

Utthita Parsvakonasana

Extended Lateral Angle Posture



1.1 Atha yoganusasanam

Now begins the disciplined practice of yoga.

We begin with the standing postures: not only the physical practice of yoga asanas, but our whole yoga journey. Patanjali elucidated an eight fold path to self knowledge. This path is not linear. We do not start by mastering yamas (yogic restraints) and then move progressively through each step to samadhi (unified state). Rather we begin with the gross physical body, and through the prism of asana, the subtler aspects of yoga manifest.

Iyengar yoga argues that asana trains, educates, and cultivates the organs of action, senses of perception, and the external mind. It connects them to the internal organs, which are the inner mind, intelligence, and consciousness. This internalisation causes the external senses to stop interfacing with the objects of the world, to connect with the internal senses, and move closer to the seer (atman).

Through the study of asana, the other facets of yoga are perceived. BKS Iyengar illustrates the point in his book, *Light on Life*, "... Yoga is something you do. So what do you do?

The second sutra tells us, yoga is the process of stilling the movements and fluctuations of the mind that disturb our consciousness. Everything we do in yoga is concerned with achieving this incredibly difficult task. If we achieve it the goal and fruit of yoga will be within our grasp. From one's very first Tadasana in one's very first class, one is embarking on this task. If one perseveres and refines, gaining strength and clarity, always penetrating from the initial practice, then the techniques of body and breath that yoga offers will lead us to the great goal that Patanjali has set..."

In the practice of asana we synchronise the understanding of the mind and body. Through most of our waking hours we are on our feet and rarely pay heed to the correct method of standing. The proper upright stance is the foundation of posture. Ideally when standing, the body doesn't lean forward or back and so when kept within this plane, the skeleton, organs and soft tissue are aligned. The standing poses are invigorating, refreshing the body and eradicating

aches and pains. The back, hips, knees, neck, and shoulders all gain strength and mobility through their practice. Standing poses introduce the principles of correct movement. As such, various standing poses form the first fundamental group of postures to be learnt.

Utthita Parsvakonasana is a primary standing pose that involves sideways bending and sideways rotation. As the top arm reaches over, there is an intense stretch from the back heel to the fingertips, hence its name Extended Lateral Angle Posture. It is a co-ordination of the movements of Trikonasana (Triangle Pose) and Virabhadrasana II (Warrior II Pose). The posture should be practiced dynamically with full extension of the limbs and trunk. The asana promotes and develops willpower, activity, alertness, attentiveness, and determination in the practitioner. Through practice of Utthita Parsvakonasana, the sadhaka (student/seeker) learns the sense of movement and mobility and perceives extension, rotation, and spreading actions.

Cautions

- Do not do Utthita Parsvakonasana if suffering from high blood pressure or heart conditions.
- Walk the feet out to the side into Utthita Parsvakonasana rather than jumping, if suffering from knee or back injuries or if pregnant.
- If you have cervical spondylosis, do not turn the head or look up in the pose.
- Avoid the pose during menstruation.
- Do what you know, not what you don't know.

Tips

- Learn to observe the whole body with an internal glance and to observe and feel your reaction to the actions of the asana.
- Make your maximum your minimum, and then move beyond it.
- Work gradually and systematically with props. The props are there to help you access the benefits of the pose and lead you to the final form of the asana.
- Don't practice the asana in isolation. Use it in a rounded sequence that includes the other standing poses.
- Use repetition as a tool for building perception in the pose.

2.46 Sthira sukham asanam

Asana is perfect firmness of body, steadiness of intelligence and benevolence of spirit.

Refer image 1

When practicing an asana, it should not distort the natural structure of the anatomical body. The joints and muscles must be kept in their natural shape and form. The role of the sadhaka is to study the body as a whole in the pose, observe the distortions as they occur and correct them. This is the theory of integrated action. It dictates that your mind needs to be involved in the process, focused to the point that every particle of the body feels this awareness. Asana is dynamic meditation.

Shape

On a base formed by the legs and feet, the laterally held trunk revolves upwards aided by the arms. Utthita Parsvakonasana involves the actions of Tadasana, Trikonasana, and Virabhadrasana II. It involves creating a strong focus of the median line of the body, with a sense of space and spreading away from that centre line. The shapes and actions of those poses have to be respected and maintained in the final form. By focusing on those actions, you will begin to understand how to study the body as a whole in the final posture.

Direction

The direction of the pose is from the back foot to the extended fingertips. There should be a strong awareness when doing the pose of the extension from the base of the back foot to the raised fingers and beyond.

The practice

Stand upright in Tadasana with the feet together and the body weight

balanced over the arches. Keep the kneecaps lifted and the front thighs pressing back. Keep your chest open and your spine lifted. Roll the shoulders back as you lift your shoulder blades onto the chest; keep your arms stretching down. Keep the head straight and gaze forward. Breathe calmly through your nostrils.

Refer image 2

From Tadasana, exhale and jump into Utthita Hasta Padasana (Extended Hands to Feet Pose) with your feet wide apart and parallel. Keep your knees lifted and thighs pressing back. Lift the trunk and chest. Extend the arms through to the fingertips at the height of the shoulders. Press your shoulders down and the shoulder blades in. Turn the entire right leg 90 degrees to the right. Turn the left heel back and firmly press it into the floor. Keep the right heel aligned to the centre of the left arch. As the front leg rotates, resist the trunk following by revolving the abdomen from right to left. Keep the centre of the torso vertical and lift both sides of the trunk evenly.

Refer image 3

Exhale and bend the right leg to a right angle into Virabhadrasana II. Keep the right knee in line with the right ankle. The right shin is perpendicular to the floor with the left leg straight and the left foot pressing firmly down into the floor. With arms extended fully at shoulder height, turn the head and gaze evenly over the right hand.

Refer images 4a, 4b and 4c

Exhale and move into Utthita Parsvakonasana and take the right hand to the floor, to the outer edge of the right heel. Keep your chest open to the front. Bend from the hips not the waist. Extend the left arm dynamically to the ceiling, elbow locked, palm open and



fingers reaching further up. Turn the head up and gaze past the left thumb (*refer image 4a*). Turn the entire length of the left arm from the shoulder socket (*refer image 4b*). Keeping the left arm absolutely straight, reach the arm over the head in line with the left ear. Gaze up and past the left thumb. Stretch the left side of the body towards the fingertips (*refer image 4c*). Relax the face and breathe calmly through the nostrils. Stay for 20 to 30 seconds. Inhale to lift up into Utthita Hasta Padasana and repeat the posture on the left side.

Working in the pose

Be observant that the space between the legs is not too short or too wide. When the front leg bends, the knee should be perpendicular to the front heel. Keep your hip sockets level and your tailbone in. Lift the pelvic floor and keep your abdomen compact. Keep the feet full of life and actively pressing into the floor. Focus on pressing the outer edge of the back foot into the floor. Observe that the kneecap on the back leg remains gripped and lifted. Don't put dead weight on the bent leg. Press the front foot firmly into the floor and suck the head of the shinbone in as you bend the knee as well as sitting the buttock down on the thigh. Directionally, the sitting bone should release down to the floor, not towards the bent knee.

Keep the inner knee of the bent leg lifted and in line with the inner heel; roll the thigh from the inside out and resist this by moving the outer upper thigh and buttock inwards.

Learn to stretch the toes apart on the back foot and to lift the inner ankle, as you simultaneously

press the outer edge of the back foot down. Keeping the knee firm, stretch the leg up and away from the foot.

Maintain a single extension from the back foot to the raised hand. Focus on energetically revolving the top hip and trunk upward to the ceiling. The structure of the chest has to remain broad. Learn to stretch both sides of the trunk evenly. While extending the topside of the trunk from hip to armpit, lengthen the bottom side of the trunk and bring it forward. Take the arm to the inner thigh to give leverage to open the chest (*refer image 5*). Lengthen both sides of the torso and keep the legs firm. Maintaining this focus, take the arm behind the leg and extend it down to the floor. Focus on the top arm. Learn to open the armpit and bring more emphasis into rotating the arm. Keep the entire length of the arm firm as you open the palm and stretch the fingers.

Keep the back body alert. The sacrum and dorsal spine press in. The shoulders need to be back and the shoulder blades to penetrate onto the chest. Press the outer edge of the back foot down. Create a continuous stretch right through the back leg, the side of the trunk, the top arm, and into the hand.

Working with props

Wall

Lean the back body against a wall. The support of the wall reduces fatigue and enables the pose to be held for longer. Another way of using the wall is to press the outer edge of the back heel into the wall which stabilises the leg and helps focus rolling the outer edge of the heel into the floor.



Blocks

Place a block under the lowered hand. This is helpful for people who cannot reach the floor and adds an element of steadiness. Be cautious that you don't sink into the bottom hand. Keep it active (*refer image 6*).

Mirror

Stand in front of a full length mirror and observe the planes of the body. Use the mirror to correct misalignment (*refer images 7a and 7b*).

Preparatory asanas

- Tadasana with Urdhva Hastasana (upward or lifted) arms
- Trikonasana and Virabhadrasana II
- Utkatasana (Chair Pose)

Benefits

- Utthita Parsvakonasana is a great tool for relieving stiffness of the neck and shoulders and emphasises stretching the upper body to increase mobility. With regular practice, the neck and shoulders will become stronger and more supple, gradually realigning to a more anatomically correct position. Pain and discomfort should diminish.
- With such a powerful effect on the upper body it is not surprising Utthita Parsvakonasana enhances lung capacity and tones the muscles of the heart.
- It makes the hip joints and spinal column supple and relieves sciatic and arthritic pain. It brings strength to the feet, legs, and knees, particularly strengthening the hamstring muscles.
- The posture is said to promote the health of the abdominal organs. It reduces fat on the waist and hips. It stretches and tones the abdominal and pelvic organs.
- An asana is not a posture that is assumed mechanically. It involves a thoughtful process at the end of which a balance of movement and resistance is achieved. It is in that balance that the practitioner glimpses the goal.

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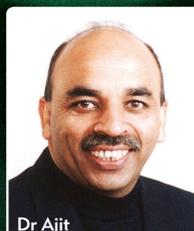
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