

Pose of the Month, May 2009

Janu Sirsasana: Head to Knee Pose

Janu Sirsasana, great forward bend, with several variations. You can work your bent leg foot, sitting on your heel. Or the third in the Ashtanga series, having the ball of the foot next to your inner straight leg. Experience a big side stretch either head to knee ala Bikram, or other styles that lengthen the spine. Very versatile

~ Victor

This seated leg extension with forehead pressing on the knee stretches the hamstrings, buttocks, and lower back. As the flexibility of the legs improves, the pelvis moves more freely and reduces stress on the lower back. Forward bends are generally comforting poses that relax the mind and generate a calming of the nervous system. Janu Sirsasana is placed at the end of the Bikram series to allow for one final deep stretch of the legs, as well as helping the yogi to quiet the mind and begin to turn inward in preparation for shavasana. The goal in this pose is to get the leg stretched flat out with fingers interlaced all the way to the webbing around the foot. Chin is tucked and abdominal muscles are pressing back. Many of us have to work with a bent leg in order to get the forehead on the knee. That's okay, keep working at it and be patient with your progress. Slow exhales aid in unlocking this posture.

~ Bernie

Janusirsasana can be practiced over 108 ways. It is translated as "head to knee" in some traditions and "head of knee" in other traditions. No matter how you dish it, this pose is one of the most therapeutic asanas we have for lower back issues, sacral blues and scoliosis. The pose is asymmetrical, making it more challenging but also more healing for the reasons afore mentioned. In Bikram's sequence the load is made easier for the hamstrings by bending the knee and stretching the spine in a rounded, or "flexed" position. This also makes it easier to find the bandhas and lift the belly. In other styles of yoga, the leg is held straight and the spine too, in an "extended" position, getting more length out of the front body and more tension on the hamstring fibers. In the "head of knee" translation the bent leg knee has more placement options as the spine and hips open up. The knee can be moved back, opening the angle between the thigh bones, the bent leg foot is drawn to the inner groin of the same leg and the whole hip roates more open allowing the sole of the foot to face the ceiling eventually...compared to Bikram's version where the sole of the foot of the bent knee leg rests on the inner thigh of the straight leg and the two thighs make a right angle. How the pose is practiced depends on the level of the practitioner, the leg muscles needing tapped, and of course, the class you are in. In any case, the benefits for the low back muscles (quadratus lumborum), ALL three heads of the hamstrings, and the myriad of hip muscles enjoy the ride. The addition of the bandhas make this pose one of my favorites.

~ Theresa Murphy

Janusirsasana is one of the best asanas for cultivating patience... for this pose is more about surrender and letting go than it is about effort. It has many benefits for the back and hips, as mentioned above. However, for me, one of it's major benefits is the awareness it brings to the Ajna Chakra... our "3rd Eye" Center. Helping us to become aware of what is beyond sight... using our "Sixth Sense" and insight to guide us along the path and bring us closer to our ultimate selves.

~ Carole