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Nancy Mau is an Intermediate Junior III Certified Iyengar Yoga Teacher (CIYT), a Certified Yoga Therapist (IAYT), and a practicing attorney. Her introduction to yoga began with an Iyengar Yoga class at Stillwater Yoga Studio in Atlanta, Georgia nearly 25 years ago - where she now teaches. In 2002, Nancy began traveling regularly to RIMYI in Pune, India to receive the teachings of B.K.S. Iyengar, his daughter Geeta and son Prashant. A teacher since 1997, she has mentored many aspiring teachers and those pursuing certification, has served as President of the B.K.S. Iyengar Yoga Association of the Southeastern United States (IYASE) and was among the faculty of the Southeast Iyengar Yoga Conference in Washington, D.C. She is most grateful to her teachers, especially Patricia Walden, Manouso Manos and Kathleen Pringle, whose example has inspired her to continue on this path.

This sequence is for those practitioners learning to clasp in Marichyasana III.

“You must break the body into pieces to get peace of mind.”
Geeta Iyengar, Yoganusasanam, December 2015, Pune India.

Often in our practice of *asana* (postures) we become so focused on the technical aspects of achieving the shape that we become fixed and rigid as a result. This immobility can keep us from progressing, from experiencing the full expression of the pose, and from observing the elemental body – *akasha* (space) for instance. An example of this is attempting to clasp in a seated twist.

Bharadvajasana is a concave twist unlike Marichyasana III which is a convex lateral twist. A convex lateral twist requires us to become smaller and more compact in order to twist the torso toward the bent leg. To clasp the arms, we must further minimize the space between the limbs and the body, becoming even smaller and more compact – *anima siddhi* (the mystic power of minuteness). How do we become small and compact enough to bend the arms behind us and clasp?




Geeta Iyengar has often said that in order to understand a complicated pose we have to break it down into parts and make it less complicated. We may need to “de-centralize” by making more space between the limbs or by taking more height at the base. Height and space is often the answer for overcoming obstacles in our *asana* practice. Work smarter rather than harder. “Undo in order to do.”

In this sequence, we will “un-do” the twist in order to clasp. As Prashant Iyengar says, “I am not telling you what you should be doing. I am telling you what you should also be doing.” This is intended to supplement what you already know. I borrowed all of these techniques from my studies with the Iyengars and my many wonderful teachers. Any mistakes are completely my own.

Approximate time for entire sequence: 1.5 – 2 hours

Suggested props: sticky mat, 2-3 blankets, 1 belt (as needed), 1 block (as needed).

For modifications: a wall and a tressler.

<p><i>Adho Mukha Virasana</i></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sit on your heels with your knees apart and big toes touching, extend your trunk and arms forward and place your forehead on the floor. As you move your shoulder blades away from your head and neck, gather the latissimus dorsi muscles toward the spine to open the front chest.• <i>Note:</i> Geeta Iyengar uses the term “cinch” the outer corners of the back ribs in toward the spine to refer to the action of “gathering” or engaging the latissimus dorsi muscles - like apron strings tied at the back. We will observe this action and its effects throughout the sequence.
<p><i>Dandasana</i></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Sit straight in <i>Dandasana</i>.
<p><i>Parsva Dandasana</i></p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Turn to your right, using your right hand on the floor behind you and your left hand against your outer right thigh (palm up or down) maintaining the extension of your inner legs.• “Cinch” the outer corner of the right ribcage in toward the spine to keep the body from tilting backwards. At the same time, spread the muscles on the left side of the back away from the spine to move the left side trunk closer to your inner right thigh. The result is a deeper twist with less effort and a spreading of the consciousness from the center to the sides.• Repeat the above turning to the left.

Adho Mukha Svanasana



- Straighten your arms and legs. Press your whole palm down to lift and extend the sides of your trunk, move your thighs front to back and lower your heels. Draw your floating ribs in and up toward the spine as you compact your outer hips and elongate your lumbar spine.
- Maintain that as you “cinch” the outer corners of your back ribs to the spine to move your dorsal thoracic spine to the sternum and open your front chest.

Urdhva Hastasana Palms forward



- Stand in *Tadasana*, also called *Samasthiti*, evenly balanced side to side with your arms and legs straight. Descend your shoulder blades and gather the latissimus dorsi in toward the spine to open your chest without pushing the lumbar, floating ribs or diaphragm forward. Relax your eyes, throat and jaw.
- Externally rotate your arms and raise them overhead, palms facing straight ahead of you.

Urdhva Hastasana Palms up/Fingers back



- Repeat a second time, turning the palms to face the ceiling with your fingers pointed backwards.
- Concentrate on keeping the upper arm bones fixed in the shoulder sockets as you raise your arms and lift the sides of the chest up to take the arms higher rather than lifting the arms only.

Gomukhasana



- Maintain all of the above and bend your left arm placing your hand high up on your back. Take time with this step of fixing the lower arm and repeat it a few times to bring clarity to the rotation and movement of the lower arm. Keep the lower arm fixed against your back as you extend your right arm up, externally rotating it as you bend it to keep the outer elbow in and upright. Clasp the fingers or hold a belt.
- Without disturbing the floating ribs or lumbar spine, move your upper arm bones front to back and your back armpits forward to help balance the collarbones. Cinch in the outer corners of the ribs toward the spine, bring your tailbone forward (into the body), and move your head back into your hands to open the front chest.
- Release the arms and return to *Tadasana*. Repeat these steps bending the right arm behind your back and extending the left arm up.

Parivrtta Hasta Padangustasana

At wall



- Stand in *Tadasana* facing a wall. Stabilize the inner and outer heel of the standing leg as you extend the right foot to the wall, holding the foot with your left hand. Use a belt as needed.
- Compact your outer hips and resist turning them as you rotate your chest to the right – bringing your left side chest in line with your inner right thigh. Extend your right arm to the wall behind you.
- To keep your trunk from tilting away from the wall: keep the shoulder blades fixed on the back ribs as you “cinch” the latissimus dorsi muscles on the right back ribs in toward the spine. This will move the dorsal thoracic spine in and help keep your spine straight. Releasing the left side will bring a better rotation of the chest.
- Repeat on the other side – balancing on the right leg as you revolve the torso to the left.

Utthita Trikonasana



- From *Tadasana*, jump your legs wide apart and turn the left foot in and the right leg out. Press your feet down to lift your legs and side chest up, extending your arms sideways from the center of your chest. Observe whether you are balanced side to side. This is *Parsva Hasta Padasana*.
- As you descend your shoulder blades, engage the latissimus dorsi muscles and move your tailbone into the body. Compact your outer hips.
- Extend your trunk to the right, spreading your arms - right hand to your shin and left arm to the ceiling.
- Retrace your steps and come out of the pose. Repeat on the left side.

Utthita Parsva Konasana



- Be in *Parsva Hasta Padasana* on the right side. Bend your right leg until the shin is perpendicular to the floor, extend your trunk to your right thigh as you place your right hand on the floor and stretch your left arm overhead.
- Form a “lock” between your right arm and right leg by keeping the hand as close to the leg as possible and as you push your knee into your arm, resist with your arm to bring your right ribs to the front and left chest to the ceiling.
- Retrace your steps to come out of the pose. Repeat on the left side.

Parsvottanasana



- From *Tadasana*, bring your arms into *Paschima Namaskarasana*. Press your hands together and move your upper arm bones back and your back armpits forward to spread and open your chest as you did in *Gomukhasana*.
- Jump your legs wide apart and turn your feet, hips and shoulders to face your right leg right.
- Standing evenly on both legs, compact your outer hips and raise your sternum as you descend the shoulder blades to lengthen your anterior spine.
- From the stability of your outer back heel, extend your trunk forward over the right leg, placing your head on your shin.
- Stabilize your legs and outer hips as you raise your trunk up and turn your feet to face the front. Repeat these steps on the left side, return to *Tadasana* and then release and extend the arms.

Parivrta Trikonasana






- From *Utthita Hasta Padasana*, turn your feet, hips and torso to face your right leg as you did for *Parsvottanasana*, extending your left arm forward and your right arm back, palm facing away from you.
- Compact your outer hips and extend your trunk forward in line with the right thigh, placing your left hand to the floor outside your right foot. You can place your hand to the inside of the right foot if necessary.
- Use your left arm against your right leg as you did in *Utthita Parsva Konasana* to help stabilize your shoulder blade and use your discernment to engage the back body: what parts move in toward the spine and what should release and spread to balance the effort?
- Return to *Utthita Hasta Padasana* and repeat, turning to the left side.

Parivrta Parsva Konasana



- From *Tadasana*, go to *Parsva Hasta Padasana*.
- Bend your front leg as for *Virabhadrasana II*. Then, keeping your back heel on the floor, rotate your hips, chest and shoulders to face your right leg – this pose is called *Vimanasana*. Take a couple of breaths.
- Compact your outer hips as you turn your trunk to the right aiming your left ribs at your right thigh. Extend your left arm as far to the right as you can to help turn the chest and place your left upper arm against the outer right thigh.
- Make two or three attempts at this stage: press the left arm to the right thigh to lengthen the side chest and twist to the right as you move your left hand to the floor. Simultaneously, push your right knee into your left arm to turn the ribs more to the right.
- Extend your right arm over your head as you take the back of your head toward the back heel.

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Re-trace your steps and return to <i>Utthita Hasta Padasana</i>. Repeat these steps on the left side.
<p><i>Pariivrtta Parsva Konasana - Part 1</i> With bent knee</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Repeat the pose as above up to the <i>Vimanasana</i> stage and then carefully bend the knee of the back leg to the floor. Bending the back leg will give stability, allowing you to deepen the twist and reach your hand to the floor. • Again, make three attempts: push the arm against the leg to lengthen the side body and twist as you extend the hand to the floor. • At this stage, you can try moving your hand further back – away from your bent leg – and externally rotating it to bring your armpit closer to the bent leg. Geeta says the arm will now be as in <i>Sarvangasana</i> (Shoulderstand).
<p><i>Pariivrtta Parsva Konasana - Part 2</i> Back heel lifted, arm farther back</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To complete the pose, tuck your toes under and lift the thigh from the floor (your heel will be lifted from the floor) as you twist and bring your arm overhead, the back of your head to your back heel. • Come out by returning to <i>Vimanasana</i>, <i>Virabhadrasana II</i>, <i>Parsva Hasta Padasana</i> and <i>Utthita Hasta Padasana</i>. Repeat all the steps on the left side.
<p><i>Pariivrtta Parsva Konasana - Alternative</i> Modified at the tressler</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To modify the pose using a tressler, you can start with your back to the tressler or face the tressler, my preferred way of doing, depending on what support you require. You can use a block for the hand or sit on a chair.

Salamba Sirsasana I



- Do *Sirsasana* and the variations in the center of the room.
- Alternative: If you need a wall for balance, take the hands all the way to the wall. For the variations at the wall, first do *Parsva Sirsasana* (not pictured) and then proceed to *Parsva Virasana* in *Sirsasana* and *Parivrttaikapada Sirsasana*.
- Establish your base for headstand and go up with both legs together (straight or bent). When attempting variations, the base must be strong.
- Alternative: If it is not possible to hold a five-minute headstand, then stay in straight *Sirsasana* and work on the base intelligence as you increase your time. Or, you can do *Prasarita Padottanasana* or *Rope Sirsasana* as a variation in this sequence.

Parsva Virasana in Sirsasana



- In *Sirsasana*, maintain the lift of the inner shoulders as you bend the legs as in *Virasana*. Move the sides of the waist front to back and move the middle buttocks in as you lengthen the front thighs to the ceiling.
- Turn your legs from left to right, bringing the feet closer and closer to the front of the room – the direction you are facing.
- Return to the center.
- Repeat to the left side.

Parivrttaikapada Sirsasana



- In *Sirsasana*, re-establish your base intelligence and without disturbing it, spread your legs apart evenly taking the left leg forward and the right leg back. From your base, lift your side chest up, compact your outer hips as you move your middle buttocks in. If you are at the wall, turn your legs first as for *Parsva Sirsasana* and then spread the legs apart (left leg forward and right leg back) keeping the front leg near the wall.
- Turn your legs from left to right and bring your back leg closer to the front of the room and your thighs closer and closer together.
- Turn back to the center and bring the legs together in *Sirsasana*. Then separate the legs evenly again this time with the right leg forward and left leg back. Turn to the left. Then return to *Sirsasana* and stay for one minute before coming down with the legs together (bent or straight). Rest in *Adho Mukha Virasana*.

Salamba Sarvangasana I



- Establish your foundation. Use a belt. With an exhalation, first go to *Halasana* and place your belt on your arms, then go up to *Salamba Sarvangasana I*. Be in *Salamba Sarvangasana I* for five minutes.

Salamba Sarvangasana II



- From *Salamba Sarvangasana I*, remove your hands from your back and interlace your fingers. Turn your thumbs toward your spine, then down to the floor and finally out toward the center of the room. Squeeze your arms together and move them to the floor. As you extend your thumbs and forearms, draw the upper arm bones toward the shoulders, bringing your shoulder blades in, as you extend up through your legs. This will help bring your outer shoulders in and take you higher on the shoulders. Compact your outer hips and lift your anterior spine to make the legs lighter.
- Bring your hands to your back, change the interlace and repeat the stages. Return to *Salamba Sarvangasana I*.
- Alternative: In *Halasana*, turn the arms as in *Salamba Sarvangasana II*.

Parsva Halasana



- From *Halasana*, without disturbing the base, lift your legs one by one and walk them to your right side. Bring the feet together and balance evenly on both feet. Press your feet and lift the thighs and hips up as you compact your outer hips. Return to the center and re-establish your base. Then walk the feet to the left side. Return to *Halasana* and come down out of the pose. Rest there for a few breaths.

Upavistha Konasana Part 1



- From *Dandasana*, spread the legs apart and balance the weight evenly between both legs and both buttocks, extending the inner legs to the inner arches. With your chest well lifted, descend your shoulder blades and move your dorsal spine to the sternum. Draw the lower abdomen in and up and descend the buttocks.

Upavistha Konasana Part 2 Forward bend



- Maintain the above as you extend your trunk forward and hold your big toes. Challenge the arms with the big toe metatarsals to bring your shoulder blades into the back ribs and lengthen your anterior spine. Place your head on the floor if possible. Release the big toes and stabilize your base as you return to the seated position.

Parsva Upavistha Konasana



- Sit upright in *Upavistha Konasana*
- Without disturbing the base, turn your trunk toward your right leg. As you move your ribs from left to right, extend through the inner left leg and keep the left buttock reaching for the floor. Use your left hand on your outer right shin to turn the ribs more as you extend your spine forward over the right leg. Rest your head on your shin.
- Return to *Upavistha Konasana*.
- Repeat the steps turning to the left side.

Parivrta Upavistha Konasana



- Sit upright in *Upavistha Konasana*.
- Without disturbing the base, rotate your trunk this time to the left and extend your right arm to catch your inner right foot, your elbow to the floor, aiming your right-side chest at your inner right thigh. Your thumb will face the floor and little finger facing the ceiling. Use your right elbow against the knee to move your back ribs to front and then upward, like you did in *Utthita Parsva Konasana*.
- Extend your left arm over your head and hold the outer edge of your right foot. Both thumbs will face the floor and both little fingers will face the ceiling. Holding the foot, bend and separate the elbows from one another and move your head back.
- Geeta says to hold the foot like you are holding the foot of the Lord.
- Turn to face the floor and sit up.
- Repeat all steps holding the left foot.

Marichyasana I - Part 1 Bent arm



- Sit in *Dandasana* on the height of 1-2 blankets and bend your left leg placing your foot close to the perineum – further to the left if your leg tilts outward. Press your left inner and outer heel to the floor, descend your inner left groin and outer left hip and lengthen your spine to the crown of your head.
- With an exhalation, twist to the right – placing your left upper arm against your inner left thigh and your right hand on the floor behind you.
- Press your inner left foot down and move your left knee to your left shoulder blade.

Marichyasana I – Part 2 Extending arm to foot



- From here, reach with your left hand to catch your outer right foot and holding the foot, extend your left side trunk forward to turn your ribs from left to right. Aim to move your armpit and shoulder blade beyond your bent knee.
- Maintain this extension of the left side trunk as you pin the left knee to the shoulder blade firmly.

Marichyasana I – Part 3
Clasping fingers



- Keep the left knee fixed to your left side chest as you turn your arm and bend it behind the back.
- Then, twist to your right and wrap your right arm around to clasp the fingers at your back.
- To clasp the wrist, cinch in the outer corner of the right ribs toward the spine as you release the muscles on the left away from the spine. You may notice one arm moves more easily toward the other, spread the fingers on that hand to extend it toward the other.
- In *Light on Yoga*, BKS Iyengar says to clasp the right with the left or vice versa in all the twists.

Marichyasana I – Part 4
Clasping wrist, forward bend



- Finally, while still clasping, align the torso with the *Dandasana* leg and extend forward over the leg. Take your head to your shin.
- Return to *Dandasana*.
- Repeat Parts 1, 2, 3, and 4 on the other side.

MARICHYASANA III
STAGES FOR CLASPING

Each variation below brings a different result and you may find that one works better for you than another. If you are unable to clasp, practice them all. Try the “touch and go” method and repeat the actions rather than try to do them all at once on each side. Repeat all stages on both sides.

Part I
Preparatory Stage:
Lengthening Side Trunk



- Sit straight in *Dandasana* on one or two blankets. Bend your right leg and place the foot close to the perineum. Adjust the leg and hips as for *Marichyasana I*.
- With both hands on the shin of the bent leg, lift and lengthen your spine bringing the trunk closer to the bent leg.

**Part 2
Reclining**



- Recline backwards and draw your abdomen toward your spine as you turn your lower spine from left to right. Place your left arm against the outer right thigh to help maintain the twist as you sit back up. Do this 2-3 times.

**Part 3
Bringing Trunk Closer to Bent Leg**



- After twisting your lower spine in a reclining position, keep your left arm against the outer right thigh to maintain the twist as you sit up, bringing your trunk closer to your bent leg.
- Then, make 2-3 attempts to bring your armpit closer to the thigh and your left arm further down on the left thigh as you did in *Parivrtta Parsva Konasana*. You can release and twist to the left (left leg bent) or go on to the next stage.

**Part 4
Both Hands on the Floor**



- Maintain the stage above and lean toward the right until you can place both hands on the floor and turn both sides of your chest to face the right. Your upper spine will turn more. Walk your hands further behind you to maximize the twist. Again, use your left arm against the outer right thigh to maintain the twist as you sit up. Try to minimize the gap between the left side chest and the right thigh. Aim the torso towards the bent leg.

**Part 5
Hand to *Dandasana* Shin**



- Maintain the twist as you sit upright and work the left arm lower on the right leg by further minimizing space between the side chest and the bent leg as you did in *Parivrtta Parsva Konasana*.
- Reach your left hand to the outer shin of your *Dandasana* leg.
- This will help move the trunk closer to the bent leg.

**Alternative
Using a Wall**



- Sit in *Dandasana* on the height of 1-2 blankets about a foot in front of a wall. Bend your right leg as above. Twist to the right, bend your left arm and place it against your outer right thigh.
- Place your right hand on the wall behind you, with your fingers first facing the ceiling, then outward. Your elbow should be bent but not caught or stuck. Depending on your body, you may need to move your blankets closer or farther from the wall.
- Externally rotate your right arm until your elbow faces the floor, bring your right shoulder blade deeper into the ribs and cinch the outer corner of the right ribs toward the spine – releasing the muscles on the left away from the spine – as you move your trunk toward the bent leg.
- Return to *Dandasana*.
- Bend your left leg, turning to the left with your left hand on the wall and repeat.

**Part 6
Arm Internally Rotated
UN-Doing the Pose**



- From *Dandasana* bend your right leg and twist to the right side placing your left arm against your outer right thigh and your left side chest as close to the right thigh as possible. You may find it helpful to go through one or more of the stages above.
- Lean forward toward your *Dandasana* leg as if you were going to stand up on your left foot and catch your right outer shin with your left hand. Allow your right leg to also bend. Take two breaths.
- Internally rotate your left arm deeply until the elbow faces the center of the room and try to touch your inner left foot or ankle. This is the same action as the lower arm of *Gomukhasana*. If you can, thread your hand up between the right ankle and the *Dandasana* leg until you can reach your waist.

**Part 7
Clasping Fingers**



- Swing your right arm behind your back until the fingers touch. Perhaps you can even hook them together. Take a few breaths looking over your right shoulder.



**Part 8
Clasping Wrist**



- Once you can touch/hook the fingers, attempt to clasp the wrist. Hold either wrist. First, exhale sharply to release any gripping in your diaphragm, the muscles around the ribs and your throat. Turn your shoulders, neck and head to the right and try to reach your fingers toward the opposite wrist or push your hand toward the opposite wrist to be caught. Both arms and hands have a job to do.
- Release and return to *Dandasana*.
- Twist to the other side, left leg bent, and repeat Parts 1 to 8, as well as any desired alternatives.

**Alternative
Sticky Mat on Knee**



- If your arm is sliding and cannot maintain its hold on your bent leg, place a piece of sticky mat over the knee or just to the outer knee.
- Knotted belts around the knee (no photo) – with the knot giving added height to the knee – also work well to fix the upper arm to the outer thigh. This will keep your upper arm firmly against the outer thigh of the bent leg as you work toward clasping.

Alternative
Dandasana Leg Wide



- Taking the *Dandasana* leg away from the midline will bring a sense of space to the abdomen and lower spine.
- Try *Marichyasana III* this way while learning to clasp and see if the added space helps you to twist enough to clasp.

Paschimottasana
With or without head support
5 minutes



- From *Dandasana*, extend your arms overhead as in *Urdhva Hastasana*.
- Compact your outer hips, bringing maximum length to the spine as you extend forward from the sides of your chest and catch your feet (use a belt as needed).
- Bend the elbows and lift them as you rest your head on your shins.
- *Modification: sit on height with legs apart and use a blanket(s) to support your head.*

Savasana
10 minutes



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