

Half Moon Pose: Balance

As we all know, yoga is all about BALANCE.

One of the most popular yogic stories about balance, involves the popular deity Ganesh, son of Shiva. Ganesh was known for his penchant for sweets which is why he is often depicted with a bowl of prasad (blessed sweet food). But he is also known for his mastery of yoga, which involves restraint/discipline (tapas) and non-grasping (aparigraha).....and of course, balance (equanimity).

On one of his birthdays, Ganesha chose to celebrate by visiting his community knowing that they would each offer him sweets. Word got out that he was traveling through town, making house calls to every burrough, so everyone scrambled to prepare the best treats to offer him. Ganesha was delighted and in his bliss, forgot about the yogic

principle of balance and restraint....he became in fact, more and more grasping. At some point, even Ganesh reached his capacity and realized it was time to return home. He climbed upon his trusty steed, a tiny mouse, a headed for home. Being a master of yoga and balance, they proceeded quite well until a snake slithered across their path, frightening the mouse. Chaos ensued with the mouse darting in one direction and Ganesh falling heavily on his back in the other direction. Ganesh's belly burst open on impact, sending the sweets flying everywhere. Still in the grasping mode, Ganesh greedily scrambled to pick up all the scattered treats and stuff them back in his belly. He used the snake to secure his belly's content and began called for his mouse so they could return home. He was stopped in his tracks by the sound of laughter from above. When he looked up, he saw the moon, Chandra, laughing at him hysterically. Now Ganesh's usual good nature was also thrown off balance. Embarrassed, angry and even a little sick....he clearly wasn't thinking with compassion. All his yogic tendencies had been thrown off balance. Under the influence of this avidya, he angrily broke off his tusk and hurled it at the moon. Upon impact, the moon's light went out and all went dark. Ganesh angrily shouted, "Never again will you shine!"

At that point, the earth was thrust into the eternal light of the sun. It wasn't long before the earth became scorched, crops burned, animals became confused and no longer performed their chores. Even lovers, accustomed to courting during dawn and dusk, ceased to exist and love drained from the world.

The gods knew they had to intervene. They approached Ganesh with a compromise. The moon would shine again but it would only shine at its fullest once a month. The rest of the month, there would be a waxing and waning. Ganesh agreed. He had learned his lesson about balance and appreciated that he should compromise. He also felt that the compromise would be a good lesson for the moon, that it isn't right to laugh at the misfortunes of others.

This pose represents equanimity, compromise, the need for the balance of light and dark. Sun and moon flow in balance with each other. In the version of the pose pictured here, Ardha Chandrasana I, you see the balance as one side of the body contracts and the other stretches/opens. There is also a balance of remaining rooted to the earth, but at the same time lengthening up through the heart....a root to rise action. In this pose, we work to not topple over to the side we're leaning towards, but rather keep control by rooting more with the foot that is on the extending side. This pose can also be executed from an even more challenging position in which one side of the body is supporting the pose with hand and foot on the floor, while the other side is extending out and up. Both poses remind one of the need for balance, non-grasping and work. The shape itself evokes the image of the moon.

Read below for a more detailed description of both Ardha Chandrasana I and II.

Ardha Chandrasana I: Standing Side Stretch

are-dah chan-DRAHS-anna

ardha = half *chandra* = glittering, shining, having the brilliancy or hue of light (said of the gods); usually translated as "moon"



Begin in Tadasana, feet together, soles merge into floor.
Press down evenly across ball of foot & heels.
Lift arches & ankles up.
Contract quadriceps to draw kneecaps up.
Fully extend knees w/o locking. Femurs & inner groins press back.
Tailbone in & down to elongate the low back.
Lift out of the base of pelvis.
Abdomen draws towards low back.
Inhale, raise & externally rotate the left arm until it's vertical, alongside your ear, with the palm facing inward.
Feel the two lines of energy, one up the arm and one down the legs, and establish the alignment of your center.

Exhale, lean to the right, turn your head & gaze down. Press your hips sideways. Shoulders relax & shoulder blades draw down, flat on back.

Notes:

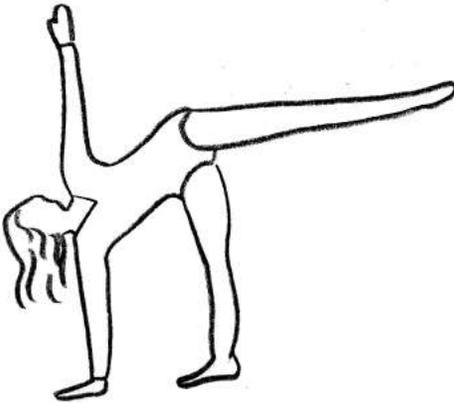
The arches of the feet are lifted, connecting with the upward lifting in the pelvic floor, the

lower abdomen, rib cage, cervical spine, and the top of the head. The shoulder blades are dropped onto the support of the rib cage and connect with the downward release of the tailbone and the grounding of the points of contact between each foot and the floor.

Benefits:

Tremendous side stretch increasing flexibility of spine, arms and rib cage. Stimulates liver, kidney & spleen function. Activates the squeeze & soak principle on the side body musculature, endocrine & nervous systems and the primary meridians along the spine (ida & pingala).

Ardha Chandrasana II



Usually approach from Triangle or Warrior II, knee & front foot are pointed forward.

Shift weight gently to front foot, press down evenly across all 4 corners of foot, lift arch.

Move your hand forward & away from the midline, shift weight to hand & foot.

Contract quadriceps to draw kneecaps up.

Fully extend both legs w/o locking.

The back leg serves as an active counter - balance to the front leg.

Use top outer hip to lift leg...forming one straight line from crown of head through spine through top leg.

Keep top quadriceps & abdomen active and

tailbone in to avoid (banana-ing).

Shoulders relax & shoulderblades draw down.

Bottom tip of shoulderblade moves forward, low front ribs draw slightly in.

Tongue, throat, face are relaxed. Breathe naturally but fully.

Endeavor to have all limbs in the same plane.

Notes:

This pose carves a half moon; ideally, it hangs quietly in the sky...all limbs must remain on the same plane, because tipping the leg backwards causes loss of balance and compresses the low back. However, it's not a forward fold either. Use a block if you need to bend the front leg as you need to lengthen not shorten muscles. Play with your drishti's here.

Benefits:

Strengthens the legs, core, develops balance, "risk-taking", trust.