

# You Cheeky Monkey

How a giggle can straighten your bum in Hanumanasana

by Kristin McGee



Here, my butt cheeks are all askew. I need to shift my front hip back so I can sink deeper into the pose.



One of my favorite old skits from *Saturday Night Live* is Mike Myers as Simon, who sits in a bathtub with a big smile on his face and, in a silly-sounding British accent asks, "Are you looking at my bum? You bum-looker, you cheeky monkey!" I would laugh hysterically.

The other day, as I was practicing Hanumanasana (Split Pose), all of a sudden, I heard Simon's voice ask, "Are you looking at my bum?" I thought, "Aha!" My butt cheeks are all askew. I need to shift my front hip back." I started to giggle and let go of trying so hard to get my front leg down

on the mat (and overstretching my hamstring in the process). I drew back my front hip, which enabled me to melt the psoas muscle of my back leg and actually sink deeper into the pose. I felt as if I were melting into a warm bathtub as my pelvic floor sunk to the ground. There I was, in a full split, my bum now sitting evenly on the mat.

## The big leap

Hanumanasana is named for the monkey god in Hindu legend. In the *Ramayana*, Hanuman made a heart-inspired

## Benefits of Hanumanasana

- Stretches hamstrings; hip, groin, and psoas muscles
- Builds integrity and patience
- Massages your abdominal muscles
- Opens heart center
- Builds courage to take leaps in your life!

## Hovering in Hanumanasana

Once you've warmed up, you're ready for your Split:

- From Downward Facing Dog (Adho Mukha Svanasana), step your right foot forward into a lunge and lay your back knee down on the mat. Lift your arms and come into Crescent Lunge (Anjaneyasana), holding for 3 to 5 breaths.
- Next, take your hands down to the floor (or blocks on either side of you), and begin to straighten out your front leg—but don't let your front hip go too. Try as hard as you can to rein that front hip rim back and press your back hip rim forward.
- Flex your back foot (toes pressing into the floor) and lift your knee off the mat to energize your back leg, and scoop your tailbone under and forward. Lower your leg back down, and point your toes back.
- Lift the sides of your mouth into a smile, and feel yourself floating in the center of your hips.
- Open your chest and breathe, and inch your pelvis deeper toward the floor as your groin muscles release.

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leap from India to Sri Lanka, in order to rescue Rama's beloved Sita from her kidnapper Ravana.

Unlike Hanuman, I have always had difficulty mastering this pose. Because of my eagerness to get my butt (and front thigh) down to the floor, I paid way too much attention to stretching my hamstrings.

When I thought of Mike Myers and silly smiles and funny monkeys, my giggle actually lifted me up a bit, which gave me space in my pelvis to tip my monkey tail under and open the groin, psoas, and quadricep muscles

of my back thigh. Once I released my back leg to the floor, my chest lifted, and I pulled my front hip rim back to even out my pelvis. Instead of feeling panicked and wanting to get out of the pose as quickly as possible, I let myself hover in the air, and then I completely let go. Like magic, my seat hit the floor.

By evening out the stretch between both legs, I no longer felt strain in my hamstrings. I wasn't overly focused on my front leg, overheated and anxious for the future; nor was I tight and cold in the back leg, stuck in the past. Instead, I was right in the middle, feeling content and warm. In order for Hanuman to make his leap, he had to be fully present.

## Before you split

To warm up for Hanumanasana, I suggest starting with Surya Namaskar A (Sun Salutation) and then Surya Namaskar B, which adds Warrior I (Virabhadrasana I) on each side. Warrior I is a great way to start to open your psoas and work your hips into an even line. Once you've built some heat, take Pigeon Prep and One-Legged Pigeon (Eka Pada Rajakapotasana) on each side to open your hips, groin muscles, and quadriceps.

You can also do a great quadriceps stretch at the wall. Place your knee on the floor (on a blanket) so your shin goes up the wall. Lunge your opposite leg forward, and with your torso upright, align your hips evenly back to the wall (with your foot on the wall outside your hip).

To open your hamstrings even more, try Standing Hand to Foot Pose (Utthita Hasta Padangusthasana), Standing Forward Bend (Uttanasana), or Seated Forward Bend (Pascimottanasana). Then, you're ready for Hanumanasana (see sidebar).

It is so easy to get caught up in moving forward and getting to our destination, but yoga teaches us over and over again that the journey is the best part. Live in the moment, and find joy and laughter as much as you can in your practice and in your life. The next time you're struggling with your Split Pose, think of the monkey god Hanuman with a giant smile on his face flying across the sea to Sri Lanka—or Mike Myers' silly face as he soaks in his tub. Laugh a bit more while you practice, and notice how a giggle can make the greatest difference in your movement, both on and off the mat. 🐒

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