

## Principles for Balances

### Benefits of balances

One of the main benefits of balances is to the mind because when we enter a balance we must necessarily be mentally calm and centered in order to maintain the balanced state; so as we learn to balance we are developing dharana, the ability to concentrate. We will also find balances create a grounding effect drawing us out of the head and into the body.

In addition there are physical benefits to be achieved such as strengthening the feet, ankles, legs etc. and they are especially good for helping to develop an awareness of postural alignment and proprioception, i.e. the ability to know where the body is in space.

Balances are of many types, some are forward bends, some backbends, some twists etc. and so the principles which apply to each of these are relevant so for instance in natarajasana (dancer), a backbending asana, we also work according to the guidelines for backbends.

There are however some general guidelines to help us in our balancing poses:

### General principles of balances

- Shift your weight within your feet so you have equal weight between the heels, balls of feet and little toes.
- Ground down creating a good foundation and simultaneously lift upwards, feeling yourself lengthening between these two points. Activating mula bandha greatly helps with this subtle rebound effect where as we press down we are being lifted up out of the floor. We may also find that lifting the hyoid bone to engage the muscles of the front of the body can be valuable.
- Balances require a great deal of mental concentration so to help keep the eyes soft and focus them upon a fixed spot (drishti). Allow the breath to be gentle and even and let the mind be peaceful.
- Always take time to centre before entering the balance and enter and leave slowly with attention.
- If it is a bad balancing day then be respectful of that making modifications such as keeping one foot the floor in tree or placing a hand to the wall for extra assistance.
- Be confident mentally saying to yourself that you can do this and if you topple over then always forgive yourself immediately!

### Good Preparation for balances

Work extensively with Tadasana (Mountain Pose) initially and then learn to balance in incremental stages, working from simple balances, where there is more support, to more challenging balances. Do not attempt the more challenging balances until ready to do so because this will cause frustration and a lack of confidence within students.

Staging is an excellent tool for balances where students can easily find their own level e.g. for Vrksasana, Tree Pose:

- 1) hands in anjali mudra at the heart, open hip with toes to floor heel against the ankle
- 2) hands in anjali mudra at the heart, open hip with sole to ankle or side of calf
- 3) hands in anjali mudra at the heart, open hip with sole to thigh
- 4) having chosen the most suitable foot position raise arms if able to do so

Or for Garudasana, Eagle Pose:

- 1) Arms crossed at elbows, arms intertwined if possible, legs as for Tadasana
- 2) Arms crossed at elbows, arms intertwined if possible, legs wrapped with lower foot to floor
- 3) Arms crossed at elbows, arms intertwined if possible, legs wrapped with lower foot raised
- 4) Arms crossed at elbows, arms intertwined if possible, legs wrapped with lower foot to raised, more deeply squatting

We can explore the stages over the weeks and use them when exploring the asana in any one class so each student is practicing at an appropriate level.

#### **Areas for caution**

Anxiety	Where balance and confidence are adversely affected work with supports and gentler modifications
Ear problems	Where balance is affected work with supports and gentler modifications
Pregnancy	Where balance is affected work with supports and gentler modifications
Vertigo	Work with assistance from the wall, chairs etc. if needed, although vertigo is usually more pronounced when lying supine