

# yoga

JOURNAL

GUIDED MEDITATION  
Strategies to  
Train Your  
Wandering Mind

## Can You Trust the Teacher Within, or Do You Need a Guru?

By Victoria Moran

How Yoga Helps Kids  
Become Better Learners

What You Need to Know  
If You're Having Trouble  
Getting Pregnant

Sarah Powers and  
Tim Miller on  
Developing an  
Authentic Practice



# Asana

BY BARBARA BENAGH

## Salamba Sarvangasana

### Shoulderstand

#### Benefits

Improves circulation and can reduce hypertension (high blood pressure)

Balances thyroid and parathyroid glands

Improves elimination

Helps treat female reproductive disorders

Helps manage asthma

#### Contraindications

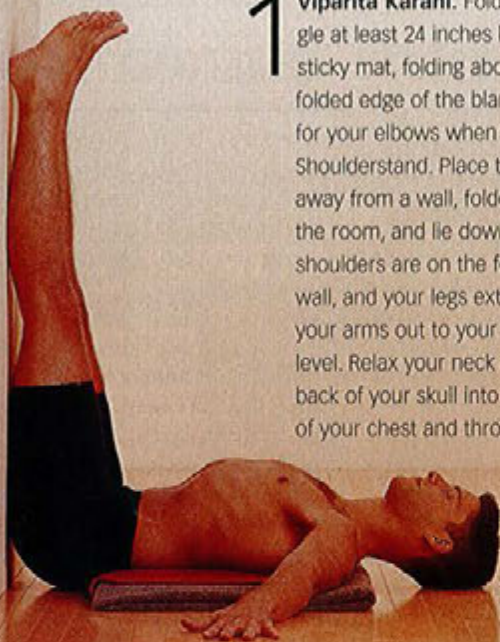
Some chronic neck problems

Migraine

Menstruation

Extreme hypertension

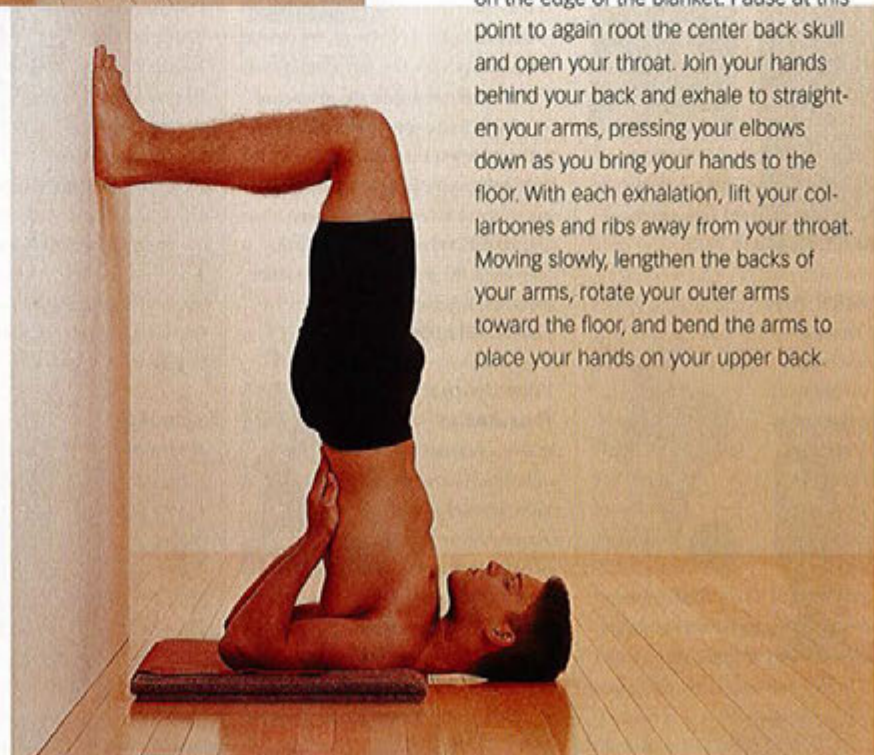
**1 Viparita Karani.** Fold a firm blanket into a rectangle at least 24 inches by 20 inches. Place it on a sticky mat, folding about a foot of the mat over the folded edge of the blanket so you will have traction for your elbows when you eventually come into Shoulderstand. Place the blanket about 6–8 inches away from a wall, folded edge toward the center of the room, and lie down on the blanket so your shoulders are on the folds, your hips are near the wall, and your legs extend straight up it. Stretch your arms out to your sides just below shoulder level. Relax your neck and root the center of the back of your skull into the floor, feeling the opening of your chest and throat.



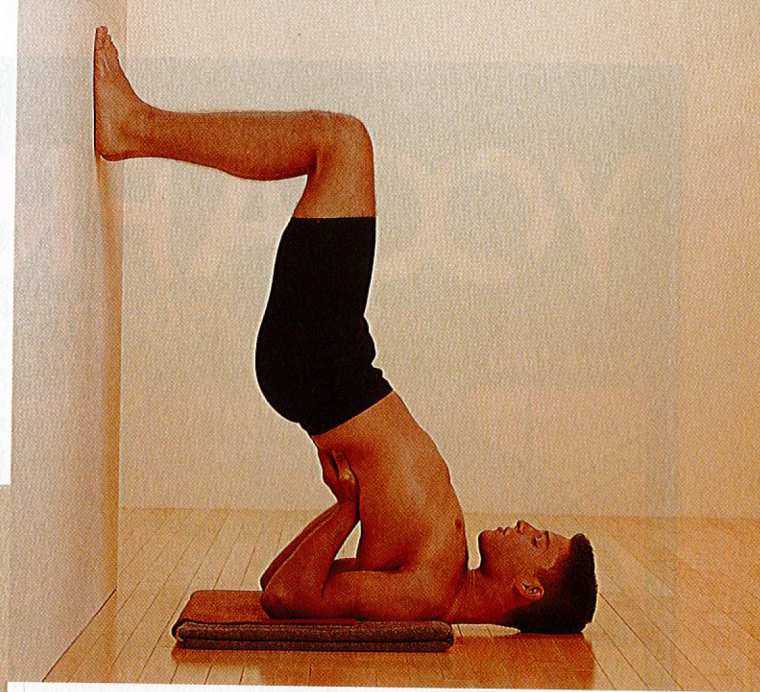
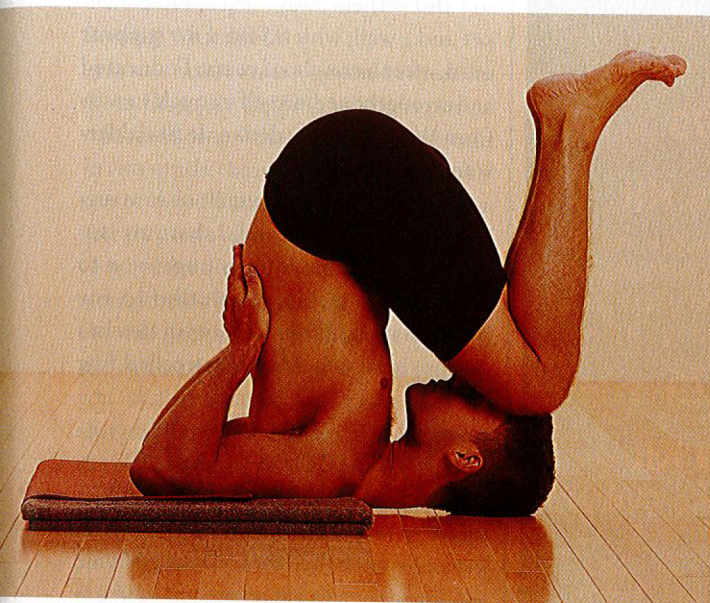
**2 Wall-Supported Shoulderstand.** From the position in Figure 1, press your heels into the wall, bend your knees, and lift your hips to bring yourself onto your shoulders. You may need to wriggle your shoulders toward the wall to keep them on the edge of the blanket. Pause at this point to again root the center back skull and open your throat. Join your hands behind your back and exhale to straighten your arms, pressing your elbows down as you bring your hands to the floor. With each exhalation, lift your collarbones and ribs away from your throat. Moving slowly, lengthen the backs of your arms, rotate your outer arms toward the floor, and bend the arms to place your hands on your upper back.

I HAVE GREAT SYMPATHY for students who struggle with Salamba Sarvangasana (Shoulderstand). Because of an old neck injury, Salamba Sarvangasana used to be quite difficult for me. My neck and upper back ached in the pose and throbbed for several minutes after I came out of it. About twice a year I would strain muscles in my upper back while practicing Shoulderstand. I sought the advice of teachers, who all came to my aid by adding more and more props. Before long, my Shoulderstand was supported by four blankets, a belt tied around my upper arms, and a chair positioned under my hips.

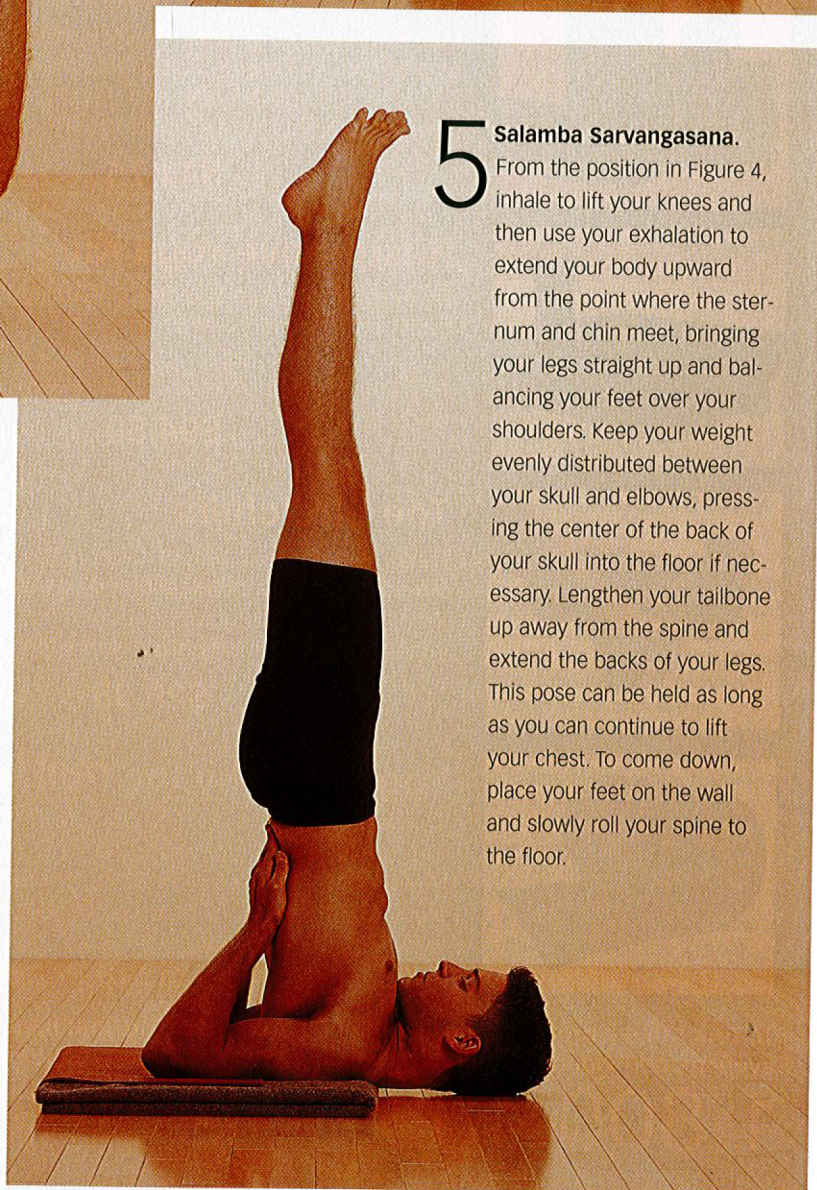
One day, surrounded by these accoutrements, I took stock of my situation and realized that while the outer form of my pose would pass muster, I had no insight whatsoever about how to actually *do*



**3 Viparita Karani Mudra.** Using your hands as a fulcrum to keep your rib cage in a near-vertical position, drop your hips slightly back toward the floor. Your spine will arch a little, lengthening your front body. To intensify this uplift, consciously open your throat and upper chest with each inhalation and continue to ground your center back skull and elbows and lift the sternum with each exhalation.



**4 Knees to Forehead.** Be diligent about keeping your weight grounding through the center back skull and elbows as you bring your knees down and rest them on your forehead. Let the weight of your knees assist in rooting the center back skull. Relax your hips toward your feet to stretch your back, lengthening it away from your neck and bringing your rib cage closer to vertical. Don't drop your chin; instead, keep your throat open, lifting the sternum toward your chin with each exhalation.



**5 Salamba Sarvangasana.** From the position in Figure 4, inhale to lift your knees and then use your exhalation to extend your body upward from the point where the sternum and chin meet, bringing your legs straight up and balancing your feet over your shoulders. Keep your weight evenly distributed between your skull and elbows, pressing the center of the back of your skull into the floor if necessary. Lengthen your tailbone up away from the spine and extend the backs of your legs. This pose can be held as long as you can continue to lift your chest. To come down, place your feet on the wall and slowly roll your spine to the floor.