

# the Magic Four

BY SWAMI NIRMALANANDA SARASWATI

*These four poses include all five  
directions of movement.*

*They are suitable for all ages and are  
accessible to everyone from newcomers to  
experienced practitioners.*



# the Magic Four

BY SWAMI NIRMALANANDA SARASWATI

**Svaroopā**® yoga is a technique for opening your body (*roopa*) to find your Self (*sva*). It utilizes a radically different approach than most modern styles of yoga and can give you a new way to think about *asana* practice. The practice creates a core opening by releasing the tensions in the deepest layers of your body. Dissolving these tensions allows you to live with ease, both in your body and in your deeper self. That ease is your birthright. This all happens without sweat or strain because *Svaroopā*® yoga is not exercise, but a scientific maximization of the body's natural capacities. When practicing *Svaroopā*® yoga, you delve into your body as if opening a precious gift carefully wrapped in many layers.

This powerfully transformative practice can be experienced with just four *asanas*, called **The Magic Four**. They're simple and amazingly effective. They begin by releasing the muscles connected to your tailbone—the pivot point of your body. With enough release in your tailbone, your whole body will realign from the inside outward. The changes will automatically extend down your legs through your hips, knees, ankles, and feet. Simultaneously, a domino effect of release will climb your spine through your sacrum, waist area (lumbar vertebrae), rib cage, shoulders, neck, and skull.

This spinal release opens more space for the intervertebral discs and delicate nerve roots that command every muscle, bone, artery, organ, and gland in your body. This opening also lifts mechanical compression off your internal organs, improving their functioning immediately. With

less tension throughout your body, your vital systems find their natural balance. Your breathing also opens up easily and immediately with the first pose.

**The Magic Four** will enhance your vitality and physical stamina while improving your state of mind and helping your emotions to rest in joy and compassion. The most important aspect of working with your body in *Svaroopā*® yoga is discovering the deeper dimensions of your being. This is the culmination of yoga's promise: you truly are more than you think you are.

The inner spaciousness opened by the Magic Four is a genuine physical reality, but it is more than that. In the full practice of *Svaroopā*® yoga, your inner opening goes much deeper as your life energy (*prana*) starts moving unimpeded through the central channel of your spine. The poses prepare your physical and subtle body for this more powerful opening that yoga promises. You gradually learn to surrender into a grace that is ever present, though your tendency has been to hold yourself tight and resist that flow. The outer practice of these *asanas* leads you to recognize that the source of grace is deep within your own being.

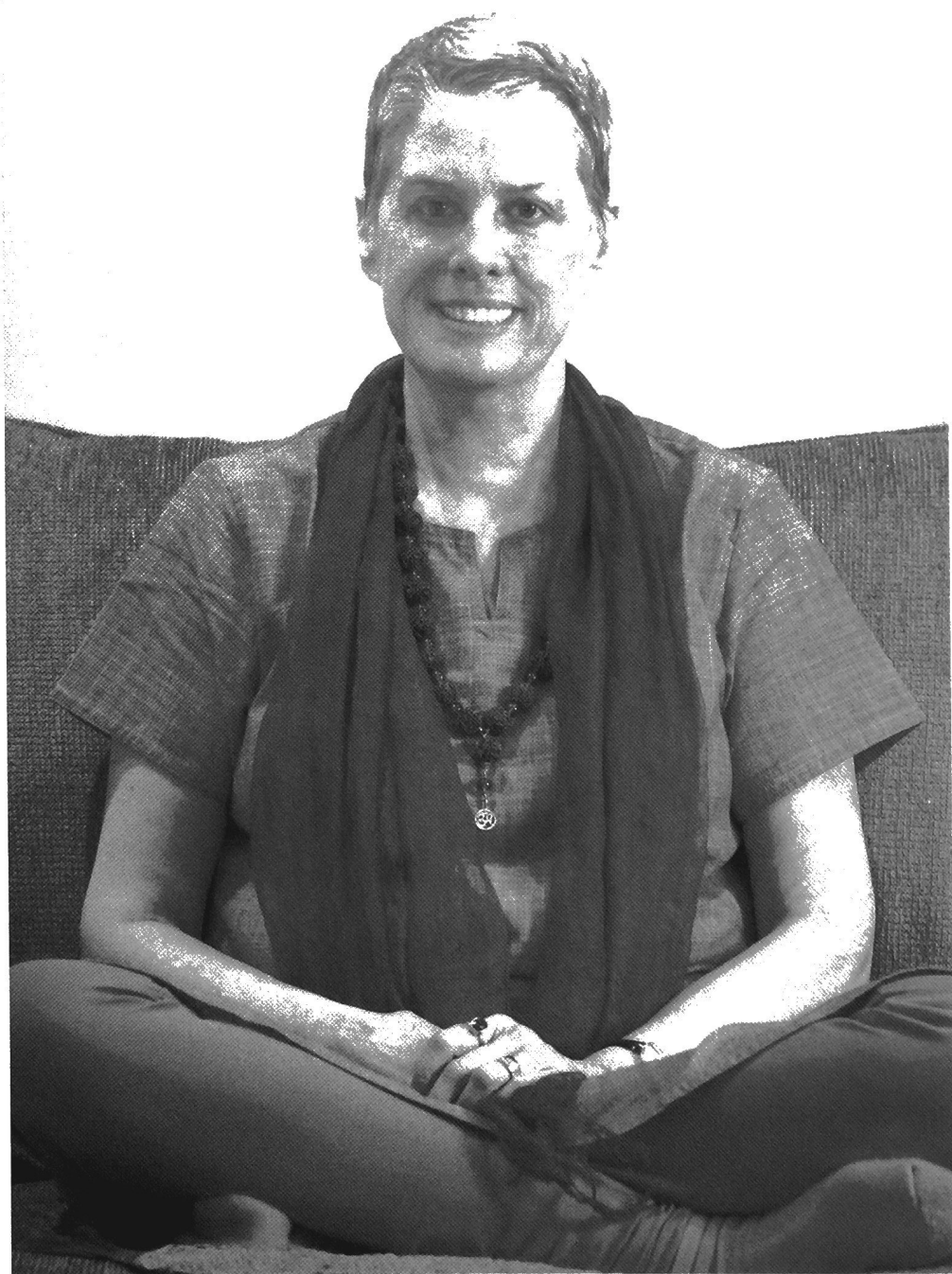
This approach to the body is based in the *tantric* tradition of *Kashmir Shaivism*. The *Pratyabhijnahridayam* describes the goal of *Svaroopā*® yoga in *sutra* 17: *madhya vikaasach chidaananda laabhaha*, "The bliss of consciousness is acquired by the opening of the central energy channel." The author, *Kshemaraja*, explains that this means your spine must be opened in order

for you to experience the truth of your own being as Consciousness-Itself. He refers specifically to *sushumna nadi* and the *chakras* in the subtle body to indicate that releasing your spine opens all levels of your being simultaneously.

The **Magic Four** can be done in as little as 20 minutes or can be extended to a full hour to facilitate deeper opening. These four poses include all five directions of movement (forward bend, backbend, side bend, inversion, and twist). They are suitable for all ages and are accessible to everyone from newcomers to experienced practitioners. Careful attention to alignment and simple props (a firm chair and two yoga blocks) are used to pinpoint and gently release the tensions deep within your body.

As a sequence, the **Magic Four** opens the entire length of your spine, with the first pose beginning with the muscles around your tailbone. The second pose extends the

release through the muscles of your sacrum. The third carries these changes through your waist area, and the fourth extends them through your rib cage, shoulders, neck, and head. The sequence should always be done in the same order without skipping any pose.



# #1 Slow-Motion Dive

Scoot all the way back in a chair, knees and feet wide. Turn your toes slightly inward. Move your feet closer together until your heels are directly under your knees and your shinbones are vertical and parallel to each other. Make sure your toes are still turned inward, with the outer edges of your feet parallel or turned inward farther.

**Stage 1:** Tip your torso forward, elbows on your knees, with your hands hanging softly between your knees. You may need to realign your feet now, in order to get your ankles under your knees, with your toes turned inward. Let your head hang forward so the back of your neck lengthens.

(Fig. 1). Soften through your shoulders so the vertebrae between your shoulder blades soften and sink inward gently. Stay in Stage 1 for a minimum of 45 seconds or up to 3 minutes, breathing easily.

You might feel a softening or tingling in the base of your pelvis as the tension in your seven coccygeus muscles begins to unravel. Or you may feel nothing. These deep layers of muscle have been tight for a long time, so they may be completely numb. This pose engenders a deep inner opening whether you can feel it yet or not.

Remain in Stage 1 if you have high blood pressure (even if it is controlled by medication), hiatal hernia, glaucoma, or a history of detached retina, or if Stage 2 is uncomfortable for any reason.



*This vertical alignment of the shins is one of the hardest things for new students to find, and hard to see from the angle your head is at, so you may want to do this in front of a mirror. Make sure your toes are turned inward.*



*If this ankle placement causes uncomfortable pressure on your thigh, you can pad it with a folded sock.*

## #2 Crook't Knee Pose

Bring your legs and feet together. Slide your feet forward 1–2 inches. Place your left ankle on your right knee and pause there for a breath or two. Use one hand to lift your knee upward 1–2 inches as you use your other hand to slide your ankle toward your hip, making sure to keep your ankle bone on your thigh bone. If you allow your ankle to slip down onto your inner thigh or to hang out over the edge of your thigh, you'll miss out on the benefits of the pose. Keep your ankle bone on your thigh bone.

**Stage 1:** Lean into the back of the chair. Keep your shoulders softly back, while you lower your chin toward your chest. Soften into the pose and remain

for at least 45 seconds or up to 3 minutes (*Fig. 3*).

These angles reach through your hip joint to release your sacrum muscles, especially your piriformis. You may feel this release as an internal movement behind your intestines, because this muscle is connected to the front face of your sacrum. If you feel it in the outside of your hip or thigh, it is still working. If you feel a pulling sensation in your crook't knee, place a thin pillow under your thigh. This will release tension in your spinal muscles, which will take the pressure off your knee.

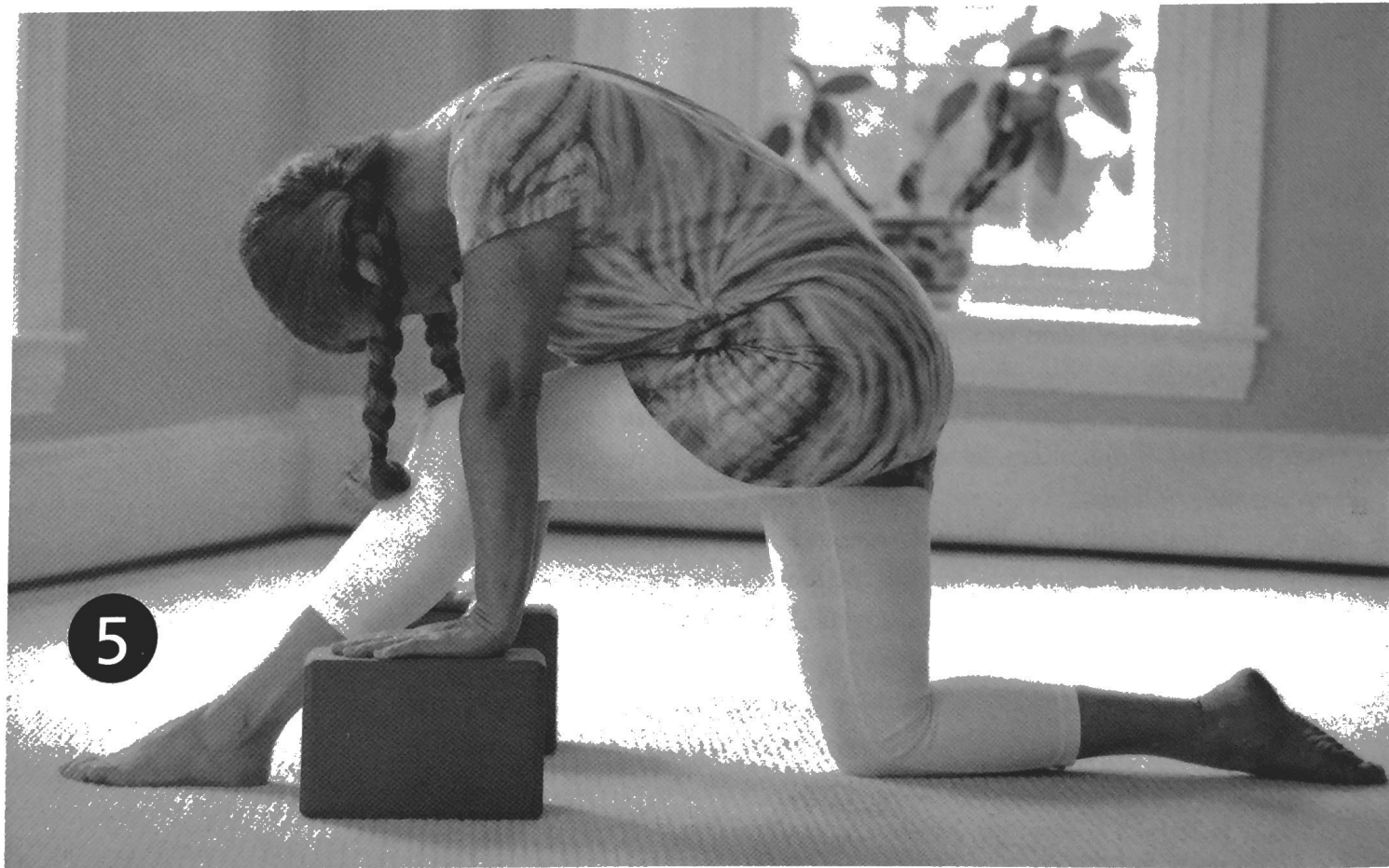
If you needed to stay in Stage 1 in the previous pose, or if you had difficulty getting your legs into this position, do not go into Stage 2.

## #3 Lunge

Kneel on the floor with your hands on yoga blocks. Move your left foot forward through the space between your hands, placing it ahead of your hands so that your left leg is almost straight (*Fig. 5*). If you find you are lifting your hands (even a little) in order to do this, make your blocks taller. Lean solidly into your right hand with your palm flat on the block.

Place your left hand on the left side of your belly, below your waist, and push your fingers slowly and deeply into your belly, toward your spine. Use your hand to move your belly and spine sideways onto your thigh. Now slide your left hand upward to place your flat palm on your lowest ribs, and use your hand to move your ribs forward toward your knee. This lengthens and aligns your spine. Place both hands on the floor (or continue to use the blocks if needed). Lower your head alongside your front knee.

*Your hand must be solidly placed on your block. With your palm flat, you will get the best alignment in your pose, which provides the deepest release in your spine, as is intended in this pose.*





6

Leave your back knee in place on the floor as you move your torso slowly forward, as far as possible without pushing or straining (*Fig. 6*). Reposition your left foot by sliding it forward or back in order to get your heel directly under your knee, so your shinbone is vertical. Your belly must stay on (or directly above) your thigh—if it slips off, back out and begin again. You can feel the lengthening of your back leg, especially in the front of your thigh. That lengthening provides traction to your spine through your waist area. While you may also be aware of tension in your front leg, it is your back leg that provides the most reliable access to your spine in this pose.

Distribute your weight evenly on both hands (palms or fists). Allow your head to hang and tuck your chin in a little. Continue with easy breathing and remain in this pose for at least 45 seconds or up to 3 minutes.

To come out, push on the floor with your hands to start your movement back and out of the pose. Leave your head hanging as you back up. Repeat on your other side.



## #4 Reclining Spinal Twist

Lying on your back, bring both knees toward your chest with your knees touching each other. Use your hands to hold your knees while you let your legs relax. Rest here for a few preparatory breaths.

Extend your arms out to your sides along the floor, with your palms facing up. Roll your legs and hips to your right and lay your bent legs and feet on the floor (*Fig. 7*). Allow your left shoulder blade to come up off the floor if needed, so you can get your right leg and foot fully on the floor. If your top knee does not land on your lower knee, place a small pillow in the space between them.

Slide your legs toward your right elbow and move your arm toward your legs until the kneecap of your right leg touches your right wristbone. This will decompress



your spine through your waist and farther down. Place your left palm on the side of your waist (*Fig. 9*). If your left elbow does not reach the floor, leave your elbow bent and keep your palm on the side of your waist, to protect your rotator cuff, while allowing your elbow and shoulder to lean toward the floor. If your elbow lands on the floor, slide your left arm down into an angle similar to your right arm, so your arms form an A-frame with your palms facing the ceiling (*Fig. 8*).

Move your feet outward to get a 90-degree angle at





your knees, and rest your top foot on your lower foot. Turn your neck and head toward your knees for a lengthening through the left side of your neck and into your jaw, as well as through the front of your left shoulder and across your collarbone (*Fig. 9*). Your neck and head position concentrates the twist in the vertebrae behind your heart, which need extra help in getting the deep release. Allow your whole body to soften while you rest in this pose and stay here for a minimum of 45 seconds or up to 5 minutes.

When you're ready to come out, roll your legs back to the center and hold your knees, with your knees touching each other. Notice the difference in the two sides of your back against the floor. Pause here, holding both knees for a few breaths, before repeating the twist to your other side.

When you are ready to get moving, rest on your side for a few breaths so you can take the inner openness with you. This is called *vyutthana*, the threshold zone, where you savor the inner experience and allow it to permeate your mind as you expand your awareness into

the external world again. You do not have to lose the inner openness and depth that your practice has provided as you move into the world. Instead, allow your awareness to expand from the inside outward, to base yourself in the deeper inner essence that yoga calls Self, while you engage with the world in a state of openness and ease.

© 2008-2011 S.T.C., Inc., All rights reserved. Swami Nirmalananda Saraswati (formerly Rama Berch) is the founder of Svaroopa® Vidya Ashram and Master Yoga Foundation and the originator of Svaroopa® Yoga. She served as founding president of the Yoga Alliance and of San Diego's Yoga Teachers Association. She has been a yoga teacher since 1976.

For more information on Svaroopa® Yoga or to find a teacher near you, contact Master Yoga Foundation at 1-866-LUVYOGA (588-9642) or [info@masteryoga.org](mailto:info@masteryoga.org), or visit our teacher directory at [www.svaroopayoga.org](http://www.svaroopayoga.org).

For more information on Swami Nirmalananda, visit Svaroopa® Vidya Ashram at [www.svaroopavidya.org](http://www.svaroopavidya.org) or email [sva@svaroopavidya.org](mailto:sva@svaroopavidya.org).

Poses demonstrated by Clair Oaks, CSYT; technical direction by Vidyadevi Stillman, CSYT, ERYT-500, Svaroopa® Yoga Teacher Trainer; photos by Larcome Photography.