

Angie Millgate

Yoga Fall 2011 – Tue/Thu 10:00am

Pose: Virabhadrasana I and II – Warrior Poses 1 and 2

Precautions

Virabhadrasana I: According to Yoga Journal website, the contraindications for this pose are high blood pressure and heart problems. They also suggest that students with shoulder injuries should keep their raised arms parallel to one another or just slightly wider than parallel. Also, students with neck injuries should continue to look straight ahead, rather than raising their eyes to look at their hands. (Yoga Journal Magazine, 2011)

Virabhadrasana II: The Yoga Journal website lists diarrhea and high blood pressure as contraindications for this pose. Additionally, it states that students with neck injuries should leave their eyes facing forward with their neck muscles lengthened equally, rather than turning to look over their hands. (Yoga Journal Magazine, 2011)

Benefits:

Virabhadrasana I: This pose helps to strengthen most of the body – legs, back, shoulders and arms – as well as developing stability and stamina and strengthening the energy in the body. This pose increases flexibility in the hip joints, groin muscles, back muscles and shoulders, as well as opening the chest area for greater breathing ability. This pose also is the beginning of the back-bending poses. (Schiffmann, 1996)



Other benefits for this pose as per the Yoga Journal website are: specifically, it works the psoas – the deep groin muscles that are so difficult to work out and relax. It also is helpful in easing sciatica. (Yoga Journal Magazine, 2011)

Virabhadrasana II: This pose builds upon the first pose, opening further the



areas discussed above. Additionally, it stretches the inner thigh muscles while strengthening the glutes, quadriceps, arches of the feet, abdominal muscles, shoulders and arms. As with Virabhadrasana I, this pose opens the chest, improving breathing and,

additionally, increases circulation throughout the body. (Schiffmann, 1996)

Some other benefits noted by the Yoga Journal website are: stimulation of the abdominal organs and relief of backaches, especially during the second trimester of pregnancy. Furthermore, it is helpful for carpal tunnel syndrome, flat feet, infertility, osteoporosis, and sciatica. (Yoga Journal Magazine, 2011)

Why I chose these poses:

As a teenager, I admired the musical, dance and artistic abilities, as well as the fashion sense of Madonna. She inspired me to excel in everything that I did. I remember that, after some time of her being on the music scene, she came out with a new look. She carried herself very regally, her body was chiseled and toned and she looked like a warrior queen. I marveled at her transformation, as did the media who hounded her to share her secrets.

She eventually revealed that she had done all of her strengthening and body sculpting through yoga. It was the first time I had ever heard the word “yoga” and the word itself sounded absurd to me, making me giggle. Being raised in a very sheltered, highly structured, strictly Christian-based and intensely “Western medicine” thinking home, I had no idea what yoga was or how you did it. Then, because Madonna had done it with such resounding success, it began to catch on in mainstream media and celebrities far and wide made yoga “cool.”

It wasn't until decades later, when I entered massage school, that I would begin, for myself, to learn the importance of yoga, that it had been around for thousands of years and that, for many, it was their spiritual practice. It was also in massage school that I fell in love with and found an innate connection with the Sanskrit language. However, by then, I had allowed my body to fall to the wayside, no longer caring for it as I had when I was in high school, no longer exercising and not eating correctly. Due to this, I had developed a horrible self-image and self-loathing that was spiraling out of control and while I could see the benefits of yoga, I told myself that my fat body could *not possibly ever* do yoga.

Around 2002, I found a community of people who were developing conscious thinking patterns. In this space and with those people, I began to heal my lifelong self-abuse patterns, erroneous thinking and beliefs. I began to fall in love with myself and understand the power of my body – even though I had neglected it for so long. During this time, I created close friendships with many of the people within this community – people who were artisans of many walks of life, musicians, dancers and performers of all kinds. One such person has become a dear friend who has spent her entire 50 years on earth

as a wandering minstrel, never taking a “real job” to earn her money but, rather, supporting her life through her music.

Her music touched my heart in profound ways and I’ve watched her evolve from the singer/songwriter she was when we first met to a renowned Kirtan artist, leading thousands in worshipful call and response chanting. Part of her process of evolution has been to become a certified Yogi about ten years ago. She combines the fluid grace of yoga with her flowing music and it is a natural fit.

Through her gentle nature, I found the courage to pour my body into the poses of yoga, feeling every single ponderous inch of me with profound clarity and awareness as the poses deepened and progressed. The day she introduced me to Virabhadrasana I, I found myself sinking into the pose with a profoundly majestic sensation that called to deep inside me and pulled hidden emotions out of the dark within. Tears rolled down my face as I felt the Warrior Queen within me come fully into light and take place in the space where a bedraggled, sad, lonely, weak woman had once stood.

She had me hold the pose for a very long time as the emotions crashed through me and the Warrior Queen fought to remain. As the sadness of whom I had allowed myself to become melted in the face of the Warrior Queen’s strength, I felt the age-old battles with which my former selves had been very familiar. I knew in that moment the great things I had once accomplished in other lives, that I had long ago forgotten and the great things that I was meant for here in this time.

When she moved me into Virabhadrasana II and I sank low, looking over my stretched fingertips into the war-torn horizons, I could feel my taught bowstring, the feathers of the arrow brushing my wrist, the quiver slung

across my back, the tension of the anticipation of launching that arrow. I was fully embodied by the memories of wars fought long ago and wars to come. I had this knowing of who I really am and that the woman I had become was only a fractured shell of who I was meant to be.

Every time I assume this pose, I feel those emotions and the knowing rushing through me. Every time I deepen my stance, pushing myself to the threshold of my maximum edge, I see myself standing on those battlefields with confidence and love. I understand myself on a primal level, feeling the pride I had/have for my people, the honor of being their Queen and the skills that seem to have been inbred within my cells.

Each time a yoga instructor mentions “Warrior Pose” and we start out in Tadasana, preparing to lunge into the strength of Virabhadrasana, I feel a calm assuredness wash through me and I am home. Each time I sink into the pose, I find awareness of myself, I learn further of who I am and for those few breaths where I allow myself to simply *be* with the pose, I am home, I am complete, I *am* the Warrior Queen.

Bibliography

Schiffmann, E. (1996). *Yoga - The Spirit and Practice of Moving Into Stillness*. New York, NY, USA: Pocket Books, a division of Simon & Schuster, Inc.
Yoga Journal Magazine. (2011). *Yoga Journal Magazine*. Retrieved 11 20, 2011, from Yoga Journal: <http://www.yogajournal.com>