

PROPER USE OF A PROP: DWELLING IN THE SPLENDOR OF TADASANA

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The way you carry yourself is important. Your outer body reflects what is going on inside.

Tadasana (Mountain Pose) is the first pose I was taught. It seemed very easy and basic to stand in the middle of my mat with my feet together. It was so basic, I did not understand why it is even considered a pose – and why it would have a Sanskrit name.

Of course, that's how my engagement with Iyengar Yoga started. The teacher would teach a pose for the first time and I'd think, "How easy!"

I did not know until much later that there are many ways to practice any pose so you can work on various aspects of it, making things infinitely more interesting and sometimes challenging.

Here, I practice Tadasana with a block. I use props like the block or sometimes a strap or rope wall for many reasons. I use the prop sometimes to work more intentionally on strengthening one particular part of the pose (i.e. work harder in the right spot).

A prop can help me relax in one area, so that I can work a little harder on the part of my body that needs emphasis on a different area. For example, I like putting a block under my sacrum in Setu Bandha (Bridge Pose) to support my body weight while I work more intentionally to open my chest and strengthen awareness and movement in my upper back.

Today I am using a block between my thighs in order to feel how to line up my legs, hips and spine so that they work in coordination with each other, and to learn how good posture feels. The block brings awareness especially to my upper thighs where I don't usually feel things.

PICTURE #1

Here, I have pushed my thighs forward and tucked my pelvis. This sometimes happens when I try to compensate for stiffness in my shoulders. I let the front thighs push forward and my buttocks/sacrum tuck under. You can see the evidence of this in my protruding abdomen! I need to get the thighs back.

The thighs pushing forward brings my weight into my toes. You can't see it in the picture, but my toes are scrunched under, and my heels are not bearing their share of the weight.



Picture #1 shows one type of misalignment, with the thighs pushing forward. Here I am pushing the block forward and tightening the buttocks/sacrum – a recipe for a back ache!

PICTURE #2

Here, I have taken my thighs back and tipped my pelvis forward. See the swaying of my back. Ouch! When I practice this way, my toes get light on the floor, the weight moves back into my heels, and I feel like I am going to fall backward.



Picture #2 shows another type of misalignment, with the thighs pushing back, the block helping me to release the groins. However, there is a shortening to my lumbar and a hardening there. Practicing Tadasana this way leads to tightness in the front parts of the hips, and a tightness in the lower back. Another recipe for back ache!

PICTURE #3

Here, I have taken my thighs back and made my pelvis level from front to back. Since I can't see myself when I do this pose, I go by how the actions feel in my body.



You can see in picture 3 how my head lines up to my side trunk to my hips and legs – a vertically line-up of my body. This is Tadasana. I moved my thighs in toward the block, rolled my front thighs in, and took the groins back. This created a softness in my groins, yet a lift to my pelvic floor that supports the lift of the whole pose.

The feet press down evenly from front to back. The legs firm vertically. The buttocks move down toward the back thighs to lengthen the lumbar waist.

Picture #3 shows my ideal Tadasana for the day. There is physical effort to be precise in my work to line up each body part. Some things have to be strengthened, some have to be relaxed. Mr. Iyengar speaks of “*effortless effort*.” With practice, the alignment of Tadasana becomes more familiar, and as it does Tadasana is way more interesting, dynamic, and dare I say transformative?

Practicing yoga brings about a yoga state, and “then, the seer dwells in his own true splendor (Sutra 1.3).”