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Photography: Fritz Partlow, Introductory II CIYT at Unity Woods Yoga Center

Lori Lipton Ritland has been studying Iyengar Yoga for nineteen years, teaching in Washington, DC, Maryland and Virginia. She continues to study and practice with, as well as assist, John Schumacher weekly at Unity Woods Yoga Center. Lori is also influenced by Lois Steinberg and has studied with the Iyengars both in Pune and here in the U.S. She has been committed to supporting and uplifting aspiring teachers.

Lori has a B.A. from the University of California at Berkeley and a Masters from University of Texas at Austin. She currently resides in Arlington, Virginia. This Summer 2018, Lori and her family will be relocating to Santa Cruz, California.

INTERMEDIATE SEQUENCE FOR MENTAL AND EMOTIONAL BALANCE

'Peace in the body gives poise in the mind,' B.K.S. Iyengar

I live a few miles from the Nation's Capital. Life is extremely busy here. I primarily teach at the Unity Woods Yoga Center in Arlington, Virginia. My students mostly attend class anonymously. Some of my students have been studying with me for over a decade, and throughout this journey together, life experiences are often revealed: Many who attend class work for the federal government as lawyers for The Justice Department, foreign service officers, or staffers for the House and Senate; some are scientists, environmentalists, doctors, and some are not able to say what they do for a living.

We live in a stressful environment with huge work demands and subtle and sometimes not so subtle political undertones to our lives. I have practiced and taught Iyengar Yoga through Presidents of each political party. Presidents and Administrations come and go. So not matter what the political winds bring, Unity Woods has been a constant for many decades.

We need our yoga!

In class, we all strive to clear our *citta vrttis*. And we practice with discipline and sustained effort. *Tapas* – burning off impurities through disciplined practice is a guiding principle in my teaching. It is so important for my students to bring the physical, emotional and mental, intellectual, and blissful effects of their practice from the mat – to their lives off the mat.

No matter what your zip code is, these asanas provide a powerful practice to bring poise to the body and mind. As we move through this winter season, the sequence is designed to support the immune and nervous system, to calm the mind, and to create clarity and emotional balance.

This is an intermediate sequence. The instructions below will enhance and guide you. The basic actions of the asana must come from your own knowledge and *sādhāna*. The sequence does not include contraindications or modifications for injuries.

Each of these asanas is positively essential to my physical, mental and emotional well-being. I cannot say enough how important these poses are to my overall practice. As I began to describe one after the other, I kept wanted to say, 'I love this asana because...'

Thank you to my friend and colleague, Fritz Partlow, CIYT, for performing *seva*, giving of her time and talent to photograph the asanas.

Give yourself 75 minutes for the practice – if you have more time, then 90 minutes.

	<p>Props: One mat. Chairs: at least one, two if you have. Blankets: at least four wool or five white Pune blankets. If you do not have enough blankets, a bolster will suffice. Two blocks. One strap.</p>
<p><i>Adho Mukha Śvānāsana</i> Downward Facing Dog Pose</p>	<p>At the wall with support: blankets, block, or bolster.</p> <p>Turns the hands out, index finger and thumb at the wall.</p> <p>Come to the full pose with the hands at the wall, then add and adjust the support under the head to ensure you do not collapse the shoulders and neck into the support. The head will rest somewhere between the crown of the head and the forehead.</p> <p>Turn the upper arms out, and do not lock the elbows. Lift the knee caps and press the thighs back. The work of the arms and legs lengthen the sides of the body and enable the head and neck to release. Observe and pacify your sense organs. Soften the abdomen. Focus on your breath.</p> <p>Cools and quiet the brain and the eyes. Helps overcome fatigue.</p> <p>3-5 minutes, as your capacity allows.</p>
<p><i>Uttānāsana</i> Intense Pose</p>	<p>Shoulders supported on two chairs. Folded or rolled blankets on chair seat for shoulders. <i>If you have only one chair, follow the below instructions for using the high blocks.</i></p> <p>Stand with feet hip width apart, facing the two chairs. Bend forward and position shoulders and upper arms on the support. Add height if the shoulders do not rest evenly.</p> <p>Lift the knee caps and keep the legs straight. Be aware of not pushing the knee joints back faster than the front thighs. Align the hips over the ankles.</p> <p>Relax neck and allow the head to hang, crown of the head towards the floor.</p>



Inhale, lift the head and trunk. Come up slowly with the head in line with the shoulders, dorsal spine in, to lengthen the sternum forward and up.

Soothing to the nervous system.
Cooling to the eyes and brain.
Lessens fatigue and refreshes the mind.

3-5 minutes

Alternate *Uttānāsana* with high blocks



If you do not have the two chairs, place the HIGH blocks outside the little toe side of the feet with the elbows aligned over the wrists.

The high blocks allow for greater lift of the shoulders and complete release of the neck.

Flatten the palms and widen the elbows. Lift the shoulders up away from the ears and relax the neck, allowing the head to hang.

3-5 minutes



***Sālamba Śīrṣāsana I*
Headstand**



Against the wall for balance if needed.

The King of all asana.

Provides fresh blood flow to the organs and cells of the body.
Nurtures the eyes, the brain, the seat of intelligence.

Builds endurance.

Tones and strengthens the nervous system.

Supports the immune system.

Builds emotional strength.

5 minutes minimum

Dwi Pāda Viparīta Daṇḍāsana
Supported Two-Legged Inverted Staff
Pose



Two chairs if you have, otherwise, one chair with two blocks for the feet at the wall. Blankets or bolster so there is enough height to support the crown of the head. Have a strap and another blanket close by for possible adjustments described below.

Sit backwards in the chair, placing one leg at a time. Hold the sides of the chair back, lift your chest and move the shoulders blades and dorsal spine into the back. Arch your torso back and move your hips towards the wall and lower your torso and head towards the floor. Rest the crown of your head on the blankets or bolsters. If your neck feels constricted, lower the height under the head. Bring the feet to the second chair. Straighten your legs. Rotate your upper arms, as in *Sirsāsana*, and reach your hands to the front chair legs. Pull gently with hands to further expand the chest. Soften the muscles of the face. Breathe deeply.

To come out, bend the knees, bring the feet to the floor and your hands to the top of the chair back. Come up with mindfulness, raising the sternum. Sit quietly with your chin slightly down towards your chest.

Relaxes, revitalizes, and creates alertness in the mind and body.
Builds endurance.
Supports emotional strength.
Pacifies the eyes.
Reduces tensions

2.5 - 5 minutes



If you cannot hold the front chair legs, use a strap for the hands. If your elbows do not descend to the floor, place a rolled blanket under the elbows.



If you have only one chair, place the blocks at the wall for the feet. And if your shoulders do not feel comfortable with the strap, place the hands between the chair legs as in *Sālamba Sarvāṅgāsana* on the chair.

Sālamba Sarvangasana on Chair

Entire Body Supported Pose
(Supported Shoulder Stand)



Place a mat on the chair seat. Do not put the chair on a mat. Fold the blankets length wise (landscape) in half –two or three stacked. A horizontal bolster can also be used.

Sit on the chair seat with the legs bent over the chair back. Guide your hands down the front chair legs and release the shoulders to rest on the support as you do in *Sālamba Sarvāṅgāsana I*. Place the back of the head on the floor. Avoid coming down on the top of the head, it will put pressure on the neck.

Place your arms, one at a time under the chair seat, inside the chair legs and hold the back legs of the chair. If this is not possible, hold the closer chair legs near the seat. Rest the sacrum on the chair. If you are tall, you may need to put a blanket on the chair seat. Expand the chest by pressing the outer upper arms down. Avoid pressing the back of the head into the floor. Release the chin towards the chest.

Extend the legs, spreading the toes.

Soften your gaze and relax the muscles of the face.

To come out, bend the knees and rest the feet on the top of the chair back. Release your arms from under the chair. Guide your hips and legs away from the chair seat towards your head. Slide off the chair. The hips can rest on your support with knees bent over the chair for a few minutes.

Cools the brain and quiets the mind.

Soothes the nervous system.

Rests the heart.

Supports emotional stability.

5- 10 minutes

Ardha Halāsana on Chair

Variation of *Halāsana*
Half Plough Pose



Use the same blanket or bolster set up for your shoulders as in *Sālamba Sarvāṅgāsana I* on the chair, and add one more blanket so there is not compression in the neck and the torso gets the lift it needs. The chair is placed close to the back of the head.

You must place a block or bolster in front of your blankets to assist in getting the legs over to the chair. Do not hold the chair legs to swing the legs up, as the chair may topple.

Lie back on your support, place your hands by your hips. With your buttocks on the block or bolster, press the hands down into the floor and swing the legs over head to the chair. Be careful to not roll your shoulders off your support. Adjust so you are on the top of the shoulders. Place your arms over head with the elbows bent and rest your forearms and back of the hands on the floor.

Rest the thighs on the chair, with the thighs parallel to the floor, and the feet slightly lower. If you are tall, place blankets or a bolster on the chair seat to raise the height.

To come down, slowly release the legs towards the head and roll down. Take care to not lift the head and hit the chair seat. Rest on your back with knees bent.

Relaxes and rejuvenates the nervous system.
Refreshes the mind.

5 minutes

Setubandha Sarvāṅgāsana
Supported Bridge Pose



Two blocks for your feet and strap for the thighs. The support for the body should be based on your flexibility. If you are not stiff in the back then four gray blankets or five white Pune blankets are the maximum height used. Otherwise, three gray or four white, etc.

Stack the blankets so the top blanket has a slight inward step to ensure the set-up moves with the curve of your back. Strap your legs above the knees. Begin with your feet on the floor, straddling the blankets. Sit in the middle of the set up. Arch back and lower the shoulders and head to the floor. The top edge of the blanket should rest as close to the dorsal spine as possible. If your shoulders are stiff, and do not descend easily, a folded blanket can also be placed under the neck and head. Once the shoulders are down, raise the legs and place the feet on the wall. Hold onto the bottom blankets and slide just enough away from the wall so the feet are flush on the wall and the legs are straight. Take care to not push yourself off your blankets. Bend the arms gently over head with the palms up. If that is not comfortable on the shoulders, place the arms down by the sides, as in *Śavāsana*.

Opens the chest and supports the lungs and deeper breathing.
Relaxes and refreshes the mind and body, helps the body overcome fatigue.

Creates quietness and alertness in the mind.

Supports emotional strength.

10 minutes

Viparīta Karaṇi
Reverse all limbs pose



I consistently hear from students that this is a go-to pose when they feel fatigued. Place a block against the wall as a spacer. Use two or three folded blankets or bolster, and strap for the legs.

Sit sideways on the support, with one hip off the blankets and dipping down towards the block. Swing your legs up and your trunk around so the legs are vertical and your trunk perpendicular to the wall. Shoulders and head on the floor. Strap the legs to hold them together, heels against the wall. The lower back, lower ribs, and upper buttocks are on the support. Tuck the shoulders under and move the trapezius muscles away from the neck. Bend the elbows and rest the arms to the side, palms facing upward.

To come out, bend the knees, slide off the support, towards the head. Once the hips are down, roll to the side and come up slowly.

Expands the chest and supports deeper breathing.

Helps recover from fatigue.

Soothing to the nervous system.

Energizes the feet and legs.

Builds confidence.

5- 10 minutes

Paschimottanāsana

Intense Pose of the Back of the Body
(the west side of the body
is stretched intensely)



Blanket or bolster height as you would for *Dandāsana* if the lower back and sacrum are stiff and forward bends are challenging. Bolster or folded blankets for the forehead. The forehead can also rest on a blanket placed on a chair seat. Blocks at the appropriate height to support the elbows which helps the pose to be more restorative. Strap around the feet if you need.

Begin sitting in *Dandāsana*, raise the arms up and come forward holding the feet or strap, concave back. On an exhalation, extend the trunk and head forward with the elbows out to the side and on the blocks for support. Rest your forehead on the blanket/bolster support, so there is softness in the back of the neck.

Press the center of thigh bones and top inner knees down, and extend the inner leg through the inner ankles. The legs can also be kept slightly apart.

Brings stillness to body and mind.
Cools the brain and soothes the eyes.

5 minutes

Upaviṣṭha Koṅāsana Seated Angle Pose



Blankets or bolsters as needed bring the pelvis upright. May need blocks under the hands for support.

From *Dandāsana*, spread the legs wide and bring each heel to a balanced spot on the mat or floor. If you are sitting on height, sit towards the edge of the support to descend the thighs. Center the thighs and balance the inner and outer thighs. Straighten the legs by pressing the center thighs down and the top inner knees down. Spread the toes and lift the center of the arches up. Extend the inner ankles. All ten toes point up. Sit upright on the sitting bones, moving the sacrum in and lengthening the lumbar spine upward. Place the hand by the sides of your hips and press the palms into the floor (or blocks if needed) to lift the spine up and spread the chest.

Focuses and creates alertness in the mind.
Brings peace and steadiness to the mind and body.

5 minutes

Baddha Koṅāsana
Bound Angle Pose



Blankets or bolster as needed for sitting

Sit on enough height so the knees remain to the level of the waist or below. Sit towards the edge of the support to descend the thighs. Bend the knees; join the soles of the feet and the heels. Bring the feet as close in to the body as possible. Press the feet to lengthen the inner thighs and move the knees closer to the floor. Lift the trunk and balance your skull with evenness in the sides of the neck. Lengthen the back of the neck to the base of the skull. If the hands do not easily grip the feet, place a strap around the outer edges of the feet and hold the strap.

Brings alertness to the spine and the mind.

3-5 minutes

Śavāsana
Corpse Pose



Blanket on the mat, head support if needed, eye cover. *Śavāsana* is often considered the most difficult pose of all. Take time to align yourself, as once the physical body is aligned the physiological, emotional and mental self can let go.

Bend your knees, feet together, and move the flesh of the buttocks away from the low back. Look down the body and adjust yourself from the nose through the navel, knees and inner edges of the feet. Extend the legs out straight with the feet together. Look again to make sure your legs remain in line with the torso. Lengthen the back of the neck with your hands. Then, hold the edges of your blanket and gently turn the upper arms out and move the skin of the upper back down. The sternum lifts and the chest opens gently. Let go of the blanket and turn the palms upward, slightly away from the sides of the body. The blanket support under the head should rest under the neck up to the shoulders, with enough height so the chin drops below the forehead. Cover the eyes to keep the senses quiet.

Look inward with your mind's eye and let go of the limbs, the abdomen and allow your body to surrender to the Earth. Spread the back of the skull and invite the brain to rest back. Relax the feet, so the big toe falls to the little toe side of the foot. Let go of the arches of the feet and make the palms open and receptive. Keeping the gaze inward, begin to deepen your attention into the body and follow the flow of the breath. Without adjusting the breath, just observe the relaxed flow of inhales and exhales. Eventually, you might be able to move beyond the breath and find a quiet space to surrender completely. If your mind wanders, acknowledge your thoughts and let them float away like a gentle breeze. Turn your attention back to the breath, as many times as it takes. Be at rest.

Relaxes the body and the mind.

Refreshes the body and the mind.

The perfect completion of this balancing practice.

5-10 minutes