

HANUMASANA, ANJANEYASANA, VIRASANA

These asanas focus on the stretch of the iliopsoas muscle group. It is the psoas where we store and hide fear in addition to being directly related to the fight-or-flight response. Opening up within these asanas allows us to physically shed our fears.

"It is with faith & hope that we can go forth with confidence & leap across oceans, change the world, or simply fall back in love." (Alanna Kaivalya)

It all started with a lovely woman named Anjana. She wanted to become a mother so badly that every day she prayed that a miracle would occur for her to have a child. Vayu, the Wind God, heard Anjana's desires on a regular basis & decided to grant her wish. He blessed several grains of rice & sent them with his birds to be delivered to her. Anjana received the grains & ate them. Shortly thereafter, she became pregnant.

She gave birth to a beautiful son and named him Anjaneya. Since Anjana was a mortal and Vayu a god, Anjaneya was half mortal and half divine. This half-god status caused a bit of trouble from time to time for Anjaneya. One day he thought he saw a giant mango in the sky. Since he loved mangoes he desperately wanted a bite so he flew toward the giant mango to take a bite. Well, the 'mango' was actually the sun and Surya, the Sun God, did not like the idea of being bitten so he sent a lightning bolt to Anjaneya. This bolt hit him in the jaw and killed him.

As one could imagine, Anjaneya's father Vayu was not happy about the death of his son so he took a deep breath and sucked up all the air on the Earth so everyone began to suffocate. He refused to exhale until his son was back alive.

Arguments were had and then an agreement was reached. Anjaneya could come alive again but would be renamed Hanuman, as hanuh means 'jaw' in Sanskrit. There was another catch; Hanuman was given a short term memory so that he could never remember he had divine powers, thus preventing him from getting into trouble. He also had to be removed from his mother's care and therefore was sent to live under the protection of Sugriva, the Monkey King. Therefore, Hanuman took the shape of a monkey.

At one point in Hanuman's life, he met King Ram. There was an instant bond and Hanuman vowed to never leave King Ram's side. Ram had a beautiful wife named Sita. As time passed, Ravana (an evil demon) grew very jealous of the happiness in which Ram and Sita lived, so he decided to kidnap Sita and go to war with Ram's kingdom. Due to the war, Ram could not save Sita but had to stay to protect his kingdom. Therefore, he sent Hanuman to the island of Lana where Ravana lived to find Sita.

Hanuman gave himself courage and went to the coast. Upon arriving at the coast he knelt down in prayer with one knee up and one knee up (inspiration for Virasana) to gain the strength and confidence to do what he deemed impossible, for he of course had a short term memory that would not allow him to remember

he had godlike powers. As he was flying to the kingdom he was in 'Hanumasana' with one leg in front and one leg in back, soaring through the air.

He finally found Sita and informed her that Ram would be coming to save her shortly, of which he did and balance was restored to Ram's kingdom. Ram was delighted for the honor that Hanuman showed and awarded him a gold bracelet with many gems. Hanuman looked at the bracelet, knocked it, chewed it, and looked it over completely. Ram was shocked at Hanumans behavior and asked why he was behaving in this fashion. Hanuman explained that "Ram every moment I chant your name, I chant your name so I can constantly remember how much I love you. I chant your name so much that even the fibers of my heart have your name written upon them. This bracelet is worth nothing to me if it does not bear your name. Here, let me show you." He then opened his chest and everyone saw that 'Ram' and 'Sita' were written on every strand in his heart.

To contemplate:

What does this story mean to you?

What does it mean to be a hero?

How could you bring this into your class?

Love above all is what overrides fear and doubts.

The asanas reflect fearlessness, bravery, strength, friendship, faith

"I don't believe in miracles, because miracles are the impossible coming true, and everything is possible." Poet Andrea Gibson

VIRABHADRASANA (WARRIOR POSES) – 2 DIFFERENT VERSIONS

“Warrior poses are a reminder that ferocity exists not only to destroy but also to allow us sufficient strength to achieve integrity, compassion, and a loving state of mind.”

“In order to preserve an elevated state of mind, be happy for those who are happy, cultivate compassion for those who are sad, feel delight for those deemed to be lucky [virtuous or righteous], and experience indifference toward those perceived to be wicked.” – Yoga Sutra 1.33

King Daksha had a beautiful daughter named Sati. Shiva and Sati were to be married. Upon meeting King Daksha Shiva showed up in his aspect of Lord of the Burial Grounds. He had long matted hair, his body was covered in ashes, he was surrounded by snakes and accompanied by many ghosts and demons. This did not go over well with King Daksha, and he did not approve. So, Shiva then showed himself in his magnificent aspect as a handsome man surrounded by gold. Her parents then approved, but Daksha never forgot or forgave Shiva for showing up how he did.

Years later Daksha held a ‘yagya’, a religious ceremony that was very special involving fire sacrifice. Sati was saddened when she realized that she and Shiva had not received an invitation. Sati decided to go anyway while Shiva did not.

1)

When Sati showed up she was ridiculed, insulted, and was clearly not welcome. She was horrified that the ceremony was not a ceremony at all but a mockery, a showing off of wealth. One must remember that improperly done rituals can bring bad luck to a kingdom. Sati was in such shock and disapproval that she threw herself into the fire.

Shiva could feel what Sati had done so he pulled a hair in frustration and threw it on the ground. From the hair arose a warrior, red in the face, who was ready for vengeance – Virabhadra. Virabhadra is the “personification of righteous anger and noble impulse to defend the innocent.” Virabhadra flew to the kingdom of King Daksha, destroyed everyone and everything.

Sati, Shiva’s first wife, was reborn as Parvati, his second wife. Shiva forgave Daksha and gave him back his life, only this time with the head of a goat.

2)

Sati went to the party weeping in front of her father, King Daksha. Daksha still did not forgive her or Shiva. Sati’s emotions were so strong she ignited a fire within herself and she went up into flames, leaving only a pile of ashes.

Once Shiva found out that this had happened he pulled out one of his dreadlocks and threw it to the ground. It fell into the pile of ashes and formed Virabhadra. He drew his sword, sliced off Daksha’s head, and reached forward to place it on the stake. (This signifies a progression of Warrior 1 – 2 – 3.

Sati appeared in a different body at the party knowing Shiva would hear and explained that what he did didn't solve anything but simply created larger problems. Shiva then appeared as himself and set Virabhadra aside. Since Daksha's head could not be attached he saw a goat and replaced Daksha's head with the head of a goat. Daksha was grateful that Shiva had realized his mistake and had given him back his life that he held another party and made Shiva and Sati his guests of honor.

What does this story mean to you?

How could you bring this into your class?

The warriors bring up symptoms of anger and grief.

The progression of Warrior 2-1-3 is "the warrior offering his efforts to his higher power, to one moving dynamically but with control into action."

What happens when we 'react' impulsively?

TRIKONASANA

Trinities everywhere – The Power of 3's:

Creation – preservation – destruction

Earth – Space – Heavens

Birth – Life – Death

3 gunas: Satva – Raja – Tama

3 Energy lines: Ida – Pingala – Sushuma

3 Phases of asanas: Embodying the pose – Sustaining the pose – Releasing the pose

What are more trinities???

The Three Faces of Dattatreya

1) Lord Dattatreya is an incarnation of Shiva which is considered the first teacher of the yogi's in the Northern tradition of Western India. He is half historical and half mythological. He has three faces representing Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. He is typically pictured seated with a begging bowl near him, a wish-fulfilling cow nearby, dogs surrounding him, and with a fire pit in front of him. There are many triangular shapes in his image: his knees, elbows, hair, and trident being a few. His trident resembles the transcendence of the three gunas through renunciation. He collects ignorance, attachment, aversion, and clinging to life, then throwing these to his dogs for treats. It is the ego in which he throws to the fire, tapas.

2) At one point in time Mahishasura, a powerful demon, was wreaking havoc on all the gods and goddesses. Everyone was concerned and did not know what to do. Shiva, Brahma, and Vishnu together created a goddess to overcome Mahishasura; her name was Mahamaya. Mahamaya, who is also known as Durga, had a lion by her side and was a strong and fierce warrior goddess. Mahamaya with her lion fought and defeated Mahishasura.

In Sanskrit, maha maya means the 'great illusion'. It is that illusion that we see reality, rather than seeing the truth that lies beneath reality. Mahishasura represents our minds, constantly wreaking havoc creating distractions and conflict. Mahamaya keeps us in touch with our true nature.

In Trikonasana we create a solid foundation and open up to leave 'maya' behind, to leave the illusion behind and open up to the truth.

What illusions do you have?

What illusions may your students have?

How can you use this in your class?

DOWNWARD AND UPWARD DOGS

From a story at the end of the 'Mahabharata':

After fighting in a battle, Yudhishthira and his family set off north to the polar mountain of Heaven. During the trek, a random dog joined as all of his family eventually died, leaving only him and the dog still en route. When they finally arrived at Heaven's door, Indra (Lord of Heaven) stated that dogs cannot come in. Yudhishthira stated that he would not go in without the dog. The dog had many choices to leave during the journey yet had decided to stay with him and help him make it to the destination. At this point the dog revealed itself to be the incarnation of Dharma. Both were allowed through the Heaven's door.

In India, Greece, and Egypt dogs are associated with death and the souls journey home. Specifically in India, dogs are wild scavengers like coyotes in the states. They are loud-mouthed, clever, hang out at burial grounds, and Shiva's natural companions.

Shiva as Bhairava (the beggar with a dog) represents the reality that seeks out people in desperate circumstances.

Dogs are also considered guardians and protectors, particularly of temples in Nepal, Tibet, and other countries. Similar to Shiva, dogs are considered guardians, playful companions, and dangerous outlaws.

What do dogs mean to you?

What could dogs mean to your students?

What does it mean to be loyal, protective, but also associated with death?

BHUJANGASANA – COBRA POSE

One particular story exclaims that the entire world itself is supported by Ananta, the great serpent.

Snakes:

Shed skin.

Can live to be very old.

Symbol of rebirth, regeneration, and ancient wisdom.

Can be dangerous.

Enjoy music and can dance.

“Footless but swift, wise but unpredictable...”

Guardians and protectors.

Have no external ears – they must listen through internal means.

The Nagas are the snake people. They either guard buried treasures underground, or are forest dwellers and hunters. They are one of the oldest aboriginal peoples of India.

Nag Panchami is an annual festival held in July or August to honor the cobra. Thousands of cobras are caught and brought to Shiva temples to be fed milk and honored with flowers. The streets are full of music and dancing among the snakes. After a day the cobras are released unharmed.

Patanjali was said to either be the incarnation of Ananta or half Naga.

Buddha’s meditation among the snakes.

What do snakes bring up for you?

What does it mean to you to have to listen through internal means rather than external?

How can you bring the symbolism of the snake into your yoga classes?

VASISTHA AND VISHVAMITRA

Once upon a time there was a divine son of the god Brahma, Vasistha, who seemed destined for 'spiritual achievement' due to him being among the top of Indian social hierarchy. He had a magical cow named Nandini who would grant wishes.

Then there was a king, Vishvamitra, who was of the Kshatriya warrior tribe, who were second to the Brahmins. Therefore, he did not have high hopes of 'spiritual achievement'.

A battle began between the two as Vishvamitra tried on numerous occasions to take Nandini by force. Though he and his warriors were known to have killed many Brahmins, Vasistha practiced his spiritual practice by being calm and never vengeful.

Vishvamitra began to desire more than Nandini, the wish-fulfilling cow; he began to desire spiritual strength. He noticed that though he was a strong warrior the strength of the sage Vasistha was much greater. He then set out to become a sage himself. While in the practice of meditation, Indra (the king god the demigods) sent a beautiful woman to distract him. They began an affair, but then Vishvamitra realized that he had gone off track. Thus, he resumed his meditation and practice and eventually became a sage himself.

*What does this story mean to you?
How does the story relate to the two poses?
Progress in life often involves trial and error.
Persistence can lead to success.*

*Vasisthasana is said to be sattvic, pure, and of a mind-clearing quality.
Vishvaamitrasana is considered to be very driven, rajastic, tense, with a firm sense of purpose, and of a higher difficulty level than Vasisthasana.*

ASTAVAKRASANA

This story “illustrates the human tendency to judge things by their appearances rather than by their true substance.”

There was a boy named Astavakra who crossed his father at a very early age, in the womb. He corrected his father as he was reciting the verses from Rig Veda (India’s oldest and sacred realms) incorrectly. With sudden rage the father cursed his son, so Astavakra was born deformed. His name refers to 8 crooked angles of his limbs.

Though deformed, Astavakra remained a loyal and faithful son. When he was twelve years of age his father was banished to Varuna (Lord of Death) for losing a debate. Though it was a huge journey, Astavakra made his way to the King’s court to challenge the decision. Upon arriving everyone laughed, due to his deformity. Immediately upon speaking, the laughing stopped and everyone realized how amazing intelligent this boy was. He won the debate for his father’s freedom. Those who mocked him eventually became his disciples, including the king.

What does this story mean to you in daily life?

What does this story mean to you regarding Astavakrasana or other poses?

How can you bring this story into the classes you teach?

Astavakra looks like a very difficult pose, yet it is considered one of the easiest arm balances as long as the student has the necessary knowledge in how to get into it.

GORAKSHASANA AND MATSYENDRASANA

Matsyendra and Goraksha are considered the founders of Hatha yoga.

One of many versions of the story is as follows:

As an infant Matsyendra was thrown into the ocean since he was born under inauspicious planets. A giant fish swallowed him. During his time in the fish's belly, Matsyendra listened to Shiva teaching Parvati at the bottom of the ocean. Twelve years later, Matsyendra emerges out of the fishes belly as an enlightened master.

Goraksha's story:

The story began when a peasant woman prayed to Shiva for a son. Shiva then sent her magical ashes to eat to bring her a son. Not understanding the meaning behind the ashes, the woman threw the ashes on a dung heap. Twelve year later Matsyendra heard about the woman's confusion and visited her explaining she may want to go look at the dung heap. Upon reaching the dung heap, the woman saw twelve year old Goraksha.

Goraksha means 'cow protector'. He is known as a miracle-working yogi to protect his guru, Matsyendra. At one time he rescued Matsyendra by taking the female form and entering the king's home to save him from the queen, whom he had fallen in love, distracting him from his spiritual life.

What does this story mean to you?

How can you relate this story to the related asanas?

KOUNDINYASANA

As Siddhartha was brought into the world, sages and seers were welcomed to make predictions about all the great things the prince would accomplish. After several sages predicted him to be the greatest king to ever rule and have the most beautiful woman as a wife, Koundinya came and stated what he saw.

Koundinya, a very wise sage, explained that their son would become one of the greatest kings ever to live but will not sit upon a throne that they call a throne, but that he will renounce the throne and leave their kingdom. He will discover the path to happiness and truth which will lead him to become a worldly beloved figure.

The king and queen were horrified at this prediction and threw Koundinya out of court, banishing him from their kingdom. Throughout the years the king and queen sheltered Siddhartha until they no longer could and he wanted to explore outside. Though only healthy and happy people were allowed in the streets when he went out, he spied some people hiding how much they were suffering and realized it was his mission to find an end to suffering in life.

Once he discovered the middle path, he and Koundinya spread the teachings of enlightenment: that the realm of the heart is the greatest kingdom one could have.

What does this say regarding Koundinyasana?

Balance, strength, flexibility, a belief in oneself

NATARAJASANA

Shiva is lord of stillness and contemplation, of all that lives and moves, and lord of the dance! The Lord of the Dance symbolizes the principle that causes change: death and decay, sprouting and growth).

His four hands represent:

- 1) The hand holding the drum represents the rhythm of time and our own heartbeats. It is the death and rebirth of another age.
- 2) The second hand gestures toward his lifted dancing foot.
- 3) The third hand is in abhaya mudra which means 'stop', but represents 'fear not'.
- 4) The fourth hand is in teaching mode.

His two feet:

- 1) One foot is crushing ignorance.
- 2) The second foot is lifted representing liberation.

Shiva, Lord of the Dance, is encompassed by a large ring of fire which is considered the samsara. The samsara is our cyclical pattern in which we are all stuck: birth, life, death. The samsara is our habits that inhibit our growth. This does not phase Shiva as he sees it as another rhythm to dance to, to move through.

One of his feet is stepping/crushing a demon which represents ignorance. Rather than let ignorance get in the way of his life, rather than let the daily dramas of life guide him, he uses the demon as a pedestal to rise above the daily dramas. Shiva uses the demon as his pedestal for dancing above and through the ignorance.

Snakes are always present among the Lord of the Dance as they are highly symbolic in Indian mythology. In this particular asana, the snake's venom represents 'avidya', which is our misunderstanding that we are anything other than divine. Shiva is immune to the snake's venom of avidya as he has the remedy – enlightened knowledge. Yet again, rather than being blocked by avidya, Shiva dances through and around it.

*What other symbolism do you see within Shiva, Lord of the Dance?
How can this be integrated into teaching Natarajasana in your class?*

CHANDRASANA AND ARDHA CHANDRASANA

Ganesh, a son of Shiva, is known for his obsession with sweet things. Typically, he is seen with a bowl of sweet blessed food, Prasad, in his palm. One time Ganesh ate so many sweet cakes that his belly was so full it was about to burst. He decided he wanted to go home and rest so he hopped on his ride (a tiny mouse) and headed home. The incredible balance of Ganesh is always demonstrated upon riding the tiny mouse, yet a long cobra came along and startled the mouse which of course caused Ganesh to stumble and fall over. As he hit the ground, sweet cakes shot out everywhere as his belly exploded. This frustrated Ganesh so he collected all the sweet cakes and put them back into his belly. He then found the cobra and tied it around his waist to hold the sweet cakes in.

During this explosion and re-ingesting of sweet cakes, the moon (Chandra) had been watching and ended up bursting out in laughter. This enraged Ganesh so he broke off his right tusk and through it at the moon, causing its light to go out. Therefore the earth would only ever see the light of the sun.

With no moonlight, and only sunlight, men and gods became scorched under the hot sun, romance was lost, and love was lost. With such despair some men approached Ganesh in his palace to allow the moon to shine once again. Ganesh agreed to a compromise. He would allow the moon to wane and wax so that it would only be in its full brightness once a month. This was the way of Ganesh to teach the moon a lesson, and of course he will always have his mark with only having one tusk.

What does this mean to you?

The moon, like the snake, is a symbol of rebirth and regeneration. Shiva represents the cosmic cycle whereas the moon represents the human cycle.

Have you noticed that the crescent moon is in Shiva's hair? Here is how it came to be there:

Once upon a time there was a churning of the Ocean of Milk. The devas (good angels) and asuras (rebel angels) had joined in the churning in search of amrita, the nectar of immortality. Vishnu took the form of a tortoise to hold the mountain in place. As the churning progressed many treasures came up: Lakshmi, the Goddess of wealth, Kamadhenu, the wish-fulfilling cow, Chandra, the moon, and an unexpected deadly mist. In order to save them all Shiva swallowed the deadly mist, but even he is affected by deadly things. The poison couldn't kill him but burned his throat incredibly. In gratitude the moon decided to live in his hair to the cool the burning.

DHANURASANA – It's all about balancing the tension and effort.

One of many Shiva forms is that of a hunter, and his bow being his choice of weapon. Once upon a time there were five Pandava brothers who rightfully ruled a kingdom, but the kingdom was taken over by Duryodhana, an inferior and aggressive man. The brothers were then exiled to the forest for twelve years. They lived simply, yet as athletes and warriors in training as they knew there would eventually be a war.

They enjoyed their time in the forest, but did not enjoy hearing the news of their kingdom; the wealthy abusing power, and the poor and sick not getting help. The brothers did not want to fight, yet they could not forget their duty and obligation to their kingdom.

Arjuna was the best archer of the brothers. His preciseness and strength were nearly superhuman. Shiva desperately wanted to give his bow to Arjuna, but the rules require that Arjuna must claim it himself. However, Shiva was getting angry and impatient waiting for Arjuna to make his move. So, he transformed himself into a tribal hunter, Kirata, and even changed Parvati herself into a hunter, Kirati, with her own bow. They snuck up on Arjuna.

Arjuna was in the middle of the forest balancing on one leg in tree pose. He saw a wild boar charge at him, and instinctively shot the boar with his bow. When checking the boar he saw two arrows, then looked up seeing a dark-haired tribal hunter saying it was his boar and he had shot it first. It was a draw and so Shiva, as the tribal hunter, and Arjuna began shooting at each other until Arjuna could not last any longer. The hunter picked up a handful of dust and threw it at Arjuna causing him to fall down.

Upon coming to, he saw Shiva and Parvati standing above him asking if he was alright. This was how Shiva was able to give his bow to Arjuna. Arjuna went back to his family and explained it was time for war.

When he went to war Arjuna had a heartfelt moment where he threw down his bow proclaiming he wasn't going to fight; too many people were going to die. Lord Krishna said to Arjuna, a famous line: "Whatever I do, I must do without attachment, offering the action and its results to God. And if I honestly do my best 100 percent, and leave the results to God, the consequences, whatever they are, are in God's hands." And so he fought.

What does this story mean to you?

What emotions are brought up?

How can you relate this story to dhanurasana in a yoga class?

How does dharma fit in with this story?

Where have you heard this story before?

GOMUKHASANA

In India, and other cultures all around the world, cows are considered sacred. Cows represent, wealth, status, life itself, nourishment, generosity, and goodness. In every Shiva temple, an image of Nandi the cow is guarding the door. The cow is the giver of plenty as it provides strength for field work, urine as an antiseptic, dung for fuel, milk for butter and ghee, and dung for building materials.

Gopala, which means 'the protector of the cows', happens to be one of Krishna's many names. Govinda is also another name of Krishna and it means "one who takes care of the cows". Once upon a time Brahma doubted Krishna's divinity thinking a cow herder is simply a peasant boy. So, he tested him. Brahma kidnapped the cowherd boys and the calves. He took them to a cave where Krishna wouldn't find them.

Brahma returned to the forest to look for Krishna's reaction to the cows being stolen, and was astonished at what he saw. He saw Krishna playing with the cows and the cowherd boys. Krishna had multiplied himself into calves and boys. Brahma was confused at Krishna's ability to be all things for all people. Krishna means "all attractive". Krishna can be whatever anyone needs.

What face are we putting on in cow face pose?

BAKASANA

There were two families fighting for land ownership, the Pandava's and the Kaurava's. The Pandava brothers, five, were banished to the forest where they lived for twelve years. One day they went in search of water and found a lake. When each brother would visit the lake a voice would say that if they drank the water they would die. The brothers couldn't resist as they were so hungry so every time a brother drank from the water he died.

Finally the last brother, Yudhishthira, made it to the lake to drink the water. Upon arriving he saw a large crane who said he was the one that had killed his brothers for drinking the water. He explained that if Yudhishthira could answer his questions correctly he would not only not kill him, but would bring his four brothers back to life. And so they began.

Crane: What is the news of the world?

Instead of replying about the economics and recent disasters, Yudhishthira replied "All living beings have forgotten their inner divine nature and find themselves in a state of ignorance, or avidya, which causes them to suffer."

Crane: What is the greatest wonder?

Instead of mentioning Machhu Picchu or the Pyramids, he replied "Although we see around us that all people and other living creatures are constantly dying, we believe this will not happen to us. We think that somehow we will escape death."

Crane: What is the true path?

He replied, "The true path lies in following the saints and yogis who have achieved self-realization. The truth lies hidden in the caves of their hearts, and they will share their knowledge and grace with anyone who cares to receive it. By associating with those great teachers who have no egocentric attachments and live only to give, we will emulate those qualities."

Crane: Who is happy in this world?

He replied, "The self-realized person, who has cleared all his debts by resolving all of his or her karma, is truly happy."

The crane was happy with his answers and revealed himself. He was Yama, the god of death. All brothers were give back their lives.

What is the symbolism of the crane and bakasana with this story?

How does balance, letting go, recognizing our divinity connect with this asana?

VAYU AND GARUDASANA

Did you know that Garuda is a divine bird with the beak, talons, head, and wings of an eagle, but has the body and limbs of a man? We lose awareness of our potential from time to time and Garudasana allows us to realize our potentials!

Vayu is also known as Indra, Pavana the Purifier, Gandha-Vaha the bearer of perfume, and Satate-Ge the ever-moving to name just a few.

Garudasana is known as the mythical bird in which Vishnu flies upon. Garuda never tires and never needs to land because he has balanced how to ride the wind.

One day, Garuda was born to his mother Vinita. Vinita was taken prisoner by very evil snakes whom she lost a bet to. They kept her deep in the underground. Garuda was determined to save her. He was to bring the snake's amrita, the immortality nectar. This required three obstacles, of which he overcame!

The first obstacle Garuda came across was he had to fly through a ring of fire. He was able to put it out using river water. The second obstacle Garuda came across was the need to pass through a circular spiked door. Using his special powers he shrank himself so small that he was able to pass through without a single scratch. Then, of course, the third obstacle was that he must defeat the two venomous snakes. With his wings he blinded them with a dust storm and was able to kill them, thus rescuing his mother. However, before the snakes could drink the amrita the gods arrived to reclaim the stolen nectar. In a reactive moment, the snakes quickly licked the nectar. However, the nectar is so strong that it split their tongues in which. This leads to the legend of why snakes of bifurcated tongues.

Garuda is also known to have protected Mount Meru, the holy mountain. Narada the Sage had request that Vayu blow strongly to Mount Meru to break off the top. Vayu blew and blew and blew, but was not successful because Garuda had his wings spread over the mountain to shelter it. One day, Garuda lifted his wings slightly just for a moment. It was that moment that Vayu saw the wings left and blew strongly at Mount Meru. The top broke off and Vayu threw it into the sea, where it became the Island of Lanka, or Sri Lanka as we know it today.

*How can you relate the stories of Garuda and Vayu to your yoga classes?
How can you relate who Vayu was to the vayu's in yoga?
What symbolism is there for Garudasana? Particularly when he lifted his wings slightly?*

KURMASANA

“Take time to embody the essence of now. Slow and steady and aware leads you down the path.”

Kurmasana the tortoise

One of the ten incarnations of Vishnu

The tortoise nadi is found in the notch of the throat

A tortoise retreats inside its shell withdrawing its limbs. Patanjali's fifth limb is called pratyahara, the stage when we withdraw our senses from the outside world so as to not distract the mind and focus on meditation. Patanjali even mentions meditating on the tortoise nadi. This brings steadiness.

There was once a flood and many of the God's treasures were lost at the bottom of the ocean. The most important of course being the 'amrita', the nectar of immortality. Both the Devas (gods) and the Asuras (demons) wanted it back. They were arguing until Brahma told them that in order to get it back they must churn the Ocean of Milk. This could not be done alone, so the Devas and the Asuras realized they would have to work together to accomplish this. A truce was made.

Together they were able to churn the Ocean of Milk by using the Mountain as a churning stick and a snake (Vasuki) as a rope. They wrapped the snake around the mountain so that each side could hold an end of the snake. They took turns pulling the snake, thus causing the mountain to move, thus churning the Ocean of Milk. However, once they began pulling on the mountain, the mountain began to sink. This is when Vishnu appeared as a tortoise to save the day. He held the Mountain on his back to stop it from sinking and churning could continue.

Treasures began to emerge: Sura, the goddess of wine, Kamadhenu, the first cow, Lakshimi, the goddess of fortune and wealth, and finally Dhanavantri, the physician with the amrita. When the amrita emerged, the truce was no longer. The Asuras of course wanted the nectar. However, Vishnu was able to save the day again incarnating as the beautiful Mohini to distract the Asuras as the Devas were able to drink the nectar and become more powerful than the Asuras.

What does this story mean to you?

How can you incorporate it into the Kurmasana pose in your class?

Is there anything else you can incorporate into other asanas that relate to this story?

Slow and steady wins the race.

Stability and steadiness is how we grow in our yoga practice.

VARUNA MUDRA:

Thumb and pinky finger are touching and all other three fingers are straight.

Varuna –

Most know him as the God of Water, but he was most importantly known as the “Guardian of Cosmic Justice, Lord of the Sky”

Credited with finding the sun

Parted the earth and sky

King of Kings

One responsible for making it rain

“...god who never does a mean or dubious action.”

Dual god known as Mitra-Varuna (mitra means friend)

He is the great friend of man and severely punishes anyone who violates friendship

Many famous hymns honor Varuna

The great magician!

Varuna mudra –

Enhances beauty

Removes impurities from the blood

Restores moisture to the skin

Helps with painful cramps

EKA PADA GALAVASANA

This pose is all about strength, balance, and openness. It is about being bound and then flying!

Galava is said to be named after the sage Galava. He is considered to be the son of Vishivamitra, guru of Rama.

It is believed that in times of tremendous distress and hard times, Galava was offered for sale with a cord tied around his waist. Gala actually means cord. It was prince Satyavrata who gave him liberty and restored him back to his father.

PINCHA MAYURASANA

This pose is excellent for the expelling of toxins from the abdominal organs, and for curing abdominal diseases.

Peacocks are known to be the vehicles of the gods and goddesses.

Mayura is thought to be the son of Garuda (Garudasana). Garuda created Mayura with his very own feathers. Mayura is said to be the vehicle specifically for Devi Sarasvati, the goddess of learning, art, and speech.

When the devas churned the ocean to obtain the elixir of immortality (look back to Ardha Chandrasana) Shiva swallowed the deadly mist to save everyone. The poison burned his throat and his throat turned blue. Shiva then acquired Lord of the Peacock due to the fact that peacocks have blue necks.

“The path of the yogi is to churn the body with the rope of the mind through repeated practice in order to reach a state of freedom and joy.” – Myths of the Asanas

BHARADVAJASANA

Intensity and dedication – necessary but there can be too much.

Once upon a time there was a student named Bharadvaja. There was no student as dedicated as he was to the study of the Vedas – the most ancient philosophical and spiritual text. He had the drive and passion to master them all. He devoted his entire lifetime to the study of the Vedas, so much that he exhausted an entire lifetime to studying.

Upon his rebirth Bharadvajasana knew what to do – he was to dedicate this next life entirely to the study of the Vedas in order to master them. Once again he worked so intensely and hard that his lifetime was exhausted entirely with study.

His third rebirth was the same. No one ever saw this wide sage that studied the Vedas so intently because he was always inside studying them. At the end of this third lifetime, he was in bed sick and dying when Shiva appeared. At first he was full of joy as he believed he was to be liberated finally with all the study of the Vedas.

Bharadva was disappointed when the first words out of Shiva's mouth were, "Bharadvaja, what are you doing?" Shiva explained that he would not be taking him with him this time and that he hoped Bharadvaja finally learned his lesson about all this crazy studying!

Shiva demonstrated what Bharadva learned each lifetime. The first lifetime a handful of dirt, the second lifetime a handful of dirt, and the third lifetime a handful of dirt. He explained that Bharadva had spent all this time becoming an expert on the Vedas and that he knew more than anyone else. However, he had nothing joyful to show for his studies. He did not share his knowledge with anyone. It is through sharing that we truly become alive inside.

Bharadva's next lifetime was spent teaching and sharing his deep wisdom and joy that comes from the Vedas. At the end of his fourth lifetime Shiva promised that he may be liberated from the cycle of birth and rebirth. Bharadvaja declined his offer as he realized he was more close to Shiva sharing moments of joy with others through sacred texts, thus he was reborn as one of the greatest sages every known.

"It took Bharadvaja three lifetimes to realize what, hopefully, we will learn in less than one: When we find the source of our joy, it is our duty to live it and share it with others." – Myths of the Asanas

How does the asana relate to the story?

How can you relate this particular story to more than this yoga asana?

SHAVASANA

A woman came to Buddha begging that he bring her child back to life because he can. He said he would if she would bring back mustard seeds from a house where no one has died. She left to begin her search, yet returned empty handed. She realized our nature is to die; death is going to happen at some time.

In Indian mythology when the world was first created, everyone was living and therefore the world was too full. Sarasvati, the goddess of wisdom, told Brahma he must create an exit, Death! Brahma then created Mrityu, a dark-skinned woman dressed in red, to take people's breath away. She was at first horrified, but then Brahma explained that all who die are reborn so she wouldn't just be a killer, she would be a midwife as well. With that Mrityu became the dark goddess who devours life and Shiva became Mahakala, the Lord of Time who regenerates life.

There was once a story of a king, King Parikshit, who was cursed by a young boy to die in seven days. Instead of spending that time with his family and enjoying his wealth, he gave up his throne and went to the forest to learn from sages the science of yoga. He achieved self-realization and was able to pass on with an open heart and mind.

What would you do if you only had seven days to live?

How can we encourage an acceptance of death instead of fear?

What do these stories and death mean to you in a yoga class?

How can teach in class to cherish aging instead of constantly trying to stop the process?

SACRED TALE: “The Savitri Ceremony”

Savitri is not a goddess. She is worshipped in the month of May on the 14th day after the full moon. Only married women perform this ceremony and if they perform it precisely, they will never lose their husbands, as Savitri did not.

Savitri’s father gave her the liberty to choose her own husband. She chose to marry the son of a hermit, Satyaban. Satyaban was the son of a king who had been conquered and driven from his throne and palace. He was fated to die within one year of marriage due to a curse. Savitri knew this, but could only give her heart to one man. She did not tell Satyaban that he was fated to die one year into marriage.

Due to her being of a higher order and him being the son of a conquered king, they lived remotely in the forest. On the day that marked one year of marriage, Yama (King of the Dead) arrived to take Satyaban. Savitri, however, would not leave her husband’s side thus following Yama as he was attempting to take Satyaban.

Yama was very pleased with the devotion of Savitri to her husband, but could not take the living with the dead. So, he granted her one wish (that could not be for her husband’s life) so that she may go on her way and he may take Satyaban. Savitri wished to let her father who has no son have one, so that he may hand down his prosperity. Yama granted the wish, yet Savitri continued to follow him. Yama said he would grant another wish because he still could not take her with him. She wished that her father-in-law be able to recover his sight and his stolen kingdom. The wish was granted, yet she still followed Yama and the body of Satyaban. One last time Yama exclaimed that he would grant a wish, but only if she would stop following him. She wished that she were to have 100 sons by Satyaban, each born after an interval of 100 years. The wish was granted, and Yama outsmarted. For, how can Savitri have 100 sons born by Satyaban if Satyaban is dead? He had to grant her third wish and return her husband. They lived for many years birthing a son every 100 years.

SACRED TALES: THE MANTHAN SASHTHI CEREMONY

This ceremony is celebrated the 6th day after the new moon in September. Pounded rice pigmy figures representing human beings are painted with turmeric-water and vermilion. The goddess is worshipped with flowers, bel-leaves, sandalwood paste, incense, rice, and blades of grass.

THE TALE: "Sacrificed to Varuna"

Once upon a time there was a Brahman who wanted to dig a pond, however no matter how deep he dug he never found water. As he fell asleep with frustration he dreamt that the only way for him to get water would be to sacrifice his only grandson, who was an infant, to Varuna (Water God). The sacrifice would involve cutting the body into five pieces and burying them in the four corners and at the center of where he was digging the pond. He awoke very sad and disturbed.

His son noticed his father's uneasiness and asked what was the matter. The father told the son about his dream. The son, with much devotion to Varuna and his father, decided he would sacrifice his only son. Therefore he cut and buried the pieces of the body as instructed. Immediately water filled the pond. When a pond is dug following a vow, it must be 'consecrated by rites prescribed in the Shastras'. Therefore, a ceremony was planned for the following day.

The mother of the infant son had no idea of the sacrifice and was bathing in the pond the following morning. It struck her that she had not seen her son that morning. However, a maid servant stopped her thought processes explaining that the infant has an aunt and grandma to also take care of him. She continued bathing, but then remembered it was the Manthan Sashthi puja day. She had been a devoted worshipper, yet it had slipped her mind that today was her puja day.

She quickly offered flowers and bel-leaves to an image she made of Sashthi with powdered rice and began to worship her with all her heart. Upon finishing she looked behind her and saw an old woman carrying her son. The woman handed her son exclaiming she must keep a better eye on her son, and then vanished into thin air. It was the Goddess Sashthi herself.

Her father and husband returned shocked and full of joy at the sight of the infant son. The sacrifice was explained to the mother and everyone was filled with joy that the son had returned. They devotedly worshipped Goddess Sashthi from then on.

SACRED TALES: THE MANASA OR NAGA-PANCHAMI CERMONY

This puja is performed in July on the last day of Ashadh. It is a worship of snakes.

THE TALE: The Divine Brothers

One day seven wives of Krisidhan, a wealthy farmer, were speaking of their wishes. The seventh and youngest wished for a good meal of kol fish with no work all day long. Her name was Lahana. While walking home from getting water it was noticed that there were a pair of kol fishes. Lahana carried the fish home. These two fishes were not just any fish. They were divine serpents – Ahiraj and Maniraj – who were testing Lahana.

Later in the evening when Lahana went to get the fish to cook she was quite surprised and taken back, yet calm, to see that they had changed into snakes! She carefully placed them in an empty cooking vessel and then proceeded to feed them milk and plantains every day for an entire month. Then a day came when milk and plantains were no longer plentiful, so she took the snakes to a field and asked that they go because she no longer had the means to feed them.

The snakes went home in the nether world and told their mother of the kind story requesting that something be done in return for her kindness. They thought of bringing Lahana to their home, being brothers to her and her mother being a mother to her. So, this time they disguised themselves as two young men with quite a following of servants carrying gifts and food. They claimed they were Lahana's long lost brother and requested to take her home for a few days.

Upon reaching the water she grabbed ahold of the snakes and they took her to her home. After a few weeks, Padma Rani (the mother) had to leave for a bit and asked Lahana to do something every day: boil the milk, peel the fruits and pour a bit into each of the holes for her children and always be aware of your safety.

One day Lahana slept in late until she noticed the serpents hissing and darting toward her. She quickly boiled the milk and crushed the plantains and poured it into the holes. However, she did this so quickly she was not aware that it was still boiling, thus some of the snakes had parts of their body burned and were furious in pain. The youngest and most impatient was so furious he darted at Lahana and struck her down dead.

Padma Rani could feel what happened and immediately returned. She brought Lahana back to life by bathing her in nectar and requested that Lahana be taken back to her human home. Upon departure they only 'jeweled' half her body for the damage she did to the kids. Padma Rani then requested that she do the following upon arriving home: to touch her mother's feet with the one foot of hers that had a bangle on it. When her mother reacts in disgust, Lahana is to say, "Long life to mother Padma Rani, mother-in-law, and to brothers Ahiraj and Maniraj. If I have got ornaments only on half of my body this time, I shall have them on the other half by and by."

Lahana did exactly this and the two snakes returned home speaking of this, that she spoke no ill of those who adorned her half way. Thus, they set out again and brought her back to their house covering her body 'fully' in jewels instead of only half.

Again directions were sent to Lahana, and she did exactly what she was told. The snakes were so happy that they wanted to do something even more for her. So they went to the palace of the king and bit the young prince to death. Then they disguised themselves as Brahmans walking around who happened to be snake doctors. They went to cure the prince on one condition, that he adopt the wife of the youngest son of the farmer, Krisidhan (Lahana) as a daughter of his own house and treat her royally.

Lahana had previously not had a father, or any family. So, she then was provided a father and treated as a daughter of the royal house. All by Pama Rani!