Working the Sides: An Introduction to Lateral Bends

Yoga for Wellness, Gary Kraftsow

TWO CLASSES OF LATERAL BENDS AND THEIR BENEFITS:

First Class: Torso is bent to the side

1. Stretch and compress the deep, lateral spinal muscles, the intercostal muscles and connective tissues. The muscles of the shoulder and pelvic girdle are also stretched.
2. Build strength and stability in the musculature of the spine,
3. Help maintain elasticity of the rib cage, therefore are helpful in breathing
4. Help restore balance to asymmetries of the spine
5. Stretch and compress the lungs and organs of the torso (kidneys, lover, intestines) and stimulate their function

Second Class: One leg is abducted and externally rotated

1. Stretch the pelvis, groin, adductors (medial thigh), rib cage, shoulders and pelvis

PRIMARY INTENTION

First Class: Lateral stretch the torso from the shoulder to the hip, and to laterally flex the spine

Second Class: Strengthen and stretch the musculature of the shoulder, anterior pelvis, hip joints and inner thighs.

SECONDARY INTENTION

First Class: Stretch and strengthen the musculature of the shoulder girdle, hip joints, anterior pelvis, and inner thighs.

Second Class: Stretch the lateral portions of the torso and structures of the shoulder girdle

TECHNIQUE

If you restrict displacement and rotation while bending laterally, you will significantly limit your range of motion, but will maximize lateral flexion. Therefore, the key to lateral bends is the ability to control the proportional relationship between true lateral bending and the natural displacement of the hips and shoulders and twisting of the spine. This is controlled with the applying alignment corrections in coordination with the inhale and exhale.

At the initiation of the exhale:
Contract the abdominal muscles to check the anterior pelvic tilt and lengthen the lumbar spine, while simultaneously initiating the lateral bend.

On subsequent exhalations, draw the top shoulder slightly posterior to keep shoulders in vertical alignment

On Inhalation:
Lengthen the spine, pull chest up and away from abdomen, pull shoulders down and slightly back, flattening the thoracic curve.

COMMON RELEASE VALVES:

1. Anterior pelvic tilt
2. Moving pelvic backward
3. Rotating top shoulder forward
4. Extending the spine (back bending)
5. Excessive thoracic flexion
6. Internally rotating knee or ankle, collapsing the arch of foot