

## BACKBENDS

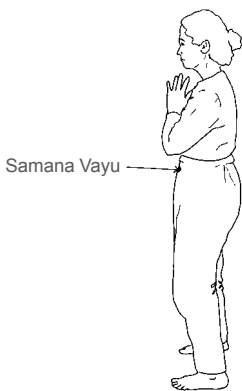
Backbends are positions in which we elongate the front part of the body intentionally, opening the upper back and drawing the front side into a bow-like line. Whereas in forward bends the back of the body is kept full and wide as we bend forward, in backbends we concentrate on keeping the front of the body in this bow-like structure; in fact, the back is not bending so much as the front is extending.

In backbends, the lower back is often sacrificed and overstretched, despite our efforts to protect it by taking the pelvis forward and tucking in the tailbone. The vayus here can play an essential role both in protecting the lower back and in keeping the upper part of the bow drawn. Performing *samana vayu* while rooting the feet to the ground and connecting to the sacrum, as in standing poses, keeps the lower back wide and at rest. It also prevents the pelvis from swaying forward. The legs remain long and invigorated and the back lower ribs widen and lift. In order to keep the upper part of the bow drawn, we perform *prana vayu* while extending the hands upwards all the way from the soles of the feet.

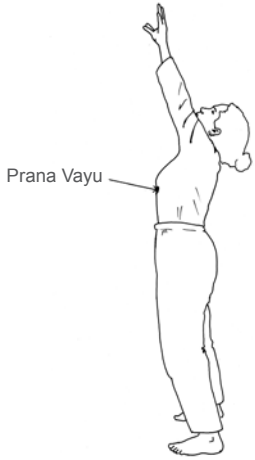
## URDHVA DHANURASANA

Going down to *urdhva dhanurasana* from standing:

### Practice:

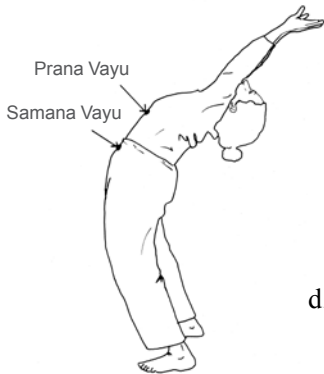


- a. At the beginning, stand in a wide *tadasana* position, inhale, and bring the hands to the chest. Exhale into *samana vayu*, lower your hands, and feel the feet rooting into the ground and connecting to the sacrum. Spread your toes as you would spread your fingers to create two anchors for the distribution of weight, using your little toe as well as the ball of the big toe. Slightly yield the inner ankle as you think down with the center of the heel. Inhale, lift your hands up from your sides, think down with the feet, and bring your hands up. As your hands go up, the weight of the body

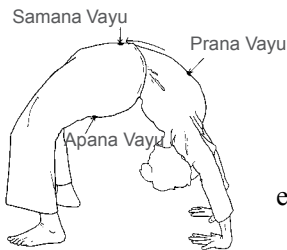


will shift towards the toes and the heels will become light. Think down with the heels as the hands extend upwards. This allows you to feel the downwards and upwards movement of the pose before you add the arching of the back. A variation of this would be to place one hand on the sacrum, moving only the other hand, thereby enhancing the connection between the feet and the sacrum. Repeat five times.

- b. When you are confident of the upward and downward direction of the pose, you can begin to move back and down.
- c. Stand in a wide *tadasana* position, inhale and bring the hands to the chest. Exhale into *samana vayu*, lower your hands, and feel the feet rooting into the ground and connecting to the sacrum. Inhale, lift your hands up from your sides, think down with the feet and bring your hands up. As your hands go up, the weight of the body will shift towards the toes and the heels will become light. Think down with the heels as the hands extend upwards.



- d. Then, exhale in *prana vayu*, allowing the shins and the pelvis to shift forward, and the hands and the upper back to move back and down; keep your knees straight as long as possible. As you repeat this movement the arch deepens and you will experience a *vayu* line extending from *prana vayu* to *samana vayu*, and then to *apana vayu*. During this time be sure to keep your exhalations slow, while rooting and connecting to the sacrum.



- e. Remember to think up with the hands so that the back of the ribs widen until your hands reach the ground.
- f. Inhale and bend your knees and elbows, place your back on the mat and relax.