

Yoga Therapy



On Four Feet,

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Sariram Aadyam Khalu
Dharmasaadhanam I

Body (Health) is the foundation of all dharmic activities.

As has been mentioned, Asanas could be broadly classified into standing, sitting, supine, prone and balancing. In this, a group of important standing asanas, along with a few useful vinyasas are taken up.

SAMASTHITHI

It is the starting position in the practice, in fact the entire session starts from samasthithi and ends with it. Refer to sketch (1). It is to stand erect, with the feet fully resting on the ground and together. The ankles and the knees are kept together. The knees are not to be flexed. Chest is kept erect and the shoulders are slightly thrown back, so that the shoulder blades tend to approximate each other, forming a

canal along the spinal column in the back. You should breathe normally a few times before starting the practice. This position is also known as Tadasana Sthithi (or Tree Pose.)

Tadasana - Vinyasa (1)

The variations in Tadasana follow. After complete exhalation, lock the chin against the top of the chest. This is Jalandharabandha mentioned in the previous issue. Then slowly and deeply inhale and raise both arms straight over head - the movement of the arms are made along the sides, stretching slowly the knees, hips, shoulders, elbows, wrists and the neck. The inhalation and the completion of the movement should synchronise. One should adjust the pace, the slower the better. Breathing is to be done with a hissing sound in the throat, created by the partial closing of the glottis which is aided by the chin lock (Jalandharabandha). Then exh-



For Asanas

Krishnamachara Yoga Mandiram

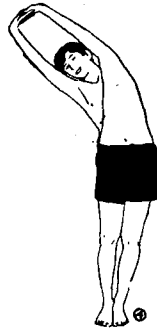
align and pressing the balls of the feet together, raise the heels as high as possible, stretching well the body, especially the ankles and calf muscles, in the process. Refer Sketch (3). One could stay in the posture for a few seconds (2 to 5), in the beginning, while holding the breath out (Bahya Kumbhaka). Then on inhalation, bring down the heels slowly and deliberately, again synchronising with the breathing (with the hissing sound). This may be repeated 3 to 6 times.

In the beginning, many may have difficulty maintaining balance or keeping the ankles and knees together or stretching the ankle. But if one proceeds step by step,—first a few centimeters — one can stay comfortably in the posture. After some time, one can stay in the stretched posture and complete a few rounds of breathing. Then exhaling get back to Samasthithi. This is a good stretching

movement, especially in the morning and has a tonic effect on the muscles and joints (Sandhis). Growing children could practice to aid in increasing height.

TADASANA VINYASA (2)

From Samasthithi, inhaling raise arms and interlock fingers. Then as you exhale, press the feet and bend the torso to the right side, stretching the left side of the body especially the side ribs in the process. The posture looks like a tree swaying to a heavy northerly wind. The upper body should neither stoop forward nor be pushed backward. The whole movement should be done in the vertical plane. One could stay in the posture for a few seconds, holding the breath out. Inhaling, then, return to the original position. The same movement is repeated in the opposite direction as well, so that movements act as Pratikriyas to each other. It will be good to keep the



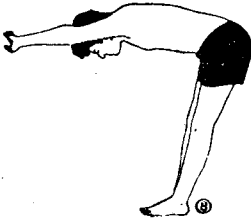
ARJUNA
UTKATASANA
HOBBING A.U.



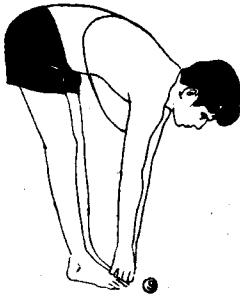
feet and knees (without bending) together all through the process. Refer to sketch (4).

TADASANA VINYASA (3).

From Samasthithi, again with the arms raised and fingers interlocked, while exhaling twist (torsion) the upper body to the left side to the extent possible and then stretch the neck and look up. The feet position are not to be altered and the knees are also kept together. Refer to sketch (5). Stay in the posture for a few seconds and on inhalation return to the standing point, and lock the chin. The same movement is to be repeated on the other side, which also acts as a counter to the previous movement.



This Vinyasa may also be done with arms kept at shoulder level, but the head is not raised as in the previous variation. While turning right the head also is turned to the right side, along with stretched right shoulder and arm. Again there is no displacement of the feet, which point front. Instead of keeping the arms at shoulder level, yet another variation (which should not be attempted by beginners) would require keeping the palms together behind the back like saluting (Pranam). The palms' position is illustrated in Sketch 2.



With arms raised, fingers locked and turned outward, slowly exhale, relax and flex the knees and lower the body half way through. (Sketch 6). The heels should not be raised and one should feel the stretching at the knees and not stiffen them especially the hamstrings. In this position, the thighs are parallel to the ground and the posture resembles a chair. Stay in the posture for a few seconds, then raise back to the starting point.

PURNA UTKATASANA

Start as for Ardha Utkatasana, but as you exhale sit down all the way, flexing fully the knees. The body should not drop forward over the knees. The arms and shoulders are stretched. The feet are fully on the ground, but not the seat (buttocks). Stay in the posture for a few seconds. Then inhale raising, pressing the heels and stretching the ankles, heels, back, shoulders and neck. Refer Sketch 7.

There are some Vinyasas (not illustrated) which may also be tried. One is to keep the arms at shoulder and complete the movements. Another Vinyasa would require keeping the palm together between the shoulders in the back like saluting (Pranam), the hand position as

shown in sketch (2). These are more difficult vinyasas requiring some degree of suppleness of the knees and shoulders. Extensions of this asana include variations in the position of the leg, like stretching one while keeping the other on the ground.

ARDHA UTTANASANA

This is again done with arms raised, fingers interlocked and turned outward. Then as you exhale, press the feet, push back the hips and bend forward with the back straight and horizontal. The knees are not to be bent. Refer Sketch (8) Then inhaling come up to original position, slightly arching the back as well. The Vinyasas in this include keeping the arms stretched at shoulder level, or with palms together on the back etc.

PURNA UTTANASANA

With arms position as before, exhaling, press feet and without bending the knees, slowly bend forward and place the palms by the side of the feet, on the ground. If it is not possible, touch the ground or hold the ankles. Then inhale and raise the head without changing the position of the palms. As you exhale, try to touch the knees with the forehead. Inhale then, as you raise to original position. This is Purna Uttana-

nasana or full stretching pose involving the back of the legs, hamstrings and knees, the back, neck and shoulders. You may also hold the toes with the thumb, index and middle fingers when it is known as Padangushtasana (sketch 9). There are a number of variations in this asana, pertaining to the position of hands and palms. Since this involves a considerable stretching the stubborn hamstrings and also use of stomach muscles to stay in position, it is necessary to do a suitable counterpose. Purna Utkatasana mentioned earlier (sketch 7) could be repeated a couple of times when the hamstring and knees are relaxed, so also the lower abdomen,

TONES UP MUSCLES

Tadasana, Uttanasana, and Utkatasana form a group of asanas, which could be a good beginning for limbering up the joints toneing up the muscles. It is to be observed that it may not be possible to reach the final position in the beginning itself. For some, due to their physical condition (Sarirasthithi) age and constitution, it may not be possible to do so even after considerable practice. But the benefits start accruing when one does consciously and with the right breathing and 'feeling' the stretching and stay with it for a



few seconds.

The 'control' against over doing — which is to be avoided — is the breath itself. When it tends to become short, it is an indication to the practitioner to take rest. It can be done by returning to Samasthithi and do normal breathing. This inbuilt check is an additional advantage in our Acharya's Paddhati. Unless otherwise mentioned, breathing should be done through throat constriction mentioned at the beginning.

HELPS DIGESTION

This group of asanas especially, Utkatasana and Uttanasana helps tone up the digestive system. After some practice, when one is steady in the posture (Sthira), the Moolabandha and Uddiyana-bandha (referred in the previous issue) could be tried

after exhalation. It is good, especially for women, as they avoid. The mornings are ideally suited for practice, at about or before sunrise. However, abhyasa in the evenings is better than skipping the practice for the day. One should not practice until three hours after a solid meal and half an hour after intake of fluids. The above group is not

exhaustive of standing postures, but are taken for simplicity and maximum advantage. There are other standing asanas with feet spread about 3' (Trikonasana Sthithi), about 5' (Prasarithapada Sthithi) and culminating in spreading the feet for over 7', when it becomes Samakona Sthithi when one sits as it were with legs apart at 180°. Well that is for the adepts !



