

Pratikriyasana: The Use of Counterposing



Pratikriyasana can be literally translated as 'reverse action pose' where 'prati' means 'reverse or against', 'kriya' means 'action' and asana means 'pose', meaning that this is the Sanskrit term used for counterposes.

Counterposes are to be included in our practices to return our body/mind to balance.

Counterposing is particularly necessary having practiced an intense asana where potentially we have exerted pressure upon a particular location(s) within the body. For example, having practiced Ustrasana (Camel), a strong back bend, we may choose to teach a 'soft' forward bend, such as Balasana (Child's Pose) as a counterpose. We can of course elect to teach more than one asana as a counterpose, so for Ustrasana we might perform Adho Mukha Svanasana (Up Facing Dog Pose) to stretch open the legs and ease the shoulders, hips etc. before moving into Balasana (Child's Pose) to ease the spine, shoulders and so forth.

Counterposes need to be:

- **Less complex**
- **Less strenuous**
- **Working the body in an opposite or different way**

With reference to the last point above do note however that we need to ensure that we **are not repeatedly working the body in two opposite directions** with any great intensity, where for instance if we were to counterpose strong forward bends with strong backward bends or vice versa then this can be unhelpful – just consider how to break a stick we bend it back and forth. So, for example having practiced Paschimottanasana (West Stretch) we do not move into Purvottanasana (East Stretch) rather perhaps we need to practice a simple spinal twist and/or Dandasana (Staff Pose) where arms are raised up the ceiling to realign and lengthen the spine. Often it is most useful to physically try the pose and see where your body is naturally inclined to move.

It is very important to note that students can benefit from feeling the effects of a 'strong' pose before moving into a counterpose so there may be a **short period of stillness for inner reflection before moving on to the counterpose** for some asana and these periods are ideally included within our classes so we are not always moving directly into a counterpose.

Indeed, the time spent in a counterpose will necessarily make a great difference to the effect our practice will have upon the body/mind where it is worth noting these quiet times in a restful counterpose following more intense asana oftentimes allows students to connect with a newfound stillness or sense of sattva, and as such these moments need to be created. As always, we can best know how to time counterposing through our own familiarity with asana and our observations in class.

We can juxtapose more challenging or intense asana, especially for more experienced students, but there always must be a following period where we can release effort. And certainly prior to the quieter work in the later stages of the class there will need to be a period of cooling down.

It is also useful to note if the counterpose is placed earlier in the class maybe a counterpose can also act as a preparatory pose or carrier of a teaching point for later asana.

Ultimately, we want to leave the body/mind feeling balanced, relaxed and full of energy, ready for anything, and the use of counterpose helps us to achieve this.