



Karuna Yoga Newsletter

Issue no: 20

November 2008

Why Do We Dislike Certain Postures?

Many students experience negative feelings for certain yoga postures but the very postures we hate are some of the most valuable ones for us to practice.

So why would you want to practice postures you dislike? For one thing, these postures often specifically address your physical imbalances; they build strength and flexibility in exactly the places that need it most. If you sit hunched all day in front of a computer, backbends may be difficult for you, but they're also just what your body needs. Or maybe years of running have left you with tight hamstrings making forward bends difficult.

But where do you start? The thought of forcing yourself to do one of your least favourite postures probably feels discouraging.

Consider the following steps for transforming your relationship with these postures:

- **Identify Your Discomfort.** Think about why you dislike a posture. Does it cause you physical discomfort or even pain? Many students say Sarvangasana (Shoulderstand) and Halasana (Plough) make them feel claustrophobic. Others complain that their breathing feels constricted in twists, or that they just feel stuck in some forward bends and backbends. You might hate a posture because you worry about harming yourself: hurting your lower back in backbends or straining your neck in Shoulderstand. Over time, you should be able to reduce and maybe even eliminate these discomforts.
- **Use props and posture variations.** You may realize that you already know variations and props to make a posture you find difficult much more accessible. Take small steps toward the posture without trying to do the full position.
- **Repeat, repeat, repeat.** Instead of holding a posture for a long time, do it briefly but move in and out of it frequently in a single practice session.
- **Create a supportive sequence.** This can consist of just a few postures, or you can develop a lengthy series that helps prepare your body for a posture you struggle with.
- **Improve your alignment.** Ask your teacher for feedback about your alignment too. You may be surprised to discover how much easier a posture becomes once you improve your alignment.

As you confront your fears, finding new ways to do previously hated postures, you'll discover the exhilaration and empowerment that comes from facing difficulty. Remember that you're only human; taking on more than one or two hard postures at once might discourage you from practicing. Always include some of your favourite postures in your yoga practice. After all, these are still the postures that are most likely to bring you to your mat and provide you with the relaxing, comforting, and even joyful experiences that are as much a part of yoga practice as the challenges are.

If you need help with any difficult postures please be sure to ask for my assistance.

Contact Lynne at lynne.gully@iremia.net or Tel +302892042356

Posture of the Month – Ustrasana (Camel posture)

In this asana, you bend back until the shape of your body resembles that of a camel – *ustra* means “camel” in Sanskrit. Ustrasana is recommended for beginners, as well as for the elderly, because the balance of the final posture is relatively easy to attain. The asana also helps people in sedentary occupations, whose work entails bending forward for long periods. Practising the asana regularly will relieve stiffness in the back, shoulders and ankles.

Technique

1. Kneel on the floor with your arms by your sides. Keep your thighs, knees and feet together. Rest on the front of your feet, with the toes pointing to the back. Keep your torso upright and breathe evenly.
2. **Beginners:** if keeping your knees together leads to a feeling of strain in your thighs, practise with your knees slightly apart. This also allows for a freer movement of the spine.
3. Place your hands on your hips so that your thumbs are resting in the dimples in your lower back. Push your thighs forward and then pull them up toward your groin. Push your spine into your body. Squeeze your shoulder blades together and move your elbows back. This extends your ribcage and broadens your chest.
4. **Beginners:** Keep your hands on your hips and concentrate on lifting the chest area. Stay in the posture for three breaths and then come out of the posture.
5. **Intermediates:** Curl your toes under so that your heels are lifted. Lift the chest and bending back carefully take your hands to your heels. Make sure that your thighs are perpendicular to the floor. Take your head back as far as possible but take care not to strain your throat. Stay in the posture for five breaths.
6. **Advanced:** keep the front of your feet on the floor. Push your shoulders back and stretch your arms from your shoulders toward your feet. Inhale, throw your head back and hold both heels with your hands. Keep your thighs perpendicular to the floor. Push your feet down on the floor. At the same time, slide your hands over your heels to cover your soles fully. Tighten your buttocks and pull in your tailbone. Stay in the posture for five breaths.
7. To come out of the posture, place your hands back on your hips and carefully lift your head and straighten your back. Sit back on your heels and relax.

Cautions

- Do not practise this asana if you have severe constipation, diarrhoea, migraine or high blood pressure.

Benefits of this posture

- Helps to correct posture.
- Increases lung capacity.
- Improves blood circulation to all organs of the body.
- Tones the muscles of the back and spine.
- Removes stiffness in the shoulders, back and ankles.
- Relieves abdominal cramps.
- Regulates menstrual flow.
- Tones the liver, kidneys and spleen.

