

# GETTING GROUNDED: Yoga Practices for the Root Chakra

**T**HE CONCEPT OF BEING "GROUNDED" MAY SOUND STRANGE TO SOMEONE NOT USED TO THINKING ABOUT IT, but chances are you have had the experience of not being grounded at one time or another. Forgetful? Lose your keys? Tend to procrastinate? Feel like you get "stuck" in your head? Have a hard time feeling at home in your body? All of these things are good examples of how not being grounded can show up in daily life. While being grounded might sound like a spiritual concept, the need for grounding is actually very pragmatic - being grounded makes it easier to accomplish daily tasks and set clear, attainable goals for the future.

From a spiritual perspective, the ability to ground is a necessary skill. The root chakra is the foundation of the energy body, and if it is out of balance, it is highly likely that the upper chakras are also out of balance. The Sanskrit word for this chakra, *Muladhara*, literally translates into "base of support" and conveys the very essence of its importance. While the root chakra might not have the spiritual grandeur of the heart or third eye, a strong first chakra may in fact balance out the entire energy system, which for many people tends to be top heavy due to excessive thinking and the pervasive mental and visual stimulation that comes from overuse of television, radio and internet. The danger for many on the spiritual path is the underlying assumption that the body and all its urges are "bad". There is a lot of talk about how to move energy up into the higher centers, but often, too little time is spent understanding the value of being able to move energy down and develop roots from which we can grow and spiritually blossom.

Emotionally speaking, the root chakra deals with survival instincts and our basic primal needs being met. Our family systems or "roots" are related to this chakra, along with our ability to reconcile with or honor and respect our upbringing. The concept of abundance or having enough is also related, and when this chakra is out of balance, it can manifest in emotional issues such as lack of trust in self or others, irrational fears, insecurity, financial instability, hoarding or a general feeling of disconnection from self and others.

The physical location of the root chakra is at the base of the spine, sometimes also described as the perineum or the tip of the tailbone. Associated body parts are the anus (one of the most common unidentified areas of tension in the body), descending colon, bones, feet, legs, tailbone and pelvic floor. It is visualized as a primal shade of red, which has the longest wavelength and slowest vibration in the visible color spectrum. The associated element is earth, and grounding is a process of dynamic contact with the earth, feeling its boundaries and limitations and in turn being fully present in the body. This does not mean that we have to identify with the body and all of its sensations, conversely, the awareness and ability to

ground allows us to recognize sensations as passing and live in the moment. When we live in the moment, also sometimes referred to as "being present", we tend to recognize and go with the energies of the moment, instead of against them. When this happens, the little things in life can become much easier to handle.

In a yoga pose practice, working with the root chakra starts with a visceral connection to the earth, usually through the parts of the body that are touching the ground. In this way we can work with the energy from a standing, seated or reclined position. This practice will offer a variety of ways to connect with and redirect energy into the lower half of the body and encourage a sense of positive connection to both the primal self and the earth.

## Getting Started

Begin in easy pose, with the legs crossed and both buttocks on the floor. Bring the hands into Adhi mudra by curling the fingers around the thumbs and forming a soft fist with the thumb held gently inside it. Place the hands palms down on the thighs or knees. Lengthen through the spine into the crown of the head, and bring some awareness to the parts of the body that are touching the earth. Take some time to notice any feelings or sensations in this area. Take a moment to notice your own aliveness. Feel the solid comfort of the weight of the body and how it is held in place by both gravity and the support of the earth below it. Imagine strong, beautiful roots coming down from the body all the way into the earth. With an inhalation, visualize drawing earth energy up through these roots into the body and repeat the following mantra "*I am connected to the earth. My base of support is stable and solid.*"



## Circular Breathing

From the seated position, release Adhi mudra and open the palms. With an inhalation, stretch out the arms, turn the palms up towards the sky and reach the arms by the ears. With the exhalation, turn the palms down, bend the elbows and bring the hands down through the centerline of the body. Once you are able to link breath and movement together, imagine directing energy to the upper chakras with the inhalation and directing energy to the root chakra on the exhalation. Repeat 15 - 30x.



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### Mountain Pose

Come to standing with the feet hip distance apart. Bring awareness to the feet and begin to rock from ball to heel and then edge-to-edge. As you rock, notice if where all four corners of the foot meet the earth. Settle into the full base of the foot, spread the toes and lift the arches. Once the feet are stable, draw the awareness up into the leg, gently pulling up on the kneecaps with the thigh muscles. Find root lock by drawing into the muscles located in the perineum (the area between the anus and the genitals). Firm the low belly and lengthen through the spine into the crown of the head. Relax the shoulders and let the arms be heavy by the sides. Hold for 10 – 15 slow, deep breaths.

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### Palm Tree

From mountain pose, with an inhalation, lift the arms and heels up and balance on the balls of the feet. Relax the shoulders and engage the lower core. Hold for 5 slow, deep breaths and slowly lower the arms and heels on an exhalation. Repeat 3 – 5x.



### Chair Pose

From mountain pose, bend the knees and lower the buttocks towards the earth, as if sitting into an imaginary chair. Engage the lower legs, inner thighs and low belly. Bring the arms to shoulder height or reach them by the ears for more challenge. Relax the shoulders. Hold for 5 – 15 slow, deep breaths.

### Tree

From mountain pose, bring the weight over into the left foot. Spread the toes of the left foot and gently draw up on the kneecap with the left thigh muscle. Engage the lower core muscles and lengthen through the spine into the crown of the head. Bend the right knee and bring the right foot to rest on the left calf or inner thigh (above or below the knee joint). With the inhalation,



extend the arms by the ears and relax the shoulders. Imagine the left leg and foot growing roots into the earth. Hold for 5 – 15 slow, deep breaths and repeat on the right side.



### Eagle Pose

From mountain pose, cross the left leg over the right, bend the knees and squeeze the thighs together. Bend the right elbow and bring it to the centerline of the chest. Cross the left arm underneath the right and reach around with the left hand for the right thumb. With an inhalation lift the arms up towards the nose, and with the exhalation, sit the buttocks down and back into an imaginary chair. Hold for 5 – 15 slow, deep breaths and repeat on the other side, crossing the right leg on top of the left, and bringing the left arm on top of the right.

### Warrior 1

From mountain pose step the right foot toward the back of the mat into a lunge position. Imagine standing on railroad tracks with the feet, and use the position of the back foot to bring the right hip in line with the left. Bend the left knee into a lunge position over the ankle. Reach the arms up by the ears and relax the shoulders. Once in this position, bring awareness to the feet and draw up through the muscles of the pelvic floor. Hold for 5 – 15 slow, deep breaths and repeat on the other side.



### Flowing Goddess

Open lengthwise on the mat, with the feet approximately 3 feet apart (this will depend on the length of your legs). Turn the toes out to 11 and 1 o'clock. Bend the knees and drop the buttocks down towards the earth into a wide squat. Bend the elbows, spread the palms and relax the shoulders into Goddess pose. When ready with another exhalation, fold forward from the hips, and take the

arms down towards the earth. With the inhalation, lengthen the legs and bring the torso upright spreading out the arms and hands as you come up. Exhale the hands down the centerline of the body and you squat and fold forward again. Repeat the movements with the breath 5 – 15x.



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### Wide Angle Forward Fold

From Goddess turn the toes towards the long edge of the mat. Bring the hands to the hips and fold forward with the torso. As you fold forward, allow the hands to slide down the

outer edges of the leg. Relax the head and neck into the stretch and breathe into the inner legs and groin. Hold for 5 – 10 slow, deep breaths. When complete, lengthen the spine and with an inhalation come back to center with a flat back. Pause and let the chin fall to the chest to allow any dizziness to pass.

### Sunbird

From all fours (table position) lift the left leg and bring it in line with the spine. Square the pelvis and draw into the low belly muscles. With an inhalation, lift the right arm and breathe into the balance. Bring the neck in line with the spine and visualize one long line of energy from fingers to toes. Hold for 5 – 15 slow, deep breaths and repeat on the right side.



### Sleeping Pigeon

From table position, slide the left knee in between the hands and lower the outer edge of the left leg, including the hip and

buttock to the earth. Take a look at the right leg behind you – there are 2 choices for the position of this leg – one is keep the knee bent, and the other is to extend it in order to bring the pelvis into a more of square position. Take a look at the left leg – there are 2 choices here as well – one is to keep the foot closer to the groin, and the other is take the foot away from the groin and create more of an L shape with the left leg. Experiment and choose the front/back leg combination that offers the best stretch for the IT band (outer edge of the left thigh, from the knee to buttock). With an exhalation, fold forward over the left leg and rest the forehead on the earth, or make a pillow for the forehead with stacked fists. Hold for 15 – 30 slow, deep breaths and repeat on the right side.



### Butterfly

From a seated position, bring the soles of the feet to touch and allow the knees to relax out to the sides. Draw the feet in towards the groin as much as is comfortable. With an

exhalation lengthen through the crown of the head and fold forward with a long back. When you find a natural stopping point, allow the upper body to round into the stretch, the back of the neck growing long and the head growing heavy. Hold for 15 – 30 slow deep breaths.



### Balancing Bear

From butterfly, grab a hold of the big toes in yoga toe lock (middle and pointer finger on the inside of the big toes and thumbs looping around the outer edges). Find the sitz bones and gently lean back with the torso as you lift the legs off the ground.

Keep the knees bent, or if the arms are long enough extend out to a wider angle. Hold the balance for 5 – 15 slow, deep breaths.

### Happy Baby

From balancing bear, release the feet and gently rock back on the mat, hugging the knees into the chest. From this position, gently part the knees and bring them out towards the armpits. Find a comfortable holding place for the hand on the backs of the thighs, or reach up for the ankles/insteps of the feet. Experiment with how far out the knees want to go from the torso before drawing the legs down towards the earth into the stretch. Gently rock from side to side to coax the body into the stretch or hold static for 5 – 15 slow, deep breaths.



### Bridge

From a reclined position, bend the knees and bring the feet to the mat. Walk the heels towards the buttocks. With an inhalation, lift the hips up towards the sky and draw the shoulder blades underneath the body, clasping the hands together underneath the body or palming the low back with the hands for added support. Feel all four corners of the feet on the earth and engage the muscles of the legs and pelvic floor. Breathe deeply into the abdomen and watch the belly rise and fall as you hold for 5 – 15 slow, deep breaths. When complete, slowly release the spine back to the mat and rest.

### Relaxation

Lie on the floor with the arms at the sides with the palms facing up. Extend the legs, and allow the legs and feet to relax. Allow the shoulders to soften and melt into the floor. Tuck the chin in toward the throat so the back of the neck is long. Relax the muscles of the face and jaw and imagine the eyes sinking back toward the base of the skull. Notice the parts of the body that are touching the earth and relax into that support. Visualize the earth as a loved one, with arms opening to receive you as you rest. Allow the breath to enter and leave the body freely through the nostrils without conscious control. Bring awareness to the base of the spine and visualize a ball of red energy in this area. As you inhale, focus on the physical nature of the senses. Feel yourself become passionate, strong, physical and filled with courageous energy. As you exhale, emanate the color red and feel its strength. Continue this breathing pattern until you enter into the security of the root chakra. Stay for as long as you like.



### Closing Offering:

*My roots reach deep into the core of the living earth.* ▲