

Virabhadrasana I

By Arti H. Mehta

Guruji tells us time and again that while performing any *āsana*, observe what you are doing, observe what is happening- unknowingly. He always tells us to reflect on our actions. Most often than not, we are satisfied with doing the pose but we have to learn to do the *āsana* - wherein there is complete engrossment- i.e. a meditative state. Guruji does not use the word “meditation” but he has made us go into that state in whatever *āsana* we are doing in his presence.

However, we are unable to achieve the same during our own practices. Guruji’s knowledge about the human body and mind is unimaginable. Without looking at the student, he can rightly state what exactly we are doing or not doing in any *āsana*. In this article, we have compiled how the mind and attention wanders and the common errors that we tend to make while doing *Virabhadrasana I*, and, how to adjust ourselves to attain perfection in this *āsana*. This article has to be read in conjunction with **Light on Yoga** and **Yoga in Action**. Guruji says, “*Virabhadrasana I* is the first step for all backbends. If you do not know how to do *Virabhadrasana I* correctly then you will never learn backbends in totality – even if you are doing them. But if you capture the total movement of *Virabhadrasana I*, observing part by part, then you can transmit those adjustments from *Virabhadrasana I* to the backbends.



Going into *Vīrabhadra*sana I

ॐ Spread the feet apart and turn the right leg outwards and the left leg in. Turn the trunk completely to the right side. Keep both the knees straight.

Front leg:

The leg that is in the front drops.

ॐ Broaden the inner edge of the heels.

When you start to bend this leg at the knee, observe the inner portion of this foot. As you bend, the region between the arch and the edge of the heel shortens.

ॐ Prevent this shortening by lifting the sole of the foot and then extend the arch of the foot towards the heel before placing the complete foot on the floor. This brings life in the leg.

ॐ The quadriceps muscle of the front leg (right leg) turns in then the left side of the chest turns to the right.

The inner portion of the upper thigh of the front leg is dull as if the container is moving towards the content of the leg.

ॐ Push the content to feel where the container is. You will then notice how the tailbone rotates. If you feel some pain in the leg then turn the outer chip of the knee of the “back leg” towards the middle of the knee for the pain to disappear.

ॐ The space between the kneecap and the knee joint of the “back leg” should be lessened as you bend at the knee of the front leg.

The tongue:

The tongue goes up when you bend the knee. The



root of the tongue is your enemy as it goes into the throat and closes the windpipe making breathing difficult.

ॐ Keep the top of the tongue passive as you bend the knee so that the root does not jam the throat. Do *Śavāsana* with the tongue.

Back leg:

If the edge of the mount of the big toe is touching the floor then it indicates a fear complex.

ॐ Open out all the toes and see how the energy is felt in the same line through the entire leg.

The inner leg is dull.

ॐ Lengthen it and observe how the waist turns evenly.

You lose your attention on the knee of the back leg when you bend the knee of the front leg.

ॐ Maintain your attention on the “back leg” and see how the leg retains its power and potency.

Observe the inner portion of the upper leg. The skin in this region tends to move outwards.

ॐ Move it inwards towards the flesh. The way the skin touches the flesh, your intelligence is sharpened in that region.

The outer portion of the bottom edge of the foot lifts up.

ॐ Your attention should be on the bottom of the outer ankle and the skin should be extending towards the heel. As the heel descends, the calf muscles open and the outer calf muscles move in.

Watch the lateral side of the muscles of the shin. It drops outwards, moving away from the body, away from the consciousness.

ॐ Move the bottom portion of the shin bone (just above the ankle joint) towards the back of the leg. You may feel pain on the outer side of the bottom of the shin. This is right pain which educates you.

Don't rest the buttock on the tail bone.

ॐ Release the buttock (of the leg which is behind) from the tail bone. The knee cap turns in more and the pain lessens.

- ॐ Turn the outer chip of the knee of the back leg slightly towards the middle line of the leg by releasing the buttock which is stuck to the tail-bone. The outer kneecap moves in and there is no injury.



off the floor. The back of the heel does not touch the floor. This is contradiction in action.

- ॐ Broaden the mounts of sole of the foot of the back leg from the big toe towards the little toe. Also, touch the heel bone. The upper leg then turns in and the energy moves uniformly in the entire leg.

“The intelligence has to flow in one line in whatever āsana that you are doing. That is known as ekagrata”

The feet:

- ॐ Broaden the skin of foot and touch the outer corner of the heel of the foot of the leg which is back on the floor.

The little toe of this foot rests on the second toe.

- ॐ Create room on the outer side of the little toe.

If you observe the feet of the front leg, you will find that the heel tends to move in more than the sole.

- ॐ The sensation felt on the heel has to be retained when you bend the leg.
- ॐ The skin on the bottom of the foot should be spread out.
- ॐ The sensory nerves should take the motor nerves back along with the entire gross body.
- ॐ Bend the knee of the “front leg” by touching the inner and outer plate of the heel evenly on the floor.

Adjusting the bottom of the foot to adjust the complete leg:

The energy in the upper portion of the back leg moves upwards while the energy in the lower legs moves downwards. The mount of the big toe moves towards the floor while that of the little toe moves

Turning the trunk:

- ॐ Turn the muscles on the lateral side of the shin of the back leg circularly inwards so that the trunk turns on its own.
- ॐ The centre of the ankle joint of the “back leg” should be lifted up. The motor nerves should feel the skin of the ankle. Ascending the ankle, revolve the lateral thigh muscles (especially the bottom of the thigh) from outside inwards.



Knees:

ॐ Broaden both your knees. Feel the inner and outer knee. Are they parallel? As you bend the knee, the inner portion of the knee moves down. If the inner knee is down, the head of the toes are rolling in. Open the toes and the inner knee bone goes up.

Calf muscles:

The inner portion of the shin bone of the bent leg is straight but the calf muscles protrude out like a balloon. They move outwards and backwards. It means the consciousness is not penetrating.

- ॐ Pound the ankle joint to the ground (slightly turning it in), nail it down and then stretch the top of the outer leg. The leg will be stable there only if the intelligence is stable.
- ॐ Observe the skin on the bottom of the arch. Create life in the skin of the arch where the flesh and the skin become harder. The skin and the flesh at the arch should be in contact and then spread the skin and the flesh (like ironing a cloth). The leg then becomes very stable.
- ॐ Observe the middle of the inner calf muscles of the back leg. These are the muscles which move, which grip, which extend and expand. These are the muscles which work for the backward bending āsanas.

ॐ Broaden the calf muscles of the back leg.

Bending the knee of the front leg:

- ॐ Maintain the length and girth on the back of the knee of the back leg as you bend at the knee of the front leg. Also “lock” the top of the knee-cap.
- ॐ Move the groin of the bent leg to reach towards the inner bank of the calf muscles and you feel lightness in the āsana .
- ॐ As you bend the knee, on the outer side of the thigh, the energy moves towards the knee while it moves away from the knee on the inner side of the thigh. Move from the groin towards the inner knee (and not the outer knee) as you bend at the knee. The energy is balanced evenly on both the banks of the knees.
- ॐ The outer side of the socket of the back leg should move towards the groin of the front leg. The more you rotate the leg, the greater is the lightness felt on the leg.
- ॐ The weight should be felt firmly on the centre of the sole and the heel of the bent leg.
- ॐ The tailbone and the sternum should be brought in line to each other.
- ॐ The mounts of the toes of the back leg should be spread.
- ॐ If the big toe of the “back leg” is moving towards the floor then move the energy to the outer side of the foot bone. To do this, raise the inner portion of the knee cap of the “back leg” and the energy will shift automatically.
- ॐ Rotate the “back leg” along with the knee from outside inwards as you bend at the knee of the “front leg”. The groin should also be rotated along with the leg. Then, there is no chance of any injury to the knee. The load comes on the knee when the groin does not turn in.
- ॐ The middle of the thigh of the bent leg should be parallel to the floor.

“In motion there is flexibility, in action there is rigidity.”



The groins:

ॐ Turn the groin of the front leg from outside in.

Watch the mounts of the toes of the back foot when you turn the groin of the front leg. The mounts narrow.

ॐ Broaden the mounts. You have to be on the heel of the front foot and not the sole to broaden the mounts of the toes of the “back foot”. Then you can easily adjust the back foot. Introspect and try to get the same movement on both the legs.

ॐ Make the bottom of the groin of the bent leg passive. Drop the groin. The groins should drop even when you lift the arms up. There is instability in the pose when the groin is lifted up.

Spine:

ॐ When the right foot is turned out, the left side of the waist should move away from the spine

ॐ Release the skin from the spinal column to move towards the periphery, let it not rest on the spinal column.

Arms:

If your wrists are light after you have stretched your hands then it means that there is darkness there. The intelligence is jarring on the back of the upper arms but there is no sensation on the front of the arms.

- ॐ Observe the middle of the “thumb side” of the forearm (which is the pole star of the hand) and make the inner consciousness to feel the skin there. Then the shoulders go down and the lightness is felt on the back of the upper arms (where the intelligence was initially jarring).
- ॐ From the pole star, move the skin back and stretch the rest of the arm forward. You are closer to the self and the arm is also closer to the self.

This pole star drops when you take the hands up.

- ॐ Keep the pole star stable as you take the hands up. The skin and the bone should run parallel to each other.
- ॐ The arms can be lifted up further by stamping the heel of the bent leg and sending the energy from the front towards the back of the heel.
- ॐ The arms can be moved up further by doing “Tādāsana” on the back of the knee of the “back leg”
- ॐ The arms have to be stretched from the back of the floating ribs and not the frontal portion of the breasts
- ॐ Observe whether the flesh or the skin has lost its potency when you take the arms up ?If the flesh has become dull, then stretch only from the inner flesh. If the skin has become dull then lift only the skin up without touching the flesh.

ॐ The palms become rigid if they are tensed. Do not let the middle of the palm cave in, let it move out.

You lose the sensitivity in the inner upper arms and the inner elbow at the joint.

ॐ Keep the skin in contact with the flesh. Then, stretch both the skin and the flesh only from the bottom of the forearm towards the wrist on little finger side of the palm.

Fingers:

The skin of the outer edge of the index finger, from the nail to the first knuckle, is dead.

ॐ Stretch the skin from the first knuckle towards the nail and observe how the trapezium, the shoulder blades and the deltoids start working.

Shoulder blades:

ॐ Before talking the arms up, turn the palms up and then stretch the shoulder blades towards the thumb. Move the shoulder blades away from each other as you move the arms up. Space is created between the shoulder blades for the arms to move up easily.

Elbows:

ॐ Stretch the arms by locking the elbow joints. Open the palms so that the energy does not block there.

The energy moves down towards the triceps at the back of the head of the elbow joint while the energy moves up in the rest of the arm.

“It is through the alignment of the body that I discovered the alignment of my mind, self and intelligence.”

- ॐ Let the energy at the head of the elbow joint also move towards the thumb.
- ॐ The eye of the elbow is the brain. Open the eye of the elbow and lift your arms up without dropping the skin there.

Wrists:

- ॐ If you cannot join the palms, keep them away but the wrists should be vertical and parallel to each other. The inner wrist should also be parallel to the outer wrist.

Deltoids:

- ॐ Extend the arms to the side and release the head of the deltoid.
- ॐ Lift the arms up by maintaining the softness in the deltoids.
- ॐ When you turn the palms up, the sensory nerves of the deltoids must dip towards the relaxed motor nerves. The arms then get longer.

The deltoids must not sink into the shoulders.

- ॐ Lift them. Lift the arms from the outer collar-bones.

This article is a compilation of Guruji's teaching during his 80th birthday and the silver jubilee celebrations of RIMYI – reprinted with thanks from Yoga Rahasya Vol. 9 (4), 200

The word of the teacher and the work of the pupil has to synchronise. Then wisdom comes to the teacher and the pupil.

Guruji B.K.S. Iyengar

