

Using PROPS

to Achieve

STABILITY and EASE

in YOGA Poses



*from* **ALIGNMENT** *to*  
**ENLIGHTENMENT**



*by*

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*and*

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*Photographs by* Sachiko Eubanks

**From Alignment to Enlightenment:  
Using Props to Achieve Stability and Ease in Yoga Poses**

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*Praise for*  
***From Alignment  
to Enlightenment:  
Using Props  
to Achieve  
Stability and Ease  
in Yoga Poses***

**N**EWCOMERS, experienced students of yoga and teachers of yoga are in capable hands with my dear friend, Tricia Fiske as their guide. In her book, *From Alignment to Enlightenment*, Tricia shares her wisdom and many insights on the vital concept of alignment in practice and the energetics of asana.

With the use of props to support the understanding of proper, safe form within the postures as the foundation, Tricia has created a clear, smart and important manual that will be of immense value to anyone looking to build a foundation or deepen their practice of yoga asana.

**Yogarupa ROD STRYKER, founder of ParaYoga®**, the author of *The Four Desires: Creating a Life of Purpose, Happiness, Prosperity, and Freedom*, world-renowned yoga and meditation teacher, founder of one of the most comprehensive online yoga teacher trainings in the world, and creator of the Sanctuary app

**Y**OGA IS all about stability and ease. This book helps one achieve it. Using photos, the authors show commonly misaligned yoga poses, followed by aligned poses using props, providing a safer, more effective yoga experience. They expertly outline the problem in the first photo and then explain how the props help correct the alignment in the second photo. This is an excellent book for any yoga teacher or practitioner who wants to get the most out of their asana practice. I'm surprised it hasn't been written before! Thank you, Marianne and Tricia.

**SHARON STEFFENSEN**, Editor and Publisher, *Yoga Chicago Magazine*

**T**RICIA & MARIANNE have put together an invaluable compendium for guiding teachers and students into lifelong learning. Props make alignment better and provide unique ways to enlighten one's understanding of yoga postures. Included is a background on yoga philosophy to set the context for assisted healing practices and self-help choices. Beautiful photos illustrate how props make poses accessible, safe, and effective.

**GABRIEL HALPERN, MA**, Founder of the Yoga Circle in Chicago, voted "best traditional hatha studio," by *Chicago* magazine; twenty year faculty member of DePaul University

*Praise for  
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**T****RICIA FISKE** was one of my first yoga teachers and inspired me to become a yoga teacher. Over the last 12 years, Tricia has been the lead faculty member of our teacher training programs; we have certified over 600 yoga teachers in the Midwest. Many have gone on to open yoga studios and become leaders in their own communities. Tricia's dedication to both the tantric yoga tradition and alignment-based yoga provides students with a multifaceted approach for practicing and teaching yoga.

Marianne Cirone has trained our advanced yoga teachers on how to adapt yoga for cancer survivors. Her depth of knowledge in this area is unparalleled. In this richly detailed book, Tricia and Marianne share their mastery of how to utilize props and alignment to guide you into deeper layers of being and make the practice of yoga accessible to all.

**LORI GASPAR**, Founder and Director of Prairie Yoga in Lisle, Illinois, Certified Yoga Therapist (C-IAYT), Yoga Teacher Trainer E-RYT 500 and Yoga Alliance Continuing Education Provider (YACEP®)

**I****HAVE SEEN** and purchased many books as resources to develop my individual yoga practice and to support students in my role as a teacher. *From Alignment to Enlightenment: Using Props to Achieve Stability and Ease in Yoga Poses* is a one of a kind book. This book has intelligence and brilliance—it is a yoga gem. It should be on every yoga teacher's shelf or on their devices as an e-book. This book focuses on common misalignments that we see in our students and clearly demonstrates how to use props to support the students in their practice. I will personally make this a go-to resource while teaching students, and I will use it in my practice and in my teacher training.

**LINDA TROUTMAN**, C-IAYT, E-RYT 500, Prairie Yoga Teacher and Teacher Trainer in the Prairie Yoga All-Embracing 250-Hour and 500-Hour Teacher Training programs

**F****ROM ALIGNMENT TO ENLIGHTENMENT** is masterful in concept, elegant in presentation, and is certain to be an essential resource for both teachers and students of yoga. This book integrates the physical, energetic and psychospiritual dimensions of asana through the proper use of props to achieve stability and ease in postures and is certain to contribute to the evolution of intelligent yoga practice in America.

Tricia Fiske, who has touched the lives of so many yoga teachers and students, in partnership with Marianne Cirone, with her research-minded approach to yoga, have together created the most beautiful, practical and comprehensive guidebook on the technology of yoga. This book is like no other, as it encompasses both the alignment and the energetics of asana. Whether you are a yoga teacher planning your class or a student using props to facilitate depth, this book is a masterful guide. It will undoubtedly be a required read for all state-of-the art teacher training programs.

**LISA BERTKE**, ParaYoga® Level II, E-RYT 500, YACEP, Certified Ayurveda Yoga Specialist, Founder of Prana Yoga Center, in Geneva, IL



## Disclaimers

This book is not intended as a substitute for the medical advice of physicians. Not all poses are appropriate for all yoga practitioners, and each practitioner should check with their health care professional to determine the appropriateness of each pose relative to their own abilities and conditions. The precautions or contraindications mentioned in this book are not exhaustive. Each yoga practitioner should regularly consult a physician in matters relating to his/her health, particularly with respect to any symptoms that may require diagnosis or medical attention. All yoga teachers should follow the scope of practice in their profession, as well as the professional and legal guidelines related to areas in which they are teaching.

# *f*rom **ALIGNMENT** *to* **ENLIGHTENMENT**

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# chapter **ONE**

## **UNDERSTANDING ALIGNMENT**

and

## **THE PHYSICAL AND SUBTLE BODIES**

Alignment and  
the Use of Props

Prana Vayus

Chakras

# Alignment and the Use of Props



As we look at the practice of yoga, it is helpful to remember that the term *yoga* has two meanings. The first is something you *do* – the various practices, such as postures (asanas) and breathing techniques (pranayama). In the first context, yoga is a means to an end. The other meaning of yoga refers to the end result, a heightened way of being or a state of connection. This is what all the practices and techniques of yoga are ultimately meant to lead you toward: an experience in which you recognize both the fullest and most essential part of yourself, and the grandeur and magnificence of the life around you. Yoga has less to do with what you can do with your body, than it has to do with the happiness that unfolds from realizing your full potential.

Today, the various styles and sects of yoga have much to say about what is perceived to be the “best” way to achieve one’s full potential, and, accordingly, how best to practice or perform the asanas. *The Yoga Sutras of Patanjali*, a classical yoga text written 1600 years ago, talks about finding the balance between stability or steadiness, and comfort, in a yoga posture (2.46 *Sthiram Sukham Asanam*).

*Sukha*, meaning comfortable or easeful, literally translates from *su* (good) and *kha* (space). *Sthira*, meaning steady or stable, comes from the root *stha*, meaning “to stand, to be firm.” In the more literal translation of Sutra 2.46, the words combine as: “resolutely abide in a good space.” While Patanjali’s original text referred to the

**Figure 1.1 – Yoga Props Used in this Book**

The props used in this book include a backless folding chair, a 10 lb. sandbag, a dowel, a bolster, a strap or belt, blankets and blocks. Information on where to purchase props can be found in “Resources” on page 174.



# chapter **TWO**

## **Spinal Lengthening** Finding Length and Neutrality



**Tadasana**  
**Dandasana**  
**Adho Mukha Svanasana**  
**Sukhasana**  
**Gomukhasana**  
**Supta Padangustasana I and II**

# SPINAL LENGTHENING POSES

Spinal lengthening poses serve as the foundation and reference model of spinal neutrality in yoga poses. Spinal neutrality refers to lengthening and straightening the spine, creating maximum space among the vertebrae and integrating natural spinal curves. The length and neutrality created in these foundational poses should then continue in other categories of poses, including forward folds, back bends and twists.

In Sanskrit, *langhana* means “to fast” or “to reduce” – in this case, meaning that the poses will typically calm the nervous system, as well as slow the heart rate, respiration rate and metabolism. Langhana poses are also called “cooling” poses, which counteract our rajasic or overactive, overstimulated culture. Cooling poses can calm a dominant sympathetic nervous system (gas pedal), tone the parasympathetic nervous system (brake pedal) and turn on our relaxation response.

## MOVEMENT PRINCIPLES

In a spinal lengthening pose done with stable alignment, the base of the pose is firmly grounded and appropriately balanced. The spine is elongated and moving toward the symmetry of Tadasana with a plumb line down the center of the pose. The neck and head align with the spine, with the occipital area of the skull (at the lower back of the cranium) moving gently back in space, allowing the back of the neck to lengthen. The chest is lifted, shoulders are relaxed away from the ears, and the belly is soft, allowing the breath to fully and naturally expand. Ribs knit inward slightly, decreasing any excessive lordosis in the low back.

Unstable alignment, or misalignments, in spinal lengthening poses can increase the risk of spinal and inner body compression, chest collapse and a depression of energy in the practitioner, while potentially leading to a cascade of misalignments in other poses, as well.

## INDICATIONS

Spinal lengthening poses serve as the starting point for all yoga poses. Developing length, neutrality and symmetry in the spine provides a foundation for proper alignment in all types of poses and movements. Spinal lengthening poses also serve as neutralizing poses after other types of poses, such as back bends and forward bends.

## PRECAUTIONS

Students with sciatica, or other leg, hip, shoulder or back problems, or those who are pregnant, should work individually with a qualified teacher to adapt the poses.

This chapter illustrates the following spinal lengthening poses:

- Tadasana
- Dandasana
- Adho Mukha Svanasana
- Sukhasana
- Gomukhasana
- Supta Padangustasana I and II

Two inverted poses, Sirsasana (head stand) and Sarvangasana (shoulder stand) illustrate the principles of spinal lengthening, but because they have a separate set of considerations, they will be included in Chapter 7, Inversions.

# TADASANA

## Mountain pose

tada=mountain

asana=pose

## Chakras Affected:

muladhara, manipura, ajna

## Energy:

balanced brahmana and  
langhana

## Governing Prana Vayus:

prana, apana and vyana

*T*adasana is the primary standing pose and reference model for alignment in virtually all other poses. As such, Tadasana teaches both outer structural alignment as well as more subtle inner body actions. Any challenges in creating stability, neutrality and ease in alignment should be addressed in the basic spinal lengthening poses before introducing more complex poses where imbalances will tend to multiply. In Tadasana, we are looking to find length and neutrality in the spine. Tadasana teaches alignment, body awareness and creates space in the joints.



Don't do this!

# TADASANA

## COMMON MISALIGNMENTS

**Figure 2.1 – Tadasana  
(front view) –  
Common Misalignments #1**



- internal rotation of shoulders
- collapsed shoulders and chest
- collapsed arches

In this photo, the student looks “collapsed.” Her shoulders are rolling forward and her arms are rolling in as well. Her knees are internally rotated and her arches are collapsing toward each other.

**Figure 2.2 – Tadasana  
(side view) –  
Common Misalignments #1**



- head jutting forward
- rounded back
- shoulders rolling inward

Notice the forward posture of the student’s head and her collapsed chest, shoulders, arms and upper back. The healthy lumbar and cervical curves are lost and the thoracic spine is hyperkyphotic, that is, rounding excessively.

Do this!

# TADASANA

## STABLE ALIGNMENT

**Figure 2.3 – Tadasana  
(front view) –  
Stable Alignment #1**



- weight distributed over four corners of the feet
- plumb line
- arches lifted
- chin and chest lifted
- active arms

In this photo, the student straightens her legs and lengthens her spine. Her weight rests equally on all four points of each foot. The knee caps (patellae) face forward. Her gaze is lifted and the bottom ribs are lifted off of the abdominal area.

**Figure 2.4 – Tadasana  
(side view) –  
Stable Alignment #1**



- bones stacked
- long spine
- plumb line
- chest lifted
- shoulders back and relaxed downward

The student's chin draws back, aligning the back of her head over the spine and creating a plumb line. The femurs press back into the hamstrings. The leg muscles activate and hug the thigh bones. The student looks symmetrical from all perspectives.

Do this!

# TADASANA

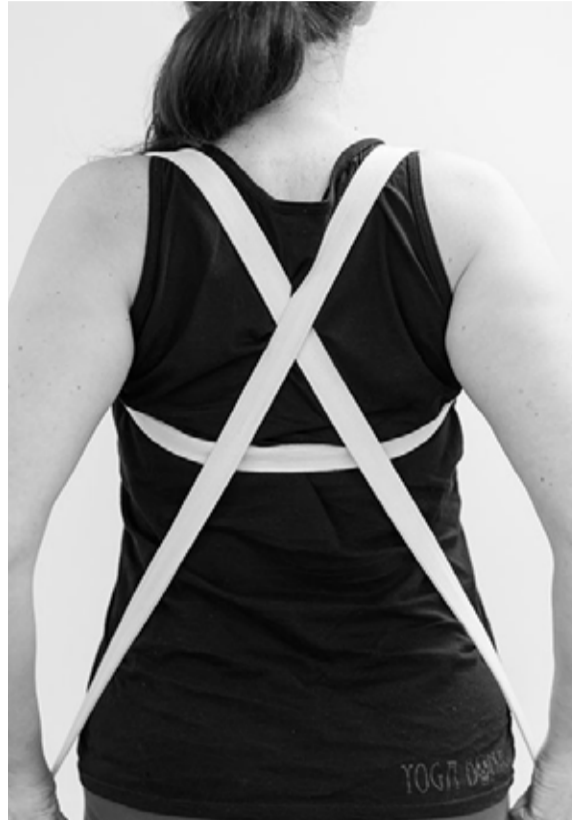
## STABLE ALIGNMENT

**Figure 2.5 – Tadasana with a Block between Thighs – Stable Alignment #2**



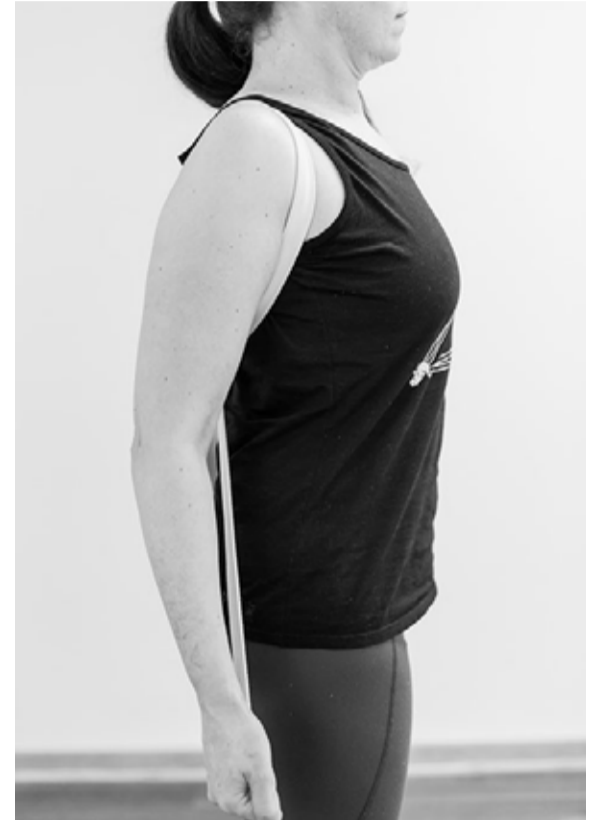
Squeezing a block between the thighs creates inner rotation of the femurs and supports better alignment in the student's ankles, knees and hips. This action improves the student's awareness in her lower body and activates the lengthening of her spine.

**Figure 2.6 – Tadasana with a Strap around Shoulders (back view) – Stable Alignment #3**



Adding the strap crisscrossed around the upper body draws the shoulder blades down and brings the shoulders back. The strap also broadens the chest and collarbones. Notice the symmetry of the student's shoulders.

**Figure 2.7 – Tadasana with a Strap around Shoulders (side view) – Stable Alignment #3**



The use of a strap “harness” supports the student's mid-back and facilitates depression of the scapulae. Note the opening and broadening of the chest.