Break them down into sequential steps.

7. Go inside your body for guidance. Decide which are the most important details—for example, which body parts get the most stretch. Predict which postures might be hard for your students and how you can support them with an easier version or with props.

8. Decide which warm-ups are appropriate.

9. Decide how you want to lead the posture you’re teaching (for example, with partner assist, using ties, or against the wall).

10. Decide which methodologies you will use (for example, experiential language, functional imagery, before/after comparisons, graduated sequence).

11. Review benefits and precautions.

12. Explore a good counterpose or complementary stretch.

13. Consider a topic of discussion to focus on.

14. Decide how you will guide the relaxation.

15. In light of what you’ve planned and envisioned, review the materials, props, handouts, etc., you will need (for example, small lamp, incense, music, pillows, ties).
Outline for Creating a Complete Experience

Overview
There are three basic steps for creating a complete experience:

- Tell your students what you are going to do.
- Do it.
- Tell them what you did.

Beginning
- Welcome students.
- Center with them/meditation/om.
- Create the context for today’s experience.

Middle
- Guide warm-ups.
- Review of material from previous class.
- Introduce new material.
- Discuss the benefits and contraindications.
- Verbally demonstrate.
- Guide the posture.

End
- Transition into relaxation.
- Share, discuss, ask for questions.
- Provide inspiration/invitation for the next class.
- Make announcements/provide resources.
- Closing with a meditation and an om.
the art of sequencing

There are a number of basic principles for sequencing asana that can support an optimal experience for students. Although some of the information below follows a particular logic, it’s not etched in stone. It’s important to be attuned to what your class is craving, or to focus on what you’re teaching in your curriculum (for example, beginner’s series). When teaching, it’s useful to distinguish whether you’re leading a class that will visit and touch upon many posture categories or a class that has a particular focus (for example, backbending). If you are emphasizing a particular posture category, use your warm-up sequence and first round of postures to open, strengthen, and stretch the following:

- **Standing postures**: calves, quads, hips
- **Backbends**: shoulders, quads, spine, abdominals
- **Arm balances**: hips, spine, abdominals
- **Twists**: side body, shoulders, abdominals
- **Inversions**: shoulders.

Sequencing may also vary depending on the time of day. In a morning class, we might spend more time warming the muscles and joints; in an afternoon practice, we might sequence more cooling and nervous system-balancing postures to help students wind down from a full day.

In general, a class begins with warm-ups, and progresses to asanas that require strength and stamina (standing, balancing, abdominal) within the first half of the class. The middle or high point of a class should consist of the postures that require the most strength, stamina, and flexibility (backbends, deep twists, arm balances). It’s important that the last quarter of the class contain asanas that are cooling, quieting, and balancing (forward folds, gentler twists, inversions).

**General asana categories**

*Warm-Ups*: Begin with joint warm-ups. Lead slow, repetitive movements, gradually increasing the pace and tempo. Open the hips and shoulders. Establish coordination of breath and movement. Explore utilizing a simple vinyasa to warm up the major muscles and joints. Surya Namaskar and its variations help to open the main muscles of the legs, hips, torso, arms, and shoulders. It flexes and lengthens the spine and helps to build stamina and strength.
Standing postures: Best practiced early in a class, standing postures require strength and stamina, and work the upper legs which are the largest muscles in the body. They are also stimulating in nature, which increases mental alertness and builds confidence, to help students feel more grounded and stable.

Balancing postures: Best done toward the end of a standing sequence, when students feel grounded and stable, balancing poses create stability or reflect the current mental and physical state. Although asymmetrical postures occur in almost every category, they are most common in the balancing category. Balancing poses point out differences in strength and/or flexibility and, through practice, provide an opportunity to even out these differences. In order to increase either strength or flexibility, guide students to practice on the weaker or tighter side first and last, and on the stronger or more flexible side just once.

Lateral bends: Best explored after the spine has warmed up, lateral bends help elongate the ribs and warm the tissue of the torso. They support elongation in backbends and help to stimulate the abdominals.

Abdominal strengtheners: Best practiced after warming up and stretching the muscles of the legs and groin, abdominal strengtheners can be interwoven throughout the practice or focused on in the first half of a class, as they tend to induce a great deal of heat.

Backbends: Backbends are typically done at the high point of a class because they require the greatest amount of physical preparation. The shoulders, low back, quadriceps, adductors, and pelvic floor must be sufficiently lengthened and warmed up in order to do backbends safely. Because deep backbends create heat and stimulate the nervous system, be sure to provide sufficient time to cool down afterward.

Forward bends: Forward bends are excellent poses to incorporate in the cool-down phase of practice because they are quieting, and help generate introversion. Forward bends provide a counterstretch for the opening in back extensions.

Twists: Considered to be neutralizing postures, twists calm the body if agitated and stimulate it if dull or lethargic. They help bring the nervous system and glandular system into balance. If done after backbends, they are cooling and soothing. They become stimulating if done after forward bends or restorative poses. They also serve as transitional poses to restore balance, and thus are good postures with which to end a class.

Inversions: Best performed after shoulder openers, such as Bridge, and shoulder strengtheners, such as Downward-Facing Dog. Explore Headstand before Shoulderstand (half or full), as Headstand is a heating inversion, while Shoulderstand is cooling and provides a counter-stretch to the neck muscles.
## Lesson Planning Form

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<th>Preparation</th>
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### Materials

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### Timing Details

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<td><strong>Beginning</strong></td>
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<td>Centering</td>
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<td>Q&amp;A</td>
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**Middle**

- Warm-Ups
- Include all six movements of the spine and warm-ups sufficient to the level of practice.

- Pranayama

- Postures
- Include postures from each classification of movement. Note if a posture is new and how you will teach it. Note if you are planning to include pranayama in postures.

### End

- Relaxation
- Meditation
- Integration
- Reflection
- Gratitude
- Q&A
- Closing
Warm-ups are gentle, repetitious, non-stressing movements that stretch and energize muscles and connective tissue. As the muscles open, they begin to lubricate the joints. In Kripalu Yoga, we divide warm-ups into three categories: warm-up movements, kriyas, and postures.

**Warm-up movements**

Warm-up movements are movements from any physical modality that can be used to prepare the body for yoga postures. Examples include crunches, windmills, and jumping jacks. One concern with using traditional exercise movements is that the students might have associations with them that are contrary to the intention of a yoga class—the movements might remind students of a competitive athletic environment, for example, which could detract from their yogic experience.

**Kriyas**

Kriya is a Sanskrit word meaning “to move” or “purify.” In this context, it refers to yogic movements. In asanas, the positions are held somewhat statically. However, on a more subtle level, we are adjusting the form of the posture with breath and awareness. Thus, a kriya can be a posture that we go in and out of in continuous motion. For example, in Bridge pose, gently move in and out of the posture several times before going into the full extension and holding.

Postures may be broken down into component stretches and performed as kriyas. For example, the shoulder stretch you receive during Bridge can be mimicked in a seated position with Yoga Mudra arms, squeezing the shoulder blades and lifting the sternum. If you hold and release this stretch several times, it could be an appropriate warm-up for Bridge.

Since kriyas consist of repetitive movement of certain body parts while other body parts remain relaxed, they support the student in developing detailed awareness of the mechanics of the postures. Because some parts of the body are passive during kriyas, not as much effort is exerted. This allows students to learn and practice the movements in ways that are less taxing.
Postures

Easier postures can be used as warm-ups for more challenging ones. For example, Standing Squat helps prepare the body for Warrior.

Sometimes warm-ups take the form of static holding positions, such as Fire Hydrant. These holdings engage the joint in a non-stressful yet still physically demanding way. The holding generates heat and fatigues the muscles, which can release tension and increase circulation. It's always safest to begin with repetitive movements and follow with static warm-ups.

Summary

Warm-up movements tend to be more external than either kriyas or postures, and can be especially effective for new students. The variety of available movements can meet almost any need, and are endlessly adaptable. Kriyas, on the other hand, tend to be more internal. They invite the student to feel from the inside and begin cultivating body and breath awareness. Kriyas often focus, sometimes intensely, on specific joints or muscle groups, and need to be practiced cautiously so as not to overstrain. Postures work best as warm-ups when students have already learned to safely practice the postures being offered.

A simple method for sequencing warm-ups is to first list the postures to be taught or the most advanced postures to be led. Then create a warm-up sequence for each posture on your list, combining a mix of warm-up movements, kriyas, and postures. Integrating these various techniques into a safe and thorough series of movements will provide a solid outline for a class.

Benefits of warm-ups

- Raise body temperature.
- Increase pulse rate.
- Invite breath awareness.
- Lubricate joints.
- Awaken supportive tissue.
- Encourage body awareness and introversion.
- Prepare muscles by increasing circulation and movement of interstitial fluids.
- Incrementally open the muscles in preparation for more advanced postures.
- Allow students to let go of judgments and competitive tendencies.
- Work muscles until they are tired, which may release tension, allowing them to stretch more fully and safely in the postures.
- Create a more enjoyable, safe, and beneficial physical experience.
Warm-up guidelines

• Assume the students are not warmed up at the start of class and begin from there.
• Warm up to the level of intensity of the postures you will be working with.
• Work the muscles and joints most affected by the chosen postures.
• Flow from one warm-up to the next, with only brief pauses between so that heat is generated.

Warm-up sequence

1. Slow, gentle stretching.
2. Circular movements that explore range of motion.
3. More vigorous circular or repetitive movements.
4. Static warm-up movements and postures.

Chapter learning outcomes:

• Understand the benefits of warm-ups.
• Understand the purpose of warm-ups to empower your class by fostering:
  > Safety
  > Introversion
  > Body awareness
  > Breath awareness
  > Adaptation to incrementally deeper challenges.
• Distinguish between warm-ups, kriyas, and postures.
• Develop skill in choosing appropriate warm-ups and sequencing them into an overall class design.

Warm-up guidelines

1. These warm-ups are in seed form and may be evolved into various expressions—for example, by simply shifting from a seated position to standing, or using a chair.
2. Inhale, and open or expand the body. Exhale, and close or contract the body.
3. Repeat, coordinating breath with movement, or pause to hold the stretch.
warm-ups

head lift and tilt
neck flexion and extension

1. On an inhale, maintaining length in the neck, lift your chin.

2. On an exhale, draw your chin to your chest.

3. Repeat, coordinating breath with movement. Maintain length in the neck and focus on the stretch in the throat.

Variations

Note that this movement may be expanded from the neck into the spine, torso, and body.
head side-to-side
lateral flexion/extension

1. On an exhale, lower your chin to your chest.

2. On an inhale, roll the right ear to the right shoulder. On an exhale, roll your chin back to your chest. On an inhale, roll your left ear to your left shoulder.

3. Repeat, coordinating breath with movement, or pause to hold the stretch.
warm-ups

upper back cat and dog
spinal flexion and extension

Variation 1

1. Interlace your fingers and place your palms behind your head, right where the head and neck meet. On an inhale, open your elbows wide while lifting your chin. Make sure you avoid pulling on your head and overstretching the neck.

2. On an exhale, hug your elbows in, tuck your chin to your chest, and round your spine, lowering the elbows toward the knees or navel.

3. Repeat, coordinating breath with movement, or pause to hold the stretch.

This movement can expand into the torso as well, by inhaling your elbows out while lifting through the chin and chest, creating a backbend.
**Variation 2**

1. Inhale, and interlace your fingers in front of the chest. On an exhale, press your palms away from you as you tuck your chin into your chest and round the spine. Note the variations available with the angle of the arms.

[Images of a person performing the variation]

**Variation 3**

1. Exhale, and interlace your fingers in front of the chest. On an inhale, extend the palms up as you press your chest forward, coming into a backbend. Focus on opening the armpits, shoulders, and chest.

**Variation 4**

Add movement by making circles with the extended arms.

[Images of a person performing the variation]
warm-ups

**dolphin dives**

1. Interlace your hands around your right knee. On an exhale, draw your chin into your chest and round your torso forward. Lower your nose to your navel, thigh or knee, pulling gently with your hands.

![Step 1](image1.jpg)

2. On an inhale, lift, leading with the chin, and push with your hands to arc your spine back to an upright position.

![Step 2](image2.jpg)

3. Repeat five or six times, coordinating breath and movement while creating a wavelike motion. Pause and feel the effects. Then continue on the other side.

**Modifications**

![Modification Images](image3.jpg)
extended seated side stretch
lateral spinal flexion/extension

Variation 1

1. Inhale both arms out to the side and overhead. Exhale the right hand to the ground as the left arm extends into a side stretch.

2. Inhale both arms up as the torso straightens and, on the exhale, lower the left hand to the ground, as the right arm extends into a side stretch.

3. Continue, coordinating breath with movement. Variations include keeping the hand on the ground by the hip and lowering onto that elbow, or letting that hand slide away from the hip, keeping the arm straight.
extended seated side stretch  
*lateral spinal flexion/extension*

**Variation 2**

1. Bring your left hand to your right thigh or knee. Inhale your right hand overhead into a side stretch.

2. Inhale, and lift your right hand as the torso straightens. Exhale your right hand to your left knee or thigh. Inhale your left arm overhead into a side stretch.

3. Continue, coordinating breath with movement. You can focus more on the side bend, letting the shoulders stay square to the front of the room, or allow the torso to twist with the side stretch.
seated twist

1. On an inhale, raise your arms overhead. On an exhale, lower the left hand to the right knee or thigh and lower the right hand behind the body into a twist.

2. On an inhale, unravel and raise the arms overhead. With an exhale, bring the right hand to the left leg and twist to the other side.

3. Continue, coordinating breath with movement.
warm-ups

side stretch arm circles

1. Bring your right hand or forearm to the ground and the left arm overhead. Begin to circle the arm in big rotations. Allow the shoulder girdle to move as well.

2. Circle in both directions. Repeat on opposite side.
sun breaths

1. On an inhale, raise your arms overhead so that palms touch.

2. On an exhale, slowly lower your arms back down to your sides.

3. Continue, coordinating breath with movement.

Variation

Inhale your arms up, then, on the exhale, bring the hands together and down through the center in a prayer position.
warm-ups

torso cat and dog

1. Bring your hands to your knees, palms down. On an inhale, pull with your hands to draw your torso forward. Roll onto your sitz bones and press your chest forward, coming into a backbend.

2. On an exhale, pull back with your hands to roll onto your sacrum. Round the spine while tucking your chin to your chest.

3. Repeat, coordinating breath with movement.
torso circles

1. Bring your hands onto the knees, palms down. Use your hands and arms to help rotate the torso around the pelvis.

2. Inhale forward through a backbend, and exhale back as the spine rounds. Allow this movement to work the shoulders, chest, spine, and hips.

3. Repeat a few circles in one direction, then change direction.
hip openers

1. Bring your hands to the ground behind your hips, with your feet hip-width distance apart or wider.

2. On an exhale, lower both knees to one side. On an inhale, raise them back through center and exhale both knees to the opposite side.

3. Continue swiveling the knees from side to side, coordinating breath with movement.
hip openers with twist

1. Bring your hands to the ground behind your hips with your feet hip-width distance apart or wider.

2. Lower both knees to the left as bring your right hand to the floor on your left side. Use both hands to lengthen your torso away from your knees, toward the back of the room. Stay upright with your arms straight, or lower onto your elbows or all the way down on your forearms, and lower your forehead onto your hands.

3. Repeat on the other side.
warm-ups

modified table

If you have knee sensitivity, you can place a blanket under your knees, fold the corners of the mat, or place a rolled-up yoga mat just under the shins. This last option allows the knees to be completely off the ground and can help build core strength.
table cat/dog

1. From a basic Table position, inhale, and lift the tailbone as the belly lowers, rotating the pelvis forward and arching the back.

2. On the exhale, scoop the tailbone under, rotating the pelvis backward to round the spine, and tuck the chin into the chest.

3. Repeat, coordinating breath with movement. You can coordinate the movement with the opposite breath pattern as well (exhale as you arch the back, inhale as you round the back).
warm-ups

table cat and dog circles

From Table, transition between Cat and Dog by circling the torso in one direction and then the other.

**Variation**

From Table position, add horizontal arm and or leg extensions to generate abdominal engagement.
puppy pose

1. Bring your knees hip-width apart, or wider.

2. Keep the hips stacked over your knees as you extend the arms a comfortable distance away, or until the chin or forehead is resting on the mat.

3. Wrap your shoulders onto your back as you stretch your arms forward, keeping your elbows off or on the ground.

4. To release, lower the elbows and press down into your hands.
thread the needle

1. Open the knees wider than hip-width and bring the thumbs to touch under the sternum. Inhale the right arm out to the side and up to the ceiling, moving into a twist.

2. Exhale, and thread the right hand between the left arm and knee, lowering onto the right shoulder. Inhale, and unravel, lifting the right hand back up to the ceiling.

3. Repeat, coordinating breath with movement on one side for a few rounds; then repeat on the other side.

4. Inhale, and unravel, lifting the right hand back up to the ceiling. Repeat, coordinating breath with movement on one side for a few rounds, then repeat on the other side.
table twist

1. Open the knees out wider than hip-width and bring your thumbs to touch under the sternum. Inhale one arm up to the ceiling, coming into a twist. Exhale, and place the hand back to the mat.

2. Repeat this action with the other arm. Continue, coordinating breath with movement.

Variation
Pause when lifting each arm and make large circles in either direction.
warm-ups

parighasana

1. From Table, come up to stand on both knees. Extend your right leg out to your side, aligned with your hip, toes pointing forward.

2. Lower your right hand onto your hip crease, or, for a deeper stretch, place your forearm onto the thigh. Lengthen through the spine and the left arm, then lean toward the right.

3. Inhale back up to center and raise both arms overhead. Exhale your left hand to the ground as you extend your right hand away from your right foot.

4. Continue, coordinating breath with movement. Repeat on the other side.
cross-crawl

1. Lift your right knee and sweep it in a circle, crossing your right leg over your left, so that both knees are touching on the ground, with the right knee in front.

2. Then, lift the left knee back and sweep it in a circle, crossing it in front of the right leg.

3. Continue this movement from side to side, either staying in place or walking up and down the mat.

Variation

Extend the right leg horizontally and place your foot on floor, by the left side of body. Look over the left shoulder for a lateral stretch.
warm-ups

hips side-to-side

1. Bring the knees and feet to touch, with the hands out wider than shoulder-width. Begin to rock your hips side to side, allowing the movement to grow, as it feels appropriate.

2. Continue, coordinating breath with movement.
hip circles

1. Bring the knees and feet to touch with the hands out wider than shoulder-width. Start to circle your hips around your knees, allowing the circles to grow to an appropriate size.

2. You can increase the circling so that you pass through Upward-Facing Dog and all the way back to Child’s pose.

3. Repeat, coordinating breath with movement. Then circle the hips in the opposite direction.
warm-ups

hamstring stretch

1. Step your right foot between your hands. On an inhale, place your hands onto your hips, sink the hips, and lift through the crown of the head.

2. On an exhale, straighten your right leg, pressing your hips back, and fold forward over your extended leg. The front foot can stay planted on the ground, or the toes can draw back toward the body as the heel presses into the ground.

3. Continue this movement forward and backward, coordinating the breath and movement. Repeat on the second side. For more ease, keep the palms on the floor. For more challenge, lift the back knee off the ground and extend through the back heel, coming into Warrior.
runner’s lunge

1. Step your right foot between your hands. Bring both hands to the inside of the right foot. Stay lifted on your hands, or lower down onto your forearms and sway your hips side to side.

2. Repeat on the left side. For more challenge, lift the back knee off the ground and extend through the back heel.

Modification
For sensitive knees, place padding beneath the back bent knee to support the leg.
warm-ups

arm circles

1. Open the knees wider than hip-width and bring the thumbs to touch under the sternum. Reach your right hand forward, up, and back, making a large circle with the arm.

2. Alternate between sides, moving the circles in both directions.
side-to-side extended arms

1. Come into Puppy Pose, keeping the arms straight.

2. On an exhale, lower your shoulder to one side. You can lower it to touch the ground, if you can. Inhale back up to a neutral position.

3. Move side to side, coordinating breath with movement.
lunge arm circles

1. Step your right foot between your hands. Lean your weight into your left hand and make large circles with the right arm, first in one direction, then the other.

2. Repeat on the second side.

Variation

Lift the back knee off the ground and extend through the back heel.
pelvic tilt

1. Bend your knees and bring your feet hip-width distance apart on the ground. Bring your hands to your hips.

2. Inhale, and rock your pelvis forward and tailbone down. Exhale back, scooping the tailbone up to the ceiling.

3. Repeat, coordinating movement with breath, or pause with the knees down to one side.
sun salutation
surya namaskar vinyasa

Intuitive Benefits

• Provides an excellent warm-up for stretching and invigorating the whole body.
• Tones the digestive system, massaging the liver, stomach, spleen, intestines, and kidneys.
• Increases cardiac activity and blood circulation.
• Regulates kidney functioning.
• Develops concentration, coordination, balance, poise, strength, and groundedness.

Precautions (proceed with care)

• High blood pressure and heart conditions: Practice carefully without holding, and do not drop the head below the heart.

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

• Recent or chronic injury or inflammation of back, knees, or hips.
• Uncontrolled high blood pressure.

Options

• There are many ways to do Sun Salutation. Experiment with adding or varying the postures in the sequence and the ways that you do them.
• Experiment with moving only on the exhalation and with sustaining certain postures longer than others.

Assists

Because this is a vinyasa, you will not usually offer hands-on assisting. If you guide your students to hold certain postures during the flow, you may move around and assist during the holdings.
**Essential cues**

Begin in Mountain, with palms in anjali mudra.

1. **Back Extension:** Raise the arms overhead and press the pelvic triangle slightly forward, lift out of the waist, and arch back.

2. **Forward Fold:** Hinge forward at the hips, keeping the back long, and place the palms on the ground.

3. **Lunge (anjaneasana):** Step the right foot back about a leg’s distance and press the right heel toward the ground as the leg straightens. Draw the shoulders back, expand the sternum forward, and press up through the crown.

4. **Plank:** Step the left foot back, with the legs, torso, neck, and head in one line.

5. **Child:** Lower knees to the ground and bring hips to heels.

6. **Inchworm:** Sweep the chest and chin forward, keeping hips high.

7. **Upward-Facing Dog (urdhva mukha svanasana):** The toes uncurl or stay curled, the legs rest on the earth or rise up off the ground. As you lengthen from the sacrum to the crown, the chest expanding forward, the shoulders drawing back, and the chin remaining neutral.

8. **Downward-Facing Dog (adho mukha svanasana):** Curl the toes, lift the hips, and press up through the sitz bones. Lengthen from the sitz bones to the crown. Press into the palms and open the space between the shoulder blades. Press the heels toward the ground.

9. **Lunge:** Step the right foot forward about a leg’s distance and press the left heel toward the ground as the leg straightens. Draw the shoulders back, expand the sternum forward, and press up through the crown.

10. **Forward Fold:** Step the left foot forward beside the right foot and fold forward.

11. **Back Extension:** Come up through Jackknife with a long back. Raise the arms overhead and press the pelvic triangle slightly forward. Lift out of the waist, and arch the back.

12. **Mountain:** Bring the hands in front of the heart in Anjali Mudra.

13. **Repeat** the sequence, initiating movement with the left foot.
“Everyone is continually performing postures while standing, sitting, lying down, and performing various
tasks. Similarly, every human being begins to breathe immediately upon birth and sustains the breathing
process until death. Most people do asana and pranayama haphazardly. A yogi is one who performs these
same practices consciously and systematically.”

—Swami Kripalu

Intuitive Benefits

• Stretches the legs, buttocks, and back.
• Stretches the ankles, knees, hips, and pelvic floor.
• Reduces head, neck, and chest pain when head and torso are supported.
• Tones abdominal organs, stimulates peristalsis, and relieves constipation.
• Stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system, reduces stress, and deeply tranquilmizes the
  body, mind, and emotions.

Precautions (proceed with care)

• Constipation: practice carefully and avoid long holding.
• Sensitivity in the knees: use a soft folded blanket under knees.
Contraindications (avoid the posture)
- Recent or chronic hip, knee, or ankle injury; inflammation or pain.

Essential cues
2. Elongate the spine by pressing down through the sitz bones and up through the crown.
3. Hinge forward at the hips and extend the torso over the thighs.
4. Bring the forehead toward the ground.
5. Extend the arms along the sides, palms facing each other up or down.

Options
- Extend the arms overhead.
- Stack two fists under the forehead.
- Open the knees wide and allow the big toes to touch.

Assists
Hands-On
1. Stand behind the student, hands on either side of the sacrum. Press down and back.
2. Step on the student’s feet, place your thumbs on the iliac crest, fingers in the hip crease, and pull back.
3. Stand in front of the student and have them grab your ankles. Walk your feet away from the student, and lean forward, placing your hands on either side of their sacrum. Press down and back.
warm-ups

plank
phalahakasana

“A significant number of earnest spiritual seekers take up the practice of yoga. Unfortunately, many stop because exactly the right things happen.”

—Swami Kripalu

Intuitive Benefits

• Strengthens the legs, buttocks, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders, arms, and wrists.
• Stimulates circulation and digestion.
• Energizes the body and builds core strength.
• Improves concentration and develops focus.

Precautions (proceed with care)

• Pregnancy: Keep knees on ground.
• Weak torso or limbs: Keep knees on ground.

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

• Uncontrolled high blood pressure.
• Recent or chronic wrist, arm, shoulder, back, or abdomen injury; inflammation or pain.
• Carpal tunnel syndrome
Essential cues
1. Begin in Table.
2. Curl the toes under and straighten one leg at a time. Keeping the toes on the ground, lift the knees.
3. Keep shoulders, hips, and heels in one line.
4. Elongate the spine by drawing the sacrum toward the heels, pressing out through the crown.
5. Press out through the heels.

Options
- Keep knees on the ground.
- Keep forearms on the ground.
- Lift one leg at a time.
- Chaturanga Dandasana/Four-Limbed Staff Pose: Keep alignment in Plank and slowly lower to a few inches off the ground.

Props
- Block between the thighs.
- Blocks under the hands.
- Belt wrapped above the elbows.
- Blocks under the ASIS bones.
- Block under the sternum.

Assists
Hands-On
1. Hip lift

Press Point
1. Heels
2. Crown
four-limbed staff
chaturanga dandasana

“The highest form of nonviolence is love.”
—Swami Kripalu

Intuitive Benefits

• Strengthens the legs, buttocks, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders, arms, and wrists.
• Stimulates circulation and digestion.
• Energizes the body, and builds core strength.
• Improves concentration, and develops focus.

Precautions (proceed with care)

• Pregnancy: Keep knees on the ground.
• Weak torso or limbs: Keep knees on the ground.

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

• Uncontrolled high blood pressure.
• Recent or chronic wrist, arm, shoulder, back, or abdomen injury; inflammation or pain.
• Carpal tunnel syndrome.
Essential cues
1. Begin in Plank.
2. Bend the elbows and lower the torso to a few inches above the ground, drawing the elbows in.
3. Elongate the spine by drawing the sacrum toward the heels and pressing out through the crown.
4. Press out through the heels.

Options
• Keep knees on the ground.
• Keep forearms on the ground.
• Lift one leg at a time.

Props
• Belt wrapped above the elbows.
• Blocks under the ASIS bones.
• Block under the sternum.

Assists
Press Points
1. Heels
2. Crown
upward-facing dog
urdvha mukha svanasana

“Service is one of the highest expressions of love.”
—Swami Kripalu

Intuitive Benefits

• Strengthens the legs, buttocks, back, and arms.
• Stretches the chest, abdomen, and throat.
• Stimulates the circulatory, digestive, and lymphatic systems; decongests the abdominal organs; stimulates the thyroid and thymus glands; and relieves asthma.
• Decongests kidneys, helping in the elimination of toxins.
• Relieves back and abdominal discomfort of menopause and menstruation.
• Energizes the mind; relieves stress, anxiety, and mild depression.
Precautions (proceed with care)

- Weak back muscles: Move in and out of the posture with the breath, and lift with the back rather than the arms to strengthen.

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Pregnancy (after the third trimester).
- Recent or chronic back, neck, or abdominal injury; inflammation or pain.
- High blood pressure.

Essential cues

1. Begin in Plank.
2. Lower the hips, arching the spine.
3. Draw the shoulder blades back.
4. Elongate the spine by drawing the sacrum toward the heels, and press out through the crown.

Options

- Keep tops of the feet on the ground.

Props

- Cushion under the hips.
- Blocks under the hands.

Assists

Hands-On

1. Straddle the student at the elbows. Squeeze the student’s hips with your shins. Place your hands on the shoulders, and, with straight arms, lift up and back.

Press Point

1. Hips
2. Sternum
3. Crown
The key to Kripalu Yoga lies in experiencing prana as the link between body, mind, and spirit. In Kripalu Yoga, prana is our ultimate object of concentration, fostering union to achieve a harmonious state of being. The process by which we enter this state is cultivated through the following methods.

**Kripalu Yoga practice guidelines**

- Breathe fully into each movement and moment.
- Consciously maintain a relaxed state of awareness.
- Fully feel as sensations, thoughts, emotions, and energy arise.
- Remain present to each experience as a witness.
- Allow yourself to surrender to the unfolding experience of the moment.
general guidance

In Kripalu Yoga, we cultivate a relaxed awareness throughout our practice. Before you begin your practice, feel yourself becoming focused and centered. As you do your warm-ups, let your body be soft and receptive. There is nothing to achieve. There is no need to strain or push. Before entering into a posture, take a deep breath. Each time you feel any sensations or tensions as you sustain a posture, allow yourself to relax. When you let go of resistance within the posture, the tension can dissolve. As you release the posture, take a moment to be still. Allow your awareness to be fully absorbed in the rush of energy.

Maintaining an awareness of relaxation at all times during your practice can heighten your ability to stay centered during your daily life as well, allowing prana to flow and nurture you.

Teaching and guiding a new posture to beginners

Remember how you felt when you took your first yoga class? For most beginners, there’s a period of adjustment. There are the natural insecurities of being in a new place, moving the body in unfamiliar ways, and, most of all, being inside yourself. For many people, this can be overwhelming. As a teacher, it’s important to be sensitive to this as you take on new students. This, along with creating an environment of acceptance and safety, can make a big difference for new students. Thus, we offer the following simple, reliable, and user-friendly format for teaching a new posture to beginners. This formula has been used for years and has provided security and support for many Kripalu Yoga teachers. It is comprised of eight sequential steps, listed below.

Protocol

1. Give a context.
2. Warm up the students.
3. Demonstrate the new posture.
4. Discuss benefits (intuitive or evidence-based), precautions, and contraindications.
5. Answer questions.
6. Lead the new posture.
7. Answer questions.
8. Lead the posture again (on the other side).
A final component to teaching a new posture is guiding the posture a second time and offering an opportunity for students to share about their experience. After becoming familiar with each step, you may wish to experiment with variations or other steps that you find helpful in your own discovery process.

**Creating the context**

Context means “the weaving together of words.” To create the context in the beginning of a yoga class is to give an overview of what you intend to offer. It’s a time to make contact with your students and prepare them for what’s about to come. Creating the context establishes a sense of safety and helps to set the mood of the class.

A typical context includes the name of the posture in English and in Sanskrit, the main reason for doing the posture, its history or mythology, any other awareness about the experience they are about to have, and perhaps your personal insights into this posture. This is a time to create inspiration. Here are two sample contexts:

“The experience that we’ll share is one that creates balance in the whole body. The first posture, Cobra, or Bhujangasana, opens us to a passive elongation in the front of the body and an opening in the heart center. It expands the belly, heart, and throat for dynamic expression. The other posture is a great counter-pose to Cobra: Garbasana, Child’s pose, where we place the head below the heart, allowing ourselves to be soft and receptive.”

“We are about to embark on a journey of balance, concentration, endurance, patience, flight, and falling as we explore three postures: Vrksasana, Tree; Garudasana, Eagle; and Setu Bhandasana, Bridge. This is an opportunity to align with the earth, to stand your ground, to focus your mind, to strengthen your arms and legs, and to fall out of your fears. Falling is a necessary part of the learning process, and today we’re learning how to fall with grace and how to accept ourselves as we fall. This may bring up some fears, but we will be using different support systems, like the wall or a partner. With support, we can feel safe to explore our sense of balance and imbalance, as the case may be.”

The length and detail of the context varies, of course, depending on the focus that you want to create, the experience level of the group you’re leading, and the amount of time you have. It’s more important to speak to the level of the group in order to create safety and trust than to tell everything you know about the posture and go into so much depth and detail that you lose your students. It’s essential to go for the balance. Remain aware of the class and notice if they’re with you or if they’re confused or distracted. The principle of “less is more” will always serve you and is worth remembering.
Warm-Ups

(See Warm-Ups section for more details.)

Warm-ups do more than prepare the body for yoga postures. They also help students move beyond the fluctuations of the mind and into the experience of being in the present moment. In this way, warm-ups are the opportunity to practice the yogic teachings of bringing the mind, body, and spirit into alignment. They create safety and connection between teacher and students. Warm-ups can be a wonderful way to move into gentle and/or invigorating variations of the posture you will be leading. You may want to experiment with feeling inquiries of the joints and muscles so that students can begin to explore their range of motion.

Demonstrating the new posture

Demonstration provides the opportunity to teach the posture with all its details and fine points. This is the time to teach the mechanics, the nuts and bolts of the posture. You may want to demonstrate the posture yourself. Another option is to ask for a volunteer from the class to demonstrate, with your guidance. Whichever way you choose, make sure you are fluent with the press points and that you know the details ahead of time that you want to bring out. Let your directions be clear, using the appropriate graduated sequence of instructions. Move step by step through the entire experience of the posture, starting from the establishing position all the way through to the release of the posture and, if appropriate, into a simple complementary stretch. Sometimes a teacher can give so many details that the students are overwhelmed. They may feel there is too much to remember. Notice which details can be taken in visually, which you may not need to verbalize, and which are important to emphasize.

Although the demonstration can be done with focused awareness, its intention is to present the foundation of how to execute the posture. Remember, you’re talking to a group, not just guiding yourself or a model through the posture. Make eye contact with students in your class. Gesture toward the parts of the body you’re talking about. You are giving your entire class important information; don’t get lost in your own experience or in creating an experience for a model.

This is also a good time to demonstrate any variations to the posture, the use of props, or the use of a partner. You may also want to experiment with demonstrating common misalignments when learning the posture, and then show how to enter it in a more supported expression.

Allow time at the end of the demonstration for a few questions. It’s a good idea, however, to limit these questions if they seem overly analytical. Your students don’t have to know everything about the posture in order to do it. Many of their questions will be answered as they experience the posture for themselves. Then, if they still have questions, you can answer them after the experience.
Demonstrating yourself

If you do the posture yourself, be sure it’s one that allows you to be heard. Half Shoulderstand, for example, is challenging, although not impossible, to hold while talking. Another posture that can be difficult is Spinal Twist. If you start out facing the class in the twist, you will end up facing away from the group as you revolve, which will make it hard for them to hear you. When you demonstrate Spinal Twist, make sure you start facing at an angle or turn your head once you’ve entered into the posture so that you’re facing your class as you speak. It’s appropriate to ask the class to move around you as you hold the posture so they can observe you from several perspectives. This holds true for any posture.

Demonstrating using a volunteer

If you choose to have someone else demonstrate the posture, it’s helpful to meet ahead of time to do a practice demonstration. That way you can make sure all the details are understood and clarified. Tell your volunteer to relax, breathe, and follow your directions. After the demonstration, acknowledge your volunteer by having him or her share about the experience or by simply offering your thanks. It’s a big step for some people to allow themselves to be seen in the privacy of their yoga experience. On the other hand, some people can’t wait to jump into the middle of a group and be the center of attention. Either type makes a fine volunteer. It’s to your advantage to choose someone you know will be able to demonstrate the posture with integrity.

When you come back to the group, notice the energy in the room. This is an important time for students to acknowledge what they’re experiencing. You may want to guide the class into a meditation, closing the eyes and taking a moment to feel, or you may simply begin to share what you’re observing. Then ask the class to share their experience of the posture. “What would you say is the quality of the energy in this posture? What did you notice? What did you feel?” If the group is silent, which often happens after a demonstration, you might try calling on the student who has the biggest smile and saying something like “I’m noticing that you’re smiling. What was your experience?” The purpose of eliciting sharing is to create a transition from an introspective space to a more external mode of learning. Sharing at this point in the process of teaching a new posture makes it easy to bring out observations about the posture, answer any questions, and transition to the next step: benefits, precautions, and contraindications.
benefits, precautions, and contraindications

**Benefit:** a positive, healthy, response and/or condition created or enhanced through the practice of a specific technique or posture either intuitive and evidence-based.

**Precaution:** an existing condition that may or may not produce unwanted or unhealthy effects in the bodymind through the practice of a specific technique or posture. Adapting the technique or posture may eliminate this result and allow for safe practice.

**Contraindication:** an existing condition that will produce adverse, unhealthy, or unwanted effects in the bodymind as a result of practicing a specific technique or posture. In this case, the technique or posture should be avoided or replaced by a safe practice until the condition changes.

“Yoga is a holistic practice that impacts every level of our being and all the bodily systems. The tradition states that many postures are targeted to affect the endocrine glands and organs. The mechanism through which this occurs is often explained as ‘rinsing and soaking.’ When a posture compresses an area of the body, old blood is squeezed out in the process of rinsing. As the posture is released, fresh blood flows in the process of soaking. The dramatic increase in circulation that results is said to rejuvenate the glands/organs and lead to their optimal functioning. Similar statements are often made about the effects of yoga on the autonomic and sympathetic nervous system. While statements like these make subjective sense to experienced practitioners, they are difficult to objectively validate. The truth is that science is only beginning to study and understand how yoga works on these subtle levels.

As teachers, we must present yoga professionally, refraining from any tendency to make unsubstantiated claims or promise miraculous benefits. At the same time, we don’t want to close any doors to yoga’s more subtle effects and its tremendous capacity to heal the body and mind. Along with understanding and, when appropriate, explaining the traditional teachings, everyone’s subjective experience of yoga should be respected. For the purposes of this 200-hour training, we will focus on yoga’s ability to support the healthy functioning of the skeletal muscles and joints. A lot is known about how yoga stretches and strengthens the skeletal muscles, and how the muscles and joints work together in the postures. While imbalances and dysfunctions will be addressed in some situations, the therapeutic application of yoga is beyond our scope. As a professional yoga teacher, you cannot know too much anatomy. All students are encouraged to continue their study of anatomy as it relates to yoga through our 500-hour program and other means.”

—Shobhan Richard Faulds
Each posture has a life of its own. It’s like entering into a whole universe of cause and effect, each with its own unique energetic relationships and corresponding benefits. The postures are like individual energy signatures, and as you place yourself and breathe into each posture with conscious awareness, you automatically begin to receive its benefits. Many postures have overlapping benefits on an external level, but the true essence of the posture is revealed at the deeper energetic level.

Another important factor is what you as a practitioner bring to the posture: your sensitivity and level of awareness. The benefits of the posture do not happen in spite of you. The energy you bring to the posture, as well as your attitudes and thoughts, all blend together with the posture’s energy, creating an experience that is unique to you.

For this reason, it’s not necessary to mention all the benefits of the postures to your students. It’s appropriate to invite them to discover the benefits themselves as they experience each posture. It’s helpful to mention some of the main benefits on a practical level, as a way to inspire your students. Explaining the physiological benefits is also appropriate when teaching beginners. As your students progress, you can gradually introduce more of the subtler benefits. Your students will probably share with you the benefits they’re feeling and come to these realizations on their own. You will want to affirm their experience and give encouragement.

Benefit statements can be woven into all parts of a yoga class. They do not necessarily have to be discussed in the order given here. As we’ve suggested, they may be used when creating the context, during verbal demonstrations, or as you guide the posture. Decide which benefits are most important to you and discuss them consciously. Precautions and contraindications are also important to mention in all class levels. For safety purposes, it’s a good idea to tell your students about the precautions or contraindications before they do a posture. The intention is not to induce fear, but rather to educate them about when it’s okay to do the postures and when it’s better not to. Not all precautions and contraindications apply to everyone. For example, remind any students with injuries to be gentle with themselves and to do only what feels comfortable. You may also wish to offer them a simpler variation of the posture you’re teaching, or suggest the aid of a prop. In the case of acute injury or medical problems, do not hesitate to ask students not to do particular postures that may be detrimental to their health. You will want to know ahead of time about any serious illnesses or injuries—this is information you can learn from the forms the students filled out at registration. If you are ever unsure whether a student should participate in your class, it’s appropriate to encourage them to consult a physician.
leading the new posture

Silently acknowledge the students’ transition from watching how the posture is done to actually experiencing the posture for themselves. Here, the deeper learning happens: a natural integration of all that they’ve just seen as they make contact with the wisdom of their own bodies.

The following is a brief overview of the suggested steps in guiding a posture.

• Have the students come into the preparatory position for the posture and relax. Ask them to take a few long, deep breaths before getting started.

• Using the press points, have the students slowly come partway into the posture, then release. Repeat this a few times, moving in and out of the posture, synchronizing breath with the movements. These movements will not only clarify the dynamics of the posture, but will also help warm up the body.

• Have the students enter into the full expression of the posture and hold. Allow any subtle adjustments or spontaneous micromovements to happen as you hold.

• When ready, have the students slowly release the posture.

• Have the students take a moment to experience the effects of the posture. Then allow them to flow into a complementary stretch.

use of language

All movement patterns are stored as images in the brain. To perform a movement, a command must be translated into an image that creates it. The simple command “Lift your right arm” must actually be translated into an image before the movement can be performed. Try directing it like this: “As you inhale, allow your breath to slowly lift your right arm over your head. See how effortless and relaxed you can be as you allow the breath to lift your arm.” Functional imagery deepens the experience beyond the mechanics and can include sound, touch, feeling, taste, or visual images: “Notice if your body wants to let go into this long, deep stretch. Allow your body to melt into the ground. Glide your palms forward and notice how this stretch feels.”
Clear, precise directions

There is a time lag for the brain between hearing an instruction, interpreting the request, and translating it into a movement. Since beginners are just developing an awareness of their bodies, our initial instructions are often a puzzle for the mind. Giving clear, simple, and precise directions makes the learning process much more efficient. Suppose the movement you want to create is tilting the head to one side. You might need to repeat the directions in several different ways to make sure the students understand what you’re requesting. You could just say, “Tilt your head to the right and relax into the stretch.” But the mind will want to know: “What does ‘tilt’ mean, and how far to the right?” These ambiguities can engage the mind and not allow the mind and body to be fully involved in the desired experience. Another way of giving this direction might be:

“Lower your right ear toward your right shoulder. Slow the movement down. Feel your head hanging. Inhale, and stretch as far as is comfortable for you. Hold the breath for a moment, then inhale the head back to center. Feel your head returning to the upright position. Notice the effects of the stretch.”

Graduated sequence of instructions

Every movement can be broken down into smaller and smaller movements, which makes our awareness much more precise. To enter into a sequence of such micromovements with deep concentration requires that the instructions build from the simple to the complex. Using the example above, the movement could be composed thus:

“Become aware of your head. How is it tilted right now? Is it pointing downward, parallel to the ground, or upward, toward the sky? Consciously drop your head to the right, moving your right ear toward your right shoulder. Relax the shoulders and breathe into the left side of your neck. As you inhale, slowly raise your head back to center. Then exhale and lower the ear back down toward your shoulder. Repeat this simple movement several times, relaxing more and more deeply into the breath. Each time you exhale, stretch the neck a little deeper. Notice how your head tilts sideways as the ear drops down. The next time you lower the ear, hold the stretch, continuing to hold as you breathe into the neck and shoulders.”

Experiential language

Asking a student to perform a specific action might sound like this: “Now I want you to raise your right arm. Now lower your right arm. Next, I want you to inhale and stretch both arms overhead.” If having the student perform those specific movements was our only goal, this style of teaching would be appropriate. Yet our intention is to communicate with our students in such a way that they hear the instructions as though they were listening to the inner voices of their own bodies. This form of communication requires experiential language that creates internal awareness.

In the example above, when the teacher says, “I want you to...” our minds hear and interpret the message as “I am now doing this movement because the teacher wants me to.” Because the
teacher is giving the commands as though your body were at his or her disposal, you are passively involved in the action.

Experiential language is a way of speaking in which the teacher removes him- or herself from wanting the student to do anything at all:

“Become aware of the sensations in your right arm and right shoulder. What is your shoulder saying to you in this moment?”

“Let go of doing and simply watch how the movement is happening through you.”

“Allow your fingertips to stretch overhead, reaching toward the ceiling.”

“Inhale into the entire right side of your body. Feel the length of your whole right side being opened by the breath.”

“Feel the space you have created inside for your shoulder and your arm to expand.”

Notice the use of words such as “be aware of,” “let go,” “allow,” and “feel,” as compared to “I want you to ...” When we hear ourselves saying to our students, “I want you to ...,” it is helpful to ask ourselves why we want them to. Is it because if they do what I am asking it will mean that I am a good teacher? Our language reveals our intention.

simple, clear, and effective posture cues

As yoga teachers, communication is one of the most crucial elements of our discipline, next to personal study and practice. Each student has a different style (i.e., visual, kinesthetic, auditory) of absorbing information and integrating it through their bodymind. We must be able to skillfully translate the practices in a way that is simple, clear, and effective. Optimally, a teacher's verbal cues will offer enough information to keep the student safe and engaged, while leaving enough space for them to have their own personal experience. Depending on the aim of the class, there can also be a range in voice quality and word choice, from soft and nurturing to strong and encouraging. Considering the spectrum and diverse aims of yoga, begin to explore your own intentions. The more you know about the group you’re guiding, the more you can you make conscious choices about language, quality of voice, and the balance between instruction and silence.
Simple: Common principles create a foundation for understanding.

Many postures have common principles among them that help simplify the complex human skeleton, muscular system, and nervous system. As a teacher, the more you can identify these principles, the easier it will be to remember the details of each posture. For example, Mountain, Warrior, Side Warrior, Tree, and Bridge are all aligned with one or both knees stacked over the ankle. Triangle, Gate, and Half Moon are all lateral bends that require abdominal engagement, length on both sides of the ribs, and the neck to curve as an extension of the spine. Being able to see the commonalities between postures will help make space for you to focus on the specifics. Don’t be afraid to be repetitive with general cues, such as suggestions to lengthen your spine, hinge at your hips, and lift up and out of your waist.

Clear: Clear language is direct and easy to follow.

As a yoga teacher, can you use clear language that offers your students an obvious action? Often, using too many words can get in the way of clarity, preventing the student from experiencing yoga in a potent way. Words such as “kind of,” “try to,” and “you’re gonna” are extraneous and can take away from the essential cues of a posture. When you communicate, be as direct as possible, identifying a body part, an action, and a direction to move. Whether working with a large group or one-on-one, speak to each individual. For example, the cue “Let’s all stand tall in Mountain pose” brings awareness to the group as a whole, whereas “Stand tall in Mountain pose” aims at each individual. This can help your students stay focused on their own experiences, and worry less about what everyone else is doing.

Sample recipe for a ”simple and clear instructional cue”:

recipe/equation: "breath + action verb + body part + direction/location"

example: "exhale and lengthen your arm, lowering to rest hands by your side"

Effective: Skillful use of language produces a desired result.

The words you use can often have an effect on the way a student engages with a posture. Depending on the intention of the posture, it can be skillful to adjust your words to match the experience you’re aiming for. For example, there is an energetic difference between relaxing your shoulders down your back and pulling your shoulders down and back. The first way offers a more gentle and nurturing type of action, whereas the latter gives a stronger, more vigorous mode. Neither way is objectively right or wrong, but one may help or hinder the experience you’re trying to cultivate. Postures can be done in many ways, from relaxing to vigorous. As you translate each cue, be clear about whether you are aiming for intensity, ease, or some quality in between.
questions and clarifications

Immediately after their first experience in the posture, give your students a chance to ask any questions so you can clarify the details. Then guide them into the posture again. During the first experience, they may be uncertain. They’re still thinking about the details and trying to get the posture “right.” They might discover things about their bodies they did not notice before.

**Lead the posture again.**

In the second guiding, your students are in familiar territory and can more fully let go and relax into the posture. This introduces the experiential part of the class, in which several more familiar postures will be led, each flowing into the next. The way you guide your students has a powerful effect on how open and receptive they are to their intuition.

If teaching a new posture to beginners is anything like eating a meal, all the previous steps would be like the appetizers, and this step would be the main course. You might want to allot the majority of time spent in class to this experience.

**Sharing and discussion**

After having the experience of doing postures and being guided through all the appropriate steps (which may include a series of postures, holding postures, releasing into a spontaneous free flow, and ending with relaxation, pranayama, and/or meditation), you will realize that much has taken place. Sharing at the end of a Kripalu Yoga class helps the mind integrate on a physical level what was experienced on a more subtle level. It’s a way to come back to earth, so to speak, and to acknowledge what has taken place inside you. Sometimes we’re not aware that anything has changed. And there are times when sharing feels inappropriate. Swami Kripalu once said that unless what you have to say is an improvement upon silence, it’s better not to say it. But for our purposes as teachers of beginner yoga classes, sharing brings the experience to completion and helps your students feel integrated.

Sharing also helps you to make contact with your students and get to know them. As they share, allow yourself to receive the effect of your teaching. Listen to how your students are being affected by your openness, by the environment that you create, and by the experience of yoga. This is a time to make a connection with your students, to inspire them to practice. You can use this as an opportunity to share what you’ve learned from your experience, or simply be a listener. When the sharing and discussion are over, you might draw the group together one last time by chanting om.
Stage One practice is a time for the students to become familiar with their bodies, to experience the sensations produced by the postures, and to bring attention to the breath. The eyes may remain open, and the senses are alert, to support the mind staying focused on structural alignment and the coordination of breath and movement. Stage One increases discipline and mental focus, awakens the ability to objectively witness personal experience, and lays the foundation for deeper practice.

KEY COMPONENTS

Graduated sequence
- Give primary directions first.
- Go back and fill in details as needed.
- Build the posture from the ground up.

Action language
- Be clear, simple, and precise.
- Use anatomical references.
- Be direct (i.e., “extend,” “press,” “lift”).
- Suggest modifications and variations.
- Use repetition.
- Use references to the body and breath.
- Explain alignment and use press points.
- Suggest warm-up movements during entry phase as needed.
- Encourage conscious effort.

Do not do the posture as you lead.
- It’s okay to begin the posture with the students.
- Walk around the room, observing as you teach.
- Focus your awareness on the class.
Observe the group and speak to what you see.

- Bring in necessary details.
- Give modifications as needed.

Hands-on assisting

- Keep talking to the whole class.
- Assist everyone.
- End by affirming.

Holding

- Once in the posture, hold 10 to 20 seconds maximum, or three to five breaths.
- If you lead the posture a second time, hold longer (five to seven breaths).

Transitions (when leading a Stage One flow)

- No complementary movement or cooldown is necessary between postures.
- Feel the effects as you move to the next posture.
- Take brief rests at intervals as needed.

For example:

“Let’s start with standing postures. Our first posture will be Ardha Chandrasana, Half Moon. Enter into Mountain, Tadasana, with your arms at your sides. Inhale, raise your arms overhead and interlace your fingers. Press down through your feet and lift the pelvic floor. Lift up and out of your waist through the crown of your head. If your elbows are bent, you can use a belt to help lengthen the muscles along the sides of the body. Press your left hip out to the left and extend up and out to the right. Feel the elongation along both sides of the body. Let your breath be calm and full. Roll your chest upward, pressing your left shoulder blade back. Keep your left hip forward to help keep both hips and shoulders aligned. Continue to lift out of the waist. Inhale, and lengthen back to center. We’ll repeat on the left side.” (Repeat on left side.)

“Take a moment to breathe and relax, feeling the benefits of Ardha Chandrasana. Let’s move right into Utkatasana, Standing Squat. Place your feet directly under your hips and come into Tadasana. Inhale, and extend both arms directly out in front of you.”
action words for guiding postures

Here is a list of some action words you can use while guiding postures.

**Relaxation verbs:**
Rest, allow, soften, let go, release, sink, drop, relax

**Action verbs:**
- Breath: inhale, exhale, breathe
- Length: stretch, lengthen, straighten, elongate, extend, reach, point, press
- Strength: squeeze, contract, support, stabilize, hold, firm, keep, engage, maintain, strengthen
- Position: stand, kneel, sit, lie, squat, belly down, on your back, place, align, position, locate, orient
- Movement: circle, hook, draw, slide, interlace, bend, swing, catch, rotate, roll, lift, turn, lower, raise, swivel, follow, move, open, come into

**Awareness verbs:**
Focus, feel, pause, be aware, find, notice, observe, distinguish, sense, take a moment
yoga posture sheets

The 200-Hour Kripalu Yoga Teacher Training is focused on a core set of 25 postures. The intention of this set is to support the beginning yoga teacher in building a solid foundation of expertise.

As you explore each posture in this core set during your training, make a note of the respective modifications, variations, and personal inquiries that help prepare you in meeting the diverse needs of your perspective students.

**The Training Posture Sheets include:**

- Neutral image to draw, color, and add comments.
- Essential cues to provide a Stage One base to support your own personal instruction.
- Basic posture modifications with the possible use of props.
- Basic variations.
- Posture inquiry section to fill in your own discoveries.
- Hands-on assists with recommended press points.
- A set of intuitive benefits, precautions, and contraindications. Building your vocabulary or specialization by becoming familiar with current evidence-based research and findings is highly recommended.
### checklist

#### core asana set

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>English</th>
<th>Sanskrit</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boat</td>
<td>Navasana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bound Angle</td>
<td>Baddha Konasana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bow</td>
<td>Dhanurasana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bridge</td>
<td>Setu Bandhasana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cobra</td>
<td>Bhujangasana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Downward-Facing Dog</td>
<td>Adho Mukha Svanasana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eagle</td>
<td>Garudasana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fish</td>
<td>Matsyasana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gate</td>
<td>Parighasana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half Moon</td>
<td>Ardha Chandrasana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Half Shoulderstand</td>
<td>Ardha Sarvangasana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Head to Knee</td>
<td>Janu Sirsasana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knee-Down Twist</td>
<td>Supta Matsyendrasana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mountain</td>
<td>Tadasana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pigeon</td>
<td>Kapotasana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Posterior Stretch</td>
<td>Pashchimottanasana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Seated Spinal Twist</td>
<td>Matsyendrasana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Side Warrior</td>
<td>Parsva Virabhadrasana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standing Squat</td>
<td>Utkatasana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standing Wide Angle</td>
<td>Prasarita Padottanasana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Symbol of Yoga</td>
<td>Yoga Mudra</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tree</td>
<td>Vrksasana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Triangle</td>
<td>Trikonasana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upward Boat</td>
<td>Urdhva Navasana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Warrior</td>
<td>Virabhadrasana</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
“It is worth remembering that there is only one yoga and can only be one yoga. True, aspirants are of different natures and resort to various doctrines and practices to progress along the path. But one who completes the process of yoga understands its different paths and sees that the systematic practice of various disciplines leads to the same place. In the end, all yogas lead to one great Yoga.”

—Swami Kripalu
boat

navasana

nava: boat  |  (nah-VAHS-anna)

Intuitive Benefits

- Strengthens the legs (hamstrings, adductors, soleus), buttocks (gluteus maximus), back (erector spinae, latissimus dorsi), and shoulders (trapezius, deltoids).
- Stretches the abdomen (rectus abdominus) and chest (pectoralis).
- Aligns the spinal column.
- Strengthens the lungs and decongests the abdominal organs.
- Decongests the kidneys, helping in the elimination of toxins.
- Stimulates the nervous, circulatory, digestive, lymphatic, and endocrine systems.
- Relieve stress, anxiety, and mild depression.

Precautions (proceed with care)

- Release posture if you feel discomfort.
- Weak back muscles: use repetitions coming in and out of the posture with minimal holding to strengthen.
- Constipation: avoid long holding, and release posture if pain develops.
- Uncontrolled high or low blood pressure.

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Pregnancy (as soon as you know you are pregnant).
- Recent abdominal surgery or inflammation.
- Recent or chronic back or neck injury, inflammation, or pain.
Key principles

- Extend the spine.
- Legs hip distance or less apart.
- Lengthen entire front of the body.

Preparation

- Warm up the spine with Cat and Dog, Torso Circles, and Inverted Table.
- Repetitions of Simple Boat, lifting and lowering the torso and legs while leaving the hands on the floor.

Muscles most involved

- The **erector spinae**, the small muscles lining either side of the spine, are strengthened by doing repetitions, either up and down with the breath or with some holding.
- The **gluteus maximus** lifts the legs, and the **adductors** keep the legs pressing in toward each other.
- The **abdominals** stabilize the torso and protect the low back. They are lengthened through the contraction on the posterior side of the body.
- The **lower trapezius** and other muscles of the shoulder keep the shoulder blades close to the spine and support the thoracic spine.
Essential cues

1. Lie on your belly with your arms about 45 degrees out from your sides, palms facing down. Bring your chin, mouth, or forehead onto the floor.

2. Press the front of your pelvis down firmly and lengthen through the crown of your head and your toes.

3. Lift your legs and torso off the floor. Keep lengthening your legs by reaching out through your toes. Lift the crown of your head while keeping your neck long.

4. Raise your arms off the floor and bring your hands about one foot away from your body. Reach back through your finger tips. Lift your torso as much as you can, maintaining length in the neck and spine.

5. To release, lower your torso, arms, and legs to the floor. Turn your head to one side and rest.
Posture options

**Modifications**

- Only lift the upper body.
- Hands remain on the ground.
- Only lift one leg.

**Variations**

- Arms forward.
- Yoga Mudra arms.

**Prop**

- Hold belt from feet to both hands behind the back.
Assists

Verbal

• Stabilize the pelvis.
• Extend through the crown with the chin close to the throat.
• Big toes together, thighs drawn inward.

Press points

• Toes, heels, or the backs of the legs
• Fingertips
• Crown
• Shoulder blades

Hands-on

• Straddle the student at the waist, facing the head.
• Place your hands on the student’s shoulders, then lift forward and up.
Teacher observations

Awareness

For all prone backbends, it is important to elongate the torso before entering the posture. This can be accomplished by reaching the arms overhead along the floor and pressing back through the toes. It is also effective to stretch one arm forward and the opposite leg back, and then repeat on the other side.

The Full Boat variation is a vigorous asana that strengthens the muscles of the abdomen, back, neck, arms, and legs. Practice it only after adequate preparation with the easier versions. If a student experiences strain in the low back, bring his or her arms back to the sides of the body, or lower them to the floor and have them press the thighs towards each other as well as more firmly down through their pelvic triangle to stimulate core engagement. Or simply have the student release the posture.

Note: All variations use the same breathing pattern.

Common misalignments

- Legs wider than hip-width apart. Help your student bring the legs toward one another by using the press points on the inner knees, or give verbal instructions to bring the legs together.

- Neck hyperextended. Students often overactivate the neck muscles, causing the head to pull back and the chin to lift. Help your students keep the neck in line with the spine by reminding them to tuck the chin slightly or to look down rather than forward.
bound angle
baddha konasana

“To read uplifting books or listen to spiritual discourses is good. But to practice even a little is of the utmost importance. The profound meaning of yoga is only understood by those who study it systematically through personal practice. The day you start to practice, your true progress will begin.”

—Swami Kripalu
bound angle
baddha konasana

baddha: bound, tied, fixed, fastened; kona: angle  |  (BAH-dah cone-AHS-anna)

Intuitive Benefits

- Stretches the hips and groin (adductors, except gracilis).
- Strengthens the legs (iliopsoas), back (erector spinae, quadratus lumborum), abdomen (rectus abdominus), shoulders (rhomboids), and arms (biceps).
- Stretches the hips and groin (adductors, gracilis).
- Stimulates circulation, digestion, and peristalsis; relieves constipation.
- Relieve stress, anxiety, and mild depression.

Precautions (proceed with care)

- Weak or stiff back muscles: hold in a vertical position and sit on the edge of a cushion.
- Stiffness in the hips, groin, knees, or sciatica: use cushions below the knees.
- Constipation: avoid long holding.
- First three months of pregnancy.

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Recent or chronic back injury, inflammation, or pain.
Key principles

- Keep the spine elongated.
- Legs in a comfortable distance from the body, with no discomfort in the knees or groin.
- Feet in a comfortable distance from body, with no discomfort in the knees or groin.

Preparation

- Cross-Crawl, Bun Warmer, Hip Series, Butterfly, and Supine Twist.
- Warm up the spine with Cat and Dog and Jackknife.
- Abdominal strengtheners.

Muscles most involved

- The **erector spinae**, the deep muscles of the back, and the **quadratus lumborum** keep the spine elongated.
- The **piriformis** and other muscles of lateral rotation rotate the femur in the hip socket and pull the thighs toward the ground.
- The **iliopsoas** flexes the torso forward over the hips.
- The **adductors**, on the inside of the thigh, are being lengthened.
asana

Essential cues

Begin in a comfortable seated position.

1. Sit tall in Dandasana, with your legs extended in front of you.

2. Bend both of your knees and allow them to open to the sides. Bring the soles of your feet together and draw your heels as close to your groin as you can.

3. Clasp your feet with your hands and lengthen your spine. If your spine is still rounded, place a cushion under your sacrum.

4. Press your sitz bones down, engage your abdominal muscles, and lengthen your spine. Draw your shoulders back and down. Pull into your feet to stretch your upper trapezius. Press your knees toward the floor to stretch your adductors.

5. Hinge forward at your hips. Rotate your pelvis to draw your pelvic face downward and your sacrum face upward.

6. Extend your sternum forward and pull your shoulders down and back. Keep your spine long and slightly arched.

7. To release, relax your torso, arms, and legs. Extend your legs out in front of you.
Posture options

**Modification**

- Reclining Bound Angle.

**Variations**

- Round down over the feet and extend the arms.
- Rise with the arms overhead.

**Props**

- Pillows beneath the knees.
- Reclined Bound Angle with the feet against wall.
Assists

**Verbal**
- Stabilize through the pelvis.
- Long belly to lengthen the spine.
- Hinge at the hips.

**Press Points**
- Crown
- Sternum

**Hands-On**
- Place the outside of your leg in line with student’s spine and your hands on the front of their shoulders. Draw shoulders back and lengthen spine.
- Place your thumbs on their iliac crest, fingers in hip crease, draw the fingers down, and move thumbs forward.
- Kneel behind the student, place your hands right below the knees, and press the thighs toward the floor.
Teacher observations

Awareness

The focus of this posture is to lengthen the adductor muscles. Hinging at the hips focuses the stretch in the adductor muscles. See Common Misalignments for more information about how to support the lengthening of the adductor muscles.

To get the maximum benefit from this posture, keep the spine lengthened and the back muscles engaged. If the spine rounds, the back muscles are stretched, especially the low back. This can lead to low back pain and instability.

Common misalignments

• *Knees high in the air*. The adductor muscles contract instead of relax. Lengthening is facilitated when the muscle is relaxed. Supporting the knees with pillows helps the adductors to release. Relaxed adductors will allow you to come farther forward with an elongated spine.

• *Rounding at the lumbar spine*. Because we cannot see our own backs, it’s hard to know when the spine is rounding. When the forward bend comes from the lumbar spine instead of the hip joint, the integrity of the posture is lost. Assist your students in knowing if the spine is rounding by speaking to it as you see it happening. There is a tendency to strain forward with the chin. Make sure the head is in line with the spine, even tucking the chin slightly.
asana

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“Everyone has equal claim to yoga and its intuitive benefits, but everyone must also observe one primary rule, which is to engage in regular practice. Without practice, even an ordinary task is not accomplished, so how could the extraordinary task of yoga be accomplished? By studying the teachings, a vision of the path may be received, but remember that success does not come in that way. Success comes only through the repeated practice of yoga techniques.”

—Swami Kripalu
bow
dhanurasana
dhanu: a bow | (don-your-AHS-anna)

Intuitive Benefits
• Strengthens the legs (quadriceps, hamstrings), buttocks (gluteus maximus), abdomen (transverse abdominus, obliques), chest (pectoralis), and shoulders (deltoids, rhomboids).
• Stretches the legs (iliopsoas, gastrocnemius), abdomen (rectus abdominus), chest (pectoralis), and shoulders (deltoids).
• Increases flexibility of the spine.
• Expands the chest, strengthens the lungs, and relieves asthma and respiratory ailments.
• Stimulates digestion and peristalsis, and relieves constipation.
• Balances hormone levels, and reduces symptoms of PMS, menstrual cramps, and menopause.
• Relieves stress, anxiety, and mild depression.

Precautions (proceed with care)
• Weak back muscles: keep knees on the ground.
• Pain in knees: press up through the heels rather than the toes.

Contraindications (avoid posture)
• Pregnancy (as soon as you know you are pregnant).
• Recent abdominal surgery or inflammation.
• Recent or chronic knee, shoulder, or back injury, inflammation, or pain.
Key principles

- The knees and feet are close together to strengthen the adductor muscles.
- Feet can be flexed or toes extended.
- Shoulders and arms are passive, pulled back and down by the extension of the legs.
- Head extends in line with the spine.

Preparation

- This posture requires the activation of the chest and shoulders. Practice Yoga Mudra, Eagle, and Fish.
- If the hip joints are tight, all the bending will happen in the lower back, which may cause strain.
- Practice Full Locust and Warrior before doing Bow.

Muscles most involved

- Stretched: **pectoralis major**, **abdominal rectus**, **transverse abdominals**, and **psoas**
- Strengthened: **hip flexors**, **gluteus maximus**, **quadriceps**, **trapezius**, and **erector spinae**
Essential cues

1. Lie on your belly with your arms at your sides, and your chin, mouth, or forehead touching the floor.

2. Bend your knees and grab your shins, ankles, or feet with your hands. Keep your knees touching or hip-width apart.

3. Press your pelvis down and reach your shins back. Lengthen your legs as much as you can. Allow the straightening of your legs to lift your head, chest, and thighs off the floor. Keep lengthening your lumbar spine by pressing your pelvis into the floor.

4. Extend your legs as much as you can and press up through your heels or toes. If possible, lift your feet higher than your head. Reach your sternum forward and the legs backward at the same time. Draw your knees and feet hip-width apart or closer. Keep pressing the feet upward to reduce knee strain.

5. To release, lower your thighs and chest to the mat. Release your legs and let them extend on the floor. Relax your head and neck.
Posture Options

Modification

- Keep knees on the floor.

Variations

- Hold one foot with one or both hands.
- Extend an arm.

Prop

- Use a belt on your feet, keeping your legs straight.
Assists

Verbal

• Extend through the crown, chin close to the throat.
• Keep the chest open to lengthen the arms.
• With knees at 90 degrees, press up through feet.

Press points

• Toes
• Sternum
• Crown

Hands-on

• Grasp the student’s heels and lean back with straight arms.
• From a comfortable squat, support the upper arms to ease open the chest.
Teacher observations

**Awareness**

- Keep knees hip-width apart.
- If there’s any discomfort in the knees, put a block between the thighs or keep the knees on the ground.
- If there’s any pinching in the low back, press the sternum forward.
- If there’s any sensitivity in the sacrum, the knees can be wider apart, if that does not cause discomfort in the knees.

**Common misalignments**

- *Knees wide apart.*
- *Neck overextended.*
bridge
setu bandhasana

“Accepting the truth proclaimed by the scriptures does not produce knowledge. Real knowledge is only obtained through personal experience. For experience, practice is indispensable. It is only through the diligent practice of the elementary techniques of yoga that its advanced techniques can be known. Only through elementary yoga is the advanced yoga generated.”

—Swami Kripalu
setu bandha: forming of causeway or bridge  |  (SET-too bahn-DAHS-anna)

Intuitive Benefits

- Strengthens the legs (hamstrings, quadriceps), buttocks (gluteus maximus), back (erector spinae, quadratus lumborum), and shoulders (rhomboids, trapezius).
- Stretches the legs (hip flexors), abdomen (rectus abdominus, obliques), chest (pectoralis), shoulders (deltoids), and the back of the neck.
- Increases spinal flexibility.
- Expands the chest, strengthens the lungs, and relieves asthma and sinusitis.
- Stimulates the nervous system and digestion.
- Regulates metabolism and stimulates the thyroid and parathyroid glands.
- Reduces high blood pressure and menstrual and menopausal discomfort.
- Relieves fatigue, stress, anxiety, and mild depression.

Precautions (proceed with care)

- Low back sensitivity: move in and out of the posture with breath.
- Pregnancy: last trimester, avoid if breath is inhibited at any point.

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Recent or chronic neck, shoulder, or back injury, inflammation, or pain.
Key principles

- Feet and knees hip-width apart.
- Weight on shoulders instead of neck.
- Neck relaxed.
- Stretch the front of the body.

Preparation

- Warm up the spine with Cat and Dog and pelvic tilts; move the knees side to side to warm up the hip joints and adductors.
- Lunge to warm up and strengthen the quadriceps.

Muscles most involved

- The muscles of the pelvis and the abdomen.
- The quadricep muscles are working to extend the knees.
- The muscles of the pelvic floor and the abdomen stabilize the pelvis as you lift the buttocks and torso off the floor.
- The adductor muscles keep the knees pressing in toward each other.
- The lower trapezius is working to press the shoulders down into the floor.
- The rhomboids are working to keep the shoulder blades in toward the spine.
- The rectus abdominis and the pectoralis major and minor are being stretched in the full expression of the posture.
Essential cues

1. Lie on your back with your knees bent, feet flat on the floor, and arms by your sides. Bring your feet hip-width apart and draw your heels close to your sitz bones.

2. Engage your abdominals, thighs, and buttck muscles. Press down through your feet to lift your pelvis off the ground. Keep your knees hip-width apart.

3. Relax your neck as your weight shifts toward the shoulders. Interlace your fingers and lengthen your arms.

4. Draw your shoulder blades toward each other and reach your hands toward your feet. Press down with the arms and shoulders and press up with the sternum.

5. To release, separate your hands and relax your shoulders. Roll your spine down to the floor. Extend your legs, or hug your knees into your chest.

Posture options

Modifications

- Keep pelvis low, hip joints flexed.
- Lift and lower hips instead of maintaining a static hold.
Variations

- Clasp ankles.
- Bring your legs together.
- Lift one leg to sky.

Props

- Block under the sacrum.
- Block in between the thighs or knees.
- Hold belt in both hands behind the back.
Assists

**Verbal**
- Draw the shoulder blades in and down to stabilize the spine.
- Draw the thighs inward to parallel.
- Press down through the feet to raise the pelvis.

**Press points**
- Inside knees
- Palms on ASIS bones
- One hand on sternum
- Hands to fingertips

**Hands-on**
- Place belt under student’s upper pelvis, wrap your hands down the belt, and lean back with straight arms.
- Palms under the shoulders to lengthen spine
Teacher observations

**Awareness**

Bridge is a supported backbend that stretches the abdominals. Breathe deeply and focus on intercostal breathing.

Bridge is an excellent posture for prolonged holding. Take your time, gradually working the body into a full expression of the posture. With the breath flowing deeply, release any muscles that are not essential for holding up the hips. Release the posture and rest for a few minutes before continuing.

**Common misalignment**

- *Knees splay wider than hip-width apart.* Emphasize proper alignment of the feet, weight pressed more strongly on the inside edges of the feet. Have students come into the posture with a pillow or a block between their thighs to get a sense of how hard the adductors need to work to keep the knees aligned over the ankles. Sometimes when we walk the shoulders in under the body to bring the hands together, the shoulders move down toward the feet. This can cause tension in the neck. Watch for the shoulders moving in, not down.
asana

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cobra
bhujangasana

“When the body is alert and the mind is joyful, you can rest assured that your practice is going well. Isn’t that a beautiful test?”
—Swami Kripalu
asana

cobra
bhujangasana
bhujaga: a serpent, moving in curves | (boo-jang-GAH-anna)

Intuitive Benefits

• Engages the back (erector spinae, rhomboids, and middle and lower trapezius), and arms (posterior deltoids, triceps).

• Strengthens the legs (hamstrings), buttocks (gluteus maximus), back (erector spinae), and arms (triceps).

• Stretches the chest (pectoralis), abdomen (rectus abdominus), and throat.

• Stimulates the circulatory, digestive, and lymphatic systems; decongests abdominal organs; stimulates thyroid and thymus glands; relieves asthma.

• Relieves back and abdominal discomfort of menopause and menstruation.

• Relieves stress, anxiety, and mild depression.

Precautions (proceed with care)

• Weak back muscles: move in and out of the posture with breath, and lift with the back rather than the arms to strengthen.

Contraindications (avoid posture)

• Pregnancy (after third trimester).

• Recent or chronic back, neck, or abdominal injury, inflammation, or pain.

• High blood pressure.
Key principles

- Legs and feet hip-width apart or less.
- Elbows in close to the body.
- Pelvic triangle presses down.
- Shoulders roll back and down.

Preparation

- Warm up the spine with the Six Movements of the Spine and Standing Swinging Twist.
- Shoulder openers and tie stretches.
- Practice Sphinx before moving into Cobra to increase flexibility in the thoracic spine.

Muscles most involved

- The **erector spinae** on either side of the spine lengthen and lift the torso. When the hands are pressing into the floor, they should complement, not replace, the strength of the erector spinae.
- The **trapezius** pulls the shoulders back and down.
- The **gluteus** firms the pelvis and keeps the pelvic triangle pressing down.
- The **adductors** keep the legs together and firm.
- The **rectus abdominus** is lengthened by pressing out through the sternum and down through the pelvic triangle.
Essential cues

1. Lie on your belly with your legs extended and big toes touching. Bring your chin, mouth, or forehead onto the floor. Slide your hands under your shoulders, and draw your elbows back and in toward your torso.

2. Press your pelvic triangle into the floor and elongate through your toes and the crown of your head. Without pressing into your hands, lift your upper torso off the mat.

3. Press upward through the crown. Encourage the neck to be an extension of the whole spine. Roll your shoulders down and back. Keep pressing your elbows toward your torso. Without pressing into your hands, arch your spine as much as you can.

4. Press the pelvic triangle into the floor. As you press the palms lightly into the ground to lift the torso higher (there should be no compression in the low back), draw your elbow’s back and in and reach your sternum forward.

5. Elongate the neck and reach your crown forward and up.
6. To release, extend your torso forward and down onto the floor. Relax your shoulders and back.

Posture options

Modifications

- Lift and lower with breath without static hold.
- Sphinx: forearms on the ground with palms facing down and elbows directly under the shoulders.

Variations

- Upward-Facing Dog: bent arms with thighs drawn inward for core engagement, then pelvis and thighs lifting.

Props

- Block between the thighs.
- Blanket under ASIS bones.
Assists

**Verbal**
- Thighs together to stabilize and support the spine.
- Lengthen through the spine, open first at the ribs.
- Chin close to the throat to protect the neck.

**Press points**
- Shoulder blades
- Inner elbows
- Crown
- Sternum

**Hands-on**
- Press calves down.
Teacher observations

Awareness

Sphinx is a variation of Cobra that utilizes the support of the elbows and lower placement of the body to isolate the elongation and stretch in the upper chest and spine. By restricting the movement of the diaphragm, Sphinx encourages you to breathe in and out of the upper chest.

For all prone backbending asanas, it’s important to elongate the torso before entering the posture.

Reach the arms overhead along the floor and press back through the toes, or stretch one arm forward and the opposite leg back, then repeat on the other side.

The downward press of the pelvic triangle and ASIS bones is the foundation of Cobra, providing a solid base from which to engage the muscles of the back and lift the torso off the floor.

The backbend emphasized in Cobra is in the middle and upper back, not in the lower back or neck.

Common misalignments

• As with Boat, when the back muscles engage to lift the torso, students often overactivate the muscles of the neck, causing the head to pull back. Help your students to keep the neck in line with the spine by inviting them to keep their chin slightly tucked or to look slightly down rather than forward.

• Pressing into the palms as you move into Cobra sometimes shifts all of the arch to the lumbar spine. Come up only as far as you can with the upper and middle spine arched, press out through the sternum and pull the hands back toward the body. If there is any pinching in the lumbar spine, press more firmly into the pelvic triangle. If the pinching is not relieved, come out of the posture and then re-enter it with more focus on the curve in the thoracic spine.

• Sometimes the legs come off the floor as the torso lifts. Press into the tops of the feet to keep the legs firmly grounded.

• Pressing into the palms often causes the shoulders to ride up to the ears. Roll the shoulder blades back and down to keep the shoulders and back in alignment.
asana

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downward-facing dog
adho mukha svanasana

“The uniqueness of Kripalu Yoga is that postures, pranayama, and meditation are all happening simultaneously, not separately. In the beginning stages, the practice of postures is primary and the other aspects of yoga are secondary. In the later stages, meditation is the primary experience.”

—Swami Kripalu
downward-facing dog
adho mukha svanasana

adho: downward | mukha: face | svana: dog
(AH-doh-MOO-kah-shvah-NAHS-anna)

Intuitive Benefits

• Strengthens the legs (quadriceps), back (latissimus dorsi), shoulders (deltoids), and arms (triceps).
• Stretches the backs of the legs (gastrocnemius, hamstrings), buttocks (gluteus maximus), and back (latissimus dorsi).
• Increases circulation of blood and lymph.
• May relieve insomnia, menstrual and menopausal discomfort, low back pain, and sciatica.
• Energizes the body and mind, improves focus, and relieves stress and mild anxiety.

Precautions (proceed with care)

• Weak or stiff back muscles, hamstrings, sciatica, or knee problems: practice carefully, keeping knees bent and spine straight.
• Carpal tunnel syndrome: Press into the base of the fingers.

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

• Uncontrolled high blood pressure.
• Inflammation, injury, or disease of the eyes or ears.
• Recent or chronic ankle, knee, leg, hip, back, shoulder, arm, or wrist injury, inflammation, or pain.
Key principles

• Feet hip-width apart.
• Arms and hands shoulder-width apart.
• Sitz bones press toward the ceiling.
• Spine elongates.

Preparation

• Belt stretches to lengthen the hamstrings.
• Warm up the shoulders and upper spine by releasing the head, neck, and shoulders.
• Warm up and strengthen the spine with Puppy Stretch and Dandasana.
• Strengthen the gluteus muscles with Donkey Kicks.
• Warm up the hands and wrists so that they are prepared to support the body.

Muscles most involved

• The deltoids bear the weight of the torso in this moderate inversion. The serratus anterior keeps the shoulders stabilized on the back.
• The quadriceps extend the legs and press the heels down toward the floor.
• The erector spinae lengthen the spine. All of the muscles of the back and shoulders support the body and help press the buttocks toward the ceiling.
• The hamstrings and the gastrocnemius are lengthened by pressing down through the heels.
• The rectus abdominus and abdominal obliques are stretched through the dynamic tension in the torso from the hands pressing down and the buttocks pressing up.
asana

Essential cues

1. Come into Table position. Bring your knees directly under your hips and palms under your shoulders. Spread your fingers and curl your toes under.

2. Press into your hands, and engage your arms, shoulders, and pectoral muscles to stabilize your body. Keep your knees bent as you raise your hips as high as you can.

3. Pull your shoulder blades down and draw them outward, away from your spine. Engage and stabilize your shoulders as you lengthen your waist.

4. Press your heels down and straighten your legs as much as you can, maintaining an elongated spine.

5. To release, bend your knees and lower them to the floor into Table.
Posture options

**Modifications**
- Widen the feet to reduce the hamstring stretch if uncomfortable.
- Bend the knees to ease pressure on the hamstrings and lower back.

**Variations**
- Three-Legged Dog: Lift one leg up and back.
- Place one hand to the opposite ankle for a twist.

**Props**
- Palms on rolled blanket or mat.
- Block in between the inner thighs.
- Cushion under the heels.
- Chair or wall for an easier forward fold.
Assists

Verbal

• Use the whole hand to stabilize: heels, knuckles, and fingertips.
• Lengthen belly.

Press point

• Heels

Hands-on

• Stand in front of student. Place both hands on either side of the sacrum. With straight arms lean forward, pressing up and back.
• Stand behind student with hands to hip crease. With straight arms, lean back.
• Kneel in front of student and roll their shoulder blades open with your hands.
Teacher observations

Awareness

Downward-Facing Dog is a partial inversion. Consult with your physician before practicing if you have uncontrolled high blood pressure, glaucoma, a detached retina, or other eye problems.

The stability in the shoulders comes not from drawing the shoulder blades close together, but rather by engaging the pectoral and serratus anterior muscles as the shoulder blades move out and down. This creates the necessary stability for the weight of the body to be supported by the arms and shoulders.

To build endurance, come in and out of the posture several times, resting in Table in between. Over time, your flexibility and strength will increase.

Common misalignments

- **Rounding the lumbar spine.** This is caused by tight hamstrings and may be corrected by bending the knees slightly and then walking the heels to the floor one at a time. Warming up properly will also help. Having the student bring the pelvis into a slight Dog tilt before pressing up into the posture will often help keep the correct alignment. The “eyes” of the elbows tend to roll forward, which can put pressure on the elbow joints. Rolling the “eyes” of the elbows in to face each other will protect the elbow joints and help to open the shoulders.

- **Allowing the chest to collapse between the arms.** This creates an unstable posture. Develop upper body strength through coming in and out of this posture from Table.
eagle
garudhasana
eagle
garudasana

garuda: the mythic “king of the birds,” the vehicle of Vishnu | (gah-rue-DAHS-anna)

Intuitive Benefits

• Strengthens the legs (soleus, quadriceps, hamstrings, adductors) buttocks (gluteus medius and minimus), back (erector spinae), abdomen (rectus abdominus), shoulders (trapezius, deltoids), and arms (triceps).

• Stretches the legs (soleus), buttocks (gluteus maximus), and back (latissimus dorsi, rhomboids).

• Strengthens and stretches the ankles and calves.

• Stretches the thighs, hips, shoulders, and upper back.

• Improves concentration.

• Improves sense of balance.

Precautions (proceed with care)

• Uncontrolled high or low blood pressure.

• Heart conditions: Practice carefully without long holding.

• Weak knees: Avoid long holding and keep the knees even with the toes.

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

• Recent or chronic knee, hip, or leg injury, inflammation, or pain.
Key Principles

- All limbs squeeze together.
- Spine and torso are elongated and arched or rounded.
- Both hips are level and facing forward, with knees and elbows in one vertical line.

Preparation

- Cow Head posture is an excellent arm stretch to prepare for Eagle.
- Open the hips with Hero and Rotated Triangle.
- Use Standing Squat to build leg and back strength.

Muscles most involved

- Stretched: gastrocnemius-soleus, rectus abdominus, trapezius, and rhomboids.
- Strengthened: adductor group, tensor-fascialata, psoas, erector spinae, quadratus lumborum (strengthening in the arched back position, stretching in the forward arch version), rectus abdominus (stabilizing the pelvis in forward arch).
Essential cues

1. Stand tall in Tadasana, with your feet parallel and your arms down by your sides.

2. Extend your arms out to the sides, parallel to the floor. Bend your knees until you feel your quadriceps engage.

3. Shift your weight into your left foot and raise your right foot. Swing your right knee out and circle it high over your left leg, crossing your right thigh over your left.

4. Bend your left knee as much as you can, maintaining stability and avoiding any discomfort.

5. Wrap your right toes behind your left calf, if you can.

6. Lift your sternum to support your balance. Reach out through your fingertips to lengthen your arms.

7. Cross your left arm over your right. Reach both arms in opposite directions as far as you can. Bend your elbows and touch opposite shoulders. Raise your hands in front of your face. Cross your wrists and clasp your hands or forearms.

8. Squeeze your arms and legs together tightly and bend your left knee to lower your hips. Adjust your torso so that your elbows are over your knees. Allow your spine to either round or arch.

9. If arched (basic posture), lift your sternum and elbows to support your spine. If you feel any compression in the low back, lengthen your tailbone down until the tension is relieved.

10. If your back is rounded, draw your elbows down toward your knees. You can pull your elbows toward your navel and bring your forearms toward or against your thighs. Or you can extend your elbows past your knees and move your chest toward your thighs.

11. To release, unwind your arms.

12. Lengthen your left leg and lift your hips. Unwind your right leg and stand balanced on both feet in Tadasana.

13. Relax your arms by your sides.

14. Rest, and repeat on the other side.
Posture options

Modifications

• Eagle arms only.
• Eagle legs only.
• Eagle arms in Standing Squat.
• Use a wall to support your back while learning to balance.
• Lie on the floor for stability.

Variation

• Exhale and fold torso into a forward bend, pressing the forearms against the thigh of the top leg. Hold for a few breaths, then inhale back up.

Props

• Place the foot of the top leg on a block for stability.
• Hold a yoga belt between the hands if shoulders are tight.
Assists

Verbal

• Find a soft gaze on a stable object.

Press point

• Crown

Hands-on

• With the student lying down, stand by their legs and use your hands to adjust their thigh stretch.
• Standing in front of the student, grasp and draw their forearms to support shoulder stretch.
Teacher observations

Awareness

• Stretch the trapezius and rhomboids as opposed to stressing the shoulder joint.
• Keep elbows aligned over the knees rather than twisting to the side.

Common misalignment

• Elbows not aligned over the knees
asana

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fish
matsyasana

“To perform every action artfully is yoga.”
—Swami Kripalu
fish
matsyasana
matsya: fish | (mot-see-AHS-anna)

Intuitive Benefits

- Strengthens the legs (quadriceps, psoas), back (erector spinae, latissimus), shoulders (trapezius, rhomboids), and arms (posterior deltoid, triceps).
- Stretches abdomen (rectus abdominus), chest (pectoralis), and neck.
- Expands chest and lungs and relieves asthma, sinusitis, and bronchitis.
- Stimulates thyroid gland, stabilizing metabolism; stimulates pancreas.
- Energizes the mind by reducing stress, anxiety, mild depression, and grief.

Precautions (proceed with care)

- Weak back or neck muscles: keep elbows on the ground next to the body.

Contraindications (avoid posture)

- Recent or chronic back or neck injury, inflammation, or pain.
- Headache or insomnia.
- High or low blood pressure.
Key principles

- Sacrum rolls forward and sitz bones press into the floor.
- Majority of the weight is on the sitz bones.
- Chest lifts toward the ceiling.
- Back of the head is on the floor and the neck is long (no compression in the cervical vertebrae).

Preparation

- Warm up the back and neck with Cat and Dog.
- Strengthen the back with Cobra and Boat.
- Strengthen the abdomen and hip flexors with crunches and leg lifts.

Muscles most involved

- The **psoas** lifts the torso from the hips, creating an arch in the spine, while the sitz bones stay in contact with the floor.
- The **serratus anterior** stabilizes the shoulder blades, and the **trapezius** and **erector spinae** lift the upper chest.
- The **triceps** lift the body into position.
- The muscles of the legs counterbalance the weight of the body.
asana

Essential cues

1. Lie on your back with your legs extended, feet touching and flexed. Bring your arms by your sides with your elbows close to your body. Reach down toward your feet and hold the backs of your thighs with your hands.

2. Press out through your heels until your hips engage and your legs feel heavy. Press into your elbows and hands to lift your rib cage off the floor. Lift through your sternum and slide onto the back of your head. Support your weight with your buttocks, elbows, and the back of your head. Press more firmly through your elbows to reduce the weight on the back of your head. Keep lengthening the back of your neck. If you feel a stretch in your throat, bring your chin toward your chest an inch or two.

3. Press firmly down through your buttocks and elbows and open your chest. Avoiding any strain, release your hands from your thighs and rest your palms on the floor, by your sides.

4. To release, bring your hands back to your thighs.

5. Press down strong into your elbows, lift your chest, and take the weight off your head. Slide your head away from your shoulders and bring your back to the floor.

6. Turn your head from side to side to release any tension from your neck.
Posture options

Modification

• Do this posture at 50 percent effort and extension.

Variations

• Palms in prayer position in front of the chest.
• Arms overhead, hands in steeple position.
• Extended Fish: Palms and legs together, extended at 45 degrees.

Props

• Supported Fish: Place one cushion beneath the upper back.
• Block between the thighs.
• Block beneath the mid-back and head.
Assists

Verbal

• Press down through sitz bones, lengthen through the heels.
• Keep weight in your hands and pelvis, not on the neck.

Press points

• Sternum
• Scapula
• Heels

Hands-on

• Straddle student. Lift rib cage.
• Press legs to ground.
Teacher observations

**Awareness**

If you have neck sensitivity, exercise great care as you practice. Be careful not to place excessive weight on the back of the head. Emphasize the press of the sitz bones and forearms into the floor, and the lift of the sternum, both of which slide the head into proper position. This "sliding" or "dragging" movement utilizes the support of the floor to protect the neck as it comes into proper position with the upper part of the back of the head, not the crown, resting on the floor. When practiced properly and with adequate preparation, Fish is beneficial for the neck and helps counteract the tendency to round the shoulders.

Fish is traditionally practiced as a complementary posture to Half Shoulderstand. Whereas Half Shoulderstand brings the chin into the throat and lengthens the back of the neck, Fish opens the throat and reverses the neck stretch. On a deeper level, Half Shoulderstand applies a gentle pressure to the thyroid and parathyroid glands, and Fish releases pressure and allows maximum blood flow to these crucial glands.

**Common misalignments**

- **Lifting the torso too high and dropping the head back, placing the weight on the crown of the head.** This causes a hyperextension between cervical vertebrae one and two, which can bring about a destabilization of the neck over time. To avoid this, come up slowly, letting the head stay in contact with the floor at all times, and place the weight on the back of the head, not the top.

- **Feet pointing away from the body.** Activate the muscles of the legs by pressing out through the soles of the feet the entire time you are in this posture.
asana

Notes:
gate
parighasana

“The root cause of all disturbances in life is the constant modification of the mind. If you can calm the mind, you can establish a kingdom of peace.”

—Swami Kripalu
gate
parighasana
parigha: the gate of a palace | (par-ee-GOSS-anna)

Intuitive Benefits

- Strengthens the abdomen (oblique), chest (intercostals), legs, hips, shoulders, and neck.
- Provides alternate stretching and contracting of sides of body to strengthen and tone.
- Increases lateral flexibility of the spine.
- Stimulates lungs, digestion, and peristalsis; helps relieve constipation.
- Increases mental clarity and relieves stress.

Precautions (proceed with care)

- Knee sensitivity: Use a soft folded blanket under your standing knee.
- Back sensitivity: Avoid excessive bending or long holding times.
- Uncontrolled high blood pressure: Keep torso vertical.

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Recent or chronic hip, knee, groin, torso, shoulder, or arm injury; inflammation or pain.
- Sciatica.
Key principles

- Hips face forward.
- Lengthen both sides of the waist.
- Shoulders are aligned with the hips.
- Thigh of the standing leg is vertical.

Preparation

- This posture requires that you have side-bending flexibility.
- Practice Half Moon first.
- The hip flexibility needed in this pose can be gained by practicing Triangle and Side Warrior.

Muscles most involved

- Stretched: hamstrings of the extended leg, quadratus lumborum, obliques, erector spinae, scalines, upper trapezius.
- Strengthened: serratus and latissimus dorsi.
Essential cues

1. Kneel in the center of your mat, facing the side. Lift your hips over your knees and bring your hands onto your hips.

2. Extend your left leg out to the side. Press down through the ball of your foot and out through your toes, making sure not to lock your left knee. If your knees don’t hyperextend, you can point your right toes up and rest on your heel, to add a calf stretch. Reach up through the crown of your head.

3. Raise your right arm overhead, with your palm facing to the left. Lengthen through your right arm and draw it back behind your ear. Keep your spine long as you reach through your fingertips.

4. Press out through your right hip and extend your right arm and torso to the left. Slide your left hand down your left leg and hold above or below your knee.

5. Reach out through your fingertips and the crown of your head. Keep both hips and shoulders facing forward. Rotate your chest and upper shoulder back. Keep your head forward and allow your neck to be an extension of your spine.

6. To release, lift your torso and reach your arm overhead. Lower your arms to your side and bring your left knee under your left hip.

7. Rest, and repeat on the other side.
Posture options

**Modifications**
- Keep extended leg bent to 90 degrees.
- Hands on hips.

**Variations**
- Bind with upper arm.
- Keep upper hand on hip.
- Flex foot of extended leg.
- Raise arms overhead to side.

**Props**
- Block behind extended leg.
- Block at 45 degrees under extended knee.
- Blanket under bent knee.
Assists

Verbal

- Allow the pelvis to settle into the support of the thigh.
- Lengthen out of the waist.
- Keep the chin in line with the spine.

Press points

- Crown
- Stabilize pelvis
- Fingertips
- Shoulder blade
- Foot

Hands-on

- Stand behind the student and square the shoulders.
- Lengthen the side ribs.
Teacher observations

**Awareness**

- Pad the standing knee as needed.
- Keep the standing knee directly under the hip for stability.
- Keep the pelvis square to the front.
- Don’t let the torso twist toward the extended leg.

**Common misalignments**

- Standing knee not aligned in support of the hip
- Pelvis twists toward the extended leg
- Torso twists toward the extended leg
half moon
ardha chandrasana

“Whoever relies on the breath has obtained a key to yoga and has taken a good path.”

—Swami Kripalu
half moon
ardha chandrasana
ardha: half; chandra: moon | (ARE-dah-chan-DRAHS-anna)

Intuitive Benefits

• Strengthens the legs (tensor fascia lata), buttocks (gluteus medius), abdomen (obliques), back (quadratus lumborum), and shoulders (trapezius, deltoïds).

• Provides alternate stretching and strengthening of the entire body, toning and strengthening the legs, back, and abdominal muscles.

• Increases spinal flexibility and alignment.

• Tones abdominal organs to stimulate digestion and peristalsis.

• Increases coordination, balance, and poise.

• Develops focus and concentration.

Precautions (proceed with care)

• Weak back muscles or shoulder injury: Keep hands on hips.

• Heart conditions and nervous disorders: Avoid long holding times.

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

• Uncontrolled high blood pressure.
Key principles

- Both feet firmly grounded.
- Neck in line with the spine.
- Extend from the heels to the fingertips.
- Hips move to one side to support balance.
- Hips remain close to center of balance.

Preparation

- Warm up the spine with the Six Movements of the Spine, Airplane Swings, Monkey Hara, the Side Stretch Series, and Windmill.
- Shoulder openers.

Muscles most involved

- The *rectus abdominus* and the *internal and external obliques* stabilize the center of the body and help the *quadratus lumborum* arch the body to the side. When one side is engaged, the other side is lengthened.
- The muscles of the shoulders, especially the *trapezius*, keep the arms raised overhead and the shoulder blades down and back.
Essential cues

1. Stand in Tadasana, with your arms by your sides.
2. Raise your arms overhead and turn your palms up once they reach shoulder height.
3. Reach your arms straight up and lengthen through your fingertips.
4. Interlace your fingers in temple position.
5. Roll your shoulders down and back. Press down through the soles of your feet. Engage your abdominal muscles to lengthen your waist and reach up through the crown of your head.
6. Press your hips to the left, keeping your shoulders and hips squared to the front. Shift your weight into your left foot.
7. Lift your rib cage and lengthen the front and back of your torso. Keep your hips and shoulders in one plane as you extend through your fingertips and extend your upper body to the right. Shift your weight into your right foot. Press through your left hip and your fingertips to balance the weight on both feet. Maintain alignment as you continue to press through both feet and lift out of your waist.
8. To release, press down through your feet, shift your hips back to center, and lift your shoulders over your waist.
9. Relax your arms down by your sides, turning your palms down once they reach shoulder height.
10. Rest, and repeat on the other side.
Posture options

**Modifications**
- Hands stay on hips.
- One hand stays on hip.

**Variations**
- Arms shoulder-width apart, grasping opposite elbows behind head.
- Extend one arm with the other arm reaching to the opposite side.

**Props**
- Hold belt with both hands and keep arms wide apart.
- Block between thighs.
- Block between palms.
Assists

**Verbal**
- Stabilize with both legs.
- Lengthen through the flexed side of the spine.

**Press points**
- Fingertips
- Scapula
- Sternum
- Hip
- Feet

**Hands-on**
- Stand behind the student and square the shoulders.
- Lengthen the side ribs.
Teacher observations

Awareness

As you enter Half Moon, imagine that the body is pressed between two planes of glass, or both shoulder blades are pressed against a wall. This will help avoid the tendency to twist the hips or shoulders, targeting the stretch on the often inflexible intercostal muscles.

Bring attention back to the feet and keep the weight evenly distributed between them.

Shift the weight back to center. Reach through the fingertips.

In Half Moon, focus the extension in the thoracic spine. Lift up and out through the sternum.

Common misalignments

- **Twisting the spine as you arch to the side.** This is due partly to weak back and abdominal muscles and partly to a lack of body awareness. Help students come into alignment as mentioned in assists below.

- **Collapsing the rib cage on the inside of the stretch.** The intention is to stretch the side of the body, not to arch to the side as far as possible. Encourage students to come back up and hold the posture with length on both sides of the rib cage.

- **Shoulders lifting up around the ears.** Be sure to keep the shoulder blades down while lengthening the torso up and over.

- **Hyperextending the lumbar spine**
half shoulderstand
ardha sarvangasana

“Wherever yoga is being practiced, pranayama is being practiced, directly or indirectly. If an approach to yoga rejects pranayama, it ceases to be yoga.”

—Swami Kripalu
half shoulderstand
ardha sarvangasana

ardha: half; sarva: entire; anga: limb

Intuitive Benefits

- Strengthens the back (erector spinae), abdomen (obliques, rectus and transverse abdominis), shoulders (rhomboids, trapezius), and arms (triceps).
- Relieves constipation.
- Improves blood flow to the brain, stimulates mental functions, and improves memory and concentration.
- Stimulates thyroid, parathyroid, and prostate function.
- Improves venous blood and lymph circulation, reducing edema and varicose veins.
- Relieves insomnia, asthma, respiratory ailments, and menopausal discomfort.
- Relieves stress, anxiety, and mild depression.

Precautions (proceed with care)

- Pregnancy (avoid after third trimester): Press the soles of the feet against a wall to bring yourself into the posture.
- Menstruation: Avoid if uncomfortable.

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Uncontrolled high or low blood pressure.
- Recent or chronic neck, shoulder, or back injury; inflammation or pain.
- Injury or inflammation of eyes or ears.
Key principles

- Weight is on the shoulders and the upper arms.
- Neck is loose and relaxed.
- Belly is open.
- Back is arched.

Preparation

- Warm up the core with abdominal strengtheners.
- Strengthen the arms and upper back with repetitions of Chaturanga, Upward-Facing Dog, and Downward-Facing Dog.
- Strengthen the low back with Simple Boat and Simple Cobra.
- Open the shoulders with tie stretches, Releasing Head, Neck and Shoulders, and Yoga Mudra.
- Warm up the spine with Sacral Massage, Spinal Lift, and Spinal Rocking.

Muscles most involved

- The **rhomboids** and the **lower trapezius** bring the shoulder blades together and down to provide stability for the weight of the body.
- The **triceps** press the elbows down to the floor.
- The **rectus abdominus** stabilizes the torso.
- The **erector spinae** keep the back elongated.
asana

Essential cues

1. Lie on your back with your knees bent. Bring your heels close to your buttocks and your arms close to your sides. Press your forearms and palms into the floor. Engage your abdominals and bring your knees toward your forehead and your hips off the floor. Rock back toward your shoulders and lift your hips high enough to hold them with your hands.

2. Adjust your hands to support your hips without straining your wrists. Walk your elbows in toward each other and press down through your shoulder blades. Lift your sternum and arch your back.

3. Lengthen your legs and adjust the hinge of your hips so that your weight is evenly distributed between your elbows and shoulders. There should be no weight on your neck. Press out through your heels and up through your sternum, maintaining the arch in your spine.

4. To release, bend your knees, release your hands, and press your palms into the floor. Keep your neck engaged and chin tucked as you roll your spine down. When your sacrum touches, lower your legs with your knees either bent or straight.
Posture options

Modifications

- Stay in Bridge pose.
- Keep the knees bent.

Variations

- Eagle legs.
- From Bridge, bring one hand and then the other to the hips. Bring one leg up at a time to the forehead. Continue Half Shoulderstand.

Props

- Lie on your back with the buttocks and feet on the wall. Press your feet against the wall until the hips rise off ground. Support the hips in your hands. Move the legs away from the wall, bend the knees, and bring the knees toward the forehead, one at a time.
- Blanket underneath the shoulders.
- Belt around the arms.
- Block under the sacrum.
Assists

Verbal

• Stabilize through the upper arms.

Press points

• Heel
• Sternum
• Scapula

Hands-on

• Squeeze the student’s elbows between the feet.
• Lift up from the shins.
Teacher observations

**Awareness**

Half Shoulderstand is a safe inversion that provides many benefits. Being upside down reverses the pull of gravity on the body, facilitating the flow of blood and lymph out of the legs and into the torso and upper body. All the organs and glands are turned upside down and gently stimulated. When the inversion is released, the whole body rebalances as the effects of gravity and circulation return to normal.

**Common misalignments**

- Feet coming too far over the head.
- Back rounded and collapsed rather than extended.
- Elbows wider than the shoulders or splayed out.
- Weight on the neck rather than the shoulders.
- Lifting the hips too high.
“The soul and the breath are close friends. When the soul departs from the body in death, the breath leaves simultaneously. This close relationship is why the technique of pranayama is so important to the practice of yoga. Pranayama is the soul of yoga. In fact, it is yoga itself.”

—Swami Kripalu
head to knee
janu sirsasana
janu: knee; sirs: head | (jah-noo-shear-shah-sa-nah)

Intuitive Benefits

• Strengthens the back (erector spinae), abdomen (obliques), and legs (psoas).
• Stretches the back side of the body from the heels to the back of neck (gastrocnemius, hamstrings, gluteus maximus), and lengthens the spinal column.
• Increases flexibility in the spine and the hips, which can alleviate certain cases of sciatica.
• Stimulates digestion and peristalsis.
• Tranquilizes the whole being.

Precautions (proceed with care)

• Weak or stiff back muscles: Do not extend arms above the head; try using cushion(s) under the hips or knees.

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

• Recent or chronic back injury, inflammation, or pain.
• Acute sciatica (with inflammation).
Key principles

- Extend the spine.
- Straight, flat back, or lengthened and rounded.
- Pelvis rotates forward as movement originates at the hips.

Preparation

- Warm up the hips and hamstrings with Leg Swings, Leg Pulleys, Squat Series, Hip Series, Bun Walk, and Runner’s Stretch.
- Lying Tie Stretches open the hamstrings in a gentle, supported manner.
- Open the hip joint with Bound Angle.
- Downward-Facing Dog helps open the hamstrings.

Muscles most involved

- The **erector spinae** and **quadratus lumborum** keep the spine elongated and folding forward evenly, without a lateral bend or twist coming into the spine.
- The **piriformis** and other muscles of lateral rotation rotate the femur in the hip socket and pull the thighs toward the ground.
- The **iliopsoas** flexes the torso forward over the thighs.
- If you use your arms to pull the torso forward, deepening the stretch in the hamstrings, your **latissimus dorsi** and **trapezius** stabilize the shoulder girdle.
- The **hamstrings**, **gastrocnemius**, and **soleus** are lengthened.
Essential cues

1. Sit tall in Dandasana, with your legs extended in front of you. If your back is rounded, place a cushion under your sacrum.

2. Bend your right knee and bring the sole of your foot against the inside of your left thigh. Press your right knee down toward the ground and face your torso toward your extended leg.

3. Press your sitz bones down and reach out through the sole of your left foot. Engage your pelvic and abdominal muscles to elongate your waist.

4. Lengthen your spine, pull your shoulders back and down, and open your chest. Raise your arms out to the sides and overhead. Extend your arms in a V position by your ears.

5. Hinge at your hips and reach your heart forward as you extend over your left leg. Engage your abdominal muscles to keep lengthening your spine. Continue to elongate forward until you reach your full extension, without rounding your back.

6. Lower your arms and hold your foot, ankle, or shin with your hands. Continue to engage your abdominals and lengthen your spine. Press out through your left heel and lengthen your leg, without hyperextending your knee.

7. Center your torso over your extended leg. Reach your sternum toward your left foot and allow your back to round. Keep your elbows close to your left leg, and use your arms to draw your sternum toward your left foot. Focus the stretch in the back of your left leg, rather than your low back.

8. To release, bring your hands to the floor, press into your palms, and lift your shoulders over your waist. Extend your right leg next to your left.

9. Rest, and repeat on the other side.
Posture options

**Modifications**
- Hands stay on the floor.
- Keep the extended leg knee bent.

**Variations**
- Bent leg in Half Lotus.
- Keep the hands out in front of the feet.
- Bind one arm to the foot on the opposite side.
- Hands on the ground on either side of the extended leg.

**Props**
- Belt around the extended foot.
- Blanket under either knee.
- Blanket under the pelvis.
Assists

**Verbal**
- Stabilize through the pelvis.
- Lengthen the belly.
- Extend through the heel.

**Press points**
- Heel
- Sternum
- Scapula
- Crown
- Low back and knee

**Hands-on**
- Kneel in front of the student. Clasp wrist to wrist, arms straight, and lean back.
- Straddle the student’s extended leg. Clasp wrist to wrist and, with straight arms, lean back.
- Support the arms to roll the shoulders.
- Support the arms to open the thoracic spine.
Teacher observations

Awareness

Forward bends foster an attitude of surrender. The flexibility required in the hamstrings, pelvis, and hips to bend forward cannot be forced. If there is strain, you are likely to experience low back pain from muscle soreness or disc compression. As you work with patience and self-acceptance, your flexibility will steadily increase over time.

The Great Seal, a variation of Head to Knee, is an excellent holding posture. Come into the posture as described and hold for an extended period of time, letting gravity do the work of stretching the body forward. Breathe deeply, emphasizing the exhalation, and notice how breathing in this way increases the depth of the posture. Rock the head and neck from side to side to release the neck and shoulders. After holding for a bit, you may find that you can come farther forward with a straight back. To release, place your hands near your hips and press into them to give support to the back muscles as you come out.

Common misalignments

• Buttock on side of bent knee slides back, turning the torso to the side instead of facing forward. Press hands down into the floor near the hips as you press the bent knee toward the opposite foot, bringing the hips into alignment.

• Bent knee high in the air. Place a pillow under the knee.

• Rounding at the lumbar spine. Because we cannot see our own backs, it’s hard to know when the spine is rounding. When the forward bend comes from the lumbar spine, instead of the hip joint, there is the possibility of back strain. Assist your students in knowing if the spine is rounding by speaking to it as you see it happening. Rounding the back in this posture should be a conscious choice.

• Shoulders riding up the back. Consciously relax the shoulders down and back.

• Chin jutting forward. Tuck the chin.
knee-down twist
supta matsyendrasana

“Mitahar, or moderation in diet, is one of the foundations of spiritual progress. One’s energy is generated, protected and maintained by mitahar, which can be defined as eating the amount of food required to keep the body alert and efficient.”

—Swami Kripalu
knee-down twist
supta matsyendrasana
supta: supine; matsyendra: a sage of yoga | (SOUP-tah MOT-see-en-DRAHS-anna)

Intuitive Benefits

• Stretches the buttocks (gluteus maximus, medius, minimus; piriformis), back (erector spinae, latissimus dorsi), abdomen (obliques), and chest (pectoralis).

• Rotates and aligns the spine, maintaining spinal flexibility and hydrating the spinal discs.

• Stimulates the circulatory and lymphatic systems.

• Stimulates digestion and peristalsis, relieving constipation.

• Relieves menstrual discomfort, asthma, and sciatica.

• Reduces stress, anxiety, and mild depression.

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

• Recent or chronic back injury, inflammation, or pain.

• Pregnancy (practice gently; avoid if it causes discomfort).
Key principles

- Movement comes from the hips.
- Avoid arching the spine.
- Pelvis is level or neutral.

Preparation

- Wind-Relieving Pose and Seated Spinal Twist are also good for warming the spine.

Muscles most involved

- The rectus abdominus, the obliques, and the latissimus dorsi lift the buttocks off the floor and rotate the torso to one side.
- Once the body has rotated fully, these muscles can relax and enjoy the stretch that occurs through the rotation.
- The erector spinae are lengthened.
Essential cues

1. Lie on your back with your arms extended in a T position, palms facing down. Press out through your fingertips, feet, and the crown of your head.

2. Bend your right knee and place your foot on the floor. Lift your hips off the ground, shift them to the right side of your mat, and place them back on the floor. This will help your spine stay long once you move into the twist.

3. Bring the sole of your right foot onto your left leg, just above your knee.

4. Engage your abdominals and press through your left heel. Lift your right hip and bring your right knee across your body toward the floor on your left side. Press your right hip toward the left while you press your shoulder blades and palms into the floor. Keep reaching out through your left heel. Turn your head to the right.

5. Keep your right shoulder on the floor and continue to press your right hip and knee to the left.

6. To release, engage your abdominals, press through your left heel, and lift your right knee and head back to center. Extend your right leg long, and even out your hips.

7. Rest, and repeat on the other side.
Posture options

Modification
• Hand on knee.

Variations
• Extend the top leg, and hold the leg or the foot.
• Eagle legs.

Prop
• Cushion under the bent knee and/or shoulder.
Assists

Verbal

- Stabilize the shoulder blades.

Press points

- Extended heel
- Scapula

Hands-on

- Spine-lengthening hip lift.
- Shoulder and hip press.
- Arm lift.
Teacher observations

**Awareness**

The intention of this posture is not to get the knee to the floor, but rather to create a complete twist in the spine. The knee serves as a lever to support the twist and allow the muscles to relax once in it, rather than remaining engaged to sustain the rotation. For some people, when the stability of the hips has been compromised, pressing down on the bent knee to bring it to the floor can dislocate the hip.

**Common misalignment**

- *Lifting the shoulder off the floor.* Place a pillow on the floor under the bent knee.
mountain
tadasana

“Practicing yoga postures with deep sensitivity to the breath is 10 times more beneficial than postures done without breath awareness.”
—Swami Kripalu
mountain
tadasana
tada: mountain | (tah-DAHS-anna)

Intuitive Benefits

• Strengthens the legs (quadriceps, hamstrings), buttocks (gluteus maximus), back (erector spinae), abdomen (rectus and transverse abdominus), shoulders (trapezius, deltoïds), arms (triceps), and neck.

• Stabilizes ankles, knees, hips, torso, and shoulders.

• Brings the entire body into correct alignment.

• Develops concentration, coordination, stability, balance, poise, and strength.

• Relieves mild anxiety.

Precautions (proceed with care)

• Uncontrolled high blood pressure and heart conditions: Keep the arms below the head.
Key principles

- Feet firmly grounded.
- Pelvis level or neutral.
- Shoulders relaxed and down.
- Spine extended.

Preparation

- Warm up the entire body before doing Mountain with Hara Squats. Use pranayama to focus the mind. Rocking Heel to Toe will activate the soles of the feet.

Muscles most involved

- The quadriceps stabilize the kneecaps and pelvis.
- The rectus abdominus and transverse abdominus stabilize the rib cage.
- The serratus anterior provides stability for the shoulder blades and keeps them down and back.
- The deltoids lift the arms out and overhead.
- The pectoralis major and minor are stretched through lifting the arms overhead and pressing the fingertips away.
- The erector spinae are lengthened and aligned.
Essential cues

1. Stand tall with your feet parallel, hip-width apart, arms down by your sides.

2. Press down through the soles of your feet. Distribute your weight evenly between the inner and outer edges, the ball of each foot and your heels.

3. Lightly engage your quadriceps to stabilize your pelvis. Keep your knees unlocked.

4. Extend your tailbone down to elongate your lumbar spine and lengthen your waist. Roll your shoulders up, back, and down to open your chest. Reach down through your finger tips and press up through the crown of your head.

5. Reach out through your fingertips as you raise your arms out to the sides.

6. At shoulder height, roll your arms so that your palms face up.

7. Continue to raise your arms into a V position overhead. Keep your chest open and your arms extended next to or behind your ears. Keep drawing your shoulders back and down.

8. To release, reach out through your fingertips and lower your arms to your sides. Relax your torso and legs.
Posture options

Modifications

• Keep your arms down.
• Arms in a wide V.
• Hands on the hips, pulling your elbows back to open the chest.

Variations

• Hands into steeple.

Props

• Hold belt with both hands.
• Belt around the shins.
• Block between the hands.
• Block between the thighs.
• Block between the ankles.
Assists

**Verbal**
- Ground the feet.
- Pelvis settles into legs.
- Lengthen the waist.
- Reach up through crown.

**Press points**
- Crown
- Fingertips
- Sternum
- Scapula
- ASIS

**Hands-on**
- Press the heels.
- Press the tops of the feet.
- Press the hips down.
- Lengthen the side ribs.
- Draw the shoulder blades down.
Teacher observations

Awareness

Mountain is the foundation of all standing postures, and the principles of alignment learned through its practice apply to every yoga posture. Learning how to engage the leg muscles without hyperextending the knees, stabilize the core, and elongate the spine are key to the safe and effective practice of Kripalu Yoga. Some people like to practice Mountain with the feet closer together, or even touching. Experiment to see what works for you.

Common misalignments

- Shoulders coming up around the ears when the arms are overhead. To correct, encourage your students to press the shoulders down and back.
- Upper torso and shoulders rounding forward. Guide your students in lifting the sternum to realign the spine.
“Asanas can involve inhalation, exhalation, and breath retention. The breath can be held either after inhalation or exhalation. It is best to follow the guidance of an expert, but here are some general guidelines in breathing with asanas: Inhale when bending backward, exhale when bending forward or twisting. While performing an asana, one usually instinctively senses whether inhalation, exhalation, or retention is appropriate. Perform a few asanas watching the natural flow of breath, and learn from your experience when to inhale, exhale, or hold.”

—Swami Kripalu
pigeon
kapotasana
kapota: pigeon | (kop-poh-TAHS-anna)

Intuitive Benefits

- Strengthens the legs (psoas), back (erector spinae), and abdomen (obliques).
- Stretches the legs (quadriceps, hamstrings, psoas) and buttocks (gluteus medius and minimus; piriformis).
- Stimulates the endocrine system, especially the adrenals, pancreas, and thyroid.
- Stimulates the digestive system.
- Relieves stress, anxiety, and mild depression.

Precautions (proceed with care)

- Stiffness in hips: Use a cushion under one buttock.
- Sensitive knees: Place a cushion between the thigh and calf of the forward leg, or under the back thigh to support the knee.

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Recent or chronic knee, back, or hip injury; inflammation or pain.
Key principles

• Hips squared to the front.
• Hips are level.
• Pelvis presses toward the floor.

Preparation

• Warm up with the Hip Series, Leg Pump, Frog, Bound Angle, and Lunge.

Muscles most involved

• The psoas aligns the hips, the erector spinae extend and lengthen the spine, and the pectoral and tricep muscles pull the torso forward over the bent leg.
• The tensor fasciae latae of the bent leg is stretching in this posture, as are the gluteal and adductor muscles.
• The quadricep of the extended leg is also stretching.
Essential cues

1. Come into Table position.

2. Slide your right knee forward between your hands. Draw your right heel underneath your left ASIS bone. If there’s discomfort in your right knee, lift back up and explore a different location for your foot.

3. Curl your left toes under and walk your left knee back and allow your hips to lower, until you feel a strong stretch in your hips. Square your hip bones to the front of the mat.

4. Press your hips toward the floor, lift your sternum, and reach up through the crown of your head. Pull into your hands to open your chest and arch your back. If you feel any compression in your lumbar spine, decrease the arch until it is relieved. Hold your hips level.

5. To release, lift your hips and bring your right knee back to Table.

6. Rest, and repeat on the other side.
Posture options

Modifications

• Foot under thigh on the bent-knee side.
• Fold forward.
• Half Wind-Relieving pose.

Variations

• Bend the back knee and point the toes up.
• Reach back with one or both hands and clasp ankle.

Props

• Cushion under the pelvis.
• Cushion under the buttocks.
• Cushion under the belly and chest in the forward fold.
• Belt around the back ankle.
Assists

Verbal

• Stabilize the pelvis.
• Lengthen the belly.
• Reach back through the toes.
• Lift through the crown.

Press points

• Toes
• Sternum
• Crown
• Scapula

Hands-on

• Stabilize the back thigh.
• Stabilize and square the pelvis.
Teacher observations

**Awareness**

Pigeon is good for opening the hips, but it can stress the ligaments of the knee. Be sensitive to pain in the knee joint and do a modified version, keeping the heel of the bent foot near the same hip, as opposed to the opposite hip, or use cushions to prop the hip and torso. Make sure you’re warmed up before doing this posture, especially the hips and knees. In its full expression, Pigeon is a deep heart-opening posture.

The initial stages, especially Simple Pigeon, can be quite introspective; therefore, feelings may arise in this posture.

**Common misalignments**

- **Hip of extended leg moves back so that the hips are not squared to the front.** Give a press point to the ASIS bone on the side of the extended leg. You may need to encourage your student to lift that side slightly, perhaps even propping it with a pillow.

- **The extended leg slides out to the side.** Check to see that it is aligned with that hip and that the toes are pressing out, rather than turning in to the side.

- **Hyperextension of the neck**
asana

Notes:

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posterior stretch
paschimottanasana

“Prana is the link between the soul and the physical body. Without this link, the body is lifeless. Whatever yoga one may practice, directly or indirectly, one must worship the life force.”

—Swami Kripalu
posterior stretch
paschimottanasana
paschima: west; uttama: uppermost, best | (POSH-ee-moh-tan-AHS-anna)

Intuitive Benefits

- Strengthens the legs (quadriceps) and back (erector spinae).
- Stretches the entire back side of the body, from the heels to the back of the neck (hamstrings, gluteus maximus, erector spinae, latissimus dorsi, rhomboids), and lengthens the spinal column.
- May relieve menstrual and menopausal discomfort.
- Stimulates the lymphatic system.
- Reduces high blood pressure.
- Stimulates digestion and peristalsis.
- Relieve stress, anxiety, and insomnia.

Precautions (proceed with care)

- Tight hamstrings: Sit on a cushion and/or keep the knees bent.
- Weak or stiff back muscles: Do not extend arms above the head.
- Sciatica: Practice carefully and use cushions under the hips and the knees to avoid strain.
- Pregnancy: Practice carefully, and avoid constricting the belly.

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Recent or chronic back injury, inflammation, or pain.
- Acute sciatica (with inflammation).
Key principles
• Extend the spine.
• Spine straight or consciously rounded.
• Pelvis rotates forward, as movement originates from hips.

Preparation
• Warm up the hamstrings and calves with the Six Movements of the Spine, supine tie stretches, Bun Walk, Runner’s Stretch Series, and hip openers.
• Downward-Facing Dog, especially pedaling the feet, alternating pressing the heels to the ground, is a great preparatory posture for Posterior Stretch.
• Great Seal is also effective because it lengthens the hamstrings one leg at a time.

Muscles most involved
• The psoas pulls the torso forward over the legs.
• The quadriceps keep the legs extended at the knees.
• The erector spinae keep the spine lengthened, and the quadratus lumborum keeps the torso folding forward evenly.
• The hamstrings, gastrocnemius, and soleus receive an intense stretch.
Essential cues

1. Sit tall in Dandasana, with your legs extended out in front of you and your palms on the floor by your thighs. If your back is rounded, place a cushion under your sacrum.

2. Press your sitz bones into the floor, lift up through the crown of your head, and reach out evenly through your heels.

3. Lift your arms out to the sides and overhead into a V position.

4. Engage your back and abdominal muscles to elongate your spine as you hinge forward at your hips. Reach as far forward as you can without rounding your back.

5. Lower your arms down to hold your feet, ankles, or shins. Continue to lengthen your spine. Press out through your heels and lift your tailbone to maximize the stretch in your legs.

6. Reach your sternum toward your toes as you allow your back to round. Use your arms to draw your sternum closer to your knees. Keep your elbows close to your legs.

7. To release, press your palms into the floor and walk them back to your hips. Keep your waist long and chest open as you lift your shoulders back over your hips.
Posture options

**Modifications**

- Legs apart.
- Standing Forward Fold.

**Variations**

- Add torso rotation.
- Reach beyond the feet.
- Keep the arms off the floor.

**Props**

- Sit on the edge of a cushion.
- Cushion under the knees.
- Belt around the feet.
- Block between the feet.
Assists

Verbal

- Stabilize the pelvis.
- Reach through the heels.
- Lengthen the belly.

Press points

- Heels
- Crown
- Sternum
- Pelvis

Hands-on

- Place thumbs on the iliac crest and fingers in the hip crease, then draw your fingers down with thumbs forward.
- Stand in front of the student to press your inner ankles to the bottom of the student’s feet. Clasp wrist to wrist, and, with straight arms, lean back.
- Stabilize the forearms to open the chest in the forward fold.
- Stabilize the forearms to open the chest in the forward fold, and lean back.
- Stand behind and wrap arms to encourage chest opening.
Teacher observations

Awareness

Forward bends are postures of relaxing into gravity with an attitude of surrender. The flexibility required in the hamstrings, pelvis, and hips to bend forward cannot be forced. If you strain forward, you are likely to experience low back pain from muscle soreness and disc compression.

If your hamstrings are tight and you cannot come forward easily, try using a yoga tie to gradually increase your flexibility. Drape the center of the tie across the balls of the feet, with the ends of the tie on either side of the knees. Enter the posture as described above. When you have come to your full extension with a straight back, grasp the tie and use your hand and arm strength to gently enhance the stretch of the hamstrings and the forward rotation of the pelvis and hips. Never force the opening. Work with the breath. With patience and self-acceptance, your flexibility will steadily increase over time.

Posterior Stretch is an excellent holding posture. Come into the posture as above and hold for an extended period of time, letting gravity do the work of stretching the body forward. Breathe deeply, emphasizing the exhalation, and notice how simply breathing in this way brings you deeply into the posture. Rock the head and neck slightly from side to side, letting go in the neck and shoulders. After holding for a bit, you may find that you can come forward even farther with a straight back.

Common misalignments

- **Rounding forward at the lumbar spine rather than hinging at the hips.** To prevent this, which transfers the stretch from the hamstrings to the low back, encourage your students to come forward only as far as they can with a straight back and, over time, flexibility will improve.

- **Straining forward with the chin.** Make sure the head is in line with the spine, even tucking the chin slightly.
asana

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seated spinal twist
matsyendrasana

“Through diligent practice, a seeker who makes use of yoga techniques will feel an awakening of prana.”

—Swami Kripalu
Intuitive Benefits

- Strengthens the back (erector spinae), abdomen (obliques), and shoulders (rhomboids).
- Stretches the buttocks (gluteus maximus, medius, minimus; piriformis), back (erector spinae, latissimus dorsi), abdomen (obliques), chest (pectoralis), and shoulders (rhomboids).
- Rotates and aligns the spine, maintaining spinal flexibility and hydrating the spinal discs.
- Stimulates circulation and lymphatic system.
- Relieves asthma and sciatica.
- Stimulates digestion and peristalsis to relieve constipation.
- Relieves menstrual discomfort.
- Relieves stress, anxiety, and mild depression.
- Pregnancy (practice carefully and avoid constricting the belly, or practice reverse twist instead).

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Recent or chronic knee, hip, back, or shoulder injury; inflammation or pain.
- Abdominal or digestive discomfort.
Key principles

- Sitz bones firmly grounded.
- Rotation occurs along the entire length of the spine.
- Spine remains perpendicular to the floor.

Preparation

- Hips Side to Side, Releasing Head, Neck and Shoulders, Squat Side to Side, and Knee-Down Twist.

Muscles most involved

- The erector spinae and the quadratus lumborum keep the torso long and level as the torso twists.
- The internal and external obliques facilitate the twist.
- The sternocleidomastoid is lengthened, as are the intercostal muscles between the ribs.
Essential cues

1. Sit tall in Dandasana, with your legs extended in front of you.

2. Bend your right knee and cross the right foot over the left knee, close to the body. Balance your weight evenly between your sitz bones. Press down through your sitz bones and out through your left heel. Lift up through your waist and the crown of your head.

3. Place both hands on top of your right knee and pull your torso toward your thigh to elongate your spine. Draw your shoulder blades down and together.

4. Keep your torso long as you wrap your left arm around your right leg. Pull your belly toward your right thigh to lengthen your lumbar spine.

5. Place your right palm on the floor behind your hips. Press down through your right palm and pull into your bent leg with your left arm. Adjust your hand positions for maximum twist while maintaining an elongated spine. Turn your head and look over your right shoulder.

6. Press down through both sitz bones and your right palm. Press out through the soles of both your feet, and reach up through the crown of your head.

7. Continue to rotate your hips, waist, shoulders, and neck.

8. To release, relax your right arm and unwind your torso back to center. Extend your right leg next to your left.

9. Rest, and repeat on the other side.
Posture options

**Modifications**
- Twist away from the inner thigh of the bent leg.
- Keep the bent knee foot on the inside of the thigh.
- Ease into the twist; don’t go as deep.

**Variations**
- Bind your arms.
- Fold both legs.
- Bend your elbow to support the twist.

**Props**
- Sit on a cushion.
- Belt for bound arms.
Assists

Verbal

- Stabilize the pelvis.
- Lengthen the belly.
- Allow the spine to compress as you twist.

Press points

- Sternum
- Crown
- Pelvis
- Heel

Hands-on

- Place the outside of leg in line with the student’s spine and hands on front of the shoulders. Draw the shoulders back, and lengthen the spine.
- Support spinal rotation.
- Support shoulder alignment.
Teacher Observations

Awareness

The spine has much more ability to rotate in the cervical and thoracic regions (rib cage, shoulders, and neck) than in the lumbar and sacral regions (below the rib cage). Therefore, there will be very little movement below the rib cage. Beginning the rotation at the belly will help to spread the twist throughout the entire spine.

Common misalignments

- Wrapping the elbow around the raised knee before beginning the twist, causing the spine to roll forward slightly. This compresses the spine. Let the shoulder move closer to the knee through the twisting before wrapping the elbow around the knee.
- Hunching the shoulder up toward the ears. Encourage students to lengthen through the spine and, if necessary, move the hand farther away from the body.
- Spine is on an angle.
- Over-twisting the neck.
- Lifting the sitz bone of the bent leg off the floor. This brings a lateral flexion to the spine and makes it difficult to rotate the spine completely. Encourage your students to keep both sitz bones pressing evenly into the floor.
- Ankle of extended leg collapses: Remember to keep the ankle flexed and press through the sole of the foot
side warrior
parsva virabhadrasana

“Exercise includes any activity that provides the body with a good workout. Sports and games fit into this category, providing exercise as well as innocent fun and laughter. This is not insignificant, as laughter nourishes the visceral organs and brain centers, and the joy it brings continues to influence a person for days at a time. In addition to benefiting the muscles, vigorous exercises like calisthenics, running, weight lifting, swimming, and mountain climbing elicit a powerful breath pattern similar to bhasrika pranayama. Dance is a genuine form of exercise that swiftly sweeps the dancer to the Lord’s feet. Rhythmic breathing occurs while singing and bestows joy and bliss. Find physical exercises that suit your body and temperament and practice them daily.”

—Swami Kripalu
side warrior
parsva virabhadrasana

parsva: side; vira: bravery, courage; bhadra: blessed, auspicious (veer-ah-bah-DRAHS-anna dwee)

Intuitive Benefits

- Strengthens the legs (quadriceps, hamstrings), buttocks (gluteus maximus, medius, minimus), back (erector spinae), abdomen (transverse abdominus), shoulders (deltoids, romboids), and arms (triceps).
- Stretches the legs (hip flexors, hamstrings, psoas).
- Stabilizes the ankles, knees, and hips.
- Tones the abdominal organs.
- Stimulates circulation and digestion and relieves sciatica.
- Builds concentration, confidence, and strength.

Precautions (proceed with care)

- High blood pressure or heart conditions: Practice carefully without long holding times, and keep hands on the hips.

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Recent or chronic ankle, knee, hip, or shoulder injury; inflammation or pain.
Key principles

- Bent knee remains directly over or behind the ankle.
- Bent knee remains in line with the middle toe of the leading foot.
- Hips face forward while the bent knee faces the toes.
- Pelvis is level and the spine remains perpendicular to the floor.

Preparation

- Warm up the hips with the Hip Series and Squat Series, as well as Frog, Pigeon, and Bound Angle.

Muscles most involved

- The quadriceps of the forward leg hold the weight of the body.
- The gastrocnemius and soleus of the extended leg keep the leg long and the heel pressed into the floor.
- The trapezius lifts and holds the arms at shoulder height.
- The gluteus medius squares the hips forward while keeping the knee in proper alignment.
- The adductors are lengthened.
- The lateral rotators rotate the hips out to either side.
Essential cues

1. Stand tall in Tadasana at the front of your mat with your arms by your sides.

2. Step back with your right foot, about one leg’s length. Bend your left knee and lower your hips. Place your hands on the floor on either side of your left foot. Press back through your right heel to lengthen your leg. If your left knee is past your left ankle, step farther back with your right foot.

3. Bring your hands to your hips. Roll onto the big-toe side of your right foot and rotate your hips to your right. Square your hips to the side of the mat as much as you can, keeping your left knee over your ankle.

4. Level your hips and tilt your pelvis to lengthen your low back. Press down through both the inside and the outside of your right foot.

5. Lengthen through your waist and lift your arms parallel to the floor. Reach out through your fingertips as you engage your shoulder muscles. Keep your neck long and look out over your left hand.

6. To release, lower your hands to your hips. Square your hips to the front of your mat as you roll onto the ball of your right foot. Step forward to Tadasana.

7. Rest, and repeat on the other side.
Posture options

**Modifications**
- Feet closer together.
- Hands on hips.
- Back knee on floor.
- Back knee on floor with deeper lunge.

**Variations**
- Widen lunge.
- Dancing Warrior: Place the front forearm on the thigh and the back arm overhead, aligned with the spine.
- Dancing Warrior: Slide the back hand down the back leg, front arm overhead.

**Props**
- Wall
- Chair
Assists

**Verbal**

- Stabilize the feet.
- Pelvis settles into leg support.
- Lengthen the belly.
- Reach up through the crown.
- Draw the shoulder blades back and down.

**Press points**

- Front knee
- Outside of the back foot
- Inside ankle of the back leg
- Scapula
- Pelvis
- Sternum
- Fingertips
- Crown

**Hands-on**

- Stabilize thigh on the bent-knee leg.
- Lengthen from hip to wrist on the back side of the mat.
Teacher observations

Awareness

Side Warrior strengthens the legs and opens the hip joints and groin. Do not extend the knee beyond the ankle, as this position can stress the knee, ankle, and foot. If the knee needs to move beyond the ankle for the thigh to reach parallel, come out of the posture and take a wider stance. The bent knee can also tend to collapse inward, which can stress the inside of the knee joint. Make sure the front of the knee points in the same direction as the toes.

If you want less of a challenge, do not bring the thigh parallel to the ground and the front knee over the ankle; rather, come into the posture only to the extent that you feel comfortable. Your legs will gain strength and the posture will deepen over time.

Common misalignments

- Leaning over the bent knee. If you equally distribute the weight between the feet and keep the shoulders facing forward, the torso will remain vertical.

- Bending the knee beyond the ankle. In order for the thigh to reach parallel, the student may need to come out of the posture and take a wider stance.

- Bent knee collapsing inward. Make sure the front of the knee points in the same direction as the toes.

- One arm dropping or lifting higher than shoulder height. Turn to look back over the shoulder to see what’s happening with the back arm.
standing squat

“"The body plays a significant role in human life. Without a body, we would not be able to perform a single action. With a body that is fully fit and healthy, we can perform many actions effectively. If the body is not fit, the other approaches to growth cannot help us all that much.""  
—Swami Kripalu
asana

standing squat
utkatasana

utkata: exceeding the usual measure, difficult | (OOT-kah-TAHS-anna)

Intuitive Benefits

• Strengthens the legs (soleus, quadriceps, hamstrings, adductors), buttocks (gluteus medius and minimus), back (erector spinae), abdomen (rectus abdominus), shoulders (trapezius, deltoids), and arms (triceps).

• Stretches the legs (soleus), buttocks (gluteus maximus), and back (latissimus dorsi, rhomboids).

• Stimulates the digestive, circulatory, and reproductive systems.

• Relieves rheumatism and arthritis in the legs.

• Relieves stress and develops concentration, balance, and strength.

Precautions (proceed with care)

• Uncontrolled high or low blood pressure and heart conditions: Practice carefully without long holding.

• Weak knees: Avoid long holding and keep knees even with your toes.

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

• Recent or chronic knee, hip, or leg injury; inflammation or pain
Key principles

- Feet, legs, and knees hip-width apart.
- Shoulders relaxed and down.
- Elongated spine.
- Strengthening for the lower body.

Preparation

- Warm up the quadriceps and hips with the Squat Series, Runner’s Stretch Series, Rocking Prayer, Lunge, and Warrior.

Muscles most involved

- The quadriceps hold you up and maintain balance.
- The erector spinae extend the spine.
- The rhomboids keep the shoulder blades on the back, and the trapezius and deltoids lift the arms.
Essential cues

1. Stand tall in Tadasana, with your arms by your sides.

2. Raise your arms in front of you to shoulder height, palms facing down.

3. Reach out through your fingertips and draw your shoulders back and down.

4. Bend your knees slightly.

5. Hinge at your hips, lengthen your waist, and draw your chest forward. Shift your weight onto your heels.

6. Lower your hips and allow your back to arch while keeping your waist long. If you feel any compression in your low back, curl your tailbone down until the discomfort is relieved.

7. If possible, lower your hips until your thighs are parallel with the floor. If you feel discomfort in the knees, lift your hips until compression is relieved.

8. Keep your knees and chest back.

9. To release, press down through your feet and rise to standing. Lower your arms by your side.
Posture options

**Modifications**
- Hands on the hips.
- Don’t lower the hips very far.

**Variations**
- Arms wide overhead.
- Hands on the waist.
- Deepen the lunge.
- Add a twist with the back arm overhead.
- Add a twist with the back hand on the hip.

**Props**
- Wall
- Block between the thighs.
- Block between the hands.
- Blocks stacked to limit the knee bend.
Assists

Verbal

• Balance on the feet.
• Lengthen the belly.
• Keep the chin close to the throat to protect the neck.

Press points

• Fingertips
• Pelvis
• Crown
• Sternum
• Scapula
• Inner knee
• Inner forearms

Hands-on

N/A
Teacher observations

Awareness

The challenge in this posture is to maintain balance while lowering the buttocks and keeping the alignment of the knees over the ankles. In the first phase, bringing a Dog Tilt to the spine helps keep the alignment of the knees without compromising balance. In Phases Two and Three, the counterbalance of the body is assisted by the position of the feet, but other points of balance are more challenged. In Phases Two and Three, the knees come forward, past the toes.

Strengthening the quadriceps with poses such as Warrior will make this posture easier.

Common misalignments

- **Arching the low back more than is necessary to maintain balance.** Focus on bringing only as much Dog Tilt to the spine as you need to maintain balance.

- **Reaching too far forward; bringing the weight onto the toes and the knees forward, past the ankles.** Keep the weight over the heels, and bring a little more Dog Tilt to the spine.

- **Resting the thighs on the calves.** This can put a lot of strain on the knees. Maintain core stabilization and focus on developing strong quadriceps.
Many people mistakenly believe that eating moderately means taking only a small, fixed quantity of food per day. When a person exercises a little, his appetite is naturally reduced, so he should eat less than usual. On days when he exercises a lot, his appetite is increased, so he should eat more than usual. Thus, a person must gauge how much he needs to eat at each meal by how much he exercises. One’s appetite also increases or decreases according to one’s emotions, for the body and mind are so intricately related. In this way, each meal tests our powers of discrimination.”

—Swami Kripalu
standing wide angle
prasarita padottanasana

prasarita: stretched out, spread; pada: foot  |  (pra-sa-REE-tah pah-doh-tahn-AHS-anna)

Intuitive Benefits

• Strengthens the legs (quadriceps, adductors) and back (erector spinae).
• Stretches the legs (gastrocnemius, hamstrings, adductors), buttocks (gluteus maximus), and back (erector spinae).
• Stimulates circulation and digestion.
• Relieves headache and sinusitis.
• Relieves stress, anxiety, and mild depression.

Precautions (proceed with care)

• Weak or stiff back muscles: Lower only halfway down with a flat back.
• Tight hamstrings or sciatica: Bend the knees slightly to avoid excess strain.

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

• Recent or chronic back or leg injury; inflammation or pain.
• Inflammation or injury of the eyes or ears.
Key principles

- Keep the back as straight as you can.
- Focus on the hamstring stretch by lifting the tailbone.
- Feet point straight ahead or slightly in.
- Shoulder blades are together and down.

Preparation

- This posture requires back strength to be safe.
- Practice postures that involve forward bending with the back straight or gently rounded, with support from the hands on the mat.
- Seated Angle

Muscles most involved

- Stretched: gastrocnemius-soleus, hamstrings, adductors, gluteus maximus
- Strengthened: low and middle trapezius, rhomboids, latissimus dorsi, biceps
asana

Essential cues

1. Stand tall in Tadasana at the front of your mat.

2. Bring your hands to your hips and step back with your left leg.

3. Turn both feet to the left and face the long edge of your mat. Adjust your feet so they’re about one leg’s length apart. Point your toes forward or slightly inward. For more stretch in your inner thighs, widen your feet even more.

4. Extend your arms out to the sides and parallel to the floor. Tilt your pelvis to engage your abdominals and lengthen your low back. Draw your shoulder blades together and down.

5. Hinge at your hips and extend forward as far as you can without rounding your spine. Bring most of the stretch into your hamstrings. If you feel discomfort in the knees, lift up and rotate your toes more inward, or bring your feet closer together. Maintain an arch in the spine. Keep the arms outstretched at shoulder height.

6. Round your spine and relax into a forward bend. Lower the hands to the floor and allow them to relax, or support your balance.

7. Clasp your ankles or the outer edges of your feet with your hands. Reach your chest between your knees and bring the crown of your head toward the floor. If you need more room for your head, bring your feet closer together.

8. To release, let go of your feet or ankles and bring your hands to your hips. Use the support of your arms to lift your shoulders over your waist. Turn to face the front of your mat and step your left foot forward.
Posture options

Modifications

- Hands stay on the hips.
- Move right into the rounded back position with your hands on the floor.

Variations

- Hands behind the feet.
- Yoga Mudra arms.
- Rotate the spine.
- Forehead to one knee.

Props

- Arms on a chair.
- Hands on a block.
- Crown or forehead on a block.
Assists

**Verbal**
- Press down on the feet.
- Pelvis supported, hinge at the hips.
- Lengthen the belly.
- Relax the neck.

**Press Points**
- Crown
- Scapula
- Pelvis
- Heels

**Hands-on**
- Place the thumbs on the iliac crest, fingers in the hip crease, and draw fingers down, thumbs forward.
- Support and lengthen the arms to open the chest.
- Open the chest through the scapula.
- Support the twist through the chest.
- Support the twist through the rib cage.
Teacher observations

**Awareness**

- Body weight extends through the ankles down into the feet, as opposed to rolling and straining the ankles.
- Keep feet one leg’s length apart; adjust for body proportions and flexibility.
- Focus on lifting the tailbone rather than rounding the back.

**Common misalignments**

- Rolling weight onto the outside edges of the feet.
- Feet too wide or too narrow.
- Back overly rounded
- Chin tucked or overextended.
asana

Notes:
“Young people are growing and active and require more food. Elderly people tend to be less active and eat less. When an elephant and an ant decide what is moderation, their portions will definitely be different. Similarly, what is moderate eating will differ from one person to another.”

—Swami Kripalu
symbol of yoga

yoga mudra

yoga: act of yoking, connecting; mudra: seal | (yo-gah MOO-drah)

Intuitive Benefits

• Strengthens the back (erector spinae), shoulders (rhomboids, trapezius, deltooids), arms (triceps), and hands.
• Stretches the chest (pectoralis), shoulders (deltoids), and arms (biceps).
• Stretches the upper trapazoids.
• Expands the chest and lungs.
• Stimulates digestion and circulation.
• Deeply calms the body, mind, and emotions.

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

• Recent or chronic knee, back, abdomen, or shoulder injury; inflammation or pain.
• Inflammation or injury of the eyes or ears.
• Uncontrolled high blood pressure: place a cushion under the head and keep the hips low.
Key principles

- Chest open.
- Movement into posture initiates in the sternum; forward bend happens at the hips, not the waist.
- Majority of weight remains in the legs.

Preparation

- Tie Stretches are a great warm-up, as they can release the shoulders and allow for greater range of motion.
- Warm up the shoulders and neck with Releasing Head, Neck, and Shoulders, Shoulder Stretch, and Eagle arms.
- Warm up the back with the Six Movements of the Spine and Spinal Rocking.
- Warm up and stretch the quadriceps with Rocking Prayer.

Muscles most involved

- The rhomboids and trapezius bring the arms in back of the body and hold them there.
- The triceps keep the arms extended.
- The flexor digitorum profundus muscle of the forearm keeps the fingers interlaced, and the extensor carpi ulnaris keeps the wrist extended.
- The pectoral muscles and the biceps are stretched, as is the subscapularis of the rotator cuff.
- The psoas flexes the torso forward at the hips, and the erector spinae keep the spine extended as you fold forward.
- The quadriceps are being stretched in the entry position.
asana

Essential cues

1. Sit kneeling in Vajrasana, with your knees together. Rest your palms on your knees or thighs. Lengthen your waist and reach through the crown of your head.

2. Raise your arms in front of you at shoulder height. Cross your thumbs, drop your chin, and reach long through your fingertips.

3. Keep reaching through your fingertips as you sweep your arms to the side and behind your back. Interlace your fingers and press your palms together, if you can. Keep your elbows unlocked.

4. Reach your knuckles toward the floor, lengthen your arms, and hug your shoulder blades together as you open your sternum. Lift your tailbone, hinge forward from your hips, and extend your torso over your thighs. Bring your forehead to the floor. Reach your knuckles away as you lift your arms overhead. Press the outer edges of your hands toward the floor in front of you.

5. Press your knuckles up and away as you draw your arms farther overhead.

6. To release, extend your sternum forward and up. Reach back through your knuckles, and raise your shoulders over your waist. Release your hands to your thighs.
Posture options

Modification
- Belt between the hands.

Variations
- Curl your toes under.
- Rest your arms on your back.
- Standing Yoga Mudra: from Standing Forward Fold, interlace the hands behind your back.

Props
- Belt between the hands
- Blanket under the knees or head.
Assists

**Verbal**
- Focus on balance through the legs.
- Shoulder blades back, chest open.

**Press points**
- Fingers
- Sternum

**Hands-on**
- Lift the shoulders up.
- Stand in front of the student. Hold the student’s wrists and lift up and away from the back.
Teacher observations

Awareness

Yoga Mudra conveys an attitude of surrender, placing the head below the heart. This posture is traditionally practiced slowly, with great sensitivity to the flow of breath and feeling.

Common misalignments

- *Lifting the buttocks off the heels before the forehead reaches the floor.* This can be caused by tight hamstrings, quadriceps, or large calves. To correct, place a cushion under your forehead for support.

- *Tension in the shoulders.* Encourage your students to use a belt to allow greater opening in the chest and shoulders, and greater range of motion for the arms.
“Everyone knows that it is best to eat moderately. Most people, however, only understand this intellectually and eat indiscriminately. People also know that it is important to exercise regularly in order to digest their food properly. Yet people rarely exercise enough and their food does not digest properly. As a result, physical waste products are not excreted completely and go on collecting in the body. In much the same way, negative ideas accumulate in the mind. Purifying the body and the mind is not as easy as one might think. It is necessary to be very patient.”

—Swami Kripalu
tree
vrksasana
vrksa: the trunk of a tree | (vrik-SHAHS-anna)

Intuitive Benefits

- Strengthens the feet, legs (quadriceps, tensor fascia lata, iliopsoas), buttocks (gluteus maximus, medius, minimus; piriformis), back (erector spinae), abdomen (transverse abdominus), and shoulders (trapezius, deltoids).
- Stretches the legs (adductors).
- Stabilizes the ankles, knees, and hips.
- Relieves sciatica.
- Stimulates the nervous system.
- Develops concentration, balance, and poise.

Precautions (proceed with care)

- Heart conditions: Practice carefully and do not lift the arms overhead.
- Weak knees: Keep the standing knee soft to avoid hyperextension.
- Difficulty balancing: Lift only the heel, keeping the toes on the ground or on a block.
- Headache.

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Recent or chronic ankle, knee, or hip injury; inflammation or pain
Key principles

• Extend the spine.
• Bent knee presses back, down, and in toward supporting leg.
• Hips squared to front and level.
• Pelvis is level or neutral.

Preparation

• Warm up the hips with the Hip Series and Fire Hydrant.
• Bound Angle and Great Seal can also be useful preparatory postures for Tree.
• The quadriceps and hamstrings should be warmed up to support the weight-bearing standing leg, and to help keep the standing leg extended.

Muscles most involved

• The psoas of the bent leg flexes the bent leg at the hip, and the lateral rotators bring the knee out to the side.
• The erector spinae keep the spine elongated.
• The quadratus lumborum and gluteus medius keep the hips level and both ASIS bones facing forward equally.
• The deltoids and upper trapezius lift the arms overhead, while the rhomboids and lower trapezius hold the shoulder blades back and down.
• The adductors on the insides of the thighs are stretched.
Essential cues

1. Stand tall in Tadasana, with your hands on your hips.

2. Shift your weight onto your left foot. Lengthen your left leg without locking your knee. Gaze at the floor in front of you or at the wall across the room.

3. Use your hands to place the sole of your right foot as high as you can on the inside of your left thigh. You can also bring your foot to your ankle or calf. Allow your right knee to open to the side.

4. Bring your hands to your hips and lift one hip if it’s lower than the other. Tilt your pelvis to engage your abdominals and lengthen your low back.

5. Press down through your supporting leg and reach up through the crown of your head to lengthen your spine.

6. Lift your arms out to the sides and overhead. Bring your arms into a V position and reach out through the fingertips. Keep your abdominals engaged and your low back long as you lengthen through your waist. Roll your shoulders back and down.

7. Draw your bent knee back and down. Square your hips to the front and adjust them so that they are the same height. Maintain a neutral position in your spine.

8. To release, lower your arms out to the sides and down. Guide your lifted leg to the ground and balance on both feet. Relax your arms down by your sides.

9. Rest, and repeat on the other side.
Posture options

**Modifications**
- Use an easier foot position, and keep the hands on the hips.
- Foot on the inner shin with the toe tips on the ground.

**Variations**
- Half Lotus.
- Arms in steeple.
- Gaze upward.

**Props**
- Foot on a block.
- Wall for balance.
Assists

Verbal

• Balance on the whole foot.
• Pelvis settles into the legs.
• Lengthen belly.
• Lift the sternum.
• Reach up through the crown.

Press points

• Crown
• Fingertips
• Sternum
• Scapula
• ASIS
• Foot on the floor
• Outside bent knee

Hands-on

• Press the hips down.
• Lengthen the side ribs.
• Draw the shoulder blades down.
• Stand near the student. Student places a hand on the teacher’s shoulder.
Teacher observations

**Awareness**

Several factors work together to allow you to balance on one leg. The first is keeping the standing leg straight and the thigh muscle contracted. (Don’t lock the knee.) The second is the focus on one object with a soft gaze (drishti). The third is the use of breath as a focus. The fourth is the position of the lifted knee, which in all variations presses down and slightly back.

The last is the elongation of the spine, which begins with the leveling of the pelvis and continues to the pressing of the fingertips to the ceiling. When all these factors come together, stillness and balance result.

**Common misalignments**

- Excessive Dog Tilt. Look for buttocks that protrude more than usual as the abdomen comes forward, and encourage your students to drop the tailbone down.

- Pressing the hip of the standing leg out to the side or lifting the hip of the bent knee. After getting the foot in place, work to level and align the hips to face forward evenly.

- Rotation in the torso. Press forward through the ASIS bone to square the hips forward.
asana

Notes:
“The highest form of spiritual practice is self-observation without judgment.”

—Swami Kripalu
triangle
tri•kona•sana
tri: three; kona: angle | (tri•cone-AHS-anna)

Intuitive Benefits

• Strengthens the legs (quadriceps, hamstrings, psoas), buttocks (gluteus maximus), back (erector spinae), abdomen (obliques), shoulders (deltoids), and arms (triceps).

• Stretches the legs (hamstrings, adductors), buttocks (gluteus maximus, medius, minimus), and chest (pectoralis).

• Stimulates circulation and digestion to relieve constipation.

• Relieves and prevents rheumatism, scoliosis, osteoporosis, and sciatica.

• Relieves menstrual and menopausal discomfort.

• Develops concentration, coordination, and endurance to relieve stress and anxiety.

Precautions (proceed with care)

• Weak back muscles: Use props to support body weight.

• Neck discomfort: If looking up is uncomfortable, look down or hold the head in a neutral position.

• Headache.

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

• Recent or chronic knee, hip, abdomen, or shoulder injury; inflammation or pain

• Uncontrolled high blood pressure or heart conditions: Practice carefully without long holding times and keep the top arm on the hip.
Key principles

- Weight is evenly distributed over both feet.
- Knee remains in line with the middle of the leading foot.
- Head remains in line with the spine.
- Spine remains long throughout the posture.
- Core strength supports the weight of the upper body.

Preparation

- Warm up and open the hips with Hip Circles, Runner’s Stretch, Standing Squat, and Side Warrior.
- Open the sides of the body with Half Moon and other side stretches.
- Strengthen the front body, back body, and core with abdominal strengtheners, Simple Boat, and Cobra.

Muscles most involved

- The quadratus lumborum and the internal and external obliques keep the torso stable as you extend to the side.
- The obliques are contracted on one side and lengthened on the other.
- The lateral rotators rotate the leg and hold it in rotation as you extend to the side.
- The quadriceps keep the kneecaps stable and protected, as well as helping the psoas with side flexion.
- The sternocleidomastoid keeps the neck long and aligned with the spine, and rotates the head upward.
Essential cues

1. Stand tall in Tadasana, on the left side of your mat.

2. Take a wide step to the side with your right foot. Adjust your feet so that they are about one leg's length apart.

3. Move from your hip joint and rotate your left leg outward 90 degrees. Rotate your right foot inward slightly. Point your left knee in the direction of your left toes, and square your hips to the side of your mat as much as you can. Bend your left knee slightly and hug your feet toward each other until your legs and pelvis are fully engaged.

4. Draw your tailbone down to lengthen your low back. Level your hips and reach up through your waist. Extend your arms out to the sides and up to shoulder height. Reach out through your fingertips and draw your shoulder blades down and back.

5. Lengthen and extend your torso to the left, reaching through your fingertips. Allow your hips to slide to the right, keeping them squared. Press up through the crown of your head and elongate your spine. Keep your abdominals engaged to stabilize your torso.

6. Lengthen both sides of your torso. Rotate your left arm down and your right arm up. Open your palms to the side of the mat and your left hand close to your left leg.

7. Roll your chest upward and draw your right shoulder back. Reach long through both arms. Lengthen your neck and look up toward your right hand. If there is discomfort in your neck, or it is difficult to balance, bring your gaze down toward your left hand. Keep your body in one plane.

8. To release, engage your abdominals, lift up through your right hand, and bring your torso back to center. Turn your feet to face the side of your mat.

9. Rest, and repeat on the other side.
Posture options

Modifications

- Practice Upper Body Triangle, Gate, or Modified Gate.
- Keep both hands resting on the hips.
- Upper body rests on the low back.
- Gaze is downward or horizontal.

Variations

- Bottom hand on the hip crease
- Bottom hand to the inside or outside of the foot.
- Extend the top arm overhead.
- Bind the top arm.
- Lean against a wall.

Props

- Block outside or inside the front foot.
- Block 45 degrees in front of the calf.
Assists

Verbal

• Balance on both feet equally.
• Pelvis settles into the legs.
• Lengthen the belly and spine.

Press points

• Crown
• Fingertips
• Lengthen the side ribs

Hands-on

• Stand behind the student. Place your thigh against the lower buttocks and draw the top hip and top shoulder back.
• Stand behind the student’s back leg and wrap a belt around the student’s front hip. Holding the belt firmly, lean back with straight arms.
Teacher observations

**Awareness**

In working to square the hips, do not compromise the alignment of the front knee. Make sure the front knee continues to point in the same direction as the front foot throughout the posture.

There is a tendency to lean over the front leg and twist the upper body to come deeper into the posture. Counter this by pressing into the outside of the back foot to keep the weight evenly distributed between the feet, emphasizing the lateral stretch to the spine.

Instead of placing the lower hand onto the leg to help support your weight, keep the hand just off the leg. This helps build core strength, which is one of the primary benefits of Triangle.

**Common misalignments**

*The forward knee rotates medially, back toward center.* This can happen particularly if you say, “Turn the foot out,” but sometimes it occurs just through the desire to square the hips forward. This can compromise the inside of the kneecap, which is a vulnerable spot, since it’s the area of the knee least reinforced by ligaments and tendons. To counter this tendency, keep reminding students that the knee should be in line with the second toe and have them bend the knee slightly so they can see if it starts to rotate in.

*Collapsing over the forward leg.* The integrity of this posture comes through lengthening both sides of the torso; therefore, when rotating the arms, keep the underside of the torso as long as the upper side. For many people, this is difficult, and it means they will not come very far toward. If the underside of the torso is rounded, then the lateral flexion is occurring in the spine rather than through rotation and abduction/flexion at the hip joint. Try to isolate the flexion to the hip joint by spending more time in the entry position (i.e., before you rotate your arms); this will allow the hips to open.

*Twisting in the spine and torso as the upper shoulder comes forward.* Correct this by giving a press point to the upper shoulder blade so the student can get a sense of where the body should be in space.
asana

Notes:

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upward boat
urdhva navasana

“When the body is sluggish and the world is viewed through a thick filter of emotional baggage and mental clutter, it is impossible to see reality clearly and respond appropriately.”

—Swami Kripalu
upward boat
urdhva navasana
urdhva: upward; nava: boat | (uhrd-vah-nah-VAHS-anna)

Intuitive Benefits

- Strengthens the hip flexors (rectus femoris, psoas), back (erector spinae), abdomen (rectus and transverse abdominus), and shoulders (deltoids).
- Tones the abdominal and pelvic organs.
- Stimulates digestion and circulation.
- Develops concentration, confidence, and strength.

Precautions

- Weak back or abdominal muscles: Keep the knees bent or hold the back of knees.

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

- Recent or chronic back, abdomen, or neck injury; inflammation or pain.
- Low blood pressure.
Key principles

• Keep the back straight by rotating pelvis forward and pulling the chest back.
• Press out through the heels to straighten the legs.
• Draw the shoulder blades back and down.

Preparation

• Practice Posterior Stretch to lengthen the hamstrings and develop awareness about maintaining a straight back.
• Practice Camel and Bridge to stretch the abdominal muscles, and Inclined Plane to strengthen them.

Muscles most involved

• Stretched: gluteus maximus, hamstrings, gastrocnemius-soleus feet in dorsiflex
• Strengthened: hip flexors, rectus abdominus, quadriceps, adductors, erector spinae, quadratus lumborum, trapezius, and rhomboids
Essential cues

1. Sit tall with your knees bent and feet flat on the floor, hip-width apart.

2. Clasp the backs of your thighs, just above your knees.

3. Pull your hands into your thighs to open your chest and arch your spine slightly. Balance between your sitz bones and the bottom of your sacrum.

4. Keep your back long or slightly arched as you lift your feet off the mat.

5. Elongate your legs as much as you can.

6. Extend your arms forward, parallel to the floor, palms facing up.

7. Maintain a long spine and an open chest.

8. To release, bend your knees and clasp the back of your thighs. Place your feet on the floor and relax.
Posture options

**Modifications**
- Both feet on the floor.
- One foot on the floor.
- Bent knees, shins horizontal.

**Variations**
- Hands on feet, legs extended.
- Palms in prayer, add a twist
- Arms wide, legs extended, ankles crossed.
Assists

**Verbal**
- Balance on the sitting bones.
- Extend through the heels.

**Press points**
- Heels
- Sternum
- Crown
- Fingertips

**Hands-on**
- Pull on the heels to lengthen legs.
- Use your leg to support the spine; draw on the arms to lengthen.

**Props**
- Use the wall to support the arms or legs.
Teacher observations

Awareness

• Do not let the back round; pull the shoulders back to keep the chest open.
• Back of the neck long.

Common misalignments

• Back rounding
• Chest collapsing
• Chin lifting
asana

Notes:

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warrior

virabhadrasana

“Exercise is a temple that purifies body and mind. Since exercise purifies the body and mind, it must be considered yoga. When we hear the word ‘exercise,’ we think of physical exertion or sports, but every movement of the body performed with awareness brings favorable results. Different types of exercise produce different results, but all have in common the preservation of health and prevention of disease.”

—Swami Kripalu
warrior
virabhadrasana

vira: bravery, courage; bhadra: blessed, auspicious | (veer-ah-bah-DRAHS-anna)

Intuitive Benefits

• Strengthens the legs (quadriceps, hamstrings, psoas), buttocks (gluteus maximus), back (erector spinae), abdomen (rectus abdominus, obliques), shoulders (deltoids), and arms (triceps).

• Stretches the legs (soleus, gastrocnemius, quadriceps, hamstrings, psoas), abdomen (rectus abdominus), and chest (pectoralis).

• Stabilizes the ankles, knees, and hips.

• Stimulates circulation and digestion.

• Relieves constipation and sciatica.

• Builds concentration, confidence, and strength.

Contraindications (avoid the posture)

• Recent or chronic ankle, knee, hip, or shoulder injury, inflammation, or pain.

• Heart conditions: Practice carefully without long holding and keep hands on hips.
Key principles

• Feet hip-width apart.
• Knee remains directly over or behind the ankle.
• Hips square to front.
• Back leg straight.

Preparation

• Strengthen the quadriceps with Standing Squat, Runner’s Stretch Series, and Rocking Prayer.
• Lunge is a good preparatory posture because the legs are in the same alignment as Warrior, but with the hands or back knee on the floor for additional support.
• Warm up the hips, hamstrings, and quadriceps rocking forward and back, as well as twisting from side to side, in Lunge.
• Warm up the spine with the Six Movements of the Spine and, especially Cat and Dog.

Muscles most involved

• The **quadriceps** of the forward leg are supporting the body, and the back leg is both strong and long.
• The **hamstrings** of the back leg are lengthened.
• The **deltoids** lift the arms overhead, and the **upper trapezius** holds them there.
• The **gluteus maximus** and the **medius** support the pelvis and the torso.
• The **erector spinae** and the **internal and external obliques** keep the spine elongated and the torso stable.
• The **rectus abdominus** is lengthened once the backbend is engaged.
• The **adductors** keep the forward knee in line with the hip and foot.
Essential cues

1. Stand tall in Tadasana, at the front of your mat, with your arms by your sides.

2. Step back with your left foot, about one leg’s length. Bend your right knee and lower your hips. Place both your hands to the floor on either side of your right foot. Press back through your left heel and lengthen your leg. Bring your right thigh as close to horizontal as possible, keeping your knee over your ankle. Align your feet so that they are hip-width apart. If your right knee is past your ankle, step the left foot back farther.

3. Bring your hands to your hips and square your hips to the front of the mat. Tilt your pelvis to lengthen your low back and reach long through your left heel. Keep the left leg long.

4. Lengthen your waist and raise your arms out to the sides and overhead into a V position. Roll your shoulders back and down and arch your upper back slightly. Keep your neck in line with the rest of your spine. Draw your arms back behind your ears.

5. To release, lower your arms down to your front thigh and lean your torso forward. Press your hands into your right thigh and step your left foot forward into Tadasana.

6. Rest, and repeat on the other side.
Asana

Posture options

Modifications

- Feet closer.
- Hands on hips.
- Knee-Down Lunge.
- Knee-Down Lunge with hands on the lower back.

Variations

- Palms in temple.
- Palms in Yoga Mudra.
- Hands interlaced the behind the head.

Prop

- Belt between the hands.
Assists

**Verbal**
- Adjust feet for stability.
- Lengthen the spine.

**Press points**
- Front knee inward
- Back heel
- Hand on hip, hand on heel
- Hands on hips to stabilize
- Sternum
- Crown
- Hands on elbows to provide resistance
- Fingertips

**Hands-on**
- Draw the shoulder blades back and down.
Teacher observations

Awareness

Warrior stretches and strengthens the legs, hips, shoulders, arms, and chest. If you have knee problems, proceed carefully and make sure the front knee is aligned directly over the ankle. If the front knee extends beyond the ankle, lengthen the stance by sliding the back foot farther back.

If you want less challenge, practice with the hands on the front knee. This makes the posture more stable and easier to hold. Over time, you will build the strength required to raise the arms overhead. You can also lower the back knee to rest on the floor, which improves balance and reduces the effort required to hold the posture.

Warrior is a good posture to hold, although its intensity makes prolonged holding quite challenging.

As you hold, you can explore small and subtle movements of the hips, and larger movements of the arms and hands. Keep the spine elongated and the breath flowing.

Common misalignments

• The bent knee should not be past the ankle in order to protect the ligaments from undue stress. If the knee is past the ankle, lengthen the stance or shift your weight back toward the extended leg.

• Feet in one straight line, as on a balance beam. This affects not only balance, but also the alignment of the hips.

• Feet too wide.

• Shoulders up around the ears.
Assists provide a wonderful opportunity to support your students, facilitate attunement to their bodies wisdom, and affirm their efforts. You are not there to “correct” them or show them the “right” way to do or be in the pose. Instead, you support them in inquiry and exploration into their own body, how it works, and how it feels.

Be aware of the tendency to assist in a habitual way. Each student has unique needs and may require different types of assists for different reasons. Allow your awareness to be open, without expectations that you should know how to assist them or that they should be able to adjust to what you tell them to do. Create an environment of relaxed awareness, allowing intuition to emerge spontaneously.

Take a moment to observe a student before assisting. Look at the whole person: face, breath, balance, and alignment. What assist will aid them best? Explore the posture with them. Suggest modifications or variations that would support them. Learn from them.

As you begin to explore the various techniques of assisting, remember to move slowly. Avoid assisting students when they are in the midst of a transitional movement, a prana response, or in meditation in motion. Be aware of limitations, contemplating whether an assist would truly enhance their current experience. Be mindful during balancing postures, as sporadic movements can disturb a student’s gaze point and balance.
safe hands-on assists

Make your presence known.

It is important to make your presence known as you approach students to assist them so that they are not startled. This is especially true if they are deep into their experience and have their eyes closed. Explore deepening your breath or rub your palms together as you approach their space.

What to say?

Observe the body for areas that seem tight and blocked. You can often touch a student without saying a word, but most of the time it is necessary to give verbal suggestions. Let your suggestions be simple and concise, communicating clearly how they should respond to your assist, i.e., “Press (reach) into my touch” or “Relax and go with me.” Use simple words such as “relax,” “breathe,” and “let go.” It is twice as powerful to touch an area that is tense while you say “relax.” You may also ask, “Where do you feel discomfort?” or “Let me know if you need more or less pressure.” Dialogue with them to make sure they are comfortable; for example, “Press into my touch. Do you feel a difference?” Affirm them after they have made an adjustment to give positive reinforcement: “That’s it,” “There,” or “Yes.”

What are you communicating?

Assisting by touch is a powerful way to learn. It is a way to speak directly to the body, and it resonates through the skin, muscles, and bones. It communicates alignment, deeper physical awareness, and more focused concentration. Assists also convey a sense of caring and reassurance. They have a way of instilling confidence and a feeling of being attended to. Giving assists does not need to be reserved for only the students who look as though they need it. Everyone has the potential to stretch more, expand more, or relax deeper into the posture. Advanced students especially need to be challenged. Your touch can help bring them into a greater outer attentiveness and inner awareness while they receive your attention and support. Attempt to offer press point, energetic, and hands-on assists at least once, to every student during the class.
types of safe assists

1. **Verbal.** Observing your students in class gives you the necessary information to offer effective verbal assists. When students are confused about a direction, or needing clarity in a certain area of movement, offer a different verbal instruction or verbal press point to them personally or to the whole class, ensuring that everyone understands the base instruction.

2. **Modeling.** Stand in front of or alongside students and demonstrate what to do, what not to do, or both.

3. **Press point.** These assists ensure safety, as the student initiates all movement and learns from their own body. Press point assisting is described in more detail below.

4. **Energetic.** These assists trace and follow the lines of energy in the body, e.g., tracing the energetic line of the spine from lumbar to crown of the head with your fingertips in Pigeon.

5. **Feel-good.** These assists release tension by bringing the student's focus, awareness, and breath to a particular part of the body. In addition, appropriate touch, like a soft shoulder massage in Child, a slight rock of lumbar after Cobra, or a squeeze of the feet in Corpse, can communicate care and nurturance and help students integrate the benefits of the posture more fully.

6. **Manipulative.** These assists require the greatest degree of experience and expertise in order to ensure safety. Moving, pulling, or pressing a student further in a posture can be of great benefit, allowing them to move into places they would not be able to get to without assistance. When done with a lack of skill and consciousness, however, a manipulative assist can lead to injury. One of the best ways to gain experience in manipulative assists is during one-on-one sessions with fellow teachers or private clients. Explore the following steps in offering a manipulative assist to your students:

   - Enter their space slowly and consciously.
   - Get their permission.
   - Move carefully and remember to assist with the rhythm of their breath.
   - Communicate clearly about their limits.
   - Notice the signs of reaching an appropriate edge.
   - Back off the assist immediately if you notice that the student is holding their breath or shows any sign of pain or discomfort.
   - Release the assist as mindfully as you moved into it.
   - Leave their space slowly and consciously.

7. **Props.** The use of props always involves one or more of the above ways of assisting. Utilize a verbal assist or model the use of props for greatest effectiveness. Remember to place props near students and help them inquire how to best feel supported by the particular item they are using. Once the prop is supporting the student, energetic or manipulative assists are easier to perform and can deepen the student's experience.
press points overview

awareness through alignment

Kripalu Yoga’s press point method for moving into the postures aids in attuning to the body. Press points are both internal directions of focus and specific external structural locations. Because the press points are simple, the mind can relax and let go of any need to have the posture be “picture perfect.”

At the same time, the press points, in conjunction with the details of the posture, can assure proper physical alignment, allowing for a maximum stretch in the safest, most supported way possible.

The diagrams in this chapter can be used to locate various press points.

Categories of press points

• Some press points assist in creating alignment. They elongate the body, as well as trigger the unfolding of the body’s natural flexibility. When the mind is absorbed in the press points, the body is freed to express that natural flexibility.

• Grounding points are the structural areas that are the foundation of the posture and establish its form. The mind focuses on the direction of the press and the body moves in response to the pressing.

• Press points counterbalance tightness in specific areas, reestablishing sound alignment by inviting the tight muscles to relax and lengthen. They can give the posture the next level of refinement and body awareness.

• Another subtle press point is an internal point of focus and direction that creates dynamic engagement within a posture, such as the use of core lift or pressing into lines of energy.
various press points

**ASIS bones**

The ASIS (anterior superior iliac spine) bones are the front-facing points of the ilium, or pelvic bowl. Pressing into these points helps keep the gluteus folds firm, which, in combination with core stabilization, supports the entire body—especially the lower back—during backbends.

**Chest points**

The chest points are the two points in the soft muscle tissue of the chest, approximately two inches below the clavicles (collarbones). One way of finding these points is to extend your arms out to the side at shoulder height, with the palms facing down. Keep your arms at shoulder height and bend your elbows, bringing your thumbs toward your chest along a parallel plane to the ground. The chest points are where the thumbs touch the chest. This may vary slightly with each individual. In general, they are in line with the earlobes. Pressing into the chest points helps lift the sternum, allowing the lungs to expand and fill more fully with breath. The chest points also help keep the spine erect, the torso engaged, and the shoulder blades in their proper place. To assist, use your thumbs with your fingers raised up. Come down from the shoulders. It takes a little more sensitivity to touch the chest points, especially with women, so proceed with extra awareness.

**Crown of the head**

The crown of the head is the top center of the skull, the fontanel. When the crown is pressed upward, away from the shoulders, the entire spine lengths. The back of the neck elongates, while the chin remains parallel to the ground. To assist, place your entire palm on the crown and press firmly. You may continue to press with pressure equal to the pressure with which the student is reaching up. If the chin lifts, remind the student to lengthen the back of the neck. A manipulative alternative is to place your fingertips under the occipital ridge and actually lift it upward.

**Elbow**

The elbow press point is located on the inside of the elbow joint. Pressing into these points helps to keep the arms tucked in toward the body, the back lengthened, and the shoulder blades in alignment.
safe hands-on assists

Fingertips
Useful for producing a lengthening in the arms, as in Warrior.

Iliac crest
The iliac crest is located on the side of the pelvic bowl and can be felt just at the base of the waist. Pressing into this point can help the student lengthen out of the waist in side-bending postures.

Inside of the knees
Effective for helping people bring their knees closer together, as in Bridge.

Greater trochanter
The greater trochanter is the point at the top of the thigh where the femur (thighbone) connects into the pelvis. Pressing into the greater trocanter provides a side stretch and helps balance the work being done in the muscle groups on the opposite side. For example, in Half Moon, pressing into the right trocanter allows the torso to bend deeper to the left side. (Pressing through the right trocanter will create elongation on the right side and shortening on the left side.)

Pelvic triangle
Located at the base of the torso where the two sides of the pelvic bowl meet in front, the pubic bone is a verbal press point only. If manual assistance is needed, use the ASIS bones instead of the pubic bone to give a line of direction. To do this, press the heels of your palms just below the ASIS, with your fingertips pointing outward.

Sitz bones
The sitz bones are the two bones in the buttocks that we sit on, technically called the ischial tuberosities. Used primarily in seated postures where the sitz bones are pressed down into the ground to assist in elongating the spine, these bones activate the body against gravity.

Soles of the feet
Verbal press points help with alignment and balance. When the soles of the feet are pressing toward the floor, the natural result is an elongation throughout the rest of the body. This press point creates a definite sense of increased pressure against the earth and a feeling of connection. Pressing into the feet provides grounding, stability, and balance for all standing and balancing postures.
**Sternum**

The sternum is located in the center of the chest, about three inches below the throat. Pressing into the sternum lifts the chest, allowing the lungs to expand and fill more fully with breath. The sternum also helps keep the spine erect, the torso engaged, and the shoulder blades in their proper place. It takes a little more sensitivity to touch the sternum, especially with women, so proceed with extra awareness.

**Tailbone**

The tailbone is technically called the coccyx and is the small bone on the end of the sacrum, located at the base of the spine. “Lifting” the tailbone acts like a lever that tilts the torso forward with the spine elongated so that the bending comes from the hip joints and pelvis rather than the waist or lower back. You will also use the tailbone as one of the bony landmarks to distinguish the pelvic tilt. The tailbone is a verbal press point only.

**Toes and heels**

Press into the toes and/or heels to create length and lift as appropriate.

**Wing points of the scapulae**

The wing points are located on the lower inside edges (closest to the spine) of the scapulae. They are used most often in rotating the spine, as in Spinal Twist. If you press one of the wing points, the torso will rotate in that direction.
safe hands-on assists

press points: front

- Crown of head
- Sternum
- Chest points
- Elbows
- Iliac crest
- ASIS
- Greater Trocanter
- Finger tips
- Pubic bone
- Inside of knees
- Heel
- Toes
press points: back

Wing points of scapula

Tip of tail bone

Sitz bones
teaching
pranayama
Kripalu Yoga Teacher Training Manual 200-Hour Training

pranayama: yogic breathing

The Sanskrit compound pranayama is composed of two words, “prana” and “yama.” Prana translates as both “air” and “life force.” As air, prana is our breath, and as life force, it is the energy behind all of life’s expressions (moving, thinking, feeling, etc.). Yama means “to restrain or hold back,” and is the same root word in yama and niyama. Pranayama can also be divided as prana and ayama. Ayama means “to lengthen or increase.” Together yama and ayama can be interpreted as “to increase by restraining.” Just as hunger will increase if the urge to eat is not satiated, so too will the urge for breath increase during breath retentions. Hence, pranayama means “to restrain or enhance the breath and the life force.”

Swami Kripalu taught that most people expend their life force unconsciously through indulgence and stress, so that it becomes weak and is barely felt. Yogis traditionally lived a simple life that minimized the expenditure of prana, and did asanas and pranayama to raise the level of prana. Through a practice of simple living, asana, and pranayama, their prana became so strong that it could be easily felt. Once the yogis were able to experience and feel prana, they found they were more in touch with their emotions, physical sensations, and needs. With strong prana, it became easier to connect with inner knowing and live in attunement with spirit.

The Hatha Yoga Pradipika is a 14th-century yoga text that was influential in the development of Kripalu Yoga. This text states that there are two reasons to practice pranayama. First, pranayama purifies the nadis. Second, it makes prana flow in the sushumna. Let’s examine these effects more closely.

Purifying nadis

The Hatha Yoga Pradipika explains that our body is full of tubes or channels called nadis. Our life experience is comprised of the flow of substances and energies through these tubes. Our health is dependent on these tubes remaining unblocked. On the physical level, the tubes make up the
teaching pranayama

circulatory, digestive, respiratory, lymphatic, and nervous systems. If any of the tubes in these systems are blocked, there will be numbness, a lack of perception, and our health or well-being will be impaired.

On the subtle level, nadis carry nerve impulses, thoughts, and feelings. If we look at the sankhya chart, each element has many nadis connecting them with each other. Between manas and ahankara, for example, there are many possible nadis. A particular thought produced in the mind travels by nadi to the ahankara, which in turn produces a particular feeling or emotion. That feeling or emotion flows through the nadis and has an effect on the senses and on the body. Nadis are continually opening and closing. When some nadis are blocked, the flow is limited. For example, the mind may only be able to send certain thoughts to the ahankara, or the ahankara may only be able to respond in certain ways, regardless of the stimulus. For a particular person, no matter what they experience, their only response may be fear. For an addict, any thought or experience may only elicit one response: the desire for alcohol or drugs.

When these channels become blocked, we lose our ability to connect with our environment or with ourselves. Painful experiences, or even the fear of painful experiences, can cause us to consciously or unconsciously restrict the flow of life force to some part of ourselves, resulting in numbness or disassociation. The ability to do this is built in as a protective mechanism when life gets too painful or stressful, but for many people it becomes a way of life.

To say that pranayama purifies the nadis means that pranayama removes numbness and helps us to feel what is really happening inside us on all the different levels. In other words, pranayama makes us more sensitive to and aware of ourselves and of the influences governing our actions and choices.

**Prana to flow in sushumna**

The *Hatha Yoga Pradipika* says that we have thousands of nadis. One of the most important ones is the sushumna. Unlike the other nadis, which flow from one element to another, sushumna flows from the elements directly into the soul. A goal of hatha yoga is to cause our prana to flow strongly in this nadi. When prana is flowing in the sushumna, we experience a strong state of introversion and inner absorption; the world fades into the background as our inner world unfolds. Deep meditation and absorption happen in this place. Such an experience can occur as we practice any of the disciplines of yoga, and the introspective effects of any yoga practice may be enhanced when we add conscious breathing.

In a beginning Kripalu Yoga class, we open the nadis through pranayama. The sensitivity generated by pranayama enhances the benefits of the postures, and help students avoid injury by increasing their body awareness. We use pranayama before and during the postures to cultivate the experience of prana flowing in the sushumna, gradually leading the students to deeper stages of absorption.
using pranayama in a beginner-level yoga class

There are many different pranayama techniques used in Kripalu Yoga, and we will learn the following ones in our program. These are breathing exercises that communicate the essence of pranayama practice, provide a foundation to build upon if students choose to move on to a more advanced practice, and are safe for most beginning students.

Dirgha pranayama. Full yogic breathing—the foundational breathing technique for all pranayamas.

Ujjayi pranayama. The ocean-sounding breath—a strong, soothing pranayama that may be used in meditation and when doing postures.

Kapalabhati. A vigorous pranayama that releases tension in the abdomen and increases the amount of prana in the nadi.

Alternate-nostril kapalabhati. Kapalabhati breathing through one nostril, alternating right and left.

Nadi shodhana. Dirgha breathing channeled through single alternating nostrils.

Breath retention

Traditionally, most pranayamas were practiced with breath retention, or kumbhakas. Holding the breath during or after pranayamas deepens their effects. Experienced practitioners may feel that something is missing if they don’t include kumbhaka. A novice student may have a very different experience of breath retention. If she cannot relax into the kumbhaka, she may have a panic response. If she does not know how long the led holding will last, she may become tense or fearful, imagining how she will feel if the retention extends beyond her capacity. Students may also feel stress if they think they have to hold as long as everyone else in the class. As a rule of thumb, pranayamas should be taught without breath retention. When the students are comfortable with the basic pranayamas, the teacher can teach breath retention and slowly add it to their practice. In our program, we practice kumbhaka in our morning and afternoon classes, but we don’t learn to teach it to our students.
teaching basic pranayama

- Introduce only one pranayama technique per class.
- Review and build on techniques taught in previous classes.
- Review previously taught techniques by including them, as appropriate, in centering, postures, or relaxation.

Methodology for teaching pranayama

The methodology we use for teaching pranayama is based on the one we use to teach postures. Some differences exist, however, because pranayamas are more internal practices, with less for the students to observe.

Methodology:

- Set the context.
- Demonstration.
- Benefits (intuitive and evidence-based), precautions, and contraindications.
- Lead the pranayama.
- Questions and clarifications.
- Lead the pranayama again.

Methodology explained

1. Set the context. Have the students start in a seated position. Pranayama can be taught after centering, warm-ups, or postures. It works better to teach pranayama earlier in the class, when the students are more alert. For this reason, we do not recommend teaching a new pranayama after relaxation. Use the Sanskrit name of the pranayama if appropriate. You may want to weave in the benefits to help students understand the importance of what they’re learning.

2. Demonstration. Demonstrations should be brief, followed by an explanation of the technique.

3. Benefits, precautions, and contraindications. It’s important that students know precautions and contraindications before they practice. If a student should not do the pranayama, or does not
feel comfortable doing it, have them observe. If appropriate, offer another breathing technique that is safer for them to do instead.

4. **Lead the pranayama.** Lead a few rounds slowly. You can let students keep their eyes open at first, and then gradually close them. You may do the breathing with them, but keep your eyes open. If you have a large group, you will need to move around to observe each student. Guide the group based on what you notice. If you see anyone attempting the breathing in a way that is unsafe, stop the group, address the concern, and lead the pranayama again.

5. **Questions and clarifications.** Use this time to address any misalignments you observed. You may also illustrate or describe any common misalignments.

6. **Lead the pranayama again.** You may lead a longer set this time, or a faster round. You can also explain it in a way that draws attention to the more subtle aspects of the pranayama.

**Proper sitting position for pranayama**

For pranayama to be most effective, sit erect with your back straight. For most students, this is easiest in kneeling position (Vajrasana). If kneeling is uncomfortable, you may place a folded towel, block, or cushion between your ankles and hips to ease any pressure on your knees. You can also release pressure on your ankles by placing a folded towel under them.

Traditionally, pranayama was practiced in a cross-legged seated posture. If you wish to use this position for your pranayama, you may sit toward the front edge of a folded blanket or cushion to make it easier to hold your back straight. If your knees don’t reach the ground, you can place a folded blankets under them for added stability and to help your thighs relax.

All the pranayamas taught in our program may be practiced sitting in a chair. If you use a chair, it’s important not to lean back, as this will compress your abdomen and make deep breathing more difficult. Use a cushion behind your lower back if you need additional support.

**chapter learning outcomes**

- Understand the role of pranayama in Kripalu Yoga.
- Understand how pranayama relates to and enhances an asana practice.
- Enhance facility with introducing and guiding a pranayama in classes.
- Create a safe and supportive context within which to teach pranayama to new students.
basic pranayama techniques

dirgha
Three-Part-Breath, Full Yogic Breath, the Complete Yogic Breath

Dirgha, the Complete Yogic Breath, utilizes full lung capacity. By consciously breathing into each of the separate areas of the lungs, we take in more air than we do habitually, invigorating the body. It is more than our lungs that breathe; every cell in our body needs to be supplied with oxygen. When we breathe freely and fully in yoga practice, the respiratory process is stimulated throughout the body, increasing metabolism.

Dirgha is done with long, slow, deep breaths, bringing the breath into the three regions of the lungs. When the diaphragm contracts, it moves downward, causing air to enter the lungs, and displacing the contents of the abdomen. This pushes the abdomen out and is often referred to as belly breathing, even though no air actually enters the belly. Many of us have learned not to let the belly expand as we breathe. This tendency has to be unlearned in order to perform dirgha pranayama. In the mid-lung, or thoracic, region, inhalation is assisted by the intercostal muscles, which, when engaged, lift and spread the ribs, causing more air to flow into the lungs. Finally, to fill the upper region of the lungs, inhale fully and feel your clavicles rise slightly. Movement in this area is more subtle.

Effects

- Calms the mind and enhances introversion.
- Cycles exchange of air in the lungs.
- Releases tension in the chest and abdomen.
- Provides a gentle massage to the abdominal organs, improving digestion.
- Facilitates a deeper experience of postures and increases holding time.

Instructions

1. Sit with a long spine, abdomen relaxed.
2. Close your mouth and relax the face and jaw.
3. Place your palms on your belly and breathe into your lower lungs, feeling the diaphragm drop and the belly expand into your palms. Repeat several times.

4. Move your palms to the sides of your torso and breathe into the chest, feeling the rib cage expand. Repeat several times.

5. Place your fingertips just below your collarbones. Breathe into the upper part of your chest and feel your hands lifting. Repeat several times.

6. Combine all three in-breaths to make a complete and full inhalation.

7. Exhale completely, gently contracting the abdomen to squeeze out residual air.

8. Repeat this cycle several times, moving your hands to different parts of the body. Focus on filling and emptying the lungs completely.

9. Rest your hands on your lap and continue this breathing pattern for several minutes.

10. Release the breath practice. Sit quietly and notice the effects.

Precaution

- Irritation of the throat or sinuses.

Teaching tools

- Have students lie on the floor and do the three-part inhalation. Make the breath more pronounced by having them elevate their chest by lying over a pillow or a rolled-up mat. Be sure that the head is still resting on the floor or on a cushion so as not to compress the vertebrae in the neck.

- Invite students to place their hands on each particular breath chamber (abdominals, ribs, and upper chest/collarbones) to feel the movement of breath.

- Ask students to place a cushion, book, or light sandbag on the belly to feel the contrast of this first part of the breath.

Awareness

Dirgha may be challenging to learn for beginners who are reverse breathers. Reverse breathing means that the habitual way of breathing is to contract the belly on the inhalation. Assist students with this by having them breathe just into the lower lungs, allowing the belly to expand on each inhalation, until this action becomes familiar and comfortable.
Ujjayi
Ocean-Sounding Breath

Ujjayi, the Ocean-Sounding Breath, is performed by taking long, slow, deep breaths while slightly contracting the glottis, the back of the throat. This subtle muscular contraction creates a sound like the rising and falling of ocean waves.

Potential Effects

• Calms the mind.
• Creates a complete exchange of air in the lungs.
• Releases tension in the chest and abdomen.
• Strengthens the breathing muscles.
• Facilitates a deeper experience of postures and increases holding time.
• Generates introversion.
• Increases concentration.

Instructions

1. Sit with a long spine, abdomen relaxed.
2. Begin with dirgha pranayama and repeat several times.
3. With your mouth closed and face soft, gently contract the glottis, at the back of throat, making a soft, continuous hissing sound like the reverberation heard in a seashell. Engage this hiss on both the inhalation and exhalation.
4. Continue deep breathing and explore a louder sound without strain; then explore a quieter sound.
5. Focus your attention on the oceanlike sound.
6. Continue to breathe like this for several minutes.
7. Release the breath practice. Sit quietly and notice the effects.

Contraindications

• Any irritation of the throat or sinuses.
Teaching tools

- Have students hold their hand out in front of them and visualize that they are fogging a mirror as they exhale through their open mouths. On the inhalation, have them visualize the mirror in the back of their throats. Once they can make the sound with their mouths open, invite them to close their mouths and continue the breath.

- Guide students to say the word “home” several times, drawing out the “hhhaaooo” sound. Next, have them say it on the inhalation, and then have them close their mouths as they make the sound.

- Instruct students to plug their ears with their thumbs for a few rounds of breath. This will help them absorb into the ujjayi sound.

Awareness

- To produce more focus, hold the breath for a few seconds at the end of the inhalation and/or at the end of the exhalation.

- Connect the inhalations and the exhalations, leaving as little space between them as possible. Allow the inhalations and the exhalations to follow a continuous circular flow.

- Ujjayi pranayama can be done with any full, deep breath.
Kapalabhati
Skull-Polishing Breath

Kapala means “skull.” Bhati means “to make shiny” or “to clean.” Through the rapid succession of sharp expulsions of the breath, the nasal passages (referred to as the skull) are cleaned and purified. Because of the use of the abdominal muscles to expel air rapidly from the lungs, this pranayama is conducive to having a responsive abdomen. In addition to the physical effects, this breath can illuminate or churn our current emotional state.

Potential Effects

- Cleans the nasal passages and opens the sinuses.
- Complete exchange of air in the lungs.
- Releases tension in the chest and abdomen.
- Tones the abdominals.
- Generates introversion.

Instructions

1. Sit with a long spine, abdomen relaxed.
2. Begin with dirgha or ujjayi pranayama for several minutes to center and connect.
3. Place one hand on your solar plexus.
4. Inhale deeply through both nostrils, lips sealed.
5. Strongly contract your abdomen and exhale sharply through your nose.
6. Keep your abdomen relaxed and receive the naturally occurring passive inhalation.
7. Continue exhalations at a steady pace. If the breath shortens, a feeling of lightheadedness or extreme fatigue occurs, or rhythm is lost, slow down and make sure to take in enough air on each inhalation, or discontinue the breath. (Start with 20 expulsions and increase as comfort and familiarity with this technique grows.)
8. Release and return to a soft, natural breath. Notice the effects.
9. Repeat one or two more rounds, or sit in meditation before moving on.
Precautions

- Any irritation of the throat.
- Any sinus irritation, inflammation, or swelling.
- Any digestive or abdominal irritation or inflammation.
- With menstruation, experiment with how kapalabhati makes you feel. For some women, it makes the cramping sensations worse, as it brings more energy to the pelvic region. For others, because it creates a responsive abdomen, it can decrease cramping.

Contraindications

- Pregnancy.
- Recent surgery, injury, or inflammation in the abdominal or thoracic region (colitis, cancer, hernia, active stomach ulcer, emphysema or other severe lung conditions, heart conditions).
- Uncontrolled high blood pressure.

Teaching tools

- Have students place their hands onto the belly and apply a gentle pressure inward and upward as they exhale. Guide students to notice their belly move in toward the spine, and on the inhalation, invite them to relax as the belly expands and air pushes the diaphragm down.
- Guide students to imagine holding a candle in front of their mouths and extinguishing it with a sharp exhalation through the mouth. To add to the technique, ask them to place one hand on their abdomen to feel the contraction. After exhaling several times through the mouth, instruct them to close the mouth and shift the exhalation to the nose.
- Have students practice kapalabhati lying on their backs. This technique is helpful for reverse breathers, or for students who move their hips or shoulders too much when they exhale.

Awareness

- It takes some practice to coordinate the breathing with the movement of the abdomen. And due to the fast pace, it can be especially challenging for reverse breathers. Students might be contracting the chest and shoulders (and actually expanding the belly) to force air out. This causes a lot of movement in the torso and destabilizes the seated posture. Slowing the breath down can help the students learn the optimal rhythm.
- The emphasis is on a strong exhalation. The key to getting the expulsion to happen is in the contraction of the belly, which forces the air out of the lungs. The inhalation is completely relaxed.
- When teaching first-time students, lead fewer expulsions to avoid abdominal muscle fatigue.
alternate-nostril kapalabhati
Skull-Polishing Breath through alternate nostrils

Potential Effects
- Cleans nasal passages and opens sinuses.
- Complete exchange of air in lungs.
- Releases tension in the chest and abdomen.
- Generates introversion of mind after the practice.

Essential cues
1. Sit with a long spine, abdomen relaxed.
2. Begin with dirgha or ujjayi pranayama for several minutes to center and connect.
3. Bring your hand up to your nose in Vishnu Mudra, curling the index and middle fingers into the palm in preparation.
4. Inhale deeply through both nostrils, lips sealed.
5. Close your right nostril with your thumb, strongly contract your abdomen, and exhale sharply through your left nostril.
6. Release the right nostril, keep your abdomen relaxed, and receive the naturally occurring passive inhalation through both nostrils.
7. After the inhalation, close your left nostril with your ring finger, strongly contract your abdomen, and exhale through your right nostril.
8. Repeat, alternating exhalation between the nostrils 20 times.
9. To release, complete the final exhalation through the left nostril and lower your hand to your lap.
10. Sit in meditation for a few moments and notice the effects.

Precautions
- Any irritation of the throat.
- Any sinus irritation, inflammation, or swelling.
- Any digestive or abdominal irritation or inflammation.
With menstruation, experiment with how kapalabhati makes you feel. For some women, it makes the cramping sensations worse, as it brings more energy to the pelvic region. For others, because it creates a responsive abdomen, it can decrease cramping.

Contraindications

- Pregnancy.
- Recent surgery, injury, or inflammation in the abdominal or thoracic region (colitis, cancer, hernia, active stomach ulcer, emphysema or other severe lung conditions, heart conditions).
- Uncontrolled high blood pressure.

Teaching tools

- Explore leading three breaths through one nostril, then three through the other, alternating three breaths back and forth before moving to one breath through each nostril.

Awareness

- Ensure that students are comfortable with basic kapalabhati before introducing alternate-nostril kapalabhati.
- Invite students to practice slowly. Be sure to observe that the inhalation is occurring through both nostrils and is passive.
- Synchronizing exhalations with the closing of the opposite nostril can be difficult for some students. Guide several slow, mechanical repetitions before speeding up.
- Invite students to relax all unnecessary tension in the face, shoulders, chest, back, legs, and hands.
- A round is an inhalation and an exhalation through each nostril once.
nadi shodhana
Channel-Purifying Breath

Effects

• Calms the mind.
• Creates a complete exchange of air in the lungs.
• Releases tension in the chest and abdomen.
• Generates introversion.

Essential cues

• Sit with a long spine, abdomen relaxed.
• Begin with dirgha or ujjayi pranayama for several minutes to center and connect.
• Bring the hand up to nose in Vishnu mudra (or another hand position) in preparation.
• Close your right nostril with your thumb and slowly inhale through your left nostril.
• At the end of the inhalation, close your left nostril with your ring finger and exhale through your right nostril.
• Inhale through your right nostril. Close your right nostril and exhale left. Continue this pattern (exhale, inhale, switch).
• After several minutes, gradually slow down the inhalations and exhalations. Allow a meditative quality to emerge as your breath continues to slow.
• To complete, exhale through your left nostril and release your hand to your lap.
• Sit quietly for several minutes and notice the effects.

Precautions
• Any irritation of the throat or sinuses.
• Any respiratory infection, especially if contagious.

Contraindications
• None.

Awareness
• Many traditions teach a ratio of inhalation time to exhalation time. In Kripalu Yoga, we find that counting can create tension in the body. Relaxing into the pranayama allows a natural ratio to develop over time, in a more organic way. As the in-breath and the out-breath flow at their own pace, the breath will slow down.
• Explore a combination of ujjayi and nadi shodhana to create even more introversion. If using ujjayi causes tension, let it go.
• If the pattern of inhalations and exhalations through opposite nostrils causes tension, release the pranayama and relax for a few minutes before resuming.
• A round is an inhalation and an exhalation through each nostril once.
During meditation, one is conscious only of the meditator, the meditation, and the object of meditation. Everything else is shifted into the background. Meditation can be difficult to teach, as it is a subtle, internal process. However, there are many methods and techniques to work with to prepare and cultivate the process of meditation. The word meditation has many meanings, including focused awareness, reflection, contemplation, and stilling the mind.

“[Meditation is] the liberation of the mind from all disturbing and distracting emotions, thoughts, and desires.” —Samkhya

“When all thoughts get diverted to the point that the mind is fixed without creating any other flow of thought, it is called dhyana by wise people. It is the kriya (purification) of chitta (mind).” —Patanjali

“Meditation is the inner journey, the spiritual journey, the journey toward the Absolute, or the journey of divine love.” —Swami Kripalu

**Purpose**

The purpose of meditation is to draw mental energies inward. This process of slowing down the mind allows us to remember our true nature. It is in these spacious moments that we might experience our deepest truth, and a more expansive feeling of consciousness.

**Intuitive Benefits**

- Promotes emotional and mental stability, which leads to clarity in decision making.
- Creates peace of mind, which influences communication and relationships.
- Helps free up creative energy and rekindles a sense of self-worth.
- Streamlines the body’s metabolic processes, which can reduce high blood pressure.
• Improves symptoms of depression, anxiety, and ADHD.
• Creates a shift to the left frontal lobe of the brain, creating more calm and happiness.
• Fosters a greater ability to line up what we think, feel, say, and do.

Common challenges

• Trouble staying awake.
  ➢ Invite the student to honor the fatigue and listen to the body’s need for rest.
  ➢ Instruct the student to practice with eyes open.
• Difficulty staying present in the body, and loss of sensation in the arms, hands, or legs.
  ➢ Ensure that student is sitting up on a cushion or blanket to allow for optimal downward flow of blood and breath.
  ➢ Suggest that the student dedicate more time to yoga practice or other forms of movement to increase circulation.
• Feeling ungrounded and spacey.
  ➢ Invite the student to sit on a chair with the soles of their feet touching the ground.

Kripalu Yoga

Any type of meditation may be used in Kripalu Yoga. In Kripalu Yoga, meditation techniques are divided into two categories: chitta-based and prana-based.

Chitta-based meditation

Chitta is an aspect of the subtle body sometimes called the “inner instrument,” with the body being the “external instrument.” Chitta is essentially mind, intellect, or witness, and ahankara the ego, or sense of self. Chitta represents our rational, thinking, perceiving aspects. Chitta meditations include prayer, visualization, or mantra. Chitta meditations leave the mind clear and detached, and are useful for regaining composure after extended periods of work or activity.
Prana-based meditation

Prana is the life force, and is felt as energy, biological drives, and emotion. Prana meditations help us to get in touch with our whole selves, revealing any disturbances or imbalances. Prana meditations are useful only if we can witness imbalances without identifying with or resisting them. For this reason, it is recommended that Kripalu Yoga practitioners use chitta meditations as a foundation for prana meditations.

Stages Two and Three of Kripalu Yoga, as well as the slow-motion prana exercise, are prana meditation techniques. Any aspect of Stages Two or Three may be used for either a moving or seated meditation. Watching the breath or counting the breaths can be used for either chitta- or prana-based meditations.

Prerequisites

The meditator needs patience, perseverance, enthusiasm, and sincerity. An attitude of non-expectation and constant self-acceptance is important. Meditation is meant to be an empowering process, although uncomfortable experiences may arise in the process of re-attunement.

Physical and mental preparation

Choosing a particular place and time for consistency is helpful in the meditation process. It is beneficial to take time for meditation once a day, beginning with five to 20 minutes. You may eventually increase the time to 30 minutes to an hour. Ensure that your meditation space is clean, comfortable, well-ventilated, and quiet, without stimulants such as distracting sounds, strong smells, and bright light.

You can sit on a straight-backed chair, up against a wall, in Easy pose, or in Diamond pose—whatever allows the spine to be erect. Use a cushion or a folded blanket to tilt the pelvis slightly forward. This is especially helpful when sitting for a longer time, as the pelvic tilt provides more circulation and blood flow for the limbs. It’s important to begin meditation with a relaxed body. Explore a few minutes in restorative yoga postures such as Legs Up the Wall or Savasana, or prepare with a grounding breathing technique such as ujjayi, followed by a few rounds of nadi shodhana.
seated postures

A base for asana transitions, pranayama, and centering meditation practices.

easy pose—sukhasana

Essential cues

- From Dandasana, draw the sole of your left foot into the right thigh, left knee toward the ground.
- Bend your right knee and slide your heel toward the left shin.
- Place your hands on your thighs.
- Elongate your spine by pressing down through the sitz bones and up through the crown.

To release

- Extend your legs.

half lotus

ardha padmasana

Essential cues

- From Dandasana, draw the sole of your left foot into the right thigh, left knee toward the ground.
- Bend your right knee and place your foot toward the left hip crease.
- Place your hands on your thighs.
- Elongate your spine by pressing down through the sitz bones and up through the crown.
To release

• Extend the legs.

**diamond pose**

* vajrasana

**Essential cues**

• Come onto your hands and knees with the toes uncurled.

• Sit back onto your heels.

• Elongate your spine by pressing down through the sitz bones and up through the crown.

To release

• Lean forward into your hands.

• Extend your legs.
centering a group

Centering is a process of accessing calm through presence. When one person lets go of tension, everyone else in the group will receive the effect on some level. When the leader of a group relaxes into being, the whole room will enter into synchronicity.

Potential benefits of centering

• Creates commonality within the group.
• Unifies, harmonizes, and uplifts group energy.
• Creates a focused state where concentration and learning can happen.
• Helps ground energy.
• Starts the session on a positive note.
• Draws the whole group into the present moment.
• Creates the space for intention to emerge.
• Fosters stillness, steadiness, peacefulness, relaxation, and readiness.

Suggested sequence

• Create rapport.
• Engage in casual conversation, i.e., “How are you? Nice to see you here.”
• Take a light and sincere tone.
• Do a brief check-in.
• Take an energy pulse: “What is your level of energy? Call out a number between one and ten; one being tired and low energy, and ten being alert and energized.”
• Invoke laughter, if appropriate.
• Create body awareness through loosening body parts, relaxation, and making sounds.
• Guide a comfortable seated position, coming into alignment.
• Invite students to close their eyes or keep them soft, with the gaze a few inches out in front.
- Create breath awareness.
- Guide a mind/body scan.
- Create intention by
  - Giving students permission to open to experience
  - Visualizing how students would want to feel at the end of the session
  - Setting the mood or tone.
- Chant om or guide students to bow forward to their hearts.

**Centering elements**

- Body scan.
- Scan through the sheaths/koshas.
- Body awareness: What is present right now (tension and openness)?
- Breath awareness: How is the breath showing up (shallow or full)?
- Pranayama.
- Relaxation in Savasana, Legs Up the Wall, Child, or a fetal position.
- Visualization.
- Chanting om.
- Massage exchange or circle.
- Playing music, chanting, or singing.
- Sharing a reading.
chanting om

Chanting om is similar to the process of deep breathing. The sound is constructed out of three different vibrations. “Ahhh” is related to beginnings, or Brahma energy, and invites contentment as the belly relaxes. “Ooo” is related to sustenance, or Vishnu energy, and invites us to open and vocalize the throat. “Mmm” is related to endings, or Shiva energy, and allows us to relax the chest. Putting these three syllables together creates the sound of “Ahhhoommm.” After chanting om, there is a moment of silence to absorb, reflect, and receive the vibration.

“The sound of all sounds encapsulates the essence of our lives, as we, too, experience creation, sustenance, dissolution and reapportion on so many levels of our existence. The breath enters the body, pauses, makes its way out, and is then reabsorbed into the air around us. The seasons also follow suit, each coming into the fullness of its respective qualities, lingering for a spell, then dissolving into the advent of the next cycle. In this way the universal sound of ‘aum’ mirrors our own participation in this natural progression. When we are able to flow with this cyclical vibration as it manifests in our lives, we can live in a more awakened state.” (Nourishing the Teacher, p. 94).

In essence, when we chant om, we are inviting our hearts to better align with the consciousness that is in us and around us. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the essence of om is highlighted through prayer in the word amen. The Sufis say amin for the same purpose. The component sounds can also be found in words like shalom, home, or mom.

Potential benefits of chanting om

• Produces a physiological relaxation response in the body and mind.
• Awakens our inner knowing and puts us in touch with Witness, observation, and awareness
• Opens the energy channels that stimulate the third eye and the crown chakra.
• Creates physical and psychological release.

Helpful hints

• Choose a pitch in a comfortable range, not too high or too low.
• Chant the same tone up to three times, or chant three or four different pitches in a sequence that moves up the scale and returns home to the starting pitch.
• If chanting in a group, chant loud enough to express your own sound, but also take time to absorb the melody and offering of others around you.
• After chanting, consider saying shanti, which means peace. Alternatively, say “Peace” or “May there be peace in all of our hearts.”
• Complete with a silent bow to yourself and others.

When to chant om
Chant om to begin or end a session, or anytime you are creating a transition from one segment of your class to another.

centering intentions

Intention for the body
“As I enter into this sadhana, I honor and respect you. As I enter and hold these postures, I open to encounter all my feelings and sensations. I align with you to be in my experience fully. I feel the light of consciousness flowing through you. Through this sadhana, I listen to you. Even as I move into a difficult pose, I am fully attentive to whatever you have to say in the process, and I will remain conscious.”

Intention for your sadhana
“I open my heart to explore the wisdom inherent within my body. I recognize that I am not just this body, but the embodiment of spirit itself. During this sadhana, I will be totally present in my body and in the light of consciousness.”

three-step meditation process

1. Still the body (anamaya kosha).
2. Still the breath (pranamaya kosha).
3. Still the mind (manomaya kosha).
concentration meditation

Concentration meditation develops the individual’s ability to fix and focus the attention on a particular object. The meditative object might be the breath; a sound, such as a mantra; an object, such as a candle; a visual image, such as the picture of a deity, or simply an image held in one’s imagination. All these methods share the basic concept that when one notices that the mind has wandered off the object, attention is compassionately brought back.

**Purpose**

- To strengthen concentration.
- To recognize sensations.
- To develop buddhi, the mental power that enables one to discriminate between the eternal and the temporary.

**Technique**

- Focus the mind on the area below the nostrils and above the upper lip.
- Use natural, effortless breath; avoid modifying or regulating the breath.
- Observe the breath as it is.
- Observe subtle sensations of breath at the tips of the nostrils.
- Return to sensations again and again. The nature of the mind is to wander away.
- Draw on your inner presence.
- Be compassionate. When you become aware that your mind is wandering, avoid getting frustrated. Simply note that the mind has wandered off and bring it back to the sensations of the breath.

Find a drishti, a point of focus. Use the breath, mantra, candle, japa, visualization, or a still gazing point. When your attention wanders, bring it back to your chosen focal point. Sit. Stay. To quiet the mind is virtually impossible, but by giving the mind a focal point it becomes steady and engaged. In this place the mind moves out of the “driver’s seat” and allows vijnanamaya kosha (the Witness Self) to guide the way. Over time, you will find more pockets of space and a greater ability to stay attentive to your point of focus.
developmental sequence for concentration meditation

Simply watching the breath flow naturally is a common concentrative practice. Yet for many students, this is exceedingly difficult. Following the breath may be too ethereal for them. They need a stronger anchor for their mind’s attention. Consider the following teaching sequence:

- Counting in- and out-breaths: Count “one” with the in-breath, “two” with the out-breath, and so on, until 10; then start over again. If track is lost, start over again at “one,” without bringing any judgment to bear. Notice that the count is simply a tool to train the attention to follow the breath, and become aware when the mind has wandered. It is common for beginners to lose track or to find themselves counting beyond 10. This alerts them to the fact that the mind has wandered.

- Counting only the out-breath: When concentration comes with more ease, transition to counting only the exhalations.

- Ten-breath exercise: When students first begin to explore seated meditation, encourage brief sittings with strong focus. Students are likely to develop better meditation skills with brief, frequent sittings than with longer sessions. Explore assigning the 10-breath exercise for homework. Every day, at least once per day, take at least 10 conscious breaths as described above. It may feel like a small, manageable task, which can get students working regularly on their concentration skills. Remind them that they can always do several repetitions of this. The idea is to create success so that the students are encouraged to practice longer.

- Three-part focus: Another technique to support concentration is to break the act of breathing down into small parts, requiring greater attentiveness to each segment. Guide students to notice the fact that they are breathing in and out, and bring their attention to the space at the top and bottom of the breath. Next, instruct students to take a deep breath, fill the abdominal chamber, and pause for a moment. Then take another deep breath to fill the ribs and add a brief pause, followed by a final sip of air to fill the upper chest/collarbones. Either guide students to exhale slowly through each section or reverse the direction on the out-breath, with a slight pause as each chamber deflates.

- Anchoring the breath to a word or a phrase: An alternative to counting the breath or breaking the breath down into small parts is to anchor the breath to a word or phrase. This could be as simple as saying the words “peace” or “relax” with each breath, or repeating a brief phrase that resonates. For example, try saying, “Breathing in, I calm my body; breathing out, I smile” or “Breathing in, I dwell in the present moment; breathing out, I know it is a wonderful moment.” For more examples and guided meditations of this type, refer to Thich Nhat Hanh’s book *The Blooming of a Lotus*.

- Follow the breath: Let go of any technique and simply explore being with each breath as it comes and goes.
teaching meditation

awareness meditation

Awareness meditation involves cultivating a moment-to-moment discernment of whatever arises, without getting lost or sucked in, without activating desire or aversion. In short, it is the practice of simply being present for what is. The vipassana tradition and Stage Two Kripalu Meditation are both examples of an awareness-based approach to meditation.

For awareness meditations, some form of concentrative practice is almost always a prerequisite. Many students’ initial exposure to meditation is with an awareness-based practice. This is likely to lead to feelings of frustration, inadequacy, and failure, unless strong concentration skills are built first. Even practitioners experienced with awareness meditations often begin their sits with some kind of concentrative practice to help settle the mind. Before introducing students to an awareness approach, lead them in some concentrative experiences first, get feedback about how they are able to sustain their concentration, and offer the awareness approach when you feel they are ready.

Using sound as a concentrative meditative object can provide a nice bridge to awareness meditation. Direct students to focus their attention on a sound that is near, then far, and then direct them to the entire field of sound. Encourage them to experience any sound they hear as vibration and to avoid attaching a label (such as truck or bird) or any evaluation (such as aggravating or pleasant) to it. Note that they can never really know when sound will arise or fall away, or what sound might arise next. Observe that if sound is truly to be their meditative object, then the most they can do is become steady and listen intently with full awareness. In this exercise, sound becomes an analogy for simply sitting with open awareness. The next step is to invite students to open their awareness to whatever arises—thoughts, feelings, and sensations in the body—in the same open, nonjudgmental, nonreactive way they have opened to sound.

An additional technique involves guiding students to attune to the sensations within their body. Developing this awareness is a constant process that does not confine itself either to a formal meditation period or to certain times in our lives. It is an ever-present, ongoing practice.

We can become more sensitive as prana communicates itself through the sensations. When we listen and respond to these messages, we find that the body and mind come into harmony. This state of integration is known to psychologists as self-actualization and to holistic health educators as high-level wellness. We can delve into this state by learning to attune to the messages that our inner energy gives us at each moment.
meditation as doing nothing

The following is a guided experience of an awareness meditation. It allows rather than causes meditation to happen. This technique, practiced twice a day, can serve as a simple yet powerful introduction to the rewards of nondoing, rewards that can carry over into every aspect of your life.

• Create a period of 15 or 20 minutes when you can be completely undisturbed. You do not need to time yourself, but if it will help you to let go into the experience, set a timer and then forget about time.

• Choose a time when you feel a little hungry and your digestive tract is empty. Digestion raises the body’s metabolism and interferes with your ability to relax.

• Choose a time when you can relax without effort. Often the early morning and evening hours are optimal for nondoing meditation.

• Sit on the edge of a pillow with your spine erect.

• Now do nothing. Do not try to create any particular experience. Do not resist any experience: if your nose itches, go ahead and scratch it; if your body’s position becomes uncomfortable, shift it.

• Do not try to control the mind. If thoughts come and the mind wanders, that is okay, for that is the nature of the mind. At some point, you will become aware of the wandering and it will stop, as long as you do not latch on to thoughts, prolong them, or identify with them.

meditation on the third eye, ajna chakra

The third eye is the center of Witness Consciousness, where we are able to observe opposites (pleasure/pain, success/failure, happiness/unhappiness, negative/positive) without judging or favoring either one. When we favor one thing and fear its opposite, the mind becomes engaged, creating conflicts and acting from relativity. Meditation on the third eye helps us soften the conflicts that emerge from opposites by recognizing how opposites become complementary and work together, just as they do in nature: night and day, winter and spring, up and down. All opposites depend on each other.

• Invite all attention and energy to focus on the third eye.

• Relax into focusing between the eyebrows, where intuition and creative knowing reside.

• When you find yourself distracted, bring your attention back to this center point.
teaching meditation

slow-motion prana

The slow-motion prana exercise is a meditation technique developed by Amrit Desai through instruction from Swami Kripalu. This exercise allows us to experience the powerful workings of our inner energy. Through this technique, prana is released to move freely throughout the system to recharge and heal the body, restoring harmony and balance.

1. Sit in a cross-legged or kneeling position on the floor or on a straight-backed chair with your feet on the floor. Keep your spine straight and hold your neck and back in alignment. Close your eyes and relax the body.

2. Release tension in your hands and arms by making a fist with both hands, squeezing and then relaxing the hands.

3. Shake your hands and fingers vigorously for a few moments and place your hands on your knees, palms facing up.

4. Take deep dirgha or ujjayi breaths.

5. After several minutes of breathing, focus your attention on the hara, just below the navel. Visualize pranic energy as a luminous liquid light glowing in this central place.

6. Gradually, visualize the liquid light flowing upward from the hara and streaming gently through the arms, wrists, palms, and fingers. Notice if there are any tingles or vibrations as pranic energy moves.

7. Continue to concentrate on the energy flowing into your hands until you feel them being moved up off the knees. Let go of any expectations about what will happen. Concentrate on prana and observe it working. Keep your elbows at your sides. Let your hands move toward your face in a slow, almost imperceptible movement.

8. If you feel your hands are moving without your conscious will, do not be alarmed. If your hands remain on your lap, consciously lift them gently off the knees and then allow movement to continue on its own.

9. Allow your palms to face each other, two to three inches apart. Bring awareness to any sensations between the hands and in the fingertips. Allow your hands to move slowly toward each other and then away. Feel and observe.

10. Allow your hands to approach the face and gently move across the face, according to the patterns that arise spontaneously from within. Imagine that as your fingertips move across the face, they are discharging prana, relaxing deep muscles, and erasing all lines of tension. Move your hands around your face and head, about an inch off your body, giving yourself a “prana bath.” Let the motion come from inside, very slow and effortless.

11. Allow your hands to lower down to their original position, letting movement be extremely slow. When the hands have come to rest on your knees, remain in a sitting position with your eyes closed for eight to 10 deep breaths, or sit in meditation for as long as you want.

12. To complete, gently open your eyes and stretch your body. Take note of what has shifted or transpired through your inquiry of slow-motion prana.
teaching tips for kripalu meditation

• Remind students that their asana and pranayama practice helps develop their meditative skills as they anchor their awareness to the breath and to sensations in their body.

• Point out to students that they are already practicing meditation with some degree of success.

• Give students plenty of seated options—on a chair, sitting cross-legged, against a wall, in Diamond pose—so they can find what works best for them.

• Explain why it is vital for the body to be in comfort. Give students permission to shift their seated position slowly and with intention if agitation in the mind or discomfort in the body persists. Explore the distinction between injurious pain and strong sensation.

• Give students plenty of permission around having their attention stray, as the idea of static stillness can create extreme frustration for beginning meditators.

• Remind students that the process is truly about noticing when attention has strayed, and the positive aspect of bringing awareness back to their focal point of attention.

• If students become frustrated with their initial explorations of formal sitting meditation, redirect them back to their asana and pranayama practice to strengthen their basic concentrative skills.
the purpose of relaxation

When the body and mind are relaxed, the usual tensions and blocks are removed. This allows prana to flow freely throughout all systems and brings the body, mind, and spirit into a harmonious, balanced state. Usually this level of relaxation and release is experienced only in a state of deep sleep. In the practice of relaxation, we cultivate the ability of letting go into that place of profound stillness while remaining conscious and aware. We allow the physical body, energetic body, emotional layer, and intuitive presence to receive the benefits of relaxation.

By consciously choosing to enter into relaxation and letting go, we give ourselves the gift of revitalizing and renewing our energy, not just when we go to sleep at night, but at any time during our waking hours. Learning how to relax is important in Kripalu Yoga. With awareness, we can allow prana to enter and release the subtle, unconscious layers of tension in the mental and emotional bodies.

types of relaxation

Contraction and release

- A progressive relaxation that brings awareness to all the major muscle groups in a sequential order.

- Provides a systematic way of learning how to relax the different parts of the body through exaggerating the tension and then releasing it.

- Through consciously creating and holding tension in the muscles, the student can acknowledge the tension. When the release finally comes, the feeling of relaxation is unmistakable. There is a rush of energy, a tingling, a sense of warmth all over, and a letting go.
guiding relaxation

- The student thereby learns how to discriminate between what is tension and what is relaxation.
- Suitable for all levels; especially effective for beginners.
- More experienced students will need less detailed instruction, as they will be able to access a deep state of relaxation much more quickly. Have them tense and lift both legs at the same time or even tense the whole body at once and then let go. More advanced students are often already in deep relaxation as soon as they lie down. In that case, begin by focusing their awareness on the various body parts and proceed from there.

teaching methodology
contraction and release

Step 1

1. Start with the feet and move up toward the head and face.

2. Tense and squeeze the right foot/toes and lift the right leg an inch off the ground as you inhale, and hold the breath in for approximately a count of five. Exhale with an audible sigh, dropping the foot and leg to the ground and softening the contraction. Feel the heaviness of the leg and the effects of letting go.

3. Repeat on the left side.

4. Tense and lift the buttocks, hips, and pelvis off the ground. Inhale and hold. Then let go and relax.

5. Follow this pattern with the chest and the shoulders, squeezing them up to the ears and then softening them down.

6. Squeeze the right hand into a fist while lifting the whole right arm. Then release.

7. Contract the throat and neck, then the face, wrinkling it up like a prune. Then relax.

8. Finally, stick your tongue out as far as you can and open your eyes wide. Release.

9. Keep in mind that you can guide the contraction-and-release exercise by moving up the body on one side and then the other side, or balance out the right leg, then the left; right buttocks, hips, pelvis, then the left, etc.
Step 2

1. Mentally scan the entire body, using conscious awareness as a way to relax even deeper. As you bring attention to a particular muscle, feel it fully. Scan that area for tension and let it go.

2. Use more detail and move slowly from one part of the body to another, such as with the feet, ankles, calves, knees, thighs, buttocks, pelvis, waist, lower back, middle back, ribs, upper back, chest, shoulders, arms, palms, fingers, neck, back of the head, forehead, cheeks, jaw, lips, tongue, eyelids, eyes, and scalp.

Visualization

- After students are deeply relaxed (for beginners, this would be after the whole contraction-and-release exercise, whereas for more experienced students, you could start the visualization process much sooner), guide them to clearly visualize and sense a warm, luminous liquid light flowing into the soles of their feet.

- Let this light fill up the feet with healing energy. Allow the liquid light to flow slowly up through the hollow tubes of the legs, creating a radiant, relaxing hue all around and through the legs.

- Continue to guide the students through each body part as described above in contraction and release.

- Instruct them to “visualize this light streaming through all your veins, relaxing you and realigning all levels of your being. Allow your body to simply bathe in the pool of luminous liquid prana.”

- Be as descriptive as you wish, and allow your description to come from your own experience.

- Other visual relaxations include journeying through the koshas, honoring both darkness and light, and specific physical/emotional healing.

Affirmations

- Affirmations are statements of a truth about yourself or a summoning of a state of consciousness you want to manifest and experience. Our minds are suggestible, vulnerable, and easily influenced when we are relaxed and open.

- Explore inviting students to formulate or repeat an affirmation you create as they drift off into relaxation, or weave an affirmation into the moments right after relaxation.

- Use the first person (“I” instead of “you”).
guiding relaxation

- Use positive words in affirmations. Avoid using negative or energy-draining words. For example, change “I am not tense” to “I am relaxed.” Weed out the negative words before releasing the affirmation into the subconscious.

- Word the affirmation as simply as possible. The subconscious takes all commands literally. You may not get the results you want if you use long or complex words.

- Use the present tense, unless the affirmation is for a specific future event for which you are preparing. Know that the quality you want to manifest is already true for you now. Know the truth about yourself and release this truth into your experience.

- Use affirmations as a way to change your belief systems. As you become aware of beliefs and habits that are not working for you, visualize the best possible way for the situation to be resolved.

- Construct an affirmation that reflects the truth about the situation as you now see it.

- Use a relaxation method and repeat the affirmation out loud or to yourself.

- Write the affirmation in your journal.

- Repeat it periodically, especially when you encounter the actual situation. For example, if you use an affirmation to improve a relationship with another person, repeat it before you see that person. This is the preventive approach—avoiding problems before they occur.

- A mantra can be used as an affirmation. This can come from a journal exercise, especially an exercise in which you contact the wise Self within you. Use a phrase that strikes you as powerful and meaningful, one that resonates within you.

- Affirmations are most effective if you believe in them, but this might take time. They still have a potent effect if you do not fully believe them right away. It can often take time to rewrite years of negative self-talk and beliefs.

- In your mind’s eye, visualize a situation as you would like to see it unfold, or see yourself in your mind’s eye as you would like to be. Then construct your affirmations.
“Crying is one of the highest devotional songs. One who knows crying knows spiritual practice. If you can cry with a pure heart, nothing else compares to such a prayer. Crying includes all the principles of Yoga.”

—Swami Kripalu
guiding relaxation

corpse
savasana
sava: corpse  |  (shah-VAHS-anna)

Intuitive Benefits

• Calms a restless mind, relieves distress, and helps alleviate fatigue.
• Relaxes the muscles and organs.
• Relieves mild depression, headaches, and insomnia.
• Helps lower blood pressure.
• Accelerates the healing process.
• Increases the ability to remain calm.
• Releases unconscious tensions in the bodymind.
• Provides the opportunity to experience the flow of prana in the body.

Precautions (proceed with care)

• Recent back injury or major discomfort: Support slightly bent knees with a prop.
• Pregnancy: Raise the head and chest on a bolster or lie on the left side in the fetal position to avoid pressure on the vena cava (large vein) that runs along the right side of the abdomen and can sometimes get compressed by the baby’s weight.
Essential Cues

- Lie on your back with your feet at least hip-width distance apart.
- Extend your arms down by sides, palms up or down.

To release

- Draw both knees to center.
- Roll to one side.
- Press up to seated.

Posture option

- Bent knees, feet wide, heels out, knees toward each other.

Props

- Blanket over the body.
- Cushion under the knees.
- Rolled blanket under the neck.
- Belt wrapped around the upper thighs.
guiding relaxation

Assists

Press points

• N/A

Hands-on

• Hold the ankles and lengthen the legs.
• Shoulder blade assist.
• Neck extension.
• Shoulder press.

Notes:

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relaxation options

When to guide a relaxation

- Relaxation is best guided at the end of the class.
- Allow eight to 12 minutes of relaxation for a 90-minute class, and five to seven minutes for a 60-minute class.
- The benefits of relaxation can be felt even in a short amount of time.

Be relaxed yourself

- Regardless of your eloquence or skill, if you are tense, your students will have a more challenging time unwinding.
- Remember that the energy and intention behind your guiding words are key.
- Keep your own breath flowing to embody a state of calmness.

Getting into a comfortable position

- Guide students to take as much time as they need to make themselves comfortable in Savasana. Offer any modifications or other posture options to support them.

Lighting and temperature

- Dim the lights or invite students to place an eye pillow or a yoga strap over their eyes.
- If the space is cool, turn the temperature up or remind students to cover up with a blanket.
- The body has a natural tendency to cool down during relaxation. Have extra blankets available.

Voice quality and rhythm

- Speak in a soft, gentle voice that is loud enough to be heard.
- Speak slowly and clearly in a natural rhythmic flow.
guiding relaxation

**Heavy/light body weight**
- Begin the relaxation with a sense of the body being heavy.
- Ask the students to feel the weight of the body sinking down into the ground.
- As they go deeper into relaxation, the body will feel lighter, as if it’s floating. This feeling happens naturally as students let go of tensions.

**Staying awake/falling asleep**
- After your students get settled, suggest that they allow their minds to remain passively alert and aware as their bodies let go and relax. This will increase their chances of staying awake throughout the entire relaxation period.
- Many people fall asleep in relaxation. On some days, students will be able to go deep and yet remain passively aware of all that is happening by remaining in Witness Consciousness.
- Reassure your students that if they do fall asleep during relaxation that it is not necessary to try to figure out why. Encourage them to be aware and trust that the body is doing exactly what it needs to do.

**Breath awareness**
- Guide the students to watch their breath as it flows in and out.
- Encourage them to notice the point at the tip of the nostrils, where the breath comes in and goes out; the temperature of the breath; the difference between the temperature of the inhalation and the exhalation; and the rhythm, depth, and sound of the breath.
- Explore having them hold the breath in for a short time at the end of the inhalation, or hold the breath out at the end of the exhalation, without creating any tension.
- Ask them to release all control of the breath and simply be with what is.

**Feel-good assists**
- The beginning of guided relaxation is an optimal time to walk around and offer hands-on feel-good assists to students.
- Make sure to signal your approach with the palms rubbing together or a loud ujjayi breath, as students can get startled when they do not anticipate your presence.
- Complete your assists five minutes into relaxation to allow for an ample time of total quiet and stillness. Explore guiding the beginning parts of the relaxation as you walk around and assist.
Quiet and stillness

- When you feel that your students are deeply relaxed, you may notice a quality of profound stillness in the room. Continue to sit with intention and hold the space for them to rejuvenate and heal.

- During this time, explore offering silent blessings and well-wishes to your students.

Handling noise and disturbances

- Prepare the room’s environment in advance by doing your best to minimize loud noises or disturbances (doors opening or closing, phones ringing, loud voices next door).

- If distracting noises do occur, give the class some gentle guidance, such as “Allow yourself to experience the sound as vibration, and let it take you even deeper into yourself. Let go of any resistance to outside sound and simply allow it to pass through your awareness and let it go.”

Coming back

- Be sensitive in the way in which you bring students out of relaxation.

- Take your time without rushing. For example:
  “Slowly bring your awareness back to the body. If you need a few more moments of rest, stay where you are. Otherwise, deepen your inhalation. Gradually allow your fingertips and toes to awaken and your facial muscles to squeeze and release. Take any other waking movements: stretch your arms overhead, breathe, yawn, or sigh. [Pause for a 10-15 seconds.] Slowly, hug your knees and roll over to [right side in morning practice to honor solar hours, or left side in evening practice to honor lunar hours]. Take a moment here to offer your body gratitude and, keeping your eyes closed or soft, slowly press one hand to the ground and rise up to take a comfortable seat.”

- Once in a seated position, lead students in closing pranayama, meditation, or any other rituals to complete your class.