



”Posturing” for Balance by Cathy Cesario, E-RYT Tree Pose

Yoga means “to join.” It is a physical and mental joining, a gesture inward toward the greatest part of the self. Yoga is a means of remembering the truth of our nature as humans—that we are, in our essence, radiant and dignified spirits in a body. Thus, yoga is a path towards realizing this true essence of the Self. We do not need to “fix” ourselves; rather, we must realize that we have already arrived, we have only to let go of the false ideas and actions that cover this true, powerful, and magnificent Self.

Those who practice the physical aspects of yoga, usually do so in order to come into a physical and mental balance from within. For many of us in this hectic world, we allow the “busy mind” to have its way with us, keeping us up at night, keeping us on the go, telling us we have obligations, responsibilities, things for which we must continue to strive, or else...yes, or else what? The physical practice of yoga, called Hatha yoga, offers us an invitation to bring body and mind into balance, which usually means quieting the “busy mind” and becoming a compassionate observer of the self. This kind of attention heals the body and quiets the mind.

The physical postures, or asanas, offer this amazing mirror to the way we “posture” or act in our everyday lives, allowing us an opportunity when we are on the mat to explore the ways we act or re-act in our daily circumstances. One of my yoga teacher trainees said it marvelously:

“What I am learning...is that asanas offer mirrors for life. How I enter—with compassion or criticism, with awareness or deadness, with truth or delusion; how I posture—grasping or receiving, in balance or imbalance; how I support myself—through centering, alignment and breath, or through exertion; all offer a mirror of how I enter life situations.”—S. Cuolontino, YTT 2007.

Tree Pose is one of the foundational yoga postures for increasing balance. As you focus on balancing poses, the invitation you have before you is to explore what gets in the way of your finding balance. Does your ankle wobble, telling you that you never quite regained your strength back after that sprain? Does your mind wander off? Is your ego so intent on “doing it right” that you rush into the final pose without taking your time to get grounded and supported in that standing leg?

All of these questions can be quite revealing in what patterns or habits you have when it comes to finding balance in your life. So as you consider the technical steps to Tree Pose, allow yourself to ask some questions and make some observations about your relationship to finding balance.

Tree Pose (Vrksasana)

1. Come into a standing position with the feet about hip distance apart. Feel the soles of your feet pressing down through the floor, as if your feet were growing roots down past the surface of the floor. Notice the leg muscles firming in response to the action of the feet.

Body Connection: Can you feel yourself sending both feet down equally? Can you press the balls of the feet and the heels evenly into the floor?

Life Connection: When you feel overwhelmed, too much to do, not in balance in your life, try simply standing consciously with both feet grounding into the earth. Does this simple action help to slow down your mind and bring you back to the present moment? That’s the power of GROUNDING, an essential part of balancing!

2. Now, shift your weight over to the left foot, grounding through the foot and firming the leg muscles. As you begin to feel supported by the standing leg, see if you can lift the sides of your body upward and lift the lower belly up towards your belly button.

Body Connection: Can you feel yourself grounding downward with the lower body and also rising upwards from the upper body? Can you balance these actions equally to create more steadiness in you whole body?

Life Connection: Often when you are able to even out your effort concerning the opposing forces of your body and life, you gain a sense of steadiness and support from within. Some examples of these opposing forces are the role of activity versus stillness/repose, the role of exerting effort versus letting go or surrendering, the role of giving to others versus receiving from others. When you can consciously balance these opposing forces, inner steadiness simply happens!

3. Once you feel steady on the supporting leg, the right foot may begin to become light. Bring the sole of the foot to the inner ankle or to the shin, or, if you feel very steady, to the inside of the left thigh. Allow the knee and hip to gradually open out to the right side. Continue to ground the left leg and lift out of the hips with the upper body. Bring the palms of the hands together in front of the heart. You can become still more steady by fixing the gaze at a point in front of you on the floor or wall.

Body Connection: Steadying the gaze quiets the mind and focuses your attention inward. If you are having difficulty finding balance, notice what is in the way of your finding balance?

Life Connection: Are there any connections between the things that get in your way when you are trying to balance in Tree Pose and the things that get in your way of finding balance in your life?

4. Maintaining a steady gaze, lift the arms up like the branches of a tree. Breathe softly and steadily.

Body Connection: Can you feel an even flow of awareness and energy throughout your body? How does the breathe help to keep you steady and focused?

Life Connection: When you feel steady from within, does it become easier to extend your self upward and outward to the rest of the world around you?

We can learn a lot from the tree. It is solid and steady, but still flexible enough to move with the wind and weather without breaking. The tree maintains its deep connection to the earth while reaching to the sky. With great dignity and majesty it endures the changing circumstances of life. I leave you with a favorite poem of mine by Mary Oliver from her collection called *Thirst*:

When I am Among the Trees

*When I am among the trees,
especially the willows and the honey locust,
equally the beech, the oaks and the pines,
they give off such hints of gladness.
I would almost say they save me, and daily.*

*I am so distant from the hope of myself,
in which I have goodness, and discernment,
and never hurry through the world
But walk slowly and bow often.*

*Around me the trees stir in their leaves
and call out, "Stay awhile."
The light flows from their branches.*

*And they call again, "It's simple," they say,
"and you too have come
into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled
with light, and to shine."*

**Namaste,
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