

# **The Aerial Yoga Manual**

## **Volume 1**

A step-by-step guide for teachers and students of  
any aerial yoga or fitness program

**Rebekah Leach**

**Photos by Matthew Leach**

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When practicing any aerial fitness program, always do so in the presence of a trained professional, with load-tested fabric hanging from load-tested rigging, which has been set-up and is inspected frequently by rigging professionals, along with crash pads underneath the fabric. It is recommended that you check with your doctor or healthcare provider before commencing any exercise especially a rigorous program that includes inversions such as aerial yoga.

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## Preface

For the past three years, I have been watching, with fascination, the worldwide birth, growth and sequential rapid spread of aerial yoga. My own aerial yoga story began in 2007. I had just moved to Ojai, CA, a hidden treasure of a town, where it's rare to find a resident who doesn't do yoga. At that point in time, I was intensely immersed in the aerial arts, with a large emphasis on fabric. For the purpose of introducing students to work in the air, I was working on aerial fabric with a low knot tied in it. Having a loop provided a way for students to work in tandem with the ground and fabric simultaneously, so that students could learn how an apparatus can take your weight, and then how this can be used for stretching, building strength, and ultimately for dance and other flow movement.

Putting these two factors together meant that I had an abnormal amount of students who practice yoga on a regular basis. Many people would make comments on the movements such as, "oh - this is just pigeon only upside-down" (in reference to a move that aerialists typically call gazelle). Naturally I began thinking more and more about this concept of combining aerial with yoga.

Then a little light bulb went off in my head that said, *this seems like such a natural progression, I bet there are others out there undertaking the exact same thing.* Living on the edge of a national forest was not the best place for an internet connection, but one day I eagerly waited out the loading of the pages to see what would come up when I typed "aerial yoga" into Google. When compared to today, I am amazed to think back on that memory of only finding one article and one person and one picture. As far as videos go, there were some videos of people inverting, but not on the looped fabric that is so fast becoming popular.

It remained a small, growing thought at the back of my mind, "what would it look like to combine aerial with yoga?" Fast forward to the summer of 2008 – the Aerial Dance Festival held annually in Boulder, CO was offering an aerial yoga class! The apparatus of choice: trapeze. *This is going to be interesting,* I thought, *what can you do with yoga and a trapeze?* While my apparatus of choice remains fabric to this day, the class gave me the spark I needed to start creating a curriculum. I opened up classes for aerial yoga officially in 2008.

I must confess, I have not always liked my work-in-progress curriculum but I knew I had to start somewhere especially. I learned a lot through teaching, and I so much appreciate all the students who were the "guinea pigs" of my curriculum development. Since then, my curriculum has grown and evolved, and taken shape. I like it more and more all the time.

When I finally sat down and asked myself what my curriculum was, that's when these books started taking shape. The process felt very systematic. It was about taking a look at a yoga move and asking the question, "In what ways can the fabric support the body in that position?" I feel that I had the wonderful privilege of being a pioneer, an explorer, as I watched each move unfold. No one taught these moves to me. Rather, it was a job in translation. And I am not surprised when I see moves that I "discovered" pop up in another mover. "Bodies in motion will find similar movement" and this is a classic example of that quote in action. Granted, there will be a lot that is unique to individual pioneers in this field, but in general, it does not at all surprise me when I see similar basic moves in an aerial yoga class arising out of two separate lineages that never crossed, or even when they had the same idea to call it the exact same thing. Much of it just makes sense as you take a look at yoga and move it onto the fabric, combining it with extensive aerial knowledge.

As I wrote in my aerial fabric manual series, I believe it's important to honor the pioneers of a new art form, but I hope that we can have a collaborative spirit in the growth of aerial yoga just as in any other movement form and not get caught up with a move "belonging" to someone. Choreography belongs to someone. Moves do not. Sometimes, it's hard to tell the difference. Applying this here, pioneers are honored by you giving credit that you were inspired by them, telling other what you learned from them, and you can complete the circle by acknowledging their influence upon your own work. It remains that the movement itself does not belong to them. It belongs to the people.

Please don't misunderstand what I am saying – all rules of copyright, etc. still apply! Respect each artist, and my work to put together this curriculum. But, as I watched the growth of aerial yoga, I have witnessed an amazing thing – multiple people coming to the same conclusions at the same time. Each pioneer has led with their own style; created some left-field moves that are unique to them; made different choices about what to call aerial yoga; have unique perspective on where to divide the line between aerial arts and aerial yoga; and are now making choices about how to lead the next generation. Within all the differences, there is an undercurrent of the same vision across the board. When you type "aerial yoga" into Google, you no longer have just one result\* – you have a multitude and I'm glad that among that multitude, you and I have come together to move this movement forward.

Happy Flying,

*Rebekah Leach*

\*Granted, at the time of this writing, this aerial yoga manual series remains to be the first and only book written on aerial yoga. I mean multitude by way of everything surrounding aerial yoga. It wouldn't surprise me if, in the coming decade, aerial yoga became as ubiquitous as yoga itself.

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# Introduction

Welcome yogis, welcome aerialists, welcome all! *The Aerial Yoga Manual* series, in two volumes, is a wonderful resource for those of you looking for reference books to have on hand and can be used as a study guide for students of any aerial yoga or aerial fitness program. (Corresponding video content that is designed to go in tandem with these manuals is now available on [AerialDancing.com](http://AerialDancing.com).) Aerial yoga combines the poses of yoga with the aerial arts. In this case, we have specifically coupled it with the aerial apparatus known as fabric, silks, chiffon, among other names. When the fabric is looped, it can also be called a sling or hammock.

Aerial yoga is neither yoga nor aerial acrobatics – it is finding its own niche somewhere in between. One of the wonderful attributes of the use of the loop for yoga is the adaptability for people of various ability levels. For example, if a student is having trouble balancing in Warrior III in traditional yoga, the added loop of the sling around the shoulder area can help them hold their position in space. On the other extreme, a yoga student who typically excels in their traditional yoga class might be surprised by the challenges of aerial yoga. It is not uncommon for a yoga practitioner to walk out of an aerial class saying, “I thought I had core strength until I took this class.” It’s amazing how something as simple as a looped piece of fabric can create so many new ways to explore 3D space. It opens up new doors as to how you can work with your own body weight.

## About this aerial yoga manual series

The aerial yoga curriculum designed by Rebekah Leach consists of roughly 100 core movements. Don’t be fooled by the relatively small number of 100. Many of the “movements” encompass moves that involve hundreds of moves within themselves. These 100 moves have been selected as representatives so that teachers have cognitive anchors for all the options they have to pull from to create sequences, etc. The curriculum has been divided up between the two volumes of the aerial yoga manual series. Each volume covers moves from each category (which are discussed below); each volume has poses that are gentle and poses that can be quite intense; and each manual has moves that are meant to test strength and moves that are meant to test range of motion. Volume I focuses on the “first moves” of each category (grounded, flying, inversions, etc.) with an emphasis on restorative poses. The bonus chapter in this manual is on prenatal aerial yoga. The major focus points of volume II include back arch poses, planks, core, and strength work, while also covering more flying poses and a few more inversions.

Moves made the cut by having some or all of the following qualities:

- they feel good on the body,
- they encompass a variety of ability levels,
- they are simple to understand even if they are not always simple to do,
- and they can be done at multiple fabric heights which are all within “strike zone” (think: above the knee and below the shoulders).

Put together, the strength moves compliment the flexibility moves so that there are periods of output and periods of rest within a workout. There are moves that will generate heat in the muscles, moves that will elongate muscles, and then moves that will encourage release of tension by working the opposite muscle groups. All of these moves work together so that your body can work well, stretch well, and rest well.

## The Categories

Take a look at the picture collage below. First, notice that the body position in all of these pictures is fundamentally the same. What position do you call this? Some may recognize the corresponding yoga move as “seated wide leg straddle.” As you start hanging on the fabric, tilting this move on an axis, wrapping yourself up, and taking yourself upside-down all with the same body pose, it helps to establish some terminology to keep things clear.

*Moving left to right, top to bottom, the variations of names we have selected for the straddle are: flying diaper wrap straddle, low-flying straddle, floating seated straddle (fabric half spread), iron hold straddle (or flying straddle), seated straddle w/ suspended arms, floating straddle, inverted straddle, and inverted straddle hold.*



Take a moment and see if you can make sense of the names of each move. What conclusions can you draw? If you heard just the names, would you be able to recall the correct move? This is goal of creating a consistent naming system.

For naming purposes, there are four main categories of movement: **grounded, inverted, flying, and floating**. Inverted, flying, and floating are all added at the beginning of the name. If a name has none of these, then grounded is implied (in the context of an aerial yoga class). If a movement is **grounded**, then there is going to be some body part that the fabric has suspended, so that becomes the characteristic naming tool for grounded moves. It should make more sense now to hear “straddle w/ suspended arms.” Because you don’t hear “inverted, flying or floating”, you know you are grounded. Because you are on the ground, there must be some body part suspended or being supported by the fabric, and the part that comes after the “w/” will give it away. Since “w/ suspended” is used so often, you may see it abbreviated as “w/ sus” or even just “w/s.”

A move is labeled **flying** when your feet are off the ground and you are in the air! Low-flying poses are the poses where your torso is between the ground and the loop, even though you are still one hundred percent off the ground. (Low-flying straddle is a classic example.) For most flying poses, you likely start by standing on the loop and then move into the flying pose from there. One example of a classic flying pose is flying tree which is covered in this volume.

**Inverted** moves, as the name implies, refer to the moves where you get to hang upside-down. Inversion trumps flying, meaning that if a move is flying and its inverted (which most inversions are anyway), it gets the title inverted, and nothing else. For example, the inverted straddle, which is the first inverted movement you learn in this course, is a flying move, but we label it with “inverted” because inverted is the more specific category.

Anytime the fabric is completely spread out, let's call it **floating**. These are also called hammock poses. A nice way to end an aerial yoga session is with floating corpse pose. Just by hearing the name, you should be able to tell that it means the fabric is spread open and being used as a hammock to lay out in corpse pose. (It is very relaxing.) If the fabric is not being fully spread open, then sometimes we use “half spread” to be clear. Typically, however, the context will make it clear, and no specification is needed. Sometimes, flying and floating can get mixed up because they are very similar. Just remember that when something floats, you need more surface area exposed to make it float, so the fabric must be open. (If it is still confusing, you can change the word “floating” to “hammock” everywhere you see it.)

Another way to name movements is by the root movements they come from. This helps create an entire subcategory that can all be considered one “movement group” rather than thinking of each individual move. The flying diaper wrap moves is a prime example of this phenomenon. Once you are in the diaper wrap (notice that since the context is clear and there is no such thing as a grounded diaper wrap, you can easily drop the flying prefix for the diaper wrap), there are a variety of movements to move into. Diaper wrap pike and diaper wrap straddle are two such examples. While diaper wrap straddle could technically be called a flying straddle, it is not the best fit in this case. There is a fundamental root move that trumps here.

It is helpful to establish a system that gets everyone thinking as like-minded as possible, but even still, we might veer off at times. If you have another way to name a particular move, share your reason for your naming so that ideas can bounce around and eventually help the community to settle on the names that make the most amount of sense to the most amount of people.\*

\*I am not particularly attached to my own naming system. I just had to come up with something so that I could organize all my files and know what move was in each file without looking through the files each time!

# The Ups and Downs of Aerial Yoga

## The Benefits of Aerial Yoga

All the set-up hassle and potential hazards of height are not stopping the growing numbers of aerial yoga practitioners. So what makes it worth the hassle? It's all the benefits that a looped fabric can bring. A looped piece of fabric can support the body in ways that allow you to experience poses that may be straining otherwise. Poses, such as a handstand which can be quite challenging for some, are suddenly not just possible, but are easier to try with the fabric wrapped around the body so that the fabric acts as the perfect self-spotter.

By practicing aerial yoga, you are likely to be able to:

- ◆ Develop upper body strength without even trying to!
- ◆ Stretch deeper without experiencing strain because the fabric supports part of your body weight.
- ◆ Work more of the body at once because weight is distributed throughout multiple working points.
- ◆ Increase your spatial intelligence by exposing yourself to new perspectives within 3-D space.
- ◆ Develop a stronger core by expanding the possibilities of positions in 3-D space.
- ◆ Improve balance through use of the fabric that can move anywhere in space.
- ◆ Experience the empowerment of being able to lift your own body weight in new poses.
- ◆ Reinforce proper body alignment, which will carry over into your everyday life, and throughout your other fitness practices.

## The Downsides of Being Upside-Down

While being upside-down can bring great health for some, there are others who have conditions which make it dangerous for them to invert. Those who should *not* invert include anyone with any of the following conditions<sup>1</sup>:

- ◆ Glaucoma
- ◆ Hypertension
- ◆ Uncompensated congestive heart failure
- ◆ Carotid artery stenosis
- ◆ Hiatal hernia or spinal instability
- ◆ Persons receiving anticoagulants or aspirin therapy
- ◆ Those with a family history of cerebrovascular accidents
- ◆ Those above age 55
- ◆ High or low blood pressure
- ◆ History of stroke or heart conditions of any kind
- ◆ Pregnancy beyond the first trimester
- ◆ Excess weight
- ◆ Epilepsy
- ◆ Eye problems
- ◆ Inner ear problems
- ◆ Other conditions – check with your doctor to make sure it's okay for you!

<sup>1</sup>Klatz RM, Goldman RM, Tarr RS, et al: Gravity inversion therapy (Correspondence). West J Med 1983 Oct; 139: 538-540

Also, some recommend that women refrain from inverting during menstruation. For my own body, I feel that prolonged periods of time being upside-down are never good, as we will talk more about in a moment. I prefer to come in and out of inverted movement, rarely staying for more than ten seconds at any given time. During menstruation, this time is even shorter. I may invert, but it's more just passing through the position.

Aerial yoga is a very young art form. At the time of this writing, the longest anyone has been doing aerial yoga (as we think of it now) is ten years (to my knowledge, in America). The reason that I bring up this fact here is that no one is able to report on the long term affects to practicing aerial yoga, and in particular, the inversions. While aerialists do hang out upside-down frequently, it remains uncertain what damage may occur from hanging upside down for a specific length of time over several years. While there are generally no side effects for a healthy person to hang upside down once or twice here and there, and teachers can feel good about inviting people to invert, I feel it is important to do a risk assessment before you start hanging upside-down on a regular basis.

While no one has been practicing aerial yoga in particular for very long, people have been finding ways to hang upside-down for over half a century. Gravity inversion therapy hit the United States in the 1960s when Robert Martin, MD, developed equipment to aid patients in relief of low back pain by utilizing gravity and their own body weight to decompress the spine and vertebral discs through inversion<sup>2</sup>.

A few decades later, researchers were motivated to conduct studies to investigate the effects of inverting. Researchers studied static inverting and oscillating inversion. From the conclusions of the studies on static inverting, researchers have found significant elevations in blood pressure, pulse rate, intraocular pressure and central retinal arterial pressure values upon inversion<sup>3</sup>. In a follow-up study, they tested whether the same results could be induced by rigorous exercise, and found that they could not<sup>4</sup>. This lead them to the list of contraindications included on the previous page.

One interesting conclusion from a 1985 study was that oscillating inversion movements, unlike static inversions, decrease both systolic and diastolic systemic blood pressure and pulse rate. They conclude, "These decreases may result from the relaxed and calm emotional state that oscillation procedures afford. We conclude that full inversion using an oscillation procedure presents no risk to normal subjects."<sup>5</sup> The oscillation procedure that they studied had participants oscillate for 15 minutes through use of an inversion table that dipped upside-down. The fully inverted-to-upright cycle was around 6-10 seconds. In other words, they did not stay upside-down for any extended period of time. It was more of a "go down, come up" motion. This is similar to how aerialists and gymnasts operate on a day-to-day basis; they visit inverted movement momentarily but do not remain in a static inversion for any length of time, except upon occasion such as handstands. I am inclined to think that this is the best approach to inverted movement. All of the information I have come across points to the conclusion that inversions are great for the first couple seconds, but no added benefits have ever been shown to come from inverting for any length of time past the initial few moments.

Listen to your body and the signals it gives you. It will tell you when it's time to come up.

<sup>2</sup>Back specialists hit "inversion" fad. Medical world News 1983 Mar 28, pp 49-50

<sup>3</sup>Klatz RM, Golman RM, Pinchuk BS, et al: Effect of gravity inversion procedures on systemic blood pressure, intraocular pressure, and central retinal arterial pressure. JAOA 1983; 82:853-857

<sup>4</sup>Klatz RM, Goldman RM, Tarr RS, et al: Gravity inversion therapy (Correspondence). West J Med 1983 Oct; 139: 538-540

<sup>5</sup>Goldman RM, Tarr RS, Pinchuk BG, et al: The effects of oscillating inversion on systemic blood pressure, pulse, intraocular pressure, and central retinal arterial pressure. Physic Sports Med 1985; 13:93-96

# FAQ

## How high off the ground should I have my loop of fabric?

There is not one height that will work for every movement. However, this course has been adapted to fit fabric that is at varying heights within the “strike zone.” The exceptions to this include a few moves in our restorative section, as well as the moves in the harness wrap in volume II, which are now included in a bonus chapter, separate from the main curriculum. As for this manual, you will find the fabric is at its lowest in the floating/restorative chapter, where the fabric is closer to knee height. Moving up in height, there is a medium-low setting which is slightly below hip height, or wherever enables you to have your head on the ground when you are in hip hang. This is not a popular height in many aerial yoga programs, but as you become more advanced in your practice, you may find you prefer it. This low height can make some moves more challenging because it enables more slack to be in the fabric for deeper poses, or it means you have to work harder to accomplish the same positions. The most popular starting height is at hip height, or the lowest height where you can proceed into hip hang from the ground and have your head comfortably clear the ground. At this height, you should be able to enter into inverted straddle without your head hitting the ground. There are few moves that require the fabric to be much higher than this. However, there is much appeal in placing the fabric higher when you are in the mood to fly.

Note: You may notice in the videos and in this manual, the fabric is typically placed lower than average because I like to work harder, deeper, and I frequently work off plumline to vary the way the fabric pulls my body, and the way my body pulls back.

## What is the “plumline”?

The plumline is the vertical line in space that goes directly from the middle of your rigging in a straight line towards the ground. You can also think of it as the line in space where the fabric hangs when no weight is on it.

## How does the plumline work to my advantage?

Some movements work better with a higher fabric than your default height. In times where changing the height of the loop is inconvenient for just one movement, you can often travel away from the plumline to achieve the same affect as heightening the fabric. Unfortunately, this doesn’t usually work the other way around. In other words, it is better to have your fabric generally too low and use these sorts of tricks to make it higher than have your fabric too high. Knowing how to work with your plumline is one of the marks of a seasoned aerial yogi.

## One Point or Two?

There are two main choices for the number of points required to set up an aerial yoga rig. One is double point and one is single point, meaning that you either have the fabric going up to two points that are separate (usually about a foot or two), or the fabrics come together to hang from one, single point. There are pros and cons to both, some of which are listed in the handy chart on the next page.

Double Point	Single Point
<p><b>Pros</b></p> <p>Front and back are very distinguishable, which is a big plus for a class setting. This way you know that all students will be facing forward when they are sitting on the loop watching you demo.</p> <p>If you dislike spinning, then having a double point makes it less likely for you to get caught in a dizzying spin.</p> <p>Having the pieces of the fabric spread apart changes the dynamics of many flying moves, making some more do-able such as stepping side-to-side to get a nice flying action going.</p> <p>You have a “freer” feeling above your head.</p>	<p><b>Pros</b></p> <p>You can make the “front” any direction you want. You get full 360 degree rotation, so, in a class setting, you can demo a move from the side, from the front, or any angle in between.</p> <p>If you like spinning, single points are rigged with a swivel and you can spin to your hearts delight.</p> <p>Because the fabric comes up to one point above your head, the fabric “hugs” your body, making it possible to balance in some moves such as standing that you could not otherwise balance in.</p> <p>The closer nature of the two pieces makes some flying moves more challenging, which to many practitioners, is a plus.</p>
<p><b>Cons</b></p> <p>With the fabric farther apart, there are some moves that are not possible such as the balancing in standing. It is not safe without the fabric hugging the body.</p> <p>You don’t get to face any direction you want – you only have two choices – front or back.</p>	<p><b>Cons</b></p> <p>Some people get nauseous when spinning, and like the fixed “home-station” feeling that the double point provides.</p> <p>The “hugging” feeling that the single point provides can be a turn off for some people. They feel like they are being squashed the farther up the fabric they go.</p>

# The Intensity Levels

In a ten week beginning aerial yoga course, a teacher may cover all the moves in this manual. However, the average beginning aerial yoga student is not your average person. The typical beginning aerial yoga student is more along the lines of an average mover. They likely have experience with some form of movement (yoga, Pilates, rock climbing, etc.); they should be in good physical condition, and have a healthy body weight for their shape. Any exceptions to this can be managed on a case-by-case basis, perhaps in private lessons.

Many moves have variations after the initial step that make the move more challenging. Do not attempt the add-on movements the first time you try movements in this manual. Wait until you have mastered the foundation and then try the add-ons once you feel strong and capable. The indicators can help give you a relative idea of the “difficulty” level for each movement. I like to refer to the difficulty level as intensity level, because even the most advanced of students enjoy low-intensity moves with which to stretch their bodies. Calling a move “easy” is misleading. Many of these movements are “easy” only in that they are simple to understand. It is another thing to do them, and it is quite another to do them with the state of mental challenge that comes from studying body alignment, awareness, and other body mechanics, positioning, breathing, and more. Let the following be a guide, but understand that a move rarely fits well in a box:

- ⚇ The move could be presented day one of a beginning course.
- ⚇⚇ The move could be presented day two or three of a beginning course.
- ⚇⚇⚇ The move should not be presented until the student feels comfortable being in the air and moving their weight around in the fabric.
- ⚇⚇⚇⚇ A relatively high amount of flexibility, strength, or inversion tolerance may be required.
- ⚇⚇⚇⚇⚇ Used when we wanted to drive the point home that this move is harder than average.

# **Chapter 1: Starter Moves**

*Seated Series (& Wrist Wrap)*

*Cat Cow w/ suspended arms*

*Sitting on the loop*

*Standing on the loop*

*Chair w/ back sling*

*Chair Arch w/ back sling*

*Shoulder Stretch I*

*Hip Hang*

*Transition: Hip Hang <-> Sitting on the Loop*

# Seated Series (& Wrist Wrap) ↶

*Prerequisite: none*

## ABOUT THIS MOVE

*The aerial yoga curriculum designed by Rebekah Leach is divided into roughly one hundred "moves." Some moves are in fact a very specific pose, but many, such as the seated series are centered on a flow. Enjoy finding your flow through this move. This is a perfect way to start off your aerial yoga day - with a move that has as many variations as you can possibly want within one "move."*

The seated series is ideal as part of warm-up, cool-down and anywhere in between. It is a wonderful way to keep flowing, but allows the body to rest at the same time. There are three main position choices for the legs: on the knees, cross-legged, or straddle. There are also three main choices for the hands: wrist wrap, holding with one hand on each piece of fabric, or resting your hands on the loop. Mix and match to customize your practice.

One way you can adjust intensity is by having your arms at varying degrees of straight versus bent. This changes the stretch in the shoulders. If your shoulders do not have a high range of motion, keep them bent when you first practice this move. As you practice this move, consider the body choices that you have with the shoulders, the rib cage, the lumbar curve, the tilt of the pelvis, and head and neck.

## WRIST WRAP

*Before we launch into the seated series, let's briefly cover the wrist wrap, which is used throughout this course. The wrist wrap can be a comfortable alternative to holding on with just your hands. Holding with the wrist wrap does not require as much grip strength. Nevertheless, make sure that you work on strengthening your grip in order to prevent injury.*

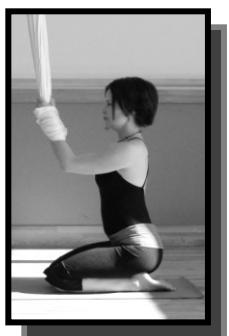
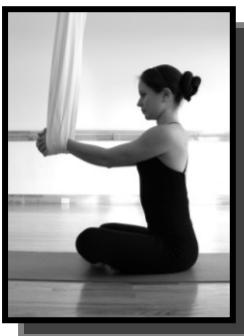
- 1 Sit on your mat underneath the loop. Reach your hands between the fabric towards your nose. Then open your hands to grip the fabric.



## THE SEATED SERIES

**1** Begin in a seated position. Place your hands on the loop. If you have a lower loop, choosing the wrist wrap will cause your hands to be at a higher level. This can be a pro or a con depending on your range of motion and your goals for this stretch.

If you choose the cross-legged position, your legs are bent in but do not actually cross. Since this position is asymmetrical, be sure to change which leg you have in front periodically so that your hips receive equal amounts of stretching throughout your workout.



**2** The main body position is a hinge forward at the hips. It is important to understand the difference between a hinge and rounding the back. Once you have the body awareness of what each one feels like, then you can make the choice about which one to lean forward into, or alternate between your choices. However, start with a hinge in order to find the rotation of the pelvis. Reach out with your arms and press into the loop.



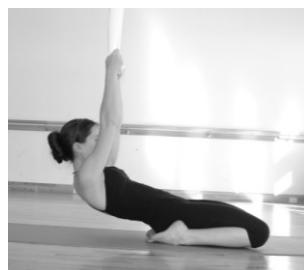
**3** Once you find “neutral,” that is, a hinge with a straight spine from your hips to your fingertips, then you can make choices to deviate from this position. Demonstrated in the picture below is a body choice to stretch the shoulders by allowing the downward pressure of the hands to slightly release, increasing the pressure into the shoulder region.

As you make this body choice to release the hands from their downward pressure, there are two positions to consider: keep the rib cage pulled into neutral or allow it to “pop,” tending towards a curved back (even though it may not look like it). If you draw the rib cage up towards the ceiling, you will notice that this brings more intensity into the shoulders (like any body choice, this is going to a pro or a con depending on your range of motion and your goals). If you draw the rib cage down, you must be careful not to allow too much strain to enter into your inner back ribs and shoulder blades. You may consider slightly dropping the rib cage in order to find what this position feels like, and then drawing the rib cage back into its neutral position.



## Progression

Here are a few ideas to add flavor to the seated series: The first one is rocking side-to-side. In the side-to-side action, your main choice will be either facing the ground or opening up to the side. This is demonstrated in the pictures to the right. It makes the twist more challenging; it feels like you are creating a spiral through the spine. The second option, of opening the torso all the way to the side, can be a wonderful side stretch. Just remember to keep the opposite hip pulling away from the shoulder to make an affective lengthener.



The rolling back option is more mentally stimulating than it is physically challenging. The mental game here is to play “ignore the hip flexor.” Pretend you don’t have one, or that it has been completely put out of commission and you must learn to use your abdominal muscles to their maximum efficiency. Typically, when performing sit-ups, the hip flexors are meant to play a role, but for many aerialists who lift their legs a lot, the hip flexors start to do more than their share, and it takes careful training to reinforce the engagement of the lower abs and use them to their full potential. Also, this is a great way to get into reclined hero.

## ❖ Rest ❖

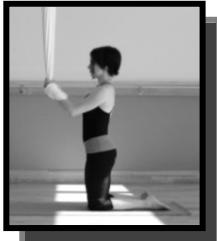
# Cat Cow w/ suspended arms ↶

Prerequisite: none

## ABOUT THIS MOVE

Perhaps you are familiar with cat cow from traditional yoga. This curriculum builds upon that movement sequence in two main ways: suspending the arms (as shown here) and suspending one leg at a time (see the move in chapter two). Per the notation of this curriculum, notice the "w/ suspended body part" part of the title to help let you know which move you are reviewing. Enjoy awakening your spine.

- 1** Begin standing on your knees with your hands in wrist wrap or with your hands placed on the loop (much like the choices in the seated series only you're not seated).



- 2** Lean forward with your weight in your hands. Keep your hips aligned over or just slightly behind your knees. Arch your back, drawing the middle of your spine towards the ground.

Again, one of the choices you can make is between straight or bent arms, and your shoulders will feel the intensity varied as a result of your choice. It is recommended to start with bent arms.



- 3** On a nice exhale, draw your belly in as you draw your spine up towards the ceiling.



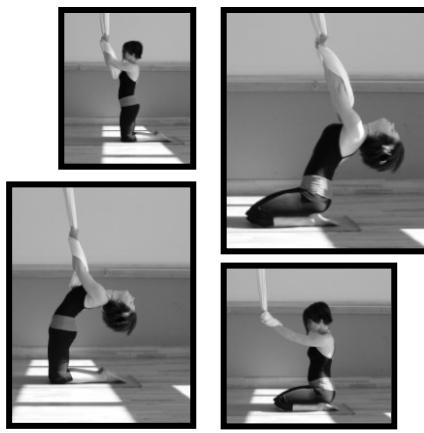
- 4** Again, working with the breath, reverse the curve of the spine, drawing your spine towards the ground once more.

Repeat this alternating pattern as many times as desired, and then pull the belly in to return back to step one.



## ADD ON

One particularly nice warm-up to add to this sequence is to arch back while holding on to the fabric with both hands. Then, sit down on your feet and bring your head up. You can proceed into the seated series, or come back up onto your knees for cat cow, etc.



# Sitting on the loop

*Prerequisite: none*

## ABOUT THIS MOVE

*If you have ever swung on a swing, then there is not a lot of new information here. Although, you'd be surprised at how long some adults have gone without a swing at the park. It brings out the playfulness in us, and that is one of the best qualities of aerial yoga – it lightens the spirit. While the initial concept is simple, there are some balancing exercises that are harder than they first appear.*

There are two main ways to get into sitting on the loop. One is from the front, like getting on a swing at the park, and one is from the back, putting in one leg at a time. Since most people are familiar with a swing, they are tempted to treat the fabric just like a swing and then what happens is that they pull up and miss getting their buttocks over the loop. This happens because they misjudged the quality of the fabric. It is soft and light and can easily stick to your body. A swing at the park is heavy and when you lift up, it generally stays put. Not so with the looped fabric. Now, this does depend on how high the fabric is set. If the loop is low, then there is no problem, but if the loop is higher, you'd be surprised by the difficulty it poses to some people. In effort to bring aerial yoga to the people, I like to offer the following method as an alternative especially if the fabric is too high to comfortably get into like a swing. This also allows for a first lesson in hanging from the shoulders in neutral position.

**1** Put one leg through the looped fabric. Bend the standing leg and begin taking weight in your hands. Keep your shoulders "seated" in your back. Do not let your shoulders come up as you take weight in your grip. It can be tempting to bend your arms, but see if you can keep them straight.

*Note: this is our first opportunity to apply the lessons of neutrality. The shoulders are to be pulled into their neutral position in the back with the arms slightly forward.*



**2** Hold on with both hands to the fabric as you bring your other leg into the loop. Again, keep those shoulders in mind. You can imagine a large air bubble held between the base of the neck and the shoulders that you don't want to pop.



**3** Come up to a seated position. If you can reach the floor with your toes, feel free to push off and give yourself a swing.



### Exit Strategy

Hold on to both sides of the fabric. Lift your weight so that you can step forward onto the ground, just as you would exit a swing.

## Progression

While sitting on the loop, carefully remove your hands from the fabric for a balance. To make the balance more challenging, close your eyes. To make it even more challenging, swing while doing this. You can also experiment with bringing your gaze to different corners of the room. Some people can do this quite easily, while others may find this challenging.

*Cathy Gauch, of Aircat Aerial Arts discovered the challenges of balancing with your eyes closed while recovering from a mild traumatic brain injury that she received from a car crash in 2009. As a teacher of aerial yoga, she gained much insight into the way the brain interacts with airborne movement as she went through the recovery process. She never gave up at coming back to her love of the aerial arts; she has simply found new ways to challenge herself.*



## & Rest &

# Standing on the loop ↶

Prerequisite: none

## ABOUT THIS MOVE

*The hidden challenge in standing is withstanding the pressure of the fabric under the arches of the feet. Many people are not used to this kind of pressure because they no longer walk over rocks or the natural terrain of the land. This move will help you go back in time where feet were massaged and toughened by running free with your feet on the earth.*

We present two main methods for getting into standing: from the ground and from sitting. Even though these movements may seem very self-explanatory, they are the perfect opportunity to focus more on the challenges of topics such as neutrality. The simpler the move is, the more likely it is similar to the movements we do on a daily basis, when we are not exercising. And it is these movements that impact our body the most. The simple act of standing is the perfect place to start taking about neutrality. What placement of your pelvis is going to be neutral for you? What placement of your rib cage is neutral? Where is your chin in space? Are your natural tendencies leading to imbalances and consequences such as lower back pain to any degree? Here in this pose, take the time to address these questions, take the time to reflect, take the time to make choices about your alignment that will carry over into your everyday life.

## FROM THE GROUND

- 1** Put the arch of your foot on the loop. Grab as high as you can on the fabric with both hands. Keep the neck long as you maintain the neutral shoulder position.



- 2** Hold on with both hands to the fabric as you bring your other foot in. Pull yourself up to standing. You can stagger your ankles so that your protruding ankle bones avoid collision.



## FROM SITTING

**1** From sitting, hold your hands on the fabric. Sink your weight back into your hands and slide back so that the loop is under your knees.

**2** Pick up one foot and slide it underneath the knee of the other leg so that it ends up being directly in the center. This is an excellent opportunity to start putting into practice the proper shoulder positioning. Keep your shoulders tucked into the back, with just the amount of force to prevent them from coming up towards your ears. While holding your shoulders down, keep the torso pulling in. In other words, do not let the rib cage pop out. Also, lean out on straight arms. This will prepare your grip strength for more weight later in the course.

**3** Pull your weight up on your foot on the loop. Slide your hands up the fabric and then pull directly upwards to stand. Use your foot to push down into the loop as well, so that the work of standing gets shared between legs and your upper body pulling muscles.

**4** Slide your hands so that they are holding on the fabric at around ear level. This is the most stable position for the hands. Look at the progression to view the method of releasing the hands, but be aware that this is not for everyone. The limitation has to do with how closely your fabrics are rigged to one another.



### Body Awareness

The biggest change that you can affect in your body is probably going to be in the pelvic region. Occasionally, you may hear the suggestion to "lengthen your tailbone towards the ground." You want to bring length into the lower back, without overdoing it. Like everything, visiting the "extremes" are permissible in movement, but for rest, you want to settle in between the extremes. Try this oscillating exercise: rock your pelvis backwards and forwards and slowly decrease the pendulum height, settling on a position that is in between. Do this for the rib cage, and then for your head. As you settle your head position, feel taller. Remember this exercise to use in future positions and movement sequences.

## Tip

Many people are surprised at the discomfort in the arches of their feet when they first stand on the fabric. The arches can be tender since they are not accustomed to pressure. One thing you can do to help is to roll the arch of your foot over a tennis ball or other hard round object. Do a little bit every day. Apply more and more pressure each day until your feet eventually become less sensitive to the pressure. The kind of pain you should experience is the good kind, like getting a firm massage.

## Progression

There are several ways that your aerial yoga loop can be hung from your anchor point. The main two ways are double point and single point,( See the introduction for more discussion on this.) The following balance in the standing position is best performed when the rigging points are close to each other. Typically, you wouldn't want to be doing this balance if you are rigged in two points that are separated by a foot or more.



## & Rest &

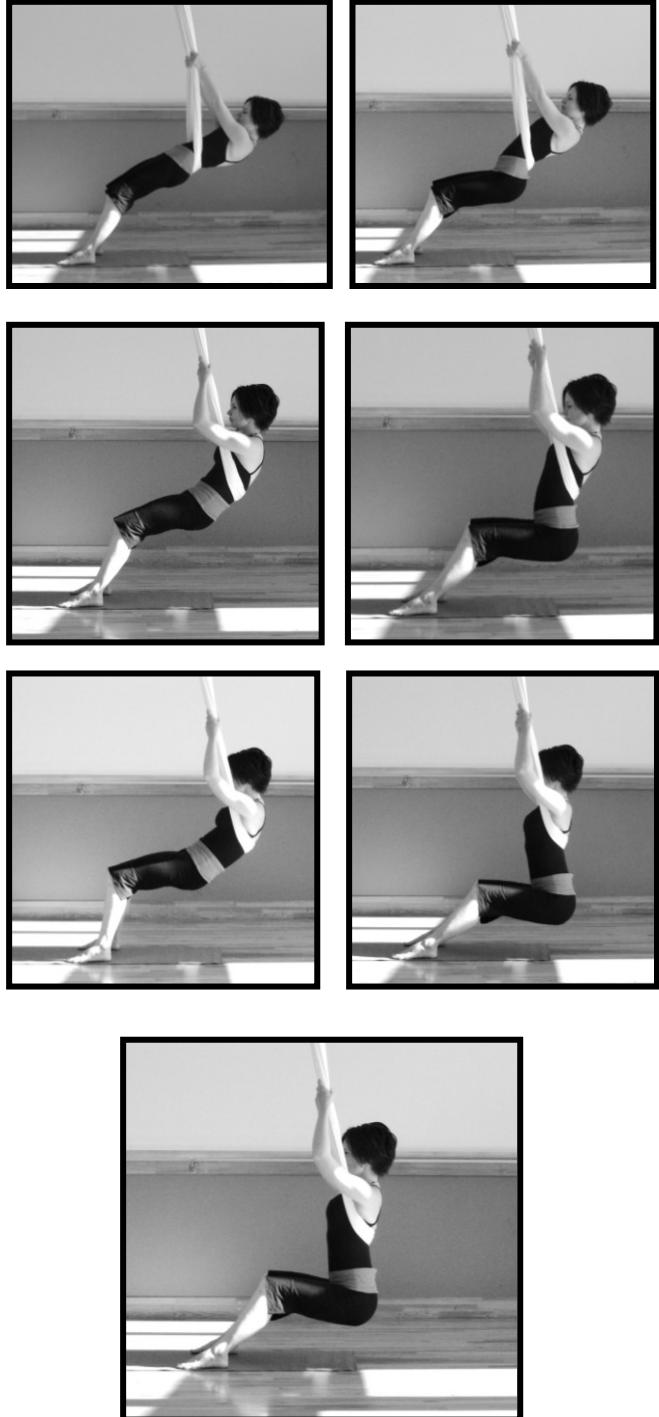
# Chair w/ back sling &

Prerequisite: none

## ABOUT THIS MOVE

*Talk about body choices! The chair can easily be simultaneously the easiest and hardest move in all of aerial yoga. The positions of the fabric around your back are uncountable. There are ranges of comfortable, and ranges of tolerable. There are ranges of too much pressure and ranges of just the right amount. Your first task is just to play. Explore and be Goldilocks. Find where the fabric is too low, too high, and then find where it's just right.*

- 1** Start with the loop passing low behind your back. (This is what we call a back sling.) Hold your hands loosely on the fabric, mainly for balance. Start with your pelvis tucked.
- 2** Release the engagement of the pelvis. Relax the lower belly and let everything hang down from the fabric. This should cause the fabric to creep up your back.
- 3** Continue in this alternating pattern of tucking and untucking the pelvis to allow the fabric to slowly inch its way up your back until it is under your arms. When the fabric is around your rib cage, notice how you can expand the sides of your rib cage to keep the fabric in place. Once you have explored the extremes, find a happy medium with the fabric around your rib cage. It should be off your armpits, but high enough to provide support for the upper torso.



& Rest &

# Chair Arch w/ back sling ☂

*Prerequisite: none*

- 1** Place your arms between the fabric behind you and then sink your weight adjusting as needed so that the fabric passes comfortably underneath your armpits and across the upper back, as found in the chair position.



- 3** Lift your heart to reach your elbows back towards the ground beneath you. Draw your tailbone towards the ground. Lengthen the belly.



- 2** Place your arms above your head, and slide one palm over the top of the opposite hand. Your fingertips should match with your thumbs on either side of your sandwiched hands. Squeeze your elbows together so that your head can gently rest in between.

## Progression

Lengthen one side of your torso as you draw your shoulder and your hip away from each other for a gentle side stretch.



### Exit Strategy

Lengthen your back and replace your hands on the fabric. Find your footing underneath you to stand up out of the back sling.

& Rest &

# Shoulder Stretch I &

Prerequisite: none

## ABOUT THIS MOVE

*Please note that some aerial teachers recommend not stretching your shoulders if your shoulders are super flexible. As you journey through aerial work, you may have times where you find this to be a wonderful stretch on tight shoulders. Other times, you might not need this in your repertoire at all. Pull it out whenever you feel you need it. It is easy to put too much pressure here, so make sure you take your time, and be gentle to your body. You want those shoulders in good condition.*

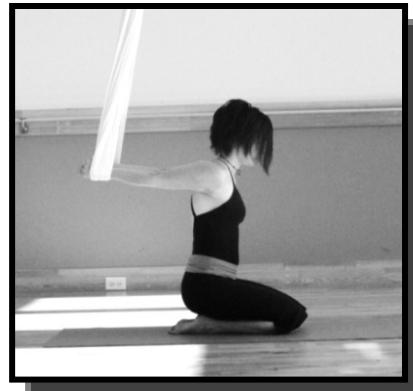
- 1 Stand in front of the loop. The loop can be at any height in the strike zone.



## 2

In the picture, you may notice the loop is on the low side, so we demonstrate coming down to your knees. Do not have any goal in mind other than to increase the angle between your hands and back until you feel a slight stretch in the shoulders. If you are standing, you might slightly bend your knees (especially if your fabric is higher).

Keep your hands relaxed. In this position, feel free to oscillate with the position of the rib cage until you center on neutral. You might curve forward or arch back which will interact with the relationship of the stretch to decrease or increase intensity. Just make sure that you are always gentle. It doesn't take much to do a lot.



## Exit Strategy

Carefully come up out of the stretch and gently shake out your arms.

## & Rest &

# Hip Hang\* &

Prerequisite: none

\*This move is a forward inversion. It is recommended that you check with your doctor or health care professional to make sure it is okay for you to be inverting. Inversions are not for everyone! They are especially not for those with a history of any heart condition, and they have a powerful effect on the inner ear which can affect stability, vision, and dizziness. If you do choose to invert, always come up slowly. Forward inversions are gentler than back inversions, but caution still applies.

## ABOUT THIS MOVE

The hip hang is one of the fundamental moves to aerial yoga because it forms the basis of all forward inversions. It can also serve as an excellent height tester to find that Goldilocks height that works for most moves, especially ones where you will be inverting (see chapter five). To check that you are at the right height, you should be able to hang in a hip hang without your head touching the ground. (You should be in a completely elongated hang.)

## FROM THE GROUND

**1** Walk forward pressing the fabric below your hips. Lunge forward with one leg as you start to lean over. Keep the fabric below the top of the hip bones by continuing to press with your hands.



**2**

Transfer one hand at a time to the floor while keeping the fabric in the crease of the body.



**3**

Walk back on your hands and feet until you are directly under your hanging point (or plumbline). Let go with your hands, tuck in your legs, and just hang. Enjoy the elongation of the spine.



## Exit Strategy

Using your hands and then your feet, walk forward, and place your feet back on the ground. Replace your hands back on the fabric. Hold the fabric in place to prevent the loop from popping off your hips and into your stomach. Come back up to standing once your feet are under plumbline.

& Rest &

# Transition: Hip Hang <-> Sitting on the Loop

Prerequisite: hip hang, sitting on the loop

## ABOUT THIS MOVE

*This is one of those moves that is deceptively simple. You are basically rolling over from sitting to your hips and then pulling yourself back up again. However, when you start inverting, you might find that things aren't so easy as they look or sound. You might find yourself in hip hang, thinking, now how do I come up to sitting without rolling off the fabric? Don't worry, you'll get it. Just have someone nearby to give you pointers so that you don't roll to your stomach. That's the worst.*

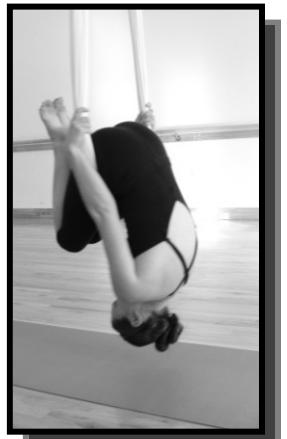
1 Start sitting on the loop.



2 Twist your hips over to one side of the fabric, making sure that you do not slide to your stomach as you do so. Keep the fabric twisting over your hips. When you have twisted as far as you can with your hips, bring your far hand over to the fabric closest to you.



3 Continue tilting until you are facing the ground. Allow the weight of the head to gravitate towards the ground. Then, remove the hand closest to the ground and place it on the opposite side. Use your arms on either side to help you continue for a full 180 degree rotation of the hips.



**4** It is common to get stuck just slightly before a full rotation, so feel free to give yourself a little kick of the legs with a pull of the arms to help scoot until your hips are even. Let go with your hands, tuck in your legs, and hang. You can hold on to the backs of your knees, or not.



### Transition back to sitting

Reach up to one of the fabrics with both hands. Walk your hands up the fabric as you twist your hips to pull yourself back up to the seated position. It can help to think about aiming the upper backs of the thighs onto the fabric as you roll up. It can also help to straighten one leg – it is also a way to add style and flare. ☺



❖ Rest ❖



# **Chapter 2: Grounded Poses**

*Leg Swing Series I*

*Leg Swing Series II (w/ spread fabric)*

*Forward Hinge (to 90°)*

*Forward Fold*

*Cat Cow w/ suspended back leg*

*Downward Dog*

*Wide Leg Bend*

# Leg Swing Series I &

Prerequisite: none

The height of fabric for the leg swing series depends on your flexibility. You want to work up to having the loop at waist height so that when you put your ankle in the loop, your leg is at a ninety degree angle to your body. If you cannot comfortably stand with your leg this high, put the loop a little lower, and gradually work higher over time.

## ABOUT THIS MOVE

If you are sequencing an aerial yoga course, you may consider putting the leg swing series II before leg swing series I. In the spread of the fabric on the leg series II, the weight of the leg gets distributed throughout the fabric, which in turns provides more balance and stability. This is especially nice for the part where you rotate the knee out for a deep glut stretch. Each series presented here will give you ideas so that you can customize your own leg series for yourself or students.

- 1** Place your leg into the loop. Aim for about ninety degrees to your body, but always adjust according to the range of motion of your legs. If you have a high range of flexibility, we recommend still having the fabric at ninety degrees; you'd be surprised at how much you can stretch in your hips with slight adjustments.
- 

**2**

Firmly plant your standing leg on the ground. Feel your entire foot on the ground.

Square your hips so that your hips would look exactly the same as if you were standing on two legs. If you are unable to square your hips, lower your loop. This is the "start" position for the leg swing series.



**3**

Point the foot and then flex the foot. Lengthen the back of the leg by pulling your sit bone away from your heel. At the same time, visualize your thigh bone (femur) being drawn deeper into your pelvis.



**4** Relax the foot so that it is neither flexed nor pointed. Begin swinging the leg back and forth, being careful not to change the position of the pelvis. It is tempting to lift the hips as your leg swings outward, but instead, reinforce the neutral pelvis position by pulling it in opposition as your leg swings out, so that nothing changes about your grounded stance.



**5** Return to the start position. On an exhale, twist your body towards the leg that is up. Look behind you as far as you can without changing the position of the pelvis. Place your opposite arm on the outside of the leg to support the twist of the torso. Reach your other arm towards the wall behind you.



**6** Return to the starting position. (Remember you can rest at any point.) Hold the fabrics with your hands and lean forward with a "flat back." Draw the lower back towards your thighs.



**7** Release and place your hands together between the fabrics. Open your arms and bring your leg up with a pointed toe. Share the muscle power equally between your arms and your deep abdominal muscles helping to lift the leg. Feel the top of the thigh bone (of the leg that is up) sinking deeper into the pelvis.



**8**

Release your arms, place your palms together and bend at the hips. Reach as far as you can towards or passed your toes.



**10**

Reach your arms forward and lean over with a flat back. Remember to keep the shoulders down.



**9**

Return to the start position and turn your leg out.



# 11

Feel free to add your own movements to meet the stretch cravings of your body.

When you are finished, remove your leg from the loop, switch legs, and repeat the entire sequence on the opposite leg.



## Body Awareness

Due to the swinging of the leg, there is a risk of twisting the knee of the standing leg as your body twists. If you feel your standing leg being affected by the swinging motion, decrease the distance you are swinging. It is important to hold both the standing leg and the pelvis near to complete motionless as you swing the leg. It can be helpful to place your hands on your hips as a reminder, and keep your awareness in your body at all times to monitor what is happening as you swing.

Here are a few examples of incorrect hip positions that can twist the knee if you allow your hip to do this while you are unaware.



In the middle picture, notice how the knee of the swinging leg is facing slightly forward. This indicates the hip is lifting out of place. This happens on a very small scale at the peak of the swing, but it is recommended that you keep the lift virtually unnoticeable to maintain control.

❖ Rest ❖

# Leg Swing Series II (w/spread fabric)

Prerequisite: none

*The height of fabric for the leg swing series depends on your flexibility. You want to work up to having the loop at waist height so that when you put your ankle in the loop, your leg is at a ninety degree angle to your body. If you cannot comfortably stand with your leg this high, put the loop a little lower, and gradually work higher over time.*

**1** Place your leg into the fabric spread open. Keep your hips facing forward that from the side, it is hard to tell which leg is raised. There are endless choices for the arms at this step. You can have them straight at a T, in a palm press over your chest, in a palm press behind your back, overhead, you can twist to the side, or just rest your hands at your side. Feel free to gently swing your leg from side-to-side or enjoy the stretch at rest.



**2** Place your arms in between the fabric and use those back muscles to open the fabric out to side while simultaneously lifting the leg. Draw the top of the thigh bone deep into your pelvis. Remember to play with flexing and pointing your foot.



**3** Hold on to the edges of the fabric as you turn your standing leg outwards and twist your hips to face the side wall. From here, if you are stable to let go with your

hands, you can lead over between the fabric, giving your side a nice stretch. Let the fabric remind you to keep your top shoulder open to the ceiling.



**4** Turn back to the starting position and then rotate the leg out to the side (you can think of this as a half-butterfly position of the leg). Carefully lean forward into this stretch of the glut and hips. If you would like to increase the intensity of the stretch, lessen the spread of the fabric on the thigh. One option is to slide the fabric down to your knee (from the top of the thigh) and then hold on to each side of the resulting panel as you lean forward.



# Forward Hinge (to 90°) ↗

Prerequisite: none

## ABOUT THIS MOVE

Here we have the forward hinge, and next we have the forward fold. The difference is that, in this pose, the spine maintains its neutral position. Imagine sitting on the ground with your legs straight out in front of you and sit up as tall as you can. Now, tilt your body ninety degrees in space. That is the forward hinge.

- 1 Stand in front of the fabric with your feet hip width apart. (Or, for a varied stretch, you can try feet together.) Hold on to the fabric with straight arms, keeping your shoulder blades “seated” in your back.



- 2 Bend at the hips, drawing the back of the legs up towards the ceiling. Do not bend at the stomach, nor let your rib cage “pop.” Instead, bend at the hips and keep your spine in one straight line from the top of your head to your sit bones.



- 3 Slide your hands down the fabric until you are at a ninety angle or as far as you can go towards a right angle. Do not strain the hamstrings to achieve a goal that your body is not ready for. Take your time, and stay within your own range of motion.

## **Exit Strategy**

No matter how you choose to exit, bend your knees first. You can roll up from this position. Or, lift through your entire torso simultaneously to unfold the crease at the hips. Lifting up with a flat back instead of rolling up engages the back and helps to strengthen these core muscles. If you are feeling tired and do not want to work your back, feel free to roll up but still maintain a firm core engagement so that your back does not get strained from the weight of the torso hanging over.

## **Body Awareness**

As you are holding the forward hinge position, let's check in to your body:

- ◆ Your head → Do not relax nor let the head hang. Keep your head lifted in line with your spine. Lengthen through the back of the neck.
- ◆ Your arms → Are they straight without being hyper-extended or bent?
- ◆ Your shoulders → Are your shoulders seated in your back? Keep them wide and in their sockets at all times.
- ◆ Your rib cage → A lot of the shoulder issues can be solved by correct placement of the rib cage. There is a tendency to sink the rib cage. Keep it lifted towards the ceiling. This will help reinforce the correct placement of the shoulder blades.
- ◆ Your core → Do not arch the back. Allow the belly to be relaxed as you breath.
- ◆ Your hips → Are they directly over the middle of your feet? Double check the location of your weight in your feet. Your weight should be shared equally between all parts of the foot in contact with the floor.
- ◆ Your knees → Double check that your knees are not hyper-extended.
- ◆ Your pelvis → Feel the upwards drawing of the back of the legs into the buttocks as the pelvis continues to rotate forwards.



# Forward Fold &

Prerequisite: none

## ABOUT THIS MOVE

*I don't know about you, but I'm one of those people who always seem to have tight hamstrings, and the regular forward fold (with no fabric) has never seemed to do the trick. The use of the fabric in this pose has allowed my body to relax into this pose. It utilizes gravity to do the pulling, rather than my muscles. It is one of those stretches that "hurts so good."*



- 1** Begin with the loop behind your back while you hold the fabric at your sides.  
Stand slightly behind plumline so that when you lean forward, the fabric ends up directly under plumline (Vary your position depending on how you want the fabric to pull your weight).
- 2** Lean over while continuing to hold the fabric. Keep as much weight in your hands as you desire. Your weight should be spread throughout your feet, but slightly favor your toes as you keep your hips above your feet. Lengthen through the backs of the legs. Let the weight of your head hang.



## Exit Strategy

After years of rolling up, and feeling like I need a refreshing change of habitual movements, I like to swan dive up from this position or unhinge using bent knees to bring my weight back to standing. Choose the opposite of what you normally do for some change in your own habits!

## & Rest &

# Cat Cow w/ suspended back leg ☺☺

Prerequisite: none

## ABOUT THIS MOVE

*In the first edition of this manual, I called this move "3 Legged Cat Cow." I still favor that name, but have since changed to the current name to maintain consistency within these manuals. Whatever you call it, this move puts a new spin on the ol' cat cow. Not only do you get some nice spine action, the hip flexor will also receive some attention as you take your leg back behind you and tilt your pelvis in the opposing direction.*

Demonstrated here, the method of getting your foot onto the loop is very "unrefined" you might say. It's basically; get it in there however you can without toppling over. When filming the video series that go along with these manuals, I discovered that this method looks rather silly as you don't always find the middle of the loop with your foot. So, one of the few discrepancies between the books and the videos are that, in the videos, I use a more formal entry which involves placing the foot into the loop while standing, revolving the leg behind the body, placing the hands on the ground, and in this way, coming down to the knee. If you are looking for a more dignified approach, feel free to use that one. Otherwise, just stick your foot on the loop any way you like. ☺

1

Placing your hands on the ground for stability, place the top of your ankle in the loop.



2

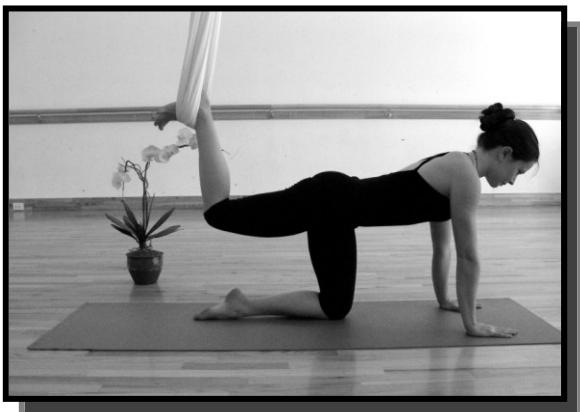
Place your knee on the ground at a ninety degree angle. Place your hands on the ground, shoulders over elbows over wrists, and your spine in neutral "tabletop" position. Place the head in line with the spine, gazing at the ground.



**3** Inhale and tuck the pelvic girdle under pulling your navel in towards your spine, as if you are tucking your tail between your legs. Lift the upper back towards the ceiling, rounding the spine. Release the head but do not force the chin to your chest. (Note: This is the “cat” part; think about how a cat stretches.)



**4** Exhale and return to the neutral tabletop position.



**5** Inhale and arch your spine towards the floor. Be firm, but do not tighten your core. (Note: This is the “cow” part.)



**6** Exhale and return to the neutral tabletop position.



**7** Extend your back leg straight behind you, pressing your ankle slightly into the fabric.



**8** Repeat the cat portion of the sequence with the straight leg: Inhale and tuck the pelvic girdle under pulling your navel in towards your spine, as if you are tucking your tail between your legs. Lift the back towards the ceiling.



**9** Exhale and return to the neutral tabletop position.



**10** Repeat the cow portion of the sequence but this time sink your hips towards your heel as you lift up: Inhale and lift your sit bones and chest towards the ceiling. Allow your belly to sink towards the floor. Be firm, but do not tighten your core.



**11** Return to a neutral spine, but continue to reach your hips back towards the ground behind your heel. Press your hands into the floor.



### Exit Strategy

Return the neutral tabletop position. Point your toe and lift it out of the loop.

& Rest &

# Downward Dog ☽☾

*Prerequisite: hip hang*

- 1** Take a small lunge forward, placing the loop below your hip bones. Lean over and place your hands on the ground. The loop should be in the crease of the body. (Note: This might look familiar from the hip hang.)



- 2** Plant your hands on the ground. Shoulders are wide and grounded into the torso. Send your entire spine towards the floor. Give your head a little shake to release undo tension in the neck, but do not let it completely relax nor look up. Keep it neutral, in line with the spine.



## Body Awareness

While in the active downward dog position:

- ◆ Lengthen the backs of the knees, but do not lock the knees.
- ◆ Lift the tailbone away from your heels, and turn the upper thighs slightly inward.
- ◆ Draw the inner thigh muscles up into the groin.
- ◆ Press the entire hand into the floor and spread your fingers across the ground.
- ◆ Think of having a nice long neck, and make sure the shoulders are seated against the back.
- ◆ Widen the shoulders and draw them towards the tailbone.
- ◆ While your neck should be relaxed, do not let it hang. Keep your neck in line with your spine, which you can imagine to be growing longer by the minute.
- ◆ Do not allow your rib cage to sink. Keep your rib cage tucked in between your shoulders, but allow your lower back to curve with the natural lumbar curve.

# Progression

## One Legged Downward Dog

To deepen the stretch in the backs of the legs, bring one leg up between the fabrics, bend it, and then hook your foot. Let the leg slide down close to your buttocks. Energize the downward dog position to feel a powerful stretch in the remaining leg.



The other way to lift a leg is to bring the leg to the outside of the fabric to hook on. Then, straighten the leg, much like a crochet action that will be talked about later in crocheted legs.



## Variation: Dolphin

Perform the movements of downward dog with the forearms on the ground.



❖ Rest ❖

# Wide Leg Bend ☂

*Prerequisite: downward dog*

**1**

Position the fabric in the crease of your body as if you were going into downward dog.



**2**

Widen your legs and lean slightly off plumbline, towards the ground in front of you. Your feet can remain in parallel, with both the knees and toes facing forward.



## To Deepen the Stretch

**3**

To deepen the stretch, interlock your fingers behind your back, straighten your arms, and then let gravity pull your fists down towards the ground. Gently engage your muscles to draw your hands away from the ceiling towards the ground.



## Body Awareness

In the wide leg bend, keep the following tips in mind:

- ◆ Press your ankles slightly outward in order to keep the natural arch of the foot. Share the weight of the foot on the floor equally over the entire base of the foot, but have as little arch on the floor as possible.
- ◆ Reinforce the lifting of the fabric by lifting the inner thigh muscles.
- ◆ Maintain a long front side of your torso. Stay lifted in the heart, and keep in mind that you are bending at your hips while not overly bending your back. Play with gravity to relax into this lifted position with your elbows or head gently resting on the ground. If this is too intense, try modifying the pose by placing your hands on your legs, and let the head relax.



- ◆ To exit this pose, place your hands on the floor, and walk your feet together. Transfer your weight into your feet so that you are fabric-independent. Then, with an inhalation, lengthen the front of the torso to come back up to standing.

& Rest &

# **Chapter 3: Warrior & Runner Poses**

*Crescent Lunge w/ back sling*

*Crescent Lunge w/ suspended back leg*

*Warrior II w/ back sling*

*Warrior III w/suspended arms*

*Runner's Twist w/ suspended knee*

*Thigh Sling Series*

*Runner's Series w/ suspended back leg*

*Runner's Press w/ suspended back leg*

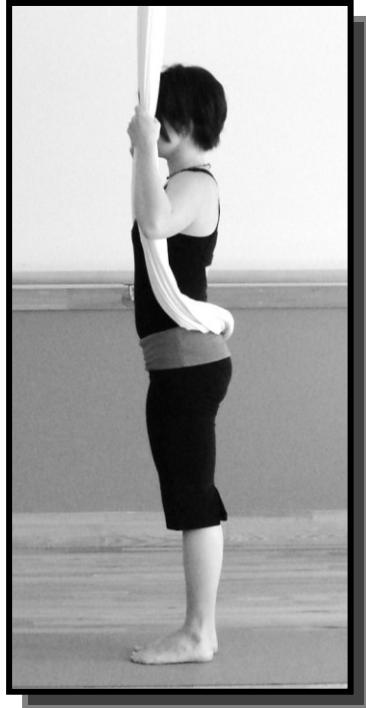
# Crescent Lunge w/ back sling ☂️

Prerequisite: none

## ABOUT THIS MOVE

The tricky thing about using the fabric to assist in crescent lunge is that you can't go through the usual sequence of traditional plank to runner's pose to crescent lunge. The fabric isn't able to come with you and then it would be too hard to get into once you're there. So, we have to try to get into crescent lunge from a standing position. However, it does work, and it can work well, depending on the height of the fabric during your workout. Using the fabric will allow you to get deeper into this pose, and will allow you to integrate your whole body.

- 1** Begin with the fabric looped around your back. Hold on with bent arms.



- 2** Step forward with one leg and then get ready to take one giant step back with your back leg.



- 3** Keep reaching your back leg back as you sink into a bent front leg. Keep your knee over or behind the center of your foot at all times to reduce strain. You can have your arms bent with your elbows forward so that the fabric remains squeezed under your arms, helping to maintain the fabric's position around the body. Keep some weight in your hands so that the weight is distributed throughout your body.



## Progression

To progress, bring your hands off the fabric in front of you, placing your arms parallel to the ground. From here, you can take a back arch, bring the arms overhead and look slightly up, keeping length in the back of the neck.



## Exit Strategy

Reach your hands up high on the fabric and pull yourself up to standing.



❖ Rest ❖

# Crescent Lunge w/ suspended back leg ☂️

*Prerequisite: none*

- 1** Position one foot in the loop. The loop should be around the back of your ankle.



- 2** Turn away from the fabric. You can use little hops to help you accomplish this, but just make sure that the knee of the standing leg always bends over your toes.



- 3** Bring your hands down to the mat (or fingers). Now press the front of the ankle into the loop as you draw your hips towards the floor.



- 4** Place your hands on your knees as you lift your heart up.



**5**

If you are stable, reach your hands up over your head. Continue to lift the heart.



**6**

You can interlace your fingers but keep your pointer fingers and thumb pointing up towards the ceiling. Or, keep your hands apart. For a balance challenge, look up with your eyes. Try sinking deeper into your front leg by bending more as you elongate your back leg. Don't forget to switch sides when you are done.



### **Exit Strategy**

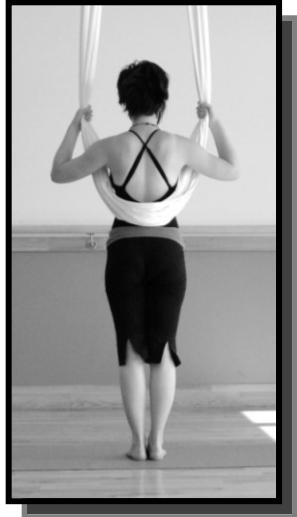
Lower your hands back to the ground and release your back leg from the loop.

❖ Rest ❖

# Warrior II w/ back sling ☯¤¤

Prerequisite: strong, healthy knees

- 1** Begin with the fabric looped around your back. Hold on with bent arms.



- 2** Pick one leg that will end up being the back leg of this pose. Bring that leg out to the side and turn your foot in.



- 3** Take a big step forward in the opposite direction, turning to face the side.



- 4** Open the arms to a T. The arms should be parallel to the ground. Your front knee should remain over or behind the center of your foot for this position. There is a tendency to lean towards the front knee. Instead, stand up tall in the spine.



*Note: This move will vary depending on the height of your fabric on any given day. This is just part of the nature of aerial yoga. Some days, you may go through this pose with the fabric barely helping at all, then other days, the fabric may take a lot of your weight. This is just the way it goes.*

❖ Rest ❖

# Warrior III w/ suspended arms ☂️

Prerequisite: none

## ABOUT THIS MOVE

*This is one of my favorites. I am drawn to moves that take me forward as opposed to backwards, and I think I like being parallel with the ground. There's something very grounding about that for some reason, or perhaps non-grounding. It makes me feel like I'm soaring above the earth, or perhaps sleeping on a bed or cloud. Find your joy of flight in this grounding pose! ☺*

- 1** Hold the fabric in front of you. Prepare to lift one leg by slightly picking up your hip, unsticking your foot from the floor, and then replacing your hip in neutral, where it should remain for the duration of the move.



**2**

Lift your leg straight back and you simultaneously bring your torso forward so that your spine is in one long line that continues through your leg to the tip of your heel or pointed toe. Stabilize and firm your body from head to toe. It helps to fix your gaze on a single spot. Continue to draw the hip of the leg that is up towards the ground.



## Exit Strategy

With your body in one straight line from your head to your feet, rotate in the hip joint of your standing leg to return to standing. Press down on the fabric to assist your raise.

## Modification

Another way to perform this move is with the back sling. It can decrease the intensity of this pose, which is helpful when working with people of varying abilities.



## Body Awareness

Have someone else examine the lines of your body so that you can be positioned correctly according the following guidelines:

- ◆ Arms → Your arms should be straight, not hyper-extended nor above your head. Bring your arms into the correct position, which may not feel like the correct position at first. Feel all your fingers helping to press the fabric towards the ground.
- ◆ Head → Keep the neck fairly relaxed in a neutral position.
- ◆ Rib Cage → Do not sink towards the floor. Keep your chest pulled in, and lift the heart towards the ceiling through your upper back.
- ◆ Spine → Feel long throughout your spine from the top of your head, through your tailbone and all the way through the legs.
- ◆ Middle → Do not overly tighten the abdominals, but do pull in the navel towards the spine. Keep the breath moving through the belly.
- ◆ Back of the legs → Lengthen through the back of the legs.
- ◆ Hips → There is a tendency to lift the hip of the leg that is up. To combat this, pull the hip towards the ground. Note that this may intensify the stretch in the standing leg.
- ◆ Legs → In regards to the leg in the air, check that the knee is in line with the hip and that it is facing the ground. Give the standing leg a slight bend to make sure its not locked too tight. Then imagine lifting the thigh up away from the knee. Focus your gaze on a spot on the ground to help find a calm stability so that the standing leg feels firm.
- ◆ Feet → The top of the foot in the air should be facing the ground when pointed. When you flex your foot, make sure to point the toes directly towards the ground. Of the foot that you are standing on, continue to maintain a balance of your weight equally throughout the entire foot, while keeping your ankle pulled up so you have a natural arch.

❖ Rest ❖

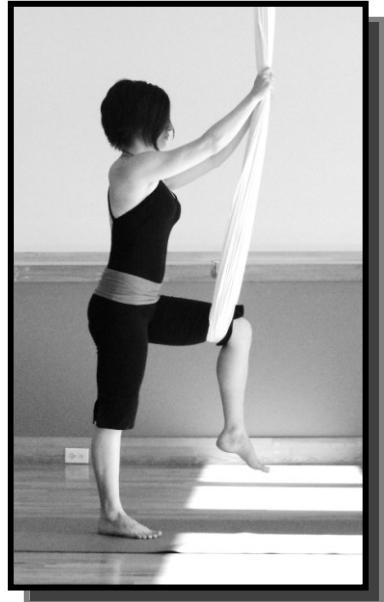
# Runner's Twist w/ suspended knee ☂

Prerequisite: none

## ABOUT THIS MOVE

*I find that this move always catches me by surprise in its intensity on the hip flexor. My suggestion is to not stay in this pose for any extended amount of time. Simply pass by this move for a breath or two, enough to give the hip flexor a nice hug and then release so that new blood can come in to oxygenate the hip area. You'll be surprised at how much a little can do.*

- 1** Start by placing the loop under your knee. You may consider taking a step backwards from plumbline so that when you lean forward in future steps, you end up directly under plumbline. Your choice in this matter involves the height of the fabric, and also how challenging you want the move to be. The more you are away from the plumbline, the more you will have to wrestle for balance.



- 2** Holding high with your hands on the fabric, lean forward, taking note of what was mentioned about the plumbline in step one. If you find yourself falling off to the side, you may want to try a new starting position. Play around with this move until you find what works for you.



- 3** Reach the opposite hand as knee between the fabric and passed your foot. This starts a twist in the body.



**4**

Place your shoulder on the outside of your knee and start releasing the top arm. Transfer directly to pressing with your forearm on the fabric (with this top arm).



**5**

With that forearm pressing into the fabric, and your shoulder pressing lightly into your knee, bring your hands together in a palm press. Look up the fabric. Do not allow your chin to stray too far from your chest, but neither have it too tucked in to overcompensate. It should be at the angle which allows for the most amount of breath to come into the throat.



### Exit Strategy

With your top arm, reach back to the fabric while releasing the bottom arm. With that bottom arm, reach long in a big circular motion to return to the fabric above your head. With your hands high, pull up and come back up to standing. Remove your foot from the loop or step through to repeat on the second side.

& Rest &

# Thigh Sling Series ☽❖❖

*Prerequisite: runner's twist w/ suspended knee*

- 1** Start by spreading the fabric under your thigh. The height of the fabric should be somewhere on the lower half of the strike zone. It will also depend on whether or not you want your foot touching the ground as you go into the various poses. You can have it on the ground or off. Each choice comes with its own set of challenges.



- 2** Hold the edges of the fabric for stability as you lean forward. You may want to drift until you are under plumbline (see the drifting section coming up in a few pages for more ideas for this step).



- 3** Reach down towards the earth with both hands. Make sure your back leg is facing the ground and you are up on your toes. Be conscious of this back leg throughout the exercise. Lengthen through the back of the knee.



- 4** Reach the arms up and overhead.



**5** Reach your arms straight in front of you so that your arms are parallel to the ground.

Place one arm on the outside of the fabric and one arm on the inside of the fabric. This can help some people with alignment checks because this should happen naturally if everything is lined up with proper form.



**6** Open your arms to the side and drop the heel of the back foot for warrior II position. You can face the side, or turn to face the fabric. Just make sure that your head is the only thing that moves when you do this.



**7** Lift the back heel as you return to the position from step 5.



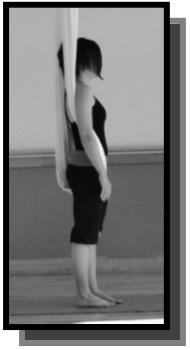
**8** Repeat the arch back and briefly reach your arms up overhead. (This helps to transition so that the arms can be brought between the fabrics in step 9.)



**9** Reach your arms towards between the fabrics, but the arm corresponding to the knee that is up holds the fabric while the second arm continues in a circular motion until the upper arm is resting on the outside of the knee, much like runner's twist w/ suspended knee. Then, bring your palms together.



**10** Release the palm press. Reach your bottom arm in a big circle until both hands are up on the fabric once again. Come up to standing and prepare to repeat that sequence on the second side.



### Note about the Transition

To transition to the other side, you could remove your leg, and then place your second leg in the fabric OR you can be sneaky about it and simply let the fabric pass behind your back and under your leg so that you don't have to lift a leg. (This only works if the fabric is low enough to be able to pass between the legs while you have one leg on each side.)



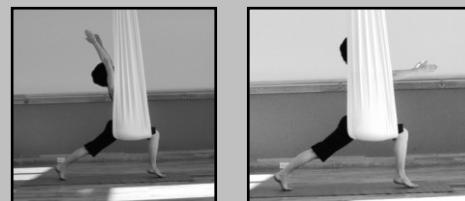
### Note about "Drifting"

When you first get into this position, it may be helpful for balancing purpose to be directly under plumline. To get there, you can lift your body in a straight manner with your knee lifted and bent. Place your arms at your sides like you are preparing to be shot out of a cannon. You can make this position a move of its own by adding many variations discussed in the coming pages.



### The Second Side

There are many ways to vary this sequence. However you sequence these moves, try to remember what you did on one side so that you can repeat it on the second side of the body. Here's the second side for you:



## Additional Thigh Sling Options

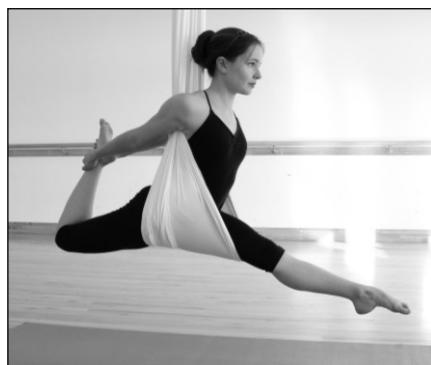
*Here are a few ways to play with the fabric while it is in the thigh sling position. In an earlier edition of this book, we included these moves as part of a "split leap series." It still gets to be included, but it is now here as part of the add-on options to the thigh sling series. While there are some modified options, there are also some challenging holds presented below.*

With your thigh supported by the fabric, lift your chest while you lift the back leg as high as you can. This is a wonderful lower back and buttocks exercise.



This next one works best with your front foot firmly planted on the ground. From the thigh sling, reach back around the fabric to grab the foot of your back ankle. Reach this leg towards the ceiling. Draw your knee away from the ground and gently press your foot into your hands.

From this last position, lift your front leg. If it feels impossible, you can need to re-position the fabric around your body. Carefully release the back leg to lift both legs in the air. Reach your arms out to the side and slightly behind you for balance. Remember to breathe during this challenging hold.



& Rest &

# Runner's Series w/ suspended back leg

Prerequisite: flexible hip flexors

**1** Start with your leg on the loop and your front knee bent at around ninety degrees.

Place your hands on the ground next to your foot. Make sure you walk forward with your hands and bring your front leg to the front of the mat so that your back leg is not too far from plumline. Having a foot that is far from plumline will be more challenging to hold still.



**2** If you have the flexibility in your hips, you can lower down to your elbows. Your knee should remain centered over or behind your foot at all times.

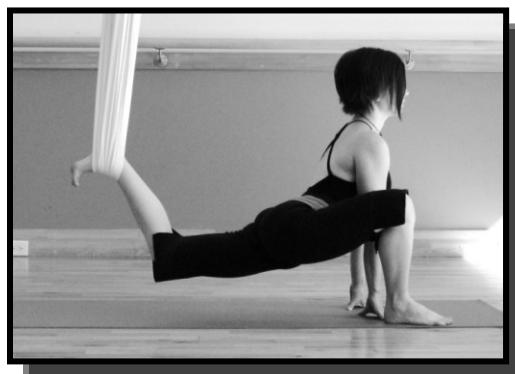
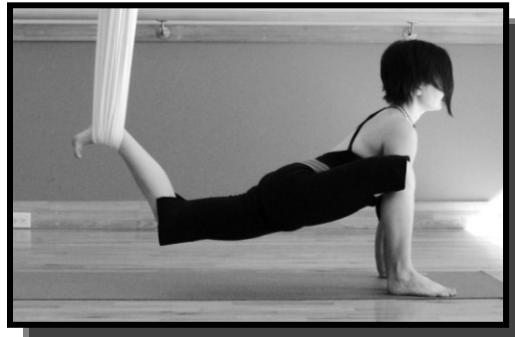


**3** Come back up to your hands. Walk your hands slightly back from your knee and gradually straighten your front leg until you feel a nice stretch through the legs and inner groin. As always, this step is optional and will depend greatly on your range of motion.



**4** Return to the runner's stance of step one. From here, bend the back leg while lifting the chest. Keep the back foot flexed in order to maintain its position on the loop. For higher intensity, lift up onto your fingers so that you can lift your chest even higher and lower the pelvis as the back leg bends in.

When you are ready to exit, firmly plant your hands on the ground for stability, raise your pelvis and remove your leg from the loop.



& Rest &

# Runner's Press w/ suspended back leg ☂ᙗᙓᙓ

Prerequisite: runner's series w/ suspended back leg

## ABOUT THIS MOVE

*The runner's series is great for every day stretching (minus the splits which are intense). But on days when my energy is up, and I'm feeling good, I bust out the runner's split press. It gives a boost to my ego, I mean confidence, and it leaves me feeling pretty cool. It's one of the most challenging moves in this curriculum. Feel good on the day you conquer it. ☺*

- 1** Start in runner's pose with a suspended back leg. The fabric should be around the bottom of the strike zone.



- 2** Snuggle your arm underneath your leg so that your upper arm or shoulder ends up behind your thigh, close to your knee.



- 3** Push your hands into the ground with a wide push-up stance, keeping your leg squeezed in towards your body. Use this squeeze to help lift your foot up.



- 4** Straighten the leg. Point both feet to create one straight line between your two feet. When you are ready to exit, carefully release the foot back down and retrace your steps to end up back wherever you started.



❖ Rest ❖

# **Chapter 4: Flying Poses Part I**

*Flying Tree*

*Flying Big Toe Grab*

*Flying Locust*

*Flying Side Locust*

*Flying Hip Balance*

*Flying Chair*

*Flying Coffin*

# Flying Tree ☺☺

*Prerequisite: standing on the loop*

## ABOUT THIS MOVE

*In flying tree pose, you get your first taste of a new kind of balance. It is very different than balancing on the ground. In some ways, it is not really a balance at all (because there is no falling allowed from the air). Rather, it is about oppositional forces that "hug" the fabric in such a way as to maintain stability. Enjoy.*

1



Start by standing on the loop.

2

Shift your weight to one foot. Take the other foot back behind you, and bring the same arm as leg forward in front of the fabric while continuing to hold on with the other hand. Make sure that one arm stays behind the fabric at all times while the opposite arm travels to the front.



3

Bend your knee up towards the ceiling. Clasp the front of your ankle or calf with your hand. Make sure that your arm passes in front of your bent leg.



**4** Using your hand to guide your foot, place the sole of your foot as close as you can to the inner groin. Press your whole foot into your inner thigh while your thigh presses back, and point the toes towards the floor.



**5** Remove your hand that was holding on to the fabric, making sure that it is still passing behind the fabric, while your other arm is still in front of the fabric. Press your hands together in a palm press in front of your heart.



### Exit Strategy

Replace your hand on the fabric while your other hand assists in the release of your bent leg. Replace your second hand on the fabric and return to standing.

### Body Awareness

- ◆ The rim of the pelvis should remain neutral throughout this position. Do not allow it to tip backwards, forwards or favor one side.
- ◆ Press the entire foot into the inner thigh. Oppose this push with the firming of the outer leg.

### & Rest &

# Flying Big Toe Grab ☂

*Prerequisite: standing on the loop*

- 1** Start in a standing position on the loop. Shift your weight to one foot. Take the other foot back behind you, and bring the same arm as leg forward in front of the fabric while continuing to hold on with the other hand. Just as in tree pose, keep one arm in behind the fabric as the other arm travels forward.



- 2** Bend your knee towards the ceiling and lift your leg out to the side. Reach in front of your knee to grab on to your big toe with your first two fingers. Alternatively, you can clasp your foot or ankle with your hand.



- 3** Straighten your leg out to the side.



**4** Bring up the other arm so that both arms are in mirror symmetry. Try to bring your leg up so that your arms can be completely horizontal.



### Exit Strategy

Bend your knee and return both hands to the fabric.

### Body Awareness

- ◆ The rim of the pelvis should remain neutral throughout this position. Do not allow it to tip backwards, forwards or favor one side.
- ◆ Lengthen your tailbone towards the floor.

❖ Rest ❖

# Flying Locust

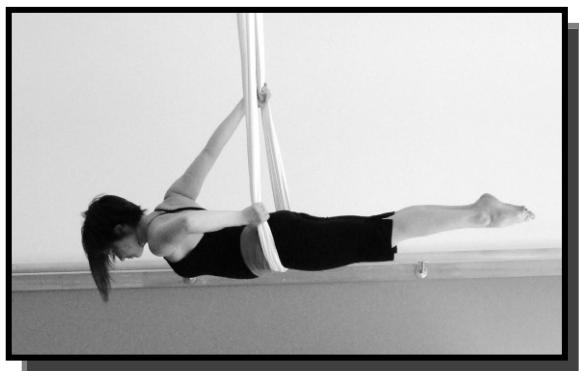
*Prerequisite: hip hang*

**1**



**2**

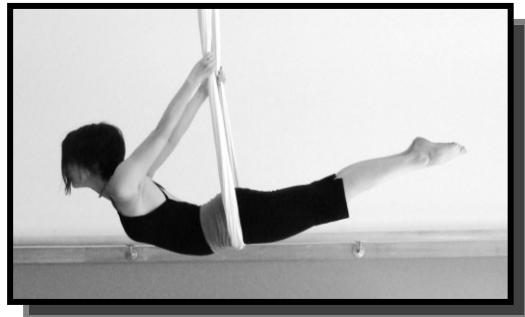
Reach your hands up the fabric behind you as you simultaneously lift your legs. Engage the lower back and buttocks to lift both your legs and torso up towards the ceiling.



**3**

There are two positions for the hands: thumbs up or thumbs down. Do whatever comes most naturally to you, and then when you are ready to challenge yourself, try the other option. Many people who have tightness in their chest or shoulder area find that having the thumbs up is too intense of a stretch and they prefer thumbs down. For others, they barely feel a stretch when their thumbs are up. It is going to be different for everyone.

*Thumbs up:*



*Thumbs Down:*



**4**

The other way this position varies is that it can be done with the feet flexed or pointed, and the legs can be either together or spread apart. You can also have your legs in parallel or turned-out, meaning your knees can remain facing the ground or turned towards the outside.

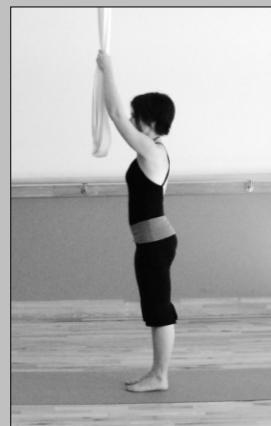


## **Advanced EXIT to hip hang or flying locust, etc.**

### **The REVERSE PULL-OVER**

*The pull-over is an advanced entry into the hip hang. The pull-over itself is introduced after the flying hip balance. Here, we introduce the reverse pull-over which should be conquered before moving on to attempting the regular pull-over. Performing the exit from the hip hang in this manner helps to build the strength to bring the body through space in this rotation through the shoulders. The important elements are to keep the core engaged, and the shoulders seated in neutral in the back so that the rotator cuff muscles can properly engage.*

From hip hang, curl up in the smallest ball you can. This will help you reach as high on the fabric as you can. When your grip is tight and ready, pull your chest up to meet your hands. A common mistake is to drop the weight of the body before the chest has come all the way to fully bent arms. Once the chest has risen up to meet the hands, then the legs can be lowered to the ground.



*& Rest &*

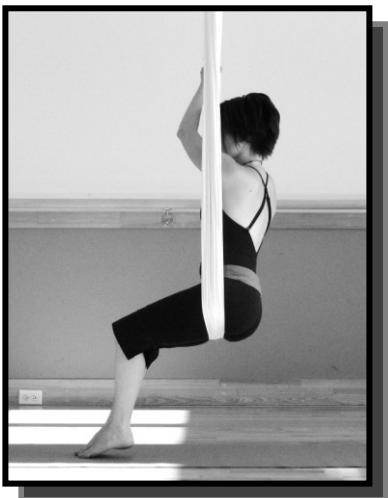
# Flying Side Locust ☂ᙗᙕ

Prerequisite: sitting on the loop

1

Begin sitting on the loop. Bring both hands over to one of the fabrics.

*Note: One of the nice things about this move as well as many in this chapter is that the fabric height does not matter.*



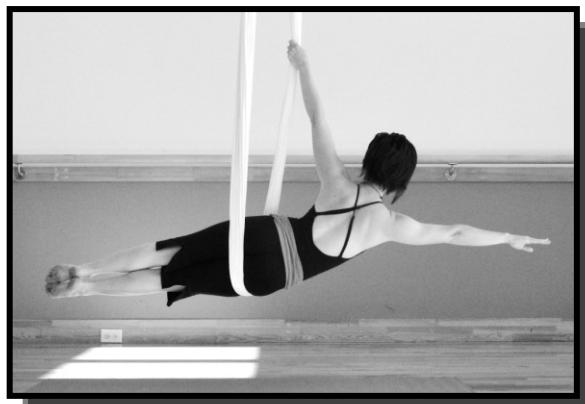
2

Twist over to your side. Lean away from the fabric, still holding one hand high. Make sure you have a nice strong grip.



3

Reach out with your bottom hand. There are two key elements that are interacting with one another to make this position "work;" you are holding on with your top hand, and you should also be engaging the oblique, or your side abdominal muscle. You could have one hundred percent of the weight in your hand, but then your oblique gets robbed of its chance to shine. So, while you should not let go, you should pretend as if you might, and try to engage the oblique as much as you can while continuing to hold some but not all of your weight in your top hand.



4

It may be easier to find the engagement of the oblique if you hook your elbow on the fabric instead of holding with your hand.



❖ Rest ❖

# Front Hip Balance ແກ້ວມະນຸ

Prerequisite: hip hang

## Advanced ENTRY to hip hang or flying hip balance: The PULL-OVER

Prerequisite: The Reverse Pull-Over from the exit to flying locust.

The pull-over is an advanced entry into the hip hang. In volume II, we cover a move called the ball, which is the fundamental movement of the pull-over. However, since the pull-over is slightly easier than the ball, the pull-over is usually introduced along with the hip balance if the student is ready. One nice feature of the pull-over is that it can be done with a larger range of heights, and is especially helpful for mounting higher fabrics.

Hold the fabric in front of you with both hands. Push off the ground and into a tuck position, taking care to maintain proper shoulder positioning with the shoulders seated in neutral down the back. Keep your chin tucked towards your chest. (Sometimes students throw their head back like they are going to do a back-handspring – avoid this temptation.)

Draw the knees over the loop and towards your nose, sinking your weight now into the fabric. Once you are in a comfortable position with the loop at the hips, release the hands for a relaxed hip hang and proceed into your flying pose of choice.



## FLYING HIP BALANCE

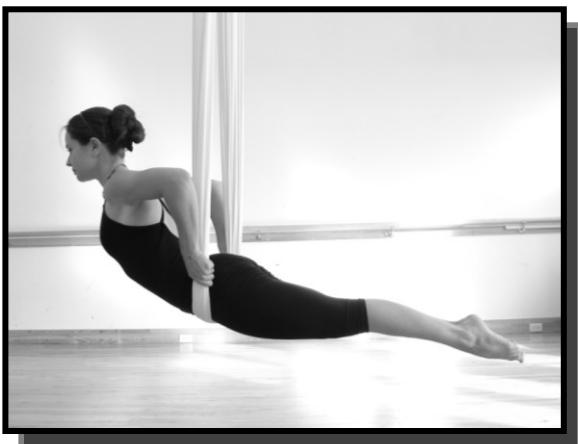
1

Begin in the hip hang and reach your hands back to the fabric.



2

Engage your stomach muscles to protect your lower back as you lift up. Lift your legs and your torso. Energize your entire body from the top of your head to the tips of your pointed toes. Squeeze your legs together.



3

Reach one hand to the side of the body. For a more challenging position, reach out the arm straight ahead of you. Be sure to maintain the strength throughout your entire back to lift the arm. Switch arms to practice both sides.



4

Carefully let go with both hands and progress to reaching above your head. Start by holding your hands underneath your chest, and then lift overhead with control.





### Exit Strategy

Replace your hands on the fabric. Release your muscles gradually to lower back into hip hang. (See Flying Locust for the reverse pull-over exit.)



& Rest &

# Flying Chair

*Prerequisite: standing on the loop*

**1** Begin by standing facing the fabric. Hold on with your arms on the fabric around head level.

**2** As you lower your buttocks towards the floor, press your hands into the fabric trying to hold on as little as possible. This pose is more challenging than it may appear. If you need to hold on with more grip to stay safe, don't hesitate to do so. As you get more familiar with this move, open the hands more and more until eventually, your hands are simply pressing into the fabric for balance and to build strength in the shoulders.



**3** Continue lowering and continue to straighten the arms. Until you build strength in this pose, you may stop at this step where your hands are more bent and you have more of your hand pressing backwards into the fabric, opposing the weight of the buttocks that is sinking down and back.

**4** In the full flying chair position, your arms are fully extended on the fabric above your head. Your arms are pressing back and your thighs are quiet, but hard at work holding the body in this bent leg position. The knees come out slightly passed the toes, and the torso is at a slight angle (about ninety degrees) to the thighs. The shoulder blades should be firm against the back.



## Exit Strategy

Press your feet into the loop and regrip the fabric to use your hands to pull yourself back up to standing.

 Rest 

# Flying Coffin ☺☺☺

*Prerequisite: standing on the loop*

- 1** Begin standing in the fabric. Pick up one foot, and turn yourself in the fabric so that you are standing on one foot, and that foot is turned out. (Your heel is on the inside, and your toes are on the outside.) Place one hand on the fabric above your head and the other on the opposite fabric.



- 2** Pick up your free foot and using the arch of a turned out foot, push the fabric away from you as you lean back into the fabric. Pick a side for your head. It doesn't matter which side you put your head on, just make sure that you switch next time you do this move!



- 3** Push the front leg straight into the fabric, as you push your shoulder into the fabric in opposition. Bend the leg that is now underneath you, and slowly take your weight off this leg.



**4** Pick up that leg you were bending underneath you and place it on top of your other foot with the arch of the foot pressing into the fabric.



**5** While pressing the arches of your feet into the fabric on one end and your shoulder pressing into the other, lift in the middle. Squeeze your body so that you are balancing on these two end points. If there is too much weight on your shoulder, scoot yourself so that you become slightly inclined with your feet lower and your shoulder higher.



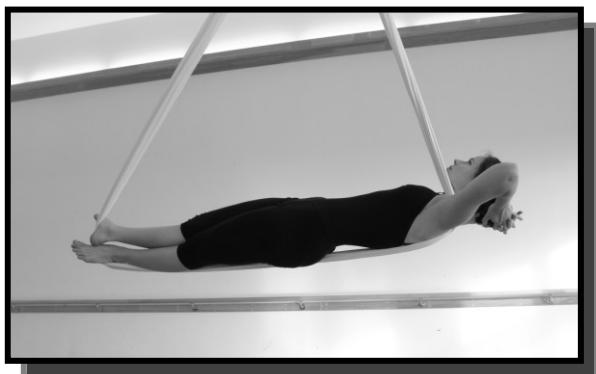
### Adding On: Circle

**6** Create a circle with your fingertips around the fabric to work on balance before fully letting go.



### Adding On: Rest the Neck

**7** Place your hands behind your head to release your neck muscles. Firm your abdominal muscles to hold still and strong. Do not lift the rib cage to bring the arms overhead. Keep your rib cage in neutral.



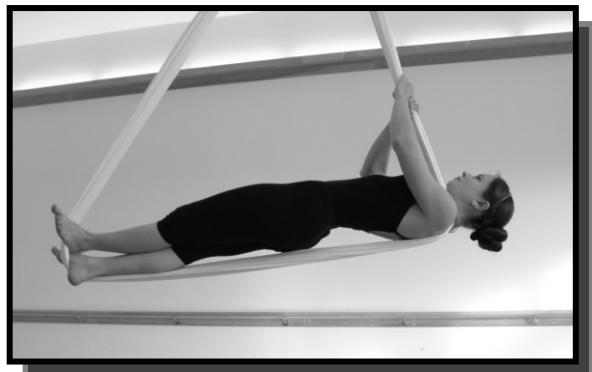
## Adding On: Arms Overhead

**8** Extend the arms overhead. Do not allow the rib cage to pop as you do so. Maintain a solid core.



## Adding On: Back Arch

**9** Hold the fabric firmly with body hands. Lift weight into your hands and then arch your back by lifting your heart. Keep weight in your hands at all times during this position.



## Exit Strategy

Allow your weight to sink in the middle. Bend your knees so that you are in a comfortable seated position in the fabric. From here, place a hand on the fabric underneath your feet and press out so that you can release your feet with control. Release your feet to the ground, and step off the loop.

❖ Rest ❖



# Chapter 5: Inversions

*Inverted Straddle*

*Inverted Frog*

*Inverted Crocheted Legs*

*Inverted Pigeon*

*Inverted Pike*

*Inverted Eagle*

*Inverted Bow*

## Reminder regarding inversions

Inversions are not for everyone. Make sure you have checked with your doctor or health care practitioner to make sure it is okay for you to invert.

When coming up from an inversion, make sure to do so slowly every time. Notice how the fluids of your body shift as you come up. This will help you to stay in tune with your body. Give yourself plenty of recuperation time between each inversion. Stay hydrated. Drink plenty of water prior to a workout, but do not eat or drink too much in the hour prior to going upside-down. The recommendation is to pass through inversions for no more than about 10 seconds. No benefit has been shown to invert for longer periods of time. (See the introduction for more information regarding this topic.)

If you do choose to invert, invert responsibly.

# Inverted Straddle ☂️

*Prerequisite: none*

## Alternative Entry

Shown below is another option for getting into inverted straddle. This method can be easier for beginners than the method shown on the previous pages. The downside to this method is that it must be done at the perfect height. If the fabric is too high, it will be too hard to lean back at the right positioning. If the fabric is too low, you risk coming back and crashing your head into the floor (this method has a lot more momentum in it than the previous method). One thing that can be helpful to do is to perform a height test by going into hip hang. If your head clears the ground when your spine is fully elongated, then you should be okay for your head to clear in inverted straddle. However, caution and control should always be exercised.

Begin by holding the fabric across the top of the buttocks, right below your belt line. Hold your hands slightly away from the body as you start to lean back so that your hands don't get caught in the fabric squeezing your side. Your goal is to get your hip bones through the fabric, but not an inch more. (That's the secret to the most comfortable spot around the body.)



As you slowly lean back, engage the abdominals so that you are not arching back, but rather bring your entire body with you in a nice curve or plank. As soon as your feet leave the ground, open your knees to the side. It is of utmost importance that your legs open so that they are stopped by the fabric from proceeding between the fabric.



Continue to use your abdominal muscles to lower your body into the inversion. Hopefully, the fabric landed in a nice spot below the hip bones with enough slack so that you can rotate your pelvis in order to open your knees towards the ground. Do not stay in any inversion too long and always come up slowly. Release the tension from your body, and enjoy the changes occurring inside your body. Tune in to see what's going on and what your body is telling you.

## THE INVERTED STRADDLE

**1** Put your arms through the fabric as if you were getting on a swing, but only put your arms through. Situate yourself so that the fabric is at your back, supporting your ribs with the looped fabric. Extend your legs in front of you so that you are now leaning your weight into the loop. Hold the fabric with bent arms, elbows at your sides.



**2** Think of pulling up and at the same time pushing your hands toward your toes as you engage your abdominal muscles to pull the legs up. It helps to bend your knees when you first start. As you raise your legs, keep them open, making sure that they pass on the outside of the fabric as you rotate back.



**3** Once you have the fabric comfortably positioned on the pelvic bone, open your legs outward. Warning: DO NOT PUT YOUR LEGS THROUGH THE LOOP! Use your lower abdominal muscles to help rotate the pelvic girdle so that the knees stay facing the ground or relax, allowing your knees to land where they may.



**4** *(Optional Step)* This step is applicable if the loop is still around your stomach rather than your hips. The inverted straddle will usually not be comfortable until you find that Goldilocks spot for the fabric around your hips.

A) Place your legs against the outside of the fabric while sickling your feet so that your toes pull in to meet each other.



B) Allow your hands to slide down the fabric as you push your hips forward while pushing your feet into the fabric. Keep your toes together and make sure that you do not push your hips too far. (Warning: DO NOT ALLOW YOUR BUTTOCKS TO SLIP THROUGH THE LOOP.) It is helpful to push one hip at a time through the loop to find just the right adjustment. Once the loop is adjusted, open your legs to the side.



**5** If you have the correct position in the inverted straddle with your legs open wide, knees facing the ground, you can remove your hands for the basic inverted straddle hang.

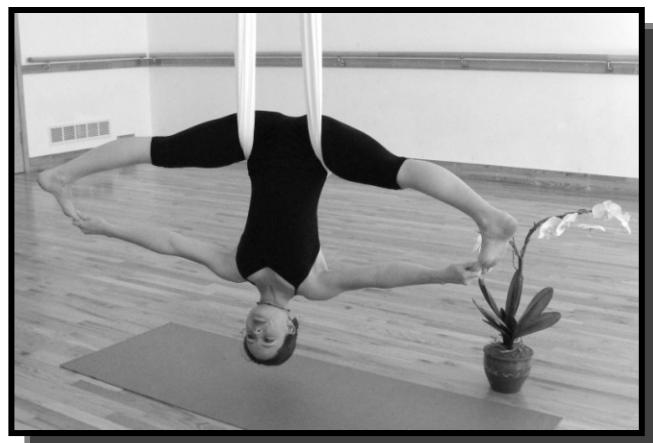


## Adding On: Hold Your Legs

**6** Do a mini crunch up and grab hold behind your legs with your hands. Help your legs rotate even more towards the ground as you gently pull.



**7** To deepen the stretch even further, flex your feet and grab on to your toes. Pull your toes toward the back wall to combat the tendency to sickle. Focus on flexing the entire foot.



## Exit Strategy

For either exit option, the key concept is the same: Keep your core engaged and your stomach slightly concave as you come up. Do *not* arch your back and place your feet down before your head is up. Instead, lift first with your head and torso, and keep the legs pulled up as you re-invert, then set your legs down.

**Exit Option 1:** Keep your legs in a split and hold for a moment before bending your legs and releasing to the ground.



**Exit Option 2:** If you are not quite strong enough to keep your legs held in the middle split as you come up, then option #2 is for you until you get strong enough. You can also perform this when you are transitioning in and out of other poses and do not have the energy for option 1. However, do option 1 whenever possible.

In this option, keep your legs bent. Come up with bent legs and then pull your knees in towards your chest prior to releasing. Exiting in this manner helps to protect your lower back from injury.



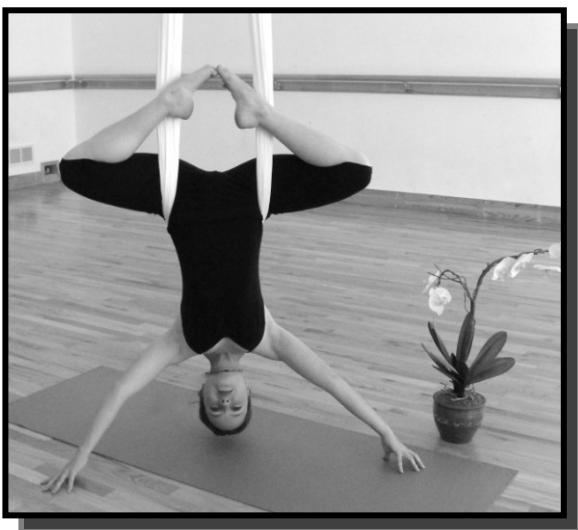
# Inverted Frog

*Prerequisite: inverted straddle*

- 1** Begin in inverted straddle.



- 2** Bring both feet in front of the fabric (on the side closest to your nose). Point your toes. You can take pressure off your hips by placing your hands on the ground, and press in varying degrees.



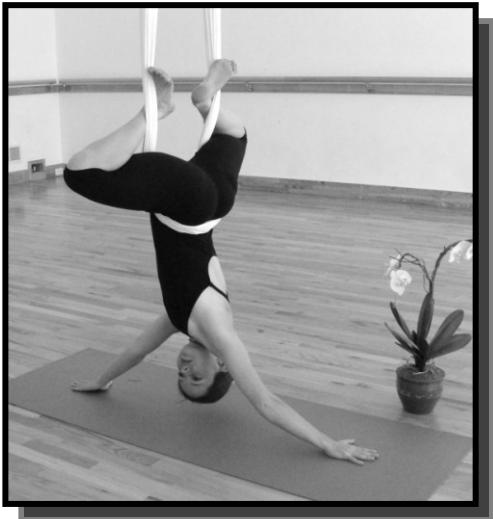
- 3** Hook your feet by taking your toes between the fabrics and flexing your feet around the fabric.



*There are several ways to add on that will be highlighted on the coming pages. Do not attempt all of these in one upside-down session. Come up and rest between movements.*

## Adding On: The Torso Twist

**4** To add on to this movement, place your hands on the ground on either side of your head. While pressing your hands into the ground, twist one way and then the other.



## Adding On: Shoulder Stretch

**5** Clasp your hands behind your back and allow gravity to pull your hands down towards the ground. You can help gravity by gently engaging your shoulders.



## Adding On: Prayer Stretch

**6** Place your fingertips together behind your back and face them towards the ground. Continue matching finger to finger until you are matching palm to palm. Do not force anything. Work at your own pace. This is an excellent stretch for aerialists.



## Adding On: Frog Handstand

**7** Press the bottoms of your feet together while pressing your knees apart from each other. Place your hands on the ground directly underneath your shoulders.



**8**

Press into your entire hand including all five fingers and knuckles. Send your feet back towards the wall behind you as you press up to a handstand.



## Exit Strategy

Remove your legs from the front of the fabric, and return to the inverted straddle position. Grab onto the fabric with both hands and proceed to slowly rotate upright. A few things to remember every time you come up from a inverted straddle-type position such as the frog: (1) Press your shoulders away from your ears, keeping them "seated" into the torso; (2) keep your abdominal muscles fully engaged until you have returned completely upright; and (3) in order to gain strength, keep your legs as high as you can for as long as you can (or at least a couple seconds) before releasing your legs to the ground.



& Rest &

# Inverted Crocheted Legs ☂ᙗᙗ

*Prerequisite: frog*

- 1** Begin in a variation of frog, where both of your feet are in front of the fabric.



- 2** Hook one foot on the fabric and straighten your leg, rotating the leg into parallel (knees facing forward). Then, repeat for the second leg.



- 3** Once both of your feet are hooked, double check that your legs are in parallel (both knees should face the same direction as your eyes are gazing.) You can place your arms at your sides if you feel comfortable hanging in this position.



*Remember to rest before incorporating add-ons into your workout.*

## Adding On: Inverted Sit-Ups

**4** Engage your abdominal muscles, and pull your chest up towards your knees. Focus on not crunching, but rather lengthening the spine and reaching the top of your head towards the ceiling. Keep your shoulders back.



## Adding On: Handstand Push-ups

**5** To perform handstand push-ups from this position, place your hands on the floor directly below your shoulders. Remember to press into the entire hand. Focus on lifting the palm to strengthen the wrist area.



## Exit Strategy

Slowly bend your knees, returning to the frog position. From there, exit as usual from a inverted straddle-type position. Remember to come up slowly as fluids take time to shift throughout your body.



& Rest &

# Inverted Pigeon

*Prerequisite: inverted straddle*

**1**

Begin in inverted straddle.



**2**

Take one leg and bend it in on the side of the fabric closest to your head. You can grab on to your calf to make sure you have done this correctly.



**3**

With the second leg, rotate it in the hip socket so that it reaches behind you, with your knee now facing the ceiling.



**4** Bend the leg behind you. Then, reach the same arm as leg to grab hold of your foot. Reach the other arm out.



**5** Switch to a deeper stretch: Reach the opposite hand back to your foot as you reach the other hand forward.



**6** Switch to an even deeper stretch for both your chest and your quadricep muscle: Reach both hands back behind you and interlace your fingers. Then place your foot into your hands. Press your foot gently into your hands. Repeat this pose with both flexing and pointing your foot.



### Exit Strategy

Reach up, placing both hands on their respective side of the fabric. Release the leg over the fabric. Put your legs in the wide straddle position. Proceed to slowly come up just as you do from inverted straddle. Perform this exit with your entire core fully engaged. This will truly strengthen you if you take this opportunity every time you come up from an inversion.

& Rest &

# Inverted Pike

*Prerequisite: inverted straddle*

1

Begin in inverted straddle.



2

Use your hands on the back of your legs to help pull your heels together. Lengthen the backs of your legs and bring your legs towards the ground.



## Exit Strategy

Open your legs back to inverted straddle. Exit as usual from a inverted straddle-type position. Remember to take your time.



## Body Awareness

Lengthen through the backs of the legs. "Stand" up tall in the spine, by not rounding the back, but instead, draw the back towards your legs. Use the pull of the arms to "lift" into this position.

 Rest 

# Inverted Eagle

Prerequisite: inverted straddle

## ABOUT THIS MOVE

*Instead of the usual comfortable placement around the low belt line under the hip bones, inverted pike and eagle work best with the fabric around the waist. This makes some people quite uncomfortable. There is a lot of tension that we hold in our organs, and when the fabric presses in on that tension, powerful shifts can happen. It is important to respect the time threshold talked about in the introduction.*

- 1** Begin in inverted straddle and cross your legs. Note: You do not necessarily need to be concerned with fully “popping” your hips through for this pose. It can be helpful to place your hands on the ground to lift your hips into a comfortable position with the looped fabric. The fabric can be properly placed around the waist. This means that blood flow will be restricted momentarily to your organs and it is recommended that you limit your time in this inverted pose.



- 2** Continue the intertwining of the legs by crossing your foot behind your calf. Do your best to keep your feet aimed at the ceiling. The tendency is to start drifting the legs sideways.



- 3** Cross your arms. Nudge one elbow in the crease of the other.



**4** Continue the intertwining of the arms by bring your hand around your opposite wrist and reach for matching your palms completely together including the fingertips. Raise the arms towards the floor so that they are perpendicular to your torso. After resting, repeat the pose, crossing the arms and legs in the other direction.

#### Exit Strategy

Release the arms. Release the legs. Regrab the fabric with both hands and SLOWLY come upright.



& Rest &

# Inverted Bow

*Prerequisite: inverted straddle*

- 1** Sit on the fabric spread out in a hammock. Sit somewhere around the middle of the hammock.



- 2** While holding on with your hands, lean back so that you are in a modified version of boat.



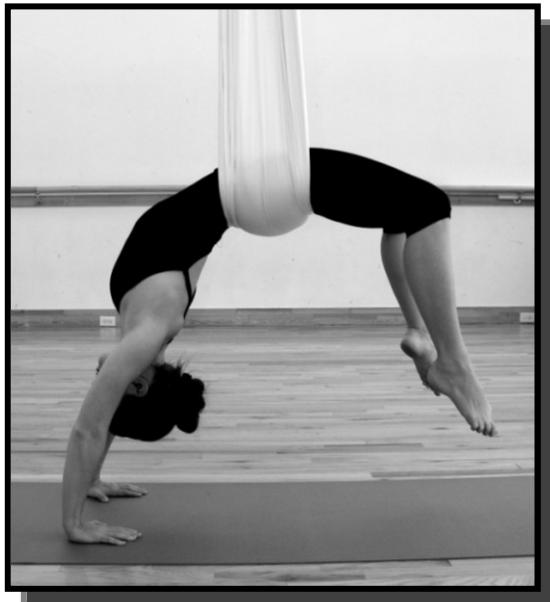
- 3** Gently let your head back as you lift your hips. Point your toes.



- 4** Continue to let your hands slide as you lift up and back, helping the fabric to slide down to the base of the sacrum.



**5** Gradually release your hands down to the ground. Point your toes towards the ground as well. If you can reach the ground, go ahead and give yourself a little lift by pushing into the ground with your hands. Also, you may need to use your hands to pull the fabric off your leg so that it is simply covering the buttocks.



**6** Reach your arms back and clasp on to your ankles. Gently press your ankles into your hands.



**7** Flex your feet.



**8** Release your hands back to the ground. If your back is feeling warm and limber, bring your foot towards your head and grab on to the top of your toes. Repeat on the other side if there is no strain in the back.



## Adding On: Frog Variation

9

Open your legs wide and bring them around the front of the fabric for a variation of frog.



*Hint: If you do this step before doing the bow, it can help set the fabric in just the right placement over your buttocks.*

### Exit Strategy

Grab your hands back onto the fabric and using your abdominal muscles, sit back up in the hammock to exit.



& Rest &

# **Chapter 6: Flying Poses Part II**

*Flying Mountain*

*Flying Warrior II*

*Flying Happy Baby*

*Flying Swordfish & Manta Ray*

*Flying Diaper Wrap*

*Flying Seal*

*Twist to Pigeon Transition*

*Somersault Transition*

# Flying Mountain ☯¤¤

*Prerequisite: standing on the loop*

1



2

Pick up one foot as high as you comfortably can and place the outside of the foot against the fabric.



3

Lift your weight into your hands as you press out with the outside of the foot. Keep pressing until you are almost standing on that foot. Slide your other foot up and prepare to stand on it as well.



4

Come up to standing with your legs wide. Have your weight mostly in your feet.



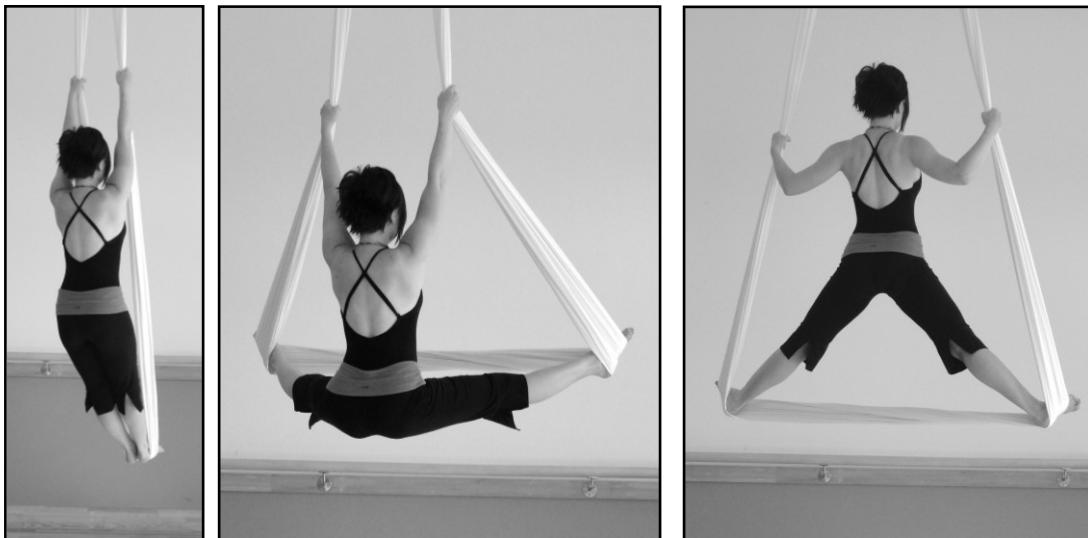
*If you are familiar with traditional yoga, mountain pose is typically where you are simply standing on the ground. Hopefully, this does not add confusion by using the same name for a new variation of standing. The reason for this choice was because this is a new kind of mountain; you are climbing to the top of it!*

## Progression

The method of getting into mountain that is demonstrated below can be used either direct from standing or you can use it as a secondary method to go higher when you are already in mountain pose.

*Hint: You may want to warm up your gluteus maximus with a few raises of the leg directly to the side (while you are on the ground). This will help prevent cramps in the air.*

Whether you are in standing or already in mountain, hold your weight in your hands and lean back. Keep your shoulders seated in your back. Slide your feet along the fabric, opening them away from each other. Once you reach the desired distance apart, pull up to stand on the fabric.



### Exit Strategy

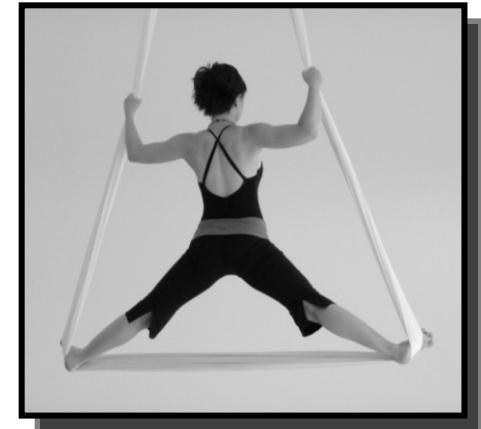
With your hands holding at shoulder level, put your weight in your hands and gently slide your feet together. Lower yourself back down to standing position.

## & Rest &

# Flying Warrior II 飛戰士 II

*Prerequisite: flying mountain*

1



Begin in a wide flying mountain stance.

2

Open one knee to the side and strongly rotate the corresponding foot so that your toes point in the same direction as your knee. Straighten the back arm. Look back and make sure that your hand is level with your shoulder. Press the fabric away from you.



3

Turn to look at your bent arm. As you do so, bring your shoulders in line over your hips so that your spine is in one tall straight line. The tendency is to stay slightly leaned over as shown in the picture in step two. Fight this temptation by strongly pushing into the fabric with your straight arm. If you can, bring your bent arm lower so that your upper arm is in one straight line with your back arm. Use caution in your choices, as this is a challenging balance.



## Exit Strategy

Carefully slide your straight arm up to holding near your head again. Then, put your weight in your hands and gently slide your feet together, lowering yourself back down to standing on the loop.

& Rest &

# Flying Happy Baby ☺☺☺

*Prerequisite: inverted straddle*

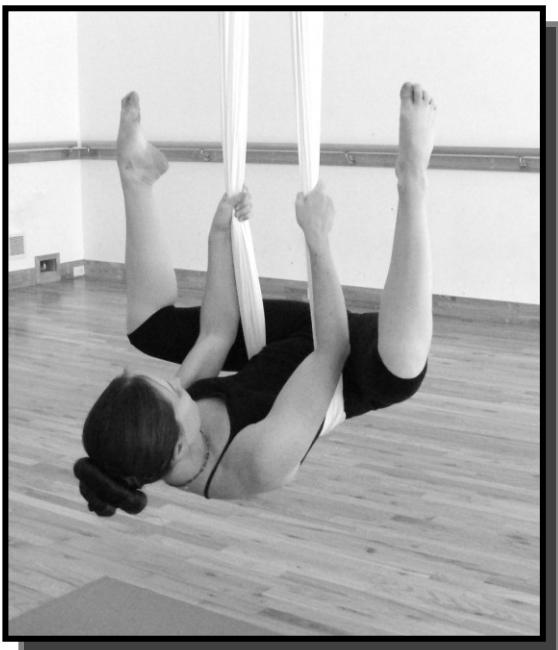
1

Begin in inverted straddle.



2

Lift up in your torso as if you were going to exit inverted straddle. Bend your legs so that your toes point up towards the ceiling. Make sure that your shoulders are seated in your back.



3

Open up your elbows and nestle them on the underneath side of your legs, close to the backs of your knees. Flex your feet.



## Exit Strategy

Release your elbows and continue coming up from inverted straddle, keeping your core engaged until your feet are back on the floor.

❖ Rest ❖

# Flying Swordfish & Manta Ray ☺☺☺☺

Prerequisite: standing on the loop

## ABOUT THIS MOVE

*The beginning steps of these moves are harder than they appear. Think of it like bicycling your legs on the fabric while holding some weight in your hands. What you are learning to do is play with tension. As your feet transition, they rotate around the fabric as the fabric rotates around them. The feet should not be sliding. Even the most skilled of aerialists sometimes have a hard time understanding the interplay of the tension on the feet.*

- 1** Begin in a standing position on the loop. Pick up one foot and place your toes on the back side of the fabric. Press your heel forward.



## 2

Using your hands to take some of your weight, push the arch of your foot into the fabric.



## 3

Remove the other leg as you lean into the fabric with your backside. Make sure that the fabric remains in one of your armpits.



**4** Slide, wiggle and scoot until your leg pressing into the fabric is almost, but not quite, parallel to the ground.



**5** Remove the free arm (the one that doesn't have fabric in the armpit) and place it on the fabric at the side of your thigh. Press into this fabric as you also press into the fabric with the arch of that foot. Do this so that you are able to slide your buttocks off the fabric towards the ground.



**6** As you let your buttocks drop slightly off the fabric, lean back to counterbalance the weight you are letting down.



**7** Arch your entire body. Point your toe and reach your free arm away from the opposite toe. Face the palm of your hand up to the ceiling.



## Adding On: The Manta Ray

**8** Bend your free leg. Reach your free arm to your toes.



**9**

For a deeper twist of the torso, switch your grip to the outside of your foot.



## Exit Strategy

Sink your pelvis, creasing your body in the middle, and allow your knees to bend. Bring your free leg up to the fabric and switch your feet. Press the top leg into the fabric and release the bottom leg down towards the ground. Release the second leg to exit.

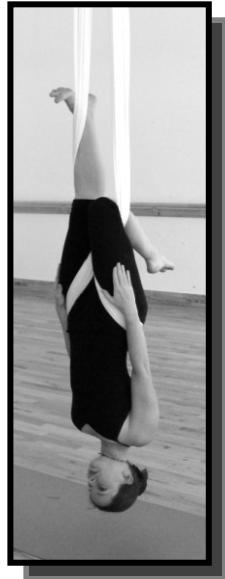


& Rest &

# Flying Diaper Wrap

*Prerequisite: inverted crocheted legs*

- 1** Begin by inverted and crocheting your legs. Bend one leg so that the back of your knee is on the fabric.



- 2** Then, bend the other leg.



- 3** With a little beat back to build momentum, swing up and grab on to the fabric above your knees.



- 4** Using another little burst of momentum by rocking your center, reach your arms up as high as you can one arm at a time.



## Modifications

If it is difficult to sit up from the crocheted legs position, you can also start in frog position. Reach your arms above your feet to the fabric, push your legs between the fabrics and then proceed as usual from step 4.



**5** Pull your body up, opening your legs into a horse position. Then, reach your arms up high.



**6** Pull up again so that your weight is in your grip and straighten your legs. Then, sink back down (hopefully) a comfortable position. This position can pinch many beginners (or even seasoned aerial yogis). It takes a combination of practice to find the right placement of the fabric around the legs, as well as practice to get used to the pressure.



## Adding On: Diaper Pike

*Note: If you still are in the phase where the diaper wrap cinches and pinches, hold off on the diaper pike, and move on to the diaper straddle.*

**7** Slightly lean back and bring your legs together in a pike in front of you. Point your toes.



**8** Flex your feet.



**9** Reach forward with one arm, placing your hand on the bottom of your feet. If you cannot reach the bottoms of your feet, simply reach as far as you can. Don't forget to repeat on the other side.



## Adding On: Diaper Straddle

**10** Open your legs as far as possible, and imagine that the floor is below you to help position your legs. Keep some weight in your hands to stay lifted and keep from sinking.



## Exit Strategy

Hold the fabric at your sides. Sit back and sink your weight down to lower yourself out of the position. Return back to the inverted position. Open your legs to inverted straddle and then exit as usual.



& Rest &

# Flying Seal

*Prerequisite: flying diaper wrap*

## ABOUT THIS MOVE

*Seal is one of those poses where it is easier to get into the pose than out of it. So, you may want to think about the exit as you go into this position. A suggestion that never goes out of style is to proceed inch by inch, and if, at any inch, you feel that it's getting too hard to undo what you just did, then back out of the pose. Also, you may want to learn the twist to pigeon transition that's coming up next and then come back and do this pose with that tool as an option to help you exit.*

- 1** Begin in diaper wrap. Bring one hand between the fabrics and around to the other side. Balance your weight by leaning back with your torso so that you do not need your hands to hold your weight. This is the prep for transitioning the hands to the other side of the fabric.



*Whatever you do, you cannot let go of the fabric at step 4. For safety reasons, that is absolutely out of the question. If you feel your grip is weak, do not perform this move.*

- 3** Repeat the same motion with your second hand so that both hands are now wrapped to the other side. One hand at a time, close your hands on the fabric with your thumbs down. Although, just like flying locust, this position can be down with the thumbs up as well.



- 4** Lean forward with your weight in your hands. This is where you want to be careful about proceeding if you do not feel you can reverse what you do. It can be more challenging than you think to pull back into the diaper wrap position once you lean forward. Venture out slowly and perhaps just a little bit at first.



**5** At first, you may want to have your hands bent as they reach to the fabric over your head. If your shoulders are flexible, you can straighten your arms a little more. This can put a lot of strain on the inner ribs of your back. This is only for those who already have a high range of motion in the shoulders. You can also bend the legs for “baby seal.”



### Exit Strategy

Using a bit of momentum, pull your hands towards your shoulders as you toss your shoulders back between the fabrics. Lean back in a nice arch so that you are balanced in the diaper wrap around your hips. Bring your arms, one at a time, back around so that you are back in the diaper wrap position. Proceed to exit as usual from diaper wrap.



& Rest &

# Twist to Pigeon Transition ☸❖❖

Prerequisite: flying diaper wrap, inverted pigeon

## ABOUT THIS MOVE

If you compare the following two transitions, this one is by far the safer option. The somersault transition has a high risk factor, and requires a strong grip. Whereas the twist to pigeon transition, on the other hand, is easy on the body. It is low risk, and requires minimal grip strength. By far, it is the better choice for any lazy day. This one requires that you simply lean out, and then relax into your core muscles to descend into an inversion. It is elegant, relaxing and convenient. I hope you enjoy it as much as I do.

- 1** Begin by sitting comfortably in diaper wrap and hold on to one fabric with both hands.



**2**

Lean forwards, and allow the fabric to naturally twist your body as you sink your weight into your hands. Continue to sink until your arms are straight. Straighten your bottom leg to help the fabric slide to join the top fabric under your thigh.



**3**

Sink your pelvis and bend your leg so that the fabric can slide to behind your knee. Slide your hands down the fabric until you can no longer slide them because they are right above your knee. Keep the core engaged throughout this process so that by this point, you barely need your hands.



**4**

Let go with your hands, using the core engagement to lower your torso to the inversion. You can either keep your knee squeezed so that the fabrics remain together, or you can relax and allow the fabric to open up into two pieces where your leg is simply resting across both fabrics. From here, you can go into another inversion pose or proceed to exit as usual.



& Rest &

# Somersault Transition

Prerequisite: flying diaper wrap, inverted straddle, strong grip

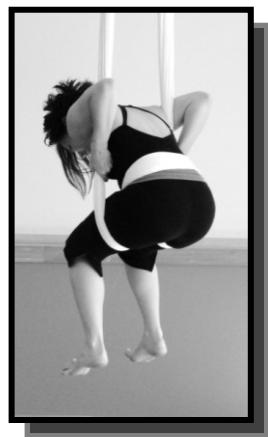
- 1** From diaper wrap, begin by bringing one elbow around to the front side of the fabric. Rotate the arm down to get ready to hold the fabric. Keep your weight balanced by slightly sinking back in your sit.



- 2** Repeat with the second arm. In order to make this position work, it is permissible to let the shoulders pull up out of the seated position. It's okay if the shoulders come up to the ears, but just remember that they should go right back down in the following steps. Keep your weight sunk back so that you do not tumble forward before you are ready to control the descent. This position is very precarious and is much more dangerous than other aerial yoga positions. A premature fall forward can be disastrous. Every ounce of focus and control must be present to make this maneuver safe.



- 3** Maintain a solid grip of the hands on the fabric, open the elbows, and bring the torso forward. Open the shoulders to, once again, down the back into that seated position. (See, we warned you that you wouldn't be able to stay out of seated shoulder position for very long.) Bring the head forwards, preparing for your somersault.



**4** Keep the knees slightly apart, making it easier to bring the chest towards the legs. Tuck your head towards your knees as you slowly and cautiously rotate forwards. This should be a controlled motion, never done quickly.

As with all aerial yoga poses, but especially this one, a spotter is most helpful. They can help you control this descent. The last part of the descent is the hardest to control, when you have a lot of weight in your hands.



As with all moves when you first practice them, but especially with this move, DO NOT ATTEMPT THIS MOVE WITHOUT A QUALIFIED INSTRUCTOR SPOTTING YOU.

**5** The last part of this roll is the hardest. It takes a lot of grip strength to continue to hold on while continuing to rotate until you are fully in a tuck position with your weight fully in the fabric. Only then should you let go and open your legs into an inverted straddle, or whichever inversion you'd like to hang out in. Proceed to exit as you would from inverted straddle.



❖ Rest ❖

# **Chapter 7: Hammock Poses**

*Floating Cradle*

*Floating Leg Stretches*

*Floating Straddle*

*Relaxed Sitting*

*Waterfall (Low)*

*Restorative: Loop under Knee, etc.*

*Floating Corpse*

# Floating Cradle ☘

*Prerequisite: none*

- 1** Spread out the loop and step one leg through the loop keeping the fabric as wide as possible.



- 2** Sit in the loop so that the fabric is spread underneath your thighs and bum.



- 3** Gather the fabric in front of you together in both hands.



- 4** Bring your legs in one at a time, crossing your ankles just below your hands. Sink the head of the thigh bone into the pelvis. Scoot in the fabric so that you can sit tall and lengthen the spine rather than sinking.



☘ Rest ☘

# Floating Leg Stretches ☂️

*Prerequisite: cradle*

**1**

Begin in cradle.



**2**

Straighten one leg into the fabric, allowing the fabric to open just enough to accommodate the leg. Interlace your fingers behind your leg. Sink the head of the thigh bone into the pelvis while drawing the sitting bones away from your head, lengthening the spine.



**3**

After switching and doing single leg stretches on both sides, bring both legs forward into the fabric. While holding your hands behind your legs, continue to sink the head of the thigh bone into the pelvis. As in floating cradle, scoot your buttocks back in the fabric so that you are able to sit up tall in the spine without over rounding.



🔗 Rest &

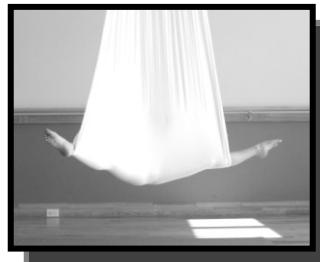
# Floating Straddle &

*Prerequisite: floating cradle*

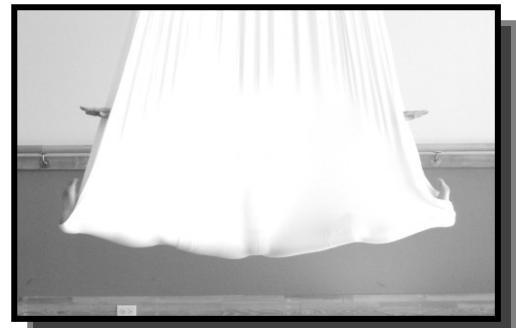
- 1** Spread out the loop and step one leg through the loop keeping the fabric as wide as possible. Sit in the loop so that the fabric is spread underneath your thighs. (This should look familiar from cradle.)



- 2** Use your hands to further spread the hammock under your legs.



- 3** To shift your weight to a position where you can sit up tall, grab on to the edges of the fabric, press your legs down and pull yourself in an “up and over” motion. Then, sit back down, sitting tall in the spine. Flex or point your feet and enjoy a very gentle stretch throughout the legs. This move can also be a way to strengthen your straddle position by engaging the gluteals to open your legs wider.



- 4** To progress, lean your torso directly to the side, reaching your hands high overhead. Open your top shoulder so that your back remains flush against the fabric. Experience this position with flexed or pointed feet.



& Rest &

# Relaxed Sitting &

*Prerequisite: none*

## ABOUT THIS MOVE

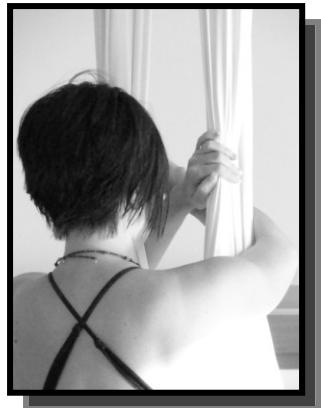
*Relaxed sitting should feel just like it sounds. It is a wonderful way to rest your spine in a curve, comfortably supported at each vertebra by the fabric. It is a wonderful transition to and from any hammock pose. Rest well.*

- 1 Spread out the loop into a hammock and sit on about half of the material.  
Hold the edges in your hands and spread the fabric out to the side.



2

Wrap your arms in a circular motion, parallel to the floor, around to the front and then back between the fabrics. Cross your arms to hold the fabric. If you didn't have the fabric, the shape of your arms would look like the picture below:



Relax your legs. Let them dangle. Do not point nor flex your feet. All tension should be released. Let your head gently fall forward.



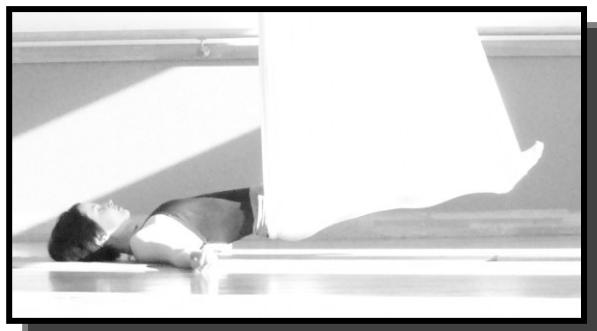
& Rest &

# Waterfall (Low) ☙

*Prerequisite: none*

- 1** Spread out the loop into a hammock and sit on about half of the material. Carefully lean back until the top of your torso is on the ground.

Pictured below are the two extremes for the fabric height. In the first picture, the fabric was just a couple inches off the ground. The height is gained by the spread of the fabric and also by being slightly off plumbline. Notice that the lower your body is to the floor, the more contact your upper body will have with the ground.



This bottom picture shows the fabric at the highest height where it still is a restorative pose. (If you have the fabric any higher, then it becomes an inversion pose similar to inverted bow. It does not have the same restorative benefits as having part of your body on the ground. Of course, this is permissible, but it is no longer in the same movement category.)

## Moving into Other Positions

From low waterfall, you can move into a variety of other restorative poses. One pose that flows well from waterfall is to open the legs, pull the fabric up the legs, and then bring the legs in front of the fabric, much like you were doing frog, only the feet do not have to hook. The aim is to completely relax the body. The feet should rest on the front side of the fabric with zero effort. Feel the release in the belly, and let other places of tension open up and let go.



### Tip

The lower the fabric, the less you will be affected by the inversion of this pose. With a low height, your body will probably be able to enjoy a longer amount of time in the pose. The higher the fabric, the less time you should be spending in the inversion. Either way, it is still recommended that you limit your time in this position.

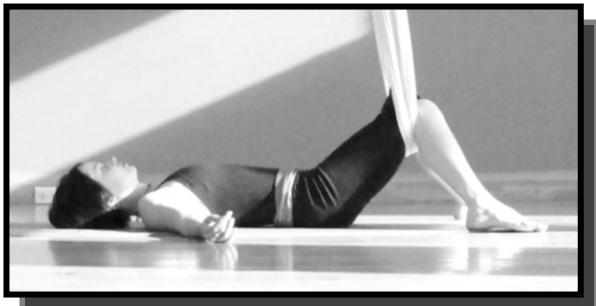
❧ Rest ☙

# Restorative: Loop under Knee, Etc. ☯

*Prerequisite: none*

*This movement works best with fabric whose height is very low to the ground. Here's a tip: Instead of going through the trouble of lowering your loop, why don't you raise the floor? You can do this by stacking mats, if you happen to have them lying around for your aerial yoga practice (which is recommended).*

- 1** Lay down on your back and place the loop under your knees. If your feet are touching the floor, scoot yourself away from plumline so that your feet barely come off the floor. Relax everything. Open your palms towards the sky, close your eyes, and do a body scan to release undo tension.



- 2** If the loop is low enough, you can place the loop under various parts of your spine for some wonderful tension releasing tools. At each placement you chose, relax into the fabric, stay for a few breaths trying to relax as much as possible. Then, move to a new placement and repeat the relaxation. We recommended resting afterwards with no fabric. It can help "reset" the spine and settle the ideas of relaxation and released tension from your body.



☯ Rest ☯

# Floating Corpse ☀

*Prerequisite: none*

*This move is likened to the corpse pose lying on the floor from traditional yoga, but don't let that trick you into thinking that they are the same pose. The hammock does not give support to your bones in the same way that the floor does. Perhaps, do not think of this pose as a "replacement" for the traditional corpse pose. Rather, enjoy each in its own way.*

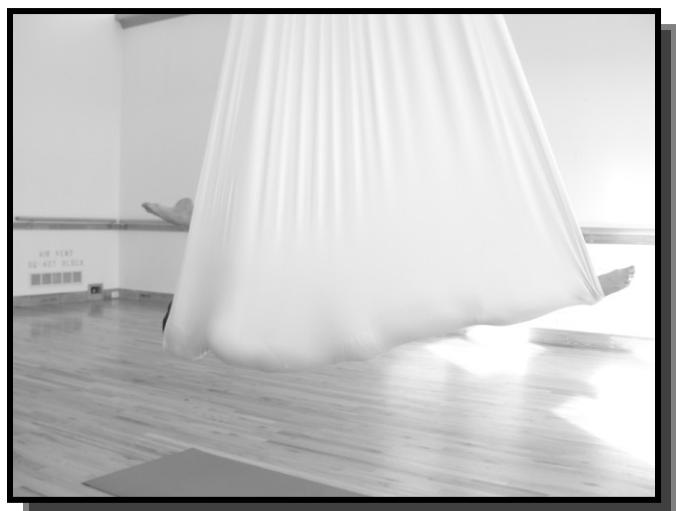
- 1** Spread out the loop into a hammock and sit on about half of the material. Open the fabric with your arms and make sure that the fabric covers your shoulders with enough extra for your head.



- 2** Holding your excess fabric above your head, lay back into your hammock. Use your feet to open up the rest of the fabric so that your entire body is lying inside. Adjust so that you are comfortable.



- 3** Stretch your legs by bringing one leg at a time toward your nose. Hold on to your leg as you straighten it and then release it. Continue to press with the opposite leg into the fabric.





### Exit Strategy

Use your feet to move the fabric behind your knees. Sit up and exit just as you came in.

## 4

Release the legs and relax. At first, you may feel awkward trying to figure out where to place your arms. Some people like to cross their arms over their belly; some like to cross their hands over their heart; some like to bring their arms overhead; and some may have yet another option that they prefer.

### Body Awareness

While you are in any relaxation pose, it is helpful to have a systematic thought process to help your body relax. The general idea is to consciously bring your thoughts to each part of your body. For example, you can gently engage a muscle and then release it for a deeper relaxation. More specifically, you can take your mind and body through these steps to help your entire body release undo tension:

- ◆ Pick up your pelvis and place it back into the fabric, softening the lower back as you do so.
- ◆ On an inhale lift the arms up towards the ceiling and replace them back at your sides on an exhale, releasing any tension in the arms. Allow the chest to widen as much as possible in your cocoon.
- ◆ Relax your eyebrows, especially the space between the eyebrows. Let your eyes sink back into their sockets. Feel the tongue and jaw soften.
- ◆ Take your mind through each body part in turn. Then, take time to turn your focus to your breathing. Notice the ebb and flow, the rising and falling of each breath.

## ❖ Rest ❖



# BONUS SECTION:

## Prenatal Aerial Yoga

*The 10 Minute  
Prenatal  
Workout*

*Using the  
Hammock in  
Labor (hey,  
why not?)*



## About the Prenatal Workout

During pregnancy, I enjoyed working out (however light) right up until birth. Whether it was swimming, walking, dancing, easy workout videos, light weight work, or just a simple warm-up and stretch session, I tried to have at least 30 minutes of activity 3-5 days a week, decreasing in intensity as I progressed through pregnancy. The highlight of my prenatal movement journey was a performance I did during my seventh month. It started out as an aerial piece on a ballet barre, but soon lost most of the aerial components for one reason or another. (View the video at [www.rebekahleach.com](http://www.rebekahleach.com).) Gaining over 40% of my body weight did make the last month especially challenging; I never tried to push myself, but always tried to listen to my body for the appropriate level to enjoy movement.

Unfortunately for pregnant women, aerial yoga typically involves the elements of holding your own body weight, invert, and/or using abdominal muscles. I did not feel at all comfortable about holding my weight in my hands after month four or five (meaning, I couldn't put all my weight in my hands, and didn't want to risk finding the threshold). Once I learned the possibility of inversions inadvertently encouraging a breech position, I stopped all inversions (including downward dog). (These positions can actually help turn a breech baby, and I didn't want to find out what would happen to a baby who wasn't breech.) And, lastly, I had extreme diastasis (splitting of the abdominal muscles), and it did not feel appropriate to use my abdominal muscles during pregnancy. One would think that moves labeled as "restorative" are automatically going to be good for anyone at any time, and that is simply not true. While I'm sure I could have lain down in floating corpse, there was no way for me to exit! My belly was too big to turn to the side (pressure of the fabric), and pulling straight up required too much use of the abdominal muscles. Furthermore, lying on your back is not recommended during pregnancy.

While that pretty much wipes out nearly my whole curriculum, there were still a few moves that I could enjoy all the way up until the end, and that is what I have presented in this chapter. The photos in this section were taken during my ninth month of pregnancy. I gave (a completely natural and wonderful) birth two weeks later to a healthy, beautiful baby girl, Naomi Jean Leach.

*NOTE: Working out during pregnancy is of course going to vary for every woman, and all exercise regimes should be discussed with your health care provider. My midwife provided me with excellent advice regarding working out. My workouts were chosen to help encourage ideal baby positioning, as well as to prepare the body for labor and delivery. I would encourage you to pick your doctor or midwife's brain about pregnancy workouts. And then remember, while exercise can be helpful and enjoyable for pregnant women, it is important to rest well as well!*

# The 10 Minute Prenatal Workout

Prerequisites: leg swing series I and/or II, warrior III w/ suspended arms, chair arch w/back sling and cat cow w/ suspended back leg

*This sequence is best performed with the loop level with your hip so that when you put your leg in, your leg can be stretched towards 90 degrees or at a height where you feel a comfortable stretch in the back of the leg.*

## Leg Swing Series I

**1** Using your hands to help you, rest your ankle in the loop. Only let go of the fabric when you feel comfortable about your balance. It helps to have a focal point in the room.

Maintaining focus on that point will help you balance. Remember to keep your hips level and swing your leg back and forth. Bring the leg directly in front of you and out to the side. Repeat for about 20 leg swings and then breathe through a static stretch with the leg directly in front of you.



**2** Place your leg back on the loop out in front of you. Then rotate your leg out, using your hand to gently press on the inside of the knee. Breathe through the initial position for about 3 breaths and then go deeper into the position by leaning forward with your hands on the fabric. Feel free to gently sway your leg in small movements side-to-side as you breathe through the stretch for 5-10 breaths.



**3** Straighten your leg once again. This time, work deeper into the stretch by pulling the two fabrics towards you and/or away from each other. Breathe into this stretch for 3-5 breaths. Continue to step 4.

Note: I like to add on to step three by bending my standing leg and leaning back, bringing the straight leg up towards the ceiling as I lean back. I rock my pelvis back and forth, bending and straightening my standing leg, pulling my leg higher each time.



**4** Turn your standing leg out with a little hop to the side. Hold on with one hand to the front fabric. With your knee bending directly over your toes, sink your entire spine towards the ground, leading with your pelvis slightly at an angle. Make sure that your torso does not tilt too far forward. You should feel the stretch in the back of your straight leg, as well as feel the heat of your opposite thigh working to maintain this position. You can bend and straighten that standing leg to make this a moving position if you are antsy to move like I am. Go deeper into the stretch each time; also try to move your legs farther apart.

When you have completed this step, REPEAT steps 1-4 on the other leg.



### *Warrior III w/ suspended arms*

**5** After shaking out your legs, face the fabric, and proceed into Warrior III. In pregnancy, balance can sometimes be a little harder. Fix your gaze at a spot on the ground directly below your eyes to help maintain balance. Hold this position with a pointed toe for 3-5 slow breaths. Then, flex your foot and continue to hold for 3-5 more breaths. If you would like to take this pose one step farther, bend your standing leg while lifting the back leg up even higher. Make sure that your knee bends directly over your toe. If the fabric is at the right height, you can place your hands together into the loop and press into the loop, keeping your shoulders open, pressed away from ears and towards the ground. Hold for 3-5 breaths and then carefully release. REPEAT this pose on the other leg.



## ***Chair Arch, Variation with Open Legs***

**6** This position is wonderful for releasing your lower back, which often can get tight after carrying around so much extra belly weight. To get into it, put your arms into the loop (as if you were putting on a jacket) then walk back and adjust the loop so that it loops underneath the back of the rib cage. You can rest your head in your hands and give some of your weight to the fabric, but also hold some of your weight in an open second position (legs apart, knees bending over your toes). This may generate some heat.

I like to take turns straightening each leg and leaning over to the opposite side, as well as playing with some side-to-side hip movements to further release and stretch the lower back. You want to feel as though your pelvis is just dangling from your spine. The side-to-side hip movements can help find this released feeling.



## ***Cat Cow w/ suspended leg***

**7** Next, perform the cat/cow series with the following modification: When you take your hips back, you might find you have a belly in the way! Walk your hands back towards your knee and take your bent knee out to the side slightly so that your belly can pass your leg for a deeper stretch. (See far right photo below) The hip flexors and thighs tend to get overly tight in pregnancy, and this is a wonderful way to stretch them. This stretch will only be effective if you remember to stay lifted in the center. Do not let your belly droop nor over tighten it. You want a subtle pulling upwards especially near the hips to help stretch the hip flexor. (Later in pregnancy, I only performed the "cat" parts and left out the cow. Feel free to make your own modifications as you feel comfortable.)

Starting from a tabletop position with a bent leg, remember this series goes like this:

With a bent leg, perform cat, neutral, cow, neutral.

\*Straighten your leg, perform cat, neutral, cow, neutral.

Sink back with the hips and perform cat, neutral, cow, neutral

*\*As you straighten your leg back, feel free to have your toe pointed or flexed.*

REPEAT this series on the other leg. Remember to move through each position with a breath.



## *Rest, Child's Pose*

**8** Finally, come to rest in child's pose. You will probably find that you need to open your knees to create space for your belly to fit. Towards the end of pregnancy, you may even want to place a pillow underneath your chest and head to lie on. Stay here for a few cleansing breaths (I like to perform nice slow, deep breaths that fill my entire body and release audibly) and then release.

Great work!



❖ Rest ❖

# Using a Hammock during Labor

*Prerequisites: having a hammock nearby when you are in labor!*

During labor, as well as any time before labor, it can feel good to rest the top portion of your body onto something to help the back release. That something could be a granite countertop, a pillow on top of the counter, a bed, your partner, or your aerial hammock. What's nice about this position is that it can help your baby rotate into an anterior position (as opposed to posterior from an already head-down position) since gravity will pull the heavier parts (i.e. their little bum) towards the ground. Every woman is going to be different in regards to what she feels comfortable doing during labor, but the wonderful thing about the hammock is that it allows for movement. You can sway back and forth as you labor. Walk forward to bring your torso closer to upright if that is more comfortable, etc. You never know what will help ease early labor, and this could be just the thing. ☺



❖ Rest ❖

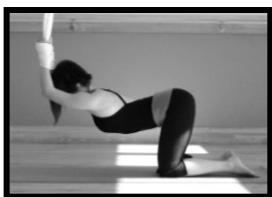


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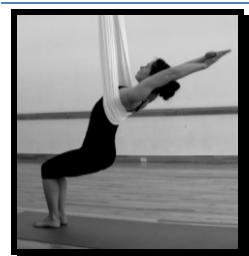
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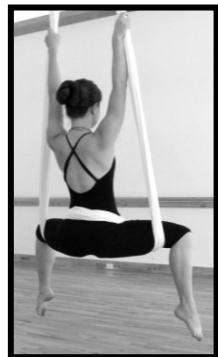
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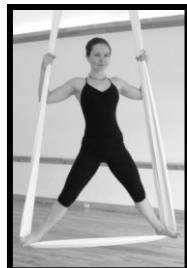
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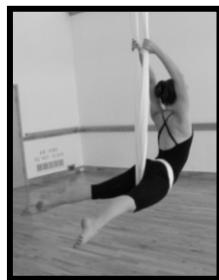
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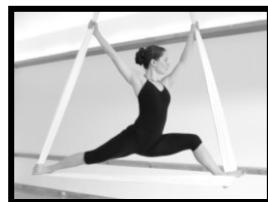
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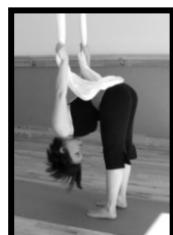
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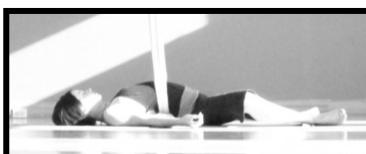
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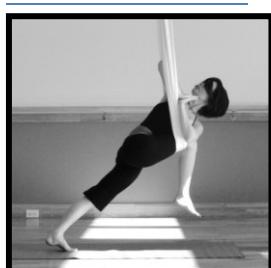
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❖ Rest ❖

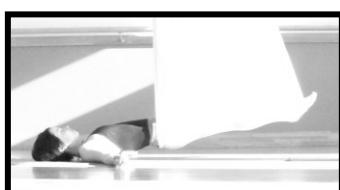
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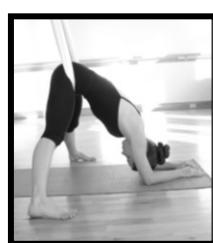
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# Acknowledgements

As always, a huge thank you goes to my husband, Matt Leach, for his continual support of my favorite hobby, for his patience in taking thousands of pictures day after day to get just the right ones, for allowing me to take over the computer for long hours while I create and edit these books, and for bring me food while I am there.

I recently had the joy of experiencing how these manuals can be used as a reference handbook for someone else's curriculum that wasn't my own. Cathy Gauch, of Aircat Aerial Arts ([Aircat.net](http://Aircat.net)), graciously let me attend an aerial yoga teacher training of hers in Boulder, Colorado. It was a wonderful opportunity to get to dialogue with another pioneer of aerial yoga to see what moves unfolded to her, how her journey was different and how it was same as my own.

While attending this training, I got to experience firsthand what is helpful and what [was] annoying about these aerial yoga manuals. For example, the binding that I had for earlier manuals was the kind of binding that doesn't lay flat and you have to stomp on it to get it to stay open. I have decided it was a must to change the binding to spiral bound to make these manuals easier to flip through when you are actually using them during an aerial yoga class or teacher training.

There were also a few moves such as the forward fold that Cathy illuminated for me. As she will attest to, I tend to make everything harder and more complicated, and I sometimes overlook simple, straightforward moves. Here are the changes made to this manual due to her influence:

- The move cat cow with suspended arms clicked as a move. While I had thought to put a leg up with cat cow, I overlooked just hanging from the arms! And it's so nice too! I wish I had thought of this one when I was doing my prenatal section. I definitely would have included it.
- I decided to include the leg swing series II.
- Cathy likes having a double point hammock, and it was helpful to learn why. This contributed greatly to my pros and cons list in the introduction.
- I learned that I can enjoy runner's lunge with suspended knee with a twist. I had always figured that a move like that would be weird and uncomfortable, but it was actually quite nice.
- The class brainstormed the various arm positions of floating corpse, and we realized that there isn't one right answer to where to place the arms.
- I changed what used to be called flying plank to flying coffin.

A big influence upon the changes that have occurred for this new edition came from further exploration that occurred as I was creating videos. The videos will eventually be complied for DVDs, but for now, they are sold as individual downloads on [AerialDancing.com](http://AerialDancing.com) (like itunes-style where you get to pick and choose). This idea to sell instruction videos that can be placed directly onto your ipod came to me by way of Jessica Reynolds. Jessica Reynolds of Pole Addiction was one of the first people to buy

an aerial book from me back when this whole vision was in its infancy. She has been a pioneer in selling instructional videos for your ipod for pole dancing, and she sent me an e-mail with the suggestion to provide downloadable materials along with advice on how to do this. The idea of selling entire manuals as downloads, and affiliate programs were tiny seeds that in my mind that she helped water. She inspired me to go on and do the same with the videos. If you have ever purchased any downloadable content from me and really appreciated how easy it's been to do that, you can join me in thanking Jessica for helping the vision grow bigger than I had dreamed!

I would like to also make a special thank you to Joni, one of my first students to complete an aerial yoga program one-on-one with me. She was returning to dance after quite some years off, and she was my test-subject for developing a gentle yet effective program. I admired her coming back week after week despite the bruises that can sometimes accompany a beginner's experience. Persisting through the discomfort, she gained a great deal of impressive strength by the end of the course. As a teacher, my greatest joy is witnessing this sort of transformation in a person. Thank you for coming back each week to press on.

All pictures for this manual were taken at the Boulder Circus Center in Boulder, Colorado. We are very thankful for the use of their studio for this manual and other aerial dance endeavors.

# About the Author

Rebekah Leach is both a performer and teacher of aerial dance. Her aerial journeys have taken her all over the country and as far as Russia; performing in aerial dance companies such as Daughter of Zion Aerial Dance Company; performing at everything from high school dance shows, to performing at benefits or symphony orchestras with Aerial Experience Productions, and her favorite, to simply aerial dance as a way to worship God.



Out of her love for creative movement, Rebekah developed and implemented a unique curriculum designed for kids and adults to explore dance in the air. What you have in your hands is one result of the exploration to create a working aerial program which integrates many movement forms. Rebekah designed this program from her knowledge and experience of various movement disciplines, and she continues to explore in and outside the box.

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Rebekah lives with her husband and daughter in Charleston, South Carolina, where she is currently serving as a Nuclear Power Officer/Instructor in the United States Navy.

*For more about these books or aerial dance resources, visit [AerialDancing.com](http://AerialDancing.com). To follow Rebekah's crazy aerial adventures, visit [www.rebekahleach.com](http://www.rebekahleach.com).*



## Aerial Books by Rebekah Leach

The Aerial Yoga Manual Volume I

The Aerial Yoga Manual Volume 2

Beginning Aerial Fabric Instructional Manual

Intermediate Aerial Fabric Instructional Manual Part I

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*Corresponding video content is also available on [AerialDancing.com](http://AerialDancing.com).*

