

BASIC BALANCE POSES SERIES

Balancing poses require tremendous concentration and focus. These qualities are further developed and refined through a regular yoga practice where we bring our attention to our center and hold ourselves up against the pull of gravity. Whether balancing on one foot, both hands, one hand or even on our head in Headstand, we must find our centered midline of stillness. This asana practice is a meditation, as the mind is focused on the body part(s) bearing our whole body weight; and therefore the mind cannot waver or wander, but must remain one-pointed and still to maintain balance. Equanimity is developed through the following series of asanas and preparations for balancing poses.



1.) **TADASANA** - The Mountain Pose begins with the awareness of the feet. How the weight is spread wide throughout the whole foot. Bring the feet together until the mound of the big toes touch. Feel the weight in a tripod base – Mound of big toe / Mound of little toe / and the heel. Widen the toes apart. Lift the inner arches of the feet – this brings awareness all the way up the legs. Slightly tuck the pelvis, so that the pubic bone moves forward. Lift the front and back waist evenly. Allow the shoulders and arms to drop freely. Create a small backbend from the sternum and collarbone. Allow the inner shoulders to soften down from the ears. Bring the hands together into Namaste – prayer position. Practice Stillness and Connectedness. Hold for 10 - 20 deep breaths.



2.) **VRKSASANA** – The Tree Pose – Start from Tadasana, and then with a deep inhalation, bring the right foot up to press into inner thigh of the left leg. Immediately energize and press the right foot into inner left thigh, and equally press (harden) inner left thigh into the right heel contact. This way there is stability, equal pressure from heel to inner thigh and from inner thigh to heel. Focus on the (right) standing foot – the tripod base of the foot. Stay with the awareness in the standing foot. If wobbling occurs, practice with a wall behind for support and slowly move away from the wall. Bring the hands together into prayer position (Namaste). Keeping the eyes soft, focus on a point in front of you and from time to time, change the focal point so that the eyes do not become too hard. Practice Stillness and unwavering Stability. Hold for 10 – 20 deep breaths / Release bent leg back to Tadasana on exhalation / Repeat other side.



3.) **PADANGUSTHASANA**– One foot balancing pose with extended leg/Holding big toe. Stand in Tadasana, bend the right knee parallel and bring the right knee up toward the chest. Use a belt to wrap around the big toe of the right foot. On exhalation breath, extend the right leg with belt holding around the big toe. Rest the left hand on the left hip and balance. Only bring the right leg up as far as you can keep the right knee straight. (Variation – Let the right foot rest on the chair placed in front of you). Hold 5 –10 deep breaths. Release the right leg and repeat on other side.



4.) **HALF VERSION – FULL ARM BALANCE** – Place a tied belt (the measurement of the forearms) around the forearms just below the elbows. This will keep the elbows straight – bone-over-bone. Kneel in the Cat Pose, with both feet close to the wall and the toes tucked under. On exhalation breath, lift the pelvis up into Downward Facing Dog Pose. Feel the support of the belt and resist the forearms out into the belt keeping the elbows very straight. Walk the feet up the wall until the backs of the legs are parallel to the floor and the back is parallel to the wall. Let the head hang freely and lift the weight of the pelvis and the legs up using the strong muscles of the back and elongate the spine. Hold 5 –10 deep breaths. Walk the feet down the wall to come down and rest in Child’s Pose.



5.) **VASISTHASANA** – Pose dedicated to the sage Vasistha. Stand in Tadasana and bring the body into

the vertical column of stillness. Then bend forward resting both hands on the floor, shoulder width apart and bring the feet back as if moving into Downward Facing Dog Pose. Place the feet at the wall, and turn the whole body sideways to the left with the left foot in contact to the wall. The little toe side of the left foot should rest firmly on the floor. Place the right foot directly over the left foot, rest the right palm on the right hip and balance keeping the body straight and still as if still standing in Tadasana.



6.) ARDHA CHANDRASANA – Half Moon Pose –

Begin in Trikonasana - Stand in an equilateral triangle – forward (right) foot at 90 degrees pointing in line with the parallel lines of the yoga mat. Back (left) foot should be turned in at 45 degrees. Place a block forward of the right foot about 12 in.(30cm), just in line with the little toe side of the foot. From Trikonasana, let the left hand rest on the left hip as you look forward over the right foot. Bend the right knee exactly over the right foot, simultaneously taking a few small steps with left foot to bring your weight over the right foot. Exhale and straighten your right knee at the same time lifting the left leg parallel to the floor. Let the right hand rest on the block so that you can lengthen the underneath chest. Both sides of the chest should be equally stretched. The tailbone now moving toward the left heel, lift the weight of the pelvis up out of the standing (right) hip joint. Look straight forward, and soften the inner shoulders down from the ears. Hold the pose 10 –20 deep breaths. Practice Balance and Stillness. To come down, bend deeply the forward (right) knee and reach out with the left heel to arrive where you started – in Trikonasana / Repeat other side.



7.) VIRABHADRASANA III - Warrior Pose – Stand in the middle of the mat with feet 3 - 4 feet apart.

Turn the right foot parallel to the mat pointing forward, and turn the back (left) foot in about 60 degrees. In this variation of Warrior Pose, the hips, knees, and ankles are all in parallel lines. Hold your hipbones as you turn to face the right leg. On inhalation, lift both arms overhead so that the ears are in line with the arms. On exhalation, bend the

right knee into 90 degrees. To protect the lower back from over-arching, soften the lower ribs into the body, soften the waist, and lead forward from the pubic bone. Create a small backbend at the top of the spine, lifting up from the collarbone. Energize the arms up to vertical and then reach forward with the arms, palms together as you take a few small steps with the left foot to bring weight over the right foot. Straighten the right leg and balance on the stable tripod base of the right foot. Keep the eyes looking up and forward of the arms, keep the head up and equally oppose through the extended back (left) leg. To come down, bend deeply the right knee to arrive back – where you started – in Virabhadrasana I.



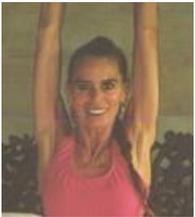
8.) Supported HEADSTAND with the use of 2 chairs. Place a yoga mat on the floor parallel to the wall. Bring 2 folding chairs (or other simple straight edged chair) to the wall on the mat with the 2 chairs facing each other, about 6 – 8 inches (15 – 20 cm) apart. The sides of the chairs should be resting at the wall. The mat placed below the chairs on the floor will keep the chairs stable. Place the hands on the sides of the chair and let the head drop into the space between the seats of the chairs. Bend the knees and let the hips rest back at the wall. Slowly straighten both legs up and rest the legs against the wall behind. Squeeze the inner thighs together to come into the quiet still midline. Flex the feet, pointing the toes down toward the floor to receive a greater stretch to the backs of the legs. Let the head hang freely. This supported headstand variation allows the beginning student to practice balance in inversion without any danger to compressing the neck.



9.) Supported SHOULDERSTAND at the Wall – Use 2 folded blankets with a non-slip yoga mat on top surface. Bring the blankets and mat close to wall. Roll onto the blanket platform so that resting on the back, the neck is completely free with the 7th cervical vertebrae hanging off the edge of the platform, and the sitting bones right up close to the wall with the legs resting up the wall. The tops of the shoulder are supported on the edge of the blankets. Bend the knees and walk the feet up the wall until the knees are directly over the shoulders. Take a few deep breaths here and open the chest, roll the shoulders underneath as best you can so that the weight is

right on the tops of the shoulders. Bend the elbows (a tied belt can be used around the elbows to keep them in line with the shoulders) and support the back with both hands flat. Lift the pelvis and legs up to vertical. Flex the feet so that the backs of the legs receive a greater stretch. Squeeze the inner thighs together to help come into the unwavering vertical column of Shoulder Stand. Hold up to 1 minute, if possible. Bend the knees to come down,

let the feet rest again at the wall while the belt is slipped out from around the elbows. Release the whole back on the floor relaxing the neck completely before bending the knees to come up.



Ann Barros is a senior Iyengar yoga instructor with over 30 years teaching experience, including 5 years at UCSC, where she introduced the Iyengar tradition to the Santa Cruz, California community. She has led over 40 successful Yoga In Bali tours. She has led workshops both domestically in California and Colorado, and internationally in Singapore, Jamaica, Greece, Mexico, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, and China, as well as as her beloved Bali, which has become her second home and remains where her heart is always. Ann first studied with BKS Iyengar in India in 1976 who personally guided her into curing her own scoliosis. She is certified by the Iyengar Yoga Institute of S.F. since 1980, and later that year after studying again in India, first came to Bali.

After 30 years of teaching, Ann's eyes are well trained. She works currently with chiropractors in the US. The chiropractic patients work individually with Ann during their stabilization phase of recovery from surgery or injury. Ann has many case histories of helping people - help themselves - toward pain-free living and avoidance of surgery in some cases. Ann's teaching approach is compassionate, yet challenging, with emphasis on precise and careful alignment of the joints for the greatest freedom: strength and flexibility, balance in the body, quieting of the mind, and a soaring of the spirit. Her strong dance background and B.A. in dance from U.C.S.C. combined with her love of art, music, yoga and Hinduism has culminated in her creating a wonderfully balanced life-style and tour program. Those who participate in her special Bali Yoga tours and recent Asia Programs develop a solid foundation and understanding of the poses. Ann gratefully acknowledges her teacher, Shri BKS Iyengar. Ann has led successful Yoga in Bali tours continuously since 1985. As of 2006, she now operates her own studio in the Iyengar tradition in Ubud, Bali, Indonesia; and offers teacher training programs and workshops.