

*Intermediate Level Practice*

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Sequence created and modeled by:

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Photography:

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Lou Hoyt started practicing yoga in 1980 and opened her studio, Eastern Sun Yoga, in Memphis, TN in 1987. She continues her study of yoga by attending classes in India at the Ramamani Iyengar Memorial Yoga Institute (RIMYI), most recently in February 2017. Patricia Walden has been her most inspiring and motivating teacher and Lou continues to study with Patricia yearly. Lou is an assessor for Iyengar yoga teaching certification and offers teacher training and apprenticeship programs. For more information go to [easternsunyoga.com](http://easternsunyoga.com)

The Iyengar family and my trips to India have been a broadening and positive influence on my life. The Indian culture is beautiful, exotic, and enigmatic with many parts difficult to understand as a westerner. I love being in a country so different from mine and the backdrop to my yoga learning. I've written about being in an asana and smelling cardamom from a nearby home cooking a meal, the beautiful scriptures of Hindu gods anywhere you look, and rickshaw rides with a Ganesha on the dashboard.

What brought me to Pune and India was to study with the Iyengars. Their brilliance of teaching and interpreting the asana practice as a way of life was what I wanted to keep learning for the rest of my life. In the presence of BKS, Geeta, Prashant, or Abhijata, one is demanded to be totally present and to do and be all you can be in that moment of practice. It is a total experience where learning, exploration, and integration never ends.

This past February, Geeta, who was not in good health, met with the students on Tuesday and Thursday afternoons to teach us Sirsasana (*no one was teaching correctly anywhere in the world*) and Sarvangasana (*everyone is using too much height*). She was definitely on a mission to correct the teaching of these two important poses and in the process, her old fire would rise up as she wanted us to learn and understand. It is quite touching as a student to feel how much she wants us to learn. That comes across in all the Iyengars' and their teaching.

The following practice comes from my interpretation of what was taught and how to integrate that into poses and a practice my students here at home can do. Some are modified from how they were taught but the principles are the same and I am seeing great progress with my students as a whole. There is a better understanding of the base of these two poses, the prep work to open the shoulders and chest, the use of the legs, upper body strength and opening for an upward extension of the spine, and the work and practice required to feel the integration of these two poses physically and mentally.

Approximate Time: 1.5 – 2 hours

Props required: 1 mat, 1 strap, 1 chair, 2 blocks, 3-4 blankets, 2 bolsters

*Tadasana*



- Shoulder blade awareness on the back ribs and drawing the outer shoulder blades forward (back armpit forward).
- Feel the lift of the rib cage and lift of the chest.
- Lengthen the mid-sternum up towards the head.
- Broaden the collar bones and take the trapezius down the back.



- Standing in *Tadasana*, place a rolled mat under the right armpit.
- Roll the right upper arm out and hold the right upper arm with the left hand. Use a belt if you can't get left arm around to right.
- Feel the outer shoulder blade pinning in, the chest opening, and collar bones broadening as the trapezius lengthens down the back away from the base of the neck.

*Baddhanguliyasana*



- Two times each side to lengthen the side body and open the shoulders and chest.
- Elbows in.
- Pin outer shoulder blades in.

### *Virabhadrasana II*



- Extend arms up to create length in the side body.
- Pump up and down with bent front leg.

### *Utthita Parsvakonasana*



- With practiced length in side ribs and chest, come into the pose.
- Back foot grounded and leg extending to get maximum length in the torso.

### *Parsvottanasana*



A.

Right arm held by left hand, repeat the actions experienced with the rolled mat under the arm in *Tadasana*:

- Roll the right upper arm out feeling the outer shoulder blade pin in, the chest opening, collar bones broadening, and trapezius lengthening down the back away from the base of the neck
- Go forward to first stage of the pose.
- Keep thighs firm and lifted to bone, hips level, side body long, and upper back moving in for length in front body.

Modification: if unable to hold right upper arm, place a looped strap at the wrist or mid-forearm and press out into the strap to feel the above upper body actions.



- B.
- Classical pose from first stage to final stage.
  - Upper body awareness and actions as above.

*Salabhasana*



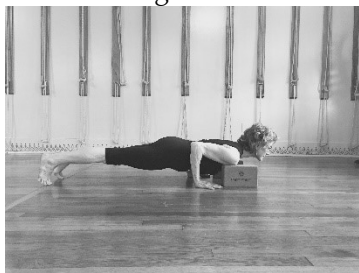
- With a strap on the wrists, extend arms toward the feet.
- Press outward into the strap to lift the chest, broaden the collarbones, and move the trapezius away from neck.

*Dhanurasana*



- Same emphasis on lifting chest, broadening collarbones, and trapezius moving down away from neck, feeling movement in upper back and shoulders.
- Use hands and arms to draw the legs up.

*Chaturanga Dandasana*



- A.
- With shoulders on blocks:
- Lift the thighs and knees away from the floor.
  - Extend calves through the inner heels.
  - Balance the lift of the abdominal wall with the tailbone movement toward the floor.
  - Broaden the collarbones.
  - Move the trapezius away from the neck.
- B.
- Classical pose practicing above actions in the upper and lower body.

*Adho Mukha Svanasana*



- Bring length to sides of trunk and rib cage.
- Shoulders opening.
- Knees and elbows firm with straight arms and legs.

*Adho Mukha Vrksasana – 3 Ways*



A.

- Sit in *Dandasana* with feet to wall.
- Turn over and put hands where buttock bones were.

B.

- Walk feet up the wall to get length in sides of trunk, lift out of shoulders, and opening of chest.

C.

- Walk feet down the wall so legs and trunk form a right angle.

D.

- Classical pose at the wall, lifting out of shoulders and pelvis.

*Sirsasana Preparation*



- Elbows at wall.
- Block turned to thick side, horizontally across shoulder blades.
- Lift knees and hips.
- Thighs firm to bone and draw thigh bones up into sockets.
- Let head release down as shoulders open and shoulder blades move into the back.

*Ardha Sirsasana*



- Begin sitting in *Vajrasana*.
- Mentally review outer shoulder blades forward, chest lifted, collar bones broad, and trapezius down the back and take that into set up for *Ardha Sirsasana*.
- Once head is on the floor, maintain all these actions before going up.
- In the pose, maintain broadness of collar bones, inner forearms down, and inner shoulders lifted.

*Sirsasana*



- Classical pose with above actions at wall or middle of the room.

## Setu Bandha



At the wall with 2 bolsters:

- A. *Chatush Padasana*: Fingers under heels or use a strap around ankles.
- B. Repeat A for more lift in chest and middle buttock.
- C. Place both feet up on bolsters. Lift back body and chest. Shoulder blades up. Come more onto back of arms. Use strap on wrists or interlace hands for more lift of back ribs, lift of shoulder blades, and lift and opening of chest.



D. Repeat above and bring hands to back ribs. Feet up on bolsters. Lift heels for more lift of back ribs and chest. Repeat and bring feet to lower bolster and finally to floor, continuing to use the hands to lift the back ribs and shoulder blades, lift and open the chest and broaden the collar bones. Strap can be used on upper arms.

If bolsters are not available, a chair can be used for *Setu Bandha*.



## *Salamba Sarvangasana*



## Setup with head toward wall:

- Sit in *Dandasana* with feet to wall to measure set up distance from wall.
- Shoulders go where buttock bones were in *Dandasana*.
- With a bolster behind back, roll feet and legs up to wall and walk up the wall to lift the trapezius and shoulder blades up toward ceiling. Place strap on arms.
- Once lift of back body comes, feet and legs come away from the wall.
- Note: If too far away from the wall, come down and move closer. The idea is to get lift of the back body with support of the feet on the wall.

*Salamba Sarvangasana* dropping to  
*Setu Bandha*



- 2 bolsters at the wall.
- Sit in *Dandasana* with feet to wall to measure set up distance from wall.

- Shoulders go where buttocks bones were in *Dandasana*.
- If too close, move back a little.
- From *Halasana* to *Sarvangasana*, get lift of back body, back ribs, and shoulder blades and opening of the chest.

- Bend knees.
- Keep middle buttocks and chest lifted as the feet come down to bolsters.



- Repeat and as able, remove bolsters one by one and drop to the floor.

*Savasana*



Legs up on 2 bolsters or a chair.