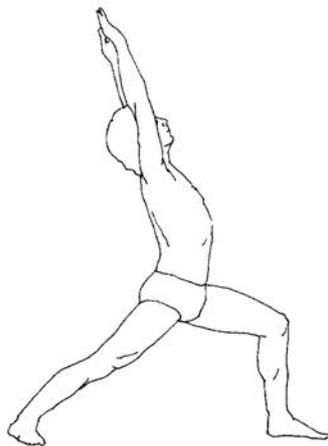


Guidelines for skilful dynamics within the performance of Virabhadrasana



Virabhadrasana or warrior pose is an Āsana where the postural focus at the level of Annamaya or the structural aspect, involves the skill of holding seemingly opposite points of attention at the same time.

Feet -

Front Leg Focus on Toes Down

Rear Leg Focus on Heel Down

For example, if we start by considering the attention on the feet using the above illustration, the front left foot focus is on the rooting of toes, whereas the focus on the right rear foot is on the rooting of the heel.

Thus, here we have an example of a Pratikriyā Bhāvana, or opposite action focus, where we need to hold our attention with a contrasting dynamic in two places simultaneously. In this example on both the front left or rear right foot at the same time, but with different points of attention.

Knees -

Front Knee Bent Forwards

Rear Knee Straightened Backwards

This opposite action focus continues as we move onto the knees. Here the focus on the front left knee is to bend or strongly flex it forward, whereas the focus on the rear right knee is to straighten it or strongly extend it backwards.

Hips -

Front Leg Hip Lifted Backwards

Rear Leg Hip Lifted Forwards

Moving up and arriving at the hips, we find here that the focus on the front leg forward hip is to lift the hip firmly backwards, whereas the focus on the rear leg hip is to lift the hip firmly forwards.

Now, this action involving opposite work on the same leg hip and knee, brings with it a kinesiological dilemma. In that as I push the front left leg knee forward it drags with it the front left leg hip forward. Equally when I pull the rear right leg knee back it drags with it the rear leg right hip backwards.

Thus, we need to multitask, in that if we look at an example of Virabhadrasana where we have the left leg bent forward and the right leg straightened back, we find that we need to draw the left knee forward whilst simultaneously pulling the left hip back.

Equally, in this example, with regard to the right rear leg, we need to pull rear right knee back to straighten it whilst simultaneously drawing the right hip forward.

Thus, the practitioner is faced with a complex structural dynamic that involves opposite tensions within a constant trade off, with over emphasis in one area diminishing the overall balance of structural tensions.

The skill is to be able to reach common, yet opposite points of attention, in both hips and knees at the same time. Here, this means that I can hold an opposite tension in the same leg, in terms of both the hip and the knee working in opposing ways. Yet at the same time consider the impact of this on the opposite side leg, in terms of the effect here on the hip and knee.

For example, over emphasising, say with drawing the front left knee forward, will drag the left hip forward and with it cause a buckling of the rear right knee. Or, equally over emphasising keeping the rear right knee straight will drag the right hip back and with it a tendency for the front left knee to straighten.

If we extend this consideration towards the question of Pratikriyā Bhāvana for Virabhadrāsana from the viewpoint of the trunk and upper part of the body we encounter further pairs of opposites. Though again we are only looking here at Virabhadrāsana from the Annamaya or structural viewpoint.

*Shoulders -
Front Leg Shoulder Drawn Back
Rear leg Shoulder Drawn Forward*

So, as we extend our perspective to consider the impact of the feet, knees and hips on the shoulders we will encounter an accumulative effect of these within the shoulder girdle. Here to compensate for this effect emerging as yet another opposite tension, the front left leg shoulder needs to be drawn back whilst simultaneously drawing the rear right leg shoulder forward.

Whilst in this area it might be worthwhile to mention a common response in the shoulders when endeavouring to self-adjust the angle or positioning of the hips. In that a common response is to pull the rear leg hip forward by initiating the impetus from the shoulder. Better to adjust the hips by moving from within the hips rather than pulling or pushing the hips via a torsion initiated within the shoulder girdle.

*Spine -
Upper Back and Chest Arching Forwards
Resisting the Lower Back from Bending Backwards*

Finally, we include the core of our perspective with regard to working on maintaining our focus on the spine amidst the opposite action forces arising from within the work around the feet, knees, hips and shoulders.

Here it might be helpful to remind ourselves of the way I was taught to consider that firstly, back bends are front stretches as in the concept of Pūrvatāna and secondly, the aim here is to arch the spine forwards rather than just bending it backwards.

Applying this concept to Virabhadrāsana, it can be useful to focus our attention on the arching the upper back and chest forward, whilst simultaneously resisting the lower back from making excessive movement bending backwards.

Thus, a kinesiological understanding of the mechanics of body movement, along with an understanding of how the structure works in terms of muscle groups and joint movement, is helpful to be able to skilfully combine the opposite tensions that are created within the postural form that comprises Virabhadrāsana.

Virabhadrāsana is an example of the performance dynamic around Āsana that I was taught as part of the Rūpa or postural form. Here, in my studies I felt fortunate to be working with the viewpoint of a structural engineer, inherent within the early training of Desikachar, integrated with the viewpoint of an energetic engineer, inherent within the Āsana teachings of Krishnamacharya.

Considering Virabhadrāsana from the viewpoint of Prāṇamaya, or an energetic perspective, is a topic for consideration within a different framework, such as exploring the Lakṣana or the systemic, rather than merely the Rūpa or structural characteristics, inherent within each Āsana.