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Bakasana

~ Crane Pose

1. It's fundamental principles

Balancing and strengthening asanas support students to find balance on a physical, mental and subtle level. These asanas develop lightness, build stamina, strength, enhance co-ordination (class notes, 2004) and begin to still the unconscious movements of the physical body, mind and energetic body.

2. The structural and functional physiology involved

Bakasana or Crane Pose:

- Strengthens the arms and wrists
- Develops a sense of physical balance as this asana requires more co-ordination than strength (Saraswati, 1996)
- Stretches the upper back
- Engages the abdominal muscles
- Tones the abdominal organs
- Opens and improves flexibility in the groin
- And an understanding of how to do bakasana prepares the student for most other arm balances.

(www.yogajournal.com: Bakasana, 2004; Saraswati, 1996)

3. The yogic or subtle physiology involved

Mind: Improves mental clarity, focus and concentration

Chakras: Balance requires a solid/firm foundation – “Tadasana hands” so this asana can strengthen Muladhara chakra. However, I find this asana also requires me to lift my energy up to higher energy centres: In particular Ajna - for focus, concentration and mental clarity.

Koshas: As the student begins to balance the body in space, and begins to find the balance in the comfort, ease and action required during asana practise, this sense of balance begins to be felt through the more subtle layers of the body. And so balance is found through each of the koshas (refer previous asana assignments for further explanation).

4. How it relates to other asanas in the group

Bakasana is both a balancing and a strengthening asana. It requires the concentration and co-ordination typically connecting with balancing asanas, whilst simultaneously being a compact arm balance (www.yogajournal.com: Bakasana, 2004).

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

I've only ever practised this asana later on, once I've worked through other strengthening poses.

Preparatory poses:

Baddha Konasana – to open and improve flexibility in the groin

Vyaghrasana – begin to create awareness of engaging core strength

Surya Namaskar - jumping back from uttanasana to adho mukha purvottanasana (strength required in arms, strengthens abdominal/core muscles)

Adho mukha purvottanasana – count slowly into Chaturanga Dandasana

Chaturanga Dandasana – engage abdominal/core muscles, arm strengthening

Adho Mukha Svanasana – arm/wrist strengthening, length through spine, awareness of placement of hands as foundational support

Tadasana – to lengthen spine, create awareness of lifting up through body, through energy centres (if appropriate)

Uttanasana with hands on the floor, bring feet together and come down into Malasana

Malasana – to lengthen spine and open and improve flexibility in the groin

Subsequent poses:

Adho Mukha Virasana – to lengthen spine, release and lengthen the arms

Balasana - again to rest, release groin or

Advasana with pranayama – breathing along the entire length of the spine, then along the entire length of the body. Aiming to release any tension that may have been held during bakasana.

Continue on with remainder of class.

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

Pre-cautions/Contra-indications:

- This asana is not recommended for students with carpal tunnel syndrome or with weak wrists.
- Nor is it recommended for students with high blood pressure, heart disease, cerebral thrombosis or during pregnancy.

(www.yogajournal.com:Bakasana, 2004; Saraswati, 1996)

7. Main indications for adjustment.

Yoga Journal suggested that some students may have trouble lifting up off the floor, so beginning by squatting on a block can help by providing additional height. However, this may be potentially problematic for when students try to come down!

When I first began learning this asana I found that I was more afraid of falling on my face than anything else. Once I got over that it became much easier. Initially I began going into bakasana, holding it for a breath and coming back out. But it was only with time and practise that the strength grew, and the fear lessened. Whilst the above

is an option for students who feel they don't have the strength yet, have weak wrists or perhaps like me, are a little afraid, another option is to provide an alternative, perhaps malasana (feet turned out, hands in namaskar mudra, lifting from base of spine). Whilst this variation of malasana is not the same as bakasana, it does open through the groin, and involves both balance and strength to some degree – only it's through the legs. (if bakasana is sequenced after Malasana, then students can simply go back into Malasana – rather than the teacher trying to teach 2 asanas at once!)

References

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

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

Bakasana. www.yogajournal.com/poses/468_1.cfm?ctsrc=nlv121. 06/10/2004.