

My Journey Into Creating a Home Yoga Practice

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”Why home practice? I think it’s only home practice. You go to class to get ideas, hear another voice, break open another way of seeing something. But without home practice, you have no way to digest it. Without making it your own, it doesn’t mean anything. Then it’s just an exercise class.”—Rodney Yee, yoga teacher, author and creator of The Gaiam Yoga Club

“But virtually all practitioners will tell you that a greater challenge lies in developing and maintaining a home practice. Beginners face the task of remembering poses to practice; more experienced students face the dilemma of deciding what emphasis to choose during any particular session. Even teachers and students with decades on their mat can be daunted by the difficulties of maintaining and renewing a home practice. Illness, family obligations, boredom, travel, and that universal bugaboo, a perceived lack of time: All these obstacles, and more, will inevitably appear.”—Judith Hanson Lasater, physical therapist, yoga teacher, author of Living Your Yoga

The big question for me is why establish a home practice? I go to a studio class almost every day. I practice yoga because it makes me feel awesome in my body-it’s akin to hitting the reset button on my life. It gives me a dose of patience, grounding and thankfulness.

So why is it important to have a home practice? I think the answer is subjective, but my goal is to bring yoga home with me and always have it. I lose the good vibe feelings almost as soon as I get in the car and drive home from a studio class. Is it possible to keep that peaceful, joyous feeling with me?

Cyndi Lee, yoga teacher, owner of OM Yoga Center and author of Yoga Body Buddha Mind, says, *”When you practice regularly, the effects of each session don’t have a chance to wear off before you come back to the mat. That consistency offers benefits that double and then double again.”*

Yoga asana is something I do at a studio and at the will of a teacher. I enjoyed how freeing it was to not have to listen to my own mind or body and do whatever a teacher had set up for class that day, yet I had this nagging feeling that I was missing out on the larger picture of what yoga embodies. I realized that I needed a home practice to progress further into developing myself, a teacher can’t do it all for me (even though I wished they could). Another reason I wanted to have a home practice was to be able to sequence appropriately for my body and play around with a few poses that don't always get focused on as much in classes.

How To Set Up For A Home Yoga Practice

I am a master at procrastination. So if I was going to set up a home practice, I was going to have to meet all of my excuses head on.

- **Figure out your excuses and come up with solutions:**

My excuses:

- I don't have the right props
- I don't have any time
- I don't have any space
- I don't know what to do
- I don't like it
- I am never alone in the house

How I addressed my excuses (these evolved as my home practice evolved):

- Bought a yoga chair, wooden blocks, and had to tell myself that it was ok not to have a set of wall ropes (first world problems)
- Made a list of times I could practice
- Made a paper copy of asanas, pranayama techniques, meditation techniques and mudras to reference and kept them accessible next to my practice space
- Reconsidered wants vs. needs
- Set up an easily accessible space

Yoga teacher, author and former editor of *Yoga Journal* and *Yoga International*, Linda Sparrowe, discusses her struggles with setting up a home practice. She said that she would forget how to practice, how to sequence types of asanas and wonder if she should start over—most days she would get frustrated, do pranayama, meditate, then make herself a cup of tea. She says:

In my desire to do things exactly right, I had somehow missed the point of home practice: it's personal. How could it be otherwise when its purpose is to cultivate an intimate relationship between the body and the mind through the agency of the breath; to cut through the noise and reconnect us with our true essence, our basic goodness? Instead, I had forged a rather tenuous union that was more like taking dancing lessons with a blind date—awkward and confusing with plenty of missteps and then surprising moments of rhythmic connection. I wanted that dance teacher (in reality my yoga teacher) not only to teach me the steps, but also to create the magic that would ensure a joyous and long-lasting relationship. I wanted one sequence I could do every single day to become a stronger, kinder and more spiritual person. Of course I somehow neglected to notice that all the meditating and pranayama I was doing—because I couldn't figure out how to practice yoga—was in fact my home practice.

One of my biggest fears with home practice is that I don't know enough. I didn't know enough about alignment, pranayama, meditation, chanting, the yoga sutras! That fear kept me from pursuing a home practice for years even though I desired to have a home practice. Knowing I had a deadline with this thesis made me get on my mat when I did. The only way to get over my fears was to do dive in.

Like Linda, my first challenge was letting go of the “shoulds” of a home practice. In my mind, a

home practice *should* be a 60-90 minute level 2/3 asana class that includes pranayama and end with a meditation before savasana. The sequence (which would change every time I practiced) should be set up prior to the practice and include challenging poses. I thought I needed a dedicated yoga room with all the props a studio has (yoga chair, wood and foam blocks, straps of varying lengths, bolsters, half rounds, slant board, books with pictures for references, blankets, an extra padded mat, wall space and ropes)! Maybe that's what my home practice could look like when my son goes to school for more than a few hours at a time and I get a bigger house, but for right now, that's not going to happen. Most people don't have that time, space, or energy to dedicate to a home practice that looks like that.

"The biggest misconception people have about a home practice is they think it should have the same degree of intensity and be as long as a regular class," Jason Crandell, yoga teacher. He goes on to say, *"It's a lot like cooking. Sure, you could make restaurant-caliber food for every meal but a piece of peanut butter toast will also sustain you quite nicely."*

Separating the needs from the wants became an exercise in aparigraha. I need yoga to quiet the mind and become whole, yet getting to my mat felt impossible. If I didn't get there, I couldn't feel the benefits. I needed yoga first to get to my mat. I could get lost in that conundrum for a while. Instead, I took a deep breath and thought about a Zen proverb: *Let go or be dragged.*

2. Setting up a space for practice:

"For some practitioners, simply stepping onto their mat or even the act of rolling it out signals their commitment to the practice. For others, the daily rituals of preparing the space." Linda Sparrowe

I live in a very small house. Finding space was very difficult with an active five year old wanting to set up Legos, blocks, train tracks and other objects of play on the floor. I started to use the space in between my dining room and family room for my practice when I was in teacher training. There was a tiny bit of wall space, large enough for my mat. If I removed the pictures hanging on the wall, it was a perfect place to practice my *ado mukha vrksasanas*, *pinca mayurasanas* and *viparita karani*s. The issue with being right there was that no one else in the family could be playing on the floor, the tv had to be off and no one could interrupt me. It made me feel tense because I wanted my practice to be perfect in this central location. It was also uncomfortable because if I wasn't alone, I felt like I was on display. I was located right next to doorway of the kitchen and basement. My mat, my written sequence, props and my body were in the way. It became so much of an inconvenience, physically and mentally, that I could not practice when anyone was home.

The only time I was alone was Monday thru Thursday, I got about two hours in the afternoon. Setting up on those days seemed like it would be easy. Only from my vantage point I could see toys that had been misplaced under the sofa, food bits under the dining room table, dust piles, cobwebs in a corner, etc. I was also right next to the kitchen. *I could just use a glass of water! Oh and I think I just heard the mailman deliver a package, I should just pick that up because it's raining outside...is the dryer still going? I don't want everything to get wrinkled. Maybe I can squeeze a run in before my practice and then use it as a cool down.* Pretty soon with all of my distractions, my two hours simply disappeared.

"I've been practicing for years on a sliver of floor between the fireplace and the coffee table

that's exactly big enough for a yoga mat. Even though it's more of a nonspace, all those practices have imbued it with a feeling that is really attractive to me.” —Cyndi Lee

After reading Cyndi Lee's quote about how her practice space is a sliver, it inspired me to think about my unused “nonspace”. I have about five feet between the bottom of my bed and dresser. There is a window on a perpendicular wall; next to it is enough wall space for me to practice inversions and narrow wall asanas. There is a very slim corner where an unused hamper that came with the house had been sitting unused for years. I cleaned it off, dusted the corner, put my yoga mats and props in the hamper, found a storage box, put my yoga blankets and remaining props in it. A little table had already been abandoned in that corner, it was perfect for my meditation cushion. Under it was space for a yoga wheel I wanted to play around with someday. My singing bowl, eye pillow, mala beads, tingsha and candle I put on top of the dvd player and cable box. I added a statue of Buddha's head so that when I looked at my “yoga corner” I would feel calm and maybe even inspired to practice.

This “nonspace” was neat, organized, private and always accessible; it wasn't prime real estate in my house so I didn't have to worry about moving my mat out of the way or being in the way of foot traffic. Food crumbs were no longer a problem. My son, Jackson, could still play and be active indoors while I practiced. Because it was a segregated spot in my home, I didn't have a birdseye view of things that needed to be straightened or cleaned up. I couldn't hear packages or mail being dropped off. I had found the perfect space! My new space gave me a place for everything my practice needed. I was able to practice with less distractions and guilt over controlling so much space in the house. It looked nothing like the fantasy yoga room my mind conjured up, but it was still perfect.

3. Finding time/Reorganizing Priorities

“Prioritize your practice in your ongoing daily schedule. That's the number one thing that gets me there. Nothing works better for me than a nonnegotiable time slot. If I've designated a chunk of time where practice is the only allowed activity, I get on the mat and see what happens.” —James Brown, yoga teacher

While trying to establish my home practice, I thought the only time I had was when my son went to school. I would rush to get him breakfast, have a cup of coffee, drop him off at school, rush home and try to practice—all moving as fast as I possibly could. Even after I moved my space to a less distracting area of my home, I would be too frazzled from hustling and bustling to get my son together and out the door on time—that I felt like I was still in a race when I finally did have the time for practice. I would look at the clock repeatedly and wonder if I had time to make a quick phone call, make a smoothie or tend to any of the things needed to run a household. It put undue stress on my practice. The anxiety also made home practice feel like something to check off of my to do list. It didn't feel as effortless as I needed it to be. In reality, getting to my mat was so much harder with my mind working against me. I needed yoga to do yoga!

RJonas advised in their blog on the IYNAUS website about home practice, *“First thing in the morning is good; wait until later and you might get caught up in your schedule. In the morning the body may be stiff, but the mind is quiet and receptive -- very important.”*

If I don't leave my bedroom first thing, it's as though my day hasn't really started and that time is still my own. Instead of getting up in the morning, getting a cup of coffee and starting

breakfast, I decided to stay in my bedroom and either begin my day with supine pranayama, meditation or just roll out my mat and start my asana practice. I found that first thing in the morning, I can simply practice without much thinking. I can be half asleep, in my pajamas and start on my mat. The fact that there is so little effort required to stumble a few steps to my mat and props makes a home practice that much more accessible.

4. Sequencing, also known as: Now I'm on my mat, what do I do?

“Even if you’ve established a strong desire and commitment to practice regularly, knowing which poses to do right now, for today’s session, is one of the most concrete challenges of a home practice.” Judith Hanson Lasater

The most difficult part of setting up a home practice was physically getting to my mat. My mind created as many excuses as it could to be anywhere but there. After that, figuring out what asanas to practice was the next most challenging aspect of home practice. I wrote out some sequences for me to follow. It was time consuming and I had to constantly look things up so that my sequence was as perfect as it could be.

“It can feel weird, silly, or confusing to practice without a teacher, but if you just “fake it ‘til you make it” at the beginning, you’ll soon be doing it for real. Getting to know your satguru, or inner teacher, takes time, so be patient with yourself. It’s ok to copy other people. Take notes on what you like in class or look online for inspiration.”—Linnea Vedder, Kripalu yoga teacher/artist/musician

It was difficult to see my notes while I was practicing without stopping, bending down, reading, standing back up and picking up where I left off—which made the flow of my practice choppy. Instead of being present with my mind, body and breath, I was concerned with what was next. That and my back often hurt a lot for the rest of the day. It was either me pushing too hard, bad sequencing, poor alignment, and/or I was forgetting that the point was to listen to myself rather than throw myself through an asana sequence in the name of getting it done. I had to stop and analyze what was going on (Did I follow the rules of sequencing? Was I compressing my lumbar spine and forgetting to lengthen the buttocks down? Were my low ribs jutting out? Was I not meant to be a teacher after all?). This struggle detracted from my practice, making me less inclined to want to practice.

“The brain is the hardest part of the body to adjust in asanas.”—B.K.S. Iyengar.

As a result, I temporarily got rid of formal sequencing on paper (when my confidence and home practice are more solid, I plan to come back to working on my own flows). Instead, I would do whatever I could remember. Not following my set sequence gave me pause to check in with myself before moving onto different asanas: *how did I feel today? Did I need a lift in energy or to slow down and get more grounded? What did I feel like working on? Could I breathe? Was my mind steady enough to meditate or did I need a more active asana practice?* This technique of what I refer to as “at will” asana felt very liberating most days.

I spent time practicing adho mukha vrksasana more days than not. It wasn't a pose I worked up to necessarily. I did it at the beginning of a practice, at the end or anywhere in between. Sometimes I did it for the energy lift. Often I left my mat out and popped into a handstand whenever I walked by my mat. I made mental notes on how it felt in the morning versus later in

the day, how it felt as the first asana, how was my energy after it? Was I more likely to be able to balance without the aid of the wall if I had warmed up first? Where did I need to cue myself? That single pose embodied everything a yoga practice meant to me. I needed to have a clear mind to focus on balancing off the wall. If I was quiet, I could feel if my ribs were jutting out, if I was pressing up through my inner arches, if my feet were “scrubbing up”, if my shoulders away from my ears. Could I find length? To do all of that, I had to breathe and be present. It made me contemplate if it was really ego that makes you want to nail a difficult pose, or if it’s the presence of mind that you know is required to get into a challenging pose. Making the decisions with what my practice entailed allowed space for these experiences and thoughts.

Finding Inspiration From Others

If I was in a studio class, I didn’t have to put what knowledge I had to work—I had a teacher there to fall back on and make sure I was aligned, breathing, working or easing up. Over time, by attending studio classes and workshops, I had started to amass bits and pieces of asanas; cues, key actions, tips, alignment corrections, things I liked, things I disliked, meditation techniques. It was as though I attended studio classes to collect the seeds to plant in home practice. If I never practiced at home, I couldn’t figure out how much I did in fact know because it never would have been put to the test. I brought the words, insights, and spirit of my respected teachers with me to my mat.

In:

Motomi Naito’s class I found a new way to strap my knees in place for swastikasana and how to work more in my shoulders in adho mukha svanasana. She also taught me that I was internally rotating my thighs from my knees and not my upper femurs.

Tias Little’s workshop I found yet another way to strap my knees which helped me while doing extended seated meditations. I also fell further enamored with SATYA.

Maria Luisa Basualdo taught me to use two bricks to build up strength in sirsasana, to lengthen my buttocks away from me in supta padangusthasana 1 and 2; to ground into my inner heel.

Tricia Fiske helped me learn that I can comfortably meditate for an hour at a time. She taught me to bring the hips higher than the knees, how to use a bolster and other tips on finding how to position my body.

Rachel Lackowski helped me to keep from thrusting my low ribs out. She also reminded me how lovely it was to visually meditate.

Kathleen Wright taught me to keep my head in line with the sacrum; that discomfort is okay, even good. She also taught me that restorative asanas are a gift. She helped me figure out that Iyengar yoga is the most therapeutic form of asana for my body right now. She also taught me the importance of gaze.

J. Michael Taylor taught me that I had been practicing gomukhasana arms wrong for over three years! He also reminded me how beautiful it is to start a class with bharadvajasana.

Linda Troutman’s class I learned how to stimulate the movement of lymph for immunity and when getting deeper into an asana it doesn’t mean twisting my neck or leading with my head.

Jeannine Majka's class taught me that restorative bharadvajasana is heaven on earth.

Sharon Carter taught me to lift the knees up (engage the quadriceps) and strengthen the inner arches by lifting them.

Lori Gaspar taught me the importance of the four corners of "tadasana" feet. She also taught me how accessible pranayama is and how the type(s) of yoga we practice aren't necessarily constant.

Marinda Stopforth taught me that I hold my breath in difficult asanas. She also taught me how melodious Om Shanti Shanti Shanti can sound.

Jenni Antonicic quoted her mentor, "*Don't let your body cash a check that your ego wrote.*" She made me ask myself how long I wanted to practice yoga for and instilled that if you want to practice for a long time you have to be smart and safe.

*Disclaimer: I know all of my teachers probably said some of the same things to me, but I am mentioning whose class I was in when the puzzle pieces finally fit into place and the lightbulb clicked on

There were still some times that I wanted a set sequence that I didn't have to think about or analyze. I printed out sequences from respected teachers (with pictures so I could put them on my bed or floor for a visual of what came next), so I could pick one out on any given day, or I could look through it for some quick inspiration for the direction of where I wanted to go on my own.

In choosing to practice a set sequence, I ended up learning more about my preferences and what my body needed posturally. It was useful to practice with a pen and paper nearby and make notes/adjustments to the sequences during my practice. Designing my own sequences felt so unattainable before, but with my adjustments, I was laying the foundation of what will soon blossom into my own sequences.

"If you're a beginner, do what your teacher taught you, but as you do it, start to get into it a little bit more, with a few change-it-up moments. You'll begin to deviate from the prescribed pattern. The energy will start moving you differently and then you have to be brave enough to let the energy guide you, making new shapes. Deviate from the pattern, and then pretty soon your practice will become this big-old deviation until it's no longer a deviation-it's you!" —Erich Schiffman, yoga teacher/author of [Moving Into Stillness](#)

5. Persevering

My father was terminally ill while I was working on establishing a home practice. I tried and failed a few times before it started to become part of my everyday life. It was easier to think about my father and his needs (doctor's appointments, hospital visits, medication management, supporting my mother, cutting their lawn, hospice, a gravesite, pallbearers) than it was to try to develop a home practice. It was difficult to see my home practice as a need when one of the most important people in my life was slowly dying. When you compare anything with prolonged illness and death, it all seems unimportant, yoga practice included.

While I did practice at home, nothing about it resonated with me. Mostly, it felt terrible. All I wanted was to be in a studio class where I could have the luxury of someone telling me where to

place a body part, when to breathe, where to focus my gaze, how much effort to elicit and from what muscle group to recruit strength from, where to find ease. The absolute freedom of being at someone else's will at that time in my life was what I needed. I was tired of decisions; a home practice was just another thing I needed to cross off my ever growing list of things to do when I felt like I was already spread too thin and on the road to a nervous breakdown.

When my father was literally losing his mind from the toxicity of chemo he had been given, I had a terrible upper respiratory infection. The week my father passed, I contracted hand, foot and mouth disease, a virus that mostly children get as adults usually build up an immunity to it. It seemed like bad timing.

After my father passed away, for months, I noticed that I had problems being alone with my thoughts. I blocked out the inner quiet moments with myself through television, reading the news, the radio, shopping online, surfing the web, making excuses of what needed to be done and being mentally occupied. Being a mother, you can always find something to help you procrastinate because there are a lot of important things to take care of on any given day. I also noticed that I was having problems reading books and concentrating. It made me too sad and emotional; everything I was attempting to repress would leak out. My exterior that was keeping everything tucked neatly inside was slowly starting to crack under the pressure.

A month and a half after my father passed, my mother started to get ill. She was another thing I had to tend to and worry about. I had to take her to the hospital ER many times, she was also admitted as a patient three times. She had three surgeries and was in constant pain. We both had to navigate grief; how our lives would continue and how to look after ourselves when we put two years into caring for my dad and putting him first.

During these few months, I continued to attend as many studio classes as I could, searching for the few minutes in my day in which everything felt bearable again. My home practices were very rushed. I flew through sun salutations as fast as I could; flung myself through a few other asanas just so I could say I did it. I was going through the motions of a physical practice to get it done fast because I was anxious to sit, practice pranayama and meditate.

When I sat for meditation, tears streamed out of my eyes constantly. In restorative poses, I just sobbed. Grief was pouring out of me and it was almost too much to bear. I didn't think the tears would ever stop. I worried that my crying was impeding my home practice and any progress I could be making. I was worried about what to do about my thesis if I couldn't stop the crying. I practiced some grief sequences, yet nothing really healed the underlying pain.

Fast forward a few months, my mother was in the hospital again while I needed to be doing the bulk of my thesis. I remember "visiting" with her in the hospital while we waited to find out when she would be healthy enough for her surgery. I sat there thinking I didn't have time for this. I had to work on my thesis. All of this was happening while I was in the midst of the worst sinus infection I had ever had. We were both suffering from not tending to ourselves.

While in surgery, I lost track of my mom's whereabouts because of a lack of communication with the hospital staff. I panicked when no one came to update me on her prognosis after four hours (the surgery should have taken two hours max). I eventually found her and she was alive, thankfully. However, the damage to myself had been done. I was so petrified that my last living parent was gone, added to the stress of the impending thesis deadline, I had gotten shingles that

very night. Because of the nature of shingles, I was unable to practice asana. If I tried to do anything that would exert my body, I would have searing, burning nerve pain. I had ignored what my mind and body had been telling me for so long that it demanded my attention. It was very difficult for me to not attend a studio class and push my way through a physical practice for the payout of a few moments of relief. I felt miserable. Even though I hadn't given my own home practice much effort, I missed it.

Aadil Palkhivala cautions that our asana practice remains important to an extent, if we focus solely on the asana and make that performance the point of our efforts, our practice *“becomes an obstacle to our own evolution. Your asana practice must serve your dharmic purpose, and not serve itself. When you practice more than is required for living your dharma, you only feed your ego.”*

Meditation and pranayama took the place of asana practice. A wonderful benefit was that every time I was able to practice, I worked a little more on finding my “seat”. I used to have a hard time finding where to put my ribs, overarching my back, relaxing my legs, my shoulders used to ache after ten minutes of sitting. Sitting was not comfortable to me at all. Now, I am able to sit for longer durations without limbs falling asleep, without being in misery. I learned to keep my knees higher so my legs don't fall asleep. I learned to put a bolster on the wall behind me if I thought I might get tired after meditating for a longer duration. I learned to put a strap either in a figure eight position or just around the knees which helped alleviate some of the “work” in the legs and it supported the sacrum so it didn't collapse in. With practice, my perfect, comfortable, sustainable “seat “is closer to unveiling itself.

I played around with my meditations, using visualization techniques, counting breaths, noticing my thoughts, repeating chants or words 108 times and using mala beads as well. While I enjoyed using mala beads in the past, I also noticed that meditating with them provided too much of a distraction when I needed stillness. I think that as my meditation practice gets stronger, I will be able to discern which technique will be suitable for where I am in my life and choose appropriately. For where I am now, I needed things to be more quiet and still.

Most days I practiced a form of pranayama. I practiced kapalabhati for energy, sitali, nadi sodhana, ujjayi, and anapana. Usually, I practiced in the morning, before meditating. But on days where I needed more presence, I worked on letting go of irritability and anxiety with pranayama. I found it to be very helpful during times of stress. It really did help lift my mood, give me energy, and bring me back to the present.

Sometimes instead of practicing pranayama during the middle of the day, I held simple mudras (chin, dhyana, and anjali). I also integrated them into my practice, while I sat for meditation (and later in asanas). I learned that mudras felt more powerful to me while I was in a meditation or pranayama practice rather than stuck in traffic. In practice they were meaningful and spiritual. In regular life it felt out of place because I wasn't able to give my complete attention.

Since I enjoy the sound and vibrational energy of chanting in large groups, I tried it in my own practice. I chose simple chants that I could pronounce, mostly the invocation to Patanjali, Hare Krishna, Om Shanti Shanti Shanti and Om mani padme om. A favorite of mine is from Thich Nhat Hanh:

Breathing in,
I am aware of the tension in my body.
Breathing out,
I release all the tension in my body.

Chanting during my meditation was more of a distraction. Instead, I used chants to either begin/end my personal practice or as a tool to bring me back to the present. I found it got me more focused and into the right frame of mind for beginning a practice and was the way to make my practice feel like it was well rounded upon completion. Some mornings when the last thing I wanted to do was get up, I closed my eyes and chanted before I settled in to practice. Sometimes I chanted in my car. My energy level always lifted and I felt better immediately.

I listened to Sanskrit chants when I could. I also learned to treasure the quiet moments of being with myself while I was recovering. Being in pain from shingles helped me focus on myself, my own needs, and realize what I was doing before was not working. I had to choose to take care of my own needs first rather than thinking of my family or being sad about the loss of my father.

While I washed the dishes, I practiced vrksasana, working hard to get my glutes to fire. The challenge of balancing and moving at the same time was fun and light hearted. I wasn't able to have a full asana practice, but I could still practice alignment. I consciously brought my ribs back in when I bent over the sink when brushing my teeth. When I drove, I widened my collarbones and brought my low ribs in, I kept my neck in line with my spine. I tried to breathe deeply, "collarbones, chest, belly" style. I realized that I hold my breath and breathe with as little air as possible all the time; I thought it was something I did when I concentrated on doing six key actions in a pose.

As I finished my teacher training requirements and reading books about yoga, it dawned on me that everything I was doing day to day **was my home practice**. As obvious as it was, I didn't see it before because I had been focused solely on asanas. Being ill had given me the gift of time for stillness. I was no longer rushing through a set of asanas to get to my favorite parts of home practice, I could focus on other aspects of the eight limbs of yoga. This was my home practice, all these bits and pieces of meditation, pranayama and mindfulness in my day put together. It didn't look like what I envisioned for my home practice, yet I couldn't deny that it was in fact, yoga.

"Your practice doesn't have to only be asana based. Listening to music, dancing, and meditation help me to ground, energize and dive deeper. And being alone, in contemplation or in reading yoga-related books—that's yoga, too," —Mey Elbi, yoga teacher

If I had listened to what I needed before, just skipped the asana and cultivated my meditation and pranayama practice, I'm confident that I would not have gotten sick. It was a tough way to learn a lesson but it is now crystal clear. If you don't listen to your body it will command that you listen, my warnings were a virus, a sinus infection and when those weren't enough, shingles. When I looked back on how I was always sick during a stressful time of my life, it clicked. Even though I was attending studio classes throughout all of this, it wasn't the solution for my personal well being. I had to let go of what "doing" looked like. Asana based practice was not my answer. Respecting the ebb and flow of life and how it affected my personal practice were key.

"My practice has given me an anchor when everything outside was pulling me into the darkest of storms."—Shibana Singh, yoga teacher/Ayurvedic practitioner

Revisiting asana practice

"Always, always, always listen to your breath, follow your breath, pay attention to your breath. Your breath is your teacher—if it's strained, back off, if you're breathing through your mouth, back off, if you're gasping for air, back off."—Kara-Leah Grant, author of Forty Days of Yoga: Commit to Your Practice

Coming back to a home asana practice after illness was much smoother than I had anticipated. My self awareness shifted which made my asana practice become slower and more mindful. I chose not to focus on any physical strength or endurance I lost. Instead, I took more time to think about opposing actions in the body. Prasarita paddotanasana used to hurt my knee, by energetically pulling my legs in, things started to feel a whole lot better. I was starting become more aware of the energetic effects of a particular asana. I checked in with my body to see how something felt. I contemplated what I needed next. I also tried to meditate in poses like B.K.S. Iyengar wrote about in *Tree of Yoga*. I listened to my breath and noticed if it was easy or labored. When I was struggling to breathe, instead of pushing through or holding my breath, I honored my body and I came out of a pose. When I was tired from adho mukha vrksasana followed by sirsasana, I rested in a child's pose before moving onto salamba sarvangasana, or I skipped the salamba sarvangasana altogether. I held mudras while I practiced adho mukha virasana and sukhasana.

Problem Solving

Some days were harder than others to practice. Mostly, I tried to treat myself with loving kindness by withholding any judgment of myself—what I did or didn't do. I addressed problems in the following ways:

- **Lack of Energy**

On mornings that I hadn't gotten enough quality sleep, I chose to lay in bed for my pranayama or meditation practice. Then, I would either do a shorter flowing asana practice or a couple of restorative postures. Sometimes I started in a supported adho mukha virasana, or restorative bharadvajasana while I figured out what would come next. In those moments, I needed to nurture myself rather than giving myself the push to get through a sequence. I gently reminded myself that being able to practice is a gift and not work.

- **Unable to practice pranayama**

If my allergies/nasal congestion made it impossible to breathe through my nose without strain, I would practice anapana or if possible, ujjayi breath.

- **Body Aches**

If my muscles were sore from a studio class or a run the day prior, I practiced anyway. All the movement brought blood flowing into my muscles and by the end of my physical practice, the soreness was lessened.

When I had pain in bones and joints, I worked with my body to ease them. For example, my foot

was really hurting yesterday morning after I worked it too hard to lift the outer arch of my foot. I mobilized the bones in my foot the way a chiropractor taught me to and then when I did standing poses, I made sure to ground down into the four corners of my feet. Sometimes a few vertebrae hurt so when I practice, I make extra sure to keep proper alignment, stacking everything in line as well as keeping my ribs from thrusting out and engaging my abs. If my SI joint is achy, I either cut back on twists, pay extra special attention to how and where I am twisting from—I try to twist with my pelvis instead of against it, or I try to find poses to alleviate the pain like eka pada apanasana .

“The more you use your practice to take care of your immediate needs, the more strength and energy you’ll have in the long run.”—Jason Crandell

- **Fell short of goals**

“Eighty percent of success is showing up.”—Woody Allen

Initially, I set a goal for myself: to practice five days a week for thirty minutes every time. This didn’t work for me. First off, I found myself looking at the clock every few minutes to see how much time had elapsed. While working on developing my home practice, I started to get into a habit of practicing for weeks at a time, then stopped altogether for various reasons. That happened three separate times. I felt guilty about it. It weighed on me enough that I didn’t want to even do a home practice anymore. As a result, the last time I attempted to establish my home practice, instead of making a vow to practice X amount of time for X days a week, I stopped looking at the clock and timing myself. I practiced for what felt right.

If I had to guess, my home practices now average about 45-75 minutes. Sometimes it’s longer, sometimes it’s shorter. Sometimes all of that time is spent on my mat in asana and meditation. Sometimes, that time is made up of what I did lying in bed and in my car as well as on my mat. I don’t allow myself to analyze it too much. I let go of any time goals and attachments to time. I concern myself more with quality: sometimes that three minutes of conscious breath in my car is a lot more lucrative than a 30 minute home asana sequence. I listen to my mind, my energy and my body, letting what happens unfold. I’m confident that in the future I will have more time for home practice and I’m ok with where I am at now. My need was a home practice, my want was a long duration.

“Once you start, you may be encouraged to move more and stay longer. But don't beat yourself up or think you're a spiritual loser if you fall short or don't stay on your schedule. It's a practice after all, so start up again.”—Giselle Mari, Jivamukti yoga teacher

- **Inability to concentrate**

On days where my mind was full of self generated noise and stress, I got out my computer and did a “brain dump” of all the internal chatter. Once I felt I had gotten everything rattling around in my brain out, I could get on my mat and start practicing with peace of mind.

“Observe the mind’s craziness, rather than be driven by it.”—Evelyn Gonzalez, yoga teacher

I also practiced with a pen and paper nearby in case something came up that I didn’t want to forget—I could easily add items to my grocery list, calendar, remind myself to text someone, a prescription that needed to be refilled and then get back to my practice.

If I was unable to concentrate because of noise (tv, lawnmowers, neighbors getting work done on their house, loud mufflers on cars driving by), I drowned it out with music.

- **A run sounded better**

In the fall, because it was so warm so late into the season, I opted to go for a run and enjoy the nice weather instead of practicing at home. I felt like I had to choose between the two: running or practicing yoga. I tried to run with better alignment, making sure I wasn't overarching my low back, bringing my low ribs back in. I tried to breathe through my nose and regulate my breathing by counting breaths. I also practiced being more appreciative of the woods I was running in-enjoying the sound of the leaves crunching underneath me, admiring the beautiful colors of the foliage, appreciating the fact that I was even able to run physically and because the circumstances of my life allowed for it.

"At its heart, a yoga practice is an intention to observe your actions and reactions. It doesn't necessarily have to take a certain form." — Amy Pearce-Hayden

- **Lacking motivation to practice first thing**

Some days, I chose to reach for my phone as soon as I woke up. I opted to read the news online, check my email, text a few friends before I settled into my practice. It wasn't my ideal, but as Gabriel Halpern says, *"How human of you."*

- **Practice time not feeling right**

On weekends, when I didn't want to practice at my allotted time, I didn't. I got to my mat when I felt like it, maybe later in the afternoon, or I skipped my "mat" practice altogether. I wasn't keeping track, but I was basically practicing 5-6 days a week. I didn't set a goal to practice a certain amount of days or for a certain amount of time and that helped me get to my mat, knowing it was a choice.

- **Just not feeling like it**

On days I really didn't feel up to doing a full practice, but had the time, I read about yoga, mindfulness, meditation, mudras or chants. If I didn't have the time, sometimes I made sure to repeat mantras and took time to focus on my breath for a few short moments. Sometimes, I didn't do anything mindful. And I let it go.

"For those particularly crazy days, let something else be your yoga for the day. Whether its doing the dishes, folding the laundry, an hour-long commute home from work—whatever the task, make it a mindful, meditative experience and let that be your yoga practice for the day. Remember that anything can be your yoga. You can turn daily tasks into mindful, meditative practices." — Ashley Winseck, of the Kripalu Center for Yoga & Health

- **I am a mother first**

"I usually have to overcome some initial pang of guilt, the passing thought that yoga is an indulgence or that I should be attending to someone. Then I remember that yoga is not an indulgence; it is a necessity," Justine Wiltshire Cohen, yoga teacher/yoga studio owner.

A surprising, yet welcome occurrence was incorporating my son into my home practice. When I

started practicing in the mornings, my son would stand outside the door to watch me, then go back to the tv or playing, come back to check what I was doing, go back to what he was doing and so on. Initially, I felt guilty letting my son watch more tv while I found stillness, but I let it go, my practice was as much for him as it was for me.

Part of living my dharma is recognizing my importance as a mother. It was wrong to exclude my son, Jackson, from my practice. I invited him to join me since he was curious. It ended up that he liked meditation more than asana.

B.K.S. Iyengar says, "*So treat the practice of yoga as part of your life, allowing it space within your normal activities.*"

My practice evolved into me first practicing alone but letting Jackson know when it was almost time to meditate. After I finished my practice, Jackson would come in and I would either read him a children's yoga book and help him in poses followed by the meditation in the book. Or, more often, I would set him up for seated or supine meditations, which he loved.

To give his practice a feeling of importance, I made sure to set him up with the same props he saw me use. I taught him to hold chin and anjali mudra, how to sit for meditation, how to lie in savasana symmetrically. I bought him his own eye pillow. I let him play with my singing bowl and tingsha then decide which we would use for practice that day. I taught him to use mala beads and we recited om 108 times. We concluded practice with om shanti shanti shanti., I

played around with what his meditation practice entailed, as I did with mine, so he could find what resonated most with him.

At first I used meditations from children's yoga books. Those were too short for him, so then I started to incorporate some of the techniques with counting breaths, anapana and yogic breath. I started to make up my own visualization techniques for him, which he adored. Some days he requested specific meditations, some days I decided what to do. A habit we fell into was that we always make sure to thank each other for sharing our practices. Most mornings, I do a medita

tion on my own and then again with Jackson. As a result, my journey into home practice also led me to find a tiny part of the teacher in me.

- **Missed a few consecutive days**

Ashley Winseck of the Kripalu Center of Yoga and Health said, "*The goal is to get to the point at which no[t] doing yoga would be like not brushing your teeth, not getting your car's oil changed.*"

I missed three days in a row due to early morning obligations. I got to a studio class on one of those days, but I did zero home practice. I could feel how on edge I was. I had this weird feeling inside of me that I thought about placating with shopping online and food. I felt anxious and just overall ungrounded. I made it a goal to remember the unease I experienced. It's a lot easier just to wake up earlier and do a practice than to choose restlessness and anxiety. Sometimes, if I skip a day, I also experience general restlessness—it has started to feel like not practicing was like I neglected to brush my teeth!

- **Distractions**

"Of course, there will always be distractions. It is good to include these distractions in your practice as well. See your reactions to it. If there are no obstacles, your journey did not start. Despite the challenges in and out, can you go deeper?"—Mey Elbi, yoga teacher

Admittedly, I did something unorthodox. I gave myself permission to do what I wanted to do while I was in the midst of a practice. If a certain dust bunny was bothering me, I grabbed the handheld vacuum and sucked it up. If I wanted a sip of water, I went to the kitchen and got it. If I was worried I missed an important phone call, I checked my phone. If someone texted me, I read it and sometimes texted back. It felt wrong and like the antithesis of yoga, but what I needed from my home practice was for it to feel like mine, a choice, not like an obligation that needed to be fulfilled or a “jail” sentence I needed to serve out.

“Anything that’s a practice takes commitment, patience, and a certain level of generosity to yourself.” —Cyndi Lee

Effects

After practicing in the mornings for less than two weeks, almost every day, I started to notice changes. It was amazing how less rushed I felt after I had practiced in the morning. I was still irritable, moody and had a propensity to swear (I hoped those would magically disappear), yet I was able to go along with life’s ups and downs a little bit better. I got a speeding ticket and it didn’t consume my day—being mad about it—I knew I was guilty of speeding and while I wasn’t pleased with the expense or of having to take a four hour safety school course, I wasn’t angry or emotional about it, it was just a fact.

As my practice evolved and my focus was able to be sustained, distractions resolved themselves. I no longer feel compelled to my phone in the middle of a practice, I rarely find myself pausing a practice to write a quick reminder note, or find that I have to do a “brain dump” before I can settle into a practice. The need to drown out noise or have complete silence abated and I learned to regularly practice to the sound of cartoons or talking in the background. Basically, I needed to treat all my issues with patience and acceptance. With perseverance, everything kind of fell into place.

While working on my requirements for my teaching certification, I noticed it used to take me about one and a half hours to get settled in enough to sit down to work, I needed to get everything perfect just so I could start or be able to understand what I just read without rereading it multiple times. I felt like I was being consumed by ADD and contemplated getting a formal diagnosis. After my home practice became regular, my attention span became sustained and I didn’t have nearly as many issues focusing. I could get work done in two hour blocks of time and not be compelled to surf the web or pay more attention to what was going on around me.

I still attend studio classes, only I don’t panic if I can’t make one. My daily schedule doesn’t revolve around a yoga class. I don’t stalk the studio class schedules of five different studios anymore. If I don’t feel like going, I know already practiced. When I do make it, I have a new appreciation for it and try to discern which parts of class I can bring back to my home practice to play around with for fun. I pay attention to ways to get into tighter areas of my body.

Physically, when it came to asana sequences, I noticed that I felt better prepared for meditation and stillness when I gave my body a good exertion. The easier the sequence was, the longer it took me to settle into savasana and meditation. The days I did a lighter asana practice, I needed to incorporate more pranayama. The more challenging the sequence, the more restful and restorative savasana felt, which made meditation almost effortless.

I also noticed that I felt less desire to stay up late at night. I've always disliked mornings and loved being awake while most people slumbered. With consistent home practice in place, I think that I was noticing the subtle signs that I was actually tired at 11pm or midnight. I found myself wanting to get to bed earlier so I could rise earlier and practice sooner. Of course, there were times I ignored that feeling and binge watched a series or surfed the web too long, but it was a conscious decision whereas before it was just out of habit that I stayed up late.

Practicing with my son has made us closer. He's a lot more spontaneous with giving hugs. And he seems happier in the morning. He doesn't complain when it's time to turn off the tv; he looks forward to our practice asks me, "Is it time yet?" His enthusiasm for meditating makes it more enjoyable for me. Getting both of us out the door in the morning also feels less rushed. He also has shown more initiative in getting himself ready to leave the house, I used to have to hound him to get socks on or not to forget his school bag. After practicing together for a few weeks, he started doing things for himself without any reminders. Teaching him a few techniques has helped boost my confidence a little, if I ever decided I was interested in teaching.

Looking back, the hardest thing was the actual doing part: finding mental space, getting on my mat and practicing. I procrastinated to not get there when I should have just done my practice. It was hard to go it alone when I had only been in group settings before. It was harder to learn to trust myself. But, I realized that I wasn't alone in my practice. Every single time I practiced, I could hear words of many of my teachers—alignment cues, key actions, modifications, and inspiration. "Perfection" consisted of letting go of my preconceived notions of the definition of yoga. Home practice is not solely an asana practice. With my own permission to be ok with what came forth and going from there, I am proud to say that I have a fulfilling home practice.

"Shifting my habit to self-practice, done alone without external distraction, was like cleaning a pair of glasses that I didn't realize was dirty. Without the distraction of my ego dealing with the ever-shifting landscape of a group practice, I suddenly saw myself with new clarity. Once that happened, I was hooked for life. My home practice has cultivated a healthier and more accurate awareness of self than the one that I saw when I was practicing in public."—James Brown, yoga teacher

"There are certain things that a home practice exposes that might not surface otherwise. That's really the core of practice: who are you and what needs to be expressed? Yoga is the tool, not the end itself; its a craft in which to express something, communicate it freely, and then through that expression have connection with others."—Colleen Saidman-Yee

"In home practice, you get to discover what you need for balance rather than let someone else decide what's going to bring you balance. So if you haven't slept and you want to lie down and do Savasana with tons of weights on...that's yoga! But if you don't ever do that, how are you going to even understand who you are or how you've evolved?"—Colleen Saidman-Yee

"I now understand that my home practice happens off the mat as much as on. Can I let go of my agenda and listen to my husband and child? On the street, can I make eye contact with someone who appears to be suffering? Can I sprinkle in a little extra kindness to the barista making my beverage? Can I remember to breathe deeply when life begins to feel like a tornado? Can I slow down and enjoy the journey instead of living in my habit to rush? I ask myself those types of questions every day."—Margo Young, San Francisco based yoga teacher

"Home practice is a lot like home cooking; you can't get it anywhere else and there's nothing quite like it."—Jason Crandell

"Why do I practice? I am simply more creative, more humble, and more loving when I do."—Elena Brower, yoga teacher/coauthor of [The Art of Attention](#)

"If you can breathe, you can do yoga," Patricia Walden, senior Iyengar teacher

"At its heart, a yoga practice is an intention to observe your actions and reactions. It doesn't necessarily have to take a certain form," Amy Pearce-Hayden

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Home Practice Sequences



Reprinted with permission from Jason Crandell, jasonyoga.com

This sequence wasn't my favorite one to practice, but what I learned was:

- I don't like surya namaskars early in the morning, even if they're effective at bringing up the energy level.
- I enjoyed the challenge of doing chapasana relatively early in a sequence; it was different than doing it in a studio class because it would have been more of a peak pose rather than a stop along the way.
- I was too tight in the front of the body for urdhva dhanurasana to feel good earlier in the day and possibly from the way this was sequenced. I played around with adding more setu bandha sarvangasanas, a supported version on two different heights, and with stretching the shoulders more before going into urdhva dhanurasana—all of which were successful.

- Supta padangusthasana also felt tight. I definitely needed a strap in the morning or I would feel it in my sacrum.
- I couldn't get ready for savasana—I added eka pada apanasana, making sure to lengthen my pelvic bones the opposite way of my head to comfort the sacrum.
- Before savasana, I added jathara parivartanasana because I love a spinal twist at the end for my low back.

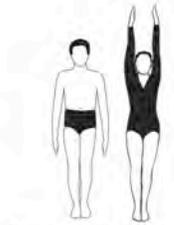
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This was my favorite sequence to practice because it was challenging and forced me to practice two of my least favorite postures, sirsasana and salamba sarvangasana. What I learned:

- It felt good to use a strap to open my shoulders. I also did any shoulder openers I could remember from classes.
- I'm so much tighter in the morning! I had a much more difficult time folding in uttanasana with my hands flat on the ground. I preferred using a block in trikonasana because of the tightness
- I like practicing virabhadrasana 2 before doing 1, practicing this way eases my body into poses.
- It felt more enjoyable to put a blanket or block under my head in prasarita paddotanasana and make it a quick restorative posture before getting into the more challenging postures.
- After doing back to back adho mukha vrksasana and sirsasana, I need a balasana or adho mukha svanasana to come back to my breath. Sometimes I just used a block in setu bandha sarvangasana, depending on how much of a rest I needed.
- If I was using a block in setu bandha sarvangasana, I would raise one leg straight up, or both to keep the energy level up for urdhva dhanurasana and salamba sarvangasana.
- If I was spent after urdhva dhanurasana, or pressed for time, I skipped salamba sarvangasana altogether.
- I also liked adding in a halasana either before or after salamba sarvangasana.
- What I liked about this practice was the energy I had to elicit. I'm sluggish in the morning and this sequence made me get up and move.
- I was able to practice two of my least favorite postures for the duration I wanted to—no one was timing me and making sure I was doing five minutes in the king and queen asanas—although I did make a mental note to bring in a kitchen timer so I could start building myself up to a comfortable five minutes.
- I had a better savasana and meditation because of all the effort required. This sequence helped still my mind, the whole purpose of asana. I figured out that the busier my mind, the harder I needed to work to come back to stillness.

(Whenever the time is not given, the pose should be done according to one's capacity and time at one's disposal. Repetitions are recommended over timings to avoid strain.)



1 Tāḍāsana/Samasthiti
 to Ūrdhva Hastāsana
 3 x



2 Tāḍāsana/Samasthiti
 to Ūrdhva Baddhānguliyāsana
 (change interlock)
 2 x



3 Vṛkṣāsana
 2 x each side



4 Utthita Trikoṅāsana
 2 x each side



5 Utthita Pārsvakoṅāsana
 2 x each side



6 Pārsvottānāsana
 (hands on hips; concave back)
 2 x each side



7 Prasārita Pādottānāsana
 (hands on floor, arms straight;
 concave back)
 2 x



8 Adho Mukha Svānāsana
 2 x



9 Ūrdhva Prasārita Pādāsana
 (resting version: legs up wall,
 back flat on floor)
 stay quietly for 5 minutes

Reprinted with permission from The Iyengar Institute of New York, iyengarnyc.org

I used this sequence when I was first starting to experiment with home practice and set sequences because it's short. It wasn't hard for me to work up to nine postures. I also liked that it was an Iyengar sequence and would complement what I was practicing in studio classes. What I learned:

- Balancing at home is harder than in a studio, no idea why.
- I liked that I could decide if I had spent equal time on both sides, sometimes in studio classes we spend more time on the first side—which is usually the right side.
- I don't like viparita karani unless I have really exerted some effort in asanas.
- I prefer having adho mukha svanasana later in the sequence, being warmed up for it, instead of warming up with it.
- I loved that there was no virabhadrasana 1!!!!

HOME PRACTICE SEQUENCE
 LEVEL I
 Sequence 2

(Wherever the time is not given, the pose should be done according to one's capacity and time at one's disposal. Repetitions are recommended over timings to avoid strain.)



1 Uttitha Trikoṇāsana
 2 x each side



2 Vīrabhadraśana II
 2 x each side



3 Ardha Uttānāsana
 (half Uttānāsana;
 hands on wall at
 shoulder height;
 concave back)
 1 x



4 Pārśvottānāsana
 (concave back;
 hands on chair or
 blocks)
 2 x



5 Prāsārita Pādottānāsana
 (hands on floor, arms
 straight; concave back)
 2 x



6 Sukhāsana
 (simple cross legs;
 switch cross and twist
 to each side) 2 x



7 Baddha Koṇāsana
 (back supported
 against wall or couch)
 sit on support for
 several minutes



8 Vajrāsana (Urdhva Hasta
 & Parvatāsana in
 Vajrāsana) sit with
 blanket between
 calves and thighs)



9 Adho Mukha Virāsana
 (knees apart; relax
 forward; then arms
 forward) 2 x



10 Pavanmuktāsana



11 Adho Mukha Śvānāsana
 2 x



12 Supta Baddha Koṇāsana
 (with support under
 legs, back, and head)

Reprinted with permission from The Iyengar Institute of New York, iyengarnyc.org

I never practiced this sequence in its entirety because it seemed low key, I was saving it for a day where I wanted something sort of restorative, but also kind of energizing. What I did learn from this sequence:

- I didn't like using the wall for ardha uttanāsana, maybe because it isn't done very often in classes and I couldn't hear any teacher's voice telling me how to correct myself. Instead, I found myself wondering if I was aligned, hips over ankles, was my thoracic spine coming in while I was broadening my collar bones? It was very distracting.
- I really enjoyed supta badha konāsana with a bolster, making it a small, passive backbend. It felt great in its gentleness.
- This had very grounding elements that helped set up for pranayama and meditation.

HOME PRACTICE SEQUENCE
LEVEL I
Sequence 3

(Wherever the time is not given, the pose should be done according to one's capacity and time at one's disposal. Repetitions are recommended over timings to avoid strain.)



1 Urdhva Hastasana
 2 x



2 Utkaṣṭasana
 3 x



3 Utthita Trikoṅṣana
 2 x each side



4 Utthita Pārśvakoṅṣana
 2 x each side



5 Vimānāsana
 2 x each side



6 Vīrabhadrāsana I
 2 x each side



7 Adho Mukha Śvānāsana
 2 x



8 Catuṣpādāsana
 2 x



9 Adho Mukha Vīrāsana
 (release the back)



10 Śavāsana
 (legs resting on chair or support; 5 minutes)

I resisted practicing this sequence because of the utkatasana, vimanasana, and catuspadasana poses. What I learned from this sequence:

- In utthita parsvakonasana, it became clear that it was better to get my head in line with my sacrum, then look up. Practicing that way made it easier on my neck. I found myself wanting to lead with my neck a lot in this sequence. I had to stop and ask myself where I was revolving from in trikonasana and parsvakonasana, was it my neck or my chest?
- Vimanasana was too awkward for me, despite the fact that it was just a virabhadrasana 1. Following this up with virabhadrasana 1 didn't feel good. I did not like these two postures together, I think next time I need to shorten my stance and widen my legs, it felt like it was compressing my low back.
- I am not a fan of practicing what I don't know. For catuspadasana, I was a little confused. This is not an asana I have practiced in an alignment based class. I actually couldn't remember practicing this posture ever except in a hot vinyasa class. Was it more important to keep my hands around my ankles or my legs hip distance? I practiced both ways and thought about using a strap, even tuck under, my shoulders are too tight to hold my ankles when they are in proper alignment.
- I started to appreciate repeating postures a few times. The utkatasana three times didn't feel like too much. It's still not my favorite pose, but doing it three times felt right in the sequence.
- I very much appreciated the restful adho mukha virasana where it was sequenced. I have started to like when sequences bring the energy down with a viparita karani, adho mukha virasana, and restorative/supportive asanas rather than just do a few low key twists or supine poses and then move into savasana. I made a mental note to remember that for my own sequences.
- I also liked that this sequence had no virabhadrasana 2, and that hips open poses were the utthita trikonasana and utthita parsvakonasana instead because they're so closely related. Sequence wise, it made sense and it also allowed for some variations—sometimes I think Iyengar sequences can be a little boring in similarity.
- This sequence was definitely not my favorite. It made my low back hurt for the rest of the day. I worked this sequence slowly and held for a long time. I'm not sure if I was too stiff the morning I practiced it, if I was out of alignment, or if it was something else entirely. I suspect being too tight made me work in the hyper mobility of my low back, something to work on next time.
- While I normally like that Iyengar sequences use regular asanas to warm up the body, this sequence made me want a warm up beforehand. Perhaps if I can find a way to work the asanas as they were intended and not overcompensating tight areas with my hyper mobile ones, I can come to appreciate this sequence some day.
- Practicing these Iyengar sequences, I finally "got" what Maria Basualdo and Kathleen Wright meant when they told me to tuck the buttocks in. I always just tried to bring it in closer to my body and tuck my ribs back into my body enough so they would stop repeating it to me. I realized that it was the external rotation in trikonasana and parsvakonasana that "tucked the buttocks in."

HOME PRACTICE SEQUENCE
LEVEL I
Sequence 4

(Whenever the time is not given, the pose should be done according to one's capacity and time at one's disposal. Repetitions are recommended over timings to avoid strain.)



1 *Sukhasana*
 (change cross)
 1 x



2 *Sukhasana Twist*
 (simple cross legs, twist,
 change cross, and repeat)
 2 x



3 *Adho Mukha Virasana*
 (extend arms forward
 then change cross)



4 *Utthita Trikonasana*
 2 x each side



5 *Virabhadrasana II*
 2 x



6 *Ardha Chandrasana*
 (with or without wall)
 2 x



7 *Adho Mukha Svanasana*
 2 x



8 *Bharadvajasana*
 (in chair)
 2 x



9 *Savasana*
 5 minutes

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I didn't practice this sequence as much as the first three. Not because I didn't like it, I just started to like doing what felt familiar. What I learned from this sequence:

- I started to want more key actions—something I hadn't thought about during a home practice before. I made a mental note to look up these asanas later. Because these standing poses are in most of the sequences I have been practicing, the postures are what Kathleen Wright describes as "coming" to me. I was looking to get deeper into the standing poses.
- After virabhadrasana 2, I needed either a standing pose like tadasana, or uttanasana. Moving into ardha chandrasana straight away when there wasn't a preceding standing pose was especially hard because it's a one legged balance. I felt like I couldn't turn on my standing leg the way I could have if I had taken the time to ground myself in tadasana or uttanasana.
- I also needed a low back release before savasana, so I chose to get into apanasana and then eka pada apanasana from there.

