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Virasana

~ Hero's Pose

1. *It's fundamental principles*

Asanas stretch and open the body in ways that prepare the student to sit mindfully and comfortably during pranayama and meditation. For this reason, the practise of seated and kneeling asanas seems imperative as they encourage; the spine to elongate, the muscles supporting the spine to be strengthened, flexibility to develop in the hips, knees and ankles. All of which encourage greater ease and comfort to arise when sitting for pranayama and meditation practises (class notes, 2004).

2. *The structural and functional physiology involved*

Virasana (or hero/warrior's pose):

- Strengthens the arches and stretches through the tops of one's feet
- Stretches the ankles, knees and thighs. Provides a deep bend in the knee
- Gives an internal rotation of upper legs
- Opens hip joints, rotating the joints in a different direction to most asanas (classnotes, 2004)
- Reduces swelling in the legs during pregnancy (particularly 2nd trimester)
- By opening up and lengthening through the abdomen, this asana is able to improve digestion, relieve gas, and help alleviate cramping associated with menstruation.
- Therapeutic for high blood pressure, as it alters circulation
- Expanding through the thoracic cavity is therapeutic for asthma

([www.yogajournal.com:Virasana\(heropose\)](http://www.yogajournal.com:Virasana(heropose)))

3. *The yogic or subtle physiology involved*

Mind: Virasana (or heros pose) is often recommended for meditation practises, as it is believed to balance the mind, increase one's power of concentration, and encourage relaxation and clarity (Saraswati, 1996). I always wondered why I liked this asana so much, it's meant to be good for those who think too much!

Chakras: As this pose encourages the student to lengthen through the entire spinal column, one can focus their attention on any chakra. Eg. Muladhara as it is in contact with the ground: Svadhisthana as virasana is believed to stimulate the Vajra nadi (which regulates and controls sexual energy) (Saraswati, 1996): Manipura if connecting with the power of the “warrior”: or Ajna by bringing in Shambhavi mudra or focussing on ajna centre etc.

Koshas: As mentioned in other previous asana assignments.

4. How it relates to other asanas in the group

Virasana is part way between a seated and a kneeling posture (part of which depends on the students flexibility). However, it rotates the hips in a direction not commonly experienced in day-to-day life, and even in other asanas. This allows the flexibility of the hips to be increased, but also in a balanced way. I’ve found that it can also, with continued practise, create an awareness of the base of the spine and of lengthening along the spine from the base (I find it seems to tilt the pelvis slightly, which changes the feeling of the weight on my sit-bones).

5. How it may be sequenced in a practise/class?

I’ve always preferred to practise Virasana later in a class, once I’ve had time to warm my legs, and in particular open up through my hip joints.

Prepatory poses:

Sukhasana – arms up to come forward, lengthening spine, engaging abdominal muscles, release to floor, hold here, working legs/hips

Knee rotation - inward and outwards

Kapotasana – Adho mukha Svanasana sequence to lengthen spine, warm and open hip joint.

Tadasana – to create awareness of length through body, through spine

Dandasana – to create awareness of lengthening spine in a seated position

Gomukhasana – lengthen spine, engage abdomen, warm and open hip joint

**Whilst practising Virasana, it can be nice to sequence arm movements; ie Garudasana, Hastasana or interlocking your arms behind your back and lifting. However, this appropriate only when students have found some comfort with virasana.

Subsequent poses:

Stretch legs back one at a time, pushing heels towards the floor to release the legs, particularly behind the knees.

Adho Mukha Svanasana – lengthen spine, stretch through backs of legs

Knee rotation - to balance hip stretch

Dandasana

Paschimottanasana

(*forward bends in particular to counterbalance supta virasana)

6. Variations according to needs and major precautions and/or contra-indications

Pre-cautions/Contra-indications:

- Heart and cardiovascular issues, due to shift in blood flow through legs

- Knee or Ankle injuries/weaknesses – due to intense stretch through these joints.

If there isn't a weakness or condition, but the ankles are just sore during this pose, it is possible to roll up a towel to place underneath the ankles before the student sits down. It might also be worth mentioning that sometimes the inner top feet press into the floor more heavily. This can often be alleviated by gently encouraging the outer edge of the foot towards the floor, using your palm.

Likewise if there is tightness in the knees and/or hips, and bolster or blankets can be placed under the student's buttocks to ease the pressure.

Alternatively it might be more beneficial to practise Ardha Virasana, working only one leg at a time.

- Inflammatory conditions like arthritis
- Yoga journal recommends that if the student has a headache, it is best to practise supta virasana with the support of a bolster or blankets.

(www.yogajournal.com:virasana)

7. Main indications for adjustment.

I've noticed in classes that it is quite common for people to slump through their lower back and roll their shoulders forward as they concentrate on the unusual stretch they are getting through the lower part of their body. Encouraging students to lift and lengthen through their spine, engage their abdomen, broaden across their chest, roll their shoulders back and down, and sit on their sitting bones may help. Alternatively/In conjunction it might be useful to use blankets/bolsters to lift their buttocks. This way the asana is not as deep.

At other times, students find it difficult to sit in this pose due to uncomfortable knees, ankles and/or feet. Again bolsters and blankets as mentioned before can be useful, alternatively, practising ardha virasana may be a useful way to start getting used to the type of stretch.

References

Class notes, teacher's instructions, own experience. etc. 2004

Saraswati, S.S. (1996). *Asana Pranayama Mudra Bandha*. Yoga Publications Trust. Bihar, India.

Virasana. www.yogajournal.com:virasana. 19 Jan 2005