

Matsyandrasana, Lord of the Fishes Pose, has many stories twirling about it (much like the twirling nature of the shape. Here is my favorite.

Matsyendra was a great fisherman, believed to have lived around the 10th Century in Bengal. He was also an avid student of yoga. His tenacity for both came in to play when he was able to snag a huge fish with as much determination as Matsyandra. They struggled together for quite some time, neither willing to give up. Finally, with one last tug, the fish was able to pull Matsyandra off-balance and swallowed him whole. Matsyandra, being the devout yogi he was, remained calm and lived quietly meditating in the fishes belly for years. He used the time to consider and explore yoga's esoteric practices such as the ability to become very still and quiet so he could hear the tiniest sounds.

One day, while the giant fish was swimming close to shore, Matsyandra overheard the beautiful voice of Lord Shiva speaking the secrets of the world to his consort, Pavrati. The fish was also intrigued by the voice and swam closer to the shore where Shiva and Pavrati were standing. Matsyandra was spell-bound, enraptured by the voice and the deep meanings of the words. Pavrati, not so much. She was more interested in all the beauty around her....the trees, flowers, sky. Shiva, a bit annoyed asked, "Pavrati, do you have any idea what I'm saying? Are you even listening to me?" Matsyandra couldn't hold back any longer and blurted out from the belly of the fish..."I am listening, Shiva. And I am learning!" Shiva was thrown back on his heels for a moment but then realized where the voice was coming from and set Matsyandra free. Shiva was so impressed with Matsyandra's ability to listen and learn, he named him Lord of the Fishes. Matsyandra became one of the most revered and enlightened yoga master of all time not just in India. The story spread across the area and he is also venerated by Buddhists in Nepal as an incarnation of the bodhisattva of compassion, Avalokiteshvara.

The physical shape of the pose, a twisting inward, with the eyes closed and the senses open, feels like the perfect position to listen. Grounded to the earth but open to the wisdom of the world all around, one is set up to quietly, patiently listen. There is also the idea of the twisting action as an opening up for kundalini energy to be activated and freed....and the focus on the low belly in the pose to connect with Matsyandra's own life in the fishes belly. For me, the shape helps me prepare for meditation but can be meditative in itself.

There are many other stories that have to do with being swallowed by fish (Jonas and the whale, Buddhists' mythology, etc). This one is my favorite so far but I'd love to hear others. Please post!