

Steadiness + Ease = Balance

When we see elite athletes at play, the ease with which they appear to be executing even the most difficult moves is mesmerizing. Think of sprinters, seamlessly moving one foot in front of the other, pulling ahead of a pack of runners in a rhythmical motion. It is not until they are done, bent over panting and walking off the strained look on their face that we even understand the effort the experience took. Or Olympic ice-skaters, executing long leg raises while propelled forward on slender blades, smiling all the way. When they fall, the exertion level becomes clear.

This sense of ease, or “sukham” in Sanskrit, is one of the two qualities that are a requirement in any physical endeavor done at the elite level. But it must be balanced with another quality, “sthira”, or stability, strength, firmness, steadiness. Think back, again, to our runner and our ice skater. Clearly they are strong. It is through their years of training that they can power their way to the front of the pack, or lift the leg so high.

It is through these dual qualities of strength and comfort that we can find balance not just in our athletic endeavors but in our lives as a whole. The key is to stay strong and alert without tension, and to be comfortable and relaxed without dullness and heaviness. So often in our lives we swing from one to the other: So

alert and focused that we tense up and therefore become unaware of what is happening around us, or so relaxed that we cannot focus due to dullness of the mind.

In the yoga tradition, it is through asana, or body exercises, that we practice these qualities of ease and strength. If we practice these exercises with the intention of integrating both these qualities, as Yoga Sutra 2.46 suggests*, then we can become adept at incorporating these qualities in other aspects of our lives as well.

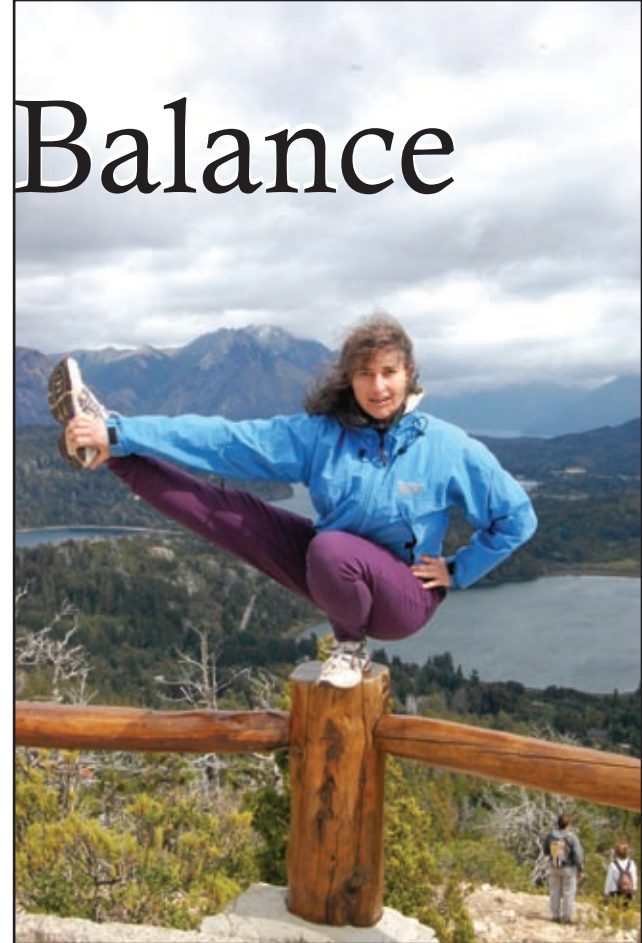
Things to note and try:

1. Do you tend to do things in your life with an emphasis primarily on strength/stability/firmness? Or do you tend to do things in your life primarily with an emphasis on comfort and ease?

2. Next time you are stressed, notice the tension arising in your body. Is it possible to create comfort and ease in your body as the tension mounts?

3. Next time you go to exercise, see if you can find that place where the workout is challenging but you are still able to have fun. If your workout is so challenging that it is no longer fun, then you are tending towards too much “sthira” and it’s time to add a little ease to your workout. If your workout is fun but not challenging, you are tending towards too much “sukham” and it’s time to add strength and firmness to your exercise.

Yoga poses, like the ones pictured here, are particularly helpful for practicing the balance between sthira and sukham. Strength and flexibility both are required to create the balance that the poses require. Integrating this duality in our daily lives is a key to leading a healthy, balanced life.



**The Yoga Sutras are a group of aphorisms based on Vedic texts, and were edited by the sage Patanjali in the 4th century BCE. They define the characteristics of yoga in great depth.*

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