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Intermediate-Advanced Level Practice Sequence for Parivrtta Janu Sirsasana

According to Yoga Sutra III.34 (sometimes classified as III.35) hrdaye citta samvit, we can come to know the nature of consciousness through the practice of constraint (samyama) on the heart. What does this mean? Can we make sense of this sutra in our asana practice? One thing this may mean is that the characteristics of consciousness (i.e. of citta) that are of prakriti rather than of purusha become evident when we practice from a place of absorption in the heart. Sutra II.5 lists distinguishing characteristics of purusha as purity, timelessness, bliss. For this sequence I would like to focus only on one facet related to sutra III.34—the characteristic of timelessness (in the realm of purusha), as distinguishable from temporality (in the realm of prakriti). There are at least four aspects of time discussed in the Yoga Sutra: ksana (the moment), kala (duration), krama (sequence), and viniyoga (progression). The importance of ‘time’ in the Yoga Sutra is made clear in the final few sutras of Vibhuti Pada and Kaivalya Pada (sutras III.53, 55, IV.32, 34), where liberation (kaivalya) coincides with a deep understanding of time and a change in our relationship to time. Consider a small aspect of time mentioned in sutra I.14 as a reflection for this sequence: the uninterruptedness of sadhana (nairantaryya) mentioned in sutra I.14 has a straightforward ‘face-value’ meaning and a deeper meaning: the ‘face-value’ meaning is that significant interruptions in practice constitute set-backs to progress. We cannot hope to see much progress in our practice if there are long gaps. The deeper meaning is that the sense of continuity in practice in the absence of interruptions makes it possible for the sadhaka to experience many repetitions of a
particular asana over years as different facets of a single multidimensional experience of the asana: the lengthy period of time (kala) over which the asana progresses (viniyoga, sutra III.6) culminates in a single moment (ksana) if we can see how the different ways of getting into the asana (krama) and the different experiences of the asana are linked: it is not only that our body grows into the asana—our lives and attitudes and understanding grow into the asana as an integrated experience. Sutra III.14 tells us there is something unchanging (dharmi) throughout the various changes of form (dharma) each asana takes. In the single moment we perceive this unchanging nature, we touch the timeless for, in that moment, all the times we have practiced the same pose are brought together as though they are happening now. Moving from the initial experience of the asana to the moment when all the various experiences join in continuity is progression (viniyoga) from the gross vehicles (kosa) to the subtle—the layer of the subtle mind resting in the quality of continuity (sutra II.11, III.2, 6, 10).

The actions to carry through the sequence are, in addition to those appropriate for each asana:

- Press shoulder blades into the back and lengthen sides of chest to expand the front and sides of chest.
- Firm outer hips and lengthen sides of waist. This stabilizes pelvis and lengthens lumbar spine in the poses, including Parivrtta Janu Sirsasana.
- When catching a foot with your hand, use that connection to create space between the arm and leg and make it easier to lengthen the spine, to reach a subtler layer in the breath.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gomukhasana</th>
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<td><img src="image" alt="Gomukhasana" /></td>
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- Cross the right leg behind the left, taking away the space between the knees, and also between the outer shins. Sit back onto feet, taking outer left hip down to make the hips even.
- Take the right arm above the head and behind the back, and take the left arm behind the back from below. Catch the hands, or use a belt.
- Pull right biceps down to move right shoulder blade down, and roll right triceps forward to pin right shoulder blade into the back. Keeping biceps pulled down, and triceps forward, lift triceps to expand the right side of chest.
- Coordinate lift of left biceps and downward pull of left triceps to pin left shoulder blade into the back.
- Keep both shoulder blades pinned against the back, and lift side ribs to expand the chest.
• Change the cross of the knees and repeat with opposite arms.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parsva Tadasana with arms of Gomukhasana</th>
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<tr>
<td>• From Tadasana, catch the hands in Gomukhasana, with the right arm from above, the left arm from below, actions of Gomukhasana as explained above.</td>
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<td>• Turn to the right and, lifting the chin look up and to the right.</td>
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<td>• Squeeze outer shins, thighs and hips toward each other, and press the left thigh back.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Keep the same hand clasp and turn to the left.</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Repeat the twist to both sides with left arm from above in Gomukhasana.</td>
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Uthita Trikonasana with arms in Gomukhasana

- Come into Parsva Hasta Padasana to the right. Place the arms in Gomukhasana with left arm from above. Lengthen both sides of chest evenly and turn the chest to the left to face straight ahead.
- Bend at the hips to the right, keeping shoulder blades pinned into the back.
- Press the inner right foot down and, from the middle of outer right thigh, pull back into the outer right hip.
- Keeping the adjustment in shoulder blades and sides of chest from Gomukhasana, place right hand or fingertips on the floor (or block).
- Turn the back of the head down to look up, use the head to push left arm back. Keep the left triceps rolling forward as you turn.
- Once the gaze is up, extend the left arm to complete the form of Uthita Trikonasana.
- Repeat on opposite side.
- In Uthita Trikonasana, the extended leg receives a similar stretch and action as in Parivrtta Janu Sirsasana.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Uttita Parsvakonasana with arms in Gomukhasana</strong></th>
<th>• Similar to <em>Uttita Trikonasana</em>, but with only the top arm of <em>Gomukhasana</em>.</th>
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| **Parighasana with top arm in Gomukhasana** | • Similar to *Uttita Trikonasana*, but with only the top arm of *Gomukhasana*: place the top arm in the position of *Gomukhasana* at first, to make the two sides of chest more even, and to adjust the shoulder blades, and then extend the top arm as in the classic form of *Parighasana*.  
• In *Parighasana*, as in *Uttita Trikonasana*, the extended leg receives a similar stretch and action as in *Parivrtta Janu Sirsasana*. |
| **Uttiha Parsva Hasta Padangusthasana** | • From *Tadasana*, bend the right knee and catch right big toe with first two fingers of right hand (or use a belt). Press the left thigh back and take buttocks down; lengthen sides of waist and sides of chest.  
• Lifting the chest and right knee, take the right hip down, then turn the right knee out. Extend the right leg and left arm, while keeping front of left thigh back.  
• Straighten both knees, keep the left thigh back. Steady your gaze to become steady in the pose.  
• Turning the right arm out and the right thigh out, lift the back of upper arm, forearm and wrist, while pressing root and body of right thigh, shin and ankle down. In this way create space between the right arm and right leg, and evenness in the two sides of ribcage.  
• Repeat on left. |
| **Salamba Sirsasana → Parsvaikapada Sirsasana** | • Coming up into *Salamba Sirsasana*: create a solid steady frame with your hands and forearms, outer elbows rolling in, and place the back of the head deep inside the hands, without disturbing the hands or wrists. Press the crown of the head, forearms and outer edges of hands, straighten the legs and walk in.  
• As you walk in, press your knees and thighs upward to create height and space in front of body, lengthening anterior spine. Lift front bottom-most ribs to lengthen lumbar and lower and middle portion of spine; lift sternum (i.e. toward ceiling) to lengthen upper thoracic. The lengthening includes the throat and front of cervical spine, so while you walk in, the front/middle of crown of the head should press down and act as a fulcrum from which you lift the anterior spine. Use the lengthening of front of body to pull the shoulder blades deeply into the back, and lengthen sides of chest and sides of neck. Lift one leg and stretch it upward to come up—without ‘hopping’ if possible—creating more length in front of body as you come up.  
• Once you are up, adjust the point of balance to the middle/back crown of head by pulling back inner thighs and sides of waist back. |
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<th><strong>Salamba Sirsasana → Parsvaikapada Sirsasana</strong> (continued)</th>
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<td><strong>Transition to a subtler breath (with corresponding change in <em>citta</em>) by squeezing outer shins, knees, thighs and hips toward midline of body, and lifting through inner edges of feet. The skin on entire periphery of crown of head should now also be lifting. Stay several minutes (ideally five minutes) in <em>Salamba Sirsasana</em> before variations—this timing fosters a transition from sympathetic to parasympathetic nervous system, from ‘intention to do’ to ‘intention to maintain’.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Coming into <em>Parsvaikapada Sirsasana</em>: turn the right toes, shin and thigh out about 45 degrees. Lower the leg about halfway without disturbing the left leg. Maintain an inner sense of connection of your left foot with some point on the ceiling as you lower the right leg. Roll the left thigh more deeply inward and press the outer thigh in as you lower the right leg—all the actions that will naturally be undone if care is not taken to maintain them. Pause halfway, as the second part requires a shift in emphasis.</strong></td>
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<td><strong>To lower the right leg farther than halfway, place your focus on the crown of head (press it down), and thoracic region of the back (press it in). That is, the focus shifts from vertical to horizontal. Lift front of right thigh and shin as you lower the leg—the back of right thigh should lengthen. Keep the outer right hip lifted and the outer femur head pressing in, and sides of waist equally long. Once the right toes are down, the emphasis returns to creating vertical height and space. Squeeze the outer upper arms, outer hips. Soften the eyes and draw the origin of your sight back, from the surface of the eyes toward the back of the head. Let the subtle breath encompass the boundary of the asana (i.e. <em>vyana vayu</em>).</strong></td>
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<td><strong>When you lift the right leg up, take care with balance, as the emphasis must shift once again from vertical to horizontal until the leg is back up. Consolidate in <em>Salamba Sirsasana</em> before taking the left leg down.</strong></td>
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**Marichyasana I**

- When preparing to come into *Marichyasana I* with the right knee bent (photo shows opposite), catch the left foot or ankle with the right hand and pull the right shoulder and shoulder blade to the right, past the right knee.
- After catching the hands (or wrist, or belt), allow the right buttock bone to lift, turn to the right and extend the front ribs and chest and chin toward the left shin. Press the left hip and thigh down and lengthen forward through the left calf and inner foot.
- Squeeze the arms against the right outer thigh and the hips to elongate the ‘inner body’.
- Repeat on left side.

**Parsva Upavista Konasana**

- Sit in *Upavista Konasana* (no photo). Turning the waist to the right, place your right hand on the floor to the outside of right knee, and catch the right ankle, big toe or outer edge of the right foot with the left hand (notice how each of these hand positions does something different). Pulling with the left hand and pressing down with the right, turn the waist and ribcage to the right. Make the two sides of chest even in height and length and extend trunk forward toward right shin.
- Both legs need to be firm; extend through inner edges of both feet. The left thigh will tend to turn in, so roll it out; the right leg will tend to ‘retract’, so lengthen it. The left buttock bone may lift a little—still keep the outer edge of left buttock bone descending, even though it doesn’t touch the floor.
- Create space between the right leg and front of body, not by rounding, but by widening front ribs and abdomen and chest as you extend forward. Take both hands to right foot and make the arms even in height.
- As you move into final pose, notice that upper part of chest tends to contract, and shoulders (inner deltoids) tend to move toward each other. Spread the elbows and fronts of shoulders, and widen the chest. Soften the back of throat and lengthen sides of neck. Keep a quality of spaciousness between the right leg and front of body, even if forehead or chin can rest on your shin. This keeps awareness inside and the pose remains light, rather than ‘heavy’. That is, the pose has a quality of *sattva* rather than *tamas*. Stay for up to a minute before coming back to *Upavista Konasana* and repeating to the left side.
**Parivrtta Janu Sirsasana**

- Bend the right knee to the side, beyond 90 degrees, but not so far that the lumbar spine is prevented from turning—about as far as the thighs are in *Parsva Upavistha Konasana*. Tuck right heel into right inner groin and turn sole of right foot up to ceiling. Fully extend the left leg.

- Place the left hand to the outer right knee, right hand on the floor behind the hips. Turn to the right and lift the chest as though in a backbend. Keep the left leg fully extended, the outer right knee pressing down.

- Lean over the left leg and catch the inner left foot with the left hand, arm turned out, thumb up. Maintain the length of the left leg and left side waist and chest by creating space between leg and waist (as in *Parighasana* and *Uttita Parsva Hasta Padangusthasana*).

- Place the right arm in the top arm of *Gomukhasana*. Turn the head and the whole right side of chest up and to the right, then catch the outer edge of left foot with the right hand. Keep the right shoulder blade adjusting in and down the back as you catch the foot.

- To deepen the twist on the left side of chest, reach the left arm to the right knee. Pull the left shoulder forward while turning the upper arm and shoulder out. Pin the outer shoulder against the inner left knee, catch the inner left foot again, and drop the back of head onto the left shin.

- As you drop back of head onto left shin, press back of left knee into floor, spread the elbows and press the back of sternum upward. Find the subtle breath that is released in the simultaneity of these actions.

- Turn to the left and face the floor to come out of *Parivrtta Janu Sirsasana*.

- Repeat on the left side.

**Adho Mukha Svanasana**

- Straighten the arms by firming the elbows, and straighten the legs by firming the knees. Turn the upper arms out while pressing the inner edges of hands; turn the thighs in while pressing the inner edges of feet and lifting the inner ankles. These actions give the basic form and stability (*sthiti*) of Adho Mukha Svanasana. To shift awareness to subtler breath—

- Squeeze outer upper arms and outer upper thighs and hips (and shins) toward midline of body, then press the thighs back. Press the thighs back as you press the palms forward to create more space between the hands and thighs, and more length in sides of waist.
Salamba Sarvangasana ➔ Parsvaikapada Sarvangasana

- Come into Salamba Sarvangasana. Place the hands as far down the back as possible, catching the ribs that are just below shoulder blades if possible (i.e. just above shoulder blades if you are upside down). Point all the fingers up to create a quality of spreading in the front of chest. Press the upper arms and outer shoulder down. Lift the fronts of thighs, tops of buttocks, and inner edges of feet. Squeeze outer upper arms, outer shins, thighs and hips inwardly to connect to a subtle breath.

- With the hands catching or almost catching the closest ribs to the shoulder blades, press the spines of shoulder blades down—spread them apart as you press them down: this brings citta deeply inside before you do variation. Then the variation is also internal, otherwise it is ‘external’, that is attention will be pulled outward. Stay for five minutes, for the same reason as in Salamba Sirsasana.

- Unlike in Salamba Sirsasana, you can now see your feet. Keep the left foot in line with a point on the ceiling, turn the right leg out about 45 degrees. Keeping both legs fully outstretched, lower the right leg. As you pass the horizontal, begin to lift the right thigh and hip even while lowering the foot.

- Keep sides of waist even, back of chest in and lifting. Spread the armpits and back of throat as your foot comes to the floor so attention remains inside the chest. Let the eyes (the origin of your sight) rest in the back of the head. Stay for up to one minute before coming back up. Consolidate in Salamba Sarvangasana before taking the left leg down.

Paschimottanasana

- Sit in Dandasana with middles of buttock bones down: with the feet joined, press fingertips down and lift the hips. Press outer hips in and point kneecaps up as you sit back down so the middles of buttock bones are down. The actions in Paschimottanasana are as in Parsva Upavista Konasana in the upper body.

- Catch the ankles or feet (or use a belt): extend forward and—as you extend forward—press both thighs, shins and heels down and maintain a quality of spaciousness between legs and trunk.

- Completely join the inner heels, big toe ball mounds and edges of big toes, and squeeze outer hips, thighs, knees and shins in as you extend forward.
| *Paschimottanasana continued* | • Lengthen backs of thighs from their midpoints (that is, lengthening forward and back from the midpoints).  
• Extend inner calves forward. Rest the forehead on the shins (or blanket). Stay for one minute (and up to five minutes). |
| --- | --- |
| **Savasana** | • Adjust with awareness of evenness in the legs and arms, feet and hands, sacrum and tailbone, shoulder blades, back of head, nose. Spines of shoulder blades should rest evenly on the floor. Create a sensation of length in sides and back of neck.  
• Rest in the *akasha* (space) in the chest behind the sternum that is contiguous with the space behind the collar bones at the top of chest and the space at the back of the throat and behind the eyes. Let the breath fill that space evenly from the central column of the body to the sides, from the back to the front. The evenness and contiguity of the space fosters awareness of continuity: the extended moment (*ksana*) spent touching continuity in Savasana can pull together many previous moments. Stay for 10 minutes. |

**Sutra References for Sequence for Parivrtta Janu Sirsasana (Siegfried Bleher)**


I.14 sa tu dirgha-kala-nairantarya-satkara-asevito drdha-bhumih But this [practice] is firmly (drdha) grounded (bhumi) [only after it has been] cultivated (asevito) properly (satkara) and for a long (dirgha) time (kala) uninterruptedly (nairantarya)

II.5 Anitya-asuci-duhkha-anamatsu nitya-suci-sukha-atma-khyatir-avidya Nescience is the seeing of [that which is] eternal (nitya), pure (suci), joyful (sukha) and the Self (atma) in [that which is] ephemeral (anitya), impure (asuci), sorrowful (duhkha) and the non-Self (anatma)

III.2 tatra pratyaya-ekatanata dhyanam The one-directionality (ekatanata) of the presented-ideas (pratyaya) with regard to that (tatra) [object of concentration] is meditative-absorption (dhyana)

III.6 tasya bhumisu viniyogah Its (tasya) progression (viniyoga – application) is gradual (bhumisu – ‘stagewise’)*
III.10 tasya prasanta-vahita samskarat The calm (prasanta) flow (vahita) of this (tasya) [consciousness] is effected through subliminal-activators (samskara)

III.14 santa udita avyapadesya dharma anupati dharmi The substrata [dharmi] is that which continues to exist and maintain its characteristic quality in all states (dharma), whether manifest, latent, or subdued.

III.34 hrdaye citta samvit [Through constraint] on the heart [one gains] understanding of [the nature of] consciousness

III.53 ksana tata kramayoh samyamad viveka jam jnanam: Integrated study of the moment of time and its progression leads to discriminative intelligence. (B. K. S. Iyengar, Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali); III.52 in Feuerstein: “Through constraint on the moment of time and its sequence [he obtains] the gnosis born of discernment.”

III.55 tarakam sarva visayam sarvatha visayam akramam ca iti viveka jam jnanam: The essential characteristic of the yogi’s exalted knowledge is that he grasps instantly, clearly and wholly, the aims of all objects without going into the sequence of time or change. (B. K. S. Iyengar, Light on the Yoga Sutras of Patanjali); III.54 in Feuerstein: “The gnosis born of discernment is the ‘deliverer’, and is omni-objective, omni-temporal and non-sequential.”

IV.34 purusa artha sunyanam gunanam pratiprasavah kaivalyam sva rupa pratistha va citi saktir iti The process-of-involution of the primary constituents (gunas), devoid of purpose for the Self, is [what is called] aloneness [of seeing] (kaivalya), or the establishment of the power of awareness in [its] own-form. Finis.