

*Ngũ Phan is wearing  
Men's Tonic shorts  
in taupe!*

master class

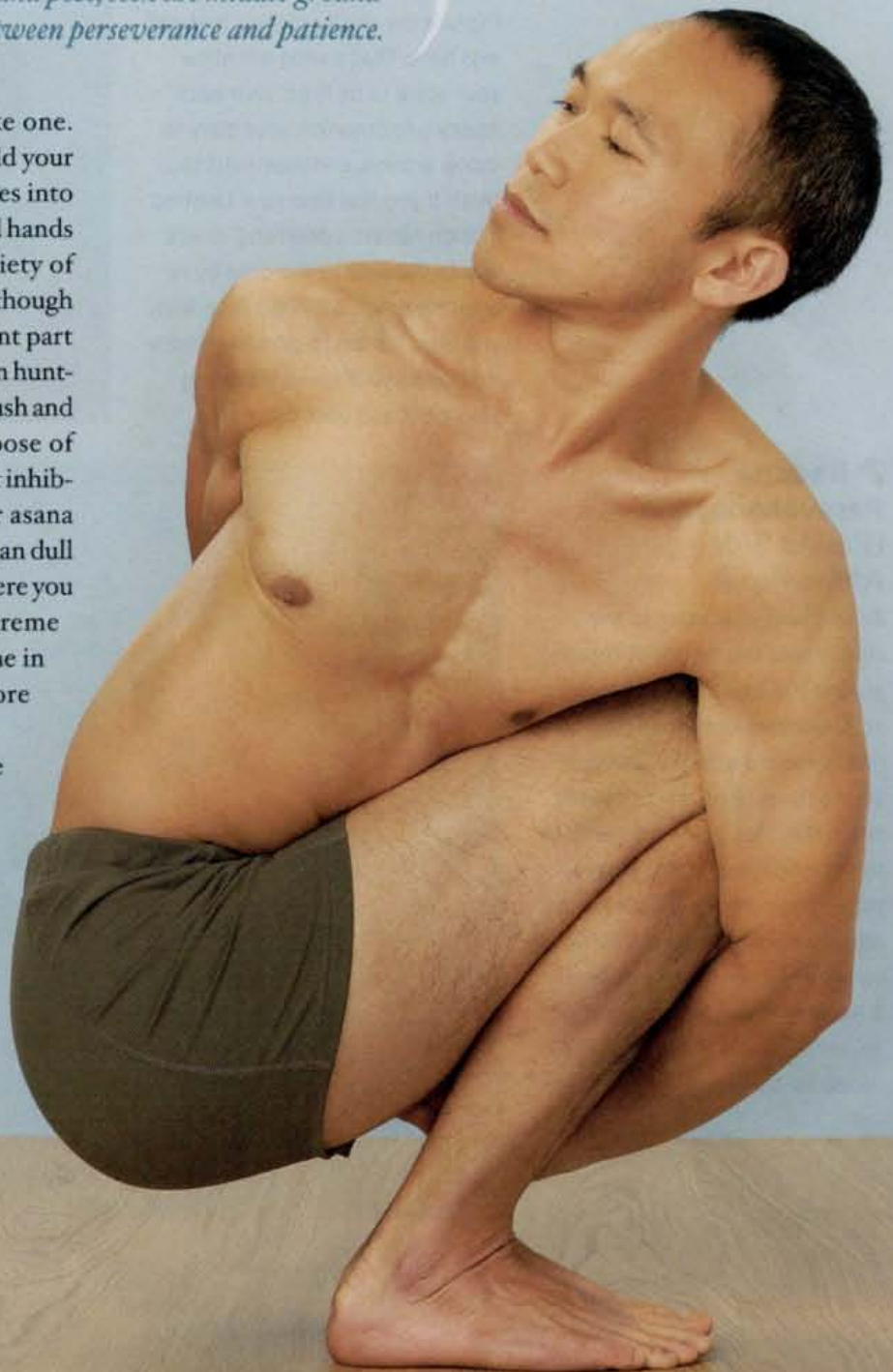
with Cyndi Lee

# a beautiful bind

*To move with grace into this  
bound pose, seek the middle ground  
between perseverance and patience.*

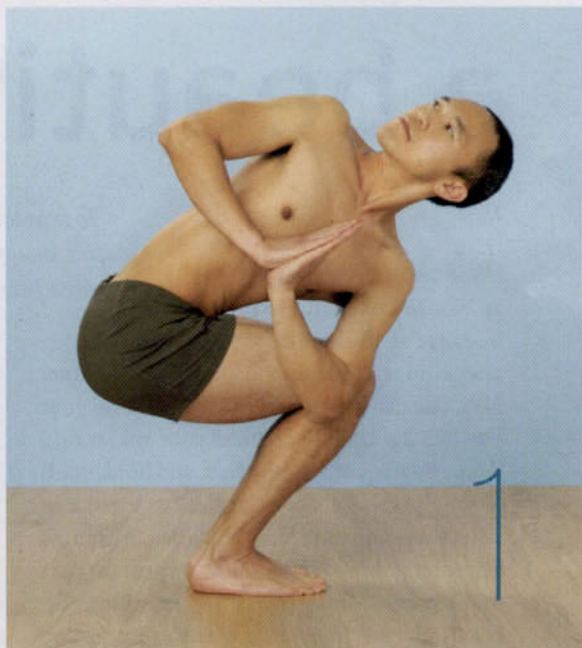
**Pasasana** is translated as **Noose Pose**, but just because it looks like a noose doesn't mean it should feel like one. Still, you can be sure that when you fold your legs like a grasshopper, bend your ankles into a superlow squat, twist in half, and hold hands with yourself behind your back, a variety of sensations and emotions will arise. Although examining those feelings is an important part of the yogic process, beware of sensation hunting. Notice whether you instinctively push and pull on yourself until the grasping noose of your arms becomes like a scary vice that inhibits your breathing. Struggling in your asana practice like this leads to injury, and it can dull your natural sensitivity to the point where you don't feel anything at all without extreme effort. The whole idea of yoga is to tune in to yourself so that you can create more **sensitivity to subtlety**—not less.

At the same time, Pasasana is a pose that requires some perseverance. If you are too passive as you practice, you will miss the vibrant aspect of juicy exertion that strengthens your muscles.



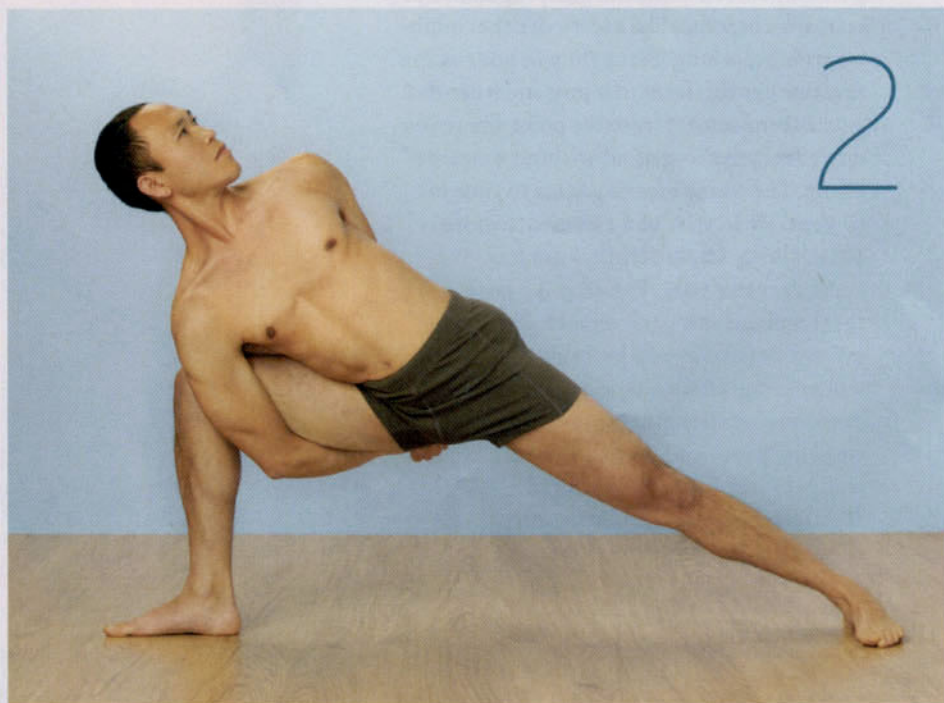
**1 Parivrtta  
Utkatasana  
(Revolved Chair Pose)**

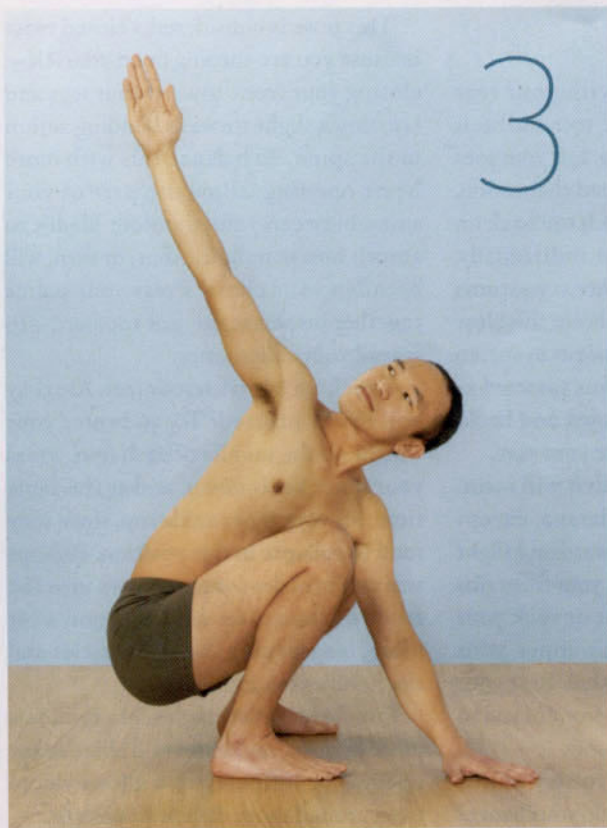
Explore the clarity of your feet and legs here. That's what will allow your spine to be fluid, your back muscles to broaden, your belly to scoop around, and your twist to... twist! If you feel that your twisting motion has hit a dead end, check in with the seat of the pose by re-creating precision in the feet, legs, and hips. It's fun to discover where that takes your spine, including your neck and your gaze.



**2 Baddha  
Parsvakonasana  
(Bound Side  
Angle Pose)**

As you lean your torso to the side, create the feeling of rotating around the axis of your spine, as if your ribs were the spiraling colors around a barber's pole. If your bottom hand doesn't easily reach the floor, place it on a block to get a bit lower in the pose. How amazing that you can hold hands with yourself like this! Or can you? Either way is just fine. A healthy mix of patience, curiosity, honesty, and ambition is the recipe for this pose.





( benefits )

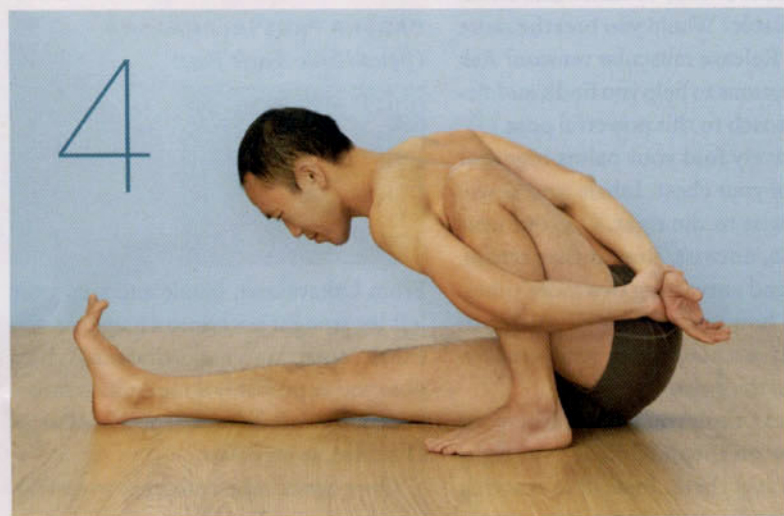
- Strengthens ankles
- Lengthens calves and Achilles tendons
- Creates suppleness in the spine
- Improves digestion

( contraindications )

- Ankle injuries
- Pregnancy

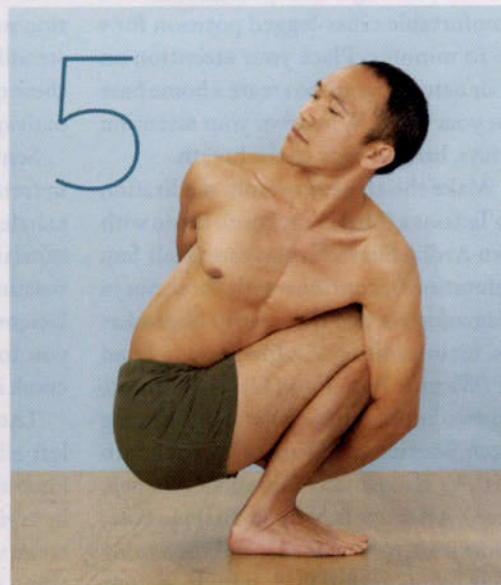
**3 Malasana (Garland Pose), variation**

If this pose is easy for you, then commit yourself to staying engaged in mind and body. If it's challenging for you, create the support you need—place a block under your seat or a blanket under your heels, or widen your stance—to be able to truly inhabit the experience of Malasana. This pose provides valuable work in preparing the legs for Pasasana, so it's important that you are present with what's happening in your body.



**4 Marichyasana I**

Before you fold over, review the internally and externally rotating actions of the arms here. The internal rotation is key to finding your bind. It's OK if the hip of your bent leg comes off the floor a little bit. Don't worry about that. Over time—or over a lifetime—it will eventually come back down. If it is so far up that you feel you might tip over, put a blanket under it.



**5 Pasasana (Noose Pose)**

After all your preparation, take the time to carefully construct this pose. Start by sitting on a block near the wall. First, twist with one arm between your legs and one hand on the wall. Stay there and clarify the precise work of the lower body. When you feel that your breath, spine, abdomen, shoulders, and attitude are not too tight and not too loose, go to the next stage in your process of growing Pasasana.

☉ The solution then, is to look for the middle path, the place where you walk the line between too much effort and complete passivity. You tap into the middle path by listening to your body, moving with sensitivity, and engaging with what's happening. You often hear the phrase "being present to the moment." What this really means is being part of the moment. This happens through the middle path of commitment, patience, and listening.

The Buddha offered insight into this process. The story goes that a musician asked the Buddha how he should meditate. The Buddha replied, "How do you tune your instrument?" The musician said, "Not too tight, not too loose." The Buddha said, "Exactly like that." If you learn to apply this to Pasasana, your noose will evolve into a warm feeling of being held and supported by yourself and by your healthy, wakeful, engaged practice.

#### BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Before you begin this practice, sit in a comfortable cross-legged position for 5 to 10 minutes. Place your attention on your natural breath to create a home base for your mind. Whenever your attention strays, bring it back to the breath.

Make the transition from meditation to Tadasana (Mountain Pose). Begin with two Ardha Surya Namaskars (Half Sun Salutations), continue with three Surya Namaskar As, and three Surya Namaskar Bs, incorporating Virabhadrasana I and II (Warrior Pose I and II). From there, do two more Sun Salutations, moving from Warrior I to Warrior II, then into Utthita Trikonasana (Extended Triangle Pose). After five breaths in Triangle Pose, come back to Warrior II, and then bring your hands to the floor and drop your back knee down into Anjaneyasana (Low Lunge). Stay there for five breaths, letting your front knee move ahead of your front heel. Step back into Adho Mukha Svanasana (Downward-Facing Dog Pose), then jump forward and finish your Sun Salutation until you come all the way back to Tadasana. Repeat the sequence on the other side, starting with Warrior I and ending with Anjaneyasana.

#### PARIVRTTA UTKATASANA

(Revolved Chair Pose)



Stand with your feet together, toes and heels touching. Lift your toes and spread them wide. Place each toe back on the floor individually, letting them touch each other as you press them firmly into the floor. From this clear connection to the earth, begin to soften the knees, moving the shins forward as the upper thighs move down and back. Lift your arms up alongside your ears.

Your spine, ribs, and pelvis will maintain the alignment of Tadasana, except that you will be leaning forward on a slight diagonal. If you notice that your front ribs are popping out, don't tilt or tuck your pelvis; instead, move your upper arms slightly forward on a diagonal. Rest your gaze on something right in front of you so that your forehead can be soft.

Now imagine you had to stay in this pose for an hour! What would you change? What would it take to make this situation workable? Would you breathe more steadily? Release muscular tension? Ask these questions to help you find a middle-path approach to this powerful pose.

Sensitively fold your palms together in front of your chest. Inhale, and as you exhale, twist to the right. On your next inhalation, untwist. Repeat that action, twisting and untwisting two more times. Discover how much is truly available to you today without using your arms to crank into the twist.

The next time you twist, place your left elbow on the outside of your right knee and stay there. Instead of reacting by trying to fix or change your position, treat whatever is happening as something interesting. Take a look down at your feet and align your nose over your big toes—that's how you can tell if you are accurately rotating around the axis of your spine.

Check to be sure that your knees are even, and if your left knee is in front of your right knee, draw your outer left hip crease back. When your body is organized, turn your head and look to the side or up to the sky.

This pose is considered a closed twist because you are turning in on yourself—closing your front toward your legs and creating a slight forward bending action in the spine. To balance this with more heart opening, allow the part of your spine between your shoulder blades to absorb into your body; that, in turn, will broaden your chest. Press your palms together just enough—not too hard—to spread your collarbones.

Check back in with your feet. Are they still firmly planted? Try to center your weight on the middle of each foot. Press your inner heels down, and at the same time, lift your inner ankles up, since they tend to collapse in this position. Perhaps you can breathe some softness into the front of the ankles so they bend a bit more, lengthening the calf muscles and the Achilles tendons.

Stay here, breathing evenly for a few more breaths, and observe if there is any opening or softening that allows you to twist around more. Inhale to untwist.

#### BADDHA PARSVAKONASANA

(Bound Side Angle Pose)



From Utkatasana, inhale and step your left leg straight back into a lunge. As you exhale, open into Virabhadrasana II. It's a pose you've probably done a zillion times, but you haven't done this specific Warrior II before, so stay alert.

Once again, take a moment to feel the weight of your feet on the floor. Soften your neck and jaw. If you find just the right amount of exertion—not too much and not too little—you might feel as though you could stay here forever, sitting confidently in the saddle of your warrior seat.

Before moving into Baddha Parsvakonasana, you'll need to create some fluidity, awareness, and precision in your shoulders, chest, and upper back through a series of arm rotations. Rotations of the arms and legs always begin at the root of the limbs. Invite the inner lower edges

of your shoulder blades to move toward each other, lift your armpits, and roll your shoulders back to create external rotation of the arms. Your palms will rotate up, and your chest will feel more expansive. Reverse that by separating the shoulder blades and rolling the shoulders forward, turning the palms back. This is internal rotation, which closes off the chest and broadens the upper back.

Continue the rotations, inhaling as you externally rotate your arms and exhaling as you internally rotate them. Notice which way is easier for you and if that changes as you repeat this action 6 to 10 times, ending in external rotation.

Straighten your legs for a moment as you exhale, and rest here for two more breaths. Then inhale back into Warrior II. Exhale, bend to the right, and place your right forearm on your right thigh. Extend your left arm straight up to the ceiling and internally rotate it. Bring your left arm around your back and hold on to the top of your right hip crease. If this is too intense, place your hand on your sacrum instead. If this is easy for you, dip your right shoulder under your right knee and internally rotate your right arm. Reach up between your legs, and try to take hold of your left wrist with your right hand.

Go only as far as you can without distorting the lower-body alignment of Virabhadrasana II. So, if you have to stick your bum way out to reach under your leg, it means that binding the pose is not available to you today. If that happens, it's OK. Just notice it, rewind, and find a middle path that balances your ambition with healthy sensation.

**MALASANA** (*Garland Pose*), variation



Slowly unbind out of Baddha Parsvakonasana by spinning your chest toward the floor and placing both hands to the inside of your right foot. Lift your left heel and bring your foot forward, coming into a wide variation of Malasana.

If your heels don't touch the ground, place a folded blanket underneath them.

Fold your palms together in front of your chest. Imagine that you have a giant yoga block between your lower legs. Squeeze that block. At the same time, press your thighbones away from each other—this is more an action than a big movement. Feel how these actions release your back muscles and give you a sense of lift and support in your spine.

Move your breath through all the nooks and crannies of your legs. Imagine your wind energy is like a warm, friendly breeze blowing through the grand canyons of your groins. Can your breath help you find the middle path within a challenging position? Maybe it can create space in your mind, which in turn can create space in your hips.

Breathe in and place your left hand on the floor a few inches in front of the right foot. Exhale and twist to the right as your right arm floats up diagonally away from your left. Make a fist with your right hand. Then spread your fingers wide. Harden them together like you're doing a karate chop. Collapse them like wet pasta. Now find your middle-path hand that feels alive but not aggressive, not too tight and not too loose.

Exhale back to the center, roll back onto your sitting bones, and have a seat.

**MARICHYASANA I**



Extend your legs in front of you and roll them in and out a few times. Then sit up tall with your hands by your sides in Dandasana (Staff Pose). If your pelvis tucks under, sit on a block or blanket so that you feel your sitting bones rooting down into the earth. Bend your left leg and place your left heel on the floor as close to your left sitting bone as possible. Make sure there is some space between your left foot and right thigh. You can measure this by making a fist with your left hand and placing it in the space between your left foot and right thigh.

Lean forward and extend your left arm way out in front of you, creating a lot of

length along your left side. Internally rotate your left arm and wrap it around your left leg. Reach your right arm out to the side, internally rotate it, and twist to the right slightly, taking your right arm around your back. If possible, hold on to your right wrist with your left hand. If you can just barely touch two fingers, then forget it. That's too much tension, and all your attention will be centered on that little finger drama, which will eventually turn into a shoulder drama, neck tension, jaw gripping, and—well, you see where this is going. Find the middle path of connection without grasping. If you can't reach, use a strap and wait for your body to open naturally in the pose.

Stay here for a few deep breaths, finding stability and equanimity. The abdominal work in this pose is an essential part of the preparation for the deep twist of Pasasana, so let's take a moment to create some clarity around this process.

From where you are, completely relax your belly. Observe what that feels like. Then activate your abdominals as strongly as you can and feel that. You will probably notice that both of those experiments feel imbalanced. When you completely harden your belly or don't use it at all, there is no movement available. Now try to engage the outer abdominal wall of muscles just enough to allow the inner belly—organs, fluids, connective tissue—to be mobile. A middle-path belly is healthy and useful.

Begin to fold forward over your long right leg. Take your time and feel how, with each breath, you might be able to go a little farther, even if the distance covered is invisible to the human eye. Review the work you did with the feet in Utkatasana, and make sure that your left foot is evenly centered on the floor and not rolling out to the left.

After five to eight breaths, inhale and release the pose. Rock forward onto your hands and step into Downward Dog. Step or jump forward into Uttanasana (Standing Forward Bend). Inhale to Utkatasana, and repeat the whole sequence to the other side, doing Parivrtta Utkatasana, Virabhadrasana II to Baddha Parsvakonasana, Malasana, and Marichyasana I.

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## PASASANA (Noose Pose)



Extend your legs into Dandasana, and send some refreshing breaths into your ankles, knees, and hips. Bring your knees into your chest,

rolling back on your exhalation and forward on your inhalation. The last time you rock forward, come up onto your feet into a low squat.

Start by doing a variation of the pose. Squat with a block or a wall about one foot behind you. Organize your legs and feet just as you did in Utkatasana, heels and toes touching. If your heels do not touch the ground in this position, slip a folded blanket underneath them.

Exhale and twist to the right. Place the outside of your left shoulder between your legs. Internally rotate your left arm and wrap it around your left leg. Reach your right arm behind you and place it on the block or touch the wall. After a few breaths, untwist and try the other side. Continue to work this way until you feel an opening to go farther.

To develop the full pose, use your abdominals to twist to the right again, but this time place your left shoulder on the outside of the right thigh. Strongly activate the inner thighs and cinch your legs together. Internally rotate both arms and reach around behind your back to bind. Use a strap if you can't reach. Eventually, you will hold your right wrist with your left hand. Try to find a way to hold hands with yourself so the noose can be more a garland of flowers. After a few breaths, release the pose and do the other side.

As you work on Pasasana, take time with every step of the process. Listen to your muscles, bones, connective tissue, breath, and mind. They will all have valuable suggestions for when you should engage more effort, let go a bit, or perhaps just stay where you are, waiting to see what unfolds. Eventually your experience of physical feelings in your asana practice will evolve into an evenness of sensation throughout your entire body.

Often when you feel intensity in one particular area, it draws all your attention there. The entire mind becomes occupied

by the little drama of the right shoulder, and you may forget you even have a whole body. Doesn't that sound similar to how we sometimes live life, getting stuck in the small stuff and missing the big picture? When we do that, we have a harder time keeping things in perspective and making smart choices.

Rather than going for extremes, see if you can discover subtle shifts that might begin to even out your various sensations as well as your responses to sensations. Find balance by letting your awareness spread through your whole body. Observe what happens with your breath and your mind as your body finds balance and creates a container—not too tight and not too loose—of equanimity.

## FINISHING YOUR PRACTICE

After Pasasana, have a seat, extend your legs in front of you, and roll them in and out a few times. Have two blocks and a blanket nearby. Come into Baddha Konasana (Bound Angle Pose). Place the folded blanket on the floor behind you and slowly lie back on it. Tuck the back of it under your neck so that your forehead is higher than your chin. Place the blocks under your thighs and relax here for at least two delicious minutes.

Use your hands to draw your thighs together, and remove the blanket from underneath you. Bend your legs and place your feet flat on the floor. With your arms alongside your body, inhale and lift up into Setu Bandha Sarvangasana (Bridge Pose). Stay for three breaths and exhale down. Do either Urdhva Dhanurasana (Upward Bow Pose) twice or Bridge two more times. Then take Happy Baby Pose, pressing your sacrum into the floor. Rock side to side for a back massage. On an inhalation, rock up to sitting. Organize your blanket setup for Salamba Sarvangasana (Supported Shoulderstand) and stay for 10 breaths. Slowly roll down, and then lie in Savasana (Corpse Pose) for 10 minutes. ❖

*A longtime hatha yoga and Tibetan Buddhism practitioner, Cyndi Lee created OM Yoga in 1998. She has written several books and teaches around the world. For more information, visit [omyoga.com](http://omyoga.com).*



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I've lost weight and my energy is way up. I just love how I feel.

—Linda W., medical doctor, Marinette, Wisconsin

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