



## On the Mat

by Christa Rypins

Releasing the central channel, part 2: Awakening the core while releasing the back



Yoga Teachers  
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This is the second of a two-part series working with the psoas to create space in what I call the central channel. Our tools are 1) breath, 2) fingers, 3) sensing, and 4) curiosity. We will use these tools to explore the deepest part of the front body, just in front of the spine.

Prior to performing the following series, I always complete the release series presented in “Releasing the central channel, part one: Psoas, iliacus, and pelvic floor,” in the ➔ [Spring Yoga Bulletin](#), this does two things: it makes it easier to feel and choose which muscles to use for the following movements, and it releases tension, which always feels good.

### Arch and Curl, or Tilting the Pelvis Toward Six O’Clock and Twelve O’Clock

Lying on your back with your knees bent, picture an analog clock under your pelvis. Twelve o’clock is under your navel, six o’clock is under your tail, and three and nine o’clock are under the edges of your sacrum. (See Figure 1.)

After completing the release portion of the series and feeling those benefits, place one mini ball between your knees and one under your sacrum just above your tailbone. Inhale, let your belly poof and the pelvis tilt over the ball. Exhale, and squeeze the mini ball between your knees to initiate the movement back to neutral with the inner thighs, the pelvic floor and the lower abs. Practice this for a while. Feel how on the arch, the sit bones open, and, on the exhale and return to neutral, the sit bones move together.

It is *very* important to distinguish the difference between using your inner thighs, pelvic floor, and lower transverse abdominus (lower abs), and using your psoas, butt, and back. This is exceedingly important in creating low-back and neck freedom. To feel the difference, press your fingers into your lower abs above your pubic bone. As you exhale and initiate with the inner thighs and pelvic floor, your lower abs will become taught and flat from the horizontal fibers sliding together. Conversely, when you move the pelvis from the psoas, butt, and back, a vertical muscle will pop up like a tent going up your torso. This is the psoas and the rectus abdominus. Feel for the difference enough times that the difference becomes obvious for you.

Engaging the vertical group (psoas, rectus abs, and glutes) tightens the anus, the sacro-iliac joint, the back of the body, and the jaw. Engaging the horizontal group (inner thighs, pelvic floor, and lower abs) strengthens the part of the core creating stability while allowing mobility of the sacro-iliac joint and the spine. Again, practice sensing the distinction between the two groups enough that you can sense the difference physically, mentally, sensorially, and perhaps even emotionally.

Perform the six-and-twelve movement long enough that you feel the release of the sit bones on the inhale, and the deep strength of the core, while feeling the jaw stay soft on the exhale. If you can let your jaw and neck stay soft, your skull will move along the floor as your pelvis moves, creating more softness in the neck.

After you become skillful at moving your pelvis from the deep core muscles and the breath, on the exhale, use the deep layers of abdominal muscle to tilt the pelvis past neutral into a curl, or toward six o’clock. (See Figure 2.)

➔ *continued on page 9*

figure 1



figure 2

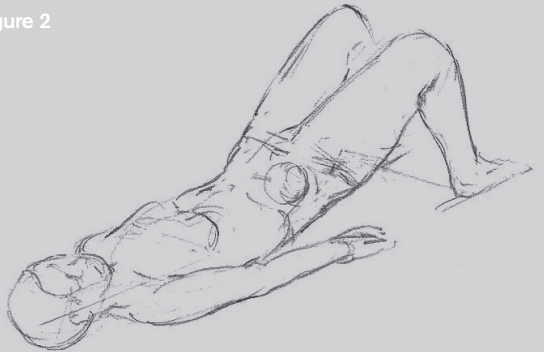


figure 3



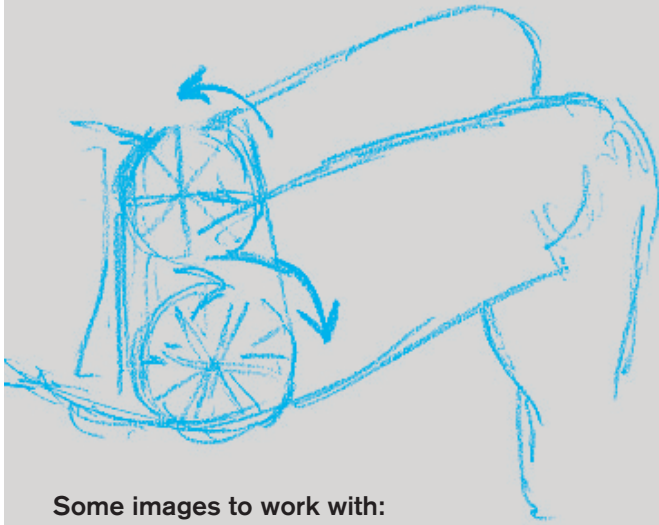
figure 4



# On the Mat

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figure 5



### Some images to work with:

- One hip joint moves back and one moves forward
- Slippery, smooth hip joints
- Diagonal gliding of the sit bones
- Opening and closing of the S.I. joints
- Pelvic halves are like wheels: one rotates back, one rotates forward (see above).

### Opening up the S.I. Joints, or Tilting the Pelvis toward Three O'Clock and Nine O'Clock

Take the mini ball away from between the knees. Be sure the feet are sit bone-width apart and the knees pointing toward the ceiling. Begin to tilt the sacrum side to side over the mini ball. (See Figures 3 and 4.) The goal is to bring one side of the sacrum toward the floor while the other side moves closer to the ceiling. This is very different from swaying the pelvis or twisting the hips and knees side to side. Both swaying the pelvis and twisting the knees and hips side to side are easier to do, but those movements will not create the mobility in the pelvis we are after. In the movement we are looking for, one knee will move closer to the ceiling and one will move down toward the hip. One hip joint moves closer to the ceiling as the other hip joint moves closer to the floor.

In the beginning, this can feel awkward. Often one side will feel open and the other will feel tighter. Hang in there. Softening the tongue, jaw, and neck will allow the head to move in relationship to the pelvis, creating more space in the neck as you attend to the pelvis.

After you feel your body has taken the next step with this, either with the start of the understanding or deepening into the relaxation of remembering spaciousness in the pelvis, take the mini ball away. Come onto your back on the floor and feel the difference in your hips, back, and neck.

After you become very comfortable with moving the pelvis in the six-and-twelve plane, and the three-and-nine plane, you can combine them into a pelvic clock over the ball. The tricky part is to still use only the horizontal muscles rather than the verti-

cal group. Once you have the feel for it, let your neck and jaw go so your skull will move in relationship to the pelvis, creating even more relaxation in the neck.

A helpful image might be to picture the pelvis as a shallow pasta bowl with olive oil in it. Swirl the pelvis/bowl, swirling the oil around the bowl/pelvis. Take the ball away and notice how your hips, back, and neck feel on the floor, as well as your mental and emotional state. After practicing this series on the ball, you might want to try performing it on the floor.

Roll onto your side to come up into standing so you do not tighten up the muscles you have just released. Take a walk and notice how your body and mind feel. Some places to be aware of: the neck, how your head floats on your spine, how your legs swing from the hip sockets, how your pelvis rotates as you walk, and your emotional and mental state. ■

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*Christa Rypins is a former professional ice skater who lived and performed with long-term chronic pain. She has a studio in Murphys, California, where she teaches the tools and techniques she used to become pain-free, strong, and limitless in her body once again. These include Kripalu Yoga, Resistance Stretching, Pilates, Somatics, and the Franklin Method® of imagery. Christa will teach Yoga for a Better Back: Yoga meets the Franklin Method, October 2-4 at Kripalu, and will offer the workshop Pelvic Power! How the Pelvis Works in Yoga and Life at KYTA Conference 2011, October 4-7. ➔ [www.intelligentbody.net](http://www.intelligentbody.net)*