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TRIKONASANA ~Triangle Pose

- *It's fundamental principles*

Standing asanas cultivate a sense of balance, of strength and of being grounded in one's body (class notes). They not only strengthen the muscles of the legs, hips, pelvis, and spine, but they also tone the digestive, circulatory and respiratory systems. Performing these asanas regularly creates more space for energetic movement.

- *The structural and functional physiology involved*

“Asymmetrical asanas show up asymmetrical patterns of functioning” (Thomson, 1994a). Thus Trikonasana is a powerful asana for developing an awareness of structural alignment, from the feet up. The benefits of practising this asana then are predominantly felt in the skeletal and muscular systems. In particular it develops; an awareness of and strengthening of the feet, power, stability and flexibility in the legs, in the pelvis, in the waist, opening through the hips, awareness of and lengthening of the spine from its base, strengthening core/abdominal/back muscles, broadness through the shoulders, strength through the arms, the neck and the head (Thomson, 2004a&b). By strengthening these muscles, the student creates tone, which supports the skeletal system throughout everyday activity (Martini, 1998). The weight-bearing nature of this practise increases bone density and adaptability (Martini, 1998).

A secondary benefit of a more supported system, is that the length and opening created through the spine and torso, allows for more efficient functioning of the other physiological systems (cardiovascular, respiratory, digestive – by activating intestinal peristalsis, urinary, endocrine, nervous, and lymphatic).

- *The yogic or subtle physiology involved*

Chakras – strengthens base chakra through awareness of feet and legs, opens through front and back of heart chakra,

Koshas – Over time, the student can work through the sheaths.

Knowledge/awareness of the physical body (annamaya kosha) and awareness of likes, dislikes, or tension (manomaya kosha), through to awareness of pranic movement (pranamaya kosha), insights associated with vijnanamaya kosha, and eventually to the effortless effort and bliss of anandamaya kosha

Nadis & Prana – clears energy blockages created through stress, tension, and poor posture. Thus prana can flow more easily. Lengthening through the spine also allows for more efficient flow along sushumna.

(Class notes, yogic physiology)

- *How it relates to other asanas in the group, and how it may be sequenced in a practise or class*

According to Iyengar, Trikonasana may be introduced after Tadasana and Vrksasana, for it's foundation draws greatly from an understanding of Tadasana (Iyengar,). In fact Trikonasana is Tadasana done asymmetrically. As such it introduces a Tadasana understanding, and subsequently an awareness of correct structural alignment to all asymmetrical standing asanas (Thomson, 2004a). This makes it an important asana to introduce early on to students.

To practise this asana, the body needs to be properly warmed up - to create the openings required. Particularly with regards to the feet, legs, hips and pelvis, core strength, the spine, waist and shoulders (that seems to be much of the body!)

For example:

Sukhasana (to open the hips)

Parvattasana (To open, broaden through shoulders)

Lateral stretch in sukhasana (to open through side waist)

Spine twist (to warm muscles of back/spine)

Forward hip stretch (to warm hips)

Majariasana (to warm spine, back muscles)

Viagrasana (to create awareness of core muscles)

Adho Mukha Svanasana (to lengthen and warm muscles through arms, shoulders, back, hips, legs, feet),

Into Utthita Eka Pada Adho Mukha Svanasana (for lateral stretch, core awareness)

Into Uttanasana with arms on inside of elbows (open through hips, legs, engage quads and to create also a broadness through the shoulders)

Tadasana (to bring awareness of alignment, working from feet up)

*NB Supta Virasana can also be used to create an awareness of the pelvic action required through Trikonasana (ie. Support the stability of the legs), however it depends on the students as to whether this is an appropriate exercise.

- *Variations according to needs and major pre-cautions and/or contra-indications*

As the power of this asana comes from the feet up, it may be beneficial to support beginning student's feet with blocks (under the heel of the back foot, and under the ball of the front foot). This way the student begins to develop an awareness of the relationship between the two feet, and the balance and alignment that comes from this.

Some people have a tendency to hyperextend through the back of the knee. This reduces strength and minimises pranic flow. Instructions to engage the quadriceps to lift the knees can be useful here (Class notes, 2004).

Also if the opening is not present through the hips and waist, it may be more beneficial for the student to place their hand on a block, or to hold on to their leg (either above or below the knee). Whilst the hand is not meant to be used to take any weight, it can be useful until core strength is developed to prevent straining or injury (particularly through the spine) (Thomson, 2004). Alternatively, students can begin by keeping their front leg bent.

Trikonasana can be quite strong through the back and hips, if a student has any back injuries (particularly sacral/lumbar) or hip replacements etc this practise may not be recommended. However, it may be possible to use props (leaning against a chair/wall in order to take much of the weight), but this again depends on the strength of the student. Trikonasana can also be quite strong on the neck. So if there are any concerns with this area, it may be preferable to keep the head straight (Saraswati, 1996).

- *Main indications for adjustment*

It is interesting to note how many people are in a hurry to get into the full expression of this asana, before their body is ready (well most asanas really). Ultimately then, it is important for the teacher to be mindful of when people are pushing themselves, not listening to their bodies, or forgetting one instruction as they concentrate on the next.

Ie. Squaring the hips at the expense of the knee being over the foot, ensuring the body is in line with front leg, noticing any collapsing through the underside of the waist, noticing if the weight is evenly distributed across both feet, and throughout the foot, collapsing through the shoulders, fingers on top hand not engaged (class notes, 2004).

I always wondered how a teacher would know if someone was not listening to their body (aside from the more obvious misalignments in practise), but one day I caught sight of the look on my face when I was working too hard...

Any of these adjustments can be made verbally, or physically – but need to be done very gently, working with the student's body.

References

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Yogic physiology class notes