

Iyengar Yoga Center of Ojai
Tal Mesika,
Certified Iyengar teacher

Balancing Flexibility with Resistance

Any true science starts by observing the facts and proceeding to form a concept. When we observe the outside world, we see that it is composed of dualities: light and darkness, hot and cold, hard and soft, acid and base, and the forming forces vs. the disintegrating forces of the universe. The balance between the two opposing forces brings what we call “health” to a system.

How does yoga balance these principles?

The yogic seers acknowledged the forming and disintegrating forces that are active in our life and in nature and saw the importance in bringing balance between them. Thus, they developed a system called **Ha Tha yoga**: HA stands for the SUN principle which is active, masculine, sympathetic nervous system and the THA stands for the MOON principle which is the passive, feminine, cooling element, parasympathetic nervous system.

Why should we balance these principles?

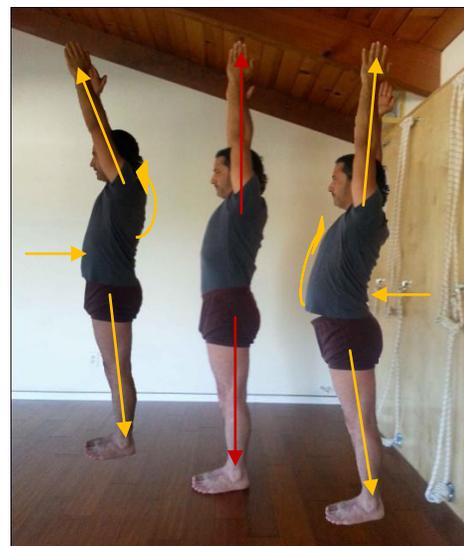
When we do a yoga pose, be it a triangle pose, forward bend, backbend or just stretching the arms over the head, are we doing the pose because of the flexibility in our joints, or are we balancing the motion of our hands with resistance?

There are two options when one does a yoga pose. For example, stretching your arms over the head to lengthen the torso can have two results:

1. The person might experience rigidity (left image) in the shoulders and have difficulty raising the arms and therefore needs to bring motion into lifting the arms...or
2. There is extended flexibility (right image), too much motion, and a lack of resistance.

In the rigid person, the body is trying to protect itself and we need to find a way to bring motion to the joints, since the body is stiff.

In the overly flexible or supple person, there is too much motion-resulting in-over extension. We might be jealous of this kind of person in a yoga class thinking this is a good thing to be flexible. Actually flexible people are prone to injuries in the same manner as rigid people are, the lack of resistance in their body taxes the nerves causing fatigue, restlessness and headaches or heaviness. This is so because they are not balancing their over-flexibility in their joints with resistance



(rigidity). So even if the body is flexible , the mind should resist and make itself hard for the body to perform the asana with difficulty, this difficulty and resistance creates action and counter-action, which triggers the intelligence to study the asana in the right perspective.

How does Iyengar Yoga resolve the crisis of perpetual opposition?

The Iyengar system of yoga emphasizes the balance between rigidity and flexibility and puts it into practice in every pose. It acknowledges the importance of the two principles in our practice. Flexibility bring free movement in the joints and muscles which enhance blood circulation and hence health. Rigidity and stiffness gives feedback to the brain or mind by action and counter-action this trigger the intelligence to think what is wrong and what is right in performing the asana which in turn create sensitivity in body and mind. This balance between the two opposing principles brings balance and tone to our body, which influences our mind and soul.

In each pose, we keep an intricate equilibrium (middle picture) between the left and right, front and back, top and bottom of each side of the body, bringing about an evenness or stability, which enables all organs of the physical body to function at their optimum level, the senses of perception become sensitive and sharp and the mind quiet and serene.