



Marjariasana (Cat Stretch Pose)

One of my favorite poses to do especially if I am short on time is **Marjarisana** – Cat Stretch pose. Volumes can be written about the importance of the spine in yoga. Our ability to rejuvenate is connected to a flexible & open spine. Time (the lessons of Saturn), earth's gravitational pull and life's experiences that have not been integrated often get stored in the vertebrae of the spine creating compression and collapse in the posture. It is not enough to sit and stand straight but necessary to use breath to release the roots of the tension which lie in the samskaras and our acquired mental/emotional fixations. With conscious movement and breath, the nerves receive higher levels of pranic flow and vitality, strengthening our ability to handle the inevitable stresses of living.

Guidance: Come onto all fours with the hands flat directly under the shoulders and the knees in line with the hips with the feet straight. This is known as table top position. First connect to your breath...making it long and deep for a few minutes before moving. Short breath reflects an active mind that that needs stilling and relaxing. Put your attention on the back brain or occipital area as you breathe and this will automatically trigger a relaxation response of the parasympathetic nervous system. The breath is a bridge that brings us into awareness of our internal experience in the body through sensations. Marjariasana begins as you inhale, rounding the back as you bring the chin toward the chest and the forehead towards the pelvis. With each inhale, see if you can focus on filling the back body with breath. On your exhale, tilt the pelvis and begin creating a back bend, releasing the spine towards the front body. The exhale is for lengthening and creating space between the vertebrae of the spine...so the crown of the head extends one direction as the hips move the opposite direction therein creating the opening. Think of the spine as a ladder by putting your attention at the lumbar area of the spine with a focus on creating space with each breath. Then with your awareness and breath move up to the next rung and continue through the thoracic/torso and then cervical/neck area of the spine. This is an exercise not unlike playing scales on an instrument the way musicians do to create fluidity and grace.

Initially do this asana slowly, focusing on breath and awareness and relaxing the mind from making this yet another task to accomplish and instead relish the joy of movement and free flow of energy that unites body, breath and perception.

Sraddhasagar